But not everything was going smoothly. On the island of Pentecost, in 1931, the Anglicans had to face a schismatic reform by a movement that supported a stricter banning of all traditional customs. The movement was called ‘Danielite,’ after the name of the prophet-founder Daniel Tambe, who died in 1934. The church on north Pentecost was split into two mutually hostile groups and the confrontation escalated in 1940 with a week of open fighting. The Danielites were defeated and had to leave the district and establish new villages. The movement gradually faded away and many of its followers joined the SDA Church, which also required from its members a radical break with traditional customs.

The French Marists, after having consolidated their positions in the centre of the archipelago, began moving southward. Since they did not have any ship of their own, they had to make use of other people’s ships and canoes for their travels, which often became very dangerous. Between 1902 and 1912 the Catholics lost three priests and two sisters, all drowned in the ocean, together with catechists and lay people. The Catholic mission, in the early years, had always been richer in personnel than in money. In 1914 it was composed of 28 priests, 2 brothers, and 10 sisters, scattered in 20 mission stations. Communications became easier only in 1927 when the Marists got their first ship — the St. Joseph — which connected their stations and ensured the necessary transport and provisions for mission stations, schools, and villages. Meanwhile, from the early 1920s, new fields of evangelization were opened with the coming of almost 6,000 labourers from French Indochina (Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam), and the establishment, in 1933, of a Catholic station on Tanna. The missionaries were invited by people who wanted an alternative to the excesses of Presbyterianism.

In 1937, the 50th anniversary of the Catholic mission in the New Hebrides was celebrated, in a low key way. The members of the church still numbered only 2,500, since many of the baptized had died of introduced infectious diseases. The Vicar Apostolic was old and sick (he would die two years later), and the number of priests was down to 20, most of them over 50 years old. Only the number of catechists had increased. The Second World War was also approaching, and with the war came the isolation of the mission from its sources of personnel and finances in France. As a memorial for the 50th Anniversary, a ‘Calvary’ was erected at the back of the cathedral, a reminder of all the sacrifices that the New Hebrides Mission was built upon.

After the death of the Vicar Apostolic Douceré, the Catholics received a new leader in the person of Fr. Jules Halbert, ordained bishop in December 1939. Being a former missionary to New Caledonia, he took some time to get accustomed to his new field of work. His first baptism of fire was a confrontation between rival clans on Pentecost Island, in which one of his priests got involved. For a long time the area had been plagued by bloody fighting among the clans, which belonged to different religious groups (Catholic, Anglican, Churches of Christ, and traditional religions). When the French and British officials failed to stop the killings, it seems that Fr. Louis Guillaume (in charge of the Melsisi mission station) intervened by providing ammunition for some who needed to defend themselves. Arrested in November, he was taken to Port Vila together with other suspects, and eventually sent into exile in New Caledonia. The Vicar Apostolic was shaken by the episode, and temporarily closed down the station where Guillaume had been working.

In the 1940s the Second World War came to Vanuatu, with the landing of more than 200,000 American troops in South Santo and Efate to prepare for the counter attack in Guadalcanal. American recruiters moved into the archipelago to enlist a native defence
force and auxiliary personnel. Thousands of Ni-Vanuatu from all the islands were enlisted. The war also deeply affected the religious life of the indigenous people. For the first time they saw thousands of Catholic soldiers who spoke English, and many of them were black. The magic of 'Amerika' — friendly, rich, and more democratic — left a long-lasting impression on the native minds and played a part in provoking the changes of the post-war period.


In post-war Vanuatu the Presbyterians continued to rely more on Australia and New Zealand for their foreign personnel and finances. At the same time, steps were taken towards church autonomy, which was achieved as early as 1 July 1948, exactly 100 years since the Rev. John Geddie had settled on Anceitym Island. The now autonomous church was officially named the Presbyterian Church of the New Hebrides (PCNH), with its own General Assembly governing future development. It has since become a member of the World Council of Churches.

Even before this, at the 1943 synod, it had been agreed that education needed to be upgraded, and in the next year two deaconesses were sent for that purpose from Australia, where single women had long been trained as full-time deaconesses. The presence of women missionaries was something new in this hitherto male-dominated mission. Later, in 1946, in order to further improve the level of education of the local teachers and pastors, the Rev. Graham Miller, future historian of the mission, was appointed to the Teachers' Training Institution (TTI) on Tangoa. With him and his successors the level of education rose and the most promising students were sent overseas for further training. From 1966 onwards many students of this institution and its successors were sent to the Pacific Theological College (PTC) in Suva, Fiji, where they could encounter the theological and cultural diversity of the world-wide Christian Church.

Graham Miller was also instrumental in bringing to Vanuatu missionaries from the Protestant church in New Caledonia. Already in 1943 he had paid a visit to that church, which also belonged to the Reformed branch of Protestantism. Missionaries from New Caledonia could better serve the French speakers among the Presbyterians in Vanuatu, and ease the relationship of the church with the French administrators in the Condominium. The plan was put into practice after the war by the French pastor Raymond Charlemagne, who sent Kanak evangelists to the islands of Malakula and Santo.

In the first ever census, in 1967, the Presbyterian Church of the New Hebrides had a membership of 30,491, that is, 39.8 per cent of the total population.

The Catholic Church in Vanuatu continued to depend on Noumea for its supplies, shipping and installations. Missionaries too, both men and women, were mostly French before the war. Trained as they were to be strongly anti-Protestant, they took part in the 'war of the churches' that afflicted the first 100 years of Christianity in the New Hebrides. After the war, however, the face of the Vicariate changed. The number of priests went down to 15 and the Society of Mary had to recruit outside the French-speaking world. Between 1947 and 1959, 12 new priests arrived, among them three Italians, two Americans, one Englishman, one Spaniard and one Belgian. An even greater number (25) of Marist sisters arrived in the same period. Among them there were several Italians, two Americans, and one each from the Netherlands and Reunion Island. Lay missionaries, too, began to
arrive, with the task of supervising the educational institutions. It would have been perhaps more profitable for the mission to entrust this task to religious brothers, but unfortunately it was only in 1967 that teaching Brothers of the Sacred Heart were able to come to help. Suffering from heart problems, Bishop Halbert resigned in 1954 and was succeeded by Bishop Louis Julliard in 1955. During Halbert's years in office (1939–1954) the number of Catholics had grown from 3,500 to 6,500, among them almost 900 Europeans and 500 Vietnamese.

One of the first acts of the new bishop was the ordination of the first indigenous Catholic priest, Fr. Cyriaque Adeng, on 25 September 1955. Another Ni-Vanuatu, Fr. Gerard Leymang, would be ordained in 1962, followed by a third in 1965. More than 20 priests would arrive during Bishop Juillard's term in office (1955-1976), from Europe, USA, and Oceania, and many more sisters. More stations could also be opened in remote places still inhabited by pagans, like the interior of Santo and Tanna. A Catholic mission station was also opened on Aneityum Island, at the request of residents who had become Catholic in Port Vila.

