STATISTICAL GROWTH OF THE LDS CHURCH IN SAMOA AND TONGA

My presentation today has to do with the growth and status of the LDS Church in Tonga and Samoa. Actually Samoa is two countries: Western Samoa and American Samoa. Inspirational stories by the history makers such as Pres. Eric Shumway, Pres. Pat Dalton, or Bishop Inoki Funaki serve to stir and build our souls. They contribute to or become part of statistics — statistics that help us to measure, to project, to plan, and to succeed.

To better understand the growth of the LDS Church in these three countries, a little social studies is in order.

PRINCIPAL ISLANDS

American Samoa is made up of the Tutuila Islands the largest of which is Tutuila where the capital of Pago Pago is located, plus three others called the Manu‘a Islands. Western Samoa has two main islands of Upolu and Savai‘i. The capital, Apia, is on Upolu. All islands of Samoa are mountainous and lush with vegetation.

Among the hundreds of islands of the Kingdom of Tonga, the principal island is Tongatapu where the capital Nuku‘alofa is located. Tongatapu is totally flat and appears from the air to be covered with coconut trees. The large island of Vava‘u is just offshore on the east of Tongatapu. About eighty miles to the north is the Ha‘apai Island group and another 100 miles further north is the Vava‘u Island group. There are other islands, but these are the main ones for the LDS Church. Vava‘u is tropical, lovely and mountainous like Samoa.

DISTANCE AND TRANSPORTATION

In the Church, all three countries are supervised from Area Headquarters which is located in Honolulu, Hawaii for both the ecclesiastical and temporal arms of the Church. American Samoa is 2,700 miles from Honolulu, or 5½ hours by jet airplane. That is farther away than from Hawaii to Los Angeles.

There is no direct flight from Hawaii to Western Samoa. Travellers must connect with another airplane which is a 45-minute flight.

Tonga is about 3,300 miles from Hawaii, or a 6½ hour flight from Western Samoa. Some travellers prefer to fly to Tonga through Fiji or New Zealand. This is a longer, more expensive route, but they feel it provides better and more dependable service.

Air transportation to these countries is spotty and often problematic. There is no boat service to these three countries from Hawaii. All LDS shipments by boat to these countries must come from New Zealand or the west coast of the U.S. Transportation to the Ha‘apai and Vava‘u Islands is by small airplane or the government-owned ferry.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications are reasonably good. Mail service from Hawaii to Samoa is about one week, with about 1½ weeks for mail to reach Tonga. For faster communications, telephone and telex service is fairly dependable.

GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

American Samoa is a protectorate of the United States. Accordingly, its lifestyle is noticeably more westernized than its sister country. Wages and the standard of living are higher, while costs of goods and services are lower. Also, there are more goods and services available — more commerce.

Western Samoa is an independent monarchy headed by a Prime Minister. It has a struggling economy based on export of locally grown food. The people group themselves into villages governed by chiefs called matai. This contributes to a strong feeling of what they call “fa‘a Samoa,” or “The Samoan Way.” Land in Samoa is obtained both by fee simple purchase and lease rental.

Tonga’s monarchy is headed by a king who is supported by 33 Nobles. Tonga’s economy is also based on agriculture and fishing, and money is a difficult commodity to obtain. The people here also group themselves into villages which come under jurisdiction of the various nobles. All land in Tonga is owned by the king, and it can be leased through the noble to whom it is assigned.

SUMMARY

These descriptions provide the setting in which the LDS Church finds itself for the spreading of its gospel message. Living in a backward economy, by modern standards, the people in Samoa and Tonga maintain their sweet Polynesian nature, and are quite literate through efforts of the governments and the various churches. The LDS Church operates 3 high schools, 10 Middle Schools, and 6 Elementary Schools there with a total enrollment of well over 5,000 students.

THE LDS CHURCH IS SAMOA AND TONGA

Mormon missionaries first arrived in Samoa in 1888, and by 1891 were also in Tonga teaching the gospel. Statistical records are not available to accurately chronicle the growth of the Church in these three countries. The stories we hear of these countries come from the journals, the hearts, and minds of those who live there and generally have not found their way into statistics. Therefore, most of the remainder of this paper will deal with the condition of the Church as it stands now, and some information from the most recent years.

TONGA

For years, missionary work for the Church was greatly slowed in Tonga by a rule that permitted only 12 single foreign missionaries in the country at one time. That rule still exists today. It was only in the most recent decades that the problem was overcome by the calling of local Tongan Saints as full time missionaries. From 1977 to 1980, under President Sione Lulu of the Tonga Mission, convert baptisms in Tonga reached a high point, averaging 2,780 baptisms each year. During that same period, missionaries serving full
tire averaged 28) and reached a peak of 326 in 1980. At that time, Tonga enjoyed the
highest number of full time missionaries per capita of any other region in the Church.

In both Tonga and Samoa, missionaries commonly lived in the homes of the Saints. This
had the advantage of putting the missionaries in close relationship with local members,
and it also gave direct involvement by the Saints in missionary work. It also kept a high
level of missionary consciousness among the Saints. However, it created problems of crowded
spaces and the absence of privacy. In some cases, little spaces such as this (picture of small
house from inside) were provided as missionary "quarters." In the last year, simple 12' x 12'
rooms such as this (picture of wood structure) have been built, which have no electricity or
plumbing. It is simply a bedroom. The missionaries are still fed by the members, and they
use either their bathrooms or restrooms of the chapels which are usually close by. Missionnaries
are easily identified by their white shirts. The missionary sisters can likewise
be spotted from afar because of their tasteful solid color dresses and their two-valves.

