

by
R. Lanier Britsch

"As we have slowed down to look around," wrote President Ebbie L. Davis in 1973 as he reflected on his missionary responsibility, "it has become increasingly clear that there is so much to do here that we are going to get very little done. There are so many programs--construction, real estate, translation, leadership training, increasing (numbers of) missionaries, Church schools, localization of leadership, new areas to open, etc.--that we will only be able to push all of them forward a little way, rather than pushing a few (programs) a long way. . . . With our six separate national governments to deal with, five kinds of money, ten major languages, and the great distances between our areas in the mission, at times it seems like an impossible task. Half of the mission president's time is usually spent away from the office and home. We have all three major South Pacific ethnic groups in our mission. There are Polynesians in Rarotonga and Niue; Melanesians in Fiji, the New Hebrides, and the Solomons; and Micronesians in the Gilberts and Nauru. Variations and adaptations are required in the missionary program and the leadership training program for all of these distinct peoples. It seems quite clear that this is a Mission of Missions. Some day divisions will have to be made along ethnic and cultural lines, if not national lines. Until their time comes it will be the responsibility of the mission president to try his best to make sure all areas get equal and appropriate time and care for their particular needs."(1)

Ebbie Davis was describing the Fiji Suva Mission in 1973, but his words, with only a few name changes, might well have described the Micronesia-Guam Mission area in 1980. In fact, in a interview with President Ferron C. Losee in 1984, he reported almost the same situation. He said that his mission field fulfilled the prophecies relating to "those on the isles of the sea." He pointed out that the Micronesia-Guam Mission covers a vast amount of territory--it is 6,000 miles across--and has numerous cultural groups. At least nine major languages are spoken in different island groups (plus English, Japanese and some Filipino dialects). There are six governing bodies in the Micronesia-Guam Mission. All of the problems of newness that President Davis mentioned concerning Fiji certainly apply here.

THE FIJI MISSION AREA; HUB OF THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC

For the first 110 years that the Church was in the Pacific, missionary work was limited to the peoples of Polynesia and Australia. It was not until 1954 that missionary work began in the Melanesian Islands, specifically in Fiji. Anthropologists generally classify the peoples of Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides), the Solomons, and New Guinea as part of the Pacific Negroid family. Great diversity exists, however.

As a rule, the peoples of this area have black rather than brown skin, curly or kinky hair rather than the generally straighter hair of Polynesia, and smaller but taller body build. There is little question that LDS missionaries were kept away from the Melanesian areas during earlier times because of the Mormon restriction against blacks holding the priesthood. Until the mid-to late-1950's, however, no one with high ecclesiastical authority in the Church had seriously looked into the question of the eligibility of the Melanesians holding the priesthood. Even after missionaries were assigned to Fiji in 1954 there was some question about this matter, but President McKay was satisfied by anthropologists at the National Museum in Suva that the Melanesian peoples were in no way related to African Negroes. In 1958 he authorized Church leaders to ordain Fijians, who have a considerable mixture of Polynesian blood, to the priesthood. Although some Fijian families had joined the Church prior to that time, this move by President McKay did much to give the work momentum among the local people.

The history of Fiji is filled with all the drama and interest of the old South Pacific. The local people were regarded by foreign visitors, settlers, and missionaries, as treacherous and dangerous cannibals. From 1860 to the end of the century, however, a complete social revolution took place. Credit for this change goes to dedicated civic and government leaders, both Fijian and British, and to Christian missionaries. Lasting missionary efforts had been started by Methodist preachers in 1835. By 1840 a printing press had been imported from Britain and portions of the New Testament were soon published in Fijian.(2)

The accomplishments of the missionaries were many. As Latourette says, "Their preaching, their training of teachers, their translation and printing of the Bible, their creation of a system of elementary schools, their systematic preparation of inquirers for church membership, and their own devotion had marked results."(3) Among these results were the cessation of tribal warfare and the end of cannibalism. Before the turn of the century the vast majority of Fijians had espoused Christianity as taught by one or another of the various denominations.

There are some interesting similarities between the history and geography of Hawaii and of Fiji. Hawaii lies 22 degrees north and Fiji 17 degrees south of the equator and their climates are similar. Although Hawaii has only seven islands of importance and Fiji has thirteen (along with another ninety-two that are inhabited and two hundred that are not), the islands of Viti Levu (on which Suva, Nandi, and Lautoka are situated) and Hawaii, "the Big Island," are almost identical in size. Even the total populations of the two areas are similar, Hawaii with 965,000 and Fiji with 612,046 in 1980. Hawaii and Fiji have both relied on sugar and tourism as important sources of income.

This development of the sugar industry in both states has determined, to an unusual degree, the racial and, therefore, their cultural configurations. Before the 1860's and the American Civil War, the southern states of the United States produced a large percentage of the world's supply of cotton. But during

the Civil War, while the U.S. supply almost ceased, planters in Hawaii and Fiji invested heavily in cotton. Before their efforts had produced a profit, however, the American south was back in business, and Hawaii and Fiji had to look for a better agricultural industry. Sugar was the answer in both places.

Just as in Hawaii, where the plantation magnates brought laborers in from China, Japan, the Philippines, and elsewhere, the sugar producers in Fiji imported first other Melanesians and then thousands of Indians. The Fijian government made arrangements with the British government of India in 1878 to bring in Indian laborers for a period of five years. If the laborers stayed for that time they were free to go home at their own expense. If they remained for an additional five years, however, their return passage would be paid or they could remain in Fiji if they wished. Although there were abuses in the so-called "indenture system," thousands of Indians preferred life in Fiji to that at home in India. By 1916, when recruitment stopped, there were almost forty thousand Indians in Fiji. The Indian part of the population has grown rapidly, far outdistancing the Fijian. By 1978 there were 272,447 Fijians and 306,957 people of Indian extraction.

