



Tonga Mission office, Nuku'alofa, Tonga.

Photo courtesy of Bob Larsen.

## Tonga Mission

---

### BARRY OLIVER

Barry Oliver, Ph.D., retired in 2015 as president of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Sydney, Australia. An Australian by birth Oliver has served the Church as a pastor, evangelist, college teacher, and administrator. In retirement, he is a conjoint associate professor at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored over 106 significant publications and 192 magazine articles. He is married to Julie with three adult sons and three grandchildren.

---

The territory of the Tonga Mission is comprised of the Kingdom of Tonga.<sup>1</sup> It reports to the Trans Pacific Union Mission which is based in Tamavua, Suva, Fiji Islands. The Trans Pacific Union comprises the Seventh-day Adventist Church entities in the countries of American Samoa, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The administrative office of the Tonga Mission is located at Alimoni Vuna Road, Nuku'alofa, Tonga. The postal address is PO Box 15, Fasi moe Afi, Nuku'alofa, Tonga.

The mission operates under General Conference and South Pacific Division (SPD) operating policies. Those policies state that the officers of the Tonga Mission are elected by the Trans Pacific Union Mission.<sup>2</sup> “The mission president elected by the union is a member of the union committee, and is the union representative in the conduct of the work in the mission. The president shall, with the local mission committee, supervise and carry forward the work in the local mission.”<sup>3</sup> Mission associate officers and departmental personnel are elected at a duly called session of the mission where representatives from all churches in the mission are present.<sup>4</sup>

In the *2018 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, the Tonga Mission was listed as having 16 Churches and 18 companies. Church membership at the end of 2017 was 3,588. The mission had 70 active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2016 totaled US\$491,428. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$203.77.<sup>5</sup>

## The Institutions of the Mission

The Tonga Mission operates four schools. Beulah Adventist College,<sup>6</sup> founded in 1924, is located on the outskirts of Vaini on the island of Tongatapu.<sup>7</sup> Beulah is a secondary college that offers grades 7 to 12. One of its special assets is its Brass Band.<sup>8</sup> Beulah Primary School, located adjacent to Beulah College, serves grades 1 to 6. It commenced classes in January 1926.<sup>9</sup> Mizpah Adventist High School,<sup>10</sup> located at Neiafu, Vava’u, opened on March 28, 1917.<sup>11</sup> Hilliard Memorial Adventist School, located at Nuku’alofa, the school offers primary grades 1 to 6, and secondary Forms 1 and 2. It opened on November 28, 1904<sup>12</sup> and enrolls over 400 students.<sup>13</sup> An *Adventist Book Center* operates from the mission headquarters office.

## The Organizational History of the Mission

Tonga was originally organized as part of the Friendly Islands Mission, a part of the Central Polynesia Mission, in 1908. The mission included Fiji and Samoa. A separate Eastern Polynesia Mission, formed in 1904, contained the Society Islands, Pitcairn, and the Cook Islands. The Central Polynesia mission was organized into a conference in 1916; however, it was disbanded in 1921 and the name Friendly Islands Mission was used for Tonga until 1933. In 1949, the mission became part of the Central Pacific Union Mission, and in 2000 a reorganization made it a part of the Trans Pacific Union Mission.

Americans Edward and Ida Hilliard and their daughter were the first Adventist to live in Tonga. They arrived at Nuku’alofa on August 30, 1895, during the fourth voyage of the *Pitcairn*.<sup>14</sup> A year later Edwin and Florence Butz, also Americans, in addition to two nurses from Pitcairn, Sarah and Mareta Young, arrived on the *Pitcairn* during its fifth voyage.<sup>15</sup>

The first Seventh-day Adventist church congregation in Tonga was organized by Hilliard in Nuku’alofa on September 10, 1899.<sup>16</sup> Then at the Fijian Council in July 1908, a Central Polynesian Mission comprising Tonga,

Samoa, and Fiji was formed.<sup>17</sup> Calvin. H. Parker was appointed chairman of the mission. Joseph E. Steed became the local director in Samoa with William W. Palmer doing the same in Tonga. In addition, Parker continued as president of the Fiji territory.<sup>18</sup> Action to confirm the organization of the Central Polynesian Mission was taken at the Seventh Biennial session of the Australasian Union Conference held in August 1908.<sup>19</sup> In 1908, the membership in Tonga was twelve with one church.<sup>20</sup>

