the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the United Church. Each of these four represents between 10 and 20 per cent of the population. These five major churches together represented 90.3 per cent of the population in 1999, but only one of them, the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA), has experienced real growth (from 9.3 per cent in 1970 to 11.2 per cent in 1999). Consequently, in 1999 the SDA membership for the first time outnumbers that of the United Church — by 3,610. The Roman Catholic Church experienced at least a little growth from 1970 to 1999, but fell back slightly from 19.2 per cent in 1986 to 19 per cent in 1999. The South Sea Evangelical Church has experienced almost no variation at all over the past three decades, while the Church of Melanesia shows minor and almost insignificant signs of decline (see the following table 3 for more details).

### Table 3: Church Growth in the Solomon Islands: Comparison 1986–1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Adherents 1986</th>
<th>Adherents 1999</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>In %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>285,176</td>
<td>409,042</td>
<td>+123,866</td>
<td>43.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Melanesia</td>
<td>96,592</td>
<td>134,288</td>
<td>+37,696</td>
<td>39.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td>54,618</td>
<td>77,728</td>
<td>+23,110</td>
<td>42.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sea Evangelical Church</td>
<td>50,344</td>
<td>69,651</td>
<td>+19,307</td>
<td>38.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist Church</td>
<td>28,514</td>
<td>45,466</td>
<td>+17,732</td>
<td>62.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Church</td>
<td>31,441</td>
<td>42,236</td>
<td>+10,795</td>
<td>34.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Fellowship Church</td>
<td>7,031</td>
<td>9,693</td>
<td>+2,662</td>
<td>37.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah’s Witnesses</td>
<td>5,100</td>
<td>7,485</td>
<td>+2,385</td>
<td>46.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customary Beliefs</td>
<td>6,096</td>
<td>2,633</td>
<td>-3,463</td>
<td>-56.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religions</td>
<td>4,079</td>
<td>17,729</td>
<td>+13,650</td>
<td>323.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion/not stated</td>
<td>1,361</td>
<td>2,203</td>
<td>+842</td>
<td>61.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A comparison of the last two available census results (1986 and 1999), as in the table above, shows an increase in most of the denominations that matches the overall population growth. Of the five big denominations only the Seventh-day Adventists have experienced greater growth than that, with 18.76 per cent over the average population growth. The other four denominations, however, although growing in absolute numbers, have experienced a slight decline in comparison with population growth, with the Church of Melanesia 4.4 per cent below the average population growth, Roman Catholics 1.1 per cent below, South Sea Evangelical Church 5.08 per cent below, and the United Church 9.1 per cent below. Major changes took place in the categories of ‘Customary Religions’ and ‘Other Religions’. With regard to the category ‘Customary Religions’, successive censuses show that the absolute number of people classified in this way is clearly declining, down to about 57 per cent below the average population growth rate. The growth of ‘Other Religions’ reflects the increase of newly emerging religions — partly in the wake of new immigrants from Asia over the past 30 years — but is more particularly the result of evangelization efforts by mainly Pentecostal-charismatic groups such as the Assemblies of God and the Christian Revival Church. Here the growth is 280.2 per cent above the average population growth rate in just 13 years.
As noted 10 years ago (Ernst 1993), changes in religious affiliation in the Solomon Islands up to that time were not nearly as dynamic or dramatic as in most other island nations in the South Pacific region. For the Solomon Islands it cannot even now be said that new religious groups with their zeal for mission and a Pentecostal-charismatic orientation are growing at the expense of the established historic mainline churches. The figures indicate, however, that they may have grown by converting large numbers of the adherents of customary religions. Also remarkable is the growth in the category of those with no religion or who refuse to state it, with 18.4 per cent above the average population growth rate.

More than in other South Pacific islands, with the possible exception of Papua New Guinea, the location and sequence of early missionary arrivals is still reflected in the provincial distribution of denominations. For example, the majority of the inhabitants of Choiseul belong to the United Church, while the majority of inhabitants of Temotu, Central Province and Isabel belong to the Church of Melanesia. Very large percentages of the population belonging to specific denominations (between 30 and 50 per cent) are to be found in Western Province (United Church), Guadalcanal (Roman Catholic Church), Makira-Ulawa and Honiara (Church of Melanesia), and Rennell-Bellona (which divides its population equally between the South Sea Evangelical Church and the Seventh-day Adventists. The Christian Fellowship Church, Jehovah's Witnesses and traditional customary beliefs show strong concentrations in some provinces. Ninety-two per cent of Christian Fellowship Church adherents live in the Western Province. Seventy-eight per cent of all Jehovah's Witnesses can be found on Malaita, and 98 per cent of adherents of customary beliefs are on that island too. The Roman Catholic Church is well spread across Guadalcanal but very marginal in Isabel, Rennell-Bellona and Temotu. In terms of age distribution most religious groups resemble the overall population. Where deviations occur, these are likely to be explained by church doctrines. For example, the percentage of the Roman Catholic Church, which is against any form of birth control, lies 1.6 per cent above the average population growth rate in the age category less than 14 years of age.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of population by large age group and by religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>0–14</th>
<th>15–29</th>
<th>30–44</th>
<th>45–59</th>
<th>60+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Melanesia</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Seas Evangelical Church</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Church</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Fellowship Church</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah's Witnesses</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customary beliefs</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religion</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The religious affiliation of the 41.2 per cent of children under 15 in 1999 and the 71.2 per cent of children and youth (under 30) combined will, since there are no signs of major changes in the age structure in the foreseeable future, determine the religious landscape in
the Solomon Islands in the next few years. If any denomination is really concerned about numbers and church growth, any effort and investment it makes in the religious education of young people less than 30 years of age will pay off.

**THE NATIONAL CHURCHES**

**Church of Melanesia (COM)**

The COM belongs to the worldwide Anglican community. Initial mission work began in 1847 with the first voyage of Bishop George Augustus Selwyn of New Zealand, who founded the first diocese in Melanesia in 1861. The COM was established as an independent province of the Anglican community in 1975 and consists today of eight dioceses (Central Melanesia, Central Solomons, Malaita, Isabel, Hanuato’o, Temotu, Vanuatu, Banks and Torres). It should be noted that these are not congruent with the nine political provinces in the Solomon Islands and, because of the inclusion of Vanuatu and Banks and Torres, extend beyond the boundaries of the country. The dioceses in the Solomon Islands are subdivided into 127 wards.