Most of the Indian immigrants were Hindus and members of castes, highly restricted groups, which because of religious and economic sanctions remained separate from one another. But by crossing the sea, the laborers lost caste as far as the people in India were concerned. Furthermore, the conditions on ships and in company housing in Fiji made keeping of caste rules, especially separate eating, impossible. As a result the caste system disappeared among Indians in Fiji.

Belief in Hinduism and Islam, however, has not diminished. Among the Indian population, about seventy per cent are Hindu, twenty-five per cent are Muslim, and the remainder are Sikhs and Christians.(4)

Because the Indian people in Fiji have remained much to themselves and have maintained their native languages (Hindu, Urdu, Tamil, and Telugu) and religious beliefs, and because the original immigrants were generally illiterate, for many decades the Indians lagged behind the Fijians in basic literacy and education. More recently, however, there has been a surge among them to acquire all the education possible. Indians now hold a significant number of government positions as well as places in business, education, and industry. Most Fiji Indians now speak a composite language called Hindustani, which is closely related to Hindi.

Between 1874 and 1970, Fiji was a British colony. Suva was the site of the administrative offices not only for Fiji, but also for all other British areas of the Western Pacific. But in 1970, Fiji gained independent Dominion status. The constitution guarantees rights similar to those found in the U.S. Constitution. English is the language of government.

LATTER-DAY SAINTS MISSIONARY WORK IN FIJI began officially in May 1954, when the First Presidency assigned this area to the Samoan Mission. The following August, President Howard B. Stone

sent Elders Boyd L. Harris and Sheldon L. Abbott to begin working in Suva. They organized the Suva Branch on September 5, 1954. Only two missionaries were allowed into the country by immigration officials, and these elders probably would not have been allowed had there not been a small group of Tongan members of the Church living there.(5) For several decades, Cecil B. Smith, a part-Tongan, and Mele (Mary) Vea Ashley and their families carried on Church meetings on a small scale. When the first missionaries arrived in Suva, they spent their time working with all people who were interested in their message, but concentrated their efforts on the Tongan and Samoan minority. This population base was too small for much success.

The work in Fiji did not receive the necessary encouragement for it to grow until January 1955, when President David O. McKay stopped over in Suva. He, like many missionaries and mission leaders before him, traveled through Fiji without considering it seriously as a mission field. Because he was delayed for a day in Suva, he happened to meet Elders Harris and Abbott on the street. Evidently he was not aware that there were missionaries or members of the Church there. On Sunday, January 9, President and Sister McKay and Elder Franklin D. Murdock attended a sacrament meeting at the home of Brother Cecil Smith. In attendance were twenty-eight members of the Church. President McKay told the little group that he considered the occasion significant. He said that when he and Hugh J. Cannon visited Suva in 1921 they did not feel that the time was right to introduce the gospel. Now, however, he felt inspired to tell the Saints that it was time to begin building up the kingdom of God in Fiji. He emphasized example, personal missionary work, and good deeds. Find a piece of land upon which to build a chapel, he suggested.(6)

In late March, the Church purchased a large piece of land at Des Veuex and Berry roads, on a hill overlooking the city and harbor. President McKay, Brother Murdock, and Wendell B. Mendenhall had seen the land. When the Church Building Committee prepared plans for the chapel, they did so with the small size of the branch in mind. President McKay, however, decided that the Suva chapel should be a manifestation of the Church's interest in the area and asked that a large building be constructed. The completed chapel is almost as big as standard stake centers. It has all of the normal LDS chapel features, such as a cultural hall with a stage, a kitchen, classrooms, and so on. The Suva chapel is designed to allow free movement of air, and it also has some other adaptations to the tropical climate. For many years the little branch rattled around in the structure, and even they wondered whether President McKay had made a mistake.

While the building was under construction, the First Presidency decided to transfer Fiji to the Tongan Mission because the Tonga mission president regularly passed through Fiji to travel from one area of his mission to another. Also, new Zion elders who were heading for Tonga always came through Fiji. The transfer took place on January 15, 1958.(7) A record attendance of ninety-three people were at that meeting.

This record was soon replaced, however, when President

McKay visited Suva in May, on his return from the New Zealand Temple dedication. On May 4, he dedicated the chapel. Over three hundred people were in attendance at the feast, cultural entertainment, and actual dedication services. In his talk, President McKay told the assembly that the time would soon come when not only the chapel but also the recreation hall would be filled to overflowing with members of the Church.

When President McKay arrived in Suva on May 2, he voiced his strong concern that the government was still allowing only two proselyting missionaries into the country. The day following the dedication, President McKay, along with Mission President Fred W. Stone, Wendell B. Mendenhall, and the Church attorney, Morris Scott, visited Sir Ronald Garvey, governor of Fiji. Garvey had attended the meeting and told the visitors that "he was very much impressed with the dedication services of the Suva chapel and that he now has a better appreciation of what the Church is doing." After receiving assurances that Mormon missionaries would never be a "charge or a burden" on the colony, and hearing that it is the LDS missionary method to call on all people, Christian or other, Governor Garvey promised President McKay that he would discuss the matter with the council and give a hasty answer. Two weeks later the Church received word that the missionary quota had been increased by six. This remains the quota to the present.(8)

When additional elders arrived, it was possible to broaden the field of activity. Within a year, elders were working in Lautoka, Fiji's second largest city, at Nausori near Suva, and in the Lau group of islands, in the direction of Tonga. In February 1959, President M. Vernon Coombs ordained Gideon Dolo, a Fijian, an elder, and sent him to the Lau group as a missionary along with the foreign elders. He was the first Fijian to hold the Melchizedek Priesthood.(9)

The story of the conversion of the Sokia family, who have become stalwarts in the Church, illustrates well the workings of the Lord among the Fijian people. In about 1948, a relative of the Sokia family who worked for the Carnegie Library in Suva picked up a discarded book that was titled WHAT OF THE MORMONS? He later gave it to Kini Sokia, who, with her husband and young family, read the story of the Latter-day Saints and the restored Church. The Sokia family then knew nothing about George Albert Smith, the man who had sent the book to the library. They cherished the book much as they loved the Bible. Kini, however, was a staunch Roman Catholic, and her husband was an inactive Methodist.

