Marshall Islands

Basic Information

The Land

The Marshall Islands consist entirely of atolls and reef islands. There are 19 inhabited and 10 uninhabited atolls, and 4 inhabited and one uninhabited islands. The largest atoll is Kwajalein, made up of about 90 islets around a lagoon 120 km long and 24 km wide. The total land area is only about 180 km². The atolls and islets are distributed into two groups, the eastern 'Ratak' (Sunrise) and the western 'Ratik' (Sunset) chains, dispersed over a huge ocean area of 1,942,500 km² in the Central Pacific.

No island is more than a few metres above sea level. The highest point is on Likiep, 10 metre above sea level. The soil is generally poor. While coconut, pandanus and breadfruit grow easily the production of even basic crops requires persistence.

Today the administrative centre and capital is Majuro Atoll. The total population in 1992 was approximately 50,000, with approximately 21,000 (42%) of the population living in Majuro.

Land tenure

Land tenure is based on customary forms and ownership is limited to Marshallese citizens, but land can be leased to foreigners. Marshallese society is matrilineally based. Each individual belongs to a bawi (clan) of her or his mother, and has certain rights to the land and other property of the bawi.

The people

While the exact origin of the Marshallese is still unknown, the majority of anthropologists and historians believe that they originated in South East Asia.

The society is organised along matrilineal lines, with chiefly titles and rights to property descending through the line of the mother. Although the influence of the US, especially in Majuro and Kwajalein, where more than 60 percent of the population lives, has affected customs, social behaviour and diet, traditional chiefs still command respect and their importance has been acknowledged by the constitution.

Over the last three decades the population has been growing rapidly. The annual average growth rate of 4.2 percent in the period from 1980 to 1990 is one of the highest in the world.

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213 The information about the population is based on a medium projection, base year 1988, assuming that there will be a moderate decline in fertility and a fast decline in mortality. See, Republic of the Marshall Islands, National Population Policy (Majuro: Office of Planning and Statistics 1990), 16.


215 The growth rate varies widely among the atolls from an extremely low negative rate in Ebon Atoll to a high positive rate of 6.3 percent in Majuro Atoll. See, "World Bank: Atlas 1991", quoted in Islands Business Pacific, 19 (June 1993), 41.
The average Marshallese woman has nearly 8 children in her lifetime. Approximately 20 percent of all births come from mothers under 19 years old. Children under 15 years of age constitute more than 50 percent of the population.\textsuperscript{216}

In 1988, 96.9 percent of the population was classified as Marshallese and the remaining 3.1 percent as non-Marshallese.\textsuperscript{217}

Migration to Majuro and Ebeye has resulted in population concentrations of very high densities. This and the limited possibilities for employment have contributed to all sorts of social problems: "Most dwelling houses are jerry built affairs of corrugated iron roofing and scrap lumber. Sanitary facilities are minimal... Social disorder is common. Arguments and heavy drinking, are frequent."

\textbf{Language}

The languages spoken in the Marshall Islands are of the Malayo-Polynesian language family. Dialects vary from island to island. Marshallese is the official language but today English is widely spoken. Some older people are also able to speak Japanese.

\textbf{Health}

Health services are provided by two major hospitals in Majuro and Ebeye and about 70 dispensaries which provide only rudimentary medical care. Public health services concentrate on immunization and family planning. The outer islands are visited by health teams from Majuro.

The most common infections are gastroenteritis, influenza, conjunctivitis and sexually transmitted diseases. Due to unbalanced diet 18 percent of the population over 40 years suffers from diabetes. Protected water supplies and sanitary disposal systems are limited to housing areas for government employees, hospitals and a few government and mission schools. Except for the missile station on Kwajalein the water supply is not regular. Without chlorination, no water supplies can be considered safe for human consumption.

