

Chapter 7

Louis and Barbara Durfee's CES Mission to Kiribati

Dennis A. Wright and Megan E. Warner

Louis and Barbara Durfee anxiously studied the small tropical isle below as their plane approached a landing strip that seemed to run the entire length of the island. The couple had accepted a call to serve as Church Educational System (CES)¹ missionaries assigned to Moroni High School located on the island of Tarawa in the nation of Kiribati.² Louis and Barbara knew very little about their new island home or the school, and they were understandably curious about their forthcoming adventure. They had accepted this missionary assignment because of their faith and desire to support the programs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This chapter will focus on the Durfees' experiences during their first CES mission to Kiribati in 1985.³ The discussion

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1. The Church Educational System (CES) administers a school system in the South Pacific sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The CES system includes schools in Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, and other locations. Over six thousand students are enrolled in these schools.
 2. The word *Kiribati* is pronounced "kee-ree-boss."
 3. Sources include Barbara Durfee, narrative history, n.d., typed copy in author's possession; Louis Durfee, missionary journal, 1985, typed copy in author's possession; notes of interviews with Barbara and Louis Durfee, December 12, 2006, and May 11, 2007, handwritten copy in author's possession. Louis Durfee earned a master's degree in education from the University of Idaho and held both teaching and

will intentionally examine the educational component of the mission.

The Island Nation of Kiribati

The Republic of Kiribati lies north of Fiji in the central Pacific Ocean where the equator intersects the international date line. Formerly known as the Gilbert Islands, Kiribati consists of three chains of tropical atolls—thirty-three small island rings of sand and coral that rise only a few yards above sea level. Typically, each atoll is no more than several hundred yards wide and between nine and sixty-two miles in diameter.⁴ Because of the tropical climate, the islands annually experience a rainy season followed by a period of drought. Due to the distances separating the islands, the periods of rain and drought are not always similar for all parts of the country. The only relief from the constant heat and humidity are the frequent ocean breezes that blow across the islands.

Historians know little of the ancient history of Kiribati because archaeological finds are rare on atoll islands. Available data suggests a rather late occupation of the islands two thousand years ago.⁵ It appears that the initial settlements occurred with the northward movement of people from the region of Fiji and New Guinea. This influence created a history, culture, language, and physical characteristics distinct from Kiribati's Polynesian neighbors. In the 1820s, Adam von Krusenstern, a Russian explorer and cartographer, published an atlas that

school administration certificates from the state of Idaho. During his long career, he served first as a classroom teacher and coach and later as a junior high school principal.

4. Leonard Mason, ed., *Kiribati: A Changing Atoll Culture* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, 1985), 2.
5. John L. Craib, "Micronesian Prehistory: An Archeological Overview," *Science: New Series* 219, no. 4587 (February 1983): 924.

first identified the Kiribati island group as the Gilbert Islands.⁶ During the 1840s, Kiribati, like other islands in the South Pacific, became important to the expanding European whaling industry. This promoted the mapping of the South Pacific that led to increased economic and social interaction between the I-Kiribati (the inhabitants of Kiribati) and the Europeans throughout the nineteenth century. During this period the Gilbert Islands became a British colony and remained so until they were granted independence on July 12, 1979.

The inhabitants of Kiribati are of Melanesian and Micronesian descent. Observers have described the natives as copper-skinned, with slight builds and typically straight black hair.⁷ The current population of approximately 105,000 residents speaks both the native Gilbertese language and English, the official language of education and government. Kiribati's limited economy consists of fishing and harvesting taro, coconuts, and bananas. The poor soil of the coral atolls and the lack of natural insect pollination does not allow for widescale cultivation. Geographical isolation, limited natural resources, and a shortage of skilled workers have curbed efforts to vitalize the economy. Currently the economy depends on foreign aid, mainly from Australia, to support government services.⁸

The traditional I-Kiribati religion centered on the worship of ancestral spirits until Europeans brought Christianity to Kiribati in the early nineteenth century. Although Protestant missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS) first

6. The name Gilbert Island was in recognition of its discovery by Thomas Gilbert and John Marshall in 1788 (Barrie Macdonald, *Cinderellas of the Empire: Towards a History of Kiribati and Tuvalu* [Canberra, Australia: Australian National Press, 1982], 15).

