



John and Merle Newman, 1995.

Photo courtesy of Laurel Newman.

Newman, John Harvey (1918–2003) and Merle Hope (Grosser) (1921–2022)

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.

John Newman and his wife, Merle, spent most of their working lives ministering in cross-cultural environments in Australia, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Papua, New Guinea, and Pitcairn Island during a time when, after World War II, the Church was beginning to gain considerable momentum, particularly in Melanesia.

Early Life

John Harvey Newman was born on March 31, 1918, at Parkes, New South Wales, Australia.¹ His parents were William Thomas and Dora Sarah Maria Elizabeth (Pardington) Newman.² William Newman had two children by a previous marriage: Polly and Nell.³ Dora had a son, Oscar.⁴ The children of William and Dora Newman were Walter, Dora (Oliver), Ernie, Davie, Reuben, John, Ada (Sheen), George, and Edward "Ted."⁵

John attended Parkes High School, where he obtained his Intermediate Certificate in 1932. He did one more year at school but did not go on to complete his Leaving Certificate.⁶ Then in 1934, John was baptized. On his first Biographical Information Blank, he recognized Pastor Thomas J. Bradley as being particularly influential in his decision for baptism.⁷ Pastor Bradley had been influential in leading many members of the Newman family to a decision for baptism into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁸ John's father, William, however, was never baptized.⁹ Between November 1935 and October 1937, John was a literature evangelist, working to gain experience in meeting people and to raise funds so that he could attend the Australasian Missionary College.¹⁰ He worked in Broken Hill for a time, traversing the countryside in the heat of summer on a bicycle.¹¹

Merle Hope Grosser was born on July 16, 1921, at Millicent, South Australia.¹² She was the daughter of Fergus George¹³ and Daisy Mary (Holloway) Grosser.¹⁴ Her parents had become Seventh-day Adventists in 1913 and were founding members of the Millicent Church.¹⁵ Merle had five siblings: Tom, Verna (Bowman), Jeff, Bert, and Esther (Hodgen).¹⁶ She attended school with her siblings in Tantanoola and the Adventist school in Millicent. In 1938 she spent a year at the Australasian Missionary College¹⁷ before completing the nursing course at the Sydney Sanitarium, graduating in 1943.

Education and Marriage

John attended the Australasian Missionary College from 1938 to 1941, when he graduated from the shorter ministerial course.¹⁸ He was president of the graduating class in 1941.¹⁹

John and Merle met at Avondale.²⁰ They were married on January 22, 1945.²¹ Three children were to be born into the family: Raymond Bruce, born at Kwailabesi, Malaita, Solomon Islands; Valerie Joy (Melvin), born at Honiara, Solomon Islands; and Laurel Dawn (Hope), born at Wau, Papua New Guinea.²²

Early Service

While at Avondale, John had been very much involved with the youth program, the Master Comrades, as it was then known.²³ After graduating, while still single, John was appointed to be a ministerial probationary in North Queensland, Australia.²⁴ He soon found himself as the MV, JMV, and Sabbath School secretary for the North Queensland Mission.²⁵ He remained in departmental work during 1942 and 1943.²⁶ Then he engaged in evangelism in the North Queensland until the end of 1944. In 1945, after John and Merle were married, they moved to New Zealand, where John cared for churches at Hastings and Napier²⁷ for nine months before they received an invitation to relocate to the Solomon Islands.²⁸

Mission Field Service

John Newman commenced his service in the Pacific Islands as the district director at Kwailabesi on Malaita²⁹ between 1945 and 1950.³⁰ While there, Merle was heavily involved in caring for the hospital that had been established in Kwailabesi and dedicated in 1937.³¹ While the family was back in Australia for furlough, John was ordained on July 9, 1949, at Wahroonga, New South Wales.³²

Then, between February 1950 and February 1953, he was the president of the Eastern Solomon Islands Mission based in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands.³³

A transfer to Papua New Guinea followed, where the family lived in Wau,³⁴ and John was the president of the Morobe Mission between February 1953 and December 1954.³⁵ John was responsible for establishing the Church at Wau and would patrol into the mountains behind Wau in the Morobe Province.³⁶ At the beginning of 1955, John was appointed to the Western Highlands,³⁷ where he was the district director at Rakamanda. He was heavily involved in requesting the Church to build the Sopas Hospital.³⁸ Once a house was built, John and Merle and family moved to Tetamanda.³⁹ In August 1957 John became the president of the Western Highlands Mission based in Mount Hagen.⁴⁰ The Ialibu area was opened up for the Church at that time.⁴¹