Between 1946 and 1956 the USA detonated 66 atomic and hydrogen bombs over the atolls of Bikini and Enetewak. When the tests started in 1946, people were evacuated. When in 1954 a new test series was started, the population was neither warned nor evacuated. They were used as 'guinea pigs', because US scientists wanted to get data on the impact of radioactivity on human beings. The consequent health problems include genetic damage, leukemia, cancer of the thyroid gland and other malignant tumors.\textsuperscript{219}

\textbf{Education}

The Marshall Islands Ministry of Education operates elementary and secondary education programmes throughout the islands. Education up to the 8th grade is mandatory. On Majuro the Catholic Church, SDA, AOG and the United Church of Christ operate high schools. On Ebeye the SDA and AOG provide secondary education. In fact in 1988 more Marshallese were in private

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{216} Republic of the Marshall Islands (1990), 15.
\textsuperscript{218} South Pacific Commission and International Labour Organisation (1983), 23.
\end{flushright}
(church) high schools (1,019), than in public high schools (891). The church schools operate under charters granted by the Minister of Education.

On the post-secondary level, the College of Micronesia in Majuro provides training for students from the Marshalls, Belau and Federated States of Micronesia.

Marshallese is the language of instruction in lower grades in public schools, but most other institutions emphasize English instruction in the early grades.

Economy

The lack of fertile soil and the concentration of most of the labour force in the 'well-paid' areas of Kwajalein and Majuro are the major factors in the low level of agricultural production. The country produces only one agricultural crop of any economic importance: copra.

Farmers raise poultry and pigs. Other crops include pandanus (used mainly for weaving), breadfruit and taro.

The vast marine resources of the Marshalls are not fully exploited. As the amount of fish caught by overseas fleets (mainly Japanese) increases, the catch by local fishermen decreases. Like many of the other Pacific islands the Marshall Islands, surrounded by waters rich in fish, paradoxically rely on imports of canned fish.

Tourism is on a very low level, with just 1,791 tourists in 1985. Because of the lack of infrastructure for tourism and the near total dependence on food imports, which means that not much income from tourism remains in the country, the outlook for development of this sector is not bright.

Not surprisingly there is a severe trade imbalance. Today the Government of the United States of America is the source of at least three-quarters of the cash income of the country's cash income. This consists of development aid and also payments for the use of Kwajalein lagoon for missile testing and compensation for the damage caused by nuclear testing.

All in all, with a high rate of unemployment, a rapidly growing population, a spoiled environment because of carelessness, a consumer oriented lifestyle without any natural local foundation, a near complete dependency on imports of food and all sorts of goods, the future of the Marshall Islands does not look very promising. The high rate of suicides among younger males is one direct result of this situation, and another is alcohol abuse that results in a growing number of crimes and social problems.

Government

The Marshall Islands are a Republic, associated since 1986 with the US in a Compact of Free Association.

The constitution of 1979, when the Marshalls received self-government, created a blend of the American and British models of government. Of all the new nations in Micronesia, the Marshalls was the first to adopt a parliamentary system.

The government consists of a president elected by an unicameral 33-member parliament, known as Nitiijela. It meets twice a year (January and August) for a total of 50 days. Each of the inhabited atolls and islands has a local government. The council of Iroij (chiefs) serves a consultative function concerning traditional laws and customs.
As in the other Micronesian countries that were once part of the US Trust Territory, defence in the Marshall Islands is the prerogative of the USA and the Compact permits the establishment of military facilities and the exercise of appropriate operating rights.

The religious situation in the Marshall Islands and contemporary developments

Table 15: Religious affiliation in the Marshall Islands in 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Adherents</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Church of Christ</td>
<td>25,950</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed Congregational Church</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies of God</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukot Non Jesus (Pentecostal)</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist Church</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Jesus Christ of LDS</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majuro Independent Baptist Church</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Apostolic Church</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahá'í Faith</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah's Witnesses</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion and others</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50,000</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data analysis

The last census in which information on religious affiliation was included is that of 1973, which lists the population as 90.1 percent Protestant, 8.5 percent Catholic and 0.5 percent others. The information given in table 15 is based on an official medium projection of the total population in 1992. The information on religious affiliation is based on church statistics and field research of

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the author carried out in the Marshall Islands in August 1992. The number of non-resident Marshallese adherents of the different groups is not included here.

