



Trans Pacific Union Mission Headquarters, Suva, Fiji

Photo courtesy of Bob Larsen.

Trans Pacific Union Mission, South Pacific Division

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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 Trans Pacific Union Mission (TPUM) is a constituent union of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and is one of four unions in the South Pacific Division of the General Conference (SPD).

Current Territory and Statistics

As a designated mission organization, the union operates under General Conference and South Pacific Division (SPD) operating policies.¹ Those policies state that the officers of the TPUM are elected by the South Pacific Division.² “The union mission president, elected by the division, is a member of the division executive committee, and is the division representative in the conduct of the work in the union mission. . . . The president shall, together with the union mission executive committee, supervise and carry forward the work in the union.”³ Division policy adds that “the union is authorised to elect or appoint at its session other employees answerable to the union executive committee as specified in Division policy and within the limits of the budget provided.”⁴

The TPUM’s headquarters are located at 357 Princess Road, Tamavua, Fiji Islands. The postal address is PO Box 270, Suva, Fiji. The territory of the TPUM in 2017 was “American Samoa, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu; comprising the Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa-Tokelau, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu missions; American Samoa, and Tuvalu attached regions; and the Niue Attached Church.”⁵ The *Yearbook* fails to list the Nauru Attached Church, which was separated from the Kiribati Mission and attached to the Union in 2010.⁶

The unincorporated activities of the union are governed by General Conference and South Pacific Division *Working Policy*. The real and intellectual property of the union is held in trust by Australasian Conference Association, Limited, an incorporated entity based at the headquarters office of the SPD in Wahroonga, NSW. An exception is the property on which Fulton Adventist University College stands. It is held in trust by Sabeto Adventist Property Trustee, Limited, incorporated on July 10, 2009.⁷ Some missions within the union have incorporated entities to hold in trust real property within the respective missions.⁸

In the *2018 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, the Trans Pacific Union Mission was listed as having six missions, two attached regions, and two attached churches, which in turn had a total of 529 church congregations and 702 companies.⁹ Church membership at the end of 2017 was 119,913.¹⁰ The union had a total of 1,791 active employees in its entities. The total tithe receipts for the union in 2016 were US\$8,506,462. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$98.17.¹¹ More recently the union secretary has given the number of churches at the end of 2018 as 534, the number of companies as 696, and the church membership as 125,595.¹²

Institutions and Services of the Trans Pacific Union Mission

Atoifi Adventist Hospital.¹³ Located at East Kwaio on the southern coast of the island of Malaita, Solomon Islands, the hospital was opened and dedicated on August 25, 1966.¹⁴ Three missionaries have lost their lives in tragic circumstances at Atoifi: Brian Dunn,¹⁵ Lens Larwood,¹⁶ and Lance Gersback.¹⁷ In 1918 the hospital had 78 beds.¹⁸ A School of Nursing as an affiliated campus of Pacific Adventist University is located at the hospital.¹⁹

Fulton Adventist University College.²⁰ Fulton College had its roots in the Fiji Training Institute, which commenced as an industrial school in 1905 at Buresala on the island of Ovalau.²¹ By 1939 the church was operating four training schools in Fiji, but in 1940 it was decided to consolidate, and land was purchased at Tailevu, about 32 miles from Suva.²² In 1940 the Buresala Training School and the Wainibuka Central School at Navuso were closed, and the boarding functions of the Samabula Indian school were transferred to Tailevu, to become the new Fulton Missionary School.²³ The name gradually changed during the 1940s to Fulton Missionary College.²⁴ Then in the early 1970s the word “missionary” was omitted, and the college was known as Fulton College. In 2014 the college transferred to a new site on the western side of the island of Viti Levu, at Sabeto, 15 minutes’ drive from the international airport at Nadi.²⁵ In 2012 it was granted university college status.²⁶ The name was subsequently changed to Fulton Adventist University College.

