

Chapter 14

The Story Continues: Latter-day Saints in the Pacific, 1984–2004

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Writing a postscript to *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* has been a fascinating undertaking.¹ Since finishing the book in 1984, I have spent most of my time in university administration, in researching and writing about the Church in Asia, and, since 2002, on a Latter-day Saint mission at the Polynesian Cultural Center and in retirement. When I turned my attention again to the Pacific, I did so with the attitude that most of what is important had already happened and most of the growth had been accomplished between 1844 and 1984. My suppositions were wrong. Those first 140 years were the foundation, the prelude for a greater work that has been accomplished since.

To make my point, consider the statistical table at the end of this chapter.² Turn to the table titled “LDS Expansion in the Pacific 1985 to 2002” and the column titled “Members.” This column provides the gross figures for most of the island areas in which the Church is established. Note the total at the bottom: 451,743 (0.04 per-

cent of the Church total). This is a respectable figure. Look next at the column titled “Stakes, Wards, Branches.” Sixty-three new stakes have been created in the Pacific since 1984 (at the end of 2002 there were 119 stakes in the Pacific).³

Some figures have not changed much; for example, there are only three new missions—Papua New Guinea in February 1992, Australia Sydney North in January 1993, and Australia Melbourne West in July 1998. Six new temples have been constructed since 1985, bringing the total in the Pacific to twelve. The totals indicate Church growth of almost 79 percent during the seventeen years included; this is a respectable rate of growth since churchwide, the growth was 49 percent—from 5,919,483 to 11,721,548. Some of the percentage growth rates are very large. For example, the Kiribati figures show a 1,516 percent increase. Papua New Guinea is also impressive with growth of 876 percent. It is important to remember, however, that rabbits double their numbers faster than elephants. In other words, it is more difficult to double a large

number than a small one. Yet the figures do not begin to reveal the full story. For example, these tables do not say anything about the large amount of family history work being done in Australia and elsewhere. And these numbers do not tell of the number of seminary and institute students who study the restored gospel on a regular, organized basis.

Significant Organizational and Administrative Changes

One important change in the Pacific (not reported in *Unto the Islands*) occurred on July 1, 1984, when the Brethren divided the world into thirteen geographical areas—seven in the United States and Canada, and six covering the remainder of the world. These thirteen Area Presidencies were initially composed of General Authorities drawn from the First and Second Quorums of the Seventy. By 2002, when the number of areas had more than doubled, Area Authority Seventies were also being called into the presidencies. (In 2004 the number of areas was reduced when Area Presidencies were done away with in the United States and Canada.) Initially, the entire Pacific was placed under the Pacific Area Presidency headquartered in Sydney, Australia. Subsequently, Hawai'i was reassigned to the North America West Area, and Micronesia was placed under the Philippines-Micronesia Area when it was formed in 1987—reflecting the immensity of the Pacific and the variety of challenges that Church leaders face in this geographical realm. In 1998, the entire Pacific region was realigned into the Australia–New Zealand Area (which also included Papua New Guinea) and the Pacific Area, which included the remaining islands. The creation of Area Presidencies moved important administrative functions much closer to the points of need. It also consolidated various administrative functions—translation services, welfare, temporal affairs (physical facilities, financial operations, statistics), and so forth—under common roofs throughout the world. Further-

more, the creation of Area Authority Seventies, initially including five from the Pacific Area and one from Hawai'i (North America West Area), strengthened the links between the Pacific and the center of the Church.⁴ The inspired genius of creating the Quorums of the Seventy is obvious. Over the years, observers who have been concerned about cultural relationships, adjustments, and conflicts have expressed worry regarding the ability of the Church to bridge various human and cultural chasms.⁵ Area Presidencies that include local priesthood leaders, and now Area Authority Seventies who can speak from the experience and perspective of the various nations and cultures, are largely the answer to the culture question.

Encouraging Seminary and Institute Participation

Throughout the Pacific, 13,860 students were registered in the seminary program in 2003, not counting the 3,203 students who attended religion classes at Church secondary schools. An additional 13,344 college students and young adults participated in institute courses. The largest institute enrollment was in Australia (3,113), with impressive numbers in New Zealand (2,917), Sāmoa (2,613), and Tonga (1,654). Of course, these are the largest Church membership areas in the Pacific. Hawai'i also has a large Latter-day Saint population, with 1,920 students enrolled in seminary classes and 644 enrolled in institutes at the various universities and colleges. Brigham Young University–Hawai'i (BYU–Hawai'i) has a student body of 2,400, most of whom are enrolled in religious studies coursework.⁶

The Continuing Translation Work

In *Unto the Islands*, I attempted to trace the history of the translation of the Latter-day Saint scriptures into every language of the Pacific in which they had been published. During the 1980s, *Selections of the Book of Mormon* (a selection of

highly important verses) was published in six new Pacific languages: Marshallese, the language of the Marshall Islands (1984); Bislama, the pidgin language of Vanuatu (1985); Pohnpeian, the language of Pohnpei (1987); Gilbertese, the language of Kiribati (1988); Palauan, the language of Palau Island (1988); and Chamorro, the language of the people native to Guam (1989).⁷ However, the Church discontinued publication of *Selections* in 1998. Complete translations of the Book of Mormon in Kiribati (2001), Neo-Melanesian for Papua New Guinea (2002), Marshallese (2003), Yapese (2004), and Bislama (2004) are now in print including an eight-page reference guide. The Translation Department is working constantly on a number of important projects. In the mid-1990s, translation offices and operations were moved to the islands—Tonga, Sāmoa, French Polynesia, Fiji, and others. Translation work is generally being done in the home countries of the languages, supervised by the area offices and overseen by the Translation Department in Salt Lake City.