In the early 1960s the Vicar Apostolic took part in the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). In 1966, the Vatican normalized the structure of the Catholic Church in Oceania by transforming the Vicariates into dioceses and grouping them into church provinces and bishops' conferences. The diocese of Port Vila became a suffragan of Noumea, and a member of CEPAC (the Pacific Bishops' Conference). Juillard presided over a missionary revival that multiplied the members of his church. When this humble and untiring bishop retired in 1976, the diocese counted more than 15,000 Catholics, in spite of having lost most of the Vietnamese, who had returned to their home country in 1963. More than 5,000 pupils were attending the 24 Catholic French schools, and two hospitals and seven dispensaries looked after the sick. The bishop had brought the Catholic community to maturity and could look back with gratitude on the work accomplished in the past 90 years (see Table 6). Juillard was succeeded by Bishop Francis Lambert, an American (1976–1997).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: Evolution of the Catholic Mission (1887–1979)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* National Census

Sources: National Statistics Office; South Pacific Commission; Archives of the Diocese of Port Vila.

From a religious point of view, the second half of the 20th century in Oceania has been marked by the arrival of numerous new religious groups into the region. Vanuatu too was not spared. In 1946 the last of the so-called historic churches arrived in the archipelago, i.e. the Apostolic Church. An Australian couple, Allan and Daisy Mann with their children, settled first in Port Vila and then on Ambae Island. More missionaries followed soon. Also from Australia came the first Bahá'í, a woman schoolteacher, Mrs. Bertha Dobbins, who arrived in 1953 and spread her faith message through her school. Seven years later the first
local Spiritual Assembly was established in Port Vila. Pioneer missionaries of the Assemblies of God, the Americans Lawrence Larson and Jim Williams, arrived from Fiji in 1968, and immediately preached a two week crusade in Port Vila. Eight years later, the Mormons’ Fiji Mission organized into a branch a group of Samoan families who had migrated to Port Vila in the late 1950s.

The coming of the new Christian and non-Christian denominations was one of the factors that spurred the historic churches to find a way for better co-operation. The worldwide ecumenical movement had created a new climate among the churches, fostering dialogue and collaboration, especially among those that had more in common. In Vanuatu too, as in other Pacific countries, a Council of Churches was established in 1967, with the aim of promoting consultation and collaboration among Christian denominations. It was called the New Hebrides Council of Churches, and later simply the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC). Founding members were the Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church, the Churches of Christ, and the Apostolic Church.


Pastors and priests were involved in the process of political emancipation from its very beginning. Virtually all of the founding fathers who strove for independence from colonial rule were ordained church leaders or committed Christians. The first political party, the National Party, which later became the Vanua’aku Pati (VP), was headed by the Anglican priest Walter Lini. Many of his co-workers were Presbyterian pastors or church workers. For this reason the Presbyterian Church was sometimes called “the Vanua’aku Party at prayer.” Anglicans and Presbyterians tended to lean toward the British, and were in favour of immediate independence. The Catholic priest Gérard Leymang, who studied sociology and economics in France, became the leader of the main opposition to the VP, the Union des Communautés des Nouvelles Hébrides (UCNH–New Hebrides Communities’ Union). This party, together with two other parties on Santo, tended to lean towards the French and favoured a delayed independence. The three parties were later named collectively the Union des Partis Modérés (Union of Moderate Parties, UMP).

While most churches sought to maintain a neutral position in politics, in 1973 the Presbyterian Church called publicly for rapid progress towards self-government. Three years later the Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches condemned the continuation of the Condominium government and urged the two colonial powers to accelerate steps towards independence. Many Catholics did not agree with these declarations and in March 1978 the president of VP, Walter Lini, sent a strong letter of protest to the president of CEPAC (Cardinal Pio Taofinu’u, Bishop of Apia, Samoa). In his letter he accused members of the Catholic Church, in collusion with the French Government, of political violence against the members of his party and the independentists. The cardinal replied in a calm letter, mentioning the major church documents in regard to the neutral position of the church in political matters. In 1978 Fr Leymang was elected chief minister in the Representative Assembly, to be replaced in that position by Fr Walter Lini after the elections of the following year and the declaration of independence on 30 July 1980.

In the rebellion against the national government, which preceded and followed the declaration of independence on the island of Santo, the Churches of Christ and other churches were also affected, since Jimmy Stevens and many members of his Nagriamel
movement were baptized Christians. Not having found enough support from the Churches of Christ, especially in Australia, Stevens founded his own religious group, called the Royal Church of Nagriamel, which had many traditional features. After the arrest of Stevens in 1980, many of his followers returned to their previous religious affiliation. Catholics, too, had to suffer in the repression conducted by the government in the islands of Santo and Tanna, since the new government took a strong position against France and the Catholics were mostly French educated.

A few weeks before the date of independence, a violent confrontation with the police in Tanna led to the killing of the Catholic Alexis Yolou, who was the major adversary of Walter Lini. After independence, on the islands of Santo, Malakula, Pentecost, Ambrym, and Tanna, many indigenous and expatriate Catholics, priests and religious included, were arrested or expelled, under the accusation of being against the newly established independent republic. Many Catholic settlers spontaneously left the country. Two months after independence, the Vanuatu Christian Council addressed a letter to the Government in which it lamented the many violations of human rights and arbitrary brutalities perpetrated by the police and army forces. It also deplored the campaign of arrests and intimidation carried out by the government, a campaign that fomented hatred and tensions among the population of the state, which, according to its new Constitution, was founded on Christian principles.

The first post-independence government was headed by the Anglican priest Walter Lini. Several ministers and members of Parliament were Protestant pastors and opposed to French influence in the new Republic. This fact had repercussions for the Catholic Church, most of whose priests and religious were still French. For eleven years — i.e. until the change of government in 1991 — the government tried to discourage the presence of foreign missionaries by raising the fee for a visa to the enormous sum of 50,000 Vatu for each person. Catholic schools were often left without subsidies for running expenses, and even the payment of teachers' salaries was delayed. The presence of Protestant pastors and church officials in Vanuatu's political arena has been maintained till the present day.

In the 1970s and 1980s a charismatic renewal movement reached Vanuatu, affecting all the churches. People of all denominations were looking for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues, prophecy, and 'being slain' by the Spirit. Prayer became spontaneous and fervent, and worship tended to be noisy, with shaking, falling down, crying and laughing. At first the reaction of the three major churches in Vanuatu was cold, especially on the part of the western missionaries. Eventually, the phenomenon was seen as a sort of 'restoration' of aspects of traditional culture, neglected in previous evangelization. The religious affiliation of Vanuatu was profoundly modified, with the historic churches assuming some Pentecostal characteristics, breakaway churches being established, and new brands of Christianity arriving from overseas. When, between 1990 and 1997, the Government required the registration of religious groups operating in the country, more than 60 groups were registered.