Organizational History of the Trans Pacific Union Mission

The TPUM came into existence in 2000. When first voted, it was named the Western Pacific Union Mission.²⁷ A change of name was voted at the first session of the amalgamated union on November 15–18, 2000, at the Fulton College campus, Tailevu, Fiji.²⁸

The territory encompassed by the TPUM had, before the creation of the TPUM in 2000, experienced a number of major organizational realignments since the Seventh-day Adventist Church first established itself in the South Pacific region in 1885. Soon after SDAs commenced work in the South Pacific region, an Australasian Union Conference was organized during the time of the Australian camp meeting, January 15–25, 1894. It comprised District 7 of the General Conference districts, and included just the conferences of Australia and New Zealand. It was, in fact, the first union conference organized in the global Seventh-day Adventist Church. The stated object of the union was “to unify and extend the work of the third angel’s message, under the general direction of the General Conference, in the Australasian field.”²⁹ Gradually the island territories of the South Pacific were added to its responsibility as the church commenced working in those territories.

Until 1949 the Australasian Union Conference, also designated as the Australasian Division, operated as a collection of conferences and missions, including all of the entities now forming the Trans Pacific Union Mission.

³⁰ In 1949 four unions were organized within the territory of the division, which also was known as the Australasian Inter-Union Conference:³¹ “1. Central Pacific Union Mission with headquarters in Suva, Fiji; 2. Coral Sea Union Mission with headquarters in Lae, Papua New Guinea; 3. Trans-Commonwealth Union Conference with headquarters in Melbourne, Victoria; and 4. Trans-Tasman Union Conference with headquarters in Gordon, New South Wales.”³² The entities in the current TPUM were shared between the Central Pacific Union Mission and the Coral Sea Union Mission.

By 1953 it was decided that the territory of the Coral Sea Union Mission would be better developed by being formed into two union territories. The result was that the Bismarck-Solomons Union Mission was created with

headquarters at Rabaul, Mandated Territory of New Guinea. This meant that there were now five unions in the Australasian Division.³³ Then, at the end of 1971, the division's mission territories were reorganized. Three of the five unions were designated as union missions: "1. Papua New Guinea Union Mission with headquarters in Lae, Papua New Guinea; 2. Western Pacific Union Mission with headquarters in Honiara, British Solomon Islands; and 3. Central Pacific Union Mission with headquarters in Suva, Fiji. The reorganization into the new unions became effective April 1, 1972."³⁴ In December 1972 an action was taken to transfer the headquarters of the new Central Pacific Union Mission to Auckland, New Zealand, from Suva, Fiji.³⁵ The Central Pacific Union Mission did not include the conferences in New Zealand. But for a number of reasons it was deemed more efficient to administer the local missions of the Central Pacific Union from Auckland rather than from Suva.³⁶ The transfer of the union headquarters was complete by January 1974. The union headquarters returned to Fiji in February 1987, when a renewed office was opened at the present site at Tamavua, Suva, Fiji.³⁷

In 2000 a major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the division session.³⁸ The number of unions in the division was reduced from five to four. The Trans Pacific Union Mission, originally termed the Western Pacific Union Mission in the action of the session, was formed in this reorganization. The action of the South Pacific Division Session on October 31, 2000, read:

"VOTED: to approve the formation of:

1. An Australian Union Conference comprising the nine conferences in Australia.
2. A New Zealand Pacific Union Conference made up of the North New Zealand Conference, South New Zealand Conference, French Polynesia Mission, New Caledonia Mission, Cook Islands Mission, and Pitcairn Island Church.
3. A Western Pacific Union Mission with headquarters in Fiji, comprising the Samoa Mission, Tonga/Niue Mission, Fiji Mission, Tuvalu Attached District, Kiribati and Nauru Mission, Vanuatu Mission, Malaita Mission, Eastern Solomons Mission and Western Solomons Mission.