7. Mason, *Kiribati*, 62.

8. "Kiribati," *CIA World Fact Book*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kr.html>.

arrived in 1852, it was not until 1856 that Christianity enjoyed a dominant presence. It was during this time that the LMS and the American Board of Commissioners assigned missionaries Hiram Bingham and his wife, Clarissa, to Kiribati.⁹ When Bingham first arrived, he had trouble converting the natives to Christianity because of their long-standing beliefs in their own gods and spirits. To further his work, Bingham employed his considerable linguistic skills to create the first I-Kiribati alphabet using Roman letters. He then compiled an I-Kiribati–English dictionary, wrote several grammar books, and translated the Bible into I-Kiribati. Because of this contribution, Bingham also successfully established his church. The work of later Christian missionaries eventually led to the formation of the Gilbert Protestant Church, currently known as the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC).¹⁰ By the end of the nineteenth century, most of the islanders had accepted Christianity.¹¹

Catholicism came to Kiribati when two I-Kiribati natives converted to Catholicism in Tahiti and brought their new religion home. In 1887 the Catholic Church assigned three missionaries from the Sacred Heart Mission in France to support the new

9. New England Congregationalists first established the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810. Early missionaries from this group traveled to numerous countries and American possessions in the South Pacific. The American Board of Commissioners sent representatives first to Hawaii and then expanded their influence to Micronesia.

10. W. James Jacob, “A Beacon to the Isles of the Sea: How Education Brought Gospel Light to Kiribati,” in Grant Underwood, ed., *Pioneers in the Pacific: Memory, History, and Cultural Identity among the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 277–88.

11. Alaima Tula and others, *Kiribati: Aspects of History* (Tarawa, Kiribati: published jointly by the Institute of Pacific Studies and Extension Services, University of the South Pacific, and the Kiribati Ministry of Education, Training, and Culture, 1979), 63.

I-Kiribati Catholics. A lasting contribution of the Catholic missionaries was the establishment of church-sponsored schools.¹² More recently, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has experienced remarkable growth throughout Kiribati. From a simple beginning in 1977, Mormonism has grown to become the nation's fourth largest religion. Like others before them, the Latter-day Saints introduced their faith through a church-sponsored school in Kiribati.¹³

Before the coming of Christian missionaries, the I-Kiribati governed themselves through tribal structures defined by specific geographic areas. During this time there was no formal education system. In the absence of a written language, a rich oral tradition developed among the people for transmitting history, folklore, religion, and personal-social values from one generation to the next.¹⁴ This changed when the early Christian missionaries established schools patterned after the British school system as a means to expand church influence. These formal Christian schools stood in sharp contrast to the indigenous tradition of experiential learning that had been so commonplace.¹⁵ Over time, the local British colonial government assumed responsibility for education and began to establish public schools. However, the colonial practice of limiting the number of children permitted to receive a formal education left many students without the opportunity to gain a formal education.¹⁶

12. Tula, *Kiribati*, 59–64.

13. As of 2005, one of every ten I-Kiribati was a member of the Church (“Church Continues to Grow in More Than 160 Countries,” *Liabona*, January 2005).

14. R. Murray Thomas, “Education in the South Pacific: The Context for Development,” *Comparative Education* 29, no. 3 (1993): 233–47.

15. Thomas, “Education in the South Pacific,” 233–47.

16. It is interesting to note that British colonial leaders typically believed that education should be limited to the number of jobs available for graduates.

Latter-day Saint Involvement in Kiribati Education

The limitations of the government school system left many of the native children without access to formal education. In an attempt to address this need in the Kiribati capital of Tarawa, Waitea Abuita started a small community primary school named the Auriaria Kokoi Ataria School (AKAS). The school opened its doors in 1969, and during the first years of its operation, it enrolled between forty and seventy students.¹⁷ To help his students continue their education beyond a basic primary level, Abuita asked secondary schools in the region to accept his graduates.¹⁸ Because the Church sponsored Liahona High School in Tonga, Abuita wrote George C. Puckett, the school superintendent, to ask if they would accept AKAS graduates. Puckett ignored the initial letters from Kiribati. It was common for his office to receive many requests from the surrounding area to accept new students.¹⁹ However, due to Abuita's repeated requests, Puckett mentioned the matter to Alton Wade, administrator of Church schools in the South Pacific. From his office in Utah, Wade reviewed the requests from Kiribati and noted that the letters were not from Latter-day Saints. Through further investigation, he discovered that the Church did not have a presence in Kiribati.²⁰

They saw no reason to provide an education if there was no immediate commercial need for it (Jacob, "A Beacon to the Isles of the Sea," 278).