Even if the movement was undoubtedly in the direction of an ever greater proliferation of churches, ecumenism was also on the agenda of many churches. In 1977 the Uniting Church in Australia was inaugurated by a merger of Methodist and Congregational churches with the Presbyterians. The movement was followed in other countries too. It did not happen in Vanuatu, since Methodists and Congregationalists were not present. The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, however, retained its established relationship with the World Mission Board of the Uniting Church.
In 1975 the Anglican diocese of Melanesia, which belonged previously to the Province of New Zealand, became an independent Province encompassing three dioceses in the Solomons and a new diocese of Vanuatu. Five years later, Fr Harry Tevi, a native of Melsisi, Pentecost, would become its first Melanesian bishop.

Apart from the difficulties experienced by the Catholics during the Lini administration, the years after independence were overall quite positive for the Catholic Church. There was a blossoming of priestly vocations among the indigenous people (18 would be ordained between 1979 and 1999), an increasing number of young people entering religious formation houses, and an expansion of the educational commitment of the church. The new Order for indigenous brothers, founded in 1977 and called 'Brothers of St. Martin of Porres,' saw its first fruits in 1983 with the religious profession of the first brothers. Some of them were posted to Tanna Island among pagan tribes, and others to Santo and Pentecost.

The 1980s also saw an effort on the part of the American Bishop Lambert to overcome the historical identification of the Catholic Church with the French speakers. English speaking Dominican Sisters were invited to come from New Zealand in 1980, and later (1992) the Daughters of Mary Immaculate came from the Solomon Islands. The latter opened an English-medium Catholic primary school on the island of Ambae. When, in 1987, celebrations were held to commemorate 100 years of missionary activity, the Catholic Church could present the following statistics: about 19,500 members, 24 priests (among them 6 locals), 11 brothers, 67 sisters, 10 major seminarians, hundreds of catechists, more than 5,000 pupils in the Catholic schools, and thousands of people grouped in different associations such as the Scouts, the Legion of Mary, and Catholic Youth. Exactly 10 years later the Catholic diocese of Port Vila received its first indigenous bishop in the person of Monsignor Michel Visi, born on Ambae Island 43 years before.

**Religious Situation in Vanuatu**

**Introduction**

The following information on Vanuatu's religious situation, and the more detailed presentation of the main religious groups, are based on the field research undertaken by the author between 8 March and 16 April 2004. During that period the author visited the island of Efate, where the capital Port Vila is located, and the island of Tanna. The latter was chosen because, apart from being densely populated, it is also the seat of the largest nativist movement in Vanuatu, namely the John Frum (or Brum) movement. Data was collected in Port Vila from the National Statistics Office, the Culture and Religion Bureau at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Cultural Centre, the library of the University of South Pacific (Emalus Campus), and the Archives of the Catholic diocese of Port Vila. Around 25 people were interviewed individually during the field research, making use of an open-ended questionnaire. Twenty more people were interviewed in groups of four or five. All the interviews except three were taped. Among the people interviewed were church leaders and 'converts,' namely persons who had changed their religious affiliation. Sometimes church leaders were also converts themselves, having left their previous church and joined another religious group. Many religious leaders provided useful material on their denomination, such as brochures, constitutions, historical books, organizational outlines, and so on. However, due to the high number of religious denominations now present in
Vanuatu — estimated to be more than 100 — and the location of many of them all across the archipelago, it was materially impossible to approach all their leaders in the limited time available for the field research.


In the first Population Census, held in 1967, the Individual Questionnaire contained the question: “What is your religion?” The same question was asked in the three following censuses (1979, 1989, 1999). However, the question was optional and therefore a small percentage of people did not answer it. The possible answers were pre-coded, and only a few religious groups were listed, namely six groups in the first three censuses and nine groups in the last one. Among the religious groups, a ‘Customs’ category has always been present in the censuses. It includes the adherents of traditional religions as well as those of the millenarian movements — also called nativist or revival movements — that have arisen after contact with Christianity and western civilization. The two most important nativist movements are the John Frum movement on Tanna and the Nagriamel movement on Santo and neighbouring islands. In the censuses, those residents who did not belong to one of the pre-coded religious groups were simply put under ‘Other.’

Table 7 (following page) shows the census figures released by the National Statistics Office (NSO), and also those collected by the author in 2004. The latter are based on the statistics provided by the religious groups or — for those that did not keep updated statistics — on the Annual Growth Rate in the intercensal period 1989–1999. In the 1989 and 1999 columns, the figures added by the author are marked with an asterisk. The projected Vanuatu population of 212,000 people in mid-2004 was released by the NSO and is based on an annual growth rate of 2.6 per cent.

Looking first at the three oldest Christian churches in Vanuatu (Presbyterian, Anglican, and Catholic) the author estimates that in 2004 around 56 per cent of the population belongs to them, down 14 points from the percentage in the 1967 census. Translated into figures this might amount to more than 30,000 people. The church that lost most members in percentage terms was the Presbyterian, with a decrease of 10.0 percentage points in 37 years. Anglicans and Catholics too lost some ground in percentage.

The other two churches mentioned in all four censuses are the Seventh-day Adventists and the Churches of Christ. The first has been constantly increasing its proportion of population in the period 1967–2004, and is likely to become the second largest religious group in Vanuatu in the near future. The second, on the other hand, while constantly growing in total figures, has lost almost one point in percentage since 1967.

Looking now at the churches listed only in the 1999 census — the Assemblies of God, Neil Thomas Ministries, and the Apostolic Church — the figures for their 1989 membership were given by their leaders. The first (AOG) enjoyed an annual growth rate of almost 13 per cent between 1989 and 1999, the second (NTM) of 6.2 per cent, while the third did not add to its proportion of the population. No other church group was listed in the censuses but the increasing number of people classified ‘Other’ — from 2,362 in 1967 up to 17,943 in the original figure given in the 1999 census report — testifies to the growing number of religious groups in the country.
### Table 7: Religious Affiliation in Vanuatu (1967–2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Groups</th>
<th>1967 No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1979 No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1989 No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1999 No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2004 No</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>30,491</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>40,843</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>50,951</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>58,540</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>63,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
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<td>14.3</td>
<td>16,778</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>19,949</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>25,084</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>28,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
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<td>16.0</td>
<td>16,502</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>20,613</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>24,515</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>26,900</td>
<td>12.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seventh-day</td>
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<td>5.7</td>
<td>6,817</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>11,737</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>20,068</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>28,300</td>
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<td>Church of Christ</td>
<td>3,909</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4,241</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6,745</td>
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<td>N. A.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>8,040</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<td>N. A.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>6,406</td>
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<td>7,900</td>
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<td>Apostolic</td>
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<td>N. A.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3,377</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3,900</td>
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<td>Latter-day Saints.</td>
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<td>N. A.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>357**</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>357**</td>
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<td>Other Christian</td>
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<td>N. A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>17,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customs***</td>
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<td>14.9</td>
<td>8,460</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>6,484</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>10,365</td>
<td>5.6</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
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<td>Bahá’í</td>
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<td>N. A.</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>N. A.</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
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<td>N. A.</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
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<td>17,666</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
<td>2,374</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total                     | 76,582  |       | 111,251 |       | 142,419 |       | 186,678 |       | 212,000 |       |

* estimates by church leaders  
** peak publishers; Memorial attendants 1,750.  
*** 'Customs' mean traditional religions and present nativist movements; the estimated figure for 2004 reflects its fluctuating membership.

