

# Parmenter, Keith Samuel (1918–1993)

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## VERNON BARRY PARMENTER

Vernon Barry Parmenter, B.A. in theology (Australasian Missionary College/Pacific Union College, USA), retired in 2008 as an associate secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Maryland, USA. An Australian by birth Parmenter has served as a pastor, departmental director at conference and union levels, and administrator at division and General Conference levels. In retirement he continues to preach and is active in his local church and conference. He is married to Zelda and has one son, one daughter, and six granddaughters.

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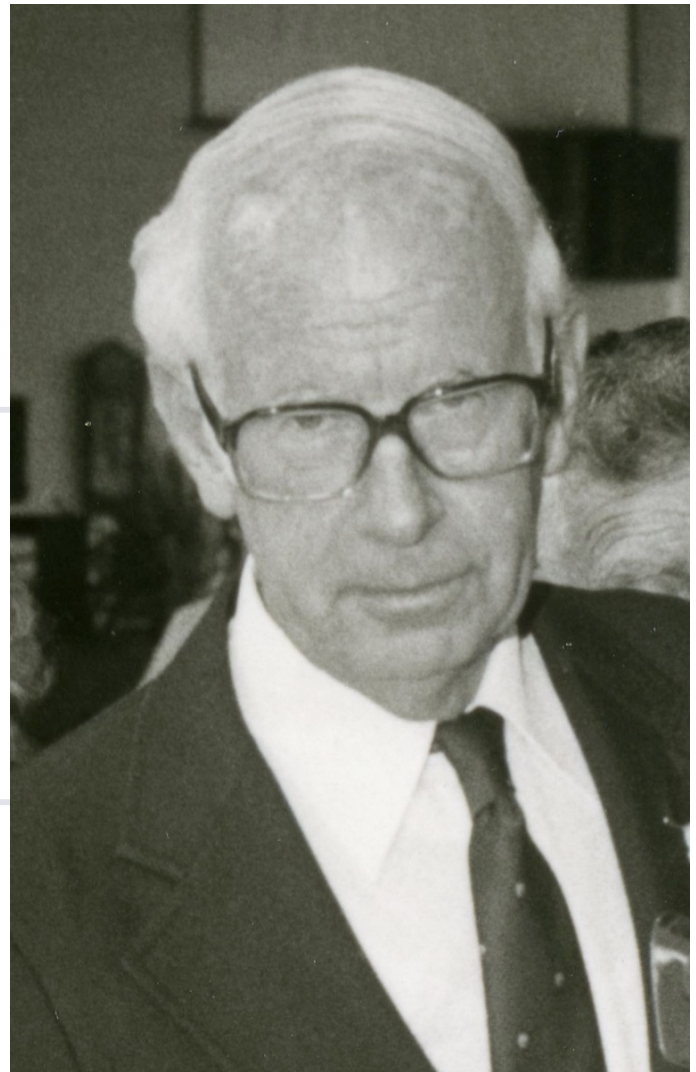
Keith Samuel Parmenter, after holding a number of pastoral, evangelistic, and administrative roles, served as the secretary and then president of the Australasian Division.

## Early Life

Keith Samuel Parmenter was born in Lismore, New South Wales, Australia, on March 14, 1918,<sup>1</sup> the third child of Charles Theodore and Sarah Elizabeth (Bettens) Parmenter.<sup>2</sup>

Keith's great-grandfather, James Serjeant Parmenter, born in Colchester, England, arrived in Australia on July 29, 1830, aboard the *Lady Feversham*.<sup>3</sup> Mary (also known as Margaret) Mcevoy, from Dublin, Ireland, arrived on October 12, 1830, aboard the *Forth II*.<sup>4</sup> Both were convicts. After working for farmers at Sutton Forest, near Berrima, New South Wales, for four years, they were married and declared free citizens.<sup>5</sup> Their seventh child, Joseph, married Emma Ward.<sup>6</sup> Joseph and Emma had 11 children.<sup>7</sup> Keith Parmenter's father, Charles Theodore Parmenter, was their ninth child, born in Berrima, New South Wales. Some years later Charles; his father, Joseph; and at least three of his brothers moved to the New South Wales north coast.<sup>8</sup>