The family returned to Australia and remained there between April 1961 and July 1965.⁴² Until December 1962, Pastor Newman was caring for churches at Busselton and Margaret River in Western Australia and was associated with an evangelistic series at Bunbury conducted by evangelist Alfred Jorgensen.⁴³ The Newmans then moved to the Karalundi School for Australia's indigenous youth, where John was superintendent between January 1963 and July 1965.⁴⁴

Then, in July 1965, John and Merle were invited to return to Papua New Guinea. They accepted and were located at Bisiatabu, where the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Papua and New Guinea had commenced almost sixty years previously.⁴⁵ They were at Bisiatabu less than a year before they were relocated to Kabiufa High School, where John taught Bible subjects at the school while also caring for some responsibilities at Moruma in the Chimbu Province.⁴⁶ After just five months at Kabiufa and Moruma, in January 1967, they were relocated at Lae, where John once again was president of the Morobe Mission.⁴⁷ In January 1970, the family transferred to Madang, where John had been appointed as the president of the Madang Mission.⁴⁸

Just a few months into 1972, John and Merle Newman were granted a furlough to give them an opportunity to regain their health.⁴⁹ They had served in the tropics of the South Pacific for some 23 years, and they needed time to recuperate. Before their furlough concluded, however, it was decided to appoint Pastor Newman to pastoral evangelism in the Greater Sydney Conference. They ministered in the Corrimal Adventist Church⁵⁰ and the Wollongong Seventh-day Adventist Church⁵¹ between May 1972 and December 1975.⁵²

In December 1975, Pastor and Mrs. Newman accepted a two-year appointment on Pitcairn Island. Unfortunately, they were not able to complete the full two years and had to return to Australia some months early because of Pastor Newman's ill health.⁵³ After some time recuperating, John pastored the Windsor church in the Greater Sydney Conference until he retired in 1978.⁵⁴ During this time, Merle was working as a nurse at Kings Langley Retirement Village operated by the Greater Sydney Conference.⁵⁵

Summary of Service⁵⁶

Nov. 1, 1935–Oct. 31, 1937	Literature evangelist South New South Wales
Jan. 1, 1942–Dec. 31, 1943	MV, JMV, and Sabbath School Sec. North Queensland
Jan. 1, 1944–Dec. 31, 1944	Evangelist North Queensland
Jan. 1, 1945–Sep. 30, 1945	Pastor North New Zealand
Oct. 1, 1945–Jan. 31, 1950	District director, Kwailabesi Solomon Islands
Feb. 1, 1950–Feb. 1, 1953	President Eastern Solomon Islands
Feb. 2, 1953–Dec. 31, 1954	President Morobe Mission
Jan. 1, 1955–Jul. 31, 1957	District director, Rakamanda Western Highlands
Aug. 1, 1957–Mar. 31, 1961	President Western Highlands
Apr. 1, 1961–Dec. 31, 1962	Pastoral/evangelism Western Australia
Jan. 1, 1963–Jul. 3, 1965	Superintendent, Karalundi School Western Australia
Jul. 4, 1965–Jun. 30, 1966	District director, Bisiatabu Papua
Jul. 1, 1966–Dec. 31, 1966	Teacher Kabiufa High School
Jan. 1, 1967–Dec. 31, 1969	President Morobe Mission
Jan. 1, 1970–Mar. 11, 1972	President Madang Mission
Mar. 12, 1972–Apr. 30, 1972	Furlough
May 1, 1972–Dec. 6, 1975	Pastoral/evangelism Greater Sydney
Dec. 7, 1975–Jun. 30, 1976	Pastor Pitcairn Island

Jun. 30, 1976–Feb. 4, 1978

Pastor Greater Sydney

Feb. 4, 1978

Retirement

Retirement

John and Merle Newman officially retired on February 4, 1978, after 38 years of service.⁵⁷ They continued for one additional year on sustentation.⁵⁸ Then they moved to Yarrowonga Park, New South Wales.⁵⁹ Then, after a short time in the Avondale Retirement Village at Cooranbong, they moved to Kings Langley, where John shared with his brother-in-law, Pastor Bert Grosser, the supervision of the Kings Langley Retirement Village in the Greater Sydney Conference.⁶⁰ They moved briefly back to Avondale but then they settled back at Kings Langley.⁶¹ John Harvey Newman died on June 4, 2003, at Blacktown, New South Wales. Merle Newman died Monday, February 21, 2022 aged 100 years.⁶²

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