

# Pacific Islanders Ministry Study

Below are adapted excerpts from PINCUM's petition to the 2008 General Conference for a study of United Methodist Church ministry needs and opportunities among U.S. Pacific Islanders. The petition, which seeks \$400,000, was approved in principle and referred to the General Secretaries Table to arrange for general agency support.

## Introduction

The common identity of people who are known as the Pacific Islanders is founded in their common legacy of being inheritors of the Earth's largest body of water, the Pacific Ocean. For centuries, they have called the islands that are scattered across the vast Pacific Ocean, their home.

Anthropologists have conveniently grouped these islands into three distinct groups, the Micronesians, Melanesians and Polynesians. The Micronesians comprise thousands of islands, big and small, including the Marianas, the Carolinas, the Marshalls, the Gilbert, Ellice and Phoenix groups. They border Asia which is separated from the Pacific by the Philippine Sea.

The Melanesians are made up of hundreds of islands, including, the Fiji, the New Caledonians, which include the Solomons and the New Hebrides, the New Guineas, and the Uvea groups.

Finally, the Polynesian group of islands includes the Hawaiian islands, Easter Island, the Pitcairn Island, the Gambier, the Tuamotu, the Marquesa, the Society, the Tahiti, the Cook Islands, the Samoan, and the Tonga groups of islands.

Pacific Islanders have been in our midst from the beginning. The Hawaiian Islands were illegally annexed by the United States in 1893. Pacific Islanders began migrating to the U.S. in the early 1950s. The first group came as military personnel workers, service industry workers, religious workers and students. The majority were professing Christians. Early after their arrival in the United States, they sought places of worship.

For the Pacific Islanders, religious and cultural heritage come together in the form of the Church. The ethnic and cultural values of Pacific Islanders are affirmed and solidified in the ways of Christianity. Pacific Island Christians truly believe that their identity, culture, and religious heritage, indeed, their way of life, is good and is where God is present and is at work.

As a result, Pacific Islanders build churches wherever they settle. The church becomes an affirmation of God's presence in their journey. In addition, the church in their new surroundings becomes the kin group or the village that they have left behind. The multiple aspects of significance and value of the church ensure its existence in places where Pacific Islanders settle. As they go forth into new territories, they have practiced their way of living. Part of that way of life is in being the Church.

The first Samoan congregation was established as a Methodist Church in Honolulu, Hawaii, on February 13, 1963. The first Tongan United Methodist fellowship was organized at Honolulu First United Methodist Church in Hawaii at a watch night service in 1970. On September 18, 1978, the first Tongan United Methodist Church was chartered in Salt Lake City, Utah.

In the 1970s, an agreement was made between The United Methodist Council of Bishops and the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga whereby the latter would not establish churches in the United States so that support would be given to the establishment of Tongan United Methodist Churches. Methodist members from the Fiji islands have also established ministries within several western states. The first United Methodist church in Guam was chartered in Barrigada in 1980. The first church in Saipan was established in 1995. Both of these churches are within the bounds of the Western Jurisdiction (California-Pacific Annual Conference).

The 2005 U.S. census identified 850,000 Pacific Islanders across forty-six states. This shows a significant potential for disciple making of Pacific Islanders across the U.S. Currently there are approximately 63 Pacific Island United Methodist churches, fellowships, and ministries across the U.S.

### **Mandate**

The Pacific Islanders National Caucus of The United Methodist Church (PINCUM) hereby petitions the General Conference to establish the Pacific Islands United Methodist Church Ministry Study. The study will (1) research and study the needs in Pacific Island communities; (2) develop recommendations to address these needs; and (3) establish priorities among the funding of programs that would begin to develop ministries in the communities to reach Pacific Islander Americans. These findings would be presented as recommendations to the 2012 General Conference.

### **Implementation**

In order to implement the Pacific Island United Methodist Church Ministry Study, a committee will be established. The committee will be composed of the following persons/categories:

10 Pacific Islanders sub-ethnic caucus members (selected by the caucuses)

1 Staff (related to racial/ethnic ministries) from each of the general agencies of the UMC

1 GBGM Staff of the Asian American and Pacific Islanders Ministries

1 Staff from the PINCUM

Other persons as needed (to be determined by the committee)

The committee will meet twice annually to design and administer an effective research tool for the gathering and analysis of information from Pacific Island communities throughout the United States. As part of this task, regional meetings throughout the United States (Hawaii, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Pacific Northwest, Salt Lake, Dallas, Florida, Midwest, Northeast) will be instituted. The administrative oversight of the study will be assigned to the General Board of Global Ministries Office of Asian American and Pacific Islander Ministries.