Charles married Sarah Elizabeth Bettens at Berrima in 1911.<sup>9</sup> Five children were born into the family—Clarice, Charles, Keith, Ellen, and Claude.<sup>10</sup> All the children were expected to help on the banana farm at Koonorigan,



Keith Parmenter

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

New South Wales, and other locations as the family moved on several occasions. This resulted in challenges for each of them to achieve a regular education. Tragedy struck when Claude,<sup>11</sup> at the age of 18, having been at the Sabbath afternoon meeting in the Burringbar church, offered to ride his sister Ellen's bicycle home so that she could travel in the car. As Claude entered the main road, not far from the church, he was struck by a vehicle and killed instantly.<sup>12</sup> Ellen carried the burden of his death as her fault, resulting in poor health for many years.

In 1925 Keith's parents, Charles and Sarah, along with two other farming families (the Devilles and the Crabtrees), purchased *The Great Controversy* from a traveling colporteur who visited their farm "Bonny Doon" in Inverell, New South Wales. They all became Sabbath-keepers as a result. Pastor Charles Reynolds was sent by the conference to follow up these interests and study the Bible with them. All three families were baptized and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>13</sup> Keith was only 7 years old at the time and was baptized later, at the age of 13. The family was living at Kempsey at that time.<sup>14</sup>

As soon as Parmenter finished school, he burned with a desire to serve the Church and devote his life to God. In 1935 he attended the Australasian Missionary College (now Avondale College) and commenced the accounting course. However, sometime in 1936, his father took seriously ill, and he was called home to help on the family farm.

## Early Years of Service and Marriage

While Keith was at home working on the farm, he met Maureen Heather Chilcott. She preferred being called Heather and had been born in Murwillumbah on September 3, 1921.<sup>15</sup> She was the second daughter of Cecil and Ivy (Harding) Chilcott. Her siblings were Gwendolyn, Bernard, Calvin, Elaine, and Yvonne.<sup>16</sup>

The family was living at Uki, approximately 15 kilometers (9 miles) from Murwillumbah, at the time of Heather's birth. Her father, Cecil, was working as a butcher's aid. They lived at Uki until 1926 and became Seventh-day Adventists through the ministry of Pastor Stan Jackson, who rode his bicycle from Murwillumbah for Bible studies every week. The family moved several times over the next few years. Heather had no high school education because she was needed on the banana plantation to help her father earn a living.<sup>17</sup>

Heather became engaged to Keith when she was 16 years old and was married at 17 on April 5, 1939, at Upper Burringbar, New South Wales, by Pastor Harry Roy Steed.<sup>18</sup>

Almost as soon as the wedding was over, Keith and Heather moved to Tamworth in New South Wales, where Keith engaged in colporteur ministry for 12 months. Then they returned to the Burringbar area, where Keith once again returned to banana farming. During this time, their first son, Glendon, was born, and three years later, their second son, Vernon, arrived. Three weeks after Vernon was born, Keith took his family to Cooranbong to attend the Australasian Missionary College, where he commenced the ministerial course, graduating in 1947.<sup>19</sup>

Heather worked at various jobs throughout her life. She served in the main office of the Sydney Adventist Hospital and then in the physiotherapy department as a secretary by day and a masseur by night. Then she worked in the Girl's Brigade office in New Zealand and in a photo laboratory in Brisbane. Over the years she was a great support to her husband, always ready to entertain guests from all over the world, playing her part as the pastor's wife in the churches where her husband served.<sup>20</sup> When living in retirement at Ocean Shores, New South Wales, and working to raise money to build a new church, Heather drove the tractor on the Taylor farm, picking up fruit for the market.

