

# **THE 2016 SCHISM WITHIN THE KIRIBATI PROTESTANT CHURCH: A LESSON FOR THE FUTURE**

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**Bachelor of Divinity with Honours**

By

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## CONSENT FORM

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis attempts to document a history of the Schism of the Kiribati Protestant Church in 2016. The main reason for this split was when the Church decided to change its name. However as this thesis argues, the name change was only one reason. The reality was, there were other deeply rooted factors such as financial mismanagement and the continual decline in memberships that were already challenging the Church and finally resulted in the Schism.

## DECLARATION

I, *Aratibin Mikaere*,

hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Malua Theological College or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in this thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Malua Theological College or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to all members of the Kiribati Uniting Church and the New Kiribati Protestant Church and their future Generations.

I also dedicate this work to my beloved late father Mikaere Kauongo; my late father in law Atireti Taikone; and to my late brother in law Bill Atireti who died during the time of this work.

I also dedicate this work to my lovely wife Pastor Ruby Atireti, our gifted daughter Arimeta Aratibin, and to all our future generations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, I would like to thank God for His calling and in guiding me in this challenging journey. I would not have been able to fulfill this difficult task without His guidance and blessing. I praise and acknowledge you God for this work.

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Last but not the least, I acknowledge and give thanks to those who I forgot to mention in this acknowledgement for their participation and assistance in doing this research paper. Thank you so much and may God guide and bless you.

Kam bati n Rabwa [Thanks a lot]



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ABCFM</b>	<b>American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions</b>
<b>CWM</b>	<b>Council for World Mission</b>
<b>GEIPC</b>	<b>Gilbert and Ellice Island Protestant Church</b>
<b>GIPC</b>	<b>Gilbert Islands Protestant Church</b>
<b>ICC</b>	<b>Island Council of Churches</b>
<b>KIHS</b>	<b>Kiribati Inter Islands Shipping Services</b>
<b>KKMM</b>	<b>Kauntira ni Kakoroi Mwiin Mooti</b>
<b>KPC</b>	<b>Kiribati Protestant Church</b>
<b>KPF</b>	<b>Kiribati Provident Fund</b>
<b>KUC</b>	<b>Kiribati Uniting Church</b>
<b>LMS</b>	<b>London Missionary Society</b>
<b>MSPF</b>	<b>Mission Support Program Fund</b>
<b>PTC</b>	<b>Pacific Theological College</b>
<b>USP</b>	<b>University of South Pacific</b>

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## INTRODUCTION

The Schism of the Kiribati Protestant Church or KPC took place during its biannual General Assembly in 2016. It began as a result of a vote for the proposal of the name change for the Church. This proposal was passed in the General Assembly of 2014. The new name was the 'Kiribati Uniting Church' or KUC. This name change however caused a lot of criticisms. And during the General Assembly in 2016, after the failure of a motion to restore the original name, the Church finally split.

I was there and I witnessed the course of events during the General Assembly. The delegates from the island of Tamana were strong opponents to the new name. Despite this opposition, the vote went ahead with 75 percent of the delegates agreeing with the new name, while 25 percent voted against it.<sup>1</sup> After the vote, about half of those who witnessed the change began to interrupt the proceedings of the General Assembly in an impolite manner. It was a difficult moment for the Church, but the General Assembly could not make an immediate action to solve this problem. A few hours later, those who did not agree with the amendment decided to select their own leaders, and establish their own rival Church which they named after the previous name the 'Kiribati Protestant Church' or KPC. This marked the beginning of the Schism within our Church.

The Schism therefore was sparked by the vote for the name restoration during the General Assembly in 2016. However, the disagreement over the new name was just the tip of the iceberg as there were other issues brewing within the Church that also contributed. This research therefore attempts to dig deeper into these issues in order to have a clearer

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<sup>1</sup> KUC, *Minutes of the 2016 General Assembly* (Antebuka: Levett Print, 2016), 35.

understanding of the current division within our Church. The Schism of our Church is a contemporary issue that has caused a lot of tensions among our people today. For me it is important that this event is documented and analyzed in order to find lessons for the Church and for its future generations.

There have already been studies on the Schism. Firstly by Rev. Waiana Tebakaro Tatiree<sup>2</sup> who wrote a thesis on the same issue for her Master degree at the Pacific Theological College in Suva. Tatiree's thesis is about the theological reasons for the name change. Her main argument is that the Schism was the result of the different theological interpretations of the old and new names. Along with Tatiree's thesis, there was another mini-thesis written by Miss Abea Ioona. Ioona's<sup>3</sup> mini-thesis is about the name change in relation to the Church's constitution. She analyses whether the name change was constitutional or not. My thesis however focuses more on the practical reasons behind the Schism as well as the consequences of the Schism.

Therefore, the main objective of this thesis is to analyze the split of the KPC in 2016 which resulted in the formation of two Churches; the Kiribati Uniting Church (KUC) and the Kiribati Protestant Church or the New KPC.<sup>4</sup> It attempts to understand the reasons behind this Schism and the consequences of these events on the two Churches and their adherents in Kiribati.

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<sup>2</sup> Waiana. Tatiree, "Tensions in the KUC Maneaba: A Historical Analysis of the Issues Surrounding the Name - Change from Kiribati Protestant Church to Kiribati Uniting Church and Its Implications for Ecumenical Cooperation in Kiribati Society " Master, Pacific Theological College, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Abea Ioona, "From the Kiribati Protestant to the Kiribati Uniting Church." Mini Thesis, Tangintebu Theological College, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> From now on I will use the name 'New KPC' to differentiate the new breakaway Church from the original KPC.

The key research questions are;

1. What are the causes for the Schism within the Kiribati Protestant Church?
2. What are the consequences of this split?
3. How can the Church be reconciled as one body again? Is this possible?
4. What are the important lessons we can draw from this Schism?

## **Methodology**

This thesis uses both textual as well as oral sources. Firstly, it looks at minutes of relevant Church meetings as well as records and resolutions of the relevant General Assemblies. These are held at the main offices of the KUC and the New KPC. Along with these primary sources are the secondary written sources about the history of the KPC in Kiribati. Secondly, I have also conducted interviews with the leaders of both the New KPC and KUC as well as various members from both factions. These interviews were carried out from December 2018 to January 2019. I have also used informal ways of collecting data such as, emails and interviews on Facebook and Messenger.

During my research, I also encountered several challenges. My official request to conduct interviews and research at the headquarters of the New KPC was denied. I believe that my position as a minister of the KUC was the main reason for this. I opted to make private arrangements with individual New KPC officials, but unfortunately, they were not available due to the same reason. Finally, I was able to carry out interviews with those related to me from the New KPC side. This enabled me to gain some perspectives from the New KPC and the reasons for their breakaway. Secondly, the collection of data and minutes and reports of relevant committee meetings, became another problem in this research. At the KUC headquarters I discovered that some of the subcommittees in the Church did not

have official records and minutes. For example, the subcommittees that were involved in changing the name of the Church. This is a reflection of poor record keeping which makes it difficult to understand what was discussed in those meetings concerning the name change. Despite these challenges, through interviews conducted, I was able to gather relevant information from both sides. These interviews have provided interesting and new insights into the reasons behind the Schism.

### **Outline of Chapters**

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 gives a brief historical background of Christianity in Kiribati and the KPC. It traces the history of the KPC Church since its inception and discusses changes within the Church particularly concerning its name and identity. Chapter two describes the 2012 General Assembly which dealt with two important issues at the time; the Church's financial mismanagement and the decline of Church members. These two issues highlight the factors that influenced the Schism. Chapter three discusses the results of the 2014 General Assembly in relation to the proposed solutions to deal with the financial issues and the decline in membership as discussed in 2012. It looks at the proposed solutions which included the motion for a change in the Church's name. Chapter four discusses the Schism during the General Assembly in 2016. It also analyzes the crucial factors that intensified tensions leading up to the General Assembly. Chapter 5 then looks at the fallout and impacts of the Schism on the Churches as well as the Kiribati people. It also looks at the reconciliation movement and the attempts made by leaders of the two factions to heal this division. The thesis concludes with the main findings of this research as well as important lessons we can learn from the Schism for the future of the Churches in Kiribati.

## **Chapter One: Historical background of the Kiribati Protestant Church**

The introduction of Christianity to the Kiribati islands began with the arrival of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions or ABCFM, on the island of Abaiang on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1857.<sup>5</sup> The ABCFM was founded in 1810 by the Massachusetts Congregational General Association in the United States of America.<sup>6</sup> The main objective of the ABCFM was to spread Christianity to every corner of the world.<sup>7</sup> In 1820, Rev. Hiram Bingham pioneered the ABCFM mission in the Pacific beginning in Hawaii. Later in 1857<sup>8</sup> his son Rev. Dr. Hiram Bingham II along with one Hawai'ian missionary J.W. Kanoa started the mission in Kiribati beginning in the northern islands such as Makin, Butaritari, and Marakei; and later Tarawa, Maiana, Kuria, Aranuka, Abemama, Nonouti, Tabiteuea, and Banaba.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kunei Etekiera, "Te Aro: The New Religion," in *Kiribati: Aspects of History* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1979), 38.

<sup>6</sup> William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and foreign Mission*, (USA: University of Chicago Press), 1993, 45

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>8</sup> John Garrett, *To Live among the Stars. Christianity Origin in Oceania*, (Suva Fiji: Oceania Printer Ltd, 1982), 148-49.

<sup>9</sup> John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea, Christianity in Oceania to World War II* (Suva. Fiji: Oceania Printer Ltd, 1992), 264-65.





Figure 1: Map of Kiribati in the Pacific.<sup>10</sup>

In the southern islands however evangelization was carried out by the London Missionary Society or LMS<sup>11</sup>. The LMS began its mission on the Kiribati islands on the island of Beru in October 1870.<sup>12</sup> This mission moved to Onotoa and extended southward to Arorae, Tamana, and Nikunau. Rev. Stephen Whitmee became the first leader in this mission, and was accompanied by Samoan teachers.<sup>13</sup> In 1916, the ABCFM left and the LMS took over the whole mission in Kiribati.<sup>14</sup>

The LMS and ABCFM faced many challenges both from the natives and later with the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church. John Garret explained that one of the challenges that the ABCFM and LMS faced in Kiribati at the time was the strong observance of local

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.climate.gov.ki/about-kiribati/>

<sup>11</sup> Latu Latai, "Covenant Keepers: A History of Samoan (LMS) Missionary Wives in the Western Pacific from 1839 to 1979", PhD Thesis, ANU, 2016, 156-57,159. Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea, Christianity in Oceania to World War II*.