Bishop Selwyn became known as a role model for mission work in the Pacific when he observed an unwritten agreement with the London Missionary Society and the Presbyterians: he would never go into areas where Christians were already at work, because he did not want to contribute to divisions and competition. He became known also for an approach that was distinctive at the time, consciously aiming for Christian faith in Melanesian clothes and arranging for pioneer mission work to be carried out by Melanesians rather than by resident European missionaries. Young Solomon Islanders were taken to New Zealand for training at Kohimarama, and later to Norfolk Island, and then sent back to evangelize their own people. These methods changed towards the end of the 19th century with the setting up of permanent mission stations staffed by Europeans, but the early relative independence of the new converts left its mark, not least in the ordination of the first indigenous priest, George Sarawia, as early as 1873.

Many of Selwyn’s contemporaries were critical of the practicality of his vision, but it survived and was continued by John Coleridge Patteson, an Englishman who became the first Bishop of Melanesia in 1861. On 20 September 1871 Patteson was murdered with a club used for beating *tapa* cloth, on the small island of Nukapu. Not only because he became a martyr but also because of his humility and his love for the Solomon Islanders, Bishop Patteson is still vividly remembered today. He is also noted for often challenging the general attitude towards mission work at his time, which alienated him to some extent from his background in Victorian England. The extent to which Patteson is still remembered and loved today is expressed in the naming of hundreds of Solomon Islanders and churches after him, as well as in the name of the COM’s key training institution in the country, Bishop Patteson College at Kohimarama on Guadalcanal.

The ministry of the COM is supported by the activities of several closely related religious communities. The best known is the Melanesian Brotherhood, an entirely indigenous order founded by Ini Kopuria in 1925 as an Anglican evangelistic order. The Brotherhood was soon complemented by the Sisters of the Cross, founded in 1929, and later by the Society of Saint Francis (1970) and the Community of the Sisters of Melanesia (1979). Each brother
or sister must take a vow for one year not to marry, not to take any pay, and to practise poverty, chastity and obedience. He or she has the status of a novice for the first three years and becomes a brother or sister after that. The mission work of the Melanesian Brothers and Sisters is simple and has proved to be effective and popular. Brothers and sisters go to all parts of the Solomon Islands, arriving with no food or possessions in sometimes hostile villages, with the simple aim of staying there for a time. Once accepted by the chief and the people they just live the life of the people, talking, sharing, and working together before they move on. Being deeply spiritual, they are not afraid of ancestral spirits and there are many people who have witnessed miracles of healings and signs associated with them. The Melanesian Brotherhood is not restricted to the Solomon Islands or to one ethnic group. By the 1930s they were working in Vanuatu and Fiji, and in the 1950s they worked among tribes in the highlands of Papua New Guinea as well as in northern Queensland, Australia, with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Recently they have gone even as far as the Philippines, where they work on Palawan in co-operation with the Philippine Independent Church. According to Carter the Melanesian Brotherhood numbers today about 450 brothers and 180 novices (nd: 6).

During the recent crisis in the Solomon Islands the Brothers earned themselves a well deserved reputation for fearlessness and great humility by placing themselves in the line of fire, taking religious services with both militia groups, encouraging them not to shoot or act with violence, and even rescuing several kidnapped hostages (Fraenkel 2004: 92). However, there is no happy ending to the story. As Carlin reports:

...early in 2003 the Head Brother, Nathaniel Sado, went to meet with Harold Keke on the Weather Coast. Nothing more was heard of him. On 23 April 2003, six brothers went into Keke territory to find him. The seven were never seen alive again. Keke kidnapped an additional six brothers in June, but they were released. After Keke surrendered to RAMSI forces in August (2003), the remains of the seven brothers were located, exhumed and taken to Honiara for forensic investigations. In October, the bodies were released to the Brotherhood and relatives for the funeral (2004a: 12).

A requiem mass for the murdered brothers was held at the Anglican Cathedral on Friday, 24 October 2003, followed by a procession through the streets of Honiara, which were sprinkled with flowers, and 30 km further on to Tabalia, the Brotherhood's spiritual home, where the burial took place.

The ongoing commitment of the COM to education and health is expressed in the running of two of the major secondary schools of the country, which were left under the charge of the church after the government took over responsibility for the primary schools in 1974–75, shortly before independence. In 1912 the COM established its first hospital. Today the church's medical and related social services include two hospitals, one clinic, one leprosarium and several community centres. With support from donors overseas the church also runs a variety of vocational training schools and rural training centres throughout the country.

Financially the COM is far from being self-sustaining and relies heavily on returns from church investments in New Zealand and investments in stocks in the USA. According to the General Secretary 95 per cent of the COM budget derives from overseas (Kiriau 2003, interview by author). Higher theological education for priests (Bachelor of Divinity, Masters in Theology, and PhD) is entirely funded from the outside. Attempts to generate
income locally through a variety of businesses combined in a holding (including printing, transport and shipbuilding) have not shown the expected results. The church’s leader states:

...I am beginning to question myself whether it is good for the church to run a commercial arm. We have not been making progress since the commencement of this social arm of the church but it is a journey we find difficult to pull out of because it would mean redundancy; it would mean that people who used to run them have to go (Pogo 2003, interview by author).

The leader of the COM, Archbishop Sir Ellison Pogo, has, in recent years, become quite vocal on social, development, justice and peace issues. For his involvement and outstanding contribution to the peace process during the crisis he was knighted by the Queen of England. As the leader of the biggest church, Pogo felt a moral and ethical responsibility to get involved in matters that concerned the members of his church. “Knowing very well we command the numbers in the country alone gives us a moral duty to be part of and prominent in leading a way as to how to contain the peace process” (Pogo 2003, interview by author).

With regard to the successive governments of the time, Pogo did not mince his words:

...The government is not only weak. The weakness comes because the government cannot think morally...the whole question of the money scam, you do not have even to go to kindergarten to know that you cannot stoop so low in signing an agreement with somebody who did not come as a legal immigrant to this country....My own assumption here is I think the Prime Minister (Kemakeza) has gone from bad to worse.... I do not think he is really the person to run the country (Pogo 2003, interview by author).

With regard to the estimated 5–10 per cent of charismatic Anglicans, the COM has taken a quite pragmatic approach:

...I feel that having charismatic as well as traditional forms of worship within the Anglican Church is like providing you with many restaurants among which you can pick and choose. This week you may go to a Chinese restaurant, next week you may want to go to a European restaurant... I think the situation really is that you try to meet everybody's needs... It is not only meeting a few people's needs but it is to meet all the needs of the people as much as possible if it is possible at all (Pogo 2003, interview by author).