Just before graduation from the Australasian Missionary College, Keith Parmenter received a call to serve in the Victorian Conference in the Trans-Australian Union Conference. Halfway through the annual camp meeting in January, he learned that he was being appointed as the pastor of the Traralgon and Moe churches in Gippsland.<sup>21</sup> The only home that he could find was a dilapidated old building next door to the shops in the main street of Traralgon. It was lined with burlap pasted over with wallpaper. When the wind blew, the internal walls moved.

One day an elderly lady knocked on the door and asked whether Keith would swap homes with her. She lived on the outskirts of town in a beautiful new home by a little stream, but because of her age, she needed to be nearer the shops because she was unable to drive any more. After examining the house, the Parmenter family excitedly moved into their new home.

After three years of full-time service, Keith was ordained to the gospel ministry in January 1952.<sup>22</sup> That same year he was elected as the Voice of Prophecy and Radio secretary of the conference, based in Melbourne, New South Wales. The program developed rapidly and enjoyed great success, particularly with its follow-up ministry. The new medium of television became available to all denominations during this time, and Parmenter was responsible for bringing *Faith for Today* to the conference, the first religious program to be televised in Australia.

During their time of service in Victoria, two more children were born into the Parmenter home: Darryl in 1951, who lived only a few hours, and several years later Colin in Melbourne, Victoria.

Parmenter served on the Victorian Conference Executive Committee and was the conference camp superintendent for a number of years, serving a total of 10 years in the conference. In addition to all these responsibilities, while living in Melbourne, he served as the pastor of the Spotswood church.<sup>23</sup>

In 1958 Parmenter was appointed to serve as pastor of the Wahroonga and Chatswood churches in the Greater Sydney Conference in the Trans-Tasman Union Conference. The Wahroonga church, at that time, was regarded as the headquarters for the Australasian Division (now known as the South Pacific Division). It was housed in an old wooden building just a few hundred meters (a few hundred yards) from the building where its members worship today. Parmenter served as the pastor during the major building program for the church building that stands on the site currently. While he was an evangelist at heart and conducted outreach programs,<sup>24</sup> during this time his administration skills became apparent, and ultimately he spent 23 of his 36 years of service in

administration.<sup>25</sup>

## Conference President and Australasian Division Secretary

After three years in the Greater Sydney Conference, Keith Parmenter was called to serve as President of the South Queensland Conference in the Trans-Tasman Union Conference. During his term of service in Queensland, he became seriously ill and was not able to fulfill his role for a 12-month period. His position was kept vacant until he was well enough to return to work. Mr. Oliver Twist, the South Queensland Conference Secretary-Treasurer, served as acting president during this time as well as taking care of his primary responsibilities. While serving in Queensland, Parmenter boldly faced pressure from a group led by Robert Brinsmead, who were making inroads into many churches in the conference.

During Parmenter's time as president of the conference, the first camp meeting on the new site at Kallangur was held in September 1962.<sup>26</sup> The conference office was significantly extended and remodeled in 1965, adding a large hall, an Adventist Book Center, four new offices, a kitchen, and a committee room.<sup>27</sup> Parmenter had the pleasure of seeing new schools built in the Toowoomba district,<sup>28</sup> in the south of Brisbane,<sup>29</sup> and Ipswich<sup>30</sup> as well as new churches in Sandgate,<sup>31</sup> Aspley,<sup>32</sup> Dalby, and Chinchilla.<sup>33</sup>

He spent seven years in Queensland before he was called to serve as President of the North New Zealand Conference in the Trans-Tasman Union Conference. He was there for only 18 months before being elected as the Secretary of the Australasian Division in 1970.<sup>34</sup> Before departing North New Zealand, he had the pleasure of dedicating the new Kaikohe Seventh-day Adventist Church<sup>35</sup> as well as opening the new hall and school at the Whangarei Church.<sup>36</sup>

While Parmenter was serving as secretary, the division voted to reorganize the Central Pacific Union Mission, moving its headquarters to New Zealand in 1972.<sup>37</sup>