Of the 12 established religions in the Marshall Islands, most have arrived since the 1950s. While the United Church of Christ together with the Catholics represented close to 100 percent of the population at the end of World War II, this proportion dropped to 59.9 percent in 1992. Most of the New Religious Groups grew at the cost of the United Church of Christ, while the Catholics remained more or less at the same level of between 8 and 9 percent of the population.

While the United Church of Christ remains the largest of the religious organizations, the Assemblies of God have moved into second place with about 10,000 adherents. A look at the origins and development of each group follows, with the focus being on recent trends.

The National Churches in the Marshall Islands

United Church of Christ

The first missionaries came to the Marshall Islands in 1857. They were sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) in Boston, USA. Like the London Missionary Society (LMS) this agency had grown in "a climate of revival and rigorous Calvinist thought". Its main home base was among the Congregational churches.

The first two couples, Edward and Sarah Doane and George and Nancy Pierson, were appointed to Ebon in the south of the Marshalls after a rearrangement of the staff for the Micronesian Mission, which had its headquarters in Pohnpei. The first missionaries were followed by Hawaiians and later by Marshall Islander converts.

"The Congregationalist pattern of leadership was established within the territory of each iroij (island chief)."

Because from the very beginning the main mission work was carried out by Pacific Islanders, the life of the church was predominantly 'indigenous/pre-colonial'; Garrett notes that

...Christianity acted as a unifying force in the Marshalls ending wars between islands and clans, converting the iroij, and introducing the outward forms of the New England democratic church meeting through the church committees.

After the 1860s the mission work was strongly supported by white traders who married local women. In this context the Heine, Milne, De Brum and Capelle families became well known.

Despite changing rulers, from the Germans to the Japanese, and later on the USA, the Protestants were able to adjust the work to the successive circumstances and to remain extensively independent. When for instance after World War I the Japanese introduced regulations to control the churches,

221 Garrett (1982), 33. Concerning the similarities between the LMS and the ABCFM Garrett points out for example that the founders of the LMS and ABCFM shared the belief that the world must be evangelized promptly.
223 John Garrett, Footsteps in the Sea - Christianity in Oceania to World War II (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific in cooperation with the World Council of Churches, 1992), 280.
224 Garrett (1992), 280.
225 Garrett (1992), 280-81.
...church conferences of teachers and pastors were held in 1926, 1929 and 1932 at the call of the American missionary, and in order to avoid Japanese church control, these conferences voted to handle the affairs of the church in their territory. 226

The church constitution from 1932 is still the basis for the work of the church today. 227

After a merger of Congregationalists and the Evangelical and Reformed Churches in the USA, the United Church of Christ was formed in the USA in 1957. The new name was adopted by the mission church in the Marshalls. Full church independence was completed in 1972, when the ABCFM decided to withdraw all its missionaries and ceased its support of the educational institutions.

In 1992 there were 37 ordained pastors and 42 assistant pastors. The UCC has 26 main churches in the Marshall Islands and 82 sub-churches. 228

In running 8 elementary schools and one high school the UCC is still strongly involved in education. The money to run the schools comes partly from tuition fees, partly from the government and, to a less extent, from supporting agencies overseas. 229

In contrast to the practice of the United Churches in other parts of Micronesia such as Pohnpei or Chuuk, the pastors of the UCC in the Marshall Islands are not allowed to have any other job or income beside their work for the church. The UCC has a variety of programmes especially for young people, such as fun nights, dramas, singing competitions, picnics and field days. For all church members a strong code of behaviour is in force, forbidding smoking, alcohol and 'Western dancing'.

Despite the existence of the Marshall Islands Theological College and a programme provided by the Pacific Theological College in Fiji, Education by Extension for Development and Action (EEDA), a major problem today is the lack of theological education. The Theological College leads a marginal existence with only about 15 students and 8 graduates in 1993. The library is not well equipped and the teaching staff has the minimum of qualifications needed to do their job. Whether the EEDA programme, carried out in a Summer School for Church leaders and laity in 1992 and 1993, will contribute to a betterment of this situation has to be examined in a couple of years.