Sources: Census 1967, 1979, 1989, 1999; interviews with church leaders.

In the 2004 column three churches have been added, namely the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the United Pentecostal Church, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They were added mainly because they keep reliable statistics of their membership, and also because they are well established and steadily increasing in membership. In the same column the category ‘Other Christian’ has also been added. This includes the scores of churches established in Vanuatu in the last 20 years. If one separates the three oldest churches from all the other Christian denominations, the members of the latter amount to 40 per cent of the population in 2004, compared to less than 15 per cent in 1967.

According to the Liaison Officer at the Culture and Religion Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 48 churches and religious groups were registered between 1990 and 1996, when registration was compulsory. Since registration was abolished in 1997, in the estimate of the same officer more than 30 other religious groups have appeared. We might divide all these registered and non-registered religious groups into four major categories: long established Christian churches; overseas Christian churches that have recently arrived; breakaway Christian churches; and non-Christian religious groups. The distinction between ‘overseas Christian churches that have recently arrived’ and ‘breakaway Christian churches’ is often blurred, since there are cases in which a pastor has walked out of a church, begun his own group, and then asked the help of (or was approached by) expatriate missionaries...
in order to establish a branch of the overseas church. A common feature, noticed among
the leaders of groups in the two above-mentioned categories, is the tendency to inflate the
number of their members.

Among the churches that have moved into Vanuatu from overseas in more recent
times can be mentioned: Free Evangelical Church, Missionary Baptist Church, Wesleyan
Holiness Church, Christian Life Centre, Foursquare Gospel Church, Grace Bible Baptist
Church, Potter’s House Christian Fellowship, Christian Revival Crusade, and so on. Most
of them have only a handful of followers, who sometimes gather in sheds or public places.
The Free Evangelical Church is a branch of that founded in New Caledonia by Pastor
Raymond Charlemagne in 1958. It has a few hundred members, mostly located on the
islands of Santo and Malakula. Some of the above churches will be described in more detail
in the section dedicated to individual profiles of the religious groups in Vanuatu.

Among the breakaway churches, the following can be mentioned: Apostolic Life
Ministry, Last Day Church, Christian Mission Centre, Word Church, Praise and Worship
Ministries, Presbyterians Born Again, Presbyterian Reformed Church, New Covenant
Church, Christian Outreach Centre, Living Water Ministry, Evangelical Church of Antioch,
Bible Church, Christian Mission Church, Only One Church of Christ, Beloved Church,
Church of the Children of God, The Mustard’s Seed, Full Gospel Bible Assembly, and so
on. In the section dedicated to the profiles of religious groups, more will be said in regard
to some of these breakaway churches.

In the 1999 census, 10,365 people were categorized as adherents of ‘Customs.’ This
category of people, according to the census, is mostly concentrated on the islands of Tanna
(8,295), Santo (963), Pentecost (861), and Efate (156). The largest groups have been the
John Frum (Brum) movement on the southern island of Tanna, and the Nagriamel
movement on the northern islands of Santo and Pentecost. They are not really traditional
religious groups but rather revival and millenarian groups, often with strong political agendas.
The John Frum group has been led for many years by Isaaq Wan. Worth noticing is the
fluctuating number of ‘Customs’ members. Many of these people, in fact, are also members
of other religious groups and can easily shift their allegiance according to the circumstances.
In the 2004 affiliation column the author estimates the number of ‘Customs’ followers at
around 5,500, a highly hypothetical figure since the membership of the groups classified as
‘Customs’ has been rather unpredictable. It is based on the fact that the largest of the
‘customs’ groups, the John Frum movement on Tanna (more than 8,000 members in 1999),
has recently splintered into three groups, the original still being led by Isaaq Wan, the new
and more numerous by Prophet Fred Maisi, and a third group of neutrals. Isaaq Wan and
his followers have walked out of their former village (Ipekel at Sulphur Bay) and built a
new one (Namakara) not far away. In the meantime, several religious groups have moved
to Tanna in the hope of attracting disgruntled John Frum members, an aim in which they
seem to be succeeding.

Non-Christian denominations, such as Bahá’í, Islam and Hinduism, have not so far
been specifically recorded in the censuses. They have been added to the 2004 column,
since the presence of non-Christian religions is an important factor that could dramatically
change the future picture of the religious scene in the country. In particular, the Bahá’í
Faith already has a substantial number of adherents. Ni-Vanuatu seem eager to try something
new, especially if it brings material benefit. Until now, worldwide non-Christian religions
have had little success in Vanuatu, but things could change.
The Hindu residents of Vanuatu are people of Indian origin, mainly Tamils, who migrated to Fiji in the 19th century. The majority are businessmen and their families who came to Vanuatu even before independence. Others are students of law at the University of the South Pacific, whose families are still in Fiji. Hindus in Vanuatu belong to various streams of Hinduism, and this fact diminishes their sense of belonging to one religious group. Moreover, they do not have a temple in Vanuatu and only one family belongs to the Brahmin caste. On the occasion of major Hindu festivals, they normally celebrate in private houses.

Ni-Vanuatu who declared no religion were only a small proportion of the population. They reached a peak in 1989, for no apparent reason. In 1999 they were registered almost exclusively on the most densely populated islands of Tanna, Efate, and Santo. Notwithstanding the inconsistencies, it seems that the number of 'unchurched' people is growing in Vanuatu, due to western education, influence of the foreign media, or simply confusion in the face of so many religious groups in the country. It is unclear why the number of those who refused to reveal their religious affiliation shows such dramatic fluctuations. In 1999, too, they were almost exclusively located on Santo, Efate, and Tanna, i.e. the most populated and urbanized islands. It may be that, since answering the census question about one's religious affiliation was not compulsory, people left it unanswered for the sake of privacy. In the 2004 column, 'No Religion' and 'Not Stated' have been put together under 'Other.'