Of course, the older areas—French Polynesia, New Zealand, Sāmoa, and Tonga—have developed a large body of translated material. But the new areas, particularly Micronesia and Papua New Guinea, are in serious need of a variety of scripture and curriculum materials. Curriculum materials are being translated into most of the main languages of the Pacific. Kiribati is receiving considerable attention. The *Gospel Principles* manual is available in languages in which the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price are available. For languages in which basic scriptures are not available, the Church has published a manual titled *Gospel Fundamentals*. It is basically like the *Gospel Principles* manual but lacks direct scripture translations.

Of interest to many are the Hawaiian and Maori versions of the Book of Mormon. Several thousand copies of each were recently reprinted and are selling well. The Hawaiian version, Ka Buke A Moramona, is a reprint of the 1905 version. The Maori version, Ko Te Pukapuka A Mora-

mona, is a reprint of the 1918 publication that was prepared by young Elder Matthew Cowley. Many Micronesian students at BYU–Hawai‘i have been extremely helpful in the translation of the scriptures and curriculum materials into their native languages.⁸

Book of Mormon language revisions are underway in Tongan, Samoan, Tahitian, and Fijian. They are being brought to the 1981 English-version standard with the addition of the Guide to the Scriptures as the reference source. “The Guide to the Scriptures defines selected doctrines, principles, people, and places found in the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. It also provides key scriptural references.”⁹ The long-awaited Rarotongan version of the Doctrine and Covenants is now available.

Translation of the less frequently used Pacific languages is a difficult, tedious task. Language and pronunciation rules are frequently not well established. Spellings are often not agreed upon even among familiar users. Despite the difficulties and expense, few undertakings of the Church are more important than translation work. The Church continues to support these undertakings.

Pacific Latter-day Saint Celebrations

Celebrations have filled the island air, especially between 1985 and 1997. This round of celebrations began in Sāmoa with its Church centennial in 1988. But moving from shortest period to longest, the Latter-day Saint Technical College in Fiji celebrated the briefest period—its twenty-year anniversary—in 1996. Over 325 students attend the school, which offers forms 1–7, equivalent to grades 7–13 in the United States (the Church also operates an elementary school in Suva).¹⁰

Next was the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the first branch of the Church in the Cook Islands, which took place on October 6,

1946. The celebration was held October 4–6, 1996, with sports, dances, and sacred services commemorating the progress of the Church in those islands. There are now 1,369 members in the Cook Islands.¹¹

Liahona High School in Tonga also celebrated a fifty-year accomplishment. More than five thousand Latter-day Saints and friends participated in one part or another of the three-day (August 14–16, 1997) jubilee. Her Majesty Queen Halaevalu Mata'aho spoke to the crowds and participated in events all three days. A new statue representing the magic and power of education was unveiled in front of the campus. It was designed by alumnus Viliami Toluta'u, who now teaches art at BYU–Hawai'i.¹²

Sāmoa and Tonga each celebrated the centennial of the founding of the Church in their islands. The events in Sāmoa came first, in 1988. Gerry Avant of the *Church News* encapsulated what happened in these words:

In a quick-paced succession of activities and meetings that left one little time to savor the tranquility of life on a South Pacific island, the 100th anniversary of the Church in Samoa was commemorated June 13–26.

The celebration was held on three islands: Tutuila in American Samoa, and Savai'i and Upolu in Western Samoa. Included were fireside testimonials, devotional meetings and a regional conference; traditional dances and songs; canoe races and other athletic contests, and parades.

President Thomas S. Monson, second counselor in the First Presidency, presided over the last segment of meetings and activities, which were held in Apia, on Upolu, while earlier events on Tutuila and Savai'i were under the direction of Elder James E. Faust of the Council of the Twelve and Elder John Sonnenberg of the First Quorum of the Seventy and President of the Pacific Area.

Two monuments recently commissioned and funded by returned missionaries and “friends of Samoa” were unveiled as part of the celebration. On June 20, Elder Faust unveiled a monument on the grounds of a stake meetinghouse at Mapusaga, American Samoa. On June 24, President

Monson unveiled the other monument in front of Church offices next to the temple in Pesega, a village near Apia in Western Samoa.¹³

In one of his addresses, President Monson said, “It is my prayer that we would be true to the traditions of missionaries who served in Sāmoa, and those traditions include love of God and love of fellowman, loyalty to the Church, obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the desire to follow the prophet of God in these last days.” He concluded his remarks with the following: “This is our day of history. This is our day to serve the Lord so we may follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before. Let the 100 years in which we live be just as glorious and honorable as the 100 years that have just concluded.”¹⁴

The Church was honored by the participation of the highest civic leaders, including American Sāmoa's Governor A. P. Lutali, Lieutenant Governor Eni F. Hunkin Jr. (a Church member), and Speaker of the House Tuana'itau F. Tula (a Church member). In Sāmoa, His Highness the Head of State Susuga Malieota Tanumafili II spoke, and Prime Minister Tofilau Eti Alesana hosted a dinner party for the visiting Latter-day Saint Church leaders.

It is difficult to make concrete connections between such events and what happens afterward, but since the centennial celebration, ten new stakes have been organized in American Sāmoa and Sāmoa. It appears that the Samoan Saints have accepted President Monson's counsel to “let the 100 years in which we live be just as glorious and honorable as the 100 years that have just concluded.”

