

A Background of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma

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The Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma is the largest Christian denomination in Fiji, with 36.2 percent of the total population subscribing. The Methodist Church forms a key part of Fiji's social power structure with its President being Rev. Ame Tugaue, General Secretary Rev Tuikilakila Waqairatu and Deputy General Secretary, Rev. Tevita Banivanua.

The first Christian missionaries to Fiji were three Tahitian teachers of the London Missionary Society, in 1830. The Wesleyan Missionary Society from Australia began working in the island in 1835. In 1854, many notable chiefs of Fiji became Christian. Following these conversions, many people openly confirmed their faith in the gospel. As the church grew, Fijians went out as missionaries to the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and North Australia. When British rule was established in Fiji in 1874, the government became the third strand in the Fijian consciousness, called Matanitu, along with the two other strands, the way of the land (Vanua), and Christianity (Lotu). For a century and a half, the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma has enjoyed the close working together of these three strands.

Starting in 1879, large numbers of Indians were brought to Fiji by the British, to work as indentured labourers in the sugar cane industry. They came with their religion, language, culture, and customs. The Methodist Mission responded to this new challenge by setting up the Indian Mission in 1892. Towards the end of the 19th century the Methodist Church was very active in the field of education. A large number of Fijian ministers were trained. In 1964 the Methodist Church in Fiji became autonomous; in 1986, close to 75 percent of the indigenous Fijian population belonged to the Methodist Church. The Indian Methodists represent about 1.5 percent of the total membership of the church.

Today the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma has 53 divisions across Fiji, including the Indian Division, each of these is then sub-divided into circuits with an ordained minister. There are 310 circuits in the church each consisting of several sections or villages depending on location. The basis of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma is the congregations in the villages. Executive authority and the highest decision making forum is the Annual Church Conference. Presiding over the conference is the president who is the spiritual leader and the general secretary who co-ordinates and implements policy matters.

The church has a number of departments including a Christian Citizenship and Social Services Department, of which Reverend Manasa Lasaro is the Secretary. This department acts as a non-government organization working in the areas of health, welfare and advocacy for disadvantaged Fijian communities.