

Botswana Union Conference

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Botswana Union Conference is a subsidiary church administrative unit of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Current Territory and Statistics

Botswana Union Conference territory comprises the entire region of the Republic of Botswana, a landlocked country in southern Africa. It is bordered by Namibia on the southwest, Zambia on the north, Zimbabwe on the east, and South Africa on the south. It covers an area of 600,375 square kilometers, with a population of 2,249,000.¹ Botswana is divided into nine districts and five town councils. Although Setswana (Tswana), the national language, is spoken by 78.2 percent of the population, the official language is English. Other languages spoken are Kalanga, by 7.9 percent, and Sekgalagadi, by 2.8 percent of the people. Gaborone, situated on the southern tip of the country, is both the capital city and the economic hub of Botswana. Other big cities and villages are Francistown, Molepolole, Selibe-Phikwe, Maun, Serowe, Mogoditshane, Khanye, Lobatse, Mahalapye and Mochudi. Pula (BWP), which means rain, is the official currency.²

The former British protectorate of Bechuanaland adopted its new name “Botswana” upon independence in 1966. The country has one of the strongest economies in Africa. Although diamond mining dominates the economy of Botswana, tourism is a growing major source of income because of the country's extensive nature reserves. Due to Botswana's dry climate, however, most people raise cattle and goats for a living as opposed to crop farming.³

The Botswana Union Conference is part of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division. Headquartered in Gaborone, the union conference was organized as a union mission in November 2003 with a membership of 40,000. The union is made up of two administrative entities, the North and South Botswana Conferences. The organized work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Botswana began with the establishment of the North Botswana Field in 1921. It was reorganized in 1951, and realigned in 1984 to create two fields. The North Botswana Field administered the Central, Chobe, Ngamiland, and North-East districts. The South Botswana Field administered the Ghanzi, Kgalagadi, Kgatleng, Kweneng, Southern, and South-East districts.⁴

As of June 30, 2018, the union's membership is 45,851, with 24,665 in the North Botswana Conference, and 21,186 in the South Botswana Conference.⁵ The union has 228 churches and Companies, served by 25 ordained ministers and 28 licensed ministers. The union and its local conferences operate three primary Schools; two secondary schools; one Hospital; one clinic; one college of nursing, and one medical practice.⁶

Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Work in the Republic of Botswana

In 1919, following a reorganization of the southern African region into six districts, Botswana (then known as Bechuanaland) was placed under the Southern African Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists.⁷ The Botswana district was assigned to W. H. Anderson, a missionary who had been contemplating opening a mission station in that territory.⁸

In 1921 Anderson was granted permission to open a hospital in Kanye Village after an interview with Gagoangwe, the queen mother. Since all the villages in Botswana had already been assigned to different Christian denominations, this permission was given with the understanding that no preaching was to be done. The condition was followed until the arrival of Dr. A. H. Kretschmar in 1922, the first medical doctor in Kanye village, who helped to break down prejudice against the Adventist church.⁹ Then Anderson was allowed to preach freely. Invitations began coming from as far as South West Africa (Namibia), which until then had been closed to Adventist missionary work.¹⁰ In 1922 J. R. Campbell was also allowed to evangelize the village. By 1926 Queen Ntebohang was reported to be rejoicing in the message.¹¹ She was described as a consistent, loyal Seventh-day Adventist, who wielded a strong influence.¹² In 1927 H. Walker was granted permission to start regular mission work.¹³

The Basuto-Bechuanaland Mission was organized in 1926 to start work in the Sesotho speaking countries of Bechuanaland, Basutoland, Orange Free State, and Northern Cape Province. It had 13 organized churches and 411 baptized church members throughout the vast territories. Work was administered from an office in Bloemfontein.¹⁴ In 1932 the Adventist church in Botswana was placed under the administration of the Zambesi Union Mission, with headquarters in Bulawayo for closer supervision.¹⁵

In 1934 Colonel Rey, Resident Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, interviewed missionary J. van der Merwe in Mafeking and invited the church to establish a hospital in the Lake Ngami area of the country, home to approximately 50,000. There was no medical facility within over 300 miles. The government promised to foot the bill by offering £4,000 for the hospital buildings and homes. After nearly three years of negotiation and the construction of buildings, Maun Medical Hospital was officially opened on Monday, February 15, 1937.¹⁶ American Doctors C.P. Bringle and J.G. Foster, with P. Hovig and Fourie as nurses, took up their duties in the hospital with an official bed capacity of 24.¹⁷ This became Zambesi Union Mission's second hospital after Kanye.