17. Jacob, "A Beacon to the Isles of the Sea," 278.

18. Howlett notes that Abuita wrote numerous letters to secondary schools throughout the world. This practice did prove successful, as he was able to find schools for several of his students (Grant S. Howlett and Patricia L. M. Howlett, "From Beginnings to an Open Door in the Gilbert Islands," unpublished manuscript, n.d., in author's possession, 5).

19. George C. Puckett, "Reflections on a visit to Auriaria Kokoi Ataria School in December of 1972 at Tabuarorea, Gilbert Islands," n.d., typewritten copy in author's possession.

20. Alton L. Wade, "And Ye Shall Be Witnesses unto Me," in *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, 1999–2000* (Provo, UT: Brigham

Sensing a potential opportunity for expansion into Kiribati, CES administrators directed Puckett to visit Abuita's school in 1972. Because Puckett was not sure what he would find in Kiribati, he was surprised at the AKAS, given its humble circumstances. The school met in an open-sided shelter as it had no permanent building. Students did not have textbooks and used broken blackboards and coconut logs for writing. The only financial support the school received was from student tuition. Puckett's initial impression was that the students were not prepared to attend Liahona High School. To verify his assumption, he administered a basic skills test to measure student achievement. To his surprise, the children were receiving a good education. While eighty students had applied for admission to Liahona High School, Puckett knew he could admit only twelve. After three days on the island, Puckett chose the top thirteen students from the AKAS.²¹ They arrived in Tonga in February 1973 to begin their schooling.

During the I-Kiribati students' first year at Liahona High School in Tonga, school leaders and fellow students made a special effort to help them adjust.²² As part of this effort, classmates invited the I-Kiribati students to attend local Church meetings. This initial exposure to Mormonism proved positive, and by May 1973, all twelve students had received permission from their parents to join the Church. Due to the success of the first group of Kiribati students, Liahona High School leaders granted permission for twelve additional Kiribati students to

Young University, 2000), 1–2.

21. Karaititi Kaina, Teuto Rubo, and Marino Iotebatu were the three girls who were chosen while Barate Timea, Tekaiheti Taratake, Teema Benitai, Abakite Tuneti, Titi Akau, Tebong Tebong, Bename Tawai, Itaia Riteri, and Taaiti Natanga were the nine boys who were chosen in the first class (George Puckett, interview by Megan E. Warner, March 2007, notes in author's possession).

22. Puckett, "Reflections."

attend the following school year.²³ Like their predecessors, all the students from this second group also decided to join the Church during their first year in Tonga. This created a problem for these new members as there was no Church presence in their homeland.

Sensing an opportunity, President Kenneth Palmer of the Fiji Suva Mission visited Kiribati in 1975 and dedicated the island nation for the preaching of the gospel. He then transferred several I-Kiribati missionaries serving at that time in Tonga to labor in their native land. The converts of these first missionaries became part of the first branch of the Church on the island of Tarawa.²⁴ During this period Abuita also joined the Church. In spring 1976, CES and mission leaders visited Tarawa and called Abuita as the first branch president in Kiribati. James W. Harris, CES superintendent of Church schools in Tonga, approved Abuita's request that the Church provide financial support for his school.

The Church assigned Grant S. Howlett, a professional educator working at Liahona High School in Tonga, to assist the new Church members and AKAS.²⁵ However, when Howlett arrived in Kiribati he discovered that the situation at both the school and the local branch had deteriorated. Only seven Latter-day Saints attended church the first Sunday he was there.²⁶ Through Howlett's consistent efforts, student enroll-

23. The final number of students accepted that year was thirteen. During the interview process, Puckett reported that he felt a special spirit during his interview with a young student named Teamau. Because of this, he decided to make an exception and accept her as the thirteenth student (Puckett, "Reflections").

24. Howlett, "Beginnings," 7.

25. Howlett had worked with the I-Kiribati students at Liahona High School. He and his family provided activities for the students and helped them overcome their natural shyness (Howlett, "Beginnings," 7-9).

