



South New Zealand Conference office, Russley, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Photo courtesy of Maheata Adeline.

# South New Zealand Conference, South Pacific Division

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## 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.

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The South New Zealand Conference, with headquarters in Christchurch, New Zealand, administers the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church within the South Island of New Zealand.<sup>1</sup>

## Current Territory and Statistics

The South New Zealand Conference is a constituent of the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference. Its headquarters are located at 6H Sir William Pickering Drive, Christchurch 8053, NZ. Its postal address is P.O. Box 5186, Christchurch 8542, NZ.

The unincorporated activities of the conference are governed by a constitution that is based on the model conference constitution of the South Pacific Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (SPD). Its real property is held in trust by the Seventh-day Adventist Church Property Trustee (NZ), Ltd., an incorporated entity based at the headquarters office of the union in Howick, Auckland, NZ, and placed on the New Zealand Companies office register on April 28, 2004.<sup>2</sup> Its intellectual property is held in trust by the Australasian Conference Association, Limited, an incorporated entity based at the headquarters office of the SPD in Wahroonga, NSW. New Zealand Seventh-day Adventist Schools Association, Limited, is an incorporated entity established in 1992 to hold the title for school properties of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in New Zealand. It is the entity that the government of New Zealand recognizes for the payment of grants to SDA schools in New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

The South New Zealand Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is registered under this name on the New Zealand Charities Services Register. Its registration number is CC42030, and it was registered on June 30, 2008.<sup>4</sup>

The official territory of the South New Zealand Conference is the “South Island of New Zealand, including Chatham Island.”<sup>5</sup>

In the *2018 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* the South New Zealand Conference was listed as having 22 churches and 0 companies. Church membership at the end of 2017 was 2,228.<sup>6</sup> The conference had 40 active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2016 totaled US\$1,767,263. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$1,164.64.<sup>7</sup>

The conference website, shared with the North New Zealand Conference, is [www.adventist.org.nz](http://www.adventist.org.nz).

The regular publication of the South New Zealand Conference is *South News*: A subscribed weekly email newsletter for churches and members in the South New Zealand Conference that contains spiritual thoughts, event information, sunset times, offering information, and news and notices from the conferences and local churches. It is accessible at <https://adventist.org.nz/connect/south-news/>.

## Schools of the South New Zealand Conference<sup>8</sup>

*Christchurch Adventist School*. Located at 15 Grants Road Papanui, Christchurch, NZ, the school at the end of 2017 had an enrollment of 234 in grades 1 to 13 and a teaching staff of 18. The primary school was opened in 1925 as a sole-teacher school and an attendance of 25. Another teacher was added in 1927. With continuing growth the school was officially “opened” as a central school on April 4, 1932.<sup>9</sup>

*Southland Adventist Christian School.* Located at 28 Bainfield Road, Invercargill, NZ, the school at the end of 2017 had an enrollment of 56 in grades 1 to 8, with a teaching staff of five. The school was opened on November 6, 1954, at 187 Esk Street, Invercargill, with 40 pupils.<sup>10</sup> It was expanded and rebuilt on its present site in 1968.<sup>11</sup>

## Camps

*Lake Lyndon Lodge.* The lodge is located on Lake Lyndon Road, Lake Lyndon, NZ. The lodge was officially opened on June 8, 1969.<sup>12</sup>

*Mount Hutt Retreat.* Originally known as Camp Koromiko, the retreat is located at 437 Hart Road, RD 12, Rakaia 7782, NZ.<sup>13</sup>

*Pascoe Park Campground.* The campground is located at 20 Farrells Road, Styx, Christchurch, NZ. The annual conference convention is held at this site.

## Significant Events in the Organization of the South New Zealand Conference

In early 1889 there were more than 150 baptized members in New Zealand. There were three organized churches: Kaeo, Auckland, and Napier. On May 27, 1889, on the recommendation of Stephen Haskell, who had written from America, a New Zealand Conference was organized, with Arthur Daniells elected as president, W. H. Hardy as secretary, and George Masters as treasurer. A conference committee of four was appointed: Joseph Hare, Jr.; S. Rout; John Glass; and Thomas Ward. None of the conference officers were on the committee.<sup>14</sup>

On the same day as the conference was organized, a New Zealand Tract Society was also organized!<sup>15</sup> The role of the Tract Society was to care for the publication and distribution of books and literature throughout New Zealand. Chosen as officers were Arthur Daniells as president, Robert Hare as vice-president, and M. H. Tuxford as secretary and treasurer.<sup>16</sup>