The creation of the Central Polynesian Mission was preceded by the creation of an Eastern Polynesian Mission in 1904, comprising the Society Islands, with Pitcairn and the Cook group.<sup>21</sup> At a council held in Raiatea, July 7-18 1904, B. J. Cady, Chairman of the Eastern Polynesian Mission reported: "At our last meeting, the plan was conceived to unite the interests of the various islands in this part of the Pacific, that we might be better able to assist one another in devising plans and raising funds for the carrying forward of the Third Angel's Message in this part of the world. An organization was therefore formed, and called the Eastern Polynesian Mission."<sup>22</sup>

At the same Australasian Union Conference Council, which confirmed the establishment of the Central Polynesian Mission, various terms were used to describe the eastern area of Polynesia: Eastern Polynesian Field,<sup>23</sup> Eastern Polynesian District,<sup>24</sup> and Eastern Polynesian Mission.<sup>25</sup>

Also, there is no listing in the *Yearbook* between 1904 and 1916 for either an Eastern Polynesian Mission nor a Central Polynesian Mission. Rather, beginning in 1909 and lasting until 1916, two advisory mission committees are listed: one for the Eastern Polynesian Union Mission and one for the Central Polynesian Union Mission. For some reason, in 1912 and 1913 the Central Polynesian Union Mission advisory committee was designated the Western Polynesian Union Mission advisory committee. Throughout this period, each local mission, including the Friendly Islands Mission, continued to be listed as a separate entity with no affiliation to an Eastern Polynesian Mission or Central Polynesian Mission mentioned. There does not appear to be any reference to these two missions as union missions, apart from the name given to each advisory committee. It is obvious that there was inconsistency in the names and designations used for the various organizational entities of the Church in Polynesia.<sup>26</sup>

In 1916, the Central Polynesian Mission was organized into the Central Polynesian Conference comprising Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and Niue. This action was first considered by the Australasian Union Conference Council in September 1916,<sup>27</sup> and then discussed and voted at a specially called council at Suva Vou, Fiji, commencing on October 5, 1916.<sup>28</sup> The office of the conference was located at Suva Vou.<sup>29</sup> The elected president was C. H. Parker, the secretary J. E. Steed, and the treasurer J. E. Nash.<sup>30</sup> This was the first time that the Adventist church organizations in the Pacific Islands were designated conferences.

Unlike the Central Polynesian Mission that was formed into a conference in 1916, the status of the Eastern Polynesian Mission did not change in 1921. It was reported as comprising "the following former missions: Society Islands, Cook Islands, and Pitcairn Island."<sup>31</sup> Its territory encompassed "all the Pacific Islands east of the 160th degree of west longitude, and south of the tenth Parallel of north latitude."<sup>32</sup> The headquarters for the

mission were in Papeete, Tahiti, and the mission officers were F. E. Lyndon, superintendent and treasurer, and H. A. Hill, secretary.<sup>33</sup>

By 1922, The Central Polynesian Conference was no longer listed in the *Yearbook* with the other conferences.<sup>34</sup> However, it is mentioned in the comments under the headings “Friendly Island [sic] Mission” and “Fiji Mission” where it is noted that these missions were part of the Central Polynesian Conference between 1916 and 1921 when it was reorganized.<sup>35</sup>

However, the Eastern Polynesian Mission did continue to be listed until 1942<sup>36</sup> although, there was a change in its territory. In 1923, the Cook Islands were designated a separate mission. A note under the heading “Cook Islands Mission” in the 1924 *Yearbook* said that the Cook Islands Mission was included in the Eastern Polynesian Mission between 1916 and 1923 when it was reorganized.<sup>37</sup> The Eastern Polynesia Mission continued to be listed as comprising just the Society Islands (French Polynesia) and Pitcairn Island.<sup>38</sup>

Up until 1932, the term used to describe Tongan territory was “Friendly Islands Mission.”<sup>39</sup> Beginning in 1933, the mission was designated the “Tongan Mission.”<sup>40</sup>