All in all the COM does not show signs of weakness or decline and is still very much alive, spiritually and also as a widely accepted moral institution that acts as the conscience of the wider society. If there is a major challenge, it is the ongoing task of keeping the different dioceses together, since they represent a huge variety of different ethnic groups that are sometimes in conflict. Although frustrated by recent developments in the regional ecumenical body, the Pacific Conference of Churches (see the discussion on ecumenical cooperation below), the COM is still committed to the principles of ecumenism, which is expressed in its involvement with the Solomon Islands Christian Association, its continuing commitment to the regional Pacific Theological College and its programmes, and its participation in worldwide ecumenical activities.

**Roman Catholic Church (RCC)**

The first Marist missionaries arrived on Santa Isabel in 1845, but this attempt was very short lived. Poorly prepared, a number of the missionaries were lost to disease and to attacks by hostile people, and this very first mission station of any Christian church in the Solomon Islands was abandoned and closed down in 1847. It was another half century
before a Catholic mission was successfully established, in 1898, and began to achieve results in many parts of the group.

In 1966 six archbishoprics were created throughout the Pacific Islands, one of them in the Solomons. Later two Bishops' Conferences were established — one for Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands and the other for the rest of the South Pacific Islands. At present the Catholic Church in the Solomon Islands has two dioceses, in Auki/Malaita and Gizo/Western Province, and the archdiocese with its base in Honiara on Guadalcanal. Archbishop Adrian Smith, an Irishman and Marist, has the role of a chairman who facilitates and guides meetings. With only three dioceses out of the eighteen that form the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, the bishops in this group naturally play only a minor part in the Conference's affairs.

For the formation of clergy there is the Holy Name of Mary Seminary on Guadalcanal, which serves the three dioceses. It takes students for three years and supervises them for a fourth spiritual year and another theology and pastoral year. The priest candidates are then sent to the Holy Spirit Seminary in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (Smith 2003, interview by author).

Like the other mainline churches, the Catholic Church in the Solomon Islands gave up its primary schools in the years before independence but still maintains two major secondary schools: Bishop Epalle School, where approximately 1,400 students are enrolled up to Form Five, and St. Joseph's School which has about 400 students up to Form Six. Apart from that the church has an increasing focus on rural training centres throughout the country, with support from the European Community as the main donor. There is also a nationwide women's programme that deals with issues such as health awareness, women's rights and family life, and tries to encourage women to support each other. Together with the also nationwide youth programme, other focal points are the development of leadership and awareness of HIV/AIDS. A family life programme is basically oriented toward family planning and marriage enrichment.

While the church does not operate medical clinics, there are a variety of joint ventures with the government in which the Catholic Church looks after the maintenance of buildings and properties and the government pays for medical supplies and the salaries of the nurses and doctors.

In the area of development the church works through CARITAS Solomon Islands, which is part of the wider Catholic network CARITAS International.

Catholic Communications Solomons is an organization of the three dioceses through which the church publishes the quarterly magazine *Voice Katolika* and deals with the national broadcaster, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC). As a member of the national ecumenical organization, the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), the church has the opportunity every five weeks of broadcasting mass live on a Sunday morning, as well as morning and evening devotional programmes during that particular week.

As in other parts of the South Pacific and the rest of the world, the ministry of the Catholic Church in the Solomon Islands is accompanied and complemented by the activities of a wide variety of religious congregations. Among women there are the 80-strong Daughters of Mary Magdalene within the diocese of Auki and the Archdiocese of Honiara, who are completely self-reliant and are mostly involved in the provision of pastoral care. The oldest order is the Marist Missionary Sisters, which had eight members in 2003, carrying a variety
of responsibilities from education to administrative functions. In 2003 there were also two Assumption Sisters from the Philippines, who were involved in programmes for women and children on the island of Makira. There is also a dwindling number of men, four Marist Fathers and four Marist Brothers, with the Fathers involved in pastoral work and the Brothers teaching at St. Joseph’s, running a formation programme for smaller children or working at a training centre. There are also Dominican priests and Vincentians who operate the seminary. The members of these different congregations represent a variety of nationalities, ranging from Pacific Islanders to people from Italy, Slovakia, Chile, Ireland and the USA, which gives the Catholic Church in the Solomon Islands its distinctive multi-national all-embracing flair.

At the community level, of growing importance is the support given to the 12 local priests and 15 expatriate priests by about 100 local catechists. So far the Catholic Church in the Solomon Islands has not faced any problems in attracting and recruiting young men for the priesthood. A total of 47 from the three dioceses are enrolled in the seminary. There are no signs, however, that in the immediate future any local priest will become a bishop. For readers outside the region it should be explained that although the so-called expatriate priests are nationals of other countries, the majority of them have lived in the country for decades, have adopted the local culture as their own and have mastered Solomon Islands Pidgin and also usually a variety of vernaculars.

The Catholic Church in the Solomon Islands is very much committed to ecumenical co-operation, at the local as well as the regional level. “I am convinced that SICA is attempting to respond to the dream that there should be unity amongst Christians” (Smith 2003, interview by author). In the analysis of the Archbishop the strength of SICA is that the leaders of the four mainline denominations (Anglicans, South Sea Evangelical Church, United Church and Catholic Church) sit together on a regular basis and have developed a good relationship with each other, which flows over to others and has contributed to greater tolerance between Christians in the country. While this ecumenical co-operation at local level has been increasing in recent years, the same cannot be said for the regional level. Like the Archbishop of the Church of Melanesia, the leader of the Catholic Church in the Solomon Islands admitted that he was frustrated by recent developments. He referred to the last General Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches in Rarotonga in 2002. The poor planning of this meeting, and the inappropriate agenda that left no space for discussing the situation in the trouble spots of the Pacific Islands (including the Solomon Islands, Bougainville, Fiji and Vanuatu), has caused his earlier strong enthusiasm to fade away (Smith 2003, interview by author).