<sup>12</sup> Toantemam Ueanteiti, *A re-reading of London Missionary Society Mission in Southern Kiribati 1870-1871*, (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2017), 6,8,9,11

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea*, 265.

indigenous deities.<sup>15</sup> Later when the Roman Catholics arrived, they taught the Kiribati people that the ABCFM and LMS were considered heretic Churches in the western world.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless the mission of Christianizing the Kiribati islanders was successful. The LMS and ABCFM are credited for successfully establishing the first theological institution, high schools, and creating the Kiribati written language.<sup>17</sup> According to Garrett, the LMS were successful in its mission because of the Samoan missionaries' effective involvement in the community.<sup>18</sup> They evangelized the local people from their own Samoan traditional way of leadership.<sup>19</sup> For instance, Mrs Sera, the wife of Samoan Missionary Iupeli who worked in Kiribati at the time, taught her fellow Kiribati women that men had high status in the society. So women should give respect to them.<sup>20</sup> The successful mission of the LMS particularly the Samoans thus gave a stronghold of Protestantism in southern Kiribati. On the other hand, the ABCFM Hawai'ian Missionaries were passive in their mission activities because they were not fully involved with the community. This in the end resulted in the prosperous mission of the Roman Catholics<sup>21</sup> in the northern part of Kiribati. The Roman Catholic Church become stronger because it was influenced by King Binoka Bauro from Abemama Island. Garrett mentioned that the involvement of King Binoka in the Roman Catholic Church led to the conversion of the whole kingdom of Abemama to Catholicism.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 269

<sup>17</sup> Garret, *To Live among the Stars*, 149

<sup>18</sup> Latu Latai, *Covenant Keepers: A History of Samoan (LMS) Missionary Wives in the Western Pacific from 1839 to 1979*, 172-173

<sup>19</sup> Garret, *To live among the stars*, 153.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>21</sup> John Garret, *Where Nets Were Cast. Christianity in Oceania since World War II* (Geneva: WCC, 1997), 421.

<sup>22</sup> Garret, *To live among the stars*, 153

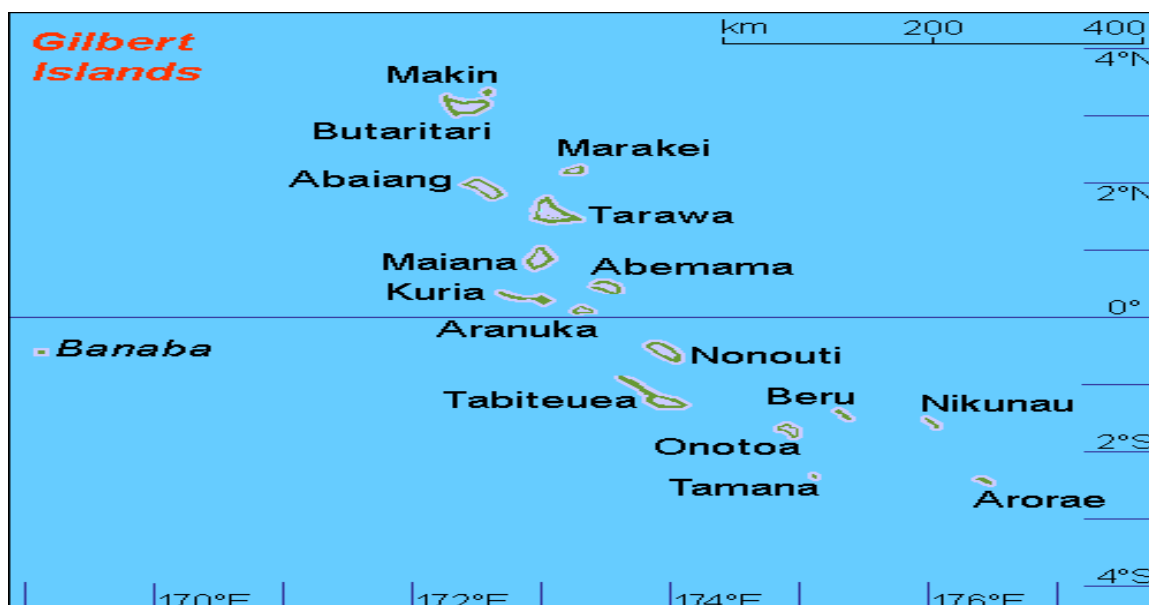


Figure 2. Map of Kiribati<sup>23</sup>

Despite these early challenges to Protestant missions, both missions were successful in the establishment of the independent local Church which became known as the Gilbert Islands Protestant Church or GIPC in 1968. The official beginning of the GIPC was marked by its first General Assembly held at Eita village in Tarawa from the 25<sup>th</sup> February to 12<sup>th</sup> March 1968<sup>24</sup>. The number of members at that time was 22, 929 out of the total population of Kiribati of 47, 735.<sup>25</sup> This shows the dominance of the GIPC as the biggest Church in Kiribati at the time. Since then however, the Church has changed its name due to changing circumstances in the political contexts of Kiribati.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.enemyinmirror.com/japanese-forces-take-gilbert-islands-dec-8-1941/>

<sup>24</sup> GIPC, *The minutes for the 1968 General Assembly*, (Antebuka: Levitt Print, 1968), 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

## Changing Identity of the Kiribati Protestant Church

The name and identity of the KPC has changed many times since the arrival of Christianity in 1857. As a mission Church it was named ABCFM until its official withdrawal in 1916<sup>26</sup>. The Kiribati people also called it as *Te baba n Amerika* or American Board. This name has been used from Makin to Tabiteuea. But as mentioned, the ABCFM did not evangelize the southern five islands of Kiribati, thus the usage of *Te baba n Amerika* as the name of the Church was not recognized at Onotoa, Beru, Nikunau, Tamana, and Arorae where the Church was known as the LMS Mission Church.

The next change in the name of the Church was in 1968. As mentioned, this was when it became known as Gilbert Islands Protestant Church or GIPC. It was used to mark the independence of the Church from the LMS.<sup>27</sup>

In 1970<sup>28</sup> the Church again decided to change its name to Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protestant Church or GEIPC. The Ellice or Tuvalu<sup>29</sup> Islands were included because of their contribution in the running cost of the Church at the time.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, they were also part of the same colony.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea*, 265.

<sup>27</sup> GIPC, *The minutes for the 1968 General Assembly*, 1

<sup>28</sup> Abea. Iona, *From Kiribati Protestant Church to Kiribati Uniting Church*, (Mini Thesis, Tangintebu Theological College, 2016), 12

<sup>29</sup> Tuvalu is the current name for the Ellice islands,

<sup>30</sup> Abea. Iona, *From Kiribati Protestant Church to Kiribati Uniting Church*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Howard Van Trease, *"From Colony to Independence."* Chap. One: In Atoll Politics Republic of Kiribati, edited by Howard Van Trease, (Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1993), 5.

After six years in 1976 the name was changed again. The change went back to the previous name GIPC. This was because the Tuvaluans or Ellice islanders left the colony and became an independent state in 1978<sup>32</sup>.

However, after three years, the name was again changed to Kiribati Protestant Church or KPC to acknowledge the political change in Kiribati at the time. On the 12<sup>th</sup> July 1979 Kiribati gained independence from the British Empire and became an independent state<sup>33</sup>. At the same time, the brand new government along with the British Empire officially announced that 'Kiribati' became the name of the new state. Because of that new independent name of the state, the Church also changed its name to KPC.<sup>34</sup> Amazingly, the name change was not voted by the General Assembly, in fact, there were no objections to the new name.

The name KPC has been used since 1979 until it was amended in 2014 during the General Assembly held at Arorae island. The name Kiribati Uniting Church or KUC became the new name of the Church. Since 2014, the name KUC has been used. However, during the 2016 General Assembly, the KUC split in two.<sup>35</sup> This contemporary issue became an unresolved problem in the history of the Church. Ironically however, the new breakaway Church took on the original name and since the Schism has been known as Kiribati Protestant Church or the New KPC<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Barry Macdonald, "Tuvalu: The 1981 General Election," *Taylor and Francis Online: Political Science* 35, no. 1: Election in the Pacific (1983): 2.

<sup>33</sup> Howard Van Treas, *From Colony to Independence*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Atea. Ioona, *From the Kiribati Protestant to the Kiribati Uniting Church* (Mini Thesis, Tangintebu Theological College, 2016), 12.

<sup>35</sup> KUC, *Minutes of the 2016 General Assembly*, 27-34.

<sup>36</sup> Here I have added 'New' to differentiate it from the original KPC Church.

In summary the history of the Church in Kiribati has shown that the changing of the Church's name is not something new. Since the introduction of Christianity, the Church in Kiribati was known by the missions that brought the Gospel, namely the ABCFM and the LMS. When the ABCFM left in 1916, the LMS continued until 1968 when the Kiribati Church became independent hence the change in name to GIPC. Later the Church's name changed to incorporate the Tuvaluans and later to acknowledge the independence of Kiribati from British colonial power. All of these name changes however caused no problems or conflicts within the Church. However, in 2014, the name change to KUC finally led to the split of the Church in 2016. The next chapter will analyze the 2012 General Assembly. This assembly dealt with two important issues at the time; the Church's financial issue and the decline of Church members. As a result, this assembly led to the proposal of a name change.

## Chapter Two: The 2012 General Assembly

The General Assembly of 2012 took place on the island of Abaiang from 19<sup>th</sup> August to 2<sup>nd</sup> September. The assembly was the 23<sup>rd</sup> bi-annual conference of the KPC. The assembly involves 33 Island Church Councils or ICCs. These ICCs represent the different districts of the Church. From each ICC, 4 delegates are chosen to represent their districts in the General Assembly where the final decisions on any matters of the Church are discussed and finalized.