In 1992 the UCC was still the largest church in the Marshalls, representing 51.9 percent of the population. But since the 1960s and 1970s, when new churches such as the AOG, SDA and LDS established themselves, the UCC has definitely experienced decline in the number of adherents. This decline is denied by the leadership, which confuses an absolute growth in terms of numbers with the growth rate in percentage. 230 The proportion of the population adhering to the UCC has dropped from about 90 percent at the beginning of the 1960s to the current proportion of approximately 52 percent.

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228 Samson, 6.
229 The tuition fee for the UCC High school, which is a boarding school, is for example US300 a year.
230 This common misperception is not restricted to the Pacific. The problem comes when leaders do not see that the growth rate of their church, if it is less than the growth rate of the population, means that they are losing ground, even if their membership is growing.
Concerning people who are leaving the UCC a widespread attitude is to look at them as weak, or as not wanting to suffer (contribute money) for the church. Consequently the loss of these people is considered as a kind of cleansing, or as a separation of the chaff from the wheat. In this view the UCC - although losing adherents - is in fact getting stronger.

Besides the explosion of New Religious Groups, the UCC experienced a major split in 1985, when a number of pastors and congregation members established the Reformed Congregational Church in Majuro (see below).

Contributing factors in the decay of the UCC may be seen in its organizational structure and the style of leadership which has developed over the last three decades.

While there are church conferences every two years and an elected Board of Directors which meets twice a year, in fact the power is seen as being concentrated in the person of the church president who 'controls everything and everyone', as one interviewed church member, who wanted to remain anonymous, stated. The current church president has held this position since his ordination in 1965, when he was elected for the first time. Key positions of the UCC are held by people who are related in one or another way to the president. While the average income of a pastor of the UCC is between 2,400 and 3,600 US dollars a year, the church president has an annual income of 44,000 US dollars. One pastor of the UCC confirmed that it is impossible to make any decision against the will of the church president.

On the other side, the UCC in the Marshall Islands is beyond any doubt the best organized of the Protestant churches in Micronesia.

Being an independent church has its price or financial consequences, which can be seen in a very demanding attitude concerning the financial contributions of its members. Although it is a fact that gift collection and exchange has been part of the life of the Marshallese people since the time of the first missionaries, the contributions are considered by an increasing number of adherents as a burden.

Today the UCC collects money in different ways. Each congregation is responsible for the salary of its pastor and for its own programmes. A Christian Endeavour Membership Fee has to be paid to the General Fund of the church. Each congregation has to pay for example 1 dollar per member, 5 dollars per deacon to this General fund every two years. The money from this fund is used to meet the requirements of membership of the Pacific Conference of Churches and the cost of sending students for studies overseas.

The practice of collecting sometimes hundreds of US dollars to give in cash to visiting ministers or teachers from overseas who preach in one of the churches or conduct a Bible study might be in line with traditions but is questionable in the presence of poverty in the Marshall Islands, the poorly equipped library of the Theological College of the UCC and the fact that visitors do not really need these gifts.

There is a close relation between the church president and the president of the country, which seems to make the UCC a kind of unofficial state church. It is of course difficult to speak out for example, against the missile testing on Kwajalein, if leading individuals of the UCC are profiting from leasing land to the US.

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231 Samson, 8. In addition to the basic salary pastors usually have free housing and receive some food from their congregations.

232 This pastor did not want to be named because of some apprehension in relation to his position and career.

233 There was at least one dubious case when it was announced in public in a church service that the offering was supposed to go to the preacher, but the preacher never saw a cent, and it was not clarified afterwards what had happened to the money.
It is not surprising that
...the Marshallese seemed to be little equipped to reflect on the tremendous impact of natural sciences and technology that they are exposed to in everyday lives, especially by nuclear testing on their islands (Eniwetok and Bikini) and the continuing missile experiments of the US army (Kwajalein). 234

The very hierarchical structure of the UCC with a dominating president at the top might be in line with Marshallse traditions and should perhaps not be criticised by outsiders. But anyone who is looking for reasons why the UCC is losing ground, cannot overlook certain correlations.

