



Vanuatu Mission, Nambatu, Vila, Vanuatu.

Photo courtesy of Nos Terry.

Vanuatu 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 Vanuatu Mission is a growing mission in the territory of the Trans-Pacific Union Mission of the South Pacific Division. Its headquarters are in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Before independence the mission was known as the New Hebrides Mission.

The Territory and Statistics of the Vanuatu Mission

The territory of the Vanuatu Mission is "Vanuatu."¹ It is a part of, and 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 Vanuatu Mission is located on Maine Street, Nambatu, Vila, Vanuatu. The postal address is P.O. Box 85, Vila Vanuatu.² Its real and intellectual property is held in trust by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Vanuatu) Limited, an incorporated entity based at the headquarters office of the Vanuatu Mission Vila, Vanuatu.

The mission operates under General Conference and South Pacific Division (SPD) operating policies. Those policies state that the officers of the Vanuatu Mission are elected by the Trans Pacific Union Mission:³ "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."⁴ 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:⁵

In the *2018 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, the Vanuatu Mission was listed as having 88 Churches and 127 companies. Church membership at the end of 2017 was 24,389. The mission had 309 active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2016 totaled US\$2,159,583. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$125.80.⁶

The Institutions of the Mission

As of 2018, the Vanuatu Mission operated thirty schools.⁷

Aore Adventist Academy, located on Aore Island near Lugainville, Espirito Santo, opened as the New Hebrides Training School in October 1927.⁸ Various known as the Aore Training School and the Parker Missionary School,⁹ it was named Aore Adventist High School in 1974,¹⁰ and renamed the Aore Adventist Academy in 1994.¹¹ The school is co-educational and offers grades 1 to 12. A clinic serving the medical needs of the school and the local community is located on campus.¹² Aore has an enrollment of 227 in grades 7 to 13, with 22 teaching staff.

Baiap Adventist Primary School, located on the western side of Ambrym Island, is the oldest continuously operating Seventh-day Adventist school in Vanuatu. It was operating as a bush school by 1923.¹³ It currently has an enrollment of 37 in kindergarten to grade 6 with four teaching staff.

Battle Creek Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Malekula, has an enrollment of 23 in kindergarten with two teaching staff.

Enekis Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Tanna, has an enrollment of 211 in kindergarten to grade 6 with seven teaching staff.

Entan Vui Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Tanna, has an enrollment of 58 in grades 7 to 9 with four teaching staff.

Epauto Secondary School is located at Fresh Wota One, just behind the University of the South Pacific–Emalus Campus. It commenced operation in 2004.¹⁴ The school has an enrollment of 489 in grades 6 to 11 with 28 teaching staff.

Fokona Adventist Primary School, located in Fokona Village near Port Vila, has an enrollment of 225 in kindergarten to grade 6 with eight teaching staff. It was rebuilt by a group of volunteers from Australia after the devastation of Cyclone Pam in 2015.¹⁵

Fonteng Adventist Primary School, located at the northern end of Ambrym Island, opened in 1964.¹⁶ It has an enrollment of 34 in kindergarten to grade 6 with three teaching staff.

Galilee Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Malekula, has an enrollment of 42 in kindergarten to grade 6 with four teaching staff.

Kwataparen Junior Secondary School, located on the island of Tanna, closed for major renovations and rebuilding following cyclone Pam in 2015. It is scheduled to reopen in mid-2019.¹⁷

Lalinda Adventist Primary School, located on the south-west coast of the island of Ambrym, opened in 1983.¹⁸ It has an enrollment of 70 students in kindergarten to grade 6 with three teaching staff.

Leaur Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Tanna, has an enrollment of 148 students in kindergarten to grade 5 with six teaching staff.

Lekan Adventist Primary School, located in the north-west of the island of Malekula, has an enrollment of 88 in kindergarten to grade 6 with three teaching staff.

Linbul Adventist Primary School, located on the north side of the island of Ambrym, has an enrollment of 67 students in kindergarten to grade 6 with four teaching staff.