In the meantime, meetinghouses for worship services were very primitive and totally in
adequate. This is a typical meetinghouse on Tongatapu (picture, half galvanized iron on
bottom and half copper inside on top) which has since been replaced by one like this (picture
of modern brick Cascade Bldg). However, here is a meetinghouse in Vava'u which is still in
use today (picture of copper inside fale). The breakthrough in constructing meetinghouses in
Tonga occurred in early 1980 when the small "oasis" design, about 20' x 40', was created for
small groups of about 20 members (picture of new wood Oasis). Meetinghouses owned by the
Church in Tonga then rose from 56 in 1979 to 68 in 1980 to 87 in 1981. Of course, the full
sized chapels were still being constructed for the larger church units. About 2/3 of these
meetinghouses are masonry construction. In fact, magazine articles in the country frequently
refer to the "flashy Mormon chapels." Walking is the principal means of transportation, and
we try to have chapels not more than 3 miles apart. Accordingly, most of the meetinghouses
are for single wards. This slide shows the distribution of meetinghouses in Tonga (Map
showing a dot for each meetinghouse).

According to a recent Church News (week ending 27 March 1982), both Tonga and Samoa
led the foreign countries of the world in the percent of the population that is LDS.
That was true in 1970 when 17.602, or about 15,480, of Tonga's 90,000 population was
LDS. There were about 3 stakes then compared to 7 now. They were still number one in
1980 with 18.482% of the people being LDS in Tonga. Samoa followed close behind in second
place with 15.992%, or about 27,000 of Samoa's people being LDS in 1970, and 14.132% in 1980.
Total LDS membership in Tonga at the end of 1981 was 26,529. I was told that it would
be closer to 16,000 if so many of the LDS didn't leave Tonga for Hawaii and the mainland
U.S. These Saints are divided into 3 regions, made up of 7 stakes, which in turn are
made up of over 105 wards and branches.

(BRIEF REPORT ON DAMAGE FROM 3 MARCH 1982 HURRICANE)

Samoan

Samoan did not have the same obstacle of the country not permitting foreign
missionaries entering. Therefore, it grew at a faster pace. Because of their family and
village system of living, it frequently occurred that a whole village was baptized when
the missionaries were fortunate enough to convert the chief or metal. Therefore, by the
end of 1981, Samoan had a membership of 36,513. These LDS are grouped into 2 regions,
made up of 10 stakes. And these in turn are made up of over 105 wards and branches.
Like Tonga, Samoa lost many members through migration to the United States. Samoa was
also successful in following the same pattern as Tonga in using many local Saints as
full time missionaries. In 1979 they hit a high point of having 263 full time missionaries.
Like Tonga, missionaries in Samoa live with the Saints. And like Tonga, small
"bedroom" quarters are being built for the missionaries. In the last six years, their
missionaries averaged 1,950 convert baptisms per year with a high of 2,596 baptisms in
1980. Because Samoa's population is larger than Tonga's, their LDS percent of the
total population is just below that of Tonga.

Walking is also the principal means of transportation in Samoa. And here too, the
Church has tried to have chapels not more than 3 miles apart. By the end of 1981, there
were 75 meetinghouses in Samoa owned by the Church (3 slides showing maps of Upolu, Savai'i,
and Tutuila with a dot for every meetinghouse). Tonga actually had more meetinghouses,
but many of them were the small 20' x 40' oasis variety while almost all of Samoa's
chapels were masonry and of full size. Compare these figures with 41 meetinghouses in
all of Hawaii.

Like Tonga, Samoan Saints have great difficulty obtaining cash. They live largely
off the land. In Western Samoa, an experiment was tried in 1980 in receiving tithe in
kind, such as shown here (picture of truckload of produce). This enjoyed reasonable
success. Now, under the newly announced Church building program requiring tithe faithfulness,
tithing in kind will be extended throughout Samoa eventually. It is also being
considered for Tonga.

Today in both Tonga and Samoa, walls are rising for each of their temples. Both
temples are about at the same stage of construction. Samoa's temple is located in
Peapiga right at the front entrance of the Church College of Western Samoa. Tonga's
temple is being built alongside the front entrance of Liahona High School. Completion
of these temples is expected around the end of this year. This will be the crowning
blessing for the Saints in these countries, to bring them to a new height of spiritual
maturity.

SUMMARY

It has been my privilege as a bishop in the Presiding Bishopric's Office to work
with the Saints in Tonga and Samoa, and to visit their very lovely countries. With the
many problems facing them, some cultural and some economic, they are generally good members
of the Church. All around you can see that sweet spirit of Polynesia - the simplicity
and the devotion. There is so much more that can be said of Samoa and Tonga, but the

purpose of this presentation was to give a very brief overview of the Church there. It is my hope that you have just a little better understanding and appreciation for our sister countries in the South Pacific. Many of their number live right here among us in Hawaii.