As the biggest challenge for the future of the church in the Solomon Islands, Archbishop Smith sees the challenge to traditional ways of life from what he calls outside ways of life. The land tenure system, for example, which supported the subsistence way of life in the past, is not able to support the new cash crop, cash oriented system. In his view traditional leaders are nowadays increasingly being pushed aside by new emerging leaders with better formal education. “The structures that made the people secure in the past are no longer secure” (Smith 2003, interview by author). To respond to the challenges of rapid social change the Catholic Church tries to encourage the discussion of issues related to social, economic and cultural change, to raise awareness at grassroots level, and to offer programmes in the area of human development.
United Church (UC)

The Methodist mission began work in what was known at the time as the Western Solomons (New Georgia, Vella Lavella, Kolombangara, and Choiseul), establishing their headquarters on the small islet of Nusa Zonga, just off Munda Point in the Roviana Lagoon of New Georgia on 23 May 1902. Earlier the (Anglican) Melanesian Mission had given its reluctant approval of this move, after the General Secretary of the Methodist Australasian Board of Missions, Dr. George Brown, visited New Georgia in 1899 and observed the need for mission work and the shortage of staff that was preventing the Anglicans from undertaking it (Forman 1982: 51). The Rev J.F. Goldie, a powerful evangelist, and the Rev S. Rooney were chosen as leaders of the pioneer group. Characteristically, and significantly, they were accompanied by three Fijian pastors and their wives, two Samoans and their wives, and a New Hebridean (ni-Vanuatu) and a Solomon Islander who had both been converted in Fiji. Later in the year the party moved on to the mainland and settled down at Kokeqolo, which is still the headquarters today. The new Methodist mission attracted much interest. It developed into an industrial type of mission centered on the head station at Kokeqolo and attracting many people from near and far for religious and general education, business activity, and medical attention.

These mission activities were disrupted when World War II reached the Solomons in 1942 and forced the foreign missionaries to return to their homelands, although they were later resumed. For 49 years the history of the mission and the church that emerged from it was dominated by the powerful personality and leadership of Goldie, until he retired in 1951. The Methodists continued their work in the 1950s, but in 1960 were hit by a major schism led by Silas Eto, a former student of Goldie. As the result of a conflict between his father, a traditional chief, and the missionaries, concerning the replacement of the traditional leadership set-up by a newly introduced system, Eto formed a new movement that became known as ‘The Christian Fellowship Church’. He considered himself the legitimate successor of Goldie and tried to retain some of the earlier patterns of mission work, in particular large rallies. He has been described as a man of spiritual conviction, with a capacity for mysticism. Approximately one third of the membership of the Methodist Church at that time went with Eto (see more detailed information below).

In the late 1960s, when the Methodist Church had not fully recovered from this tremendous drop in membership, the leaders of the church in the Solomon Islands started negotiations for union with the Methodist, Papua Ekalesia (formerly LMS) and United Churches in Papua New Guinea. With the signing of an agreement in Port Moresby on 19 January 1968, the United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands came into being. The new church grew rapidly at first and became successfully involved in many new activities at the local, national, regional and international levels. Some traditionalist Methodists in the Solomon Islands watched the progress of the United Church with growing concern, however. They were displeased by what they saw as an acceptance of ‘sceptical and liberal theologies,’ which they considered unscriptural and in conflict with the teachings of John Wesley. Eventually a dissident group drafted a new constitution and on 6 November 1996 registered the ‘Wesleyan Methodist Church in the Solomon Islands’, which was another major breakaway (see more detailed description below). This schism occurred in the same year as the UC in the Solomon Islands and that in Papua New Guinea decided for other reasons to separate from each other after 28 years of sailing together.
Even today the UC in the Solomon Islands is still feeling the effects of too many breakaways and the organizational restructuring of 1996. The separation from PNG in that year certainly accelerated already existing problems, since the church had to set up and equip a new administrative centre, as well as its own Bible School at Seghe for basic training. This coincided with a series of economic losses in the church’s business ventures, preventing the expected financial contributions to the church budget. The good idea of setting up an alternative to commercial logging, by marketing sustainably produced ‘eco-timber’ with the support of the Dutch Interchurch Organization for Development (ICCO), which subsidized these activities with SIS$ 3 million (US$ 400,000), ended in financial disaster for the United Church and brought the shut down of timber operations in October 2001. Solomon Western Islands Fair Trading (SWIFT) never became viable. A loan of SIS$ 1.5 million, taken out in 1996, could not be repaid, and the political crisis affecting the nation made things worse. The former General Manager, John Sasabule, is quoted by Carlin as follows:

The concept was good, it educated the villagers but it was not practicable. As soon as one block had been milled the next block may throw up new problems; and SWIFT failed also because of the unique constraints that being owned by the church imposed on business (Carlin 2004b:13).

The concept was renewed, however, and a new organization was set up by ex-SWIFT staff under the name of National Resources Development Foundation (NRDF). Assets from SWIFT were taken over, the previous funding partner was approached again, and a trial order from the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) was shipped in November 2003. Instead of the SIS$ 160 paid by foreign logging companies, NRDF received SIS$ 2,000 per cubic metre.

Being pioneers of social services in the Solomon Islands, especially in the educational and medical areas, the UC still maintains two hospitals and a few schools. In these institutions, however, mismanagement and a lack of planning are evident. The Bible School at Seghe is supposed to offer basic training for lay people, and in 2003 had between 100 and 120 students, including a few women. After two years of study the more promising students are encouraged to study for another three years, with the prospect of ordination after a total of five years. But the school reflects some of the structural central problems of the United Church with regard to management, planning and administration. Despite goodwill and external support from a variety of partners overseas the library consists of a few shelves containing very basic study materials, maybe 2500–3000 books in all. The books are not very well organized because there is no trained librarian. The hot and humid conditions and the lack of proper chairs and tables do not encourage studying and are certainly not good for the books. The small shop at the landing site is even less than basically equipped, has no regular opening times, and certainly does not operate at a profit. Seghe also claims to offer vocational training in carpentry and mechanics, but there are no proper facilities, let alone qualified teachers or necessary basic equipment. After their successful completion of five years of studies in early 2002, eight graduates were ordained, but now the church faces the problem of producing more ministers than the system needs and can sustain.

The crisis in Bougainville in the early 1990s spilled over into the main area of UC work, with thousands of refugees fleeing the fighting. Later on, too, there were members of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) operating from the Solomons, bringing weapons into the country and contributing to the militarization of a previously peaceful area. Later again, the conflict between the fighting factions of Malaita and Guadalcanal also spilled
over to the Western Province, where two special constables were killed near Noro by ex-members of the BRA. Before the killings the two constables had supposedly publicly challenged some former members of the BRA. Following the killings tensions developed quickly between people from the Western Province and Malaitans, because one of the constables was Malaitan. People from the Western Province living in Honiara were harassed in many ways, ranging from vehicle theft to assaults, compensation demands and the raping of women. Bishop Philemon Riti, the Moderator of the UC in the Solomon Islands, was at the centre of eventually successful efforts to bring calm and reconciliation.

