

United Methodist Church – California-Nevada Annual Conference
United Methodist Volunteers in Mission
Mission to Yasawa-i-Ra, Fiji 2015

The Yasawa mission grew out of communication from Methodist Church of Fiji to Virisila Batiratu of Centennial UMC in Sacramento, that the Yasawa-i-Ra Division needed a boat for transportation between the Division's four islands and from there to the City of Lautoka on the mainland of Viti Levu. Yasawa-i-Ra Division has about 13 villages, 1900 church members, one Division Superintendent (DS), four Talatalas (Pastors) and nine Vakatawas (Spiritual Leaders) and Tuiraras (Stewards). The distances by boat between these villages are as great as 20 miles, it is 50 miles to Lautoka, and the Division's financial resources could not support commercial transportation except in very extraordinary circumstances.

Alena Vunakece Vosa of San Rafael First UMC was at the time seeking with Virisila to develop a new UMVIM mission to Fiji and so, in December 2013, Virisila, Alena and Chris Klein (also of San Rafael First) started to meet in order to plan and develop the project. Meetings followed, at intervals of several months, with the additional participation of Iva Condrokadroka, Penijamini Vuatakagane, Sigakalele Bari and occasional other parties. A quote for the needed boat was obtained from Safeway Marine in Suva, Fiji: US\$11,972 for a 7 meter-long F23D fiberglass boat (nominal capacity 8 persons) with half cabin, 60 HP outboard motor, life vests and other accessories. Support for the project was obtained from the Fijian Ministry of San Rafael First, with very significant guidance provided by Vakatawa Penijamini Vuatakagane and later Vakatawa Alifereti Malo. Funds were first raised by the sale of T-shirts and a major fund-raising dinner at San Rafael, organized and prepared by Siga Bari with others, and held on January 31, 2015. This income plus a donation from the Fijian Ministry enabled sending a down payment to Safeway Marine. (All payments to Safeway were transmitted via the Conference Office in Sacramento.) A "Curry Dinner" to raise additional funds was organized by Alena Vunakece Vosa and held in late June, and the income from this, an additional individual donation and pledges of \$300 each from mission participants enabled sending the final payment to Safeway Marine with extra money available for anticipated Mission expenses in Fiji (lodging, ground transport, food, fuel for the boat, fees for boat certification and licensing, support for Fijian hosts). Mission participants paid their own airfare to Fiji. All of these activities received considerable support and advice from many other members of the Fijian and English ministries of San Rafael.

With these activities as prelude, the Mission to Fiji to formally deliver the boat to the Yasawa Division departed San Francisco on July 21, 2015. The participants were Christopher W Klein, Pastor Elizabeth H Klein (Ret.), Damen Hauswald, Virisila Batiratu, Alena Vunakece Vosa, Penijamini Vuatakagane and Selina Vuatakagane. Upon arrival in Nadi, our group was joined by Rev. Ili Vunisuwai, who is Assistant General Secretary of the Methodist Church of Fiji. We then met with Rev. Taisevi D. who is Talatala at Soso Village and Coordinator of the Division; the boat was delivered by truck from Suva to Lautoka harbor, we purchased extra fuel to take the boat to and travel within Yasawa, and assorted supplies (kerosene, water, snacks, toiletries) for a five night stay at Marou Village on Naviti Island, which is the seat of the Division.

On the morning of Friday July 24 our group departed Nadi (Denarou marina) by commercial ferry, disembarking at Manta Ray Resort on Waya Island (which is part of the Division). Rev Tavesi separately departed Lautoka in the Yasawa boat and met us at the resort, along with a second small boat to carry our luggage. Our arrival in Marou was celebrated at the beach by Divisional Superintendent (DS) and Talatala Rev. Naibuka Lata, accompanied by the superb men's choir from the church and many others from the village, all dressed for celebration. A formal Yaqona (kava) and SevuSevu ceremony of greetings, gifting and thanks was carried out (Penijamini acted as our formal spokesperson) and a Meke of singing and dancing on the village green followed. The participants in our group were then lodged at the home of the DS and his family and at the home of the village headman Vesi Bose and his family.



Arrival at Marou Village, Naviti Island



Group Photo (taken by Chris Klein)



Meke Celebration

Saturday was a day of rest that included a picnic with children of the village, held on a small island nearby offshore. Included in the picnic was singing by the children and informal rugby played on the sand and in the water. Several church services were held on Sunday, with Rev. Klein and Penijamini preaching at Marou, Damen and Alena preaching at the nearby residential high school, and Rev. Vunisuwai preaching at Soso village about two miles away. After the Sunday morning Service the boat was formally blessed by Rev. Lata and Rev. Klein.



Blessing of the Boat

On Monday several of us traveled by boat around the coast of Naviti Island, stopping at Soso for lunch with Rev. Taivesi and his family; Virisila stayed on in Soso to preach that night. Tuesday was again a day of rest with an evening farewell church service that provided opportunity to give thanks to the village for all that we had received and to God for all of these blessings and gifts. On Wednesday at about 2 pm we departed Marou in the Yasawa boat, meeting the commercial ferry again at Manta Ray resort and returning to Nadi for the night. Our group members then scattered to various parts of Fiji for local visits with friends and family members, before gathering in Suva the following Monday, August 3, to have tea with Church President Rev. Tevita Nawadra Banivanua, General Secretary Rev. Epineri Vakadewavosa and others, and to report to them the success of our mission. Several of us depart Fiji back to the USA that evening and others stayed on for longer visits. All departed with warmed hearts, fond memories and renewed thanks to God for the graces we have received.



Morning Tea in Suva, at Methodist Church Headquarters

Submitted by:
Christopher Klein
14 September 2015