The centennial celebrations of the Church's coming to Tonga were held in July and August 1991. They, like those in Sāmoa, were elaborate, interesting, and faith affirming. The main difference was the wider geographical range of the festivities—Hawai'i, Northern and Southern California, and Utah, as well as the three main island groups of Tonga—Tongatapu, Ha'apai, and Vava'u.¹⁵ Generally the same kinds of activities were held as those in Sāmoa, only the players

were different. One could not but be impressed with the high profile participants, including King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, who attended many events on Tongatapu and spoke at one of the conference sessions. Elder Douglas J. Martin of the Seventy, president of the Pacific Area, attended. In his comments he quipped: "It is not a good year to be a pig in Tonga." The feasts were tremendous. So were the spiritual feasts enjoyed at the various devotional and conference sessions. At the conference, Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve, who represented the Brethren, spoke on the vision he gained by seeing how far the Church had come in Tonga in one hundred years. As reported in the *Church News* by John L. Hart, Elder Nelson observed that just as the Church set roots in Tonga one hundred years ago, the Church is planting seeds in eastern European nations this very year. "I look forward 100 years to similar congregations in other countries where the missionaries are just setting foot. The Lord said, 'I will hasten my work in its time,' and you and I are living in that day when the work is being hastened. . . . So as I look at this congregation, I have a vision of what can happen in those countries. It is your faith and example that will help, your missionaries and your tithing that will make it grow. So I thank you for your example as Latter-day Saints."¹⁶

The events included dances and a dance festival, singing, balls, feasts, sports, cultural programs, parades, firesides, and conferences. Elder John H. Groberg of the Seventy, former missionary and mission president in Tonga, dedicated new chapels on August 26 and 27, and Elder Nelson dedicated a new chapel on August 18. The Tongan celebration included one additional contribution, a book containing faith-promoting stories of Tongan Saints. President Eric B. Shumway, former missionary and mission president in Tonga and, at the time, academic vice president of BYU–Hawai'i, collected and translated the stories from Tongan into English. Although published only in English, *Tongan Saints, Legacy of Faith* was widely distributed in Tonga.¹⁷ It has

provided a vivid and lasting tribute to the faith-filled lives of Tongan Church members. As in Sāmoa, the Church has continued to flourish in Tonga. Nine new stakes have been created since the centennial celebration.

In addition to the Utah pioneer sesquicentennial that was celebrated in 1997, there was a previous sesquicentennial of the founding of the Church in the islands of French Polynesia. The Church sesquicentennial of French Polynesia was celebrated from April 30 to May 11, 1994, one hundred-fifty years after the arrival of the first Latter-day Saint missionaries in the South Pacific, at Tubuai. The diaspora of Tahitian Saints from French Polynesia to other nations has not been so great as that from Sāmoa and Tonga, so the celebrations were confined to the native islands, but the spirit and dedication of the Saints were as large as elsewhere. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve and Elder Rulon G. Craven of the Seventy, also Pacific Area President, were the principal outside visitors, with Elder Nelson presiding over the celebration. Many former mission leaders, missionaries, and others with a love for French Polynesia returned to the islands to participate. S. George Ellsworth and Kathleen C. Perrin prepared a sesquicentennial history to provide the story behind the celebration. Titled *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, the book is a work of love by Ellsworth, who was enamored with French Polynesia for many years, and Perrin, who lived there for seven years with her husband, Yves, who served as principal of the Latter-day Saint elementary school and as mission president.¹⁸

The agenda for this celebration was similar to those held in Sāmoa and Tonga. Government officials participated, the media gave the events considerable attention, and the activities and Church services were filled with the spirit of love, exultation in the blessings of the Lord, and ample fellowship. Elder Nelson and others visited the outside islands of Takaroa, Moorea, Raiatea, and Tubuai. On each island he and Elder Craven spoke to the local members and encouraged them to live the gospel.

At the main conference sessions, held in French and then Tahitian, Elder Nelson asked his hearers to “increase in number and righteousness.” His words were direct and challenging:

While we congratulate ourselves on the growth of the Church, we need to measure our progress against what the Lord asks of us. This is what the Lord expects: “For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments” (D&C 82:14). The Lord uses the word *must* four times. This is not a suggestion. For the next 150 years, we must strengthen these stakes and enlarge our borders.

According to John L. Hart, Elder Nelson said that despite the rich history of the islands, “the most important pages of history are being written right now. I have a marvelous vision that no longer do the stakes of Polynesia need imported help from other stakes. You have the power to lead yourselves.”¹⁹

On the morning of May 8, Elder Nelson gathered with thirty-four other Church members behind the Tahiti Temple to dedicate French Polynesia for the preaching of the restored gospel. He told the assembled group that following a search of Church history had failed to find a recorded formal dedication of those islands, “the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve made the decision, in conjunction with the sesquicentennial, . . . that an apostolic prayer of dedication should be given.”²⁰ In the prayer Elder Nelson noted the contributions of the missionaries who left Nauvoo in 1843 to commence the spread of the gospel in the islands. He prayed:

Wilt thou bless these islands with a rich portion of thy holy spirit, that its citizens and their visitors may learn thy commandments and be obedient to them, that they may prosper in love. Let there be a resurgence of missionary zeal, that thine elect may be gathered prior to the second coming of thy Son, which is nigh. These islands are rich with the blood of Israel. Bless thine elect to find thee and enter the waters of baptism, remain faithful, and prepare for the ordinances and covenants of thy holy temple.²¹

The islands that were specifically mentioned in the prayer were the Society Islands, the Tuamotu Islands, the Marquesas Islands, the Gambier Islands, the Austral Islands, and others that make up French Polynesia. Speaking later that day, Elder Nelson asked, regarding the dedicatory prayer, “What does that mean? It means the Lord will bless French Polynesia according to that prayer. The people of this territory will be blessed. The elected and government officials will be blessed. The natural resources will be blessed to the end that the work of the Church will increase. The elect of the Lord will find Him and prepare themselves for the temple.”²²