While on the one hand the UC is part of the worldwide ecumenical movement through its participation in activities at national, regional and international level (at the General Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches in September 2002 UC Bishop Philemon Riti was elected as the new Moderator), this participation is not very effective because of the inability of the church to meet the basic membership requirements. Moreover, there is no trickle-down effect, since information on activities and programmes never reaches the ordinary church members but remains at the level of the few who are privileged to attend the meetings. It should be noted, however, that these less positive features of ecumenism in the Pacific are shared by the UC with many other churches in the region.

The ordination of women in the UC is possible in principle, but the ordination in 1987 of Mareta Tahu, a woman who is highly qualified in counseling, still remains the exception. “Men sort of look down and talk hard” she has said. “I remember in one meeting I was talking and one of the men stood up and said you do not talk because you are only a woman” (Tahu 2003, interview by author).

The strength of the United Church is certainly its democratic organizational structure, based on the local congregations, and the still deep commitment and spirituality of the members that remain. There is clear evidence that the church has not recovered from schism and breakaway and still struggles to achieve full independence after the separation from Papua New Guinea. A review of the organizational set-up and the effectiveness of the church’s operations at all levels might be helpful, but the church also needs the practical support, patience and prayers of its partners overseas if it is to have a chance of being resurrected from a seemingly desperate situation.

**South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC)**

The history of SSEC began in Queensland, Australia, where an estimated 19,000 men, mostly from Malaita, were recruited to work on sugar plantations. Many cases of abuse by the labour recruiters, known as ‘blackbirders,’ have been documented. The working conditions in Queensland were very poor and the uneducated labourers were often treated badly. The ‘South Sea Mission’ that took an interest in them

...was the first example in the Pacific Islands of the non-denominational, evangelical type of mission that had been spreading in Asia and Africa and Latin America since the 1860s. This type of mission was usually founded by some outstanding individual; it drew support from people in many denominations, was very conservative in theological outlook, and inclined to emphasize evangelism rather than social services. All these characteristics fitted the South Sea Mission (Forman 1982:52).

The ‘outstanding individual’ Forman refers to in this case was Florence S.H. Young, who started her mission in Queensland among the labourers under the name ‘Queensland
Kanaka Mission. Later called the South Sea Evangelical Mission, it consisted of missionaries from various denominational backgrounds, mainly Baptists but also Anglicans and members of the Churches of Christ. Accompanied by some like-minded supporters, Young followed the labourers when they were repatriated to the Solomon Islands, establishing the mission's first station in 1904 on Malaita, the home island of the majority of the returning labourers. Out of this work emerged the SSEC, which was established as a national church in 1964. Although the first president elected was a foreign missionary, the SSEC from its very beginnings until today has had a strong local foundation and has established self-governing and self-supporting congregations. Full independence from the Mission was gained in 1975.

Following a spiritual revival in the 1970s the SSEC established several Bible Schools, a Bible College and a clinic (Silas 1992, interview by author). Over the past 15 years the church has experienced some drifting of members to other evangelical-Pentecostal-charismatic groups, but with 31 per cent of the population of Malaita it still remains the biggest denomination on the island. With a strong concentration of adherents on Malaita, the SSEC nevertheless has adherents throughout the country, with other pockets of high membership to be found on Makira, Guadalcanal and Rennell. While still holding a strictly conservative evangelical theology, and insisting on a code of behaviour that forbids its members to drink, smoke, or chew betel nuts, the SSEC has opened up itself to ecumenical co-operation with more liberal churches and has become one of the cornerstones of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA). On the other hand, the SSEC was instrumental in initiating the Evangelical Fellowship of the South Pacific in 1989, and the church is affiliated to the World Evangelical Fellowship but not to the World Council of Churches. It maintains close relationships with other evangelical denominations and para-church organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ, World Vision, the Pacific Asia Evangelistic Mission, and its own former mission board with its headquarters in Brisbane, Australia.

As mentioned earlier, the recent ethnic conflict had a distinct denominational element, with the majority of Malaita Eagle Force members believed to have come from an SSEC background. It could be that the strong SSEC code of behaviour — if one drinks, smokes, chews betel nut, or supports the payment of bride price or compensation, one cannot be baptized or will be excommunicated if already baptized — may have driven young men to join the militia, where such restrictions did not exist. However, on its own initiative and within the framework of SICA the SSEC has been heavily involved in the negotiations for peace and has contributed to the restoration of law and order. The commitment of the church is well summarized in the following statement by SSEC president Eric Takila:

The church must be part of the rehabilitation of individuals and communities affected by the ethnic tension and must provide spiritual counseling for all parties affected by the ethnic tension, including members of the militia groups. In the same process the church must continue to organize activities that promote peace and healing (2000: 6).

Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA)

According to the church's own sources, SDA history in the Solomon Islands can be traced back to 29 May 1914, when the first missionaries from Australia landed from the ship Minidi at Gizo in the Western Province (Dixon 1983: 200–232). The missionaries — after having sought approval from the Resident Commissioner, Charles W. Woodford — started by building Sabbath Schools in Gizo and then extended their activities to villages
such as Marovo, Noro and some in the Roviana lagoon. Very soon the SDA became predominant in the Marovo lagoon of New Georgia, where they promoted the creation of church villages. The aim was to separate people from their old lives of pagan beliefs and practices, replacing them with a new order of cleanliness, dietary regulations, health services, small scale businesses and English education. This approach was successful inasmuch as the Solomon Islands SDA can claim, with 11.2 per cent, the highest SDA proportion of the population in any country in the world. Growing steadily, the SDA have also overtaken the United Church in total numbers over the past 10 years, and are today the fourth biggest denomination in the country.

Within the Solomon Islands the SDA Church is divided into three missions: the Malaita Mission with 43 churches, the Eastern Mission with 47 churches, and the Western Solomons Mission with 87 churches. This is to be changed however: according to the General Secretary of the SDA’s Trans Pacific Union Mission (TPUM) in Suva, Pastor Lawrence Tanabose — himself a Solomon Islander — the three Missions will be amalgamated into one in September 2005 (Tanabose 2005, interview by author).

