

STRATEGY FOR EVANGELIZING SAMOANS

IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

12/1/04

PROFILE OF SAMOANS

General Background

The Samoan Islands are politically divided into two parts: Western Samoa, which has been independent since 1962, and American Samoa which has been a U.S. territory since 1899. The Samoan Islands are located south of the equator, 2,300 miles from Hawaii and 1,600 miles from the northern tip of New Zealand.

American Samoa is made up of six islands that total 76 square miles of land. Tutuila, the main island, is roughly 18 miles long and six miles wide. Pago is the capital city and is located on Tutuila. The land is mountainous, and most villages are located along the irregular coastline.

Western Samoa is made up of two large islands and two small ones, with about 1,100 square miles of land. It was under German administration until 1914 and then occupied by New Zealand until independence in 1992.

The islands are volcanic in origin with fertile soil and heavily forested, producing a great variety of tropical fruits and vegetables.

The people of Samoa are Polynesian. Nearly 65,000 people live in American Samoa and 150,000 people in Western Samoa. The citizens of American Samoa are U.S. nationals and have the privileges of American citizenships, except the right to vote, and can move freely between the islands and the mainland. It is estimated that there are 20,000 Samoans in Hawaii and nearly 100,000 on the mainland, primarily in California.

Although Samoa is becoming Westernized, there are still pronounced differences between the U.S. and traditional ways of life. Though the education is patterned after U.S. models, there is still a large number of children who receive nothing more than a village school education. Therefore, many migrants arrive in the United States with limited knowledge of English and mainland culture.

The Samoan language is most closely related to Hawaiian and to other Polynesian languages. However, most of the people are bilingual.

Immigration Patterns

In recent years, many Pacific Islanders from American Samoa, Western Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, and Tonga, have migrated to the United States mainland. There are more Samoans from American Samoa in California now than live on the islands. They come for many reasons; primarily to take advantage of the educational and employment opportunities available on the U.S. mainland. Overpopulation and depletion of natural resources on the home islands are other reasons for migration.

In the U.S., Pacific peoples tend to be concentrated in certain geographical areas, such as Hawaii and the urban centers of the West Coast, on Oahu, the San Francisco Bay area (15,000 people).

Samoan Americans provide a good example of the difficulties most Pacific Americans face in attempting to

adjust to urban life in the U.S. In Samoan households of California and Hawaii, families are relatively large, generally two adults, three children, and one or more related individuals elderly persons. Because about half of Samoans lack a high school education, employment rates run at 25%, with enormous difficulties in finding and maintaining jobs, receiving adequate health care, locating decent and sanitary housing and so forth. Some of the symptoms of maladjustment include child abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse, physical and mental ill-health, crime, juvenile delinquency and increasing outbreaks of violence, especially in urban schools. Yet despite these difficulties faced by families migrating to the mainland, the American Samoan population has many positive attributes which help in adaptation including the strength of the family and the network of positive social accountability.

Many Samoans desire to retain their culture and especially the social structure of relating to one another. The individual is important only in terms of the position s/he occupies in the universal scheme—of him/herself, s/he is nothing. Eyes are always on the play, never on the players, and each individual's task is to fit his/her role. The cohesiveness of the extended family is very strong. Samoans are friendly, fun-loving and courteous.

Religious Heritage

The first Christian missionaries arrived in 1830 and soon most of the islands came under the spiritual influence of the London Missionary Society. Today, well over half the population is Christian Congregationalist or affiliated with the London Missionary Society, with the rest of the population being dispersed among other Christian groups and sects such as the Church of the Latter Day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Nazarene work in Samoa began in 1960 with missionary Jarrell Garsee until now the work is under the leadership of a national district superintendent and has its own training school, South Pacific Nazarene Theological College located in Western Samoa.

Moving from a 1987 base of a church in Honolulu, Hawaii, the Church of the Nazarene extended its ministry to Pearl City, HI, Long Beach, CA and new mission in Sacramento. Additional ministries have been added since then including in the San Francisco Bay area and Seattle. Now 19 ministries have been developed that reach from Anchorage, Alaska to San Diego, and into the heartland in Salt Lake City and Kansas City, more than double in the last decade.

The Missional Task of Evangelizing Samoans

General Suggestions:

Receive American Samoans as fellow citizens that, despite their differences, have the same rights and privileges as any Americans.

Recognize the continuum of relationships between the Pacific Islanders, yet not confuse one group with another. The Samoans, though sharing much in common with Hawaiians, and other Polynesians, ought not to be confused with them, as they have their own language and history unique to their setting.

Realize that Samoans more than any other cultural groups has been wholesale displaced from the home environment to a relatively alien environment. However, because their land is so small, the networks and relationships are of paramount important both to their own survival and to the potential of Christian ministry.

Understand that these islands have been heavily Christianized and that the Nazarene presence is a substantial one of great influence. However, the danger is that in the transitions to a new land, if the church cannot be receptive or creative in pursuing these historical connections, then others will fill in the void, or the Nazarene identity will be lost altogether. Good communication with the Samoan fields, and “moving Nazarenes” are important here.

THE MISSIONAL TASK FOR THE DISTRICT IS TO:

- Be informed about pastoral development options both in North America and in the homeland. Recognize that many Samoans will eventually come to the United States. To invest in education may well prepare someone to minister in a productive U.S. context.
- Invest in Samoan projects both within the country and in the homeland, perhaps organizing a “Work and Witness” team to minister in Samoa, or in a Samoan congregation, States-side.

THE MISSIONAL TASK FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH IS TO:

- Research the local demographics to see if there are Samoans living in the neighborhood. If so, is there a critical mass that can sustain a new ministry? Or should an existing church extend a spirit of hospitality to those who find themselves culturally alienated. Invite a local Samoan to share information about his/her culture for a missions rally, even if there is no Christian or Nazarene affiliation.
- Address the social and spiritual needs of the Samoan immigrant. Don't do so on a one-to-one basis but a family to group or group to group. To minister within the

collective community will mean more than isolated conversions.

- Practice hospitality. This is easier done with Samoans than with other immigrant groups because the meal and language compatibilities are easier to manage.
- Celebrate Samoan festivities and cultural events. Be learners of what Samoans can teach about themselves.
- Acquire Samoan language religious materials that can be used to introduce the Church of the Nazarene to inquirers. Christian Rituals, the denominational Manual, Basic Bible Studies (by Chic Shaver) and Evangelism Training (Taulima Age) are materials that have been translated into Samoan.
- Develop programs for young people that are accessible to Samoans. Given the fact that so many of the families are large and young, this is a great opportunity for integration into Christian fellowship.
- Celebrate Samoan worship with their worship music and arts. Because many North American have experienced South Pacific cultures through trips to Hawaii, etc., there is a great opportunity and openness to “enjoying” the musical and stylistic tastes of Samoa.