Membership in French Polynesia has more than doubled to 20,383 since the mid-1980s. As historian Kathleen C. Perrin observed, “The future has never appeared brighter.”²³

“Pioneers in the Pacific: 150 Years of Latter-day Saint History in the Pacific Islands” was a gigantic celebration of the growth of the Church in the Pacific. Held at BYU–Hawai‘i from October 7 to 11, 1997, *Pioneers in the Pacific* brought together Pacific pioneers, Church leaders, historians, students, and interested observers from Hawai‘i, the Pacific, and the American mainland. Several thousand participants attended a variety of events, including three full-court performances and pageants; devotionals with Chieko Okazaki, former member of the Relief Society general presidency (see chapter 7 herein), and Elder Glen L. Rudd, emeritus member of the Seventy (see chapter 2 herein); two original plays—“Matthew Cowley in the Pacific,” a one-man production by James Arrington that was commissioned for the conference, and “Nāpela,” by Ned Williams; a special history night at the Polynesian Cultural Center; the unveiling of a new statue of George Q. Cannon and Jonathan Nāpela (who together translated the Book of Mormon into the Hawaiian language) created by Viliami Toluta‘u (see figure 2 in chapter 3); an island *lū‘au*; and finally an address on the Church’s pioneers in the Pacific by President Gordon B. Hinckley (see chapter 1). Those who attended the conference were richly rewarded intellectually and spiritually.



Fig. 1. Fiji Suva Temple
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Developments, Changes, and Areas of Growth Since 1984

The grand historical event in the Pacific since *Unto the Islands* has been the continued expansion of the restored gospel into the lives of thousands of new members who have “come unto Christ” and have taken His name upon them. Everything else is supplementary to the mission and purposes of the Church. Growth has come in different ways. For example, in Fiji and New Zealand, political and internal cultural developments have affected the nature and direction of where the Church is moving.

The 1987 coup in Fiji affected the development of the Church there in the years that followed.²⁴ Domestic tensions and upheavals such as the coup frequently bring adaptation and adjustment. Such was true in the Church. Surprisingly, since the 1987 coup, more ethnic Indians have come into the Church than before. Also, the quota of only six missionary visas was dropped. Before the coup, the Fiji Council of Churches dominated the immigration office and determined which churches would be allowed to bring ministers and missionaries into the country and the number of visas. In 1997, thirty foreign elders and sisters and ten couple missionaries were serving in Fiji. That number has slightly increased since then. President Inosi Naga was largely responsible for encouraging this change. There were also twenty-nine local missionaries

serving in Fiji. Church growth between 1987 and 2002 was from just under 4,000 to 13,228 members, a 258 percent increase.²⁵

The most important Church development in Fiji since the gospel was introduced is the construction and dedication of the temple in Suva (fig. 1). Announced in May 1998 and dedicated on June 18, 2000, the temple has increased the availability of temple blessings for Fijian Saints, which has greatly strengthened the Church in Fiji. A government coup diminished participation in the dedicatory services to a mere sixty to eighty persons, but the temple has been a blessing to not only members in Fiji, but also to those of New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Nauru, and Tuvalu.

Sociopolitical developments among the *tangata whenua*, the Maori, have brought some changes within the Church in New Zealand in recent years. Observers have noted a policy shift within the Church from earlier post–World War II efforts to downplay cultural and linguistic differences between Maori and *pakeha* (Caucasian) Saints to a partial return to the bicultural position of earlier times.²⁶ Maori culture remains strong, yet the immigration of many Samoan and Tongan members of the Church and the creation of ethnic wards and branches, as well as the expansion of the Church among the *pakeha*, has complicated the ethnic situation within the Church in New Zealand. Ironically, before the recent trend toward biculturalism, Maori Saints were gradually being restricted from using their language (*te reo*) in Latter-day Saint Church meetings and from following many Maori traditions, particularly those related to the *tangi*, or funeral practices. At the same time, immigrant Samoan and Tongan Saints were being allowed to hold services together in their own languages.

A change that has necessitated revisitation of the Church policy regarding *Maoritanga* (Maori culture) and the use of *te reo* is section three of the Maori Language Act of 1987, which makes Maori an official language of New Zealand. In partial adjustment to this legal change, current policy allows some use of Maori in Latter-day Saint meetings and functions, particularly at funerals. Another

accommodation to *Maoritanga* was the dedication of a Latter-day Saint *marae* (community center) and *wharenui* (large ceremonial house) at the Church College of New Zealand in 1994.

Many young Samoans and Tongans in New Zealand are making the shift from Polynesian languages to English, while a momentum shift back toward Maori language and customs creates a crosscurrent of reverse cultural trends. The addition of over thirty-six thousand members since 1985 has necessitated building of new chapels and support structures, and involvement of larger numbers of seminary and institute students and teachers.

Stories of the Church's growth in Kiribati and Papua New Guinea illustrate the hand of the Lord in the spread of the gospel in the Pacific. The story of the Lord's hand in the establishment of the Church in Kiribati is truly faith promoting (see chapter 22). Briefly told, the British officials in Tarawa created a frustrating situation for the Church in which they required fifty adult members in the Gilbert Islands before they would allow missionaries. The Lord moved matters to accomplish His purposes by opening the way for I-Kiribati students to attend Liahona High School in Tonga, to come in contact with and join the Church, and then to return to their home island as set-apart missionaries. The Church was primarily established in Kiribati by local members. What started as a less than comfortable relationship between the Church and the government soon became a close and friendly one. The Church Educational System (CES) found it necessary and desirable to take over the Auriaria Kokoi Ataria School (AKAS) in 1977, and they soon renamed it Moroni Community School.