We are thinking of unifying these three Missions simply for logistic reasons. For example, the government of the Solomon Islands would not like to deal with separate offices... The other reason is that even in administration having three separate Missions in one nation is not really practical because of properties, the legal registration of the name; we are basically duplicating positions even, for instance we have three mission presidents in one nation (Tanabose 2005, interview by author).

In 2005 the leadership of the SDA in the Solomon Islands is basically localized, with only a few positions such as the secretary for the Eastern Mission and business manager of Betikama Adventist High School still held by expatriates (Lilo 2003, interview by author). From its early beginnings until today the SDA in the Solomon Islands has focused on education and health as pillars of their mission approach. While other churches over the past three decades gradually transferred their responsibilities in education to the government, the SDA still maintain their own independent school system, with over 50 primary schools and two high schools (Kukudu High School in the Western Province and Betikama Adventist High School in Honiara), which are known for their excellent standard. The church also runs Atoifi Adventist Hospital on Malaita and 16 clinics on various islands. Other areas of work are programmes carried out by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) for street kids and HIV/AIDS. Attempts have also been made to address the problem of unemployed youth by means of vocational schools. ADRA is acknowledged worldwide as a reliable and trustworthy development agency and therefore attracts funding from a variety of governments and organizations that are not related to the SDA Church.

Financially the SDA Church in the Solomon Islands relies on tithes, offerings and donations. As part of the world SDA’s centralized organizational structure, however, the Solomon Islands SDA Church benefits from a system under which part of the locally raised income goes to the Division and then to the General Conference, from which in return contributions are received to guarantee the smooth running of the church locally. This is a system in which churches in developing countries benefit from the support given to poorer members by the richer ones.

Over the past two decades the SDA Church has developed a cordial relationship with the other major churches in the country, at least at the national level, since it participates in
programmes and activities of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA). Without doubt the SDA have been just as affected by the ethnic tensions as other churches, since members of the church were to be found on both sides of the fighting. The two representatives of the IFM and MEF who met on an Australian ship in the aftermath of the Townsville Peace Agreement were both members of the SDA Church. As the General Secretary of the Trans Pacific Union Mission, who was an eyewitness, recalls: “I was with the IFM group when the crafts landed side by side. The two men jumped out, hugged and cried. It showed that the hatred, the fighting and all these things is [sic] something that influences them but deep down they are one” (Tanabose 2005, interview by author).

The SDA Church fully supports the participation of women in the ministry. There are already women pastors, women graduates from colleges, and deaconesses. As in other churches in the Pacific Islands that have women pastors, for cultural reasons it is normally men who are nominated for the top positions.

For higher academic education the SDA Church offers a variety of possibilities for its members. Students can obtain degrees as pastors, teachers, accountants or nurses at the Pacific Adventist University in Papua New Guinea, or at Fulton College in Fiji. In some cases promising students are also sent on scholarships to Australia or the USA.

As in other Pacific Islands, the SDA Church in the Solomon Islands has experienced some breakaways involving disgruntled members who felt that the church had compromised its doctrines whereas they themselves wanted to maintain what they saw as historic Adventist positions. One such group that has been registered in the Solomons is known as SDA Laymen Ministries in the Western Islands, but it does not have more than 300 members (Lilo 2003, interview by author).

**Christian Fellowship Church (CFC)**

The CFC in the Solomon Islands began in 1960 as a breakaway group from the former Methodist Church, under the leadership of an ex-catechist by the name of Silas Eto (Forman 1982: 159–160). Eto was the son of a traditional chief called Goldie, and it is believed that a conflict between Eto’s father and the missionaries, who had just replaced the traditional leadership structure with a new system, contributed to the decision of Silas Eto to start a new church (Situ 1986: 20). While showing some similarities with the various ‘adjustment movements’ or ‘cargo cults’ that emerged in the South Pacific Islands, mainly in Melanesia, in the disturbed years after World War II, there are some features of the CFC that are quite different from those of these other movements. First of all the CFC had few or none of the millennial expectations common in these movements, and, secondly, it was not expecting the arrival of cargo. Consequently, the CFC did not suffer the disappointment and decline that followed when these expectations were not met in the other movements.

The CFC not only reorganized village life completely but also developed new agricultural and commercial enterprises, built a Bible Training Centre in a model village renamed ‘Paradise’ (originally Menakaposa), and continued to run their own primary schools after all other churches (except the SDA) had transferred responsibility for primary education to the government. The founder of the CFC is recognized by his followers as a prophet and is called ‘Holy Mama.’ Esau Tuza, who has studied the CFC for many years, describes Eto as “a man of spiritual conviction (with) a definite capacity for mysticism” (Tuza 1977: 166). The founder is also known as a great admirer of John Wesley. He built his own special
prayer room just like Wesley did. Equipped with a very good educational background received in the Methodist schools and in catechist training, he was able to translate Wesley’s ‘Twelve Rules of A Helper’ into the Roviana language (Siru 1986:20). One contributing factor to the breakaway might have been that after the retirement of the charismatic missionary John F. Goldie the Methodist Church was increasingly seen by some as a church that had tried to eliminate the traditional culture. Eto, who claimed to be the legitimate successor of Goldie, rejected the changes in the organizational structure, liturgy and teachings that were introduced after Goldie’s retirement.

There are some interesting similarities between Silas Eto and the founder of the biggest independent African church, Simon Kimbangu, not only in their similar background at a certain point of history but in that both were guided by dreams and visions. For example, Eto claimed that he had been to heaven and met God, Jesus, Goldie and an angel. He also claimed that he had two sources of inspiration, God the Holy Spirit who directed him through an angel, and the ghost of Goldie, who was seen by Eto as the spiritual descendant of John Wesley (Tippett 1967: 226–227). While firmly rooted in traditional Methodism, Eto also reintroduced old Melanesian magical practices that had been used in pre-Christian times, when it was believed they had the power to heal or to kill. Siru reports that Eto had a secret room in his house where he placed family skulls, the *dracaena* plant (which was traditionally used for all forms of protection and counter-magic, medicine and exorcism), and male and female figures (Siru 1986: 21). In 2003, however, it was claimed that sorcery and all sorts of magic have been thrown out by the CFC and are not used any more (Kuku 2003, interview by author). Literature on the Christian Fellowship Church and its founder is still limited, and in particular the development of the church after the death of the Holy Mama has not yet been researched in detail. Tippett’s description is a good summary of the known features of the movement: “Etoism is a typical nativistic cult with a prophet-saviour and a message of revelation, incorporating both biblical and old traditional concepts, the latter gradually assuming dominance” (Tippett 1967: 237).