26. Howlett, "Beginnings," 9.

ment at AKAS increased, and the school became the center of Church involvement on the island. In 1977, CES assumed full responsibility for the school and renamed it Moroni Community School; it later became Moroni High School.²⁷ CES then assigned Howlett as the new school headmaster, replacing school founder Abuita. Church leaders assigned Howlett to next seek official government recognition for the Church in Kiribati. When he began this task, local government leaders told Howlett that it would take at least seven years to gain official approval. Undaunted, he asked his new associates in government circles to assist in the process. Bob Campbell, who was then serving in the ministry of education, responded with important assistance that enabled the Church to gain official recognition in June 1977. In December 1977, George and Ana Moleni arrived from Tonga to assist the Howletts. The Molenis were certified teachers and qualified to serve as educational missionaries at the AKAS.

Grant Howlett pressed forward to construct two school buildings and arrange for electrical service. He also acquired a legal lease for the property on which the school stood as well as adjacent land necessary for expansion. Sacrament meeting attendance mushroomed from 7 to a weekly average of 128. Retired CES seminary teacher Richard Pratt and his wife, Adeline, replaced the Howletts in September 1978.²⁸ Conditions at the school remained humble, but student enrollment had increased to

27. Secondary, or high school, education on Tawara was limited to St. Louis, a Catholic school; Taborio School, sponsored by the Kiribati Protestant Church; and King George V, the only government school. The community considers Moroni High School academically strong because many of its graduates qualify to enroll in colleges in the region. It also has a strong vocational component that allows 60 percent of the graduates to find employment after graduation.

28. Roy G. Bauer, "A Short History of the Growth of the Church and Moroni Community School in the Republic of Kiribati," CES report written in

140 students. Because Pratt was a skilled contractor, the Church assigned him to construct several new buildings at the school. By the time the Pratts departed in 1980, AKAS's enrollment had increased to 200 students. In the years that followed, missionaries assigned by CES continued to fulfill administrative and instructional positions at the school. The CES missionaries taught eight religion classes and three home economic courses at the school. CES also hired several local Church members who had graduated from Liahona High School in Tonga to teach English, math, science, social studies, and other subjects. Their only qualification was that they were high school graduates.²⁹

By January 1981 the school's campus included a student dorm and dining facility, but not all of the buildings had running water and electricity.³⁰ The school did not have toilet facilities and relied on outhouses to serve faculty and student needs. Classrooms lacked sufficient benches, forcing many students to sit on the floor. The headmaster was never sure how many students would enroll in the school, and many attended the school without paying tuition. However, things began to improve in 1982 when the school obtained running water, electricity, and a phone. Soon, Church headquarters sent representatives to expedite the building program and assist in the purchase of additional land for the school. CES representatives also visited the school to provide direction for the headmaster and teachers. Later in the year, CES assigned missionary couples with teacher certification to the school. They had an immediate impact on the curriculum and instruction offered. These CES

1986, n.p. This narrative history appears to be an attempt to provide a summary history of Moroni High School from 1977 to 1986.

29. It appears from Bauer's history that the school focused on church and life skills. Rather than focusing on becoming a certified high school, the emphasis was on basic support for local Church members.

30. Brother Reasor, "Moroni School History, 1981–1982," typescript, CES administrative offices, Salt Lake City; copy in author's possession.

missionaries also initiated an improved budgeting system and hired a finance officer to stabilize the school's financial operations. Significant progress was made in obtaining additional property, upgrading and adding new buildings, and improving the quality of CES and lay teachers. During this time the school received certification as a secondary school and became Moroni High School.³¹ After this, students from Kiribati no longer went to Tonga for their secondary school education. In 1984, CES appointed the first non-Anglo headmaster who had Church school experience in Tonga.

The 1985 Mission of Louis and Barbara Durfee

It was during this time of school growth and development that Louis and Barbara Durfee arrived as CES missionaries in January 1985. By this time Moroni High School had four CES missionary couples and ten local, uncertified teachers. The student body consisted of 353 students. Louis had recently retired as a public school principal and, as such, was experienced in matters of curriculum and school administration. Barbara was an award-winning artist and skilled in the homemaking arts. They had also served many years in various Church priesthood and auxiliary positions. The Durfees initially received a call to serve a leadership mission in the Micronesia Guam Mission with the specific assignment to assist Church leaders on the island of Tarawa. In preparation for this assignment, the couple met with former Kiribati missionaries George Puckett and Grant Howlett.

