

# **SOUTH WEST PACIFIC (SWP) (VANUATU, SOLOMON ISLANDS, FIJI, SAMOA AND TONGA) RELIGIONS GENERAL AWARENESS TRAINING**

## **PRELIMS**

Introduction.

Safety.

Breaks.

## **OUTCOME:**

There are three desired outcomes for this training, these are:

- Personnel will be aware of the general religious make up of countries in the SWP (Orientation)
- Personnel will be able to identify key characteristics of religions and denominations (Awareness)
- Personnel will have the ability to ascertain further information about religions in AO and impact on daily life (Operability)

## **PHASES**

There are three phases of deliver of this training

### **Phase 1 - Overview and Orientation**

This covers a historic overview of religions across the SWP. Movement of religion through a general outline of missionary endeavours throughout the SWP through following the movements of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and Church Missionary Society (CMS). And briefly outlines current religious dynamics in the south west pacific.

### **Phase 2 – Operability**

Outlines four key questions to answer to understand and assess religious dynamics and potential issues in an AO. A spectrum of religious influence is also utilised to identify the degree of influence that religion has over daily life.

### **Phase 3 – Awareness**

Countries in SWP are placed on spectrum of religious influence. Religious make up of SWP countries is identified in comparison to NZ. Four key questions are practiced with religions and denominations present in the SWP.

## ORIENTATION

### Socio-Theology

The focus on this training is on what is believed in the SWP and the impact of those beliefs over daily life, not on the validity or veracity of the beliefs themselves.

### Historical overview

? What do you know about the history of the SWP ?

Two clear relevant periods of history in SWP: Pre and post European contact.

Early European contact through explorers and trading occurred prior to missionary endeavours. Missionary movements, largely coming from England, had success in evangelising SWP, and were the initial driving force behind the rapid spread of Christianity through the SWP. Early missionary movements throughout the SWP occurred 1830-1860, with some missionary movements occurring in the later part of the 1800s.

Christianity in the SWP meant a transformation of indigenous religion and culture. Many rituals and traditions were abandoned post-missionary contact, though not immediately (there was a delay of a number of years between initial contact and transformation as the gospel was communicated, spread and understood). Christianity largely replaced indigenous religion, though often in an expression shaped by previous indigenous religion (a la Maori Christian movements), it didn't result in a transplanted version of European Christianity. Social structures within the SPW also encouraged adoption of Christianity through tribal leaders converting and leading their people to convert. Pre-contact prophecies also existed which spoke of a God who would come through a white visitor and that the people would worship that God.

The LMS (Methodist) was the most successful missionary endeavours. Rev John Williams was a significant figure within LMS.

The CMS (Anglican/CoE) was far less successful, except in the Solomon Islands, where LMS didn't reach initially. The Rt Rev George Selwyn (previous Bishop of NZ and Wellington) was a significant figure as he also became the first Bishop of the Solomon Islands.

Missionary movements in the SWP are linked to and inherently involved with the wider social changes and challenges of colonialism in the SWP. During the time of colonisation there was significant church reform happening in England and across Europe. This reform was focused on a belief in the importance on sharing the gospel, as new nations and peoples were discovered Christians were excited to preach the gospel to them and see them accept the Christian faith. These reformers were often involved with the social unrest and dissatisfaction that was the backdrop of colonialism in England; the desire to spread out and move away from England itself. As such at times the Christian church became a vessel of colonialism, and sought to “westernise” SWP cultures, other times missionaries sought to allow the church in the new colonies to form its own identity. This tension is evident in the difference between LMS and CMS in the SWP.

LMS focussed on training and deploying indigenous missionaries. These missionaries would first work in their local areas before moving beyond their tribes to their nations, and then moving to neighbouring islands and countries. This meant that there were less cultural and linguistic barriers to evangelism. Prior to western contact a indigenous prophesy has also been shared about a god who would arrive in Tahiti who would replace their tribal Gods. Familiarity, this prophecy and the patriarchal social structure assisted with the swift conversion to Christianity.

CMS was a strong missionary movement in NZ, much more so than LMS, however the success that was found in NZ was not replicated in most of the SWP except for in the Solomon Islands and in Vanuatu. CMS was much more reluctant to utilise indigenous missionaries than LMS. This meant that there were significant delays in CMS’s ability to conduct evangelism (ironically in NZ indigenous missionary activity occurred and outpaced European missionary endeavours). This relationship between European and indigenous missionaries is an example of other tensions that existed at the time between Europeans and local populations. These tensions can still be evident in churches today across the SWP.