## Australasian Division President

Seven years later, in 1977, Keith Parmenter was elected as President of the Australasian Division, a position he held for eight years until his retirement in 1984.<sup>38</sup> During his time as president, the division saw significant development: the establishment of Pacific Adventist College<sup>39</sup> (now University) in Papua New Guinea,<sup>40</sup> the commencement of the Aboriginal Work Development<sup>41</sup> program, and the Australasian Division rescue operations of Loma Linda Foods in the United States of America<sup>42</sup> and Granose Foods in the United Kingdom.<sup>43</sup>

During Parmenter's tenure as president, two other initiatives commenced: the Ethnic Work Committee, which assisted conferences to hire ethnic ministers to pastor the burgeoning development of numerous ethnic churches;<sup>44</sup> and the Volunteer program, which coordinated the growing interest by laypersons to assist in the South Pacific Islands and in their home territories.<sup>45</sup>

During his time in leadership, Parmenter initiated the first Australasian Division Bible Conference, with 250 ministers from all over the division in attendance, at Avondale College.<sup>46</sup> Prior to 1980, the *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey* was available to church members and others only on a subscription basis. Parmenter was able to convince the division committee to support the concept of providing free supplies on a weekly basis to all the churches.<sup>47</sup>

The position of division president carried with it another title, Vice President of the General Conference, together with the automatic role of General Conference Executive Committee member. These roles required Parmenter to make numerous trips to the General Conference offices in the United States of America (USA), the General Conference Sessions, and various parts of the world.

## Significant Challenges

A number of significant challenges occurred during the time of Parmenter's presidency. Michael Chamberlain, an ordained pastor, who together with his wife, Lindy, were vacationing at Ayer's Rock, Northern Territory, Australia, when their little baby was taken by a dingo. Lindy was charged with murder and jailed for a number of years. Michael was charged as an accessory. During this ordeal, the church had to respond to considerable negative publicity as well as support the Chamberlain family.<sup>48</sup>

Doctrinal challenges were precipitated by the presentations and writings of Dr. Desmond Ford during Keith Parmenter's time as division president.<sup>49</sup> Dr. Ford had served as head of the Theology Department at Avondale College for many years before serving on the faculty at Pacific Union College, USA. He was a charismatic presenter and attracted a large following wherever he spoke.

However, in early 1980 the General Conference requested that Dr. Ford respond to concerns the Church had in regard to significant aspects of his theology.<sup>50</sup> Three months later, a committee was appointed to meet at Glacier View Ranch in Colorado, USA, to review a one-thousand-page document that he had prepared. More than one hundred theologians and administrators of the Church met to review the document.<sup>51</sup> A spirit of consensus prevailed, and the Church published a statement affirming that the Church's position on the sanctuary doctrine had not changed.<sup>52</sup> The ultimate outcome was that Ford had his credentials revoked by the Australasian Division Committee and was terminated from denominational employment.<sup>53</sup>

The Church in the Australasian Division became polarized, with leadership being challenged both by those who felt that Ford should have been dealt with earlier and by those who felt he was being treated too harshly. Numerous ministers and church members left the church during this time. Parmenter experienced the most difficult time of his ministry because he was personally accused as the cause of the split, even though at all times all decisions were made by General Conference, Australasian Division, and Avondale committees.<sup>54</sup>

At the time of Parmenter's death, his colleague, Division Secretary Ron Taylor, wrote:

Keith was one of God’s great men, a humble man, often a quiet man, but a man of principle, who was not afraid to stand for the right when it was challenged and who lived what he preached. Because Keith was a caring and sympathetic man, he carried on his heart a more than average load as he led the church through such crises as the Ford disaffection, the Chamberlain saga, and the controversy over Ellen G. White’s borrowings. There was also a debate within Church leadership over the acceptance of Government Grants for the support of Church Schools. Without doubt these stressful events took a toll of his health.<sup>55</sup>

## Later Life

Keith and Heather Parmenter retired to Ocean Shores in North New South Wales in 1984, where Keith dedicated a major portion of his time to local church activity. They spent endless hours volunteering and raising funds to build the new Ocean Shores church. He moved around the local community, giving Bible studies and preaching in local churches.