In 1945 the Bechuanaland government took over Maun Medical Mission and gave the church a site alongside the former mission property. The church built a house for the European missionary and one for the African

pastor.¹⁸ They were now conducting a regular mission station at Maun. In 1946 they baptized 66 people, from a total of 684 members.¹⁹

In 1951 Botswana was organized into a mission station with headquarters in Kanye. W. M. Webster was the first mission director and treasurer. The mission started off with four ordained ministers, two locals and two expatriates who looked after four organized churches with a total membership of 505.²⁰ In 1959 the territory of Botswana was reorganized into the Bechualand Field, with headquarters in Francistown. W. M. Cooks was elected the first president and secretary-treasurer. The field had 1,408 baptized members in 13 organized churches, under eight ordained pastors.²¹ Besides evangelistic work, Cooks built many church buildings around the country. These buildings are known to be strong structures with capital "A" shaped roofs, which stand to this day.

On September 16, 1966, the field was renamed Botswana Field in anticipation that the Bechuanaland Protectorate would attain political independence from Britain on the 30th of that month. In 1972 C. D. Mguni succeed Cooks as president, becoming the field's first indigenous pastor to serve as president.²² About a year later H. J. Swenson became the Secretary-Treasurer. At this time the field had 22 organized churches, 2,593 baptized church members, and 10 ordained pastors.²³

The first Adventist school in Botswana was established in 1962 in the small village of Ramokgoname, 66 kilometers south-east of Palapye. In 1990 the government took over the ownership and administration of the school.

When work started in the Zambesi Union territory, church members from different racial groups attended the same camp meetings. The following Nyazura Mission camp meeting report by Mrs. Robert Buckley confirms this arrangement:

The first night the campers were packed into the church. On Sabbath they met in the natural amphitheater outside. Eight hundred people were in attendance. Among them were twenty-two Europeans including the Mutare group. By 1935 the European group had grown to 37. Every year they continued to attend the Nyazura Camp Meeting.²⁴

In an attempt to effectively minister to Europeans in its territory, the Zambesi Union Mission organized the Rhodesia-Bechuanaland Conference in 1929 with headquarters in Bulawayo. Its territory covered the countries of Bechuanaland Protectorate (Botswana), Northern and Southern Rhodesia, Belgian Congo, and Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). The white population was 54,018, while mission work among indigenous Africans was administered by the mission fields. The Rhodesia-Bechuanaland Conference started with 71 baptized members who congregated in two churches. The first officers were E. C. Boger, President, and D. A. Webster, Secretary-Treasurer.²⁵ Later its services were extended to the mixed-race and Indian people in those countries. The conference territory had no geographical boundary. Instead, it operated as a regional conference that focused

on work among the three racial groups.

In 1969 the Rhodesia-Bechuanaland Conference was reorganized, and the Zambezi General Field was instituted to serve the mixed-race group and Indians in Zimbabwe. It started with a membership of 83, in one organized church. The first officers were President F. G. Thomas and Secretary-Treasurer M. B. Musgrave. The parent conference was left to minister to 458 white members who congregated in five churches. By this time white people from Zambia and Botswana were ministered to by the unions or fields in their respective countries.²⁶ Currently, most unions have assigned local conferences to minister to the different races in their territories.

Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Angola are home to about 100,000 San people, or Bushmen, an indigenous people who in Botswana have learned to survive in the harsh environment of the Kalahari Desert. In 1953 a Bushman named Sekoba had a strange dream in which an angel told him to journey to the eastern part of the country and find people with "the black Book" and who worshipped on the seventh day of the week. The angel also gave him the ability to speak the Setswana language. Carrying his skin blanket, biltong (dried meat), and his bow and arrow, he headed towards the eastern border of Botswana. After traveling for 250 kilometers he reached a Bantu village near Serowe whose pastor had "the black Book." Convinced that he had found the right church, he slept in the pastor's house after the evening meal.²⁷

That night the angel told Sekoba that this was not the true church. He was told to look for Pastor Moyo who worshiped on Saturday and had "the black Book" plus four other "brown books." The following morning a cloud guided him to Tsessebe, 197 kilometers north-east of Serowe. Pastor Moyo, a Seventh-day Adventist minister who had both "the black Book," the Bible, and "four brown books," four volumes written by Ellen White, welcomed him. After a week of Bible studies Sekoba went back to his family, after which he relocated to Nata, about 189 kilometers north of Francistown. Pastor Mogegeh baptized him in 1954.