LMS’ endeavours began in Tahiti, then moved West to the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Fiji. LMS missionaries then continued with Rev Williams to Vanuatu, however they did not receive a hospitable welcome and Rev Williams was killed and eaten by a tribe he was trying to convert. At the same time CMS was moving north from NZ and East from Australia to Vanuatu and

the Solomon Islands. There were strong links to the Anglican Church in NZ (through Bishop Selwyn) and Australia (through church structure links) for a number of years. Presbyterian Missionaries moved into the missionary vacuum that was created when Rev Williams was killed and began working in Vanuatu.

Over time a new religion, Hindusim, moved into Fiji through the movement of Indian indentured workers from India to Fiji. Hinduism is now the second biggest religion in Fiji, but is primarily the religion of Indo-Fijians.

?Questions?

What about other Religions in the SWP?

Islam has a limited presence throughout the SWP. It is growing, yet this growth is due to immigration, not through conversion of the local population. In the Western area of our area of responsibility Islam is a more significant presence due to the proximity of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands to Islamic countries. Depending on the country there is some structured organisation of Islam.

Other religions of Hinduism, Sikh, Animism Baha'l and Judaism are present due to immigration. Hinduism is present in Fiji due to the migration of sugar cane workers in the late 1800s. Due to the cultural tensions between Fijians and Indo-Fijians and the Theological difficulty of converting to Hinduism, Hinduism is largely the belief of Indo-Fijians. Hinduism and other religions have a very limited presence.

Atheism and Agnosticism is a significant belief systems in NZ and western countries (try not to dwell on labelling them as belief systems as they don't have a uniform set of belief aside from commonly held beliefs about what there isn't). However, it is very uncommon to have atheists or agnostics in the SWP, those that are present are often westerners.

?What do you know about the separation of church and state?

In NZ the church and the state are separate, and there is no state sponsored religion. Meaning that the church does not expect to dictate the laws of the land and that the state supports free practice of religion. Across the SWP this is largely the case. However, due to the involvement of missionaries with the

formation of the nation states as we know them there are varying degrees of separation.

?Questions/Comments?

Break

## **OPERABILITY**

*Unpacking means of identifying dominant religions in AO and identifying areas of special consideration related to religions in AO*

Firstly it is important to be cognisant of the fact that any AO will have a dominant belief system. And that at times, unlike in New Zealand, this dominant belief system will be religion based. The key is to be able to quickly and accurately identify what the dominant belief system is and any potential activities that you may engage with that will cause conflict with that belief system.

There are four key questions to ask which can help you identify potential areas for conflict or offense, couple these questions with your own knowledge of the belief system (ie. if the locals claim a belief system) and SME guidance.

We will look at each question one at a time, unpacking what could be included in each questions and what some hypothetical examples are. (Depending on the size of the group, split into pairs and get the pairs to discuss one or two of the key questions and feed back to the group).

The four key questions are:

What is sacred?

What are the traditions?

What is considered "good"?

Who is important?

*Examples of areas that the questions might look at:*

*What is sacred*

*Sites/buildings/places*

*Texts*

*Items/relics*

*People*

*Who is central & important*

*Clergy/ministers/pastors*

*Other religious leaders*

*Other authority figures*

*What are the traditions*

*Patterns of worship*

*Calendar observances (Holidays, Holy days)*

*Weekly rhythms*

*Giving and financial arrangements*

*What is considered "good"*

*What is the criteria that is used to define good/bad*

*What is expected as punishment for those who are "bad"*

*What are the points of difference with your own culture and understandings*

It is time to address the obvious issue here, and that is that there can be a difference between what someone, or a group, profess to believe, how they live their lives and their worldview. People can often have conflicting beliefs and practices. This is as true for New Zealanders as it is around the world.

That someone's actions may contradict their beliefs, does not mean that we should disregard their belief system as it can still fundamentally shape how they see and interact with the world. It is not our place to try to "smooth out" their belief system so their belief system perfectly matches their practice or vice versa. We need to be cognisant of the dominant belief system of the locals where we are operating, regardless of how well they live it out.