During the General Assembly of 2012, the assembly discussed two important challenges that the Church was facing at the time. Firstly, was the financial problems and secondly the decline in membership. These issues are interrelated as one of the reasons for people leaving the Church was the mismanagement of Church money.<sup>37</sup> These issues had long been happening in the Church. In 1992, according to Ieuti Teruro the KPC needed "...to look again at its mission—that is, whether it is being carried out or not, whether it has a ministry to care for its people or not. The KPC needs to implement its mission if it hopes to see growth in its membership"<sup>38</sup>. He mentioned this because there was already a decline in the Church's membership. (Refer to the graph below).

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<sup>37</sup> Teruro. Ieuti, "Kiribati Protestant Church and the New Religious Movement," in *Island Churches: Challenge and Change* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1992), 77-78.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 83.

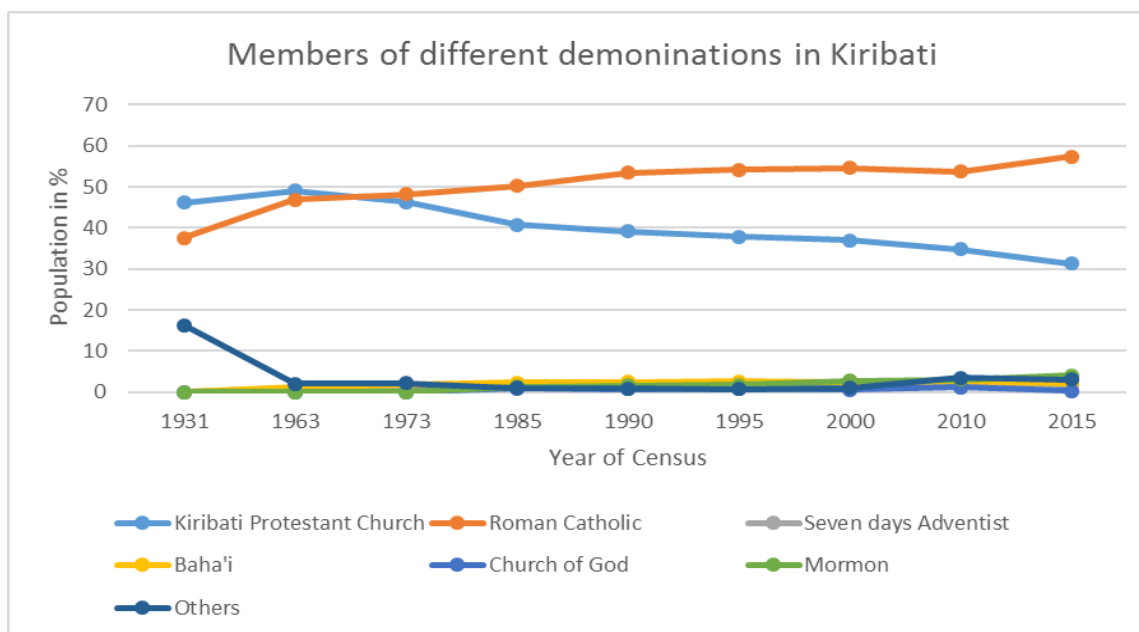


Figure 3. Members of different denominations in Kiribati in percentages.<sup>39</sup>

As we can see, from the table above, since 1963 the KPC had declined remarkably from 50% in 1963 to 30% in 2015. The decline in the KPC compare to the growth of the Roman Catholics reflect problems within the Church. During the General Assembly in 2012 the delegates raised the questions concerning how and why there is a drastic decline in Church members. This was one of the questions that was raised by Betio Island ICC.

Moderator and members of the General Assembly, why is there a drastic decline in Church's membership? Are there any reasons why? Moderator and members of the Assembly Betio ICC need a critical discussion on this matter.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Department of Statistic, *Kiribati Census: 2015*. Religion Population. (Bairiki Ministry of Finance and Economic Development: 2015), 45-47.

<sup>40</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly* (Antebuka: Levett Print, 2012),16.



This question thus sparked the discussion on this issue. Several factors were given concerning members leaving the Church. However the overall feeling was that this was due to the poor financial state of the Church's finance.

### **Financial issues**

At the 2012 General Assembly, the financial issues dominated discussions with more than half of the motions and discussions related to the financial situation of the Church. Some of the major financial discussions concerned the Church's debts and outstanding payments to other organizations. For instance, the KPC's outstanding payment to the Kiribati Provident Fund or KPF<sup>41</sup>. The government of Kiribati has a national policy for every employer to provide retirement for its employees at the end of their careers. The KPC failed to pay this fund to its employees resulting in more than 250,000 Australian dollars in unpaid funds.<sup>42</sup> Many delegates at the 2012 General Assembly wondered why the Church could not pay the KPF on time. In response, the Church officials explained that the unpaid KPF fund was caused by the Church's shipping company named the Kiribati Inter Island Shipping Services or KIISS<sup>43</sup>. This company had been in operation since the beginning of 1999. However, the company struggled to be profitable and the Church was losing money because it had to maintain its services. In fact, it became another burden for the KPC since it had to increase its budget every two years to cater for its rising costs. This burden was seen by the 3% increment of the Church budget in every biannual General Assembly from 2008 to 2012.<sup>44</sup> Delegates of the General Assembly at this time were really

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 58.

disappointed with the KIISS financial problem. However, the assembly continued to support the payment of the outstanding costs. Even though, some in the Assembly asked for the closure of the KIISS, the shipping company continued its operations. Mrs. Teakoiti Teutaake<sup>45</sup> one of my interviewees from the New KPC said, “This was one of the embarrassments that caused KPC members to move out from the Church.”<sup>46</sup> She said that she herself was really frustrated and embarrassed when she heard of this outstanding or overdue KPF payment. She could not believe that the Church had owed the KPF more than a quarter of a million Australian dollars.<sup>47</sup>

The KIISS and KPF were not the only causes of financial debts. The KPC also had debts to other organizations such as the University of the South Pacific or USP and the Pacific Theological College or PTC. The debts included outstanding school fees to both institutions for KPC scholars who had been educated there.<sup>48</sup> The total amount of debt owed to the USP was more than \$40,000.00 AUD.<sup>49</sup> The KPC Secretary for Finance at the time Mr. Teemaia Mackenzie mentioned that the main office had already made a partial payment and that the debts were to be paid in full by the end of 2015.<sup>50</sup> The General Secretary of the KPC at the time Rev. Mareweia Riiteti expressed the need to restore KPC membership at PTC in order for local pastors to carry out further studies at PTC.<sup>51</sup>

During the General Assembly other Church projects were also queried including the Scrap Metal Development Project which began in 2007. The Scrap Metal Development Project

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<sup>45</sup> Mrs Teakoiti Teutaake had been a member of the KPC General Assembly since 1990 to 1998.

<sup>46</sup> Personal interview with Teakoiti Teutaake, Betio, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2019

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly*, 11.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 11; Teemaia. Mackenzie, KPC Financial Reports, (Antebuka: Levitt Print, 2012), 10

<sup>51</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly*, 11.

showed the mismanagement of the Church finance. This Scrap Metal Development Program was part of a new source of income for the Church.<sup>52</sup> The General Assembly asked the Development Secretary about the exact amount that the Church had earned from this project. Unfortunately, the Development Secretary at the time Mr. Nataara Biribo could not answer the question. He only said that there was no official handing over of the Development Department from the former Development Secretary Rev. Tekabei Kaoma because he died and he was chosen to be a successor.<sup>53</sup> Many expressed frustrations over the lack of information. One of those came from the island of Tamana. A Tamana ICC representative told the General Assembly that every project and development program in the Church have been failures. The Tamana representative also mentioned that the Church projects should be called, “Ghost Projects”.<sup>54</sup> This issue shows the poor management of the Church’s finance which in turn put a huge and unexpected load on the Church members—which have resulted in members leaving the Church and in search of other Churches.<sup>55</sup>

During the assembly, concerns were also raised in relations to the misuse of financial aids from organizations and governments such as the Council for World Mission or CWM, Japan, Taiwan, and Kiribati local government.<sup>56</sup> A good example of the misuse of these funds was the Mission Support Program Fund 1 or MSPF1 from the CWM in the late 1990s to the early 2000s.<sup>57</sup> The main purpose of this fund was to strengthen and empower the mission work in every member Church of the CWM. According to the reports from the

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<sup>52</sup>KPC, *The Minutes for 2006 General Assembly* (Antebuka: Levett Print, 2006), 34.

<sup>53</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly*, 92.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>55</sup> Personal interview with Teakoiti Teutaake, Betio, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2019

<sup>56</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Temaia Mackenzie, "KPC Financial Report 2012," (KPC Headquarters Antebuka:2012), 5.

finance department of the Church, the MSPF1 funds had been misuse by the previous leaders of the Church in purchasing three Ships which are: MV Tetaobe, MV Baan te Oriwa, and Landing Craft Te Euangkerio.<sup>58</sup> The report also stated the misused of funds by the establishment of a Church company known as the Lagoon Motors Company. These two companies the Kiribati Inter Island Shipping Services or KIISS and Lagoon Motors were not in line with the main goals of the MSPF1. In fact, when the Church attempted to apply for the MSPF2<sup>59</sup> the CWM refused until the Church provided a transparent and systematic financial account of the previous MSPF1 fund. The 2012 General Assembly asked the Church leaders how the Church managed the financial funds provided from other organizations. In response, the Church General Secretary at that time Rev. Riiteti said that the fund was used properly, unlike the previous leadership body. He claimed that there were no misusages of those funds in their leadership role.<sup>60</sup>

The 2012 General Assembly thus shows the dire financial situation of the KPC. Many felt that these financial issues were the main reason for the decline of Church membership. Mr. Tion Autane, one of my interviewees from the KUC strongly believes that the decline in the Church was caused by the financial mismanagement of the Church. As he said “this financial problem provides the core reasons why the KPC members had left for other new religious movements especially Mormonism”.<sup>61</sup> The General Assembly of 2012 also concluded its financial discussion by saying that “the financial issues were the main push factor why people decide to join other Churches”.<sup>62</sup> It is all about the economic pressure.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>59</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly*, 85.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 85

<sup>61</sup> Personal interview with Tion Autane, Betio, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

<sup>62</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly*, 85.

That is why the Church members have to find their own ways to have a better life rather than living in an insufficient and expensive Church life.