A year or two after LDS missionaries were assigned to Suva, the elders called at the Sokia home. When they introduced a tract called "Joseph Smith Tells His Own Story," the Sokias made the connection between their book on the Mormons and the message the missionaries were presenting. The Sokia family studied the gospel carefully, and by 1958 every member joined the Church. Even before their conversion Sister Sokia took her children to Primary. They were the first three to graduate from that organization in Fiji.

Over the years since that time, this family--the second Fijian family to join the Church--has been part of the foundation of the Church in Fiji. The oldest son, Josefa, for instance, has grown up in the Church and has held important responsibilities in it. Like any other active LDS boy, he held the offices of the Aaronic Priesthood and then served in the MIA and Sunday School. Later he became branch clerk, branch president, district clerk, and district president; and in 1974, when he was twenty-eight years old, he was called as a member of the mission presidency. He directed the seminary program for a time. (11)

Progress during the 1960's was steady but not dramatic. By 1966, 150 people regularly attended district conferences in Suva. But three years later the number had grown to almost five hundred and the district was divided. (11)

In July 1971, the First Presidency approved the creation of the Fiji Mission, and Elder Howard W. Hunter presided at its organization. At that time there were only seven branches of the Church in Fiji; but Niue and the Cook Islands needed a "home," and they were added to the mission. Total mission membership at the end of 1971 was 3097. Sherman Lindholm, who, with his wife, was serving a mission in Suva, was asked to lead the mission during its first year. In 1972, Ebbie L. Davis, who was a teacher at Liahona High School in Tonga, was called to fill the first three-year term as mission president.

By 1972, President McKay's prophecy concerning the large Suva chapel was fulfilled: at every district conference that year the building was filled with Latter-day Saints--Fijians, Indians, Rotumans, Tongans, Samoans, New Zealanders, Australians, Europeans and Americans.

The growth and development of the Fiji Mission since 1972 has been rapid and varied. President Davis and President Kenneth M. Palmer, who followed him, directed the expansion of the Church into several new areas. They also presided over a redivision of the mission, in 1975, along new lines. They strengthened the educational efforts of the Church, a matter we will discuss shortly, and emphasized translation work in the seven languages that were spoken in the mission. Temple work, too, was stressed.

As was true in other parts of the South Pacific during February 1976, the Saints in the Fiji Suva Mission were encouraged and strengthened by the first Area Conference in their country. President Spencer W. Kimball, President N. Eldon Tanner, and Elders Haight, Simpson and Hales spent only six hours with the Fiji-Mission Saints, but during that time the visitors observed a cultural program that included songs and dances from Rotuma, New Caledonia, the Gilbert Islands (now called The Republic of Kiribati), and Fiji. The Saints presented President Kimball with a tabua, a sperm whale tooth, a gift of great prestige.

The General Authorities presented the Saints with their special witness of the gospel and taught them concerning their responsibility to be involved in missionary work, in works of brotherly kindness, and to lengthen their stride in building the Kingdom of God. Elder Simpson stressed the importance of the Fiji Suva Mission as a leader in taking the gospel to all Pacific

peoples. President Kimball emphasized, among other things, the importance of living the Ten Commandments as well as the commandments Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. "There is no greater example of the type of life we Latter-day Saints should follow than the life of the Savior." The 980 people in attendance left the meetings with a new resolve to live more Christ-like lives. (12)

In 1979, about thirty missionaries were assigned to Fiji proper. Of that number, six were from North America, four were allowed from Tonga, and the rest were local missionaries. An additional ten missionaries were laboring in New Caledonia, which had been part of the mission since 1975; eight elders from the British Commonwealth were then working in the New Hebrides (now called Vanuatu), and another eight missionaries were teaching the gospel in the Gilbert Islands (now called Kiribati).

Beginning early in the mission's history considerable effort was dedicated to translation projects. Because of the diversity of languages spoken in various parts of the Fiji Suva Mission it was difficult to make much headway on many fronts, but some undertakings were more important than others. In 1980 the Church published the Book of Mormon in Fijian. Translation work was done in Fiji and in Salt Lake City.

The development of Church schools in Fiji, and the establishment of the Church in New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, and the Gilbert Islands deserve our attention. Both public and private education was provided in Fiji, but most schools are operated either by local committees or by church groups. The leaders of the Church in Suva recognized in the mid 60's that the Suva chapel afforded an excellent facility for an LDS school. Most of the young people of the Church found it necessary before that time to attend schools that were operated by other religious denominations. In an effort to create an LDS setting for elementary education, the Church School System approved the creation of the LDS Elementary School in Suva. Brother Charles Mohi was imported from New Zealand to serve as the first principal, and local teachers, mostly LDS, were hired to teach the classes. The school was opened in February 1969. (13) Although there were some periods of adjustment to the local education system during the first three or four years, by the end of 1973 the school had well over a hundred students, and the educational standard satisfied the Church and the government.