When Silas Eto broke away from the Methodist Church in 1960 approximately 3,500 people followed him. It took the new church five years to work out a constitution and to gain official recognition. In its organizational structure the CFC does not differ much from the set-up of other churches. There is a General Conference, which is held twice a year with representatives from the different villages. There are people appointed for administrative tasks, including secretaries for finance and education. A major difference from the historic mainline churches is that there is an undisputed overall lifetime Spiritual Leader, who has final decision-making power and gives care, guidance and wisdom to the church followers. When Silas Eto, who was born in 1905, passed away in 1983, his son, Reverend Ekone Rove, based at Duvaaha village in the Western Province, became the new leader. According to one of the grandchildren of Silas Eto, the spiritual leader must be a male descendant of the founder (Kuku 2003, interview by author). Another difference is that pastors of the church do not receive any formal training. The process of appointing a pastor starts when a village identifies a man with the qualities and attributes of a leader. This person then works closely with the serving pastor and when he is ready and the serving pastor retires, the new pastor takes over. Important attributes of a leader in this context are that a suitable candidate must command a high level of respect and support from the community. It should also be someone who considers a variety of opinions before taking decisions. Church workers and ministers are not paid.
The CFC’s main source of income is community fundraising. The different congregations are asked to prepare items for sale, and when money is needed for a project a time and place are chosen for the sale of these items. Each congregation has its own fundraising activities and a high level of independence. There is no overall church administration that might interfere or needs to be paid or maintained. Typically, two or three days of each week are committed to community work, which usually involves classroom repairs, garden work or reforestation.

Sunday is the day of worship. Here the CFC follows a traditional Methodist liturgy with choruses, hymns, prayers, sermon and announcements. Another major difference from most other Christian denominations is that there is no Holy Communion (Kuku 2003, interview by author). The main language used in church is Roviana. There is a hymnbook containing self-composed hymns in the Roviana language, which is used alongside the Methodist Hymn Book. By the late 1970s the CFC had seemingly become more practical, with the Holy Mama pointing out “what to do each day rather than what to believe” (Trompf 1983: 53). This leads us to another major difference from most other Christian denominations: the CFC leader lives like any other ordinary person in the village, except that he sets an example. “He does not just let the people do it. He starts it himself. He does not talk without work” (Kuku 2003, interview by author). Rather than having youth groups, women’s groups or any other groups, all activities of the CFC involve the whole community.

With all these features and with a growth rate almost identical to the overall population growth rate, the CFC is well established and does not show any sign of decline. In 1999 9,636 adherents were recorded, with a very high concentration of followers (86.3 per cent) living in one or the other of 26 villages in the Western Province, where the CFC is numerically the fourth biggest church. At the national level the CFC is in sixth position. In the provinces of Isabel, Rennell and Bellona, Temotu, and Makira-Ulawa the CFC has fewer than 10 adherents. Outside the Western Province there is a high concentration of members only in Honiara, where there are 500 adherents. This is evidence that the CFC can also blossom and survive in an urban environment.

The CFC is not mission oriented at all and does not try to convert others because it believes that true conversion will be achieved by the Holy Spirit only. Co-operation with other churches is limited, not as a policy but simply because the majority of adherents live in entirely CFC communities in the Western Province (which also makes inter-church marriages unlikely).

**Wesleyan Methodist Church (WMC)**

The WMC of the Solomon Islands is another breakaway church from the United Church, and was registered on 6 November 1996. It began in late 1992 with a meeting of five men who were sharing deeply about their own sinful nature and formed a study and prayer group in order to pray about their conviction. It is recalled that their conviction was to return to the blood of Christ and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit based on a scriptural understanding and teaching. The group gradually increased to 70 people, male and female, who eventually adopted the old Methodist doctrines and class meetings and called themselves the Wesleyan Methodist Church of the Solomon Islands.

In an interview conducted with a group of seven church leaders on 13 February 2003, the author was told that an increasing number of members of the United Church had felt
that too many changes were creeping into the life of the church. Examples given included worship styles, liturgy, Sunday School, education, action songs, the use of local languages instead of traditional English in services and singing, the introduction of new ways of fundraising alongside the old tithes and offerings, and the introduction of 'sceptical' teaching (Wesleyan Methodist Church group 2003, interview by author). In the understanding of the breakaway group the WMC is not a new church, but rather "the restored continuing church from the Methodist Mission founded in 1902 to the period where the Christian Fellowship Church and the United Church of PNG and the Solomon Islands had broken away and formed their own separate movements" (Constitution of the Wesleyan Methodist Church 1996, 6).

In 2003 the WMC claimed to maintain five church buildings and a number of other places used for worship. There were two ordained ministers and six associated ministers. One of the ordained ministers is Robinson Bato who joined the breakaway group after he was disciplined by the United Church in 1992. The number of adherents is unknown because there is no mention of the WMC in the census of 1999, probably because all members of the new church were counted under the United Church. Estimates given range from 1,000 to 3,000 adherents for the three organized church districts, namely Choiseul, Central West/New Georgia, and Honiara. Growth takes place by natural means rather than as a result of proselytizing. It was emphasized that the WMC is concerned not so much with quantity as with quality, and that therefore evangelization is less a priority than 'right teaching.'

**Jehovah's Witnesses (JW)**

The beginnings of the JW in the Solomon Islands can be traced back to 1948 when Clement Fa'abasua, a young man from Malaita, was jailed for 15 months for his involvement in the Maasina Rule Movement. Originally a member of the South Sea Evangelical Church, Fa'abasua received from a Fijian plantation worker a JW publication entitled *Let God Be True*, which he studied while in prison. After his release he wrote to the JW in Australia requesting more information. Subsequently, he was appointed as the first 'special pioneer' of the JW in the Solomon Islands (Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses 1978: 44). As an outcome of the Witnesses' house-to-house visitation programme about 70 or 100 people were converted in the early years, and the first Circuit Assembly of the JW in the Solomon Islands was held in 1961 at Kwainaketo village. Because the JW vigorously attacked other churches their literature was not allowed into several territories of the South Pacific, including the Solomon Islands. The ban on the import of the magazines *Watchtower* and *Awake* was imposed in 1956 and not lifted until 18 years later, in 1974. In 1977 the JW were officially registered as a Charitable Trust and, consequently, missionaries were allowed into the Solomons.