The following year his wife, brother, and sister were also baptized. Sekoba was later ordained as an elder of his church. Before his death in 1957, ten other Bushmen joined the church.²⁸ His daughter MaSekoba worked for the Botswana Field for 27 years.²⁹

Organizational History Toward the Establishment of Botswana Union

In 1983 Adventist membership in Botswana reached 4,648. The country's population at that time was 936,600, which translated to an Adventists versus non-Adventist ration of 1:202. The Botswana Field under the leadership of J. N. Dube as president experienced positive growth.³⁰ Members congregated in 25 churches under 14 pastors. The steady growth in membership motivated Botswana Field to initiate an application for union status. During the 1982 year-end meetings, the Zambesi Union Executive Committee voted to pass on a request from Botswana Field that it be attached to the Trans-Africa Division (TAD) effective January 1, 1983.³¹ It was also voted to request the division set up a regional office to help the Botswana region attain union mission status by June 1985.

The Division Committee voted to accept the Botswana Field request to be administered as an attached entity to the Division.³² One of the listed guidelines stated that the field was to “[r]emit to TAD Treasury all funds received that would normally be passed on to a Union, which funds shall be administered by TAD Treasury in the name of Botswana Field in accordance with the TAD Working Policy provisions and requirements.”³³ In the same action, the committee further voted “that all allocated funds and trust funds held by the Zambesi Union for Botswana Field, Kanye Hospital and Botswana Adventist Medical Services, be passed on to these organizations³⁴ for the administration of the work in the entities and in the Botswana region. Meanwhile, the division assumed administrative oversight of the two church medical institutions in the country, Kanye Hospital and Botswana Adventist Medical Services.

J. G. Evert was appointed to serve as the first Botswana Region president. He chaired an advisory body of 14 persons tasked to supervise the roadmap to Union Mission status. The regional office was given responsibility for preparing the church constituency in Botswana for evaluation by the GC Survey Commission. It was also given the responsibility to work towards the establishment of a second field in Botswana by January 1, 1985, and to work towards the establishment of a union mission. While the field reported to the Regional Office, all accounting functions were administered by the Division Treasury department. From 1983 the Regional Office and Kanye Hospital were financed by 25% appropriations that used to go to the Zambesi Union.³⁵

Criteria for Union Status in Botswana

In 1983, the Division voted the following criteria for approving union mission status in Botswana Region:

Membership growth of 12 percent per annum from 1983 to 1985.

Fourfold increase in tithe from 1983 to 1985.

The organization of a second field by January 1, 1985.

Preparation of sufficient leaders to fill administrative and departmental positions.

Once the criteria were met, the Division would set up a Survey Team to evaluate the region and submit its recommendations to the General Conference.³⁶

In June 1983 the Division committee voted to approve the construction of a TAD Branch Office in Botswana.³⁷ The TAD allocated P5,000 from its miscellaneous income, and an additional P5,000 from the Thirteenth Sabbath Donation Fund, to make a total of P10,000 which Botswana Region was to match.

The November 1983 division year-end committee meeting voted to realign the territory of Botswana Region into the North and South Botswana Fields.³⁸ The same committee meeting voted C. D. Mguni to continue as president of North Botswana Field, with G. Olefile as secretary-treasurer. The North retained 41 organized

churches with 3,511 baptized members. At the 1988 session Pastor A. M. Motlhaapula became the new president for North Botswana Field and J. K. Mpenya became secretary-treasurer.³⁹

The newly created South Botswana Field appointed A. C. Khumalo (Mpfu) as the first president and O. N. Simankane secretary-treasurer. The south field started with 17 organized churches with 2,474 baptized members. The field headquarters was designated to be in Mogoditshane. During the 1988 session the field appointed new officers, R. Hall and W. Mashingaidze as president and secretary-treasurer respectively. In 1992 the Division voted a loan of P280,000 to fund the construction of staff housing for South Botswana Field.⁴⁰

In 1983 the division year-end executive committee meeting set up the following commission to study the readiness of Botswana Region for union mission status: R. R. Ndhlovu (Chair), J. G. Evert, D. W. B. Chalale, K. Sebonego, D. Saleshando, J. F. Wilkens, M. Mooka (replaced by C. P. Mpuang in 1985), and D. J. Sandstrom.