To complete the picture of the religious scene in Vanuatu, one has to mention the so-called para-churches. Interdenominational organizations of this kind are present in Vanuatu, although not in great numbers. Since 1981 the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) has been present, with its headquarters at Tébakor, Port Vila. Vanuatu's SIL branch relates to the headquarters in Brisbane, Australia. It works in collaboration with the Vanuatu Christian Council. When SIL members enter an area, they are usually guests of the local church. The staff has been doing translation and literacy work among several linguistic groups on the islands of Uripi, Maskelynes, Mota Lava, Epi, Efate, Santo, and Tanna. Since the government decided to begin classes in local languages at primary school level, SIL staff have been training primary school teachers to develop materials in these languages. Some SIL members work in collaboration with World Vision and the Bible Society. In 2004 there were 12 translator couples working in the archipelago.

The number of people working for World Vision Vanuatu (WVV) is smaller. WVV constitutes a field under the Pacific Development Group Headquarters in Papua New Guinea. It arrived in the country in 1982, and at present has a staff of 12 people. Five staff members work in the main office, near the Parliament House, while the rest run three projects in health care, water provision and literacy on the islands of Santo and Tanna.

Of a different nature are para-church groups like Campus Crusade for Christ, Every Home for Christ, the Bible Society, and Scripture Union. Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) in the Pacific Region is based in Auckland, New Zealand. For a long time it was not active in Vanuatu. Only in March 2004 did Wes Brenneman, the Pacific Regional Director, pay a visit to several churches in Port Vila in order to re-establish the organization in the country. His first aim was to promote the Jesus film, which has been translated into several languages. A boat was to arrive in May 2004, visiting very isolated islands to show the film to the inhabitants. CCC is now also offering materials that deal with family life, youth problems, and university life. For the moment Mr Brenneman does not plan to recruit personnel in Vanuatu, but just to offer all the prepared programmes to the churches.
The para-church ‘Every Home for Christ’ is not active now in Vanuatu. Former members have merged with the Christian Revival Crusade Church. Scripture Union, which is based in Suva, Fiji, seems also not to be active in Vanuatu at present. The Bible Society produced the Bislama translation of the Bible in 1980. In 2004 it employed three people, who worked in co-operation with SIL and ran two bookshops, one in Port Vila and the other in Luganville.

**Ecumenical Endeavour**

In Vanuatu there are several ecumenical institutions that bring religious groups together, at the level both of leaders and of members. The major institution is certainly the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC), established in 1967. It has five full member churches and two churches with observer status. The full member churches are the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, the Anglican Church in Vanuatu, the Catholic Church in Vanuatu, the Conference of Churches of Christ of Vanuatu, and the Apostolic Church of Vanuatu. Churches with observer status are the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Assemblies of God. According to the 1999 census, the above-mentioned seven churches encompass 79.2 per cent of the Vanuatu population. VCC is run by an executive committee, which has a chairman and a general secretary. In spite of having only a consultative and advisory role, the VCC has been able to promote various ecumenical initiatives and collaboration in the fields of evangelism, education and health. It works together with several para-church groups, including World Vision, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the Bible Society, and the Scripture Union.

Some major VCC initiatives have been the promotion of a ‘Ministers’ Fraternal,’ the holding of an annual Church Leaders’ Conference, the establishment of offices for women and youth, and the support given to united Theological Colleges. The Ministers’ Fraternal is a voluntary collaboration of church leaders at local level, both in urban and in rural areas. The co-operation takes place in regard to religious instruction in schools, pastoral care in hospitals, barracks and prisons, attendance at civil celebrations, the common use of mass media, the organization of ecumenical prayers, and so on. The Ministers’ Fraternal also establishes and supervises women’s and youth groups at local level.

The annual Church Leaders’ Conference is open to all the churches in the territory, which are requested to send representatives in proportion to the number of their members. As far as collaboration among theological colleges is concerned, the Presbyterian training centre at Talua in South Santo has already opened its doors to students sent by other Protestant churches. During its almost 40 years of existence, the VCC has made its voice heard on several social and political issues.

VCC is also the channel for the implementation in Vanuatu of ecumenical initiatives taken at Pacific level, such as the South Pacific Prayer Assembly, which was conducted in Vanuatu in 2003. Other Prayer Days are also held by different churches as part of similar events in the Pacific region. During the Christmas period an interdenominational Carols Evening is normally organized. The annual week of prayer for the Church’s Unity is usually poorly attended, since most churches do not see the need for a more visible unity among Christians. Another reason for the lack of attendance is the timing of the week of prayer at the end of January, which coincides with the end of the long holiday season.
Unfortunately, many of the leaders of churches that are not members of the VCC sometimes look at the Council with some distrust. They accuse it of monopolizing the voice of the Christians in the country, of exceeding its mandate, of meddles in politics, and so on. When asked why they do not join the Council, the answer is that they do not agree with its constitution, or with its theological foundations, or with its way of doing things. Sometimes the other churches call themselves the 'non-VCC churches,' but this is an empty label, since Vanuatu has no other ecumenical organizations similar to VCC. In fact, leaders of non-VCC churches might occasionally collaborate with churches of similar background (Reformed, Pentecostal, Holiness, Baptist, etc.) but they have not yet established alternative councils, federations, or alliances.

Vanuatu Christian Radio (VCR) is an initiative of several Protestant churches, particularly of the breakaway Apostolic Life Ministry. VCR broadcasts religious programmes (preaching the Word) and music 24 hours a day. It is especially Pentecostal churches (AOG, Apostolic, Churches of Christ, Neil Thomas Ministries, and United Pentecostal) that take part in the broadcasting, but also the Presbyterian. Other churches make use of the state broadcasting services (Radio Vanuatu) instead.

The fact that the Protestant churches are the most affected by splitting and separations points to the low value given by some of them to the organic unity of Christianity. It seems also that the more recent a church group is, the easier it is for it to undergo partition. When asked, many Protestant leaders admit that they never pray for the unity of the Church, since the personal salvation of the individual is their main concern. Unfortunately, the conditions for 'personal salvation' vary among the different religious groups. For some, adult baptism by immersion is paramount, for others it is the following of certain dietary and social rules or the abandoning of traditional habits. There are Christian denominations in Vanuatu that even refuse to give the name 'Christians' to those who do not belong to their cluster of sister-churches.