The next question that needs to be considered is the degree of influence that that belief system has over daily life, local and national politics. In order to identify how influential a belief system is, and therefore what considerations you must make to ensure you do not cause offence, it is useful to place the

dominant belief system's influence on a spectrum of influence. Here we will return to the language of "religion"; however, please remember that religion refers to a belief system, not just a recognised formal "religion".

?If you were making your own spectrum, what would the extremes be and what labels would you place in the middle?

A useful spectrum of influence goes from a Theocracy to free exercise of religion. Degrees between the two extremes are: One state religion, state sponsored religion, and limited exercise of religion. Any culture, society, nation, will fit somewhere along this spectrum when considering dominant belief systems.

?What do each of the degrees mean?

Theocracy

State led by clergy

Laws based and justified using theological texts and frameworks

One religion state

Political leadership outlaw other religions

Expectation of adherence to a particular religion

Laws based on religious beliefs

State sponsored religion

State preference of one religion/denomination

Limited respect/allowance of other religion

Legality of exercise of alternative religions may be in question

Limited exercise of religion

No state sponsoring of one religion

Significant social expectation of conformity to one religion,

Incl. potential for hostility towards proselytizing and conversion to alternate religions

State may claim free exercise of religion

No repercussion for exercise of religions within secular laws

Free exercise of religion

Varying degrees of social expectation of conformity/adherence to one religion

State claims free exercise of religion

No repercussion for exercise of religions within secular laws

Questions/Comments

Break

**AWARENESS**

Returning to our spectrum of influence. Where would you place Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and New Zealand?

Free exercise of religion

Fiji

Solomon Islands

Limited exercise of religion

Vanuatu

Tonga

State religion

Samoa

One religion

Theocracy

We are now going to turn our attention to the religious makeup of each of the countries that we are considering here. Primarily to get a greater appreciation for how ubiquitous religion is in the SWP, that almost everyone claims to be part of a religion. This can then help you to delve into which religions you may



want to learn more about or what you might be going to if deploying to the SWP.

Samoa – CIA Fact book

Christian

Congregationalist 31.8%

Roman Catholic 19.4%

Mormon 15.2%

Methodist 13.7%

Assembly of God 8%

Seventh-Day Adventist 3.9%

Worship centre 1.7%

Other Christian 5.5%

Other .7%

Baha'I (house of worship in Samoa)

Hindu

Buddhist

Jewish

None .1%

Unspecified .1%

Tonga – Tonga department of Statistics 2011

Christian 98.2%

Free Wesleyan 35.5%

Roman Catholic 14.9%

Latter Day Saints 18%

Free church of Tonga 11.5%

Church of Tonga.07%  
Tokalkolo.02%  
Anglican.01%  
Seventh-day Adventist.2%  
Assembly of God.2%  
Constitutional church of Tonga.01%  
Gospel Church.0%  
Jehovah's witnesses.0%  
Other 1034 .01%

Baha'I.01%

Hindu.0%

Buddhism.0%

Islam.0%

Other.01%

None.0%

Refused to answer .0%

Fiji – Fiji statistics department 2011

Christian 58%

Methodist - 36.2%

Roman Catholic – 8.9%

Assemblies of God 4%

Seventh-day Adventist 2.9%

Anglican .8%

CMF .7%

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Latter Day Saints .4%  
 Apostolic .3%  
 Gospel .2%  
 Baptist .2%  
 Salvation army .2%  
 Presbyterian .0%  
 Other 2.3%  
 Hindu 33.7%  
     Sanatani – 25%  
     Arya Samaj – 1.2%  
     Kabir Panthi .0%  
     Sai Baba .0%  
     Other 7.4%  
 Muslim 7%  
     Sunni – 4.2%  
     Ahmadiyya .3%  
     Other 2.6%  
 Sikh .4%  
 Baha'I .1%  
 Confucianism 0.0%  
 Other Religions .1%  
 No Religion .7%

Vanuatu

Christian 83%

Presbyterian 32%  
Roman Catholic 13%  
Anglican 13%  
Seventh Day Adventist 11%  
Church of Christ 3.8%  
Other 10.2%

Animism 7%  
Buddhism 4%  
Baha'i 3%  
Others 3%

Solomon Islands

Christian 92%  
Anglican 35%  
Roman Catholic 19%  
South Seas Evangelical 17%  
United church in PNG and Solomon Islands  
Seventh Day Adventist church

Animism 5%  
Other 3%

Muslim  
Baha'i  
Jehova's witnesses  
Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter Day Saints  
Unification Church