The running of the Church depends on the amount given by the Church members. Every two years there is a budget and the amount from the budget is then equally distributed to the ICCs who had to pay for it. The higher the budget therefore the more the Church members had to pay.<sup>63</sup> This puts a lot of financial burden on the Church members. The burden is even more when the Church had to deal with financial debts.

### **Five Year Strategic Plan and the New Emblem**

As a result of these financial issues and the decline in membership, the General Assembly decided that there should be solutions to these issues. Hence two proposals were made from both the General Assembly and the Executive Committee. Firstly, was the proposal of the Five Year Plan, and secondly, was the proposal for a new Emblem for the Church.

On 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012—eight days after the commencement of the 2012 General Assembly, the KPC General Secretary submitted the proposal for the Five Year Plan. The main idea behind this proposal was in relation to strengthening and empowering the mission work within the KPC. It was also related to the Church's application plan to the CWM for the second stage of the MSPF. As mentioned, the MSPF2 could not be released unless the Church provided a clearer and systematic financial account. CWM also needed the Church's Mission Plan as part of the application. The General Assembly together with the Church Executive Committee, namely Komete ni Kakoroi Mwiin Mooti or KKMM believed that once they complete the Five Year Plan, the MSPF2 would had then be granted

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<sup>63</sup> Personal interview with Tion Autae, Betio, 15th January 2019.

to them.<sup>64</sup> Once the Church has the CWM fund, there would be no more financial problem that would cause the decline of the Church in the future. According to Rev. Maleta Tenten the current Secretary for Mission of the KUC, the MSPF2 was a big amount of money that could reduce the burden of donation from the Church members.<sup>65</sup> There would be no more financial crisis because the MSPF2 fund would provide the financial support to the Church mission programs, and the Church members would focused on reimbursing all the debts of the Church.

During the discussion Mr. Teemaia Mackenzie, the Church Finance Secretary at the time divided the members of the General Assembly into 10 groups. The main aim of this division was to seek more suggestions and comments to the proposed Five Year Strategic Plan. At the end of the discussion the General Assembly decided to put the motion forward to the next General Assembly to be held in 2014.<sup>66</sup>

On the same day delegates of the South Tarawa Island Church Council or ICC, along with representatives from Betio ICC proposed a change to the Church logo or Emblem (refer to diagram below).<sup>67</sup> The South Tarawa ICC and Betio ICC proposed to change the Emblem because of three reasons; the current Emblem is not applicable in today's context; the usage of the current Emblem sketched the poor leadership role of the Church;<sup>68</sup> and lastly the current Emblem symbolized the decline in the Church<sup>69</sup>. On the Emblem there is a staff

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<sup>64</sup> Rev. Mareweia Riiteti, *KUC Five Year Strategic Plan* (Antebuka: Levett Print, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> Personal interview with Maleta Tenten, Antebuka, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

<sup>66</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly*, 85.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>68</sup> As you can see in the Emblem, there is a staff located from the top of the sail and goes down to the bottom of the boat. The South Tarawa representative asserted that the staff made a hole at the bottom of the boat that would allowed the boat to sink.

<sup>69</sup> The improper sketch of the staff can also symbolize the decline of the Church.

located on the top of the cross and goes down through the bottom of the boat. (Refer to Figure 4 Below) Betio ICC interpreted that staff as the leadership of Church that made the hole in the Church, which simply portrays that the leadership had caused the decline in the Church. The delegate believed that “once the Emblem is changed then the financial issues will probably be healed along with the decline of the Church’s members.”<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, one of the Betio ICC delegates Mr. Tebakia Karuaki said that if the Church decided to change its Emblem, the name of the Church should be changed as well. However, Tebakia’s proposal on name change was not included in the discussion.<sup>71</sup>



Figure 4. KPC Emblem.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly*.

<sup>71</sup> Waiana Tatiree, "Tensions in the KUC Maneaba: A Historical Analysis of the Issues Surrounding the Name - Change from Kiribati Protestant Church to Kiribati Uniting Church and Its Implications for Ecumenical Cooperation in Kiribati Society " (Master, Pacific Theological College, 2016), 9.

<sup>72</sup> 1) Staff symbolizes the leadership of the Church. 2) Sail symbolizes the doctrinal belief in the Trinity. 3) Small coconut tree symbolizes the KPC as a young Church. 4) Fish symbolizes the Love of God through Jesus Christ. 5) Cross symbolizes the KPC as a Christian Religion. 6) The Boat and its Name symbolizes the body of the Church and its name. 7) 4 stripes of the sea symbolize the 4 Synods of the KPC.

In fact, the proposal of the Church Five Year Plan and the proposal of the new Emblem were not finalized in the 2012 General Assembly. They all carried forward to the 2014 General Assembly as a task of the Executive Committee or the KKMM.<sup>73</sup>

In Summary, the 2012 General assembly shows the poor management and misusages of the Church's finance. Therefore, many believed that this had led to the decline in the Church's membership. The financial issues were strongly linked to the decline in membership of the Church. Interestingly the proposals for the solutions to these issues included a Five Year Plan and a new Emblem. As we will see these two proposals became the very factors that caused the Schism. In the next two chapters the discussion focuses on the Schism which was caused by the proposed solutions to the Church's Financial Crisis and the decline of membership in the Church.

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<sup>73</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly*, 99.



### **Chapter Three: The 2014 General Assembly**

The 2014 General Assembly was a memorable and historical assembly in every heart of the KPC members. The Assembly started on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2014 with the name Kiribati Protestant Church and concluded with the name Kiribati Uniting Church on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2014.<sup>74</sup> There are two parts to this chapter. The first part looks at the Five Year Strategic Plan along with the new Emblem of the Church. Secondly is the motion on the name change along with the vote on the new name. Note that these were carried out as the proposed solutions to the financial issues the Church was facing along with the decline in Church membership.

#### **Preparation: Five Year Strategic Plan and the New Emblem**

After the 2012 General Assembly, the Kauntira ni Kakoroi Mwiin Mooti or the KKMM started their preparation for the content of the Five Year Strategic Plan and the design for a new logo or Emblem for the Church. This preparation was the task of the KKMM which had been designated by the 2012 General Assembly and should be accomplished before the 2014 General Assembly. The preparation began with the collection of data by a community survey which was led by Rev. Tabutoa Ngauea<sup>75</sup>, an ordained minister of the KPC at the time.<sup>76</sup> The main goal of Rev. Tabutoa's survey was to collect suggestions for the Five Year Strategic Plan. This data was then given to the Special Task Team selected by the KKMM

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<sup>74</sup>KPC, *The minutes for 2012 General Assembly*, (Antebuka: Levitt Print), 99.

<sup>75</sup> KKMM, *The reports on the 2013 Special Task Team*, (Antebuka: Levitt Print), 2013, 1-3.

<sup>76</sup> He was chosen to work out this survey because he was posted as a Church Project Surveyor. The main role of this position is to do survey on any projects of the Church

on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2013<sup>77</sup>. The members of this Special Task Team consists of the General Secretary Rev. Mareweia Riiteti, Treasurer Mr. Taaneti Mamau (today's current President of Kiribati), the Chief Education Officer Mr. Meita Beiabure, and a Private Consultant Dr. Iete Roauatu a civil servant of the Kiribati Statistic Department. On the 13<sup>th</sup> August 2013, the Special Task Team completed their task for the Five Year Strategic Plan and the renewal of the Church's Emblem.<sup>78</sup> So, on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2014, their findings and proposals were finally presented in front of the KKMM meeting<sup>79</sup> (Refer to appendix 3 for the Summary Chart of Five Year Strategic Plan).

The Five Year Strategic Plan was a four page document which includes its main goal which was to strengthen the spiritual, social, and physical life of KUC members. Under these categories the plan set out to improve the capacity of the Church members and its personnel; to mobilize and develop infrastructure and resources available to the Church in order to reduce the financial burden and its members; and to strengthen KUC administration.<sup>80</sup> In the Strategic Plan it clearly states that the Church has to be concerned with the burdens being put on the Church members. Its main concerns should focus on the transparency on the Church finance and sustainable sources of income for the Church.<sup>81</sup>

The Five Year Strategic Plan was well received by the KKMM and there was no objection. The KKMM then agreed that this plan was to be put forth to the 2014 General Assembly.<sup>82</sup> However along with the plan, the committee also decided to include the amending of the

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<sup>77</sup> KKMM, *The minutes for 2014 KKMM meeting*, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 13

<sup>81</sup> KPC. *Five Year Strategic Plan*. Antebuka: Levitt Print, 2013.

<sup>82</sup> KKMM, *The minutes for 2014 KKMM meeting*, 13.

Church's name. The main purpose was to make a better connection between the theme of the Five Year Strategic Plan and the renewal of the Church Emblem. The main theme of the Five Year Strategic Plan was the "Fullness of Life in Jesus Christ"<sup>83</sup>. According to Riiteti, who was the General Secretary and also member of the KKMM at the time, the committee believed that "the change of the Church's name can renew every single heart of the Church members to become a new being".<sup>84</sup> Once the Church members become a new being, they will probably know their roles and responsibilities as members of Christ's body which is a fullness of life in Jesus Christ.<sup>85</sup>

Interestingly one of the reasons given for the need to change the name of the Church was the word 'Protestant'. The KKMM felt that this was a negative word that encourages an attitude of protest in the Church. It means that by amending the name of the Church the protest attitudes<sup>86</sup> of the Church members might change. This suggestion raised by the KKMM member from the Betio ICC.<sup>87</sup> Attitudes of rejection to any sort of ecclesiastical administrations and programs were common, such as; financial support of the Church from the Church members, and spiritual development to the life of the Church members. The committee thus felt that once the Church's name is changed, then, the Five Year Strategic Plan will probably reach its purpose as a proposed solution for the financial crisis and the Church's decline.<sup>88</sup> The KKMM finally agreed that the preparation of the Five Year

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<sup>83</sup> KPC, *Five Year Strategic Plan*, 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Personal interview with Mareweia Riiteti, Antebuka, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> KKMM, *The minutes for 2014 KKMM meeting*, 2014, 13

<sup>88</sup> KPC, *Minutes for 2012 General Assembly*. 85

Strategic Plan, the renewal of the Church's Emblem, and the amendment to the Church's name were ready to be brought up as a motion to the 2014 General Assembly.