While the UCC is closely affiliated to the World Council of Churches and the Pacific Conference of Churches the church president has kept up relations with Billy Graham whom he met while studying in the United States in 1967. He decided to invite Campus Crusade for Christ to come to the Marshalls and later, people from the Spiritual Overseers Service International Corp. 235 The latter is a nondenominational service agency of evangelical tradition with headquarters in Irvine, California, engaged in support of national churches and workers, relief aid, management consulting and theological education including short-term programmes operated by spiritual leaders sent from the USA. 236

Both of those Para-Church Organizations had activities for a couple of years but are not active at present.

Reformed Congregational Church

Motivated by rivalries and disagreements with the leadership of the UCC rather than by doctrinal differences the RCC was established by a group of deacons who left the UCC in 1985.

While the UCC president emphasizes disobedience of an individual who refused a part-time appointment at the Marshall Islands Museum, what the current RCC president highlighted is that the RCC disagrees with the political direction the UCC has been taking in recent years. In his perception the RCC wants a return to the form of the original Congregational Church inaugurated by the first missionaries. 237 The current RCC president, a former student of the Pacific Theological College in Suva, joined the RCC in 1987, after returning from his studies. He was given what he saw as an 'unattractive' assignment to an outer island by the UCC president. When he was approached by the deacons of the breakaway group, which urgently needed an ordained minister, he decided to join them.

The development of the RCC since 1985 has been slow but steady. In 1992 there were about 3,000 adherents, the majority in Majuro with about 1,000 adherents. Outside Majuro there were 9 organized congregations and 6 church buildings, looked after by 9 pastors. 238

The main activities and programmes are directed towards social problems (including suicide), family planning and youth.

On a local level the RCC has a good relationship with the Bukot Non Jesus Church (United Pentecostal Church), the Rita Protestant Church (UCC), and the Roman Catholics. On an

235 Samson, 13.
236 Roberts and Siewert, 224-225.
237 Kaji Titi, president of the Reformed Congregational Church, interview with the author, Majuro, 12 August 1992.
238 Titi,
international level the RCC is affiliated to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. There are also contacts with the World Council of Churches. Because of strong opposition from the UCC, whose president is a member of the Executive Committee of the Pacific Conference of Churches, all efforts of the RCC to cooperate with this regional ecumenical body have, up till now, been fruitless.

The Roman Catholic Church

Two Missionaries of the Sacred Heart landed in Jaluit in 1891 and started Catholic missionary work with a few catechists from the Gilbert Islands. But the first activities were soon stopped by the German Commissioner, who feared strong reactions from the predominantly Protestant population. Seven years later, after a series of negotiations between the colonial power and the Catholic Church a solution was found in assigning the Marshalls to the German Province and sending German missionaries. According to Forman, "the German missionaries did solid work, building excellent schools and fine churches, translating religious literature and producing dictionaries, but the economic handicaps were great...".

During the time of the Japanese occupation (1914-1944), the Germans were expelled and Spanish Jesuits continued with the mission work. Progress was very slow, with a total number of 500 members recorded in 1940.

After World War II American Jesuits continued the mission work and the church grew, with a focus on education. In the five Catholic elementary schools in 1992 there were more than 1,000 students enrolled and, besides this, there are also two high schools run by the Catholics.

Organizationally the Catholic Church in the Marshall Islands is part of the Caroline and Marshall Islands Diocese. In 1992 there were 10 church buildings, 7 parishes, and 4 priests, looking after the estimated 4,000 adherents. The priests are assisted by Catholic workers such as Maryknoll Sisters, Notre Dame Sisters, Gilbertese Sacred Heart Sisters, Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and brothers from the Society of Jesus.