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## Indigenous churches

## NZ – 2013 Census

Christian	47.65%
Roman Catholic	12.61%
Anglican	11.79%
Presbyterian, Congregational and Reformed	8.47%
Christian (not defined)	5.54
Methodist	2.64%
Pentecostal	1.9%
Baptist	1.39%
Latter-day Saints	1.04%
No Religion	41.92%
Objection to answering	4.44%
Maori Christian	1.36%
Ratana	1.03%
Hindu	2.1%
Buddhist	1.5%
Muslim	1.18%

## 4 Key questions exercise

Looking at the six main religions found in the SWP, apply the four key questions in pairs or as a group to identify what considerations you may need to make, or further questions to ask, when working or planning work.

## Christianity

## Sacred

Churches – Places of worship and public gathering. Often situated in each rural village and a number of churches will be present in built up areas. Used for regular worship activities and other ceremonies.

Texts – Bible. Various groupings of books within the bible are held as authoritative.

Teachings – Teaching of ministers are held as important and informative. Significant weighting can be given to these for certain denominations.

Holy sites – certain areas will identify sites of significant historical and spiritual importance.

#### People

Within a local church group there is an individual or group who are appointed to leadership positions.

These leaders often hold responsibility for different areas of communal life, E.G.. Teaching, care for others, services, activities in the community.

Different titles for leadership largely divided by denomination, roles of leaders differ according to denomination

Historical person of Jesus Christ, also other prophets or saints for different denominations/sects.

#### Traditions

Communal gathering for worship at a designated place of worship (church). On Saturday or Sunday (the norm is for Saturday evening or Sunday, however some denominations gather on Saturdays or Fridays).

Main holiday commemorations

Easter

Christmas

Other holidays, significant days (denominational and regional differences)

Ash Wednesday

Lent (40 days before Easter)

Passover

Pentecost

Saints days

#### Ethics

Based on particular interpretation of bible and church teaching.

Large variations between denominations and regional differences.

#### Hinduism

##### Summary of religion

Hindusim is a religion born from Indian culture. It does not have a clear doctrine or theology and there is a vast range of beliefs within Hindusim. Because of the vast range of beliefs it is not possible to classify Hinduism as monotheistic, pantheistic, polytheistic, atheistic or any other religious classification.

A range of beliefs exist within the umbrella of Hinduism. Attempts to characterise uniformity in Hinduism have been rooted in European attempts to categorise it as a religion or at attempted conversion to Christianity by English missionaries.

Hindusim came to Fiji through indentured labour brought in from India during English rule.

Different classifications of schools exist around deities worshipped, vedas observed etc. Modern moves to create a more unified Hindu religion (revivalist movement)

##### Sacred

Texts - no clear grouping or canon of scripture, two main groupings of sacred text are

Vedas (What is heard), significant variations exist between different branches of Hinduism over what Vedas are authoritative.

Smritis (Remembered), a range of other texts, stories, poems and mythology

Animals – As an extension of Hindu beliefs about not harming animals, cows are a particularly revered animal, but are not worshipped.

Gods or Avatars of particular Gods – significant variations of which God is worshipped, however they are often seen as different versions or expressions of Brahman (Unknowable and undefinable supreme divine entity). Icons or statues of these Gods are considered sacred also.

Temples – House of Gods.

#### People

No organised hierarchy across Hinduism

High levels of respect and support offered to Brahmins (Vedic teachers & priests) & those that have chosen a monastic life.

Caste system which has been a significant part of Hinduism places all peoples into a certain class/role which are seen as more or less important

Priest & Vedic teachers

Warriors & Kings

Farmers and Merchants

Servants and Labourers

#### Traditions

A wide variety of traditions exist within Hinduism

Life stage rituals are significant

Personal worship in home

Pilgrimage, not mandatory but often undertaken to sacred sites.

#### Ethics

Pursuit of Moksha (oneness with God) thereby ending individual cycle of rebirth is seen as the goal of ethical life.



Dharma (ethical living) is a central belief, Various definitions of what this entails are held by different groupings of Hindus.

## Islam

### Summary

The world's second largest religion

Abrahamic faith, through the Prophet Mohammed. Born in the middle east, dominant religion in the middle east and parts of Africa, and Southern Asia.

Quickly growing religion.

Two significant schools – Sunni (largest 85-90%) and Shia (10 %). Other smaller regional schools exist too.