Until 1949, all the local conference and mission entities in the Australasian Union Conference, including Tonga, reported directly to that union. But at a specially called session of the Australian Union between August 16 and 21, 1948, a proposal for a major reorganization was presented, discussed, and approved. Australia and New Zealand were divided into two union conferences known as the “Trans-Tasman Union Conference” and the “Trans-Commonwealth Union Conference.” The mission territories were divided into two union missions known as “The Coral Sea Union Mission” and “The Central Pacific Union Mission.” The Central Pacific Union Mission included Tonga, along with the New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Fiji, the Gilbert and Ellice groups, the Cook Islands, Samoa, Niue, Nauru, Society Islands, and Pitcairn.<sup>41</sup>

In 1950 the Tonga Mission and the Niue Mission were joined and administered from Nuku’alofa. In the *Yearbook* of that year, Niue was listed as having just one church with five members.<sup>42</sup> Niue continued to be aligned with the Tongan Mission until 2005 when it was detached from the mission and aligned directly with the Central Pacific Union Mission as the ‘Niue Attached Church.’ There was still just one church but the membership had grown to nine.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, the Tongan Mission was listed as having 194 members in eight churches.<sup>44</sup>

In 2000, a major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the Division session.<sup>45</sup> By this time marked growth had occurred. There were 1,811 members in thirteen churches.<sup>46</sup> The number of unions in the division was reduced from five to four. A union mission, initially designated as the Western Pacific Union Mission but shortly thereafter designated as the Trans Pacific Union Mission was formed. The former Central Pacific Union was dissolved, and the Tongan Mission became a part of the Trans Pacific Union Mission.<sup>47</sup>

## Tongan Mission Superintendents/Directors<sup>48</sup>

Friendly Island Mission (1895 – 1916); Edward A. Hilliard (1895 – 1899); Edwin. S. Butz (1899 – 1905); Ethelbert. E. Thorpe (1906 – 1907); William. W. Palmer (1907 – 1911); George Stewart (1912 - 1915); Ethelbert. E. Thorpe (1916)

Central Polynesian Conference (1916 – 1921): C. H. Parker (1916 -1921)

Friendly Islands Mission (1921 – 1932): Robert W. Smith (1920 – 1927); Hubert L. Tolhurst (1927 - 1940);

Tongan Mission (1933 - ): Hubert L. Tolhurst (1927 – 1940); A. W. Martin (1941 – 1943); Bernard E. Hadfield (1943 – 1946); Walter G. Ferris (1946 – 1949); Oliver D. F. McCutcheon (1950 – 1952); James E. Cormack (1953 – 1955); A. G. Jacobson (1955 – 1963); Donald E. G. Mitchell (1964 – 1971) Reginald A. Millsom (1972 – 1975); John R. Lee (1976 – 1985); W. D. Boucher (1986 – 1988); David E. Hay (1989 – 1990); Fonua K. Ofa (1991 – 1994),<sup>49</sup> Teti Pahulu (1995 – 2005); Manu Latu (2006 – 2010); Sione Kakala Moana (2010 – 2015); Saia Ve'a (2015 -)

---

## SOURCES

*2018 Annual Statistical Report 154th Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2016 and 2017*  
Accessed January 20, 2019. <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2018.pdf>

"ADM 10.05, Principles of Denominational Organization." In *South Pacific Division Working Policy*. Wairoa, NSW: South Pacific Division, 2018.

"Australasian Union Conference: Advance Moves." *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908.

"Beulah Adventist College: BAC History." Accessed January 28, 2019.

<https://beulahcollege.adventistconnect.org/bachistorr>.

Boyd, Ella A. "Our Tonga Church School," *Union Conference Record*, September 15, 1905.

"Brass Band." Accessed January 28, 2019. <https://beulahcollege.adventistconnect.org/brassband>.

"Decisions of the Union Conference Council. Held August 29 to September 12, 1916." *Australasian Record*, September 25, 1916.

Gates, E. H. "Report of the Mission Secretary." *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908.

Gates, E. H. "Eastern Polynesian Mission Conference." *Union Conference Record*, September 1, 1904.

"Hilliard Memorial School." Accessed January 28, 2019. <http://twofortonga.blogspot.com/2011/09/hilliard-memorial-school.html>.

"Index to this Number." *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908.

