STATISTICAL GROWTH OF THE LDS CHURCH IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

by Glenn V. M. Lung

As suggested by the MPH Board of Directors, my progress report for 1984 has been expanded to include Hawaii and Micronesia in addition to Samoa and Tonga. This is appropriate since some of the more interesting 1984 developments have not only impacted these other islands also, but have been more centered in Hawaii and Micronesia. Further, adding these islands to the report will now include all of the island groups of the Hawaii-Pacific Islands Area which is headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii.

MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

Missionary activity is the cutting edge for growth in the Church. In the Hawaii-Pacific Islands Area, 1984 saw replacement of Pres. Robert Martin of the Hawaii Honolulu Mission with Pres. William O. Perry, and Pres. Carl Harris with Pres. Malina Tia in Samoa. In 1984, self-appointed antagonists to the LDS Church, Ed Decker, launched a vigorous campaign in Tonga and Samoa. In Tonga, he was successful in winning the king's sympathy. The spirit and effort of the Tongan Saints remains strong, but receptiveness by the population must have been affected as convert baptisms dropped from 2,251 in 1983 to 1,361 in 1984. I was house guest at Mission President Melvin Butler's home in March where he declared warily that the missionary zeal has not suffered. Meanwhile, in Samoa, President Tia held sway with 2,176 baptisms, just slightly below the 2,344 of 1983. Hawaii continues to struggle with less than 700 convert baptisms per year.

For excitement and success in missionary effort, we must turn to far-flung Micronesia with its over 2,000 inhabited islands. Although the natives are now hungry for the word of God, caution must be exercised not to expand the work too rapidly in order that priesthood leadership and physical facilities can keep pace with growth. Nevertheless, under President Joseph Keeler's dynamic drive, convert baptisms increased from 228 in 1983 to 595 in 1984 - a 160% increase. Micronesia is definitely the frontier of the Hawaii-Pacific Islands Area.

MEMBERSHIP

Emigration by Tonga and Samoa saints again kept the local congregations from swelling because of repeated successes in missionary work. In Hawaii, it is the high cost of living which has a perniciously pressured Mormons to leave the island paradise. Church growth, therefore, in Hawaii, Samoa, and Tonga has leveled off. Hawaii went from 36,256 to 36,759, or a 1.5% increase. Samoa increased 4% from 40,705 to 42,416, and in Tonga, the membership went from 31,723 to 33,497 or 6%. In Micronesia, where missionary work has skyrocketed, membership increased 27% from 3,054 to 3,884.

In previous reports, I had noted the Church units in Samoa and Tonga. With hardly any change, they ended 1984 with 103 wards and branches in Samoa under 11 stakes. In Tonga, the 10 stakes are made up of 105 wards and branches. Here in Hawaii, we also have a stable condition with 13 stakes made up of 91 wards and branches.

Since Micronesia is a developing area and included for the first time in this report, may I give a brief geographical description. Although Guam is an American territory, we include it and its branches in the Micronesia package. Micronesia is actually made up of four separate sovereignties - the Federated States of Micronesia (Truk, Ponape, Kosrae, and Yap), the Marshall Islands, the Marshall Islands, and the Kingdom of Belau (Palau). In the Federated States, we have seven branches - in Moen, Truk, in Uman, Truk, in Sapak, Truk, in Kolonia, Ponape in Hand, Ponape in Sapokalap, Ponape in Yap and in Palau. We have one branch in Saipan in the Marianas. In the Marshall Islands, we have branches in Rota, Majuro and in Kwajalein. That makes 15 branches. Interestingly, Micronesia keeps right up with the other established countries of Samoa, Tonga, and Hawaii as far as Sacrament Meeting attendance is concerned. The Area average is 47% and Micronesia performs at 48.5%.

The number of members whose addresses are unknown continues to increase at an alarming rate from 15,791 to 20,275. The locating of these members is a high priority with priesthood leaders.

TEMPLES

The Saints in both Samoa and Tonga received their temples in 1983 with great appreciation. This was shown by the outpouring of temple work. At 12,000 square feet, these temples are one-fifth the size of Hawaii's temple at Laie. They are still building and widening the base of temple recommend holders. And many of the Saints have to walk to the temple. But in one short year, Samoa has achieved 69,000 endowments for 1984, which is almost half of Hawaii's 61,000 endowments for 1984. Tonga's progress is even more spectacular with 55,600 endowments for 1984. At this pace, there is no doubt that 1985 will see Tonga surpass the endowment work done in Hawaii. Already plans are in motion to build the second phase of the Tonga Temple which would double the ordinance rooms from two to four. One very amazing observation with the Samoa temple is the traditional problem of balancing the male and female pages. Samoa male endowments for 1984 exceeded the female endowments by almost 3,800. What an inspiring example for the priesthood in other countries! The sale of temple garments continues to increase. There was an increase of 40% in 1983 in garments sales in those two countries. From that higher base figure, Samoa increased their sales still another 60%, and Tonga went up by 33%.

MEETINGHOUSES

In 1984 another $12 million was spent on construction in the Hawaii-Pacific Islands Area, compared to $10 million in 1983. We
are rapidly coming to the point where very few additional chapels will be needed. But instead, serious consideration will be given to expanding existing chapels to multiple-ward usage. In Hawaii, 68 of the 94 chapels are multiple use. In Tonga, only 10 out of its 95 chapels are multiple use, while Samoa has only 11 of its 92 chapels used by more than one ward. With the rising cost of construction and with automobile usage increasing in both countries, the word has already been given by our Area Presidency to look further into the sharing of chapels. But in Micronesia, however, where there is usually only one branch on an island, it will be some time before multiple use becomes practical.

Mormons pride themselves in having their chapels fully paid. When chapels are completed and fully paid, dedication is the final touch of spirituality to brick and mortar. For various reasons, many Mormon meetinghouses are not dedicated. Our Area boasts the highest percentage (about 75%) of dedicated buildings in the international world.

Much effort and money is expended in keeping these meetinghouses clean and in good repair. The result is that the high standards of appearance and structure add to the Church's image in the Pacific as being the "rich, Mormon Church."

OTHER INTERESTING HIGHLIGHTS

In 1984, Hawaii joined the rest of the United States and Canada in having satellite receivers at each stake center. The project was completed just in time to receive the Christmas message from the First Presidency. The satellite programs already announced as well as the potential satellite transmission of data truly excites the imagination.

Also in 1984, both Hawaii and Guam joined in the worldwide emergency radio network of the Church with operational center in the Church Office Building, Salt Lake City. Hawaii's equipment is located in the Hawaii Area Office next door to the Honolulu Tabernacle, and its operational team is headed by volunteer Joseph Hao. Missionary Lorenzo Lisbonde operates the Guam equipment from the Mission President's office. It is hoped that in 1985, portable hand units will be provided for the branches in Micronesia, and the system adapted for regular communication with mission headquarters.

SUMMARY

The great impact for the islands of the Pacific in 1985 will be in the new Area Presidency concept which was announced for July 1, 1984. Implementation of the concept is now in progress. Before the year is out, we should all feel the effects of this tremendous change in church organization.

With the many growing pains evident in Samoa, Tonga, and Micronesia, we have great hope for these beautiful people because of their love of God and their deep, simple faith. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the way they do temple work for their dead. These must be the qualities meant by Jesus when he declared, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."