If the General Assembly agreed to the Church's name change, then the new Emblem will show the new name on the new Emblem. It is the role of the General Assembly to find a new name for the Church.<sup>89</sup>

### **The 2014 General Assembly**

During the General Assembly the KKMM finally gave their report and proposals for the Five Year Strategic Plan and the new Emblem.<sup>90</sup> The report and the plans were well received. The General Assembly however was shocked when the KKMM added the proposal for a name change of the Church. (Refer to appendix 2. Minutes of KKMM).<sup>91</sup> The General Secretary at the time, Riiteti was responsible for reading this proposal.<sup>92</sup> This is what he said,

...because of the new Emblem plus the implementation of the Five Year Strategic Plan of the Church, the KKMM puts forth the proposal to change the name of the Church. Members of KKMM had discussed the factors that influenced the issues of the Church, and they agreed that the attitudes of the Church members is the reason for the financial and decline in membership of the Church. They believe that the attitudes of the members comes from the name 'Protestant', Kiribati Protestant Church. Because of our name Protestant, our attitudes toward the Church is always

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<sup>89</sup> Personal interview with Maleta Tenten, Antebuka, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

<sup>90</sup> KPC, *The Minutes for the 2014 General Assembly*, 84.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 84

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 85.

to protest. So the KKMM proposes this change in order to relate better to the theme of the Five Year Strategic Plan and to change members' negative attitudes.<sup>93</sup>

All the delegates of the different Island Church Councils or ICC were silent for just a few minutes, because the proposal of the name change was not part of the task that the 2012 General assembly handed over to the KKMM.<sup>94</sup> Straight after their silence, there were many frustrated arguments to this proposal from different delegates.<sup>95</sup> The first argument<sup>96</sup> was that,

Is that part of the task that we gave to you? Is it true that the word Protestant is related to the attitudes of the KPC members?<sup>97</sup>

Some of them mentioned that the proposal for the name change is not constitutional.<sup>98</sup> According to the Constitution of the KPC, every motion from different ICC have to be submitted to the KKMM six months before the assembly, and three months before the General Assembly, the KKMM should circulate all the motions to every ICC.<sup>99</sup> However, the KKMM did not follow this constitutional process.<sup>100</sup> The delegates from ICC Maiana<sup>101</sup> were concerned as well as all the Church members. They told the General Assembly that the proposal on the name change should be carried forward to the next General Assembly. They asked the 2014 General Assembly to postpone the vote for the name change, because all members of the Church who were waiting for the end of the General Assembly will

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<sup>93</sup> Personal interview with Mareweia Riiteti, Antebuka 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

<sup>94</sup> KPC, *The minutes for the 2012 General Assembly*, 99

<sup>95</sup> KPC, *The Minutes for the 2014 General Assembly*, 84.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>97</sup> Tamana delegate mentioned this.

<sup>98</sup> KPC, *The minutes of the 2014 General Assembly*, 84

<sup>99</sup> Statistic, *Kiribati Census: 2015*.

<sup>100</sup> KPC, *The Minutes of the 2014 General Assembly*, 84.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 84.

probably not agree with the name change. Some of the ICC delegates<sup>102</sup> to the 2014 General assembly told the Assembly that this kind of motion should be submitted twice because members of the Church have to be consulted. Unfortunately, the 2014 General Assembly<sup>103</sup> could not wait for another process for the name change. In fact, the 2014 General Assembly agreed to finalize their vote on the motion of the name change. After the approval of the motion on the name change, the 2014 General Assembly then agreed to vote again for the new name.

The Moderator of the Church at the time Rev. Rewi Teroroko then selected a special group within the General Assembly.<sup>104</sup> This group was to be made up of one delegate from each ICC. The responsibility of this group was to find a new name of the Church. During their discussion the group came up with three names which were: Kiribati Christian Church; Kiribati United Church; and Kiribati Uniting Church. These were the names that were put forth to be voted on by the General Assembly.<sup>105</sup> Finally, the 2014 General Assembly voted for the “Kiribati Uniting Church” as the new name for the Church. Finding the new name took just one day.<sup>106</sup>

The new name however had already caused tensions. Several ICCs<sup>107</sup> were still not happy with this motion, but they could not do anything because the majority of the 2014 General Assembly agreed upon the new name to be voted. The assembly had agreed to vote this

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<sup>102</sup> Here are the names of the Island Church Councils who told the 2014 General Assembly to postpone the motion on the Church name amendment; Maiana, Tamana, South Tarawa, Abemama, Nonouti, Kuria, Arorae, Kiritimati and Teraina.

<sup>103</sup> KPC, *The Minutes of the 2014 General Assembly*, 88.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>107</sup> ICCs that they were not agreed with the new name: Tamana, Maiana, North Tarawa, and Abemama.

name because it is more meaningful and applicable with the theme<sup>108</sup> of the Five Year Strategic Plan which is “the fullness of life in Jesus Christ”. As mentioned, one of the reasons for changing the name relates with the attitudes of the Church members because of the word ‘protestant’. It suggests that most KPC members have a protest attitude. This kind of attitude was seen by the KKMM as one of the good reason for the decline and the financial crisis in the Church.<sup>109</sup> So the approval of the name Kiribati Uniting Church was intended to stop the protest attitudes of the Church members. It was the hope that the name change will assist the overall theme of the Five Year Strategic Plan.<sup>110</sup>

At the end of the 2014 General Assembly, the new Emblem of the Church with its new name was finally revealed. The new Emblem reflects a new beginning to a newly named Church. However as we will see in the next chapter, this new beginning was to be rocked by voices of protests and anger that finally led to the Schism in the General Assembly of 2016.

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<sup>108</sup> Riiteti, *KUC Five Year Strategic Plan*. 3

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>110</sup> According to Rev. Waiena Tebakaro Tatiree the name change was connected with the Mission & Vision Statement. This is what she wrote, “The Strategic Plan (SP) presented at the General Assembly reflected many weaknesses of KPC. The Plan highlights the overall KUC background in the past, her present context and her visions for the future. KUC is one of the oldest Churches in Kiribati and has experienced many problems over the years since independence from LMS in 1968. The I-Kiribati pastors lacked administrative training, and many were unable to handle the administration of the Church. Financial mismanagement also leads to many problems in the Church. The KUC’s vision statement says: The Kiribati Protestant Church is to be dynamic and effective in aspiring to the fullness of life in Jesus Christ. So in proposing for the name-change from ‘Protestant’ to ‘Uniting’, there was a strong hope in fulfilling the KUC mission statement (refer to the Summary Chart of Five Year Strategic Plan). In the context of KUC, the name-change from ‘Protestant’ to ‘Uniting’ is perhaps part of these changes to develop broader visions of what the KUC is today and is striving to be in the future. The name-change does not mean KUC failed to co-operate with overseas partners in the past; but it will help KUC to integrate and effect changes possibly by implementing and offering new opportunities to sustain physical and spiritual needs of her congregation. Tatiree, *Tensions in the KUC Maneaba*, 11



Figure 5: The New Emblem<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> KUC Letter Head. 1) The KUC maturity symbolizes by the over boundary of the coconut leaf. 2) Coconut tree also symbolizes the maturity of the KUC. 3) Bird symbolizes the mission of KUC should go beyond its boundary. 4) Cross symbolizes that the KUC Church founded in Jesus Christ. 5) The Book symbolizes that the KUC faith is guided by the Word of God.



## Chapter Four: The 2016 General Assembly

The 2016 General Assembly was held at the KUC Headquarters on South Tarawa. It is one of the most unforgettable Assembly in the history of the Church as it resulted in the Schism of the Church—the KUC and the rival Church—the New KPC. As discussed in chapter three, the proposed solutions for the financial issues and the decline in membership led to the formulation of the Five Year Strategic Plan, the change in the Emblem and name of the Church in 2014. However, as we will see, these changes particularly the name change resulted in the Schism in the 2016 General Assembly, when the delegates of the Tamana ICC walked out from the Assembly. They walked out from the Assembly because their hope in restoring the previous name of the Church was rejected by the Assembly. Their walk-out marked the beginning of the Schism within the Church.

The 2016 General Assembly began on the 4th September 2016 and concluded on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2016.<sup>112</sup> This Assembly was the 25<sup>th</sup><sup>113</sup> General Assembly of the Church. On the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016, the first motion to be discussed was the name restoration.<sup>114</sup> The motion of restoring the previous name of the Church ‘Kiribati Protestant Church’ was raised by 9 Island Church Councils which were; Makin, North Tarawa, South Tarawa, Betio, Maiana, Abemama, Nonouti, Tamana, and Teraina.<sup>115</sup> However, before the discussion of this matter, the General Secretary read a complaint letter from a group known as the “KPC Group”.<sup>116</sup> The KPC Group was made up of those who opposed the name change in 2014. The letter was their complaint about the rejection of their motion to

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<sup>112</sup> KUC, *The minutes for 2016 General Assembly*, 1

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 1

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 26

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 28

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

postpone the discussion of the name restoration to the next General Assembly in 2018. Apparently they wanted to postpone the discussion of the name restoration because of an ongoing court case which involved both the KUC and KPC Group.<sup>117</sup> Despite their complaint, the General Secretary declared that the motion from the KPC Group had not followed the six months' requirement of the agenda circulation and therefore the Assembly must continue the discussion of the motion for name restoration.<sup>118</sup>

During the discussion of the name restoration, delegates of the Tamana ICC<sup>119</sup> also urged the Assembly to avoid the vote on the name restoration. Like the KPC Group, Tamana wanted the vote to be deferred to the 2018 General Assembly in order to gather more support for the name restoration. Tamana felt that they did not have the numbers to win the vote. Indeed, Tamana ICC could not do anything because the majority of the Assembly agreed to continue the discussion and to vote on the motion of the name restoration. The discussion took the whole morning session of the Assembly. During the discussion of the name restoration, Betio ICC and North Tarawa ICC brought out more concerns<sup>120</sup> about the constitution.<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, the ICCs from Tamana, Maiana, South Tarawa, Nonouti, Abemama, Teraina, and Makin had more concerned about the consequences of the new name.<sup>122</sup>

After the long discussion on the motion of the name restoration, the Moderator of the Church at the time Rev. Reirei Kouarabi told the Church to finalize their discussion by a

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 32

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>121</sup> KPC, Constitution of the KPC, (Antebuka: Levitt Print), 1994.