Loukaru Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Tanna, has an enrollment of 149 students in kindergarten to grade 6 with five teaching staff. A library was recently added to the school!¹⁹

Lowenata Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Tanna, has an enrollment of 115 students in kindergarten to grade 6 with four teaching staff.

Luganville Adventist Primary School, located in the main center of the island of Espirito Santo, has an enrollment of 297 students in grades 1 to 6 with ten teaching staff.

Malo Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Espirito Santo, has an enrollment of 118 students in kindergarten to grade 6 with eight teaching staff.

Malua Bay Adventist School, located on the island of Malekula, has an enrollment of 84 students in grades 7 to 10.

Mamau Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Efate, has an enrollment of 220 students in kindergarten to grade 7, with eight teaching staff.

Maranatha Adventist Junior Secondary School, located on the island of Ambrym, the school has an enrollment of 94 in grades 7 to 10, with six teaching staff.

Matafanga Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Gaua, has an enrollment of 85 in grades 1 to 8 with eight teaching staff.

Olwi Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Efate, has an enrollment of 281 in kindergarten to grade 7 with a teaching staff of nine.

Parker Adventist Primary School, located on Aore Island, has an enrollment of 44 students in kindergarten to grade 6 with four teaching staff.

Port Quimi Adventist Junior Secondary School, located on the island of Epi, has an enrollment of 107 students in grades 7 to 10 with seven teaching staff.

Riseshime Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Espirito Santo, has an enrollment of 36 students in grades 1 to 7 with four teaching staff.

Sise Adventist Primary School, located on the island of Paama, has an enrollment of 61 students in kindergarten to grade 6 with four teaching staff.

Susana Mate Adventist Primary School, located in the north-east of the island of Epi, has an enrollment of 147 students in kindergarten to grade 6 with six teaching staff

Vila Number 2 Adventist Primary School, located in Port Vila on the island of Efate, has an enrollment of 320 students in kindergarten to grade 7 with eight teaching staff.

Winn Adventist Primary School, located in the north-west of the island of Malekula, has an enrollment of 63 students in grades 1 to 7 with five teaching staff.

ADRA International maintains a Vanuatu office located at mission headquarters. Working closely with ADRA South Pacific, ADRA Vanuatu provides resources for social and community development and responds to natural disasters.

The Vanuatu Mission operates six medical clinics and dispensaries.

Aore Clinic. Private Mail Bag 7; Santo; Vanuatu

Fundue Clinic. Seventh-day Adventist Mission, via Lolowai; East Ambae; Vanuatu

Jet Clinic (formerly known as Middle Bush Clinic). C/o Seventh-day Adventist Church; P.O. Box 14; Lenakel Tanna; Santo; Vanuatu.

Port Quimie Clinic. Seventh-day Adventist Mission; South Epi; Vanuatu.

Port Resolution Clinic. C/o Seventh-day Adventist Church; P.O. Box 14; Lenakel Tanna; Santo; Vanuatu.

Santo Middle Bush Clinic. C/o Seventh-day Adventist Church; P.O. Box 14; Santo; Vanuatu.

The Organizational History of the Mission

Seventh-day Adventists first arrived in the New Hebrides, as it was then known, with a brief visit of the *Pitcairn* to the islands of Efate and Ambrym in 1896.²⁰ In September 1911, Calvin and Myrtle Parker, together with nurses Harold and Clara Carr, were appointed at the Australasian Union Conference council to pioneer the work of the Church in the New Hebrides.²¹ The two men went ahead arriving in Port Vila on Efate on June 10, 1912.²² Their wives arrived in Port Vila on August 11.²³

A permanent site of operations was found on the small island of Atchin, just off the north-east coast of Malekula.²⁴ The Carrs transferred to Atchin on June 19, 1913,²⁵ and began giving medical treatments to the local people.²⁶ Meanwhile, Parker built the mission station and a clinic.²⁷ Tragedy struck after just a few months, on October 6, when the Carrs son, Harold Carr, Jr., contracted bronchitis and died. Harold and Clara Carr returned to Australia.²⁸