With most of the money coming from overseas and an administration dominated by expatriates, in contrast to the UCC, the Catholic Church in the Marshalls "is far from being a truly Marshallese church."

Assemblies of God

Officially the AOG started in 1964 when a missionary couple received a missionary appointment. But the first time the Pentecostal message reached the islands is recorded as being at the time of World War II, through US servicemen based in the Marshalls. Prayer meetings were held and one of the servicemen, Tom Fox, who had no knowledge of the Marshallese language, is reported to have delivered a message in fluent Marshallese when "he was moved by the Holy Spirit."

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239 Hezel, 249.
240 Hezel, 251.
242 Hezel, 269.
244 Hezel, 287.
245 Assemblies of God, Field Focus Marshall Islands (Springfield, MO: Division of Foreign Missions, 1992), 3.
When the servicemen left, the prayer meetings ended. Later on, in 1961, an AOG couple came to the Marshalls to teach in one of the UCC High Schools. When they started to share their belief wherever possible and to organize meetings, they were fired. While the woman returned to Guam, her husband continued to preach. The UCC asked for the intervention of the government but the missionary was able to organize considerable support so that several influential people, including one island chief, petitioned for his case and he continued until an official appointment was made in 1964. In the same year the Calvary Bible Institute was established with 36 students enrolled. The AOG grew very quickly in the first years when 'healings' and 'miracles' took place. After reaching a certain plateau the church grew more slowly but still steadily up to the present level of an estimated 10,000 adherents.

In 1992 there were 32 churches and four preaching points (rented or private places for meetings and worship). There are 31 ordained ministers and 44 accredited church workers.246

In the AOG Bible School there were an average of 30 students enrolled in recent years. With 10 graduates each year the output is comparable with that of the UCC College.

The AOG in the Marshall Islands have their own local superintendent and executive committee and the church is extensively independent organizationally and financially. Six foreign missionaries assist and advise the local leaders in specific areas.247

In 1988 the AOG experienced a major breakaway when a pastor who was disciplined because of 'some immorality', was approached by the United Pentecostal Church International and given their financial support to establish the Bukot Non Jesus (Looking for Jesus) church in Majuro.248

According to the Principal of the AOG Bible School the success of the AOG is related to a widespread desire of the people for a different style of worship as well as to the dissatisfaction of UCC members with the direction the UCC has taken recently. He admitted that many conversions have taken place on a very emotional basis.249

The AOG are today represented on nearly every atoll. The majority of adherents is clearly concentrated in the fast growing urban centres such as Majuro, where the AOG have eight churches of whom 2 have about 1,000 adherents each.250

Bukot Non Jesus Church

The Bukot Non Jesus Church broke away from the AOG in 1985 after a pastor was suspended from his work because of claims that he committed adultery. Together with this pastor a group of people left the AOG, became affiliated to the United Pentecostal Church International and established the present church. Bukot Non Jesus has two main churches, one in Majuro and another in Kwajalein. Some members also live on other islands and atolls. The estimated number of adherents is about 2,000.

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246 Credentials are given at three levels. First as a license issued to those who have finished the Bible School and want to become pastors. Secondly to Christian workers who do not have any academic theological education but want to become pastors and make a commitment. Thirdly the ordained pastors.

247 Carl Bradley, Principal of the AOG Bible College, transcript of an interview with author, Majuro, 12 August 1992, 6.

248 Bradley, 7.

249 It was claimed that the UCC became 'too political' and failed more and more to meet the 'spiritual needs' of their members. As elsewhere in the South Pacific the AOG in the Marshall Islands preaches a clear separation from politics and focuses on the spiritual development of its adherents.

250 Bradley, 9.
Seventh-day Adventist Church

Mission work began in 1967 with Pastor Syd Nelson, who started a small school at Majuro. In 1992 there were approximately 1,200 adherents (including children). With 8 elementary and 2 high schools today and a total of 2,000 students enrolled, the SDA Church in the Marshall Islands takes first place among all the churches involved in education.