Later, the school was divided into school "A" and "B," with the older grades meeting in a newer chapel in north Suva and the lower grades remaining at the original chapel. (14)

As early as 1970, mission leaders in Tonga and Fiji were talking about opening a high school in Suva or Nausori. Young Latter-day Saints needed the school, the President James P. Christiansen and the Fiji missionaries believed that a high school could help attract many young people into the Church. The school could also provide a much-needed service to the people of Fiji. But the idea did not gain support among the First Presidency of the Church until early 1974. Shortly after he became President of the Church, Spencer W. Kimball sent Commissioner of Education, Neal Maxwell, to Fiji to do a

feasibility study. He, along with Alton Wade, who administered Church schools in the Pacific at that time, made a positive recommendation to President Kimball; and the new school, the LDS Fiji Technical College opened in a beautiful new campus in 1975. The college's curriculum is oriented toward trades and vocations, but it also includes an academic emphasis. Most of the faculty are local people. Howard Wolfgramm was the first principal. Perhaps the most exciting fact is that about half of the student body is composed of Indians (this is also true of the elementary school). These students, many of whom are members of the Church, may well be the future missionaries of the Church to India. (15)

The Seminary program of the Church was established in the Fiji Suva Mission in 1973. Since that time the enrollment has grown steadily. In 1978, 128 students were enrolled in home study classes in Seminary, 137 were taking Institute courses by individual study, and another 147 students, those who were enrolled at the Technical College, were taking daily religion courses. (16) By 1984, 372 students were enrolled at the college.

Church growth in Fiji has been steady and impressive. A number of Latter-day Saints hold positions of prominence in government, education and business. For example, Ro Tevita Logovatu, a social welfare officer in the Fijian government and paramount chief of the Rewa District surrounding Suva, is an active member of the Church and a graduate of Brigham Young University--Hawaii Campus. Nemani Delaibatiki, also a member, is editor of one of Fiji's two major daily newspapers.

On June 12, 1984, Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles organized the Suva Fiji Stake. He called Inosi Naga, a convert in 1974, as stake president. President Naga is CES administrator and director of religious education in Fiji. Naga is a man of spirituality, knowledge of the gospel and a fine administrator. (17)

CHURCH ACTIVITY IN NEW CALEDONIA began during the 1950's, and in 1984 included over six hundred members. At the time of its beginning a few Tahitian Latter-day Saints migrated to the French Overseas Territory to work in a nickel smelter. In July 1961, the First Presidency authorized President Kendall Young of the French Polynesia Mission to go to Noumea, the capital of New Caledonia, and organize the city Tahitian members into a branch. In October President Young visited Noumea and called Teahu Manoi, an elder in the priesthood, to be first president of the Noumea Branch.

President Young investigated the possibility of opening missionary work in the Territory. He learned that the populace, which consisted at that time of 80,061 people, was divided among Europeans of French extraction (28,454), Melanesians (32,334), and "others" (12,016). By the early 1970's the population had risen to well over 100,000 people.

President Young concluded that it was time to proselyte the gospel in New Caledonia and took the necessary steps to gain government recognition of the Church there. But it proved difficult for him to obtain visas for missionaries. In 1967, President Karl M. Richards of the French Polynesia Mission met

with the high commissioner and governor of New Caledonia, Monsieur M. Jean Risterucci, and convinced him of the need for Mormon missionaries in Noumea. High Commissioner Risterucci approved visas for six missionaries in February 1967, with the understanding that the number would soon be raised to ten. President Richards then asked the First Presidency to authorize missionary work in New Caledonia. In August 1967, Elder Paul H. Dunn of the First Council of the Seventy travelled to Noumea and recommended that it was time to move into New Caledonia. On October 6, 1967, the First Presidency approved this action.

On May 2, 1968, Elder Thomas S. Monson of the Quorum of the Twelve visited Noumea and under instructions from President David O. McKay, dedicated the land of New Caledonia for the preaching of the gospel. Two months later, on July 15, 1968, the first LDS missionaries arrived in Noumea. They were Harold and Jeannine Richards and their daughter Jacqueline. Harold was the son of President Karl M. Richards. Harold had learned French on his first mission in France. Jeannine was a native of France. Their knowledge of the French language and people was essential for success in this area where French was the official language of government and the language of a significant part of the people.

Although the high commissioner had granted the Church permission to have six missionaries, the established churches, particularly the Roman Catholics, opposed this move and successfully delayed the entrance of additional elders until January 1969. At that time Elders James A. Tatton and Lyle W. Parker received visas and entered the country.(18)

When President Richards first met with High Commissioner Risterucci, the commissioner suggested that the Church should buy land and build a large and impressive chapel. With this in mind, Harold Richards bought a choice piece of land. But unfortunately, someone in the Church Building Department decided that the branch in Noumea was too small to justify more than a "first phase" building, a small building that consisted of little more than a chapel area. Because of this tactical error the Church had a difficult time gaining support from French administrators in Noumea.(19)

Although mission leaders in Tahiti were concerned about the Saints and missionaries in New Caledonia, the distance between the two countries was too great for the mission president to visit there very often. The Church did grow during the first five years of the '70's, but not to the extent that might have been possible with closer supervision. In September 1973 and again in October 1974 Elder Groberg, Regional Representative, and the mission presidents discussed which mission could better serve the needs of New Caledonia--Tahiti or Fiji. In June 1975, the First Presidency transferred New Caledonia to the Fiji Suva Mission.(20)