Five years later the New Zealand Conference was included in the Australasian Union Conference (AUC), which was organized during the time of the Australian camp meeting, January 15-25, 1894. The AUC comprised District 7 of the General Conference districts, and included 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."<sup>17</sup>

A major organizational change occurred within New Zealand in 1915. At the twenty-fifth annual session of the conference held at Napier, January 19-31, 1915, a recommendation to form a separate conference for the South Island was proposed and adopted as follows: "*We Recommend*, That the territory south of the Cook Straits be

detached from this conference, and be organized into a separate conference.<sup>18</sup> The elected officers of the New Zealand Conference (now just the North Island) were: J. M. Cole, president; H. E. Piper, vice president; and E. Rosendahl, secretary/treasurer.<sup>19</sup> The elected officers for the South New Zealand Conference were: W. H. Pascoe, president; and H. E. Sharp, secretary/treasurer.<sup>20</sup>

The formal division of the two conferences took place on April 1, 1915.<sup>21</sup> The first official meeting of representatives from across the conference was held in Christchurch, April 2–5, 1915. All but one of the conference employees were present, and J. M. Cole, F. G. Rampton, and E. Rosendahl from “the mother conference.”<sup>22</sup> An appeal was made for help to furnish the conference office and meet the cost of the church school property. “An amount of £120 was asked for, but in all, £165 18s. 6d. was pledged.”<sup>23</sup>

In his report of the Napier session, C. H. Watson made particular mention of the work of colporteurs in the South Island. He referred to “the remarkable increase in book sales in the South Island during the past few months.”<sup>24</sup> The ministry of literature evangelists in the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in New Zealand and in the South Island in particular was vital. These salesmen and saleswomen traveled long distances (often under difficult conditions) to remote communities, placing literature in homes of villagers and isolated families. Their work was often the forerunner of camp meetings and evangelistic programs. One earlier example reported by New Zealand Conference president W.L.H. Baker was Mary Owens, who devoted her life to the sale of SDA literature. The year before the 1902 evangelistic program in Dunedin conducted by E. W. Farnsworth she weekly delivered 400 *Bible Echoes* into the homes of appreciative readers. Baker also commended W. H. Pascoe and D. A. Owen for their work in the South.<sup>25</sup>

The South New Zealand Conference continued as a constituent conference of the AUC until 1949. Up until that time the Australasian Union Conference, also designated as the Australasian Division, operated as a collection of conferences and missions throughout its designated territory.<sup>26</sup> In 1949 four unions were organized within the territory of the division, which also was now designated as the Australasian Inter-Union Conference:<sup>27</sup> “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.”<sup>28</sup> South New Zealand Conference and North New Zealand Conference were part of the Trans-Tasman Union Conference.<sup>29</sup>

In 2000 a further major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the division session.<sup>30</sup> The number of unions in the division was reduced from five to four. The New Zealand Pacific Union Conference (NZPUC) came into existence in this reorganization.<sup>31</sup> The action of the South Pacific Division session on October 31, 2000, read that there would be 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 . . . and further that the above new organizational structure be operative from January 1, 2001.<sup>32</sup>

Following the reorganization, the headquarters of the NZPUC were first established in the conference office of the North New Zealand Conference.<sup>33</sup> Since that time there have been no further organizational changes affecting the North New Zealand Conference or the South New Zealand Conference.

## The Headquarters Office of the South New Zealand Conference

Soon after the New Zealand Conference was organized it was recognized that there was a need for a central administrative office. Thus, in May 1890 the headquarters of the conference were established in Buckle Street, Wellington, where a lease on the building was obtained for one year.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently the office was moved to Banks Terrace, Wellington, and then to 57 Tory Street, Wellington. In March 1898 a building to house the conference office and the office of the New Zealand Tract Society was being erected at 37 Taranaki Street, Wellington.<sup>35</sup> The building known as Beulah Hall was sold in 1908.<sup>36</sup> New premises were secured and the office occupied at Queen Street, Lower Hutt, on Monday, July 20, 1908.<sup>37</sup> That office was occupied for three years and the conference moved to Royston House, 70 Nairn Street, Wellington, in 1912.<sup>38</sup> The next move was to Auckland. Rented premises were obtained for a short time at 108 Ponsonby Road, Auckland.<sup>39</sup>