Initially CES planned to maintain the school at around 240 students, but student demand among a growing number of Church members brought its continued growth. In the early 1980s, the school was enlarged to include the upper forms (equivalent to an American high school) and it became Moroni High School. By 1996, 400 students were enrolled, and the campus had been enlarged and beautified with concrete-

block and metal-roofed buildings. In addition to regular secular subjects, all students receive religious education, the same as seminary classes. Incidentally, in addition to the students at Moroni High School, 68 other students received seminary classes and 111 participated in institute classes in 1996. The faculty consisted of 34 teachers, including 4 missionary couples. Over half of Moroni High School graduates (60 percent) find employment before they graduate, and 10 percent go on to higher education.²⁷ Moroni High School has become a bright spot on the island, a "solid little school."²⁸

Church membership has grown to over ten thousand since the first six missionaries introduced the gospel in the mid-1970s. Adequate numbers and growing gospel maturity brought the creation of the Tarawa Kiribati Stake on August 11, 1996, the dedication of seven island groups on August 10, and the dedication of Moroni High School. Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve created a stake of six wards (Bairiki, Bikenibeu, Eita and Teaoaraereke on Tarawa, and two on Betio) and two branches (Bonriki and Moroni High School), consisting of 2,400 members.²⁹ He called Atunibeia Mote, age thirty-four, a graduate of Moroni High School, as the first stake president. By 2002, the number of wards had grown to eleven. There was also a district with sixteen branches.

While in Kiribati, Elder Perry dedicated seven island groups, including Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Wallis, Futuna, and Vanuatu, on August 10. He chose Red Beach on the island of Betio as the site for the prayer. It was there that 4,700 Japanese and 1,056 Americans lost their lives in a fierce World War II battle. He selected that site because of his "great feelings for what some of my Marine buddies went through" in claiming the island.³⁰ Considering the relatively small Kiribati population, the Church is growing impressively.

The Church is also spreading throughout Papua New Guinea. This Melanesian nation consists of the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, a chain of islands that includes the northern Solomon Islands, and the islands of the

Bismarck Archipelago. Eight hundred and thirty-six languages are spoken there (about one-third of the world's languages).³¹ Adult literacy ranges somewhere between 43 and 52 percent. Unemployment and underemployment are very high. The government, newly independent since 1975, faces the difficult task of bringing the various tribal units together into a cohesive nation.

Prior to formal missionary work, some Latter-day Saints from Australia and elsewhere had lived in Port Moresby and a few other communities. But missionary work did not commence on a consistent basis in Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea, until 1980. A year later, in 1981, the Church gained legal recognition. In April 1983, Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve dedicated Papua New Guinea for the preaching of the gospel. By the end of that year, there were seven hundred and fifty Latter-day Saints in Papua New Guinea, and a chapel was underway. The last sentence I wrote in *Unto the Islands* speaks of Papua New Guinea and reads as follows: "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."³² These words have proven true.

In 1989, most Church members (1,500 of 2,100) in Papua New Guinea lived in Port Moresby. But in several outlying villages the gospel had found its way into the lives of the people. Six hundred villagers were also members. The story of John Oii and his family illustrates how the gospel has been spread: "Members of the Port Moresby Branch, [the John Oii family] attended [meetings] regularly and were progressing in the Church. Tragedy struck when their 10-year-old was bitten by a poisonous snake and died. The Oii family followed tradition and returned to their *wontock*, or ancestral village, for the burial. This village, Kuriva, is an hour-and-a-half drive, then a half-hour walk from Port Moresby."³³ The Jenkses, the missionary couple who taught the gospel in Kuriva village, continued the story this way:

John Oii remained in the village, where he told the people about Joseph Smith and the angel Moroni. The villagers wanted to know more. They asked John Oii if the missionary couple who spoke at the funeral could teach them the gospel. We were that couple.

On 16 September 1986, a group of about sixty people sat waiting for us to begin the missionary discussions. With John Oii translating into the village language [Toroipi], they nodded approval of the principles explained in the first discussion. We left several copies of the Book of Mormon and promised to return the following Tuesday.

An even larger group awaited our arrival on the second visit. The villagers had met together every night since the last discussion to study the Book of Mormon as a group. They had even composed a song in the village language about Joseph Smith and the angel Moroni. After discussing Jesus Christ and some of the gospel principles, the Kurivans wanted to pay fast offerings and tithing. We left more copies of the Book of Mormon.

Now the villagers wanted Sunday School for a group that grew each week. The following month, President [Robert G.] and Sister [Carol] West came to Papua New Guinea for a second bi-monthly tour and visited Kuriva village. At a meeting held with the villagers, President West was impressed with the spirit and love of the people and, upon his return to Brisbane, gave permission to prepare the people of Kuriva for baptism into the Church. The Kurivans began constructing their own chapel. . . .

On 27 December, the Kurivans convened in their chapel for baptismal services. At the meeting's conclusion, everyone was transported four kilometers to the [Vemaui] river, and the first twenty-nine members of the Church in Kuriva were baptized and confirmed. Fourteen men were then sustained and ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood. The day concluded with a feast.³⁴

Growth continued. Elder James E. Faust of the Quorum of the Twelve dedicated the little chapel (built of local materials and with a thatched roof) in March 1987, and a few days later, on March 15, 1987, the Kuriva Branch was organized. In 1990, there were seventy-five members of that branch. By 1995, fifteen young Kurivans,

having been trained in seminary classes, had served full-time missions.