The New Caledonian members were soon incorporated into the mainstream of the mission. District and branch leaders attended regional meetings in Suva (a thing that would have been impossible in Papeete), and when the first Area Conference was held in February 1979, fifty members from New Caledonia traveled to Suva to participate. In May 1976, President Kenneth M. Palmer divided

the Noumea Branch into two units. At that time the Noumea Saints also approved a decision to enlarge the chapel. The division of the Noumea Branch gave the district presidency a reason to be. Before long, district officers were directing regular leadership meetings and a district council, similar to a stake high council, was organized. Mission records reveal that by 1976 the full program of the Church, including seminary, was operating in New Caledonia. In July 1978, there were 382 members of the Church in this area and a third branch, the Tontouta Branch, had been organized. Through careful and regular negotiations with government officials, President Palmer arranged to have one expatriate (i.e. non-French) missionary in New Caledonia for every two French missionaries. This arrangement has made it possible for the Church to increase the number of missionaries and to expand missionary work beyond the Noumea area. The next big step will be to extend the work among the Melanesian people of New Caledonia. In 1978 the First Presidency called Georges L. Bouurget of eastern Canada to replace President Palmer as mission president. President Bouget combined the advantages of Commonwealth citizenship with a native fluency in both English and French. Since that time the church has continued to grow. In 1984 there were over eight hundred members in New Caledonia.

VANUATU (The New Hebrides) AND THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Through the efforts of Presidents Davis and Palmer, the Church established missionary work in the New Hebrides. Although the New Hebrides are made up of eighty islands and a population of close to 90,000 people (approximately the same as Tonga), the Church has moved into this area only since 1974. The organization of the Fiji Mission created the impetus to open missionary work in this area.

The New Hebrides are racially part of Melanesia. The islands were governed until 1980 by a condominium administered jointly by the United Kingdom and France. English, French, and a variety of local dialects are spoken, as well as Bislama, a kind of pidgin English that is rapidly becoming the universal language of Melanesia. The condominium was headed locally by French and British resident commissioners, who were assisted by a joint advisory council but who also lead dual governments.

The first known Latter-day Saints to live in the New Hebrides (since World War II when thousands of American servicemen were stationed there) were several Tongan families who migrated to Port Vila (or simply Vila) in the late 1950's. These members were not organized into a branch, however, until July 15, 1973, when President Ebbie L. Davis created the Port Vila Branch with Lanipoto Fehoko as president. At that time the First Presidency had not approved the area for proselyting. But because the area was part of the Fiji Mission, President Davis traveled from island to island and determined that although not all of the major islands of the New Hebrides were prepared for the gospel, some parts were.

President Davis visited a Mr. Townsend, the British resident commissioner, and discussed the possibility of bringing

missionaries into the country. Townsend encouraged President Davis to pursue the matter as soon as Church leaders approved the move. Eight months later, in June 1974, the First Presidency gave its blessing to opening the New Hebrides, the Solomons, and the Gilbert and Ellice groups.

When President Davis visited Mr. Townsend on June 11, 1974, he found that the resident commissioner was still favorable to the LDS desires, but he informed President Davis that he could approve visas only for British Commonwealth citizens. The French resident commissioner could approve visas for French citizens. All other people would have to be approved by both commissioners, and this would probably prove difficult. The first LDS missionaries to enter the New Hebrides were Tongans who were Commonwealth citizens. They arrived in Port Vila on January 12, 1975. A week later, on January 26, 1975, President and Sister Davis flew to Port Vila, where they, along with Branch President and Sister Fehoko and Elders Mokofisi and Malohifo'ou, met together to dedicate the New Hebrides Islands to the preaching of the gospel. Together they climbed a small hill in Port Vila, and President Davis offered the dedicatory prayer to turn the key for the establishment of the Church there.

Four months later, two Canadian elders, Elders Olsen and Lowry, were transferred from the Canada Montreal Mission. At that point the immigration officer in the New Hebrides decided that four LDS missionaries were enough. His action was symptomatic of greater problems yet to come. The Church did grow slightly--by 1978 there were 83 members and in 1984 there remained 120--the new government of Vanuatu was hostile to LDS missionaries and soon missionary work was curtailed. Before the work stopped, missionaries were working in Port Vila in Efate and at Santo (Luganville), Espirito Santo Island.(21)

Although Presidents Davis and Palmer both tried to obtain permission from the government of the Solomon Islands to establish the Church in that area, neither was successful. In 1974, the Solomons were in the final stages of obtaining complete independence from the British when President Davis applied for visas for missionaries. He was told that the visas could not be granted because three other churches had recently moved into the islands and that rather than bringing peace, they had caused inter-village wars. Government leaders desired peace and unity at the time of independence; therefore they had decided not to allow any new churches. At this writing there are no LDS missionaries in the Solomon Islands.(22)

KIRIBATI

To most older people the name "Gilbert Islands" means little more than a few vaguely remembered dots in the South Pacific where thousands of servicemen lost their lives during World War II. Tarawa, a with its population of fifteen or twenty thousand people, is only a series of coral islets that make a forty-mile chain beside a triangular shaped lagoon. The highest point on the atoll is fifteen feet above seal level. Until 1975, however, Tarawa served as the administrative center for the Gilbert

and Ellice Islands, a British Crown Colony. It is now the capital of the Republic of Kiribati. Hardly fifty thousand people reside in the entire republic.

The minute size of these Micronesian islands and their unimportant status on the world globe, notwithstanding, since 1972 Kiribati has played an interesting and faith-promoting role in the development of the Church in the Pacific. In 1972 there were no Latter-day Saints in the Gilbert Islands; in 1984 there were over 500 baptized members (plus children), two branches, and a Church secondary school. In 1976 Church service education missionaries were sent to Tarawa, and in 1978 the first educational missionaries arrived there.

Living conditions may be as primitive in Kiribati as in any other area in the Pacific. In a letter of December 1978, Elder Richard M. Pratt, who, with his wife Adline, was teaching school in Kiribati, described the status of the Church, the islands, the school, and the people on Tarawa.