After the formation of the South New Zealand Conference the office was established at 7 Battersea Street, Sydenham.<sup>40</sup> The conference president, W. H. Pascoe, lived at the same address. The office was located there for only two years and then moved to 84 Cashel Street, Christchurch.<sup>41</sup> Then in the first half of 1920, premises were purchased at 902 Colombo Street, Christchurch.<sup>42</sup> A new office was dedicated in early 1939 at 40 Bealey Avenue, Christchurch.<sup>43</sup> This building was the headquarters of the South New Zealand Conference until 1990, when the building was sold and the staff moved on a temporary basis to the conference campground at 20 Farrells Road, Christchurch, while new accommodation was being sought.<sup>44</sup> Premises were leased at 487 Papanui Road, Christchurch, in early 1992, after 20 months at the campground.<sup>45</sup> In 1997 the conference office was moved to a multistory building already owned by the conference at 93–95 Cambridge Terrace, Christchurch.<sup>46</sup> Then in May 2007 the office moved to 6H Sir William Pickering Drive, Christchurch.<sup>47</sup>

## Some Significant Evangelistic Events in the History of the South New Zealand Conference

Prior to 1891 evangelistic endeavors in New Zealand were conducted only in the North Island cities and towns. In 1891 M. C. Israel erected the fifty-foot mission tent in Blenheim in the northern part of the South Island and conducted a series of meetings in that town. As a result, eight or ten adults commenced the observance of the Sabbath, and 22 became Sabbath School members.<sup>48</sup> In November of that year he repeated the series in Nelson before returning to Wellington at the end of February 1892.<sup>49</sup> Also at that time, Stephen McCullagh moved to Kaikoura on the east coast late in 1891 and was successful in raising a church company and having the first South Island SDA church built and dedicated on Sunday, December 27, 1892.<sup>50</sup> In 1896 and 1897 W. M. Crothers

conducted meetings in Westport on the west coast and attracted a number of people whose interest had been aroused through the sale of SDA literature.<sup>51</sup>

The first major public evangelistic series in the South Island's major city of Christchurch was conducted by E. W. Farnsworth in 1897.<sup>52</sup> These meetings led to the establishment of the first Seventh-day Adventist church building and congregation in Barbadoes Street, Christchurch, in June 1897.<sup>53</sup> Five years later, in 1902, Farnsworth was the speaker at a major public evangelistic series in Dunedin, the second-largest city in South New Zealand. These meetings drew a particularly strong negative response from the clergy of Protestant churches in that city.<sup>54</sup> By September 1902 there were just ten persons in the Sabbath School, and it was reported that despite a great deal of effort, "the visible results" were "not great."<sup>55</sup>

From the beginning of the SDA Church in Australasia, camp meetings were used as a means of nurturing members and evangelizing communities. The January 1901 Christchurch camp meeting was the first to be held in the South Island, and the leadership was "agreeably surprised" to find the tents all pitched and occupied one week before the scheduled commencement date. Eighteen persons were baptized on the last Sabbath, and 27 visitors began keeping the Sabbath.<sup>56</sup> The 1903 camp meeting held in Dunedin was intended to consolidate the work of the 1902 evangelistic series.<sup>57</sup> Ashburton was the venue chosen for the 1905 camp meeting. Attendance was down because of the cost of travel but by the close of the meetings four visitors had expressed intention of keeping the Sabbath. W.L.H. Baker and G. Teasdale ran follow-up meetings, establishing a small group of believers in that South Canterbury town.<sup>58</sup> O. A. Olsen was able to report an encouraging attendance of nonmembers at the Christchurch camp meeting of January 1909. J. L. McElhany and W. H. Pascoe conducted follow-up tent meetings to consolidate the interested people in their faith.<sup>59</sup> The Addington Showgrounds (Christchurch) was the venue for the 1910 New Zealand camp meetings, proving to be such a favorable site that it was frequently the site for South Island Conference camp meetings after the division of New Zealand into two conferences.<sup>60</sup>

In July 1915 C. K. Meyers commenced a series of meetings the South Island's other large provincial city, Invercargill. In spite of the fact that it snowed every day for the first week, Meyers was able to continue with between forty and fifty interested individuals.<sup>61</sup> In 1923 James W. Kent conducted a series of meetings in a 1,000-seat picture theater in Christchurch's Central Square with an attendance that exceeded the seating capacity.<sup>62</sup> In 1962 Austin P. Cooke hired the same theater with three sessions to accommodate the crowds.<sup>63</sup> In 1968 George Burnside's opened a series on the subject of "Life After Death," attracting an audience of 1,000 to his first meeting.<sup>64</sup>