Parker completed the church on Atchin, his first in the New Hebrides, and dedicated it on January 17, 1914.²⁹ Norman and Alma Wiles, recent nursing graduates from the Sydney Sanitarium, arrived at Atchin in April 1915 as replacements for the Carrs.³⁰ Then in 1916, the Parkers were appointed to Fiji.³¹ They were replaced by Andrew and Jean Stewart. Atchin was the headquarters for mission operations in the New Hebrides.³²

At the time that the Stewarts arrived in Malekula, an organizational experiment was being implemented. Many of the mission fields in the area of the western Pacific were amalgamated into the Melanesian Mission. This extensive mission field comprised "New Caledonia, Loyalty Islands, New Hebrides, Torres Islands, Banks Group, Santa Cruz Islands, Solomon Islands, Bismarck Archipelago, Eastern New Guinea, and adjacent islands; also Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands."³³ Its headquarters were placed at "Mizpah," Wahroonga, New South Wales in Australia.³⁴ It is likely that the designation was a descriptive title rather than an administrative one. Distances were too great and communication and transport far too rudimentary for effective administration of this territory. By 1919, the experiment had been abandoned.³⁵

In September 1917, Ross and Mabel James were appointed to the New Hebrides.³⁶ On July 10, 1919, they commenced work in the Big Bay area on the north coast of the island of Espiritu Santo.³⁷ Jope Laweloa and his

wife Torika from Fiji joined them as assistants.³⁸ Then in 1922, a mission station at Baiap on the south coast of Ambrym was opened.³⁹ The Baiap church was officially organized in late December 1923.⁴⁰

The official organization of the New Hebrides Mission took place in 1924. A simple note, first appearing in the Seventh-day Adventist *Yearbook* for 1927 says; "Organized as a separate mission in 1924."⁴¹ At the annual council of the Australian Union Conference held August 20 to September 4, 1924, C. H. Parker was listed as the superintendent of the New Hebrides Mission Field.⁴² At the end of 1923, there had been two organized churches and just 31 baptized members in the mission. There were 23 baptisms in 1923 alone.⁴³

Meanwhile, mission leaders began a search for a larger training school site that could eventually replace Atchin as mission headquarters. Late in 1925, they found land on the southern edge of Aore Island that included the smaller Ratua Island.⁴⁴ The total area was approximately 2,412 acres.⁴⁵ The New Hebrides Training School at Aore, opened on October 27, 1927.⁴⁶

On Friday night, June 28, 1929, a volcanic eruption and lava flows destroyed the Baiap mission station on the island of Ambrym.⁴⁷ There was no loss of life, but it was nearly three years before the station was re-built.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Limbul was developed as the new mission station for Ambrym.⁴⁹

In 1931, mission personal visited Tanna Island and the work of the church expanded.⁵⁰ In the following years, further expansion was made on Paama Island, Aoba or Ambae Island, Malo Island,⁵¹ and Tongoa Island.⁵²

By 1940, eight churches were organized in the mission with a total baptized membership of 488 and a Sabbath School attendance of over one thousand.⁵³ Tanna Island, with eleven groups meeting regularly, had the largest representation of Seventh-day Adventists. Malekula, Ambrym, and Aoba Islands each had four worship groups. Espiritu Santo and Paama Islands each had two groups, and Malo, Aore, Atchin, and Tongoa Islands each had a single group of believers.⁵⁴

Until 1949, all of the local conference and mission entities in the Australasian Union Conference, including New Hebrides Mission, reported directly to the union conference. 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 the New Hebrides, along with New Caledonia, Fiji, the Gilbert and Ellice groups, the Cook Islands, Samoa, Niue, Nauru, Society Islands, and Pitcairn.⁵⁵ Thus, the New Hebrides Mission fell under the administration of the new Central Pacific Union Mission with headquarters in Fiji. Closer proximity to union conference headquarters facilitated a more consultative approach.