A Botswana Affairs Committee under the chairmanship of R. R. Ndhlovu was further set up to serve in an administrative liaison role for North and South Botswana Fields. The committee members were J. G. Evert, C. D. Mguni, D. W. B. Chalale and K. Osborn.⁴¹ In 1985 the membership of this committee was adjusted to include A. C. Khumalo (Mpfu), the president of South Botswana Field, and K. Seligmann, the director of Botswana Adventist Medical Services. The committee met in Harare, Zimbabwe, at the time of the division mid-year and year-end committee meetings.

The first application for union status for the Botswana territory was submitted to the General Conference through a recommendation of the Eastern Africa Division (EAD) Executive Committee's mid-year meetings in 1985.⁴² Unfortunately, after a careful analysis of the application documents, Botswana Region failed to meet the criteria for granting union mission status. On January 1, 1986, D. W. B. Chalale replaced J. G. Evert as Botswana Region director. Chalale's appointment led to a reactivation of the request for a visit of the GC Survey Commission to evaluate the region for receiving union mission status.

During the 1986 year-end committee meetings, the EAD voted and submitted a second request to the GC to evaluate Botswana Region's readiness for union mission status.⁴³ The GC gave a second negative response. In 1989, the Botswana Affairs Committee arranged with Broadhurst Church to build its church next to the plot purchased for the union offices. At the same meeting, the names of M. Mooka of South Botswana Field and J. G. Ndaba of North Botswana Field were included in the membership of the GC Survey Commission.

At the request of the EAD in 1991, the General Conference set up a Commission on Territorial Realignment for North and South Botswana Fields, Namibia Field, and Caprivi Strip Field, comprising: M. Bediako (Chair), M. T. Battle, W. Duncan Eva, D. E. Robinson, Bekele Heye, L. D. Raelly, G. De Boer, South African Union Conference President, Southern Union Mission President, North Botswana Field President, South Botswana Field President, a representative from Caprivi Strip Field, and a representative from South West Africa Field (Namibia).⁴⁴

A third application proposed the formation of a union that comprised the two Namibia fields and two Botswana fields with headquarters in Gaborone. For the third time the GC turned down the proposal. However, the church leadership in Botswana did not give up on their vision. New attempts to attain union status were made when A. Motlhaapula replaced Pastor C. D. Mguni as North Botswana Field president, with J. Mpenya as secretary-treasurer.

In 1992 EAD appointed H. Dumba chairperson of the Botswana Affairs Committee, and B. G. Muganda secretary.

⁴⁵ A positive development came when in June 1993 the division adopted the following GC Commission recommendations that would lead to a Union Mission status in Botswana:

Maintain a working capital at 125 percent and liquidity at 100 percent effective June 1, 1993.

The two fields to operate within the voted budgets.

Submit trust fund reports and retirement contributions monthly.

Keep the repayment schedule for capital loans with the division current.

Submit to the Division Ministerial Secretary by December 31, 1993 a funded professional development plan to upgrade ministerial personnel.

Set up a Sun Accounting system for Botswana Region. Accounting records to be on the system retroactive to January 1, 1993.⁴⁶

Upon meeting the above guidelines, the division was to approve the establishment of a Union Mission in Botswana. By April 1995 the criteria stated above had not been met. This led to the fourth unsuccessful attempt.

The Division set up another commission in April 1998, chaired by N. C. Brightman. Its task was to reevaluate the finances of the two fields in Botswana to determine whether they could sustain a union mission and to report to the year-end committee meeting.⁴⁷ Further, the commission was to recommend the most suitable union mission model, examine the financial viability of the region, prepare a budget proposal, and choose a location for the union office.

The commission made the following recommendations:

1. Develop different models, including the concept of a union of churches, and decide on a union [status] that has the two existing fields under it.
2. Gaborone was chosen as the most suitable location for union offices because of its proximity to government offices and to major church institutions.

3. The union offices could either be on the same plot of land with South Botswana Field or on a plot of land in Broadhurst.

The church membership of the Botswana Region had risen from 13,238 in 1993 to 17,657 in 1997. Growth in membership made it possible for tithe income to increase from P1,176,022 to P1,909,054 in the same period.

In February 2001, a Botswana Region subcommittee chaired by Pardon K. Mwansa, the newly elected division president, met and recommended to the North and South Botswana Fields, the following preparatory steps for union mission status:⁴⁸

Mission:

1. Target December 2002 as the date for the attainment of a union status.
2. Mobilize and train lay people for soul winning.