Adherents are scattered over nearly all the atolls but in 1992 there were only 4 congregations organized, with three church buildings.

Organizationaly the SDA Church in the Marshalls belongs to the Guam-Micronesian Mission. This mission is part of the Far Eastern Division of the SDA with headquarters in Singapore and from there related to the Worldwide headquarters close to Washington DC in the USA.

The church is considerably localized, with a local superintendent and six local pastors, most of them trained at the SDA Fulton College in Fiji. The school system is run and administered by specialised workers from the US who are not necessarily pastors. Although the focus of SDA activities in the Marshalls is clearly on education there are some other programmes, such as health education and the building of a seawall with funds obtained from the SDA's own relief organization.

SDA growth since 1967 was not as explosive as that of the AOG, but steady. The statement "We have more schools here than churches" points clearly to the key factor in the success of the SDA in the Marshalls: most of the converts first come into contact with and are attracted to the SDA by their school programme. This school system is different from that of the government or the UCC, in both of which, in an attempt to keep the culture alive, the main teaching language in elementary schools is still Marshallese. In contrast, in all SDA schools at all levels the teaching language is English. This is attractive for those who want to attend a high school because everyone has to pass an entrance examination in English and Mathematics.

At SDA schools the teaching staff consists of first, second or third year College students from the USA or England. "The teachers that we have present a good programme and they have a high standard of conduct and I think that attracts a lot of people initially."

Once enrolled in an SDA school and automatically introduced to the theology of the church the step of becoming a member is sometimes taken quite naturally.

Latter-day Saints

Established in 1977 the LDS is a very new church in terms of its presence in the Marshalls. In the 16 years of its existence the LDS Church has grown considerably in influence and size, with an estimated 1,000 adherents in 1992. Church membership growth was relatively slow during the first three or four years of LDS official presence in the Marshall Islands, with an average of 50 new adherents annually. But the following years brought a considerable growth with an average of 150 new members annually since 1990. Most church membership is concentrated in Majuro.

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251 Bruce Lane, Principal of the SDA High School in Majuro, transcript of an interview with author, Majuro, 12 August 1992, 1.
252 Lane, 4.
253 Lane, 15.
254 Lane, 14.
255 The number of adherents is based on the claims of the LDS to have baptized 1,400 people in 1992 and assumes a retention rate of approximately 70 percent.
In 1992 there were five branches spread out on the islands of Ebeye, Kwajalein, Majuro, and Mili, and 4 chapels have been built, all in Majuro. A fifth chapel was under construction and a sixth was planned. With its 14 young missionaries, who are complemented and guided by an older missionary couple, the church is very active in proselytizing. The LDS Church is probably the fastest growing of all religions in the Marshalls at present.

In 1991 forty-two young Micronesian students were sent to Hawaii and the LDS Brigham Young University. Additionally other younger Marshallese have had opportunity to travel overseas to Mormon-run schools for high school level education.

Another contributing factor in the obvious attractiveness of the LDS Church in the Marshalls is in the practice of offering courses in English, free of charge, especially in Majuro. These lessons, open to both Mormons and non-Mormons, are supplemented by special instruction in English for 7th and 8th graders who want additional help preparing for high school entrance.

Organizationally the Marshall Islands are part of the LDS Guam Mission, with its headquarters in Agana. In terms of finances the Marshall Islands LDS church relies heavily on money from the mother church. For example 97 percent of the cost of meeting houses such as are being built in Rita (Majuro Atoll) is provided from tithing funds of the mother church, with local members providing just three percent.

**Salvation Army**

Starting its work in 1985, the Salvation Army is one of the most recently established churches in the Marshalls. Traditionally its emphasis is on working with the marginalized, the poor people. In a statement published in a church magazine the Army compared the current social situation in the Marshall Islands with the work in the slums of London in the last century, where the Salvation Army started.

In Majuro, where the multi-purpose building (including a worship centre) is located, the Army has several programmes, especially for young people and children. The estimated number of adherents in 1992 was 400.