Keith Parmenter died in the Mullumbimby Hospital in the early hours of December 16, 1993, having suffered a massive cerebral hemorrhage.<sup>56</sup>

Ron Taylor wrote of him: “Pastor Keith Parmenter was a man of conviction who served his church with distinction; but he was also a kind, humble man who lived what he preached and was highly respected by both those for whom he worked and those who worked with him.”<sup>57</sup>

## Summary of Denominational Service<sup>58</sup>

Aug.–Dec. 1935	Farm Hand	Avondale College, Cooranbong
Jan.–Dec. 1939	Colporteur	North New South Wales Conf., Tamworth
Jan. 1948–Dec. 1950	Church Pastor	Victorian Conf., Traralgon/Moe
Jan. 1951–Dec. 1957	Radio/TV Secretary	Victorian Conf., Melbourne
Jan. 1958–Dec. 1961	District Director	Greater Sydney Conf., Sydney
Dec. 1961–Feb. 1969	President	South Queensland Conf., Brisbane
Feb. 1969–Aug. 1970	President	North New Zealand Conf., Auckland
Sep. 1970–Dec. 1976	Secretary	Australasian Division, Sydney
Jan. 1977–Jan. 1984	President	Australasian Division, Sydney

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Wright, W. E. "A Moment of Triumph." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, July 14, 1969.

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## NOTES

1. New South Wales, Australia, Birth Certificate 11615 (March 14, 1918), Keith Samuel Parmenter, Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, New South Wales, Australia.
2. A considerable amount of material in this biography is written from the personal knowledge of the author, Vernon Parmenter, as a son of Keith Samuel Parmenter.
3. "Lady Feversham Voyage to New South Wales, Australia in 1830 with 180 Passengers," Convict Records, accessed November 18, 2018, <https://convictrecords.com.au/ships/lady-feversham/1830>.
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7. Ibid.
8. "Charles Theodore Parmenter, 1885–1969," March 16, 2018, [http://www.bellsite.id.au/gdbtree/HTMLFiles/HTMLFiles\\_17/P9549.html](http://www.bellsite.id.au/gdbtree/HTMLFiles/HTMLFiles_17/P9549.html); Raymond Faull, "The Stan Faull Family History" (unpublished document, n.d.), personal collection of Vernon Parmenter, 5.
9. Brian Yap, "Charles Theodore Parmenter," February 11, 2016, <http://yewenyi.net/FH/1314.html>.
10. Ibid.
11. T. Howse, "Claude Kevin Parmenter obituary," *Australasian Record*, September 1, 1941, 7.
12. Ibid.
13. Raymond Faull, "The Stan Faull Family History" (unpublished document, n.d.), personal collection of Vernon Parmenter, 5.
14. Keith S. Parmenter, "Our Leaders Affirm Their Faith," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, September 21, 1981, 1.
15. New South Wales, Australia, Birth Certificate 40964 (September 3, 1921), Maureen Heather Chilcott, Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, New South Wales, Australia. She was born in the Sunnyside Hospital, Murwillumbah.
16. B. W. Chilcott, *My Father, Cecil* (self-pub., 2003), 93.
17. Ibid., 139.
18. New South Wales, Australia, Marriage Certificate C464063 (April 5, 1939), Keith Stanley Parmenter and Maureen Heather Chilcott, Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, New South Wales, Australia.
19. Australasian Missionary College Diploma, Keith Samuel Parmenter, December 14, 1947.
20. "First Meeting of Sydney's Northern Federation Dorcas Welfare," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, August 28, 1961, 5.
21. H. W. Kingston, "Traralgon Church, Victoria," *Australasian Record*, August 14, 1950, 8.
22. Certificate of Ordination, issued in Melbourne, Victoria (unpublished document, January 12, 1952), personal collection of Vernon Parmenter.
23. Keith Samuel Parmenter Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Parmenter, Keith Samuel," Document: "Personal Service Record."