However, while attending the Church's Mission Training Center, the Durfees were reassigned as education missionaries to Moroni High School in Kiribati. CES provided the Durfees with a one-day general orientation that included a lunchtime visit from Bill Geertsen, a former CES missionary in Kiribati. Later they spent several days with their new mission president

31. Bauer, "History."

at his Guam office receiving instruction. These limited experiences, while important, left the Durfees feeling unprepared for their mission. They had expected CES to provide an orientation and in-service specific to Moroni High School rather than the brief seminar provided for all CES missionaries. To make matters worse, when the Durfees arrived in Tarawa, they discovered that Moroni High School officials were unaware of their new assignment. No one was at the airport to greet the couple to Kiribati. However, word quickly spread of their arrival on the small island, and a van arrived to transport them to the school.

The Durfees were unprepared for the island scenes that awaited them. As they traveled from the airport to the school, Louis and Barbara noted the primitive native homes constructed of four poles and palm leaf roofs nestled in the coconut and breadfruit trees. To their relief, however, their oceanside apartment at the school had cinderblock walls, an electric refrigerator, and a gas stove. Their drinking and culinary water came from a reservoir tank mounted on their roof that collected rainwater, but they still had to filter and boil it. The apartment consisted of a living room–kitchen combination, a bedroom, and a small bathroom. However, given what they had seen on their way from the airport, they were most grateful. In time, they grew accustomed to a variety of bugs and the island rats.

After spending their first weekend on the island with the local Latter-day Saints, the Durfees attended their first Moroni High School faculty meeting with the school's headmaster, other CES missionaries, and local amateur teachers.³² The lack of textbooks and other teaching supplies surprised Louis. He

32. The headmaster or principal of the school was a professional educator formerly employed by CES at the Church school in Tonga. The faculty of the school consisted of CES missionaries and local nonprofessionals hired as teachers. The CES missionaries were the only certified teachers.

also learned that there was no official curriculum and that he was expected to draw upon his experiences as a public school teacher to devise his own. Moreover, when the Kiribati students arrived for class, it was apparent that school registration procedures were inadequate. It took the first two school days to sort out who was enrolled in the school and who had yet to pay their tuition. That Wednesday the headmaster felt that school should begin. Louis found himself assigned to teach seven classes of nearly thirty students each. To add to the confusion, students continued to enroll in his classes. The school leaders grouped the students under the British system of forms, which is somewhat different from the American system of high school grade levels.³³ As with the registration process, there was considerable confusion over assigning students to appropriate classes because the administrative records were incomplete. The Durfees spent the remainder of that first week repairing their apartment.³⁴

In subsequent weeks, Louis searched the island for more textbooks. The headmaster announced that he had received a budget of four thousand dollars for such texts but faced the problem of finding books to purchase. During this time, Louis described how class periods did not adhere to a specific time schedule. It puzzled him that bells announcing the end of class were not dependable, resulting in confusion between classes. Louis hoped that these simple things like obtaining textbooks

33. The British system organizes school years into forms. Forms 1–6 are the equivalent of grades 7–12 in the American system. Each form is organized into three sections. At the end of the grading period, grades are posted showing individual rankings within the section and form. If a new student comes to the school midyear and demonstrates more ability than one enrolled, that student is dismissed and the new student enrolled.

34. Louis and Barbara were most concerned about the number of rats in their apartment. Louis spent considerable time in an attempt to plug all the ratholes in the walls and floor of the apartment.

and fixing bells would be addressed. He spent his days teaching and his nights creating student materials. This made Louis even more grateful for the eagerness of the students and their desire to learn. At the next faculty meeting, he again requested textbooks and curricular material. Louis was not sure how the headmaster felt about his comments. He found out the next day when the headmaster informed him that he had sufficient materials and should not expect more. Louis felt disappointed and vowed to do his best to help his students in spite of the lack of materials. Moreover, when the school headmaster learned of Louis's construction skills, he pressed Louis to use his free time to repair roofs, build shelves, and install a fence around the school tennis court. Before Louis finished his mission, he confessed that he had spent almost as much time doing construction work as teaching.

Like Louis, Barbara received a variety of assignments, including teaching religion and English. During this time she also discovered that the community had considerable interest in her skill at cake decorating. The locals attempted to pattern their wedding celebrations after what they saw in Western magazines and movies. In order to have a Western-style wedding cake, they often ordered cakes from Fiji at great expense. Barbara became a local celebrity when members of the community learned that she could prepare a better cake than those available from Fiji. The problem came when the headmaster directed her to stop making her cakes because it required too much cooking gas. After counseling with the mission president, the Durfees decided to provide the extra funds necessary to continue this service to the community. Most agreed that her efforts made friends for the Church in the community.