**Jehovah's Witnesses**

The JW started in the Marshall Islands in the early 1960s with mission work on Majuro. They have two Kingdom Halls, one located in Majuro and another in Ebeye. Members are to be found on other islands and atolls. In 1992 there was a huge building project under construction, mainly financed by Witnesses from overseas. The main construction work was carried out by volunteers from overseas. The building is supposed to serve as a centre for meetings, with offices for translation work and with flats for permanent employees (Bethel Home).

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Summary and outlook

No other society in the area of this research has experienced such a dramatic and all embracing change as that of the Marshall Islands after World War II. This change can be briefly described as a breakdown of traditional social structures, cultural patterns, and traditional sets of values, caused by urbanization, migration, and rapid development of communication systems and technologies. It left many individuals confused, uprooted, insecure and therefore vulnerable to all kinds of New Religious Groups with a message of hope. The explosive growth of New Religious Groups has to be analyzed in this context.264

A study of the churches in the Marshall Islands reveals many deficiencies and inadequacies in the organizational structure and practical operation behaviour, especially the UCC, in facilitating the success of the new groups.

Because a change in the political and economic context in which the dramatic changes in church affiliation over the last decades have taken place is not to be expected in the near future, a further diversification of religion and growth of new groups at the cost of the dominant church, the UCC, is very likely.

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264 A detailed analysis is provided in the following Part.
Majuro Independent Baptist Church

The Independent Baptist Church was established in 1976. In accordance with one of its basic tenets there is no affiliation with any other larger church body, except a loose affiliation to the World Wide New Testament Baptist Missions, Inc. with headquarters in New Bern, North Carolina. In stating that the "World Wide New Testament Baptist Missions missionaries are not to seek or accept support from any Church or Churches or groups who knowingly are a part or in sympathy with neo-evangelicalism, modernism, liberalism, charismatic or any other scripturally unsound doctrine or practice"261, this group displays very clearly its fundamentalist orientation.

A loose cooperation exists between the Majuro Independent Baptist Church in the Marshalls and the Independent Baptist Churches in Pohnpei (Federated States of Micronesia), Guam, and Saipan (Northern Mariana Islands).

In 1992 there was just one church building in Majuro. With an estimated 150 adherents and two missionary pastors the Church is still small in numbers. But the Independent Baptists in the Marshalls have a wider impact because they run one of the two local radio stations, with a programme from 5:00 am to 11:00 pm based on pre-produced tapes from, for instance, Bob Jones University in Greenville, USA. Besides this there are Marshallese sermons and children’s stories. Every full hour the news from the Voice of America is broadcast.

Bahá’í Faith

The first Bahá’ís came to Majuro at the beginning of the 1950s but it was not until 1979 that the work was really structured and established. Since that time the growth has been slow but steady. The Bahá’ís are organized in 16 local Spiritual Assemblies. Obviously mainly the better educated and wealthier people are especially attracted by the teaching of the Bahá’ís. But some copra cutters in the outer islands also became Bahá’ís. According to the chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly, who is the son of one of the wealthiest business men in the Marshalls, most of the members come from a Protestant (UCC) background from which they were previously alienated. The estimated number of adherents in 1992 was 1,500.

National Council of Churches

In 1991 meetings were held with the aim of establishing a National Council of Churches. Participating churches included the United Church of Christ, the Roman Catholics, Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventists and Latter-day Saints. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Independent Baptist Church did not participate. But these meetings had nothing to do with any ecumenical awareness of the participants. In fact they were motivated by the single fact that the government decided to give some money to support all churches who were running schools but a precondition was that a kind of organizational structure linking the churches must be established. In all meetings that have taken place so far the only subject of discussion has been money. It is aimed to draft a constitution for this kind of National Council of Churches in the near future.263

260 Stanley Cline, pastor of the Independent Baptist Church, transcript of an interview with author, Majuro, 13 August 1992, 1-17.
262 Information based on notes from an interview with Francis Reimers, Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís in the Marshall Islands, Majuro, 14 August 1992.
263 Samson, 19.