<sup>122</sup> KUC, *The minutes for the 2016 General Assembly*, (Antebuka: Levitt Print), 32-33.

vote. The Moderator told the assembly to prepare themselves for the vote. Before the vote the Secretary for Mission at the time Rev. Maleta Tenten led the assembly with a short meditation and prayer.<sup>123</sup> After the meditation, Tamana ICC and Betio ICC once again told the Assembly to avoid the vote.<sup>124</sup> Tamana reminded the Assembly if the name KPC is not restored, Tamana will walk out from General Assembly. Betio ICC request the Assembly to postpone the vote because the KPC group needed to settle this issue in the High Court. However, the Moderator ignored these requests.<sup>125</sup> He told the Tamana delegates that the vote should be carried out. He could not accept their request because the majority of the Assembly wanted the vote to go ahead. In response to the Betio ICC, the Moderator told them that Church matters should be discussed first within the Church. The High Court has no authority in Church matters.<sup>126</sup> After this, the vote was carried out. The result was 23 delegates voted for the name KPC to be restored, while 79 delegates voted for the new name KUC to be confirmed as the Church's name. Eight (8) delegates did not vote.<sup>127</sup> Immediately after the vote, the Tamana delegation walked out of the General Assembly. The General Secretary<sup>128</sup> tried to negotiate with Tamana but they told him that they could not do anything, because the decision from Tamana ICC had already been agreed upon.

### **Events before the 2016 General Assembly**

It has to be noted that several events took place before the 2016 General Assembly that contributed to the Schism. After the approval of the new name during the 2014 General

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>128</sup> Personal interview with Mareweia Riiteti, Antebuka, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

Assembly, members of the Church started to question the decision of the assembly.<sup>129</sup>

This was the beginning of tensions within the Church in which members began to split over the new name.<sup>130</sup> This questioning of the decision of the General Assembly started when delegates returned to their home islands.<sup>131</sup> Traditionally, delegates of the General Assembly had to report first to their local Church members. This includes what had been discussed and approved by the General Assembly. In fact, the first meetings straight after the Assembly, were ICC local meetings and these were known to have been very hard for every delegate of the 2014 Assembly. The most contested issue was the new name. Every parish criticized how the Assembly changed the Church's name to KUC without any consultations with the Church members.<sup>132</sup>

By the middle of 2015 a resigned Minister of the Church Rev. Dr. Kambati Uriam came back from Fiji to make an attempt to share his own view on the new name. He sought permission from the KUC headquarter to make a presentation on the name change, but he

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<sup>129</sup> Personal interview with Tabotabo Auatabu, Betio, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2018

<sup>130</sup> In the 2010 General Assembly, Rev. Dr. Kambati Uriam was disappointed when the Assembly did not accept his request of canceling the name of Rev Mareweia Riiteti as a candidate for the office of the General Secretary. He did want Rev. Mareweia to continue his journey as a Lecturer and PhD candidate for Tangintebu Theological College. Rev. Mareweia also mentioned that when he became a General Secretary in 2010 he made a lots of changes to the previous unconstitutional system of the Church. One of those unconstitutional system, for instance, the account of the Church should be consolidated under one account in terms of avoiding the financial crisis within the Church account. Despite the consolidation account, Rev. Dr. Kambati had perhaps disagreed with that in which he started to think that he has no purpose as a Principal of Church Theological College and Deputy Moderator of the Church. Because of that, he wrote a letter of resignation to the Church on the 04th February 2010. His resignation letter based on his own interpretation about the reaction of Church office particularly on the new changes such as the consolidate account of the Church. As Principal and Deputy Moderator of the Church, he wrote a resignation letter because the Church did not trust him anymore to be a Principal and Deputy Moderator of the Church. In facts, in the midst of 2015, Rev. Dr. Kambati used the name change to be doorway to revenge and exercise his power as a Reverend Doctor of the Church. The power that had been abused by General Assembly in 2010. So what he did, he started to do a presentation in every parish of the Church without the approval from the KUC Headquarters.

<sup>131</sup> Personal interview with Ataata Nuariiki, Bikenibeu, 29th December 2018.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

was refused. This was because the Church headquarters did not want to cause more issues concerning the decision of the 2014 General Assembly. Uriam however continued to voice his views. In his presentations at local Churches and some of the public halls, he argued that the new name of the Church has no connection with the history of the Church. The emphasis of his presentation was all about the omission of the word 'Protestant' and usage of the word 'uniting'. As a Church Historian, he claimed that the word 'uniting' is not historical in the context of the Kiribati Church. The word 'uniting' is often used when several Christian denominations come together in unions.<sup>133</sup> Uriam was told however by the Church headquarters to stop his movement but unfortunately, his movement increased in its adherents. As a result, those who agreed with Uriam established a group which became known as the KPC Group. After the establishment of this group, they took the Church to court because they believed that the name change was not constitutional. It was this court case that was still pending when the General Assembly of 2016 began and one of the reason why the KPC Group wrote a letter to defer the discussion of the name restoration to 2018.<sup>134</sup>

Between the 2014 General Assembly and the 2016 General Assembly, different ICCs were surprised with the rise of the KPC Group. In fact, the movement of the KPC Group encouraged the Church members to take a critical view of the decisions of the 2014 General Assembly. According to Mr. Tabotabo Auatabu<sup>135</sup> one of the legal advisors and adherents of the New KPC, the name change was not a well-organized motion. Auatabu is a

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<sup>133</sup> Waiena Tatiree, "Tensions in the KUC Maneaba: A Historical Analysis of the Issues Surrounding the Name - Change from Kiribati Protestant Church to Kiribati Uniting Church and Its Implications for Ecumenical Cooperation in Kiribati Society " (Master, Pacific Theological College, 2016), 46,47.

<sup>134</sup> Personal interview with Mareweia Riiteti, Antebuka, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019 .

<sup>135</sup> Personal interview with Tabotabo Auatabu, Betio, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2018

graduated lawyer from the University of South Pacific, in fact, stated that the process of the name change was unconstitutional. This is what he said,

...the name change was voted in an unconstitutional process. In our constitution, all the agendas of the General Assembly should have been submitted six months before the Assembly. In this case, the motion of the name change did not reach the minimum six months' schedule for the agenda circulation within the Church. The KUC however told the High Court that the name change was circulated within the Church for more than three years. That it was proposed in the 2012 General Assembly...I had read all the agendas of the 2012 General Assembly but I could not find any words that dealt with the name change. This simply portrayed that the name change did not follow the six months' schedule for circulation.<sup>136</sup>

According to Mr. Tabokai Tekina<sup>137</sup> of the New KPC, the KPC Group took their disagreement to the court because of their dissatisfaction with the 2014 General Assembly's decision which was not constitutional. They were encouraged to do this because of two reasons; the name change and the new name did not follow the six months' requirement of agenda circulation; and secondly they were inspired by the presentation of Uriam, whom had claimed that the name change was not connected with the history of the Church. Because of these two reasons, the New KPC took the Church to the court.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Personal interview with Tabokai Tekina, Betio, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

In an interview with a KUC adherent, retired pastor's wife Ataata Nuariki at Marakei. She expressed how disappointed she was of the decision to amend the name of the Church. She said,

I accompanied my husband into the ministry for almost five decades. We started our mission when the Church was called Gilbert Island Protestant Church or GIPC until it was changed to Kiribati Uniting Church in 2014. When the GIPC changed to Kiribati Protestant Church in 1979, I can remember that there were no objections to the name change. However, in 2014, we were totally shocked and disagreed when we heard that the General Assembly had changed the name of the Church to Kiribati Uniting Church. From that time, I was trying to persuade my husband to find ways to restore the previous name. I was willing to campaign against the new name in our ICC. Unfortunately, the majority in our ICC accepted the new name and decided not to raise the matter of restoring the previous name in the General Assembly.<sup>139</sup>

As we have seen, tensions had been building up since 2014 between opposing groups which finally exploded in the Schism in the 2016 General Assembly. The walkout of the Tamana ICC delegates on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016 marked the beginning of the division within the Kiribati Uniting Church. It was a sad moment when the Tamana ICC delegates decided to walk out from the Assembly. I remember how some shouted, "There is no God's Spirit in the decision. We have to establish our own Church using the previous name".

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<sup>139</sup> Personal interview with Ataata Nuariki, Bikenibeu, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

On 18<sup>th</sup> September 2016,<sup>140</sup> the New KPC was formed when its adherents started their own rival Church by selecting their own leaders and opened their first General Assembly. Here are the names of their chosen leaders; Rev. Baranite Kirataa a former Lecturer of Tangintebu Theological College was chosen as the Moderator; Rev. Karikate Bobo a former Bishop was selected as the Vice Moderator; Rev. Enoka Reete as a Secretary of Mission, Rev. Takaua Tarakabu as Secretary for Finance; and Mr. Taatoa Kaiteie a former Secretary of the Kiribati Government was chosen as General Secretary. Their first Assembly held at Temaiku village inside the Tamana Gathering hall. It has to be noted that every single outer-islands has their own Gathering Hall at the main land—Tarawa. So Tamana Island, also has a Gathering Hall at Tarawa island. This Gathering Hall is owned by the Tamana Island; it does not belong to the Church of Tamana. Because Tamana include only one denomination this made it very easy for them to host the first New KPC General Assembly. The commencement of the New KPC General Assembly was thus held on the same day the KUC General Assembly held its closing service. In the next chapter we will turn to the fallout of the Schism and its impact on both Churches, its adherents and Kiribati people in general.

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<sup>140</sup> Kiribati Public Broadcasting Authority, *English Broadcasting: Opening of the KPC General Assembly*, (2016).



## **Chapter Five: The Fallout: Impacts of the Schism**

The Schism of the KPC in 2016 is one of the most challenging events that have ever impacted the people of Kiribati. The split not only caused damage to one of the most dominant Church in Kiribati, but it also caused tensions among people, within island communities and even within families.