Financial:

1. Both fields to reach and maintain a liquidity and working capital of 100%.
2. Reduce worker indebtedness.
3. Show evidence of strong Stewardship promotion that results in increase in tithes and offerings.
4. Both Fields to train district pastors and office workers.
5. Recruit more literature evangelists.
6. Improve pastor to member ratio.

Facilities:

1. Develop plans for the construction of two field office buildings.
2. The two fields to set aside funds for the construction of a union office.

Educational Institutions:

1. Start at least one educational institution by January 2002. This condition was met when in 2002 South Botswana Field, under the presidency of Pastor O. Gabasiane, started a pre-school, "Little Lambs," which in 2003 developed into what is now Mogoditsane Adventist Primary School.

General:

1. Set up a Botswana Region Coordination Committee as follows:

P. Machamire (Chairman), H. Stickle (Secretary), EAD Education & Health Ministries Directors, North and South Botswana Field Presidents and Secretary-Treasurers, one pastor from the North and one lay person from the South, BAMS Medical Director and Kanye Hospital Administrator. EAD Officers – Ex-Officio.

2. Terms of Reference

Search for an appropriate location for the union office and report to the EAD Committee by mid-2002.

Recommend plans for building union offices and worker accommodation to the EAD Committee.

Set up a budget for the new union.

Decide on the necessary personnel.

Coordinate bursary distribution for personnel development.

Finally, the fifth application received a positive response. In 2003, the General Conference Committee approved a recommendation of its survey team to organize a Botswana Union Mission that consisted of two local fields and a skeleton staff. The set up provided for union departmental directors to also serve as local conference departmental directors until the missions had adequate staffing in place. The new union mission started operating with three officers, three full time departmental directors, and three volunteers.

In February 2003 the division voted to authorize the purchase of a plot of land comprising 12,447 square meters, situated in a township as a site for the proposed Botswana Union Mission office. The purchase price was P18.00 per square meter.⁴⁹ Due to its location, the government of Botswana required a structure costing one million pula to be built on that land by the end of September 2003.

To fulfill the requirements recommended by the division, a boarding secondary school, East Gate Academy, was opened in Francistown in 2005 with the help of 13th Sabbath Offerings. The school was built on a plot of land purchased at a cost of Botswana Pula 2,750 million, when Strike Ben was president of the North Botswana Field. The first headmaster of East Gate Academy was D. Nkwai.

In November 2003 the Division Executive Committee appointed the first union officers of the Botswana Union Mission: Paminus Machamire, president; Kenaope Kenaope, executive secretary, and Hebert Stickle, CFO.⁵⁰ This was followed by a union session which appointed the first departmental directors, and the union executive committee. The above team served until 2005, when H. Stickle retired. B. Kabo replaced K. Kenaope as executive secretary, while Bapi Rana replaced H. Stickle as chief financial officer (CFO). The Division Council of 2010 voted

Strike Ben as president; B. Kabo as executive secretary, and G. Mpofu CFO.

Botswana Union Mission attained conference status in 2013. It voted K. Kenaope president; K. Rakwena executive secretary, and G. Mpofu as CFO. The membership stood at 35,936 in 106 organized churches⁵¹

Institutions

Primary Schools:

1. Mogoditshane Adventist Primary School, five kilometers from Gaborone.
2. Immanuel Adventist Academy in Molepolole, 60 kilometers from Gaborone.

Secondary Schools:

1. Eastern Gate Adventist Academy in Francistown, 421 kilometers from Gaborone.
2. Mountain View Adventist Academy in Mogoditshane.

Colleges:

1. Kanye College of Nursing, 91 kilometers from Gaborone.

Medical Institutions:

1. Kanye Hospital.
2. Moshupa Clinic, under the administration of Kanye Hospital.
3. Kanye College of Nursing.
4. Botswana Adventist Medical Services

List of Botswana Union Officers

Presidents: P. Machamire (2004-2010); S. Ben (2011-2013); K. Kenaope (2014-present).

Executive Secretaries: K. Kenaope (2004-2005); B. Kabo (2006-2013); K. Rakwena (2014); O. Gabasiane (2015-2017); J. Nkape (2018-present).⁵²

Treasurers/CFOs: H. Stickle (2004-2005); B. Rana (2006-2009); G. Mpofu (2010-present).

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