Many Ni-Vanuatu feel that the proliferation of churches and religious groups carries some advantages but more disadvantages. Among the advantages is that of keeping the religious groups alert and active lest they lose members. Another advantage is that disgruntled believers, instead of ceasing all religious practice, may still be able to find another religious group in which to continue to practise their faith. The disadvantages, however, seem to outnumber the advantages. The proliferation of Christian groups is first of all damaging the common Christian witness. Moreover, the fragile unity of the country is undermined. Clans, villages, lineages, and even families are splintered into different religious affiliations. Conflicts at village level, with the burning of churches and houses, have already taken place. So have litigation cases in court. They could even increase in the future if the trend in religious fragmentation continues. With the wisdom of hindsight, one could imagine that a common Christian faith might have functioned as the new ‘cultural glue,’ able to bind together peoples whom nature, languages and customs had kept separated and in mutual distrust for so many centuries. Regrettably, just the opposite is happening, since divisions in religious affiliation seem to add new reasons for conflict in an already contentious society.
Social Involvement of the Religious Groups

When asked about the major social problems in Vanuatu society today, church leaders mention political instability and corruption, economic stagnation, unemployment, illiteracy, mistrust between Anglophones and Francophones, excessive consumption of kava, poor health infrastructures, criminality in urban areas, and the country’s exposure to natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions.

A few churches in Vanuatu, among them the Presbyterian and the Anglican, are seriously concerned with providing good leaders for the country. For this reason they allow pastors and church workers to get involved in party politics. Other churches, like the Catholic, limit themselves to giving guidelines for lay members involved in politics and to critically monitoring their behaviour. Members of Government and politicians are invited to attend general assemblies and conventions of the major churches, when social and political topics are discussed. Some churches have also established church and society committees, which deal with socio-political issues and liaise between the churches and the civil authorities. On the opposite side, however, there are many religious groups, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Bahá’ís, which forbid their members to get involved in politics, while professing their respect and obedience to the legitimate authorities.

The problems of illiteracy and poor health infrastructure were a major concern of the historic churches up till independence in 1980. These churches were pioneers in providing school and health institutions for the Ni-Vanuatu. This changed after independence, however. Many church schools and dispensaries were handed over to the government. It was only the Catholic Church that kept its educational institutions. The overall situation in 2003 was that, out of almost 40,000 pupils, only one quarter were attending church-run schools. The proportion of church-run dispensaries and health centres was negligible. Among the major religious groups, however, there is now an awareness that more should be done by them in the fields of education and health, especially in regard to vocational institutions for drop-out students.

In order to alleviate the poverty caused by economic stagnation and unemployment in Vanuatu, most religious groups are committed to several undertakings, such as charitable institutions, scholarships for poor students, courses in different skills, economic projects (workshops, building companies, etc.), the provision of piped water, and so on. Relief agencies have been established by several churches, among them the Catholic Caritas (Secours Catholique) and the SDA’s ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency). This is a field in which the different religious groups could fruitfully work together in order to maximize the outcome.

Within the religious groups there is an ongoing debate on how to deal with the abuse of drinks and substances. Many of them simply forbid all kinds of narcotic or alcoholic drinks, along with tobacco and drugs. A few groups, e.g. the Mormons, go as far as prohibiting even stimulant drinks like coffee. Kava drinking is still a divisive topic among religious groups in the country. Because of its cultural value this is a very sensitive issue, with some leaders stressing the benefits and others pointing to the damage caused by this national beverage. It seems also that experts are divided on the matter. Many agree that kava is less damaging than alcohol and marijuana, which are already causing a lot of damage to individuals, families and villages. Unfortunately, religious groups have not yet come up with any serious programmes for the rehabilitation of alcohol and drug addicts.
Finally, religious groups in Vanuatu are still reflecting on how to overcome the legacy of mistrust between Anglophones and Francophones, left behind by the Condominium. It is true that the conflict is now less acute than it was around the time of independence, but it still causes polarization at the social and political level. One way to overcome the identification of Protestant with Anglophone and of Catholic with Francophone might be to increase the access of both groups to their educational and religious institutions. Religious groups might run both English and French medium schools, or ensure that both languages are effectively taught in their institutions. By this means they would provide a valuable contribution to the betterment of inter-group relations and to the unification of all the inhabitants of the archipelago.

**Profiles – Major Religious Groups in Vanuatu in 2004**

**The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu**

**Background**

The Rev. John Geddie, together with Polynesian evangelists who had been sent earlier by the London Missionary Society, began the Presbyterian mission on the southern island of Aneityum in 1848. Many other Presbyterian missionaries followed soon, sent by the mission agencies of Presbyterian churches in Canada, Scotland, Australia and New Zealand. In the beginning the evangelization had to face resistance on the part of the indigenous people, but eventually it spread slowly to the other islands. The church pioneered also in the fields of education and health. By the end of the century it is estimated that 40 per cent of the population had already joined the church. During the period of the joint British-French rule (the Condominium) they tended to lean towards the British. The Presbyterian Church became autonomous in 1948 but keeps a partnership relation with the Presbyterian Churches in Australia, New Zealand and the USA, and with the Evangelical Church of New Caledonia. The church is a member of the Pacific Conference of Churches and of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. In Vanuatu the Presbyterian Church is a full member of the Vanuatu Christian Council. In the last 30 years several groups separated from the parent church, mainly on the initiative of pastors. Among the newly formed church groups are the Presbyterian Born Again Church, the Presbyterian Reformed Church, and the New Covenant Church.

**Membership**

With an estimated membership of 63,100 people in 2004, the Presbyterian Church encompasses around 30 per cent of the population. It is in the majority in three provinces — Sanma, Malampa, and Shefa — and particularly on the major islands of Santo, Malakula, and Efate. The existence of a big ‘Custom’ group on the island of Tanna prevents the Presbyterians from having the majority in the southern Tafea Province. However, they are the most numerous group on all the Tafea islands except Tanna. In the intercensal period 1989–1999 the annual growth rate has been 1.5 per cent, which is less than the population growth rate (2.6 per cent). Baptisms are registered but full membership is achieved only with Confirmation.
Organization

The supreme governing body of the Presbyterian Church is the annual Assembly. The Assembly has an executive board, chaired by the Moderator. The faithful are scattered in about 400 local congregations, grouped in 77 sessions (districts) and 6 presbyteries (regions). Around 200 pastors, among them 5 women, serve in the congregations. They are trained at Talua Mission Training Centre on South Santo for a four-year course. In 2004 there were 24 Presbyterian candidates. For further studies some students are sent to the Pacific Theological College in Fiji. One pastor serves the Ni-Vanuatu Presbyterians in Noumea, New Caledonia, and another is working among the Aborigines in Australia.

Activities

The normal pastoral activities of the church include worship, the sacraments, Sunday and Bible schools, etc. Being the major religious group, Presbyterians provide pastoral care in hospitals, prisons, barracks, and in institutions of higher education. The church is also involved in secondary education with three English-medium institutions. More are planned in the near future. In spite of having a small number of confessional schools, the church provides religious instruction in hundreds of Government schools. In the political field, the church encourages its members to take an active part in politics, and for this purpose pastors, elders and deacons are allowed to enter the political arena. Members in government and parliament are invited to attend church assemblies when social and political matters are discussed.

Finances

The general secretary states that the church is 70 per cent self-supporting. Financial assistance comes from partner churches and serves to cover expenses for training or for major projects. The daily running of the church at the level of presbyteries and sessions is completely self-reliant. Pastors are paid by their local session, but often the payments are late or incomplete.