"This is our tenth day in the islands," wrote Pratt, who was obviously suffering from culture shock, "and words fail to tell the true story. It is as primitive as a thousand years ago in the ways they live, yet there are elements of civilization such as the narrow oiled road that stretches the length of the island on the lagoon side The other signs of modern culture are the bank, the post office, and 2 or 3 tiny all-purpose stores 30 minutes and 30 cents from our village of Elta."

"The island," he continued, "is thickly covered with coconut trees. They are the staff of life. Without the coconut tree, life would cease to exist here, literally. They eat it, wear it, drink it, build their huts from it; and burn the rest to cook their rice and fish. Our <five> acre campus, leased for 99 years by the Church, spreads from the ocean on the south to the road on the north next to the lagoon"

"Our buildings consist of 12-15 native-constructed buildings, completely made of coconut, except the two teachers' homes have the luxury of concrete floors There are no glass windows, no doors that can be locked. The upper half of the walls are open to allow free passage of air. The often-blowing trade winds make the heat bearable"

"The center of the campus is dominated by the main building, some 30 by 40 feet in size, and called by the natives 'maneaba.' (Maneaba means central gathering place.) Its steep roof, supported on 12 coconut posts, is gracefully designed and resembles a bird in flight. This covered area is the chapel, assembly hall, and center of all campus and branch activities. The graveled floor is covered with thin coconut leaf mats. These are picked up and stored after each Sunday service. About 120 natives sit on the thin mats, no chairs, sing without accompaniment, and rejoice in the gospel from 9 until 1:30. The meetings follow each other, for these people are too poor to afford more than one bus fare a Sunday. Some come Saturday night and sleep on the gravel. It is just as good as they have at home."(23)

Although Elder and Sister Pratt found the standard of living far lower than in the developed part of the world, they also found a people who desired more education for their young people.

It was their desire for schooling that created the opportunity for the Church to enter Kiribati.

In 1972 officials in Church Schools in Tonga began receiving letters from Waitea Abiuta, the headmaster of a small secondary school known as A.K.A.S., an abbreviation for Auriaria Kokoi Ataria School. Waitea, who represented a number of parents and board members of the A.K.A.S., asked Church education leaders to allow their children to attend Liahona High School. These letters were considered seriously by Tongan, Fiji Mission, and Church Education System leaders, and in September 1972, President Ebbie L. Davis, visited Tarawa.

President Davis, of course, saw this situation as an opportunity to start missionary work in the Gilbert Islands. He investigated carefully, but found that the department of immigration had a policy that "when a church has 50 adult members it will be officially recognized and will be allowed to bring foreign proselyting missionaries into the Gilbert Islands." (24) In effect this policy made it impossible to establish a new church, or so it seemed. In his survey of Gilbert affairs, President Davis learned that only six or seven per cent of all children ages twelve through seventeen were offered any educational opportunities. The A.K.A.S. school had successfully avoided the government's policy by sending students to various church schools outside the Gilbert Islands. Now the board was attempting to send students to Liahona High School. President Davis decided to recommend that twelve Gilbertese students be enrolled on a trial basis. This recommendation was accepted by Church officials, and in late 1972, George Puckett, superintendent of Church Schools in Tonga and an associate, went to Tarawa and selected twelve students. The following year, twelve more A.K.A.S. students were accepted.

During 1972 and 1973, President Davis sensed a certain amount of hostility from the government toward the Church and A.K.A.S.. In July 1974, however, the attitude of the government officials seemed to change for the better, probably because local Gilbertese administrators were replacing British officials. Mr. Tnentoa, the Gilbertese minister of education, told President Davis that he favored the expansion of secondary education and welcomed LDS efforts in this field. (25)

By the end of 1976, sixty Gilbertese students had been enrolled in Liahona High School. All of these students were non-Mormons when they arrived in Tonga; however, all but three or four joined the Church. Once again Liahona High School played a significant role in missionary work.

From his first visit to the Gilberts in September 1972 until he was released as mission president, President Davis made frequent visits with government officials in an effort to obtain visas for missionaries. In late 1974 he and Elder John H. Groberg, Regional Representative for the area, talked with President Tonga Toutai Paletu'ua of the Tonga Nuku'alofa Mission about using Gilbertese converts from Liahona High School as missionaries in their native islands. President Toutai supported the plan, and by October 1975, six Gilbertese students had been ordained elders and were prepared to serve missions. President

Palmer, the new mission president in Fiji, flew to Tarawa with the missionaries on October 19, 1975. The following day the little group met in a cemetery on Betio, Tarawa, and President Palmer dedicated the Kiribati to the preaching of the gospel.

As is frequently true when the Church moves into new areas, opposition arose from both Roman Catholic and Protestant church leaders. When school opened at A.K.A.S. in early 1976, only seventeen students enrolled. Students who were converted after the six missionaries returned to the country were almost the only students in the school. The other students left because of the indirect association between the Church and the school. Waitea, the headmaster, two board members, two teachers, and thirteen students had joined the Church since October. On Sunday, January 24, 1976, Waitea was ordained an elder and set apart as president of the Tarawa Branch. The A.K.A.S. school buildings were used for church meetings. The sudden drop in enrollment caused a crisis for the school, for it had debts that were being paid through student tuition. In order to save the school and also to maintain the Church's base of operation, the Church Education System (CES) provided a modest amount of financial help to keep the school solvent. CES also decided to send a professional teacher, Grant Howlett, and his wife Pat, to Tarawa from Liahona High School. The Howletts were called on a Church service basis. They and their five children arrived in the Gilberts in August 1976.