And

FURTHER: That the above new organisational structure be operative from January 1, 2001, and

FURTHER: That this body direct the division executive committee to amend the relevant sections of the division working policy."³⁹

The name was changed at the first session of the new union, and since that time there have been no further changes to union boundaries within the South Pacific Division. Within the TPUM there have been some changes to local mission boundaries and other entities.⁴⁰

Mission and Strategic Plans of the Trans Pacific Union Mission

The Union Mission Statement:

“To Make Disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the three angels’ messages in preparation for His soon return (Matt. 28:18–20).”⁴¹

The Union Vision Statement:

“A vibrant Adventist movement, living our hope in Jesus, transforming the Pacific.”⁴²

The Trans Pacific Union Mission is fulfilling its mission within what it terms the farming cycle framework: Prepare the soil, sow the seed, cultivate the crop, harvest the crop, multiply the harvest.⁴³ Every aspect of the five-part cycle is aimed at making disciples for His kingdom. During the 2015–2020 quinquennium the month of July was the focus for evangelism, leading to a special day for baptism, called the day of Pentecostal harvest. Each year a different group within the church was encouraged to lead out in evangelistic meetings. The year 2016 was one of preparation for evangelism with an emphasis on total membership involvement. In 2017 the elders led out in evangelism. In 2018 the laity led out. In 2019 the women led out. In 2020 the youth will lead out. Specific training was given for each of these groups to prepare them for evangelistic leadership.⁴⁴

Ongoing challenges for the union include the resourcing of TV, radio, and Internet use within the entities of the union. Fiji Mission and Samoa Mission have both TV and radio stations. Other missions are operating either a TV station or a radio station. Fiji Mission not only broadcasts Hope Channel on TV but also has it on the Walesi digital platform. Walesi has an app, so anyone with the Internet can connect to Hope Channel⁴⁵.

In 2016 the TPUM initiated Project Hope, a gathering of media personnel from around the union. Representatives gathered in Suva, Fiji, and were trained in the production of radio and television programs. During Project Hope, more than four hundred broadcast episodes were produced in local languages of the countries in the union. The remaining challenge is to provide funding and local content with specialized personnel in all areas, including presenters and those with technology skills. The TPUM is grateful for the support the SPD gives for media ministry.⁴⁶

Another challenging issue for the union is the pandemic of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) across the South Pacific. NCDs, such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, are rapidly increasing among residents of South Pacific island nations.⁴⁷ Since 1916 the TPUM has employed a full-time health director to coordinate a response by the church. Traditional subsistence lifestyles with garden produce and physical exercise have largely disappeared and been replaced by the consumption of processed food, increased red meat consumption, and decreasing physical activity.⁴⁸

Specific strategies to address these issues include: 1. Training of Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP) facilitators; 2. Training of Community Health Education Program (CHEP) facilitators; and 3. Training of Live More

Abundantly Project (LMAP) facilitators. Adventist Health is currently working with ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) to implement the Live More Abundantly program in the Trans Pacific Union. This program is a contextualized version of CHIP appropriate for use at a village level among people with a limited education and low levels of literacy.⁴⁹

List of Executive Officers

Presidents

Bruce Roberts (2000–2005); Lawrence Tanabose (2005–2007); Waisea Vuniwa (2008–2013); Glenn Townend (2013–2015); Maveni Kaufononga (2015–).

Secretaries

Lawrence Tanabose (2000–2005); Waisea Vunuwa (2005–2007); Paul Cavanagh (2008–2012); Wayne Boehm (2013–2014); Maveni Kaufononga (2014–2015); Robert A. Larsen (2015–).

Treasurers

James Kent (2000–2003); Vic Bonetti (2004–2010); Francois Keet (2010–2015); Kingsley Wood (2015–).