One of the first consequences of the Schism was confusion. Members of the Church all over the country were confused about which Church they belonged to—the New KPC or KUC? According to Miss Teauama Atireti<sup>141</sup> one of my interviewee from the New KPC. the opening of the New KPC Assembly made her confused. She did not know whether she was to join the New KPC or the KUC. As a youth, Teauama's confusion was settled by her parents' decision, and that was the reason she became a youth of the New KPC. According to Miss Motate Kition<sup>142</sup> one my interviewees from the KUC, the formation of the New KPC made her confused as well. She was on the same situation with Teauama. She did not know which Church she has to join. She told me that she joined the KUC because of her parents' decision.<sup>143</sup>

Tensions between the rival Churches also developed on social media particularly on Facebook.<sup>144</sup> A new KUC Facebook page was created on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2016 before the commencement of the 2016 General Assembly by Rev. Aneru Ionatan, a current Pastor of the KUC.<sup>145</sup> The main purpose of this page was to share the daily devotion to the Church

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<sup>141</sup> Personal interview with Teauama Atireti, Betio, 16th January 2019.

<sup>142</sup> Personal interview with Motate Kition, Bikenibeu, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ionatan Aneru, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1683137218607973/>

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

members, however it soon became a place for debates among the two factions. Their debates did not settle down the issue of the name change but it made more arguments and developed more tensions between them.

At Betio, the impact of the name change rapidly changed the communal life of the Church members. Mr. Tabokai Tekina mentioned that the Church's communal life was interrupted by the division of the Church. He emphasized that the name change destroyed the usual way of the Church's fellowship and caused tensions that would have ended up either in jail or death. He mentioned that one of the good example of the tension between the New KPC and KUC took place at the end of 2016 at Betio on Tarawa Island. This is what he said,

Probably at the end of 2016, the High Court was distributing its order that the New KPC adherents were not allowed to use any assets of the KUC. Because of that court order, the KUC leaders locked the main entrance of the Church compound at Betio. In fact, we, the New KPC adherents, decided to cut the locks of the Church's main gates and enter the compound for our worship service.<sup>146</sup>

As mentioned, the first court case began before the 2016 General Assembly by the KPC group. This court case was completed on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2016 in which the KUC won. The court thus agreed that the name change was constitutional.<sup>147</sup> This result came after the General Assembly of 2016. Then the KPC Group took the KUC to court again for the right of ownership of the Church's properties and assets.<sup>148</sup> Again the KUC won the case

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<sup>146</sup> Personal interview with Tabokai Tekina, Betio, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019..

<sup>147</sup> Court, *Minutes of the High Court: KPC vs KUC*, (Betio: High Court, 2016),23-26

<sup>148</sup> Magistrates Court of Kiribati, *Betio Land Case No Betian 797/71* (2017).

which meant all properties and assets belong to them. Since then, there have been many cases brought up to the High Court that are still ongoing today.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2017,<sup>149</sup> adherents of the New KPC from Aoniman Beru decided to destroy everything in their own Church. They had decided to do this because of the decision from the High Court that the Church land and its assets at Aoniman belonged to the KUC alone. The idea behind their movement was to destroy everything because they felt strongly that the assets belonged to them. They decided to declare to the KUC and its adherents that the New KPC also has a right at the Church of Aoniman. They did not want the KUC and its adherents to use the assets of the Aoniman Church. In fact, they burnt the Pastor's home, they destroyed the Gathering hall and finally they destroyed the House of the Lord - the Chapel. (See images below)



Figure 6: Impact of the Schism at KUC Aoniman Beru<sup>150</sup>

<sup>149</sup>Nelson Ekeaua, [https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=Aoniman&epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=Aoniman&epa=SEARCH_BOX).

<sup>150</sup>Nelson Ekeaua, Te kanganga I Aoniman Beru, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10210038412066472&set=pcb.1939840049604354>.

The Schism also led to tensions among young people. The youths from both Churches began to get involved in arguments and physical confrontations.<sup>151</sup> Miss Kition told me that their good friendship with their fellow youth members had been destroyed by this Schism. She mentioned that some of their fellow youths fight against each other because of their argument on the name change. It also caused problems within families. Some families are divided because they are no longer in the same Church.<sup>152</sup> Mr. Autaene<sup>153</sup> emphasized that the division within the Church resulted in the division within his family as well. He talked about how he had been disowned by his own siblings, because all of his siblings joined the New KPC. He was told by his siblings that he does not belong to their family anymore because he has humiliated their family by rejecting the decision of their home island—Tamana Island, to join the New KPC.<sup>154</sup>

Because of the increased impact of the Schism, the Government of Kiribati decided to challenge the two factions to make peace. The leaders of the Government told the two factions to do the proper and cooperative negotiation to solve their own problem.<sup>155</sup>

However, the involvement of the Government did not help heal the division. Rather when the New KPC leaders and their adherents decided to register their new Church in Government, the leaders of the government used this for political reasons.<sup>156</sup> According to the Religious Body Registration Law of Kiribati, any new religion should have a name in order to be registered. If the new name had already been registered, the organization cannot

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<sup>151</sup>Personal interview with Moterate Kition, Bikenibeu, 29th December 2018

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Personal interview with Tion Autaene, Betio, 15th January 2019.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Public Broadcasting Authority, *Te Uekera News Paper: Number 45*, (Bairiki: PBA, 2018), 1

<sup>156</sup> Personal interview with Tabokai Tekina. Betio, 17th January 2019 .

be registered unless it has a different name.<sup>157</sup> This meant that the New KPC cannot be registered because the name KPC or Kiribati Protestant Church had already been registered as a recognized Church in Kiribati. However, the Kiribati Cabinet made the amendment to Religious Body Registration Law.<sup>158</sup> The Cabinet along with its back benchers brought up their amendment of the Religious Body Registration Ordinance during the National Parliament Assembly in 2018 where the amendment was approved. The amendment was that, a new Church can be registered under an old name.<sup>159</sup> For me, this amendment showed how the government changed its laws in order to campaign and seek favour from the members of the New KPC.

### **Reconciliation Movement**

Because of the rapid negative impacts of the Schism, the leaders from both factions tried to negotiate solutions to the tension. It has to be noted that the reconciliation movement started straight after the Schism in 2016. Rev. Maleta Tenten<sup>160</sup> the Secretary for Mission from the KUC at the time told me during an interview that the first step of their reconciliation movement was held at the KUC Moderator's boardroom. The meeting was attended by Moderators from the two Churches along with their Secretaries. She also mentioned that their meeting did not find a solution. They could not do a proper reconciliation meeting because tempers had flared and strong words were exchanged. They continually argued among each other until the Moderator of the KUC stopped the

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<sup>157</sup> Kiribati House of Parliament, "Religious Body Registration Ordinance " in *5 of 1985*, ed. Republic of Kiribati, Gap (Bairiki: Public Office of te Beretitenti, 1985), pp1-3.

<sup>158</sup> Kiribati House of Parliament, "Religious Body Registration Ordinance "5 of 2018," (Bairiki: The Public office of te Beretitenti, 2018), 1-3.

<sup>159</sup> *The Amendment of the Religious Body Registration Ordinance 5 of 2018*.

<sup>160</sup> Personal interview with Maleta Tenten, Antebuka, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

meeting.<sup>161</sup> She also mentioned that the reconciliation meeting could not solve the issue of the name change, because they personally stood their grounds on this issue. The second step she mentioned was to seek another body to chair their reconciliation negotiation. They chose the Pacific Theological College or PTC to chair their meeting. In 2017, they sent a request to PTC to chair their reconciliation meeting. The request was approved and they travelled to Fiji for the one-week reconciliation negotiation from 9<sup>th</sup> July to 13<sup>th</sup> July 2017.<sup>162</sup> The meeting came up with some solutions. One of the solutions that Mrs. Tenten had mentioned was patience. She said that PTC told them to set a good example of patience to their congregations. If the Church leaders practice patience, the congregation will imitate them and live their lives in patience as well. She also mentioned that the other solution that PTC told them to do was to form unity in their leadership. They were told by PTC to do their reconciliation outreach to different congregations as one body but not from their own different Churches. When they came back from Fiji they started to exercise what they had done at PTC. However, no changes seemed to solve the impacts of the Schism after the reconciliation at PTC.

Despite the reconciliation efforts from both factions of the New KPC and KUC they both decided to go their separate ways. According to Mr. Tabokai Tekina<sup>163</sup> a New KPC adherent, there is no more hope for reconciliation. This is what he said,

...there is no hope for the Church reconciliation because of what we had done and planned for our future Church—KPC. We've already built our own Church. We

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Personal Interview with Tabokai Tekina, Betio, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

have now our own assets in different parishes and different islands. We also have our own administration officers. We will build our Theological College to train our future minister without the need of Tangintebu Theological College<sup>164</sup>.

From the KUC adherents' perspective, reconciliation can only be effective and possible if the New KPC members sacrifice their decision and respect the decision of the KUC General Assembly. Mrs Ataata Nuariki<sup>165</sup> one of my interviewee from the KUC, believes that restoring unity between the two factions cannot be effective unless the New KPC members decide to accept the name change. She mentioned this because she wants to restore the unity of the Church. However, she concluded her view by saying that if the New KPC does not want to reconcile, then both Churches must go ahead alone. According to Mr. Tion Autaene<sup>166</sup> from the KUC, the division within the Church cannot be reconciled. It cannot be reconciled because everyone has their own reasons for supporting their own side. From the KUC official perspective, unity is not possible. The KUC headquarters cannot play its role to restore the unity of the Church because some of those who encouraged people to criticize the decision of the Church were officially recognized as Ministers of the Church.<sup>167</sup> These views from both factions assert that any reconciliation will be impossible. They depict that the two factions have to move ahead as divided Churches.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid

<sup>165</sup> Personal interview with Ataata Nuariki, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2019..

<sup>166</sup> Personal interview with Tion Autaene, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

<sup>167</sup> Personal interview with Mareweia Riteti, Antebuka, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis set out to document a history of the Schism of the Kiribati Protestant Church or KPC in 2016. Chapter one gives a brief historical background of Christianity in Kiribati as well as the KPC since it was established as a mission Church during the LMS and ABCFM in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It looks at the challenges of the early missions until the new independent Church was established in 1968. One of the most notable features of this history is the changing identity of the Church from the ABCFM and LMS to GIPC to GEIPC to KPC. These changes in its names were the results of the Protestant missions that established it, as well as the changing colonial administration of Kiribati. However as we have learned these changes in the Church's name did not result in conflict until the name change in 2016 when the Church's name was changed to KUC.