### Sacred

Qu'ran – is the central Holy Text. Certain behaviour is expected when handling or transporting the Qu'ran.

Haddith (stories of Mohammad's life) considered second in importance as a sacred text. Significant variations between sects exist around what Haddith are authoritative.

Islamic Jurisprudence – Learned judgements of laws regarding how to live and interact that aren't covered in Qu'ran or Haddith

Mosques – Houses of worship

Pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca once in a lifetime

Eid prayers on Friday

### People

Scholars of the Qu'ran

Religious leaders – Imams (not ordained but rise up in a mosque)

Muslim lawyers

### Traditions

Salat – 5x daily prayers

Eid – Friday evening prayers

Shahadah – profession of faith

Alms giving – portion of wealth given to the local mosque

Pilgrimage

Ethics

Defined by Qu’ran, Haddith, and Jurisprudence

Animism

Summary

Anthropological term for indigenous spirituality/religion

Broad category of religious observance, but no conformity across villages/areas/islands/countries

There may be a mix of animism and other religions (e.g. Christianity)

Sacred

Individual or household Gods

May have local spiritual figures/identities

Local shrines/holy places

People

Holy people/witch doctors etc. varied depending on local tradition/custom

Traditions

Varied

Ethics

Varied, can be significantly different from western traditions/customs & ethics

Buddhism

Summary

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Fourth largest world religion

Origins in Northern India, widespread adherence throughout southern Asia

Based on the teaching of Buddha.

Branches out from Hinduism

Significant emphasis on Karma, and attaining merit to ensure better state of rebirth.

Nirvana, freedom from the state of eternal rebirth, is a central idea however what exactly Nirvana constitutes is not agreed upon.

#### Sacred

Texts – teachings of Buddha, various collections of authoritative texts are held by different sub-schools of thought, no one collection is considered authoritative. The first known text was written down 400 years after Buddha.

Temples/Monasteries

Shrines

Places of Pilgrimage from Buddha's life.

#### People

Monks- those who have dedicated their lives to live as ascetics to achieve Nirvana

#### Traditions

Meditation, casting aside of physical cravings and desires.

#### Ethics

Variations according to the school/sub-school of Buddhism and their texts/traditions.

#### Baha'i

##### Summary

Monotheistic religion that emphasises the spiritual unity of all human kind.

3 core principles

Unity of God

Unity of Humanity

Unity of religion

Emerged from Shia branch of Islam, in late 1800s, now considered a stand alone religion.

Precursor to the emergence of Baha’I was the Bab (the gate) who declared himself the twelfth Imam of Shia Islam, and introduced the expectation of a coming holy person who would be “He whom God shall make manifest”

Each major world religion is seen as a precursor to Baha’I faith, iterations of what would come from Baha’u’llah

#### Sacred

Text – Writings of Baha’u’llah the founder of Baha’I (Most Holy Book, Book of Certitude, Gems of Divine Mysteries, Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys)

Other canonical texts are the writings and authenticated talks of Abdul-Baha, writings of Shoghi Effendi, and writings, judgements and laws of the Universal House of Justice.

Temple- Baha’I house of worship in Samoa. Often meet in Baha’I centres or homes.

#### People

Elected or appointed officials at local, regional, national and international levels who are responsible for controlling the affairs of Baha’I religion, propagating teachings and protecting the community

Key figures are the members of the universal house of justice.

#### Traditions

##### Holy Days

April 21, 29 May 2 – Baha’u’llah’s public declaration of his mission

May 23 – Bab’s declaration of his mission

May 29 – Passing of Baha’u’llah

July 9 – Martyrdom of the bab

October 20 – Birth of Bab

November 12 – Birth of Baha'u'llah

Fast 19 Days a year

Daily prayer

Each location/group will have their own traditions and customs

#### Ethics

Based on their scriptures and social principles

Unity of God

Unity of Religion

Unity of humanity

Unity in diversity

Equality between men and women

Elimination of all forms of prejudice

World peace and a New World order

Harmony of Religion and science

Independent investigation of truth

Principle of Ever-Advancing civilization

Universal compulsory education

Universal auxiliary language

Obedience to government and non-involvement in partisan politics unless submission to law amounts to a denial of Faith.

Elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty

Spiritual solutions to economic problems.

*If time or if required choose particular denominations eg. Methodist, Sanatani Hindu to explore further differences in belief systems.*

*Feel free to make any other closing comments to wrap up this session.*

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