The Anglican Church in Vanuatu

Background

Started on the initiative of Bishop George Selwyn of New Zealand around 1850, the Anglican mission in the New Hebrides has been always linked with that in the Solomon Islands. In 1861 the diocese of Melanesia was established, comprising the two archipelagos. In 1881 Anglicans and Presbyterians formally divided the New Hebrides into two influence zones, the Anglicans being given the Banks and Torres Islands in the north and some other larger islands in the centre-east. During the Condominium (1906–1980), Anglicans tended to lean towards the British Administration. In 1975 the church province of Melanesia was established and the diocese of Vanuatu created as one of its components. The Primate (Archbishop) resides in Honiara in the Solomon Islands. In Vanuatu the Anglican Church is a full member of the Vanuatu Christian Council. A few Anglican pastors, such as Walter Lini and John Bani, played major roles in the nation's political life before and after independence. Recently, on the island of Santo, the church has suffered a partition, when a priest walked out of the church with his congregation and established a new religious group.
Membership

About 28,500 people belong to the Anglican Church, i.e. 13.5 per cent of the Ni-Vanuatu. Anglicans represent the majority in the northern provinces of Torba and Penama, and particularly on the islands of Vanua Lava, Gaua, Pentecost, Ambae, and Maewo. Between 1989 and 1999 the annual growth rate has been 2.6 per cent. Members are registered at baptism. A few hundred Ni-Vanuatu Anglicans live now in New Caledonia and they usually worship with Catholics. Most of the Anglicans in Vanuatu consider themselves Anglophones.

Organization

The former Diocese of Vanuatu has recently been split into two, namely the Northern Diocese, which encompasses the small archipelagos of Banks and Torres, and the Central Diocese, which includes the major islands of Santo, Pentecost, Maewo, Ambae, and Efate. Two indigenous bishops preside over the dioceses. In the Northern Diocese there are about 7000 members, grouped into 9 districts, whereas in the Central there are more than 21,000 Anglicans, grouped into 42 districts. Almost the same number of priests, all men at present, serve in the districts, assisted by deacons and lay leaders. The church personnel are trained at the Bishop Patteson Theological College in the Solomons. Recently some candidates have been sent to Talua, the training centre run by the Presbyterians. For further training candidates normally go to New Zealand. Anglicans in Vanuatu also have religious orders, like the Melanesian Brothers, the Franciscans, the Sisters of Melanesia, and the Sisters of the Church, which are all now fully localized. For the laity there are organizations like the Melanesian Brotherhood, Companionship, and the Mothers' Union.

Activities

Pastoral activities are conducted in churches and outstations as well as in institutions such as universities, hospitals, barracks, and prisons, for which chaplains are provided. Recently healing and deliverance services, counseling and family care have been added. The church runs several primary schools and two secondary schools. In all of them the teaching medium is English. Teachers of religion are sent to the state schools. Anglicans look after several health centres in remote areas.

Finances

The Anglican Church in Vanuatu is estimated to be 75 per cent self-supporting. Assistance is provided by partner churches in New Zealand and Britain. Pastors are paid by the finance office of the Church Province in Honiara.

The Catholic Church in Vanuatu

Background

After a failed attempt on the island of Aneityum in 1847–1849, French Marist missionaries and indigenous catechists, sailing from New Caledonia, began their apostolic work on the islands of Efate, Malakula and Santo in 1887, under the leadership of Fr Charles Le Forestier. Notwithstanding several setbacks, they managed to consolidate their position, and in 1904 the territory of New Hebrides became a Vicariate Apostolic, having Mgr. Victor Douceré as its first bishop. At the beginning of the new century Catholic
mission stations were opened elsewhere in central Vanuatu, and Port Vila became the seat of the mission headquarters. During the joint rule of Britain and France, Catholics tended to lean towards the French. In the early 1930s mission stations were opened also in the southern islands of Tanna and Aneityum. The mission territory became an autonomous diocese in 1966 and by then counted more than 10,000 Catholics (indigenous, French settlers, and Vietnamese). In the period around independence Catholics suffered from discrimination and persecution, being considered pro-French and hostile to independence. Since 1967, the Catholic Diocese of Port Vila has been a member of the Vanuatu Christian Council. In 1997 the diocese of Port Vila received its first indigenous bishop (Mgr. Michel Visi).

Membership

The Catholic Church in 2004 has an estimated membership of 24,500 people. Catholics constitute the second most numerous group in the Provinces of Sanma, Penama, and Malampa. They are the second biggest religious group on the islands of Malakula, Pentecost, Santo, and Efate. They are mostly Ni-Vanuatu, with a few hundred members of European and Vietnamese origin. Their annual growth in the period 1989–1999 was 1.9 per cent. Weekly religious practice is estimated to be around 50 per cent in the rural areas and 40 per cent in town. In the last 10 years the average number of baptisms has been 680 per year, 20 per cent of them being people aged over seven years. Most members consider themselves Francophone.

Organization

The diocese of Port Vila, which encompasses the whole country, is a suffragan of the church Province of Noumea, New Caledonia. The diocese is headed by a bishop, who is a member of CEPAC (Pacific Bishops’ Conference). In the administration of the diocese the bishop is helped by various councils and commissions. The diocesan territory is divided into 19 parishes, of which 3 are on Pentecost, 1 on Ambae, 3 on Ambrym, 3 on Santo, 4 on Malakula, 1 on Efate, and 4 on Tanna. Catholics are served by 24 priests (among them 15 Ni-Vanuatu), 19 religious brothers, and 78 religious sisters. Priests are trained at the Pacific Regional Seminary in Fiji. In 2004 two Ni-Vanuatu priests were serving overseas, one in France and another in French Polynesia. The numerous catechists have their own organization, and the laity may join several organizations such as the Boy and Girl Scouts, the Legion of Mary, and the Women’s Club.

Activities

As in other churches, much of the energy and time of church workers is spent in pastoral activities, including holding services, administering sacraments, visiting outstations and households, teaching catechism, giving religious instruction in Catholic and state schools, and so on. Chaplains are provided for institutions such as hospitals, prisons, barracks, and high schools. Pastoral care is given in the three official languages, since Catholic members now belong to all the three groups. Aside from that, the Catholic diocese is heavily involved in education. In the school year 2003 it ran 57 primary schools and 9 secondary schools, with a total of 7,448 pupils, which is more than 15 per cent of the whole school population and more than half of the pupils attending French-medium schools. The teaching in all Catholic schools except one is given in French. Secondary schools also provide accommodation for the pupils. Small dispensaries and health centres are also run by the
church in rural areas. Charitable organizations, like Secours Catholique and the St. Vincent de Paul Conferences, look after the needy and downtrodden. A diocesan committee for Justice and Development (CDJD) deals with social issues. The diocese of Port Vila is equipped with a Media Centre (Katolik Media Senta), which produces radio and video programmes and publishes the Catholic bulletin Ekle sia.