Chapter two then looks at the 2012 General Assembly. This assembly dealt with two important issues at the time; the Church's financial mismanagement and the decline of Church members. These two issues highlight the factors that influenced the Schism. During that assembly, concerns were raised about the mismanagement of the Church's finance which ranged from the non-payment of employee's retirement funds and scholarship fees, to the misuse of donor aides and funds and the failures of Church businesses and projects. These examples of poor financial management reflect the problems within the leadership of the Church. Moreover, it shows clearly that one of the main reasons for the decline in membership was due to these financial issues and the burden that it was having on its members. As a result, the Church decided that a Five Year Strategic Plan was needed in order to mitigate these issues within the Church. At the end of this



assembly, the KKMM was tasked with the preparation of the Plan with the hope that it will be presented in the next assembly.

Chapter three then focuses on the 2014 General Assembly. It looks at the tabling of the proposed Five Year Strategic Plan as a solution to deal with the financial issues and the decline in membership as discussed in 2012. As we have learned, the plan included ways in which to improve the administration and the management of its finance and assets. The plan also aims to alleviate the financial burdens on Church members and to have more accountability. The plan was well received however, what came as a shock was the proposal by the KKMM to change the name of the Church. What was most interesting was the rationale behind this change as the word 'Protestant' in the name of the Church was considered to have a negative influence on the attitudes of members of the Church. Despite voices of concerns about this, the assembly went ahead and voted for the new name, Kiribati Uniting Church or KUC.

Chapter four then looks at the Schism during the General Assembly in 2016. As shown, since the 2014 assembly, voices of dissent were already heard. Before the 2016 assembly, groups such as the KPC Group led by Kambati Uriam were already making headways in countering the decision for the name change. While this was gathering support, there were also court cases where the KUC were being charged for the unconstitutional way it changed the name of the Church. The Schism during the 2016 General Assembly was thus inevitable. When the vote for the name restoration was carried out, the assembly voted unanimously for the new name. This is despite the efforts by the KPC Group and Tamana ICC to defer the vote to the next General Assembly.

Chapter five looks at the aftermath of the Schism and the attempts at reconciliation. As we have seen, the consequences of the Schism was damaging. It led to fights among youth, tensions between villages, arguments on social media and sadly, violence and destruction of properties. Unfortunately these conflicts and tensions did not help heal divisions but intensified them more. Even families were torn apart because of this Schism. Attempts were made at reconciliation but to no fruition and as a result, the reality is, according to both factions, it is impossible to reconcile. Any hope of reconciliation and unity can only occur if one faction is willing to sacrifice its stance – something that both sides don't see happening in the future.

In conclusion, the Schism was caused by the decision of the KKMM. As Mentioned, during the 2012 General Assembly, the KKMM was tasked to finalize the proposed solutions to the financial crisis and the decline of the Church. Those proposed solutions became known as the Five Year Strategic Plan included the amendment to the Church Emblem. These proposals were discussed in the 2012 General Assembly, but the Assembly could not finalize their decision. In fact, the Assembly of 2012 decided to carry forward the decision to the next General Assembly in 2014 because there was much still to be done in preparing the Five Year Strategic Plan and the amendment to the Church Emblem. However, during the KKMM preparation the KKMM decided to add on their task with the amendment of the Church's name. Their decision became the doorway to sparking the division between members of the Church. Of course, the suggestion of the KKMM was not a bad idea for the Church, but it became the reason for the Schism.

The Schism would not have existed if the KKMM did not add the amendment of the Church name. Hatred, Confusion, Destruction, Civil Court Cases, and many more consequences that the Church had, would not have happened if the KKMM had just worked on the Strategic Plan and Emblem Amendment alone.

The addition of name change to the task of the KKMM reflects the failure of the decisions made by the KKMM. It illustrates that the KKMM inability to make a proper plan for the Five Year Strategic Plan. As I observed in reading the Strategic Plan, the Plan did not mention what the Church should do as part of her vision and mission. There was no fixed schedule for the Church plan on how funds should be raised and any concrete and innovative ways to source funds. If the KKMM focused more on the proper plan for the Five Year Strategic Plan, in fact, the Schism would not have happened.

The Schism between KUC and the New KPC shows the importance of transparency and accountability within the Church. Transparency and Consultation are very essential in doing the decision making. Even when the decision body thinks that their decision came out from the best of their abilities but they have to transparent and consult their decision before it is finalized. Cooperation between the Church leaders and the congregation is very vital in decision making. As leaders of the Church, we have to be cooperative with the congregation about what we plan and propose for the Church welfare and infrastructure.

As an author of this thesis, the findings and analyses of my research are very crucial and significant for the future Generation of both factions: Kiribati Uniting Church and new Kiribati Protestant Church. Of course both factions have been pointing fingers to say these are the main reasons behind the Schism. However, we cannot return back to our past and

solve these main causes of the Schism and their impacts. In this case, I recommend that this work of mine will be useful for the two Churches to set a new light within their members to learn and provide a good future for their Generation.

## **Appendix**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Sample Interview Questions:**

1. What do you think are the causes of the Schism? Was it just because of the name change?
2. What do you think are the consequences of the Schism? Do you think there is a possibility for unification?
3. What do you think are the lessons that we can learn from this Schism?

## **Appendix 2**

### **The Minutes of KKMM: “Five Year Strategic Plan, New Emblem, and the Amendment of the Church name”. (item KKMM 14/021) Rev Mareweia used this Minute for his Presentation**

“The KKMM is very grateful for the accomplishment of the Five Year Strategic Plan Booklet for 2014-2018. Hopefully, this Strategic Plan will lead the KPC ahead to its mission and all services for God. KKMM approved this Five Year Strategic Plan and it is ready to be brought up to the 2014 General Assembly for its final approval and blessing. There are many changes that should be done as well in the Church as part of the task that the 2012 handed over to the KKMM, such as the new Emblem and the name of Church as an additional suggestion of the KKMM. The amendment of the Church name has to be raised in terms of finding the applicable word to the Strategic Plan.”

### Appendix 3: The Summary Chart of the KUC Five Year Strategic Plan

<b>FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE KPC</b> <b>Overall Theme: The fullness of life in Jesus Christ</b>		
<b>Mission Statement: That the Kiribati Uniting Church to be a dynamic and effective Christian Church in Kiribati while aspiring to the fullness of life in Jesus Christ</b>		
<b>Vision Statement: To ensure that the Christian faith is lived to the full by all KUC members through the enlightening and vigorous ministerial and pastoral outreach, education and development intervention programs of the KUC</b>		
<b>Goals</b>	<b>The expected Values that KPC should practice</b>	<b>Arms to fulfill the Plan and their Departmental Activities</b>
<b>1.</b> To strengthen Spiritual, Social, and Physical life of its members.	<b>Caring attitude:</b> KPC members care for each other and for other people as well--just as Jesus care for all. It does not discriminate any person, regardless of creed or belief.	<b>Mission and Church Department</b> <b>1.</b> To increase the level of Christian understanding among the members in order to resist unchristian teachings and principles. <b>2.</b> The local Churches to have strong women & men and youth ministry including Sunday Schools in their villages. <b>3.</b> KUC members to acquire knowledge and skills relevant to sustain their social, physical and spiritual life. <b>4.</b> To become responsible in their roles for their families, communities, Church and society. <b>5.</b> To promote gender equality & the rights of children.
	<b>Responsiveness</b> KPC members respond promptly, to requests or concerns from their neighbors and those in need.	
<b>2.</b> To improve the capacity of the Church members and its personnel.	<b>Respectfulness</b> KPC members respect all people, including the old and the young, men and women in their communities.	<b>Education Department</b> <b>1.</b> All KUC's Schools are financially self-sufficient and self-reliant. <b>2.</b> All Church schools are registered with the required infrastructure to accommodate the young population and in place to deliver quality Education. <b>3.</b> Well organized KUC Educational Institutions that are fully manned with qualified and well-trained staffing for Delivery of quality education. <b>4.</b> Religious Education is a compulsory subject in all the Church's schools from Early Childhood Educational Institutions.
	<b>Individualized support</b> KPC member cares and supports all individuals whatever their needs or aspirations are.	
<b>3.</b> To mobilize and develop infrastructure and resources available to the Church in order to reduce the financial burden and its members	<b>Ecumenical</b> KPC enjoys close ties with other Christian faiths through the Kiribati National Council of Churches, the Pacific Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches.	<b>Finance and Properties Department</b> <b>1.</b> 75% of KUC communities are materially more self-reliant and self-sufficient. <b>2.</b> Creating alternative long term sources of funding for the Church and accelerating inflow to the KUC's Endowment Fund (Buroon te KUC). <b>3.</b> KUCs Current Income Generating Arms are reorganized and revitalized with Independent professional bodies to own and manage. <b>4.</b> Improve the Church's financial procedures and capacity of the staff so that transparency is attained.
	<b>Integrity and Accountability</b> KPC is striving at all times to be reliable and dependable while accountable to all its members, development partners and other people in the communities they work with.	
<b>4.</b> to strengthen KUC Administration	<b>Openness</b> KPC members are fully conscious and appreciative of new inventions and new technology and embrace these as part of God's gift to man.	<b>Office of the General Secretary</b> <b>1.</b> Partnership and Sharing is fully promoted by the Church. <b>2.</b> The KUC Administration is restructured and downsized. <b>3.</b> A training plan is derived and in place.
	<b>Cooperative and collaborative</b> KPC members will work ecumenically with other people of other faiths including government or with development partners.	
	<b>Prudent and careful</b> KUC members try to be prudent or careful when spending money or using up other resources.	

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## **Interview**

Personal interview with Ataata Nuariki, Bikenibeu, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2018, from the KUC women's fellowship

Personal interview with Motate Kition, Bikenibeu, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2018, from the KUC Youth

Personal interview with Mareweia Riteti, Antebuka, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019, from the KUC office

Personal interview with Maleta Tenten, Antebuka, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2019, from the KUC office

Personal interview with Teauama Atireti, Betio, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019, from the new KPC Youth

Personal interview with Tabotabo Auatabu, Betio, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2018, from the new KPC office (New KPC legal advisor)

Personal interview with Tabokai Tekina, Betio, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019, from the new KPC men's fellowship

Personal interview with Teakoiti Teutaake, Betio, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2019, from the new KPC women's fellowship

Personal interview with Tion Autaene, Betio, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019, from the KUC men's fellowship