Manners. Bruce. "Session Votes for Restructure." *Record*, November 25, 2000.

Piper, H. E. "Special Session, Australasian Union Conference." *Australasian Record*, September 13, 1948.

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909-2017.

"The Fijian Council." *Union Conference Record*, August 3, 1908.

Thorpe, Lily M. "Vava'u, Friendly Islands," *Australasian Record*, June 11, 1917.

Westerman, W. J. "Organization of Central Polynesian Conference." *Australasian Record*, November 6, 1916.

---

## NOTES

1. "Tonga Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2017), 359.
2. "ADM 10.05, Principles of Denominational Organization," in *South Pacific Division Working Policy* (Wahroonga, NSW: South Pacific Division, 2018).
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. A current statistical overview of the mission at any time may be accessed at <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2fStatistics%2fASR&FolderCTID=0x01200095DE8DF0FA49904B9D65211328>
6. The website for the College is <https://beulahcollege.adventistconnect.org/>.
7. "Beulah Adventist College: BAC History," accessed January 28, 2019, <https://beulahcollege.adventistconnect.org/bachistorr>.
8. "Brass Band," accessed January 28, 2019, <https://beulahcollege.adventistconnect.org/brassband>.
9. R. W. Smith, "Tonga," *Australasian Record*, September 27, 1926, 10.
10. A website for the school is <https://www.facebook.com/mizpahhigh/>.
11. Lily M. Thorpe, "Vava'u, Friendly Islands," *Australasian Record*, June 11, 1917, 4.
12. Ella S. Boyd, "Our Tonga Church School," *Union Conference Record*, September 15, 1905, 4.
13. "Hilliard Memorial School," accessed January 28, 2019, <http://twofortonga.blogspot.com/2011/09/hilliard-memorial-school.html>.
14. O. A. Olsen, "Movements of the "Pitcairn,"" *ARH*, October 22, 1895, 681-682.
15. John E. Graham, "From the "Pitcairn,"" *ARH*, November 17, 1896, 736.

16. Nuku'alofa Church Record Book, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Wahroonga, NSW, Box: 3418; Folder: Tonga; Document: "Nuku'alofa Church Record Book."
17. "The Fijian Council," *Union Conference Record*, August 3, 1908, 2 – 3.
18. Ibid.
19. E. H. Gates, "Report of the Mission Secretary," *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908, 4.
20. "Friendly Islands Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909), 99.
21. E. M. Graham, "The Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Union Conference Record*, September 7, 1908, 7.
22. E. H. Gates, "Eastern Polynesian Mission Conference," *Union Conference Record*, September 1, 1904, 23.
23. "Index to this Number," *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908, 44.
24. "Australasian Union Conference: Advance Moves," *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908, 3.
25. E. H. Gates, "Report of the Mission Secretary." *Union Conference Record*, September 7, 1908, 5.
26. For example, see "Australasian Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909), 92.
27. "Decisions of the Union Conference Council, Held August 29 to September 12, 1916," *Australasian Record*, September 25, 1916, 5.
28. W. J. Westerman, "Organization of Central Polynesian Conference," *Australasian Record*, November 6, 1916, 2.
29. "Central Polynesian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1917), 143.
30. Ibid.
31. "Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1917), 144.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. "Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1922), 144.

35. , "Fiji Mission" and "Friendly Island Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1924), 175-176.
36. "Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1942), 61.
37. "Fiji Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1925), 188.
38. Ibid.
39. "Friendly Islands Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1932), 108.
40. , "Tongan Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1933), 74.
41. H. E. Piper, "Special Session, Australasian Union Conference," *Australasian Record*, September 13, 1948, 2-3.
42. "Niue (or Savage Islands) Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1950), 77.
43. "Niue Attached Church," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2006), 304.
44. "Tongan Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1950), 78.
45. Bruce Manners, "Session Votes for Restructure," *Record*, November 25, 2000, 8-9.
46. "Tonga and Niue Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 287.
47. Ibid; "Trans-Pacific Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 310-311.
48. There is sometimes a short time delay with dates as given in the *SDA Yearbook*. In some cases, an appointment was made late in the previous year and by the time the General Conference was notified it was already the following year.
49. Fonua K. Ofa was the first Tongan president of the mission. Personal knowledge of the author as the President of the South Pacific Division.

---

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000