In 1953, the territory of the Coral Sea Union Mission was divided into a Coral Sea Union Mission and the Bismark-Solomons Union Mission.⁵⁶ This reorganization did not directly affect the New Hebrides as the mission

continued to be within the territory of the Central Pacific Union Mission.

Another reorganization of union mission boundaries occurred in 1972. This time, the New Hebrides Mission was affected. At The 1971 annual meeting of the Australasian Division executive committee, a recommendation for adjustment in the boundaries of the union missions was presented.⁵⁷ In February, sub-committees gave further study to details related to the reorganization of the union mission, and on February 29 the final draft was approved by the division executive committee.⁵⁸

This action dissolved the Coral Sea, Bismarck-Solomons and Central Pacific Union Missions as they had been constituted. These were replaced with the new Papua New Guinea Union Mission, a reorganized Central Pacific Union Mission, and the Western Pacific Union Mission with headquarters in Honiara, Solomon Islands, and which included the New Hebrides.⁵⁹

In 1980, the New Hebrides was granted independence from Britain and France. The newly independent country was named Vanuatu, and the New Hebrides Mission was renamed Vanuatu Mission.⁶⁰ At the time there were 34 churches and a church membership of 4,101.⁶¹

In January 1999, Nos Terry Mailalong was appointed president of the Vanuatu Mission, the first Vanuatu national to hold the office.⁶² At that time, he had the oversight of forty-seven churches with a total baptized membership of 13,270.⁶³ Over the years administrative headquarters had been transferred from Atchin to Aore in 1945; to Luganville, Espiritu Santo, in 1962; and to Port Vila, Efate Island in 1984.⁶⁴

In 2000, a major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the division session.⁶⁵ 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 Vanuatu Mission became a part of the newly named Trans Pacific Union Mission.⁶⁶

Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan

In 2018, the website of the Vanuatu Mission published its vision statement: "Our vision is to be a church that knows, experiences, and shares our hope in Jesus Christ!"⁶⁷

The mission statement read: "The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Vanuatu exists to:

Tell the world about God's salvation

Make disciples for Jesus Christ of all peoples

Prepare them for his second coming as we share the gospel in the context of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14

Grow a faith community in which people are inspired to know, experience and share their hope in Jesus Christ."⁶⁸

The values of the Mission were stated as: "Discipleship, Spirituality, Togetherness, Openness, People & Stewardship."⁶⁹

The strategy was summarized: "To Reach Up, Reach Across, and Reach Out to Tell the World.

We reach up to know, we reach across to experience and we reach out to share our hope in Jesus Christ."⁷⁰

Mission Superintendents⁷¹

New Hebrides Mission

Calvin H. Parker (1913-1916)

Melanesian Mission

G. F. Jones (1916-1918)

New Hebrides Mission

Andrew G. Stewart (1918-1922); Vacant (1923); Calvin H. Parker (1924-1926); J. Ross James (1926-1928); Raimunde Reye (1928); Dr T. A. Sherwin (1929); Calvin H. Parker (1930 – 1931); Gerald Peacock (1931-1936); G. H. Engelbrecht (1936-1941); John B. Keith (1941-1943); J. C. Hamley Perry (1943-1948)

Mission Presidents⁷²

New Hebrides Mission

Albert D. Pietz (1949-1951); Vacant (1951); O. D. F. McCutcheon (1952-1957); Vacant (1958); Alec C. Thomson (1959-1963); Rex E. Cobbin (1963); G. Dean Giles (1964-1971); Eric H. Winter (1971-1972); K. Ross Miller (1973-1976); C. T. Parkinson (1976-1978); R. W. Townend (1978 – 1980)

Vanuatu Mission

Ferguson L. Mackay (1980-1981); David V. Bertelsen (1981-1983); P. E. Verdvoort (1983-1986); Vacant (1987); Ray Woosley (1987-1991); H. W. Errol Wright (1991-1998); Nos Terry Mailalong (1991-2005); John Leeman (2005-2015); Nos Terry Mailalong (2015-)

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71. There is sometimes a short time delay with dates as given in the *Seventh-day Adventist 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.

72. Ibid.

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