24. "The Wairoonga Church . . .," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 19, 1961, 8.
25. Keith Samuel Parmenter Service Records, "Personal Service Record."
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33. M. M. Stewart, "Twin Churches Dedicated—Dalby and Chinchilla, Queensland," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, October 18, 1965, 3.
34. Keith Samuel Parmenter Service Records, "Personal Service Record."
35. George Drinkall, "Historic Day at Kaikohe, N.Z.," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, September 14, 1970, 1.
36. W. E. Wright, "A Moment of Triumph," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, July 14, 1969, 6.
37. K. S. Parmenter, "Australasian Division Mission Field Development," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, May 14, 1973, 1.
38. Minutes of the General Conference Committee, November 24, 1976, 76-482, General Conference Archives, accessed September 21, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1976-11.pdf>; "Australasian Division Executive Appointments," *Australasian Record*, December 13, 1976, 1.
39. K. S. Parmenter, "The Lord Has Done and Will Do Great Things," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, December 3, 1983, 2. Pacific Adventist College was opened in 1984.
40. "A Century of Adventism in the South Pacific," ARH, October 11, 1984, 3.
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44. Ron W. Taylor, "Strong Development in Ethnic Churches," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 16, 1980, 1.
45. R. W. Taylor. "The Course We Now Pursue," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, September 22, 1980, 1.
46. R. H. Parr, "Australasia Holds Its First-Ever Bible Conference," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, February 19, 1979, 8.
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48. "Support the Chamberlains with Prayer and Giving," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, July 23, 1983, supplement.
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51. K. S. Parmenter, "Ford Document on Sanctuary Studied: Variant Views Rejected," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, September 8, 1980, 3.
52. Minutes of the General Conference Committee, August 21, 1980, 80-227-228, General Conference Archives, accessed September 21, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1980-08.pdf>; "Statement on Desmond Ford Document," ARH, September 4, 1980, 8-11; William G. Johnsson, "Overview of a Historic Meeting," ARH, September 4, 1980, 4-7. The October 1980 issue of *Ministry* magazine was devoted to a discussion of the Glacier View meetings and their aftermath.
53. Kenneth H. Wood, "Further Information," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, December 8, 1980, supplement.
54. "Stop-Press Message from Division Headquarters," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, March 30, 1981, 2. "The stress of the conflict was not without cost to Pastor Parmenter. One day he said to me, 'I will probably go down in history as the most hated president this division has seen, but I had to obey my conscience.' The burden seemed to him to be more than he could bear and he tendered his resignation, but the AUD Committee chose not to accept it, suggesting rather that he take several months off in order to recuperate, and thankfully in due course he was able to return to his post. The Adventist Church, and in particular the Australasian Division, can thank God for placing a man like Keith Parmenter at the helm during this stormy period and blessing him with heavenly wisdom with which to steer His church through

troubled waters." Ron W. Taylor, "Comments on Events in the South Pacific Division During the Presidency of Pastor Keith Parmenter and Beyond" (unpublished paper, n.d.), personal collection of Vernon Parmenter. Ron Taylor was the South Pacific Division Secretary from 1975 to 1985.

55. R. W. Taylor, "Life Sketch of Keith Samuel Parmenter" (unpublished document read at the funeral of Keith Parmenter), personal collection of Vernon Parmenter; see also "No Adventist Scandal," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, December 22, 1980, 3; "The Acceptance and Use of Government Grants for Church Schools," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, October 22, 1983, 11.

56. Ron W. Taylor, "Past SPD President Dies," *Record*, February 12, 1994, 12.

57. Ibid.

58. Keith Samuel Parmenter Service Records, "Personal Service Record."

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