Without materials or textbooks, Louis continued to spend most of his evening correcting papers and preparing materials for his students. As the term ended, the students faced the dreaded government exams. Both the students and the reputation of the

school depended on their performance in these exams. While disappointed by part, Louis felt satisfaction over the students who passed the government exams. When the new term began, Louis again felt frustrated with the inefficient registration system and pondered a solution to the problem. He suggested a few changes that resulted in an improved operation.

During this time Barbara developed a serious foot infection. They treated her foot as well as they could. Finally Barbara was able to receive medical attention, but the infection remained a worry for some time to come. The term flew by as Louis threw himself into the work. However, in spite of his enthusiasm, the school continued to have problems. Louis described the unrest that existed among the missionaries and lay teachers. Nevertheless, Louis was elated when a science curriculum guide arrived from Samoa. However, disappointment soon followed when he discovered that he had taught form 3 content to his form 2 students during his first term. He felt bad knowing that he had not adequately prepared them for the government exam.

When CES called the headmaster away on school-related business, Louis's administrative role increased. Upon his return the headmaster experienced a period of illness, so Louis continued to draw on his experience as a school principal. It was during this time that Louis obtained the curriculum guides used in the local government high school. This enabled him to continue his work to upgrade the existing school curriculum. Louis also modified the school policy requiring punishment for those students who spoke their native language at school: Louis replaced the punishment with a special program that required attendance at an English class after school. This program proved so popular that students purposely spoke their native language in order to participate in the class.

More curriculum guides soon arrived from the Church school in Tonga. However, increased faculty unrest resulted in

a tense faculty meeting that tempered Louis's enthusiasm. Feeling threatened, the headmaster called the meeting to address letters of complaint written by several CES missionaries to Church headquarters about the headmaster and teaching conditions at the school. The headmaster's handling of the matter disappointed Louis and left issues unresolved in the minds of the CES missionaries. While Louis and Barbara had not participated in writing the letters, they were sympathetic to the concerns expressed by their colleagues.

Excitement grew at Moroni High School when its headmaster directed Louis and Barbara to travel to Fiji to purchase textbooks for the school. That was not the only surprise that week; the mission president also called Louis to serve as the president of the first student branch at Moroni High School. Louis was excited because of what this would mean for the students. The arrival of additional curriculum guides proved providential because Louis now found himself spending almost every spare evening conducting priesthood and auxiliary training sessions. Because the students understood very little about the Church other than the most basic doctrines, it was up to Louis to provide the necessary training that would enable the students to form a branch. Soon the branch had a functioning Young Men and Young Women program, an active Relief Society, and a diligent elders quorum.

The promised trip to Fiji proved to be an adventure. Louis and Barbara described how much they enjoyed having a green salad in a restaurant on Nandi, a luxury they never enjoyed in Tawara. When they spent the next day with a textbook representative, it soon became obvious that the company had a limited selection. Nevertheless Louis was able to find books and materials that would enhance student learning at Moroni High School.

Upon returning to Tawara, Louis learned that his friend Edwin Dharmaraju, the other branch president on the island,

had suffered a stroke and was in a coma. After receiving a priesthood blessing from Louis and others, he quietly passed away. Louis and Barbara felt a great personal loss. Because there was no way to embalm the body, Louis dressed his friend in temple clothes and helped with his burial on the island. The members of the branch followed their ancient tradition of sitting up with the body all night singing and praying. Following the funeral, Sister Edwin quietly returned to her daughter's home in the States.

Louis tired as the pressures of school and branch leadership weighed upon him. The departure of Sister Edwin created an extra teaching load that Louis assumed. The branch continued to require attention as Louis discovered that Church records were missing or incomplete to the point that information regarding essential ordinances was not available.³⁵ As Louis faced the end of his first school year, he expressed excitement over the arrival of the new textbooks from Fiji. For the first time in the history of the school, the students had sufficient textbooks and other resources to assist them in their learning. He did not mind spending several long nights cataloging the books and preparing them for the new school year.