Brother Howlett became headmaster of the school and established excellent relations with the ministry of education. Through his guidance the A.K.A.S. school remained open, and the enrollment increased from seventeen to seventy-three students by early 1977. Even though the Roman Catholic bishop demanded that members of his church withdraw from the school, Brother Howlett offered the students so much that the enrollment did not decline.

Only a short time after Elder Howlett arrived, he began hearing reports that Waitea, the headmaster, was not living a moral life. After a careful investigation Elder Howlett confronted Waitea with the accusations. Waitea confessed his failings and was later excommunicated from the Church. This left the school entirely in the hands of Elder Howlett and the Church. The local government withdrew the school from official registration and made it necessary for the CES to either take over the school or to allow it to be closed down. CES decided to take over the school, lease the property on which it stands, and change the name to the Moroni Community School.

On January 1, 1978, George and Ana Moleni from Liahona High School, and their five children arrived on Tarawa. The Molenis both held college degrees and were experienced teachers. They were called to assist Grant Howlett both in the school and in the branch. Nine months later, the Pratts arrived to begin their two years as education missionaries. Through their united service the student body of Moroni Community High School grew to 120. In 1984 the student body was 240 and being held at that number.

After the first six Gilbertese elders opened missionary work, several similar groups followed. But anti-Mormon influence upon the department of immigration caused that agency to change

its long-standing policy of allowing churches with fifty adult members to bring foreign missionaries into the country. Almost as soon as the Church was officially registered as a legal body during 1977, the department of immigration declared that the Church would have to use only Gilbertese missionaries. In an effort to train and strengthen these young men, President Palmer developed a policy of sending all foreign elders from the Fiji area to Tarawa for the last three or four weeks of their missions. Gilbert Island immigration laws allowed short stays of this kind. In this way the local elders were helped considerably, and the Church continued to grow rapidly. There were 105 baptisms in 1977 and 95 in 1978.(26) In October 1980, construction began on a new chapel that was completed in 1982. Even though some fixtures had not arrived from Australia to be installed, the new branch president, Buren Ratieta (the first I-Kiribati to so serve since Waita was released in 1976), held the first services in it in February 1982. Almost 250 people attended. The president of the Republic of Kiribati attended when that building was dedicated. During the festivities that followed, he told the audience that he and other leading government officials had objected to the LDS Church being established in Kiribati because it is so influential. He said they feared that the Church would divide the people. But his attitude changed after he saw the great contribution the Church made to the social, educational and cultural development of their country. They are now happy to welcome and cooperate with the Latter-day Saints.

A manifestation of his trust in the Church is his appointment of Baitika Toun, a branch president and member of the parliament, as Minister of Education in the president's cabinet. It is significant that the Church, once rejected on the basis of legal technicalities and prejudice, now stands in a position of trust.

THE MICRONESIA-GUAM MISSION

Some Latter-day Saints have lived in Guam and many others have been aware of Guam and the islands of Micronesia since World War II. At that time the Marshall, Caroline and Mariana Islands, with their tiny islands of Majuro, Kwajalein, Ponape, Truk, Yap, a larger Saipan--were forever ingrained on the minds of Americans and the world as Allied troops fought through these islands. Since World War II, servicemen's groups and branches of the Church have continued on Guam.

Guam is a territory of the United States. America's westernmost outpost, it played a large role in U.S. defense during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, and remains strategically important to the U.S.. 1980 estimates place the population of Guam around 120,000. Military personnel are much in evidence, but the local people, the Chamorros, number well over 80,000. English is the official language of the island, but the Chamorro language is still widely spoken. Guam was controlled by the Spanish for over two hundred years. During that period the local people were converted to Roman Catholicism,

which remains important. The U.S. government took over the island in 1900.

LDS presence on the island of Guam has been evident since 1944's when the first servicemen's group was organized. On August 25, 1955, President Joseph Fielding Smith visited Guam and dedicated it to the preaching of the gospel. In January 1957, the first full-time missionaries arrived. Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Council of the Twelve dedicated the first chapel in 1959. Until the 1970's, however, the missionaries confined their efforts almost entirely to Americans who were interested in the Church.

Before being made the headquarters of the Micronesia-Guam Mission in 1980, Guam was part of the Japanese, the Northern Far East, the Southern Far East, and the Hawaii Honolulu Missions, and the Kaneohe Hawaii Stake, even though Guam is separated from Hawaii by 3300 miles of ocean. In the spring of 1980, Guam and Micronesia became a separate mission, with Ferron C. Losee as president. Guam, like many parts of the Fiji Suva Mission, has been, if not an orphan, at least a stepchild. After the early 1970's, however, Guam received considerable care and interest from the Hawaii Honolulu Mission and the Kaneohe Hawaii Stake. The Hawaii Honolulu Mission sent missionaries to Guam in 1970, and after that time the Church there grew from a branch to two wards which were made part of the Kaneohe Stake. During the mid-1970's, and after that time the Church grew from a branch to two wards which were made part of the Kaneohe Stake. During the mid-1970's, missionaries broadened their proselyting base to include the Chamorro people.

In January 1975, President Robert E. Crandall of the Hawaii Honolulu Mission sent Elder Callis Carleton and Jeffery Frame to Saipan, headquarters of the U.S. Trust Territory, in the Mariana Islands. This was the first real move into Micronesia proper. Elders Carleton and Frame, like elders who have opened new areas elsewhere in the Pacific, encountered opposition from the Roman Catholic clergy and also had difficulty arranging for an appropriate place for meetings. These problems notwithstanding, they proselyted the people of Saipan (who number about 13,000) and soon baptized their first convert, a Mr. Taylor. Through the help of Alfred "Mustang" Gonzales, a member who was working on a new airport, the elders found a quonset hut for Sunday meetings and began holding services. Before long, replacements came for the original elders, and two additional missionaries brought the force to four.