Today the Solomon Islands form one of the 109 branches of the JW worldwide. Currently the Solomon Islands branch is subdivided into 41 Assemblies. Each Assembly has an 'overseer', who reports to and is guided by the branch overseer, a coordinator based at the headquarters in Honiara. In 2003 this position was held by an Australian citizen of English origin, Tom Cook (Cook 2003, interview by author). The headquarters of the JW in the Solomon Islands is an impressive modern structure – well protected, air-conditioned and the place of work for approximately 87 employees (including four overseas couples without children) involved in administration, translation and maintenance. The state-of-
the-art computerized translation equipment is used to produce literature in Pidgin and three major vernaculars (Cook 2003, interview by author). The two main magazines, Watchtower and Awake, are regularly translated in the Solomon Islands by local workers called 'pioneers.'

The JW in the Solomon Islands do not hide the fact that they are financially dependent on the worldwide Witnesses. The new branch office alone cost about 2 million US dollars, an amount too large to be raised by the 7,485 adherents (including children) who were recorded in the last census (1998). Some minor income derives from free will offerings. As with the Seventh-day Adventists, Roman Catholics and Mormons, the hierarchical centralized worldwide organizational structure supports adherents in developing countries. Seventy-seven and a half per cent of all the members of the JW in the Solomon Islands live on Malaita, while in Choiseul and Isabel there were respectively only 4 and 8 adherents recorded in the last census. The remaining 22.5 per cent (1,684 adherents) are scattered throughout the different provinces. The growth of the JW over the past three decades has been slow but steady.

The main activities for the adherents are the Assemblies held twice a week, in which selected passages from the Watchtower are presented. This is a standardized practice throughout the world, where every week on the same days in every Assembly of the JW the same passage with a binding interpretation is thoroughly introduced. This practice certainly contributes to the highly developed ‘corporate identity’ of the Witnesses, and prepares them for the house-to-house visitations and mission work. The JW do not co-operate with other religious bodies and maintain a strict separation of church and state. During the ethnic tensions, which according to the coordinator had no effect on JW operations, a few members lost their homes and lived temporarily in one or the other Kingdom Hall. Altogether five Kingdom Halls were vandalized by militants.

Like other fundamentalist religious organizations, and following their own interpretation of Scripture, the JW are uncompromisingly against drinking, smoking, betel nut chewing, the payment of bride price, and deathwatch. They also do not participate in certain festivities of Christian and non-Christian origin.

**Assemblies of God (AOG)**

The AOG belong to a category of newer churches that arrived in the Solomon Islands after World War II. On 30 January 1971 Apakuku N. Nacagilevu and his wife Viniana were sent by the AOG Fiji on an evangelistic tour to New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands. On 5 March of the same year they began AOG ministries in the Solomon by renting quarters to live in and a hall to preach in. Joined temporarily by AOG missionary Lawrence Larson, who was also based in Fiji, after seven weeks of intensive work the missionaries could claim 415 decisions for Christ, 6 water baptisms, 15 people filled with the Holy Spirit and 20 membership cards (Larson 1997: 380). On 6 December 1971 Larson was able to conduct the Official Organizational Meeting of the First AOG in Honiara. Sixty-seven eligible adults were listed as members and a Constitution and By-Laws for a local church, as proposed by Larson, were accepted. Appointments of pastors and deacons were made. The national church was officially inaugurated on 7 June 1974, when a properly called meeting was conducted in Honiara. Paul Wright, a missionary from the USA, became the first Superintendent, while Apakuki Nacagilevu from Fiji was elected Assistant
Superintendent. Two local people were ordained as pastors of churches in Honiara and Kerkasa (Larson 1997: 391). More missionaries from the USA and Fiji followed over the years, and the AOG became the fastest growing church in the Solomon Islands. In 1992, according to the church’s statistics, there were 1,281 adherents, and only seven years later 2,262 adherents were counted in the more reliable official national census.

The opening of a Bible College in 1992 on Malaita certainly contributed to the fast growth of the AOG. In 2003 there were 24 single students and six couples enrolled in the one year training programme, taught by two local lecturers and a missionary couple from New Zealand (Otasui 2003, interview by author). The fees ($SI 300 per year) are far below the real costs involved. The Bible College is financially supported by the different AOG congregations in the Solomon Islands, which have one special offering a year dedicated to the running and maintenance of the school (Otasui 2003, interview by author). Plans for the future include an upgrading of the curriculum to Diploma level and an extension of the course to 2–3 years.

With regard to finances and administration each AOG congregation tries to be autonomous and self-sustaining. Whenever the need arises, especially when infrastructure and personnel are concerned, there is the possibility of support from the worldwide Assemblies of God. The work of the local pastors in 2003 was complemented by the ministry of two missionary couples, one from the USA and one, as mentioned above, from New Zealand. The AOG took part in the setting up of the Solomon Islands Full Gospel Association (SIFGA), an umbrella organization of Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the country, which was registered in 1996. Later on the AOG dissociated itself from SIFGA when a controversy developed over the question of whether pastors from SIFGA churches could be interchanged, which the AOG did not agree with.

**Christian Outreach Centre (COC)**

The COC was founded by Pastor Clarke Taylor — a former Methodist minister — in 1974 in Australia, and established its headquarters in Brisbane (Ernst 1993, unpublished working paper). It can best be characterized as a charismatic-fundamentalist church with a clear focus on mission and evangelism. Activities in the Solomon Islands started in the early 1980s with Daniel Buto, a previous member of the Church of Melanesia and Secretary of the Ministry of Education, and Pastor Joseph Douglas, previously a member of the South Sea Evangelical Church and Coordinator of World Vision in the Solomon Islands (Medobu 1993: 21). According to the former church secretary the majority of the first converts originated from the Church of Melanesia (Douglas 1992, interview by author). The last census showed 3,481 adherents in 1998, which makes the COC the numerically strongest of all new Pentecostal-charismatic groups. The COC has its highest concentration in Temotu Province, where 35.4 per cent of all adherents reside. Other areas with significant COC membership are Malaita, Western Province, Honiara and, to a lesser extent, Makira–Ulawa. In its organization the COC in the Solomon Islands is divided into three provincial divisions centred on the areas where members are concentrated: Eastern Division, including Temotu; Central Division, including Honiara; and Western Division. The national headquarters is in Honiara. In the Temotu province the COC’s growth is linked with another former member of the Church of Melanesia, Sanders Bok, who was involved in the youth ministry of the Anglican Church at Graciosa Bay district, Santa Cruz and had a strong charismatic