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NOTES

1. The author is indebted to Robert A. Larsen, secretary of the TPUM, for much of the information in this article.

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. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Trans Pacific Union Mission," page 358, accessed May 30, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2017.pdf>.
6. Trans Pacific Union Mission Executive Committee minutes, June 7, 2010, "24.2.1. Nauru Realignment," Trans Pacific Union Mission Archives, Tamavua, Fiji.
7. Rodney Brady, treasurer of the South Pacific Division, email to the author, May 31, 2019.
8. Ibid.
9. A current statistical overview of the union at any time may be accessed at <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2fStatistics%2fASR&FolderCTID=0x01200095DE8DF0FA49904B9D65211> ;
10. *2018 Annual Statistical Report: 153rd Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2016 and 2017*, accessed November 18, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2018.pdf>
11. Ibid.
12. Robert A. Larsen, secretary of the TPUM, email to author, April 25, 2019.
13. See Atoifi Adventist Hospital, Solomon Islands, in the *ESDA*.
14. A. R. Mitchell, "Opening of Atoifi Adventist Hospital, Malaita," *Australasian Record*, January 23, 1967, 1, 2.
15. See Dunn, Brian, in the *ESDA*.
16. See Larwood, Lens in the *ESDA*.
17. See Gersback, Lance, in the *ESDA*.
18. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Atoifi Adventist Hospital," page 695, accessed May 31, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2017.pdf>.

19. Kent Kingston, "New Leader Appointed for Pacific Adventist University," *Record*, December 3, 2016, 3.
20. See Fulton Adventist University College, Fiji, in the *ESDA*.
21. "The address of J. E. Fulton . . .," *Union Conference Record*, June 15, 1905, 7.
22. A. G. Stewart, "Visiting in Fiji," *Australasian Record*, August 28, 1940, 3.
23. E. B. Rudge, "The Fulton Missionary School," *Australasian Record*, January 6, 1941, 3.
24. Eva E. Edwards, "General Meeting at Fulton Missionary College," *Australasian Record*, September 24, 1945, 4.
25. Jarrod Stackelroth, "Fulton College Opens New Campus," *Record*, March 1, 1914, 9.
26. "Fiji Higher Education Commission, Certificate of Registration," November 7, 2012, copy held in the personal collection of Stephen Currow, Fulton president at the time of registration as a university college.
27. Bruce Manners, "Session Votes for Restructure," *Record*, November 25, 2000, 8, 9.
28. "WPUM to Become TPUM," *Record*, December 8, 2000, 2; A. Larsen, secretary of the TPUM, email to author, April 25, 2019.
29. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Australasian Union Conference," accessed April 30, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1894.pdf>.
30. H. E. Piper, "Special Session, Australasian Union Conference," *Australasian Record*, September 13, 1948, 2, 3.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. Australasian Division Executive Committee minutes, "C.P.U.M. Headquarters, Auckland," December 21, 1972, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives.
36. K. S. Parmenter, "Australasian Division Mission Field Development," *Australasian Record*, May 14, 1973, 1.
37. "New Offices Opened for CPUM," *Australasian Record*, May 2, 1987, 12.

38. Manners, 8, 9.
39. South Pacific Division Quinquennial Session minutes, Action 2.5, "Realignment of Union Boundaries," October 31, 2000, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives.
40. See the following *ESDA* articles: Solomon Islands Mission, South Pacific Division; American Samoa; Nauru; Tuvalu.
41. Robert A. Larsen, secretary of the TPUM, email to author, April 25, 2019.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. <https://www.walesi.com.fj/>.
46. Ibid.
47. "Pacific Islanders Pay Heavy Price for Abandoning Traditional Diet," accessed June 2, 2019, <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/88/7/10-010710/en/>.
48. "Diabetes Country Profiles," accessed June 2, 2019, <https://www.who.int/diabetes/country-profiles/en/#U>.
49. L. M. Kent, P. Rierson, and D. P. Morton, "Study Protocol for a Community-based Lifestyle Education Program Addressing Noncommunicable Diseases in Low-Literacy Areas of the South Pacific," accessed June 2, 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26652606>.

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