

# Nyamweya, Paul Maobe (1878–1974)

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One of the first ten converts in Gusii land in Kenya, Paul Nyamweya became the first pastor to be ordained to the gospel ministry in Gusii land.

## Early Life and Conversion

Paul Maobe Nyamweya was born to Maobe Onyangore and Mora a Onyangore in 1878 in Nyaura, Nyaribari location in Kisii, Kenya. He had four brothers: Omari, Nyanganyeria, Ogendi, Oigara, and three sisters, who included Mogunde, Bonareri, and Monyenche. Paul was the last born of the eight children.<sup>1</sup>

Nyamweya attended Nyanchwa Mission beginning in 1916 for his basic education under the tutorship of Eric Beavon. Nyamweya was greatly inspired by the missionaries' ability to read and write. Therefore, he enrolled in formal education to learn to read and write. In 1922 he attended Kamagambo Theological College for a certificate course in theology. In 1932 he enrolled for another ministerial certificate course at Kamagambo, and he became one of the top three students in the class.

Nyamweya joined the Adventist church in 1919, as a result of his schooling, and was baptized in 1920 along with nine other pioneer students and converts in Gusii land. The others included: Mathayo Ratemo, Ibrahim Ombega, Musa Nyandusi, Joel Araka, Daniel Kiyondi, Johana Omboga, Yusufu Simba, Mariko Nyasinga, and Samuel Omoke.<sup>2</sup> When Paul Nyamweya joined the mission in 1916, he was already married to two wives, in accordance to Gusii customs, but he had to part with the younger wife in accordance with church teaching. He remained with Lois Manyange Nyamweya, his first wife with whom had 13 children.<sup>3</sup> He wrote in his diary "when we [referring to himself and the other nine pioneer students at Nyanchwa] read the gospel truth and listened to the messages from the missionaries we were persuaded to break off from some practices like drinking alcohol, tobacco smoking."<sup>4</sup>

All was not rosy for Paul. He encountered strong opposition from family members. His parents, brothers, and sisters opposed his decision to be baptized into the Adventist Church, but he went ahead with baptism. He also separated from his second wife and remained with the first wife according to the principle of one man, one wife. This marked the beginning of a strained relationship between him and his family and the community. His mother, one Sabbath morning, confronted him in church while he was preaching and hurled insults at him,

condemning him for wasting his followers' time and misleading them and poisoning the people with dangerous ideologies. At the time, locusts had invaded Gusiiland and people were expected to physically chase them away from their crops throughout the day. On this Sabbath God performed a miracle. All the farms were invaded and destroyed by locusts, but Pastor Nyamweya's portion was spared. The other nine converts succumbed to pressure and went back to polygamy, but Pastor Nyamweya was steadfast until his death.

## Ministry

Pastor Nyamweya started his ministry as a teacher at Nyanchwa Mission School in 1919 and continued there until he was appointed as pastor at Motagara Church in 1924. In 1925 he returned to Nyanchwa Mission School where he continued to serve until 1927. He was appointed a pioneer evangelist in 1936 and was ordained to the gospel ministry. After his ordination, he was appointed to serve as the Assistant Mission Director at Nyanchwa Mission, a position he held until 1948 when he was appointed as a pioneer missionary to open a mission station at Kabokyek among the Kipsigis people, where he served until 1942. At Kabokyek he served as the pastor and as a teacher in the school that he and a local leader founded. He faced great opposition from the African Inland Church, but God granted him and his team of workers success through the establishment of the first nine Adventist churches in Kipsigisland.

Nyamweya was the first Gusii pastor to be ordained (1936) and the first to be granted a car loan and subsequently monthly car allowance (in 1946). He was also granted license to own a diesel power mill on the farm to make both animal feed and mill maize for family use. In 1955 the East Africa Union sent Pastor Nyamweya to Congo, Rwanda Urundi (presently Rwanda and Burundi), and Tanganyika. He conducted a total of 23 camp meetings in which 393 people heeded the call to join the Church.<sup>5</sup>

## Later Years

Paul Nyamweya retired as a church worker in 1952. After retirement he remained active in church matters. He was occasionally invited to leaders' meetings in Gusiiland. He also actively engaged in dairy farming and other agricultural ventures at his farm located at Nyanchwa Hills. Nyamweya was a passionate dairy farmer. He and his wife established a dairy business at their farm at Nyanchwa. The farm acquired certification to keep pedigree cows (the first of its kind in Gusiiland). He died on March 9, 1974, and was buried at Nyacwha village 22 years after he retired.

## Legacy

Many Gusii people became pastors as a direct result of Pastor Nyamweya's influence. He had a good working relationship with all the missionaries. It is evident from the letters in his file that he kept touch with Eric Beavon, even after he had left Kenya.

As a pioneer pastor in Gusiiland, Nyamweya laid the foundation for the pastors who later joined the ministry. He was instrumental in planting churches in Kenya and in the Congo. He consistently and successfully fought against cultural practices that were in direct conflict with the church and Bible, for example, polygamy and alcoholism.

He was a firm believer in Adventist education. He wholeheartedly supported the establishment of Adventist schools across Gusiiland and beyond. Establishment of Kabokyek was part of his initiative. He kept copies of all regular reports regarding his work as a pastor.

As a member of Gusii community, he actively participated in community development activities. He was always invited to community and Gusii leadership meetings, as confirmed by a letter obtained from his file.

His home on Nyanchwa Hill was a beacon of farming and hygiene. He was one of the pioneers of the flour milling business in Gusiiland. He sought a government permit to establish a diesel-operated flour mill, which was granted. The mill served the needs of his farm, the neighbors, and Nyanchwa Mission School.

He gave the community access to a water spring located on the lower part of his farm, which is still the case. He protested the requirement to sell his milk to the dairy board, which meant doing business even on Sabbath. He sought for permission to be exempted from selling his milk on Sabbath. He was granted a license by the colonial government to directly sell his milk to customers (the only license of this kind in the colonial era).

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## SOURCES

Nyaundi, Nehemiah. *Seventh-day Adventism in Gusii Kenya*. Kenya: Africa Herald Publishing House, 1997.

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## NOTES

1. Unless stated otherwise, information in this article was obtained from Samson Nyambati, eldest son of Pastor Nyamweya.
2. Nehemiah Nyaundi, *Seventh-day Adventism in Gusii Kenya* (Kenya: Africa Herald Publishing House, 1997), 21.
3. The children's names are: Nyamokami Salome, Nyambati Samson, Maobe Elizaphan, Mikaye Samuel, Nyang'ara Delilah, Kwamboka Annah, Miyienda James, Mogaka David, Anyega Andrew, Marube John, Maragia Peter, Kerubo Milkah, and Bonarereri Ruth.
4. Information from the diary of Pastor Paul Nyamweya accessed by his son, Peter Maragia Nyamweya.
5. Ibid.