In 1998 South New Zealand joined the global "Net 98: The Next Millennium Seminar," produced in the United States. The seminar was conducted in eight sites through the South New Zealand Conference utilizing satellite technology. This was followed in 1999 by "Net 99: The Millennium of Prophecy Seminar," and culminated with an SPD production, "Jesus 2000."<sup>65</sup> In 2015 *It Is Written Oceania* and the South New Zealand Conference partnered

together to conduct an evangelistic series in Christchurch, featuring Gary Kent.<sup>66</sup>

## Mission and Strategic Plans of the South New Zealand Conference

Following conference wide consultation with local church leaders, youth, and staff, the conference adopted in 2018 its vision statement: “A movement of growing disciples who KNOW, LIVE, and SERVE Jesus.”<sup>67</sup>

The vision statement was further articulated in the categories:

1. To Know—Believers are engaged in a growing, loving, and trusting relationship with God, and we:

Recognize our urgent need for God

Experience God’s grace, love, and forgiveness through Jesus

Willingly surrender to God and are filled by the Holy Spirit

Experience Jesus daily through dwelling in His Word, praise, prayer, and worship.

1. To Live—As we support each other within a Spirit-led community, being equipped and empowered to be more like Jesus, we:

Recognize our need to be part of a faith community

Desire to value and love others through God’s grace

Embrace opportunities for growth

Desire to be more like Jesus as evidenced by the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit

Grow as Holy Spirit-led disciples of Jesus by dying daily to self, engaging in meaningful fellowship, and actively using our spiritual gifts.

1. To Serve—As we intentionally inspire and transform others by connecting, serving and sharing the message of Jesus’ soon return, we:

Recognize our personal need to have a heart for others

Have a passion to influence others through the transforming power of the everlasting gospel

Have a readiness/willingness to connect with and bless our neighbors/others wherever God sends us.

Prayerfully build, out of the overflow of our relationship with Jesus, loving relationships with nonbelievers, ministering to their needs and leading them to Christ.

The South New Zealand Conference Is Fulfilling Its Mission by.<sup>68</sup>

### Strategic planning

The strategic plan is a work in progress that is giving focus to everything the conference does.

### Major events

The annual conference convention, regional meetings, children and youth events, and ministerial meetings are now aligned with the conference strategy. Speakers who are specialists in specific focus areas are sought. In all ministerial meetings a half day is set aside for strategic planning.

### Strengthening the team

The conference has a widely experienced team of employees, but needs to increase its workforce.

### Equipping and empowering the ministerial team

Funds are being set aside to better equip and empower ministers to realize their potential. A family concept is being promoted within the team.

### Evangelism

The harvest model of evangelism has been adopted. An initiative called "Pray for 5, Disciple 1" is being promoted. All are encouraged to get involved in praying for five people within their circle of influence and that they lead at least one to Christ.

### Practicing the priesthood of all believers

Scripture is foundational to all practice. The conference discipleship strategy encourages all to be involved and utilize their God-given gifts for the works of ministry.

### Church visits

Conference administration has a well-defined strategy for local church

### Communication



Communication tools include a website, Facebook page, short videos, *South News* (a weekly news feature inclusive of promotions), and PowerPoints that go out to churches.

Some Remaining Challenges for the Conference Are:<sup>69</sup>

An aging membership

Disengaging youth, including those who leave the church before baptism, making it easier for them to disappear

Losing members to other countries and the North Island of New Zealand for education and employment

Independent, unsupportive ministries

Increasing compliance requirements

Divergent views on some doctrinal issues—for example, anti-Trinitarianism.

## Presidents of New Zealand Conference

A. G. Daniells (1889–1891); M. C. Israel (1891–1893); G. T. Wilson (1894–1896); E. W. Farnsworth (1897–1900); W.L.H. Baker (1901–1905); S. M. Cobb (1906–1908); J. Pallant (1908–1911); J. M. Cole (1912–1915).