Louis and Barbara did not hesitate to accept a call to serve a second mission at Moroni High School. This time Louis had the specific assignment from CES to prepare a standard curriculum for the school and serve as the deputy headmaster with the specific responsibility to improve school administration and registration procedures. While the headmaster had not changed, CES had given the headmaster assignments requiring

35. Church records were also confusing because the I-Kiribati members do not traditionally have surnames. Instead, the children take the first name of their father as their last name. This makes it difficult to do family history and link other Church records. Today the members of the Church are using surnames to standardize family links in the records of the Church.

travel away from the school on Church business. This gave Louis the opportunity to apply his professional expertise in upgrading the programs at Moroni High School. In addition to his administrative and teaching responsibilities, Louis returned to his position as the president of the student branch. At the branch level, Louis continued to work on record-keeping procedures that would ensure the proper recording of all ordinance work. No wonder Barbara records in her narrative history that at the end of their second mission to Kiribati, “We were tired and it wasn’t so hard to return home this time.”

Conclusion

It is important to recognize that the situations described in this essay represent educational realities at Moroni High School that existed in 1985. Since that time both the Church and CES have supported a plan that now ensures the viability of the school. The school campus is now a model for all of Kiribati as a successful educational facility. The faculty and administration are now qualified and carefully prepared teachers. One significant example of Church leadership in this area is the Brigham Young University–Hawaii teacher preparation program that currently provides professional training to teachers at Moroni High School and other Church schools in the Pacific.³⁶ As a result, the teachers at Moroni High School are now able to earn an educational degree and the related certi-

36. CES, the School of Education at Brigham Young University–Provo, and Brigham Young University–Hawaii sponsor the International Teacher Education Program (ITEP). Drawing upon the services of professionally experienced educators, the program provides training to teachers working in the Church school system. This training enables the native teachers to earn a degree in education from Brigham Young University–Hawaii. It is a fully accredited degree, which ensures that Church schools have qualified teachers.

fictionation that enables them to provide a professional service to their students.

The enormous success of the school in recent years provides evidence that the challenges the Durfees confronted in their pioneering mission have been largely overcome. While the Durfees and other educational missionaries struggled with real inadequacies at the school in its early years, the faith and diligence of these pioneers laid a foundation that enabled the school to grow and develop. The school today stands independent of educational missionaries largely because of the contributions of those early elders and sisters. The students at Moroni High School now receive a high-quality education.

The Church continues to grow and mature in Kiribati.³⁷ Because of the contributions of Church members in community leadership, education, and government, the Church has gained a positive reputation in the islands.³⁸ Elder L. Tom Perry organized the first stake in Kiribati in 1996.³⁹ By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Church membership exceeded twelve thousand members who resided in one stake, ten wards, one district, and fourteen branches. During his tour of the South Pacific in January 2000, President Gordon B. Hinckley became the first prophet to visit Kiribati. “I’ve never been to Kiribati before—not many people have. But what a pleasure it

37. In 1982 the Church built its first meetinghouse on the island. The president of Kiribati attended the dedication of the building and commented on the great contribution the Church had made in the island nation and pledged full government cooperation. In 1988 portions of the Book of Mormon were translated into the I-Kiribati language (*Deseret News 2003 Church Almanac* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2002], 361–62).

38. Sarah Jane Weaver, “Church Continues to Grow in Kiribati,” *Church News*, March 1996.

39. Elder L. Tom Perry organized the first stake of the Church in the nation of Kiribati on August 11, 1996, with approximately 4,600 members (“Celebrating Independence,” *Church News*, July 2004, 15).

is to look into your faces and to feel of your spirit—your great love for the Lord; your great love for the prophet Joseph Smith; your great love for the Church which you have joined in such large numbers,” President Hinckley said.⁴⁰ He commended the Kiribati Latter-day Saints on their faithfulness.

Two decades after their mission to Kiribati, Louis and Barbara Durfee still review their missionary scrapbooks and journals, recalling their memories and gratitude for the wonderful opportunity to serve their fellow Latter-day Saints at Moroni High School. Their personal reminiscences are filled with notes regarding spiritual experiences that led to baptisms among both the student population as well as the community. In addition to teaching school, they taught missionary discussions, introduced people to the Church, and fellowshipped community members. The Durfees experienced miracles, saw lives change for the better, and received answers to many prayers. They now reflect on their mission, pleased to know that many of the students they taught and mentored have served missions, graduated from college, and now lead the Church in Kiribati. In the words of one of the Durfees’ former students who is currently enrolled at Brigham Young University–Hawaii, “They are my great teachers back home.”⁴¹

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40. “Pres. Hinckley Completes Tour in Pacific Rim,” *Church News*, February 2000, 3–4.

41. Mary Taitai, personal correspondence to author, May 4, 2007.