

# Waber, Karl (1921–2015)

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## GUNTHER KLENK

Gunther Klenk received a pastoral degree in 1973 (Predigerseminar Marienhöhe, Darmstadt, Germany). Although he retired in 2014, he is still engaged in the church in Örtlimatt, Krattigen, and with minor book projects. He served for 19 years as pastor in the Swiss-German Conference and was employed in the Advent Publishing House in Krattigen. For 22 years, he served as editor-in-chief for the health magazine, *Leben und Gesundheit*, and was responsible for all published materials.

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Karl Waber was a pastor and church administrator in Switzerland and missionary to Cameroun. He wrote two books describing the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Switzerland.

## Early Life

Karl Waber was born August 15, 1921 in Kiesen, Kanton Bern, Switzerland, as the oldest son of Karl Johann and Margaretha Waber-Kohler. As soon as his father was able to buy a small farm the family moved to Oberhofen near Turbenthal, Kanton Zurich. There the family grew with an addition of two sons and two daughters.

The year 1935 ushered a new period for the family. While Karl's father was very sick he was visited by his neighbor Christian Gehrig, who had recently become an Adventist. The two men talked about salvation from sin and obedience to God. After Karl Johann had recovered, the family received Bible studies. In the summer of 1935 Karl Waber's parents were baptized. Two years later on July 10, 1937, Karl, who was always present at the Bible studies, was baptized.

## Theological Education and Marriage

Karl always wanted to study theology at the seminary in Collonges-sous-Salève, but the dream could be realized only after the end of World War II. In the meanwhile, Karl found a job as lumberjack in the forests near Winterthur. Even though he loved this job he decided to try working as a literature evangelist in 1944. This was not easy for a shy young man. One and a half year later he was asked to join Pastor Hugo Möschinger in a large evangelistic campaign in St. Gallen.

In the autumn of 1946 after the end of the War, Waber started his theological studies in Collonges-sous-Salève. Because workers were urgently needed in Switzerland, he was allowed to study only two years in Collonges. At the eastern conference meeting of the Swiss Union in 1948 in Basel, Karl met Charlotte Perrochet, a newly converted deaconess. The two were married on November 30, 1948 in Neuchatel.

## Early Ministry in Switzerland

After marriage Waber started his long career as a minister in the eastern part of Switzerland, in Romanshorn. During the four years he worked in this area, two sons, Marc-André and Bernard, were born. In 1952 Waber was called to work in the Zurich-Oerlikon church, and a year later he was ordained for the gospel ministry. Towards the end of 1953, being bilingual, he was called to minister to both the French and German speaking Adventist churches. This ability to serve in dual languages became an effective training for his future work in Cameroun.

## Service in Cameroun

The summer of 1956 brought new ministry challenges to the Wabers. The South European Division, located in Bern, asked if Wabers would serve as missionaries to South Cameroun. The family was excited that their long-time desire to be missionaries was at last to be realized. Soon they sailed out of Bordeaux (France) to Douala (Cameroun) and from there to Yaoundé, the headquarters of the Adventist church. After three weeks of training in missions, in December 1956, the Wabers took over the missionary outpost in Nangandjango. The "Mission de Kribi," as it was called, included at that time an area as big as Switzerland with different tribes (including remote pygmies) and languages. In addition, there were 20 outdoor schools with native teachers and evangelists and a total of 1,200 students.

The city of Douala, which also belonged to the mission territory of Waber, became more and more politically unstable. The unrest spread over the country and culminated in the declaration of independence of Cameroun in 1960. The resulting upheavals paralyzed train and road traffic. In spite of these difficulties God blessed the proclamation of the gospel and the membership grew. About this time in Kribi, the Waber family saw the addition of another son, Jean-Luc. In 1962 Waber was sent to Niamvoudou in a remote district in the southeast of Cameroun where he was to build a school to train evangelists. With great energy Waber took over this new challenge as pastor, teacher, constructor and gardener.

After furlough in Switzerland, where Mrs. Waber gave birth to the fourth son Martin, they returned to Niamvoudou, but because of persisting health issues of Mrs. Waber, the family permanently returned to Switzerland in 1965.

## Ministry in the French Part of Switzerland

After his return to Switzerland, Waber was called to work in the French speaking part of the country, where he was responsible for caring for the churches in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Tramelan and St. Imier. In this area, where the Adventist Mission in Europe started, Waber worked for four years. The church in Tramelan still used the old chapel, built by the Roth family on their property, which had been dedicated at Christmas 1886 in the presence of Ellen G. White.

## Ministry in Zurich for the German Swiss Conference

In 1969 the German Swiss Conference elected Waber as its president, resulting in the Wabers moving to Zurich. Besides serving fulltime as conference president, Waber also worked as an active evangelist and held campaigns in different Swiss cities.

A short while later, the conference treasurer resigned, and the responsibility fell on Waber, while Harald Knott became the conference president. At the next meeting of the Swiss Union, Waber was given the additional responsibility of being the treasurer of the Union. Even though he worked mainly as an administrator he frequently preached in different churches in both German and French speaking areas of Switzerland.

During his administration in Switzerland, several large church building projects were realized in Switzerland: in Krattigen (Oertlimatt), Zurich (Cramerstrasse), Wetzikon, Biel, and Lucerne. Other building constructions during Waber's stewardship include the extension of the house for seniors at Oertlimatt in Krattigen and a new chalet for youth groups in St. Stephan. Waber retired in 1988 at the age of 67 after 42 years of service to the Adventist church.

## Final Years

Waber's post retirement years were not years of rest and leisure. Waber moved his residence to Titterten in the Canton of Basel-Land. From there he helped one of his sons (Jean-Luc) in the health food store "Country Life" in Basel. But the most fruitful work of this period was two books describing the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Switzerland. All through his service in ministry and administration as president and treasurer Waber gathered documents and photos relating to the Adventist history in his country. Over the years he brought together a considerable collection. The first book *Streiflichter aus der Geschichte der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in der Schweiz, von den Anfängen 1865 bis 1901* was published in 1995 by Advent-Verlag Krattigen. Four years later Waber completed the second volume with the same title, covering the years 1901 to 1929.

Together with his wife Charlotte, Waber lived his final years from 2003 to 2015 in Krattigen (Canton Bern). His last days were spent in a home for seniors in Oertlimatt, which was built under his guidance. Four years before his death, he wrote these encouraging words to his beloved church members: "We do not need to fear the end of this life. Death will be to us as agreeable as the sleep after a long work-day, with the assurance to see a new morning. Beyond description will be at that great day of resurrection the reunion with the marriage partner, the sons and the grandchildren ... May none of them be missing. It is worthy to orientate to this target."

Karl Waber died January 29, 2015 at the age of 93 and was buried in Aeschi/BE.

## Contribution

Even though Karl Waber was not trained as a businessman, he handled the finances of the Church with wisdom and a sense of stewardship. Without his careful management, it would not have been possible for the church administration then to build several new church buildings. Waber also watched carefully the theological developments in the church and courageously defended the landmarks of Adventist faith and belief through his two landmark publications on the roots of Adventism in Switzerland.

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