**Finances**

The Catholic Church is only partially self-sufficient. It still has to rely on the ordinary Vatican subsidies and on the assistance of partner churches in New Caledonia and France. As far as education institutions are concerned, the state covers only part of the expenses (mainly the teachers’ salaries).

**The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Vanuatu**

**Background**

Established in 1912 by the pioneer Pastor Parker, who came from Australia, the SDA now constitutes a Mission within the Trans Pacific Union. During the Condominium SDA’s were numbered among the Anglophones, since in their schools the medium of teaching was English. The church is a member of the Vanuatu Christian Council, with the status of ‘observer.’ Conflicts sometimes arise when the SDA enters territories already occupied by other churches. In the early 1990s a few hundred SDA members broke away from the parent church and formed their own churches. Among these are the Reformed Seventh-day Adventist and the Indigenous Seventh-day Adventist churches.

**Membership**

In 2004, the Seventh-day Adventist Church will probably have reached around 28,000 members, if the growth rate of 1989–1999 has continued. This would be 13.3 per cent of the population. SDA members are located most numerously on the islands of Ambrym, Malakula, Ambae, Santo, Efate, Epi, Tanna, Erromango, and Anetityum. The church achieved one of the greatest growth rates recorded for the period between 1989 and 1999, i.e. 7.1 per cent per year. There is a big discrepancy, however, between the figures given in the latest census (more than 20,000 members) and those released by the head office (12,000). This is probably due to the fact that in the census children are also included, as well as members who have been expelled from the church. Members are, in fact, registered at baptism (performed by immersion), and their membership status is reviewed according to their behaviour. In recent years the church has had an average of 600 baptisms per year. SDA recruits mostly among the Anglophones (Presbyterians and Anglicans).

**Organization**

SDA is an international organization, subdivided into Divisions, Unions, and Missions. The Vanuatu SDA represents a Mission, within the Trans Pacific Union of which the headquarters are in Fiji. The Trans Pacific Union, together with other Unions, belongs to the South Pacific Division, of which the headquarters are in Sydney, Australia. The Mission’s head office in Port Vila presides over about 200 local congregations scattered throughout the country.
About 50 pastors and many ministers are serving in the church and quite a few lay members have been sent to work in Fiji, PNG and the Solomons. Church workers are trained first on the small island of Aore, off south Santo, then some are sent for further training overseas (mainly in PNG and Fiji). The SDA in Vanuatu does have non-ordained women in the ministry. A few overseas helpers are still present in the country.

Activities

Saturdays are dedicated to the weekly worship while Bible studies and seminars are normally held on other days. The Youth Department promotes programmes suitable for the youngsters, while the Women's Department looks after the welfare of women. SDA in Vanuatu runs five primary schools, and one senior and three junior high schools. In the health field, it runs three dispensaries and operates a programme of health awareness through books and other publications sold in the Adventist Book Centre. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) helps in building water supplies in rural communities throughout the country and provides assistance when natural disasters strike the archipelago. SDA, in general, strives to work closely with the different departments of the Government. The church has its own media system (TV), which downloads programmes broadcast from Sydney and sends them out to the local congregations.

Finances

According to the church's president, SDA in Vanuatu is not rich but has sufficient funds to keep its operations going. Assistance is sometimes provided by the financial departments of the South Pacific Union or the South Pacific Division.

The Churches of Christ in Vanuatu

Background

The first Church of Christ members in Vanuatu were labourers who were converted in Queensland. Once returned to their islands (Pentecost, Ambae and Maewo) soon after 1900, they became the first missionaries. Soon afterwards, starting from 1903, expatriate missionaries came from Australia. The church is now an independent body, affiliated to the South Pacific Evangelical Alliance. Recently it suffered from the separation of some members who gave birth to new breakaway religious groups such as the Christian Outreach Centre and the Mustard's Seed.

Membership

In 2004, the Churches of Christ are estimated to have 8,900 members, i.e. 4.2 per cent of the population. The bulk of them are to be found in Penama Province (Ambae, Maewo, and Pentecost), and on the islands of Santo, Efate and Tanna. Their annual growth was 1.9 per cent between the 1989 census and that of 1999. Most members consider themselves Anglophone.

Organization

The supreme administrative body of the church is the annual National Conference. For the daily running of the church there is an executive board, chaired by the president. The main office is on Santo. Various committees are in charge of different tasks.
also conferences at island level, which preside over area councils and local church councils. Pastors and deacons are trained in the Church of Christ Training College located on Pentecost Island. For further studies, candidates are sent to Australia or Fiji. The church runs three vocational and one primary school, all meant primarily for dropout youngsters. The church is a member of the South Pacific Evangelical Alliance.

Activities

The pastoral activities of the church leaders include worship, the sacraments, religious instruction in schools, Bible courses, and so on. The church rebaptizes its new members, if they wish. The church’s involvement in education is minor: it runs only three schools, two of them vocational.

Finances

The leader of the church in Port Vila states that its church is only partly financially self-sufficient (‘fifty-fifty’). Assistance comes principally from the partner churches in Australia.

The Assemblies of God in Vanuatu

Background

The Assemblies of God (AOG) in Vanuatu were started in 1968 by a USA missionary, previously based in Fiji. Other Fijian and American missionaries followed. The church became independent in 1977 but still has a few expatriate missionaries (from Fiji, New Caledonia, Australia and USA), who are involved in the Joy Bible Institute or in pastoral work with French speakers. Vanuatu AOG has two branches in New Caledonia. The church is a member of the South Pacific Evangelical Alliance and of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship. At the Vanuatu Christian Council AOG has the status of observer. Through the years the church has experienced several painful separations by pastors and members, who eventually formed separate churches, including the Christian Mission Centre, Word Church, Praise and Worship Ministries, Upper Room Church, Living Water Ministries, and Last Day Church.

Membership

With an estimated membership of 13,200 people in 2004 (6.2 per cent of the population), AOG is the fifth largest Christian group in the country. The biggest concentrations of adherents are on the islands of Malakula, Malo, Santo, Efate, Epi and Tanna. Between 1989 and 1999 AOG had the highest annual growth rate, namely around 13 per cent. The great majority of its adherents are Anglophones. They are registered as members of the church at baptism by immersion.

Organization

The church is led by the National Council, chaired by the Superintendent. There are also Provincial Councils, which preside over the five provinces into which the territory is divided. Provincial councils are headed by a Presbyter. All major officials in the church are chosen in the National or Provincial Conferences, held every two years. In each province there are a number of local congregations (called ‘sovereign churches’) with their governing council. At all levels there are departments for men, women, and youth. Congregations are