Brad Nago, one of the most important early converts, had come with his family to Saipan to work on the airport. There he met Brother Gonzales, and the two men became good friends. The story is told that Nago saw Gonzales at a cafe one day and they talked about Gonzales' planned return to Hawaii. Brother Gonzales told Brad Nago that he needed a replacement as branch president for the little dependent Mormon branch that had been formed. Brother Gonzales jokingly informed cigar-smoking Brad Nago that he was the man for the position. Subsequently, Nago and his family studied the gospel and were baptized in January 1976. He replaced Brother Gonzales as president of the Saipan

Branch. By July 1978 there were sixty-nine members of this new unit.

Through the enthusiastic encouragement of Elder John H. Groberg, area supervisor for Hawaii and the South Pacific, President William W. Cannon of the Hawaii Honolulu Mission led the expansion of the mission into all seven districts of the U.S. Trust Territory. Over forty missionaries, many of whom are from Tonga and Samoa, were soon proselyting on or near Saipan (*one branch with 122 members), Pauau (one branch with 75 members), Yap (one branch with 100 members), Truk (three branches with 200 members), Ponape (three branches with 300 members), Kwajalein (one branch with 75 members), and Majuro (three branches with 325 members). In March 1979 there were 500 members of the Church in these islands.(27), but by 1983 the number had grown to over 3000 in nineteen branches. Kiribati was assigned to this mission in late 1980.

Because the Trust Territory was under U.S. protection and control, the Church had no difficulty bringing missionaries into the area. The timing for entry was right, however, because of political changes that are taking place there.

Micronesia--not including Kiribati--was administered by the United States as the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands from 1947 to 1982. In mid-to late-1982, the U.S. and the governments of the Republic of Palau (sometimes spelled Bilau), the Federated States of Micronesia (which includes the states of Yap, Truk, Ponape, and Kosrae), and the Republic of the Marshall Islands signed a Compact of Free Association, which was designed to terminate the the Trusteeship. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is a legal part of the Trust Territory until the Trusteeship Agreement is terminated; it will then become a U.S. territory. There has been considerable confusion in Micronesia during the late 1970's and the early 1980's as the new governments have come into being and taken control. Land purchases for chapels in particular were difficult because local laws were not clearly established and government officers were not prepared to make many important decisions. Most recently, however, relations with the new governments have been amicable.

The entire population of Guam, Kiribati and the present and former Trust Territory is only 300,000 people, spread over thousands of islands in millions of square miles of ocean. There are nine distinct cultural groups and at least nine different languages. Considering these facts, the Church cannot expect to bring large numbers of people into the kingdom. Nevertheless, through the programs of the Church, including seminary and possibly schools, the Church can expect to greatly enrich the lives of many people in this far-flung part of the world.(28)

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The newest major area of the Pacific to be opened to LDS

*Figures in parentheses are for 1983.

missionary work is Papua New Guinea (PNG). Aside from Australia, it is the most densely populated area in the Pacific. New Guinea is the second largest island in the world. Its dense jungles, mangrove swamps, savanas and high mountains topped with snow evidence a land of diversity and challenges for the Church.

PNG's rivers, forests, and mountains have created an isolating effect that has helped preserve a multitude of nations and tribes within a nation. It has been suggested that the seven or eight hundred languages account for a sixth of the world's tongues. Most used are English, Tok Pisin (pidgin), and hiri moiu. Tok Pisin has rapidly become the lingua franca of the country. The vast majority of people in PNG are Melanesians, but within that classification are found a rich variety of cultures and customs.

The nation of PNG became independent on September 16, 1975, following almost one hundred years of colonial status under Germany, Britain and Australia. It is part of the British Commonwealth of Nations. PNG includes not only the east end of New Guinea (the west half is called Irian Jaya, part of Indonesia), but also six hundred other islands.

LDS missionaries had visited New Guinea for twenty-five years or more before seriously attempting to gain a permanent foothold. Shortly after becoming president of the Australia Brisbane Mission in July 1980, Dennis D. Flake sent Elder and Sister L. Douglas Johnson to Port Moresby, PNG, to open missionary work there. Port Moresby (population 122,000) is the capital city. The Johnsons and other couples who have followed them have devoted their time to gaining legal recognition for the Church, to making friends, and meeting with those who have invited the missionaries to share the restored gospel with them. The Church gained legal status in May 1981, and has the right to lease land for chapels and other church buildings. No land is held free and clear. To date, LDS missionaries have not ventured far beyond the capital, but several branches of expatriates have been formed in several mining districts on islands. In addition to the three or four branches in Port Moresby, there are small branches at Lae, Arawa and Rabaul.

In April 1983, Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve and Bishop H. Burke Peterson of the Presiding Bishopric, visited Port Moresby and Elder Perry offered a prayer dedicating that land. At the same time these Church leaders and the mission president held planning meetings to plot the future development of the Church in PNG. It was decided to move slowly and baptize only as many members as could be trained in doctrine, government and church administration. The idea was to prepare the PNG members to govern themselves and then moved more quickly to spread the gospel beyond Port Moresby and its immediate hinterland.

Although the missionary couples who have labored there have maintained a low profile and have not proselyted openly, many people have asked to be taught and the Church had grown to over 750 by late 1983. A chapel was constructed in 1983-84. Two local young men had been called from Port Moresby to serve missions in Australia. They were Elders George Mauhi and Robert

Goisisi.

Although the plan of the Church leaders was to contain growth to limited numbers within the Port Moresby area, there were signs that because of the transient nature of the people the gospel was finding its way into villages and homes outside the capital.(29)

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