In 1990, because of inquiries regarding the Church, missionaries began proselytizing on the small island of Daru, across the Gulf of Papua from Port Moresby. Within three months, 150 people had been baptized and a branch was established. As is frequently true in areas where members new to the gospel are inexperienced in Church organization and procedures, activity slumped for a time, but training and concerted missionary work has reactivated many. By 1995 the Daru Branch had over three hundred members. It was also the catalyst for further expansion. "On the mainland across from Daru, people in ten villages are already asking for the Church and for the missionaries," reported former branch president Charles Garry. "People learn from our members who return to their villages. Then they come over here to church, they listen, and they become very interested. Our teachings are new to them, and they are opening up their hearts. They want the Church to move faster to their villages."³⁵

In February 1992, the Church created the Papua New Guinea Port Moresby Mission, with Joseph J. Grigg as the first president. As the mission has grown (missionary numbers in late 1995 were not large—thirty-four elders and eight couples), the Church has spread to additional communities on the north coast of New Guinea, and to Rabaul on the island of New Britain. Monthly baptism totals averaged between forty and fifty in that year.

The continued spiritual growth and faithfulness of the Papua New Guinea members paved the way for the creation of the first stake, the Papua New Guinea Port Moresby Stake, on October 21, 1995. About a year before, Elder V. Dallas Merrell of the Seventy, First Counselor in the Pacific Area Presidency, had visited Port Moresby. While there he challenged members to become temple worthy and to share the gospel more enthusiastically. He also learned that only a few more elders were needed in each branch to jus-

tify creating a stake. Careful interviews with every prospective elder brought forth enough worthy men to be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood that Elder Merrell "carried with him the completed paperwork for the stake" when he left a week later.³⁶

Elder Merrell called Vaiba Rome, a thirty-eight-year-old former district president, to serve as the first stake president. President Rome and his wife, Mauveri, were among the early converts in 1981. In 1984 they traveled to the New Zealand Temple and became the first Papua New Guinea couple to be sealed in the temple. "In 1991 they led a group of 138 members to the Sydney Australia Temple."³⁷ At the time of its creation, the stake consisted of 2,200 members in six wards and one branch. In 2002, the stake had five wards and two branches, while the mission contained eight districts and forty-three branches.

Life in Papua New Guinea offers many challenges. As mentioned, earnings are modest by any standard. Illiteracy is an endemic problem. Health is a concern. Personal safety continues to be a serious problem. But the Church is addressing the literacy problem through the Relief Society Literacy Program, and many members are helping each other gain the ability to read and write. A few members have attended BYU–Hawai'i, where they gained not only secular education but also rich experiences in Church leadership. Many teachers and leaders struggle to understand their teaching materials and leadership manuals, but they are steadily improving. Employment is a continuing struggle. But the almost twelve thousand members in the stake and mission are moving ahead with faith and hope.

Christmas Island (the largest atoll in the world) is the most recent addition to the list of islands where the gospel has been established. Prior to 1998, this small island, located in the Line Islands chain, about 1,500 miles south of Hawai'i, was part of the Fiji Suva Mission. But because of transportation difficulties and a small population (around 4,000 people), the Church had not been officially established there. Mission



Fig. 2. President Hinckley in 2003 at the fortieth anniversary of the Polynesian Cultural Center
Courtesy of BYU–Hawai‘i

President H. Ross Workman of the Hawai‘i Honolulu Mission sent a series of couple missionaries to work with members who were already living on the island. These people had been introduced to the Church in other parts of the Pacific or elsewhere. The first branch was established on May 23, 1999. President and Sister Mark H. Willis further strengthened the branch during their years in Hawai‘i from 2001 to 2004. President Willis encouraged President Gordon B. Hinckley to visit Christmas Island for a jet-refueling stop on June 19, 2003. President Hinckley’s visit to

this tiny place with so few members is indeed proof that the Lord’s “eye is on the sparrow.”³⁸

Final Observations

Church growth will continue to gain momentum in the Pacific. There is a tremendous amount of goodwill created by the Polynesian Cultural Center and BYU–Hawai‘i that not only contributes to the development of the Church in the Pacific, but throughout Asia and the world. Other influences for good are the many Church

members who hold public offices—elected or appointed—in their states or nations throughout the Pacific. The great acts of love and kindness toward their neighbors that have been typical of the Saints in the aftermath of hurricanes, tropical storms, and droughts, have continued unabated in recent decades. Also a growing number of capable new people are serving in Church leadership throughout the Pacific, such as Hawaiian resident Sam K. Shimabukuro, who served in the Second Quorum of the Seventy from 1991–96. Though substantial events will continue to occur in the Pacific, I close by quoting Elder Russell M. Nelson’s remarks to the Saints in Tahiti: “The most important pages of history are being written right now.”³⁹ How fascinating it will be to see the ways in which the Pacific story will continue to unfold in the future.

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Notes

1. R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986).

2. Sources for the table and statistics in this chapter include *Deseret News Church Almanac*, 1987, 2004; Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, passim; and Seminary, Institute, and Church Schools Reports for the Pacific, 2003, Church Educational System.

3. Subsequent to the growing Latter-day Saint population, meetinghouse construction has continued at a rapid pace throughout the Pacific. New stakes usually indicate the need for a new, larger stake center. They also indicate growth among a number of branches. Usually these units, too, need larger and better facilities.

4. The initial Area Authorities called in 1995 were Lindsay Thomas Dil (Auckland, New Zealand), Pita Foliake Hopoate (Nuku’alofa, Tonga), Phillip Bruce Mitchell (Cherrybrook, Australia), Eugene E. F. Walter Reid (Pago Pago, American Samoa), and Donald L. Hallstrom (Honolulu, Hawai’i). In 1996, Victor D. Cave (Ascot, Queensland, Australia) was called.