## Presidents of South New Zealand Conference

W. H. Pascoe (1915–1916); F. H. Letts (1916–1918); B. Cozens (1919–1923); W. J. Westerman (1923–1926); H. E. Piper (1926–1930); S. L. Patching (1930–1934); F. G. Rampton (1934–1936); James Pascoe (1937–1939); L. C. Naden (1939–1941); E. J. Johanson (1941–1944); W. J. Richards (1945–1946); A. R. Mitchell (1947–1955);

W. W. Petrie (1955–1960); H. W. Hollingsworth (1960–1967); J. H. Wade (1968–1970); K. J. Bullock (1971–1975); C. V. Christian (1976–1980); P. J. Colquhoun (1981–1985); W. H. Otto (1986–1987); R. W. Townend (1988–1992); D. K. Hosken (1993–1996); Garry Hodgkin (1997–2003); L. P. Sleight (2003–2006); Craig Gillis (2007–2012); Damien Rice (2012–2016); Michael Sikuri (2016– ).

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## NOTES

1. The author acknowledges the assistance of Michael Sikuri, president of the South New Zealand Conference, and Yvanna Boulton, administrative secretary and project coordinator of the South New Zealand Conference, in compiling information in this article.
2. Graeme Drinkall, secretary-treasurer of the NZPUC, email to author, February 20, 2019.
3. Ibid.
4. "Charities Services: Supporting Charities in New Zealand," accessed March 28, 2019, <https://register.charities.govt.nz/CharitiesRegister/ViewCharity?accountId=b7e25f93-8f1c-dd11-99cd-0015c5f3da29&searchId=ea90ab30-4d9a-4cb9-857d-ddac72070d8f>.
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "South New Zealand Conference," p. 353, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2016.pdf>; Michael Sikuri, president, South New Zealand Conference, email to author, June 5, 2019.
6. *2018 Annual Statistical Report: 154th Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2016 and 2017*, accessed March 28, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2018.pdf>.
7. Ibid. A current statistical overview of the conference at any time may be accessed at <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2fStatistics%2fASR&FolderCTID=0x01200095DE8DF0FA49904B9D65211>.
8. Enrollment and staff statistics were obtained from "South Pacific Division, Annual Report to the General Conference, NZPUC, 2017," Office of the Education Director of the South Pacific Division, Wairoa, NSW.

9. Maud Smart, "Central School, Christchurch, N. Z.," *Australasian Record*, May 5, 1932, 4.
10. The most southerly church . . .," *Australasian Record*, January 17, 1955, 8.
11. "Southland Adventist Christian School: About Us," accessed March 29, 2019, <http://sacs.school.nz/About-Us>.
12. E. A. Ferris, "Opening of Papanui Pathfinder Lodge," *Australasian Record*, July 21, 1969.
13. James M. Johanson, "Youth Bible Conference at Camp Koromako [sic]," *Australasian Record*, January 31, 1964, 2.
14. "New Zealand Conference Proceedings," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, August 1, 1889, 236.
15. For further information, see "New Zealand Tract Society" in the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*.
16. "Organization of the New Zealand Tract Society," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, August 1, 1889, 236.
17. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Australasian Union Conference," p. 40, accessed April 30, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1894.pdf>.
18. "The New Zealand Conference," *Australasian Record*, March 1, 1915, 3.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.; C. H. Watson, "New Zealand Camp-meeting," *Australasian Record*, February 22, 1915, 5.
21. E. Rosendahl, "The Christchurch Convention," *Australasian Record*, May 3, 1915, 5.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Watson, 5.
25. "Union Conference Proceedings: Third Meeting Monday Morning, July 15," *Union Conference Record*, July 22, 1901, 25. To further consolidate the place of literature evangelism in the work of the church, the following recommendations were made at the conference session that had been held in Dunedin in 1903:

That the importance and advantage of resident canvassing prominently brought and continually kept before our churches, and that an effort be made to place a resident canvasser in each of the large centers in New Zealand.

That each church encourage one or more of its numbers to engage in canvassing for our large books under the direction of the state agent.

That these agents furnish their churches with the names and addresses of their subscribers, and that the churches follow up the work by correspondence, periodicals, and tracts.

That as far as consistent, canvassers' institutes be held at every church, and that the conference plan with the general agent for ministerial help for these meetings.

That time be devoted to presenting the interest and importance of our publishing work at our general assemblies and camp-meetings (W.L.H. Baker, "Report of New Zealand Conference," *Union Conference Record*, March 15, 1903, 5).

26. H. E. Piper, "Special Session, Australasian Union Conference," *Australasian Record*, September 13, 1948, 2, 3.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. K. S. Parmenter, "Australasian Division Mission Field Development," *Australasian Record*, May 14, 1973, 1.
30. Bruce Manners, "Session Votes for Restructure," *Record*, November 25, 2000, 8, 9.
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