

David & Val Parker



Vanuatu

About Vanuatu

The Republic of Vanuatu is made up of 82 mostly-volcanic islands (about 70 are occupied). It is located 1750km off the north-east coast of Australia (west of Fiji and south of the Solomon Islands). Vanuatu has a population of approximately 220,000. Port Vila, the capital, is on the island of Efate.

Known as the New Hebrides until independence in 1980, Vanuatu is part of Melanesia, and the languages spoken are Melanesian (about 105 different languages), and officially Bislama, French and English. For its population size, Vanuatu has the greatest linguistic diversity in the world! The main religion (84%) is Christianity. The majority of Ni-Vanuatu are engaged in subsistence farming and some fishing, but tourism has also become significant.

The Seaside Paama (or Paama Seaside) community in Port Vila gets its name from Paama Island (just north of Efate Island), as the residents have generally come from Paama Island in search of work and education in Port Vila. Rural-to-urban migration has led to the growth of several informal settlements like Seaside Paama in Port Vila, which typically face issues to do with housing, sanitation and water supply, unemployment, education, and violence against women.

The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu

The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, inaugurated in 1948, is the largest denomination with over 60,000 members and



encompassing around 30% of the population. There are 400 scattered congregations within 6 presbyteries. The current Moderator is Pastor Obed Moses.

Activities of the church include training for mission both inside and outside Vanuatu, pastoral care in hospitals, prisons, barracks and in institutes of higher education. The church operates three secondary schools and three rural vocational training centres. The Church is very active in operating various social development projects, including the Port Vila area where the Parkers will be living and volunteering. The PCV is currently engaged in extending the Presbyterian Church Assembly buildings, which will also include a new eye care clinic.

Ministers are trained at Talua Ministry Training Centre on South Santo. The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu values the long ecumenical partnership with the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies and partners.

UnitingWorld's Relief and Development unit, through a regular volunteer, Don MacRaid, is engaged in a long term eye care project with the PCV.

(Photo above: some members of Seaside Paama church choir)

About David and Val

David and Val Parker will be volunteering for approximately 6 months from late February 2012 in Port Vila and Seaside Paama. Val is a registered nurse and David is a Civil Engineer, and they have a hobby farm with alpacas and many different animals!

David will be assisting with the extension of the Church and Eye Clinic, in administration and building planning, and in an advisory capacity. He will also be teaching part time at Seaside Paama School, probably in upper Primary Maths.

Val will be mainly assisting with the PWMU (women's ministry), who are keen for her to assist in developing a health awareness



Experience Program



(Above: Seaside Paama school and kindergarten. Below: the current church L and new church being built R)

and first aid program for women. This is also likely to include some workshops relating to women's crafts such as sewing. The Seaside Paama community is also keen to use Val's skills in health promotion in the local community. Both David's and Val's roles and time-allocation will be clarified in more detail in the weeks after arrival and as the projects progress, as an integral part of the partnership process.

David and Val have visited Vanuatu on several occasions, and feel strongly drawn to the people and location (if somewhat doubtful about the heat!). As Christians about to retire, and with independent children, they feel that this is the right time to 'give back' in acknowledgement of the many financial and lifestyle benefits they have enjoyed in Australia; however, they are fully expecting



to gain more than they can imagine through living in relationship with local partners and experiencing Christianity in the Ni-Vanuatu context. They hope to make a lot of new friends and also share their own lives and skills in return.

David and Val are members of St Stephens UC in Wodonga and are keen to be representatives of the Australian Uniting Church community as they engage in partnership with the PCV. They value the prayer and support of their sending church, as well as family and friends and other volunteers. They are particularly encouraged by these verses as they prepare for this wonderful experience:

"Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Colossians 3:16-17

and: *"The happiest people don't necessarily have the best of everything; they just learnt to make the best of everything they have and accept it with humility and gratitude." Anon.*

Contact UnitingWorld

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