5. See Marjorie Newton, “Almost Like Us’: The American Socialization of Australian Converts,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24 (Fall 1991): 9–20.

6. Church Educational System, Reports and Records, 2003.

7. See chart in Carolyn Toronto, “Translated Languages of the Book of Mormon,” *Church News*, January 6, 1996, 7.

8. My principal source of information for this section was Ebbie L. Davis, director of the Translation Department—Scripture, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, telephone interview by the author, September 30, 1997. I updated this information in a telephone conversation with Kai Anderson of the Curriculum Department, September 16, 2004.

9. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Guide to the Scriptures* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1983), 3.

10. “LDS Technical College Celebrates 20th Anniversary,” *Church News*, November 16, 1996, 10.

11. “Anniversary Marks Progress in Country: Members Celebrate Church’s 50 Years in the Cook Islands,” *Church News*, November 23, 1996, 6, 14.

12. Sarah Jane Weaver, “Liahona High School: A Foundation for Life,” *Church News*, September 13, 1997, 8–9, 12.

13. Gerry Avant, “100 Years in Sāmoa: LDS Celebrations Span 3 Islands,” and “A Centennial in Sāmoa Honors Missionaries,” *Church News*, July 2, 1988, 3, 8–9. See also Gerry Avant, “Church in Sāmoa to Celebrate Centennial,” *Church News*, June 11, 1988, 3, 12; and Gerry Avant, “Centennial Looks to Future as well as Past,” *Church News*, July 9, 1988, 3, 12. In addition to the Church periodical articles, Jennie M. Hart, John William Hart, and R. Carl Harris wrote *Samoan Mission History, 1888–1900*, vol. 1 (n.p., 1988), as a contribution to the centennial celebration.

14. Avant, “A Centennial in Sāmoa Honors Missionaries,” 10.

15. The list of articles relating to the Tongan celebrations is extensive. The principle items follow: Allen Kroff, “Tongan Festivities Launched in Hawaii,” *Church News*, July 13, 1991, 3, 7; Gerry Avant, “Gifts of Song, Faith, Love Part of Tongan Heritage,” *Church News*, August 3, 1991, 3, 11; John L. Hart, “Celebrating 100 Years in Tonga,” *Church News*, August 31, 1991, 3, 9; Eric B. Shumway, “Tongan Saints, A Legacy of Faith,” *Tambuli*, August 1991, 36–45 (a similar article appeared

in the *Ensign* under the title, “Tonga: A Heritage of Faith,” August 1995, 32–37); “Faith, Service Paved Way for Growth,” *Church News*, August 31, 1991, 10; “Centennial of LDS Arrival in Tonga Celebrated,” *Ensign*, October 1991, 77–78; and “Tonga Marks LDS Centennial with Nationwide Celebrations,” *Ensign*, November 1991, 106–7.

16. Hart, “Celebrating 100 Years in Tonga,” 9.

17. Eric B. Shumway, *Tongan Saints, Legacy of Faith* (Lā‘ie, HI: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1991). Although the stories of testimony and faith are the center of the book, it also contains a thorough chronology of Church events (1891–1990), an unusually large number of photographs and maps, and a personal introduction by the author.

18. S. George Ellsworth and Kathleen C. Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in French Polynesia, A Sesquicentennial History, 1843–1993* (Sandy, UT: Yves R. Perrin, 1994). In addition to a useful historical survey, *Seasons of Faith* provides maps, inspirational stories, prayers of the Tahiti Temple ground-breaking and dedication, and some Church membership statistics. It is not footnoted.

19. John L. Hart, “Sesquicentennial: ‘Spiritual Feast,’” *Church News*, May 21, 1994, 4.

20. “Islands Dedicated During French Polynesia Celebration,” *Ensign*, August 1994, 76.

21. John L. Hart, “Dedication Culminates Celebration,” *Church News*, May 21, 1994, 3–4.

22. Hart, “Dedication Culminates Celebration,” 4.

23. Kathleen C. Perrin, “150th Year of Church in Tahiti,” *Church News*, May 7, 1994, 13.

24. For an in-depth study to the Fijian coups see “Republic of Fiji,” in *Culturegrams: World Edition 2004, Asia and Oceania* (Provo, UT: David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Brigham Young University, 1997), 4:41–42.

25. Sonny Maiwiriwiri, “Impact of the ‘Coup’ on Church Growth in Fiji,” paper presented at Pioneers in the Pacific Conference, October 9, 1997, Lā‘ie, Hawai‘i, in possession of the author. Also see chapter 20 herein.

26. Ian G. Barber and David Gilgen, “Between Covenant and Treaty: The LDS Future in New Zealand,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Spring 1996): 207–22.

27. Weaver, “Moroni High School,” 13.

28. Bryan Weston, former CES Administrator for the Pacific, interview by the author, tape recording, September 30, 1997, Provo–Salt Lake City, Utah.

29. Dell Van Orden, “Elder Perry Creates First Kiribati Stake, Dedicates Islands,” *Church News*, September 21, 1996, 3, 5.

30. Van Orden, “Elder Perry Creates First Kiribati Stake, Dedicates Islands,” 3.

31. No one seems to be sure regarding the actual number of languages. For example, I have used the number (836) provided by the 1998 edition of *Culturegrams: The Nations Around Us* (Provo, UT: David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Brigham Young University, 1998), 242, as my number of choice. However, other sources vary as much as from 715 to 854.

32. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 527.

33. Carol West, “New Guinea: Light and Truth Pouring into Nation Ten Years Following Church’s Arrival,” *Church News*, September 16, 1989, 8–10.

34. See Varsel and Minnie Warwood Jenks, “Saints in Kuriva, Papua New Guinea,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 76–77.

35. See Michael R. Morris, “‘One Talk’ in Papua New Guinea,” *Ensign*, February 1995, 27. The entire article is a useful introduction to the Church in Papua New Guinea.

36. Sarah Jane Weaver, “Faith Leads to First Papua New Guinea Stake,” *Church News*, November 11, 1995, 6.

37. Morris, “‘One Talk’ in Papua New Guinea,” 29.

38. “Christmas Island” in *Deseret Morning News 2004 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Morning News, 2004), 339. See also Julie Dockstader, “New Branch Created on Pacific Isle,” *Church News*, July 3, 1999; and “Christmas Island Receives Honored Visitor,” *Church News*, June 28, 2003, 11.

39. Hart, “Sesquicentennial: ‘Spiritual Feast,’” 4.

Table 1. LDS Expansion in the Pacific, 1985 to 2002

Nation/territory & date missionary work commenced	Members 1985 / 2002 / percent growth/loss 1985 to 2002	Total population 2002 / % LDS	Stakes / wards / branches 2002
French Polynesia 1844, 1892	9,800 / 20,383 / 108%	262,000 / 6.3%	6 / 48 / 30
Hawai'i 1850	43,800 / 60,143 / 37%	1.23 mil. / 4.9%	14 / 107 / 5
Australia 1841, 1851	60,800 / 105,087 / 73%	19.7 mil. / .5%	32 / 184 / 101
New Zealand 1854	56,300 / 92,631 / 65%	3.95 mil. / 2.34%	25 / 144 / 56
Samoa and American Samoa 1888	43,500 / 74,500 / 71%	248,000 / 30%	20 / 139 / 27
Tonga 1891	27,400 / 49,719 / 81%	108,000 / 30%	16 / 112 / 34
Cook Islands 1899 (failed); 1947	760 / 1,369 / 80%	21,000 / 6.5%	
Guam 1951	764 (1983) / 1,653 / 116%	164,000 / .99%	
Niue 1952	600 / 260 / -57% [emigration]	2000 / 13%	
Fiji 1954	3,700 / 13,228 / 258%	869,000 / 1.5%	4 / 23 / 20
New Caledonia 1961	550 / 1,631 / 197%	211,000 / .8%	
Vanuatu 1973	210 / 2,042 / 872%	199,000 / 1.03%	
Kiribati 1975	620 / 10,019 / 1,516%	99,000 / 10%	1 / 11 /
Northern Mariana Islands 1975	260 / 932 / 258%	80,000 / 1.1%	
Micronesia, Federated States of 1976	1,600 / 3,341 / 109%	108,000 / 3.09%	
Marshall Islands 1977	890 / 3,843 / 332%	56,000 / 6.8%	
Palau (Belau) 1978	140 / 399 / 185%	20,000 / .02%	
Papua New Guinea 1980	1,200 / 11,715 / 876%	5.3 mil. / .22%	1 / 5 / 2
Solomon Islands 1995	0 / 186	509,000 / .04%	
Nauru 1995	/ 116	13,000 / .89%	
Christmas Island 1999	/ 117	2,771 / 3.6%	
Total: 21 countries, territories, and island groups	252,130 LDS in 1985 / 451,743 LDS in 2002 / 79% growth between 1985 and 2002	33,138,771 total population / 1.36% LDS	119 stakes, 773 wards and 275 branches (1,048 units total)

Sources: Deseret News Church Almanac for 1987, 2004; Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea, passim*; and CES 2003 Year End

Districts / branches / missions	Temples: Years	Book of Mormon translated into local language(s)	Seminary / institute / LDS secondary schools religion class enrollment
1 / 3 /	1: 1983	1904 Tahitian	770 / 527 /
1 / 0 /	2: 1919, 2000	1855 Hawaiian	1,920 / 644 /
7 / 12 /	5: 1984, 2000 (2), 2001, 2003		2,895 / 3,113 /
2 / 4 /	1: 1958	1889 Maori	2,917 / 2,993 / 517
1 / 1 /	1: 1983	1903 Samoan	1,930 / 2,613 / 700
1 / 2 / 10	1: 1983	1946 Tongan	1,030 / 1,654 / 1,339
1 / 5 / New Zealand Auckland Mission		1965 Rarotongan	36 / 80 /
1 / 1 / 4		1989 Chamorro selections	46 / 56
1 / 3 / Tonga Nuku'alofa Mission			23 / 10 /
1 / 2 /	1: 2000	1980 Fijian	310 / 505 / 340
/ 1 / 9 Fiji Suva Mission			70 / 69 /
/ 2 / 12 Fiji Suva Mission		1985 Bislama selections	338 / 141 /
/ 1 / 16 Fiji Suva Mission		1988 Gilbertese selections	364 / 437 / 307
/ 0 / 1 Micronesia Guam Mission			
/ 4 / 17 Micronesia Guam Mission		1987 Pohnpeian & Trukese selections	519 / 132 /
/ 2 / 11 Micronesia Guam Mission		1984 Marshallese selections	
/ 0 / 1 Micronesia Guam Mission		1988 Palauan selections	13 / 15 /
1 / 8 / 43		1985 Bislama selections	634 / 355 /
/ 0 / 1 Papua New Guinea Mission			
/ 0 / 1 Fiji Suva Mission			
/ 0 / 1 Hawai'i Honolulu Mission			16 / 0 /
45 districts, 135 branches, and 16 missions	12 temples in the Pacific	15 languages	Total enrollment: 13,860 / 13,344 / 3,203

Seminary, Institute, and Church Schools Reports for the Pacific, CES, Salt Lake City, Utah

