



South-East Rwanda Field headquarters.

Photo courtesy of South-East Rwanda Field.

## South-East Rwanda Field

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South-East Rwanda Field (SERF) is a subsidiary of Rwanda Union Mission in the East-Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

South-East Rwanda Field covers the southern part of Eastern Province, Rwanda. This includes all of the Ngoma and Kirehe districts and part of the Rwamagana and Kayonza districts. Its headquarters is located at Musamvu, Kibungo Sector Ngoma District. As of September 2021, the membership of SERF was 114,934 out of a total population of 1,260,175, approximately 9.1 percent of the population.<sup>1</sup>

### Origin of Seventh-day Adventist Work in South-East Rwanda Field

The Seventh-day Adventist work in southeast Rwanda started in 1942 in Nyarubuye when missionaries arrived from Gitwe where the Seventh-day Adventist work had begun in Rwanda. Nehemiah Kinyogote was the first district pastor of Nyarubuye. The first local churches in this area were Nyarubuye, Kabare, Rundu, Nyamirama, Munyaga, and Rukumberi. Those churches were part of the East Rwanda Field (the current East Central Rwanda Field), which was organized in 1965 with its headquarters in Kigali. From 1970 onwards, many people moved from the north and west to look for arable lands in the east. Among them were some Adventist church members who spread the Adventist message in far eastern Rwanda. With this movement, the Adventist message reached the traditional area called Gisaka near the border of Rusumo toward Tanzania.

In 2011, it became necessary to divide the former East Rwanda Field as its membership had become too large for effective ministry to the members. The former East Rwanda Field was divided between the East Central Rwanda Field, which remained with its headquarters in Kigali, and the new East Rwanda Field, with its headquarters in Kayonza town, Kayonza District. The new East Rwanda Field was organized in 2011 with 74,514 church members distributed in 216 churches and 109 companies.<sup>2</sup> The first officers were Dan Ngamiye, president; Elie Hakizimana, executive secretary; and Jean Pierre Rukundo, treasurer. The field experienced exponential church growth, reaching 161,194 church members, 310 local churches, and 221 companies by the end of 2017. This rapid church growth was particularly due to the 2016 Total Member Involvement (TMI) program during which 25,891 new church members were baptized.<sup>3</sup>

## Events that Led to the Organization of South-East Rwanda Field

On April 18, 2017, the Rwanda Union Mission executive committee recommended to the East-Central Africa Division (ECD) the splitting of the East Rwanda Field (ERA) into two fields named the North-East Rwanda Field (NERF), with headquarters in Nyagatare, and the South-East Rwanda Field (SERF), with headquarters in Ngoma.<sup>4</sup> On July 24, 2017, the Rwanda Union Mission executive committee requested that the ECD evaluate the readiness of the East Rwanda Field for division into two new fields.<sup>5</sup> It also established a committee in charge of making a geographical survey to determine the territory of each of the proposed fields. This committee was composed of Ntakirutimana Issacar, executive secretary of the Rwanda Union Mission (Chairman); Kageruka Nkuba Elly, treasurer of the East Central Rwanda Field; Sebutimbiri Javan, associate treasurer of the Rwanda Union Mission; Hakizimana Elie, department director of Sabbath School and personal ministries of the Rwanda Union Mission; Ndwaniye Isaac, president of the East Central Rwanda Field; and Nsengiyumva Edison, executive secretary of the North Rwanda Field.<sup>6</sup>

The ECD executive committee approved the RUM recommendation in May 2017 and formed a survey team to check the readiness of the proposed entities for the organization with the following terms of reference.

To verify if there is an office for each Field

To ascertain if there is leadership capacity in each Field

To ensure that boundaries are the best there can be

To ascertain if the leaders and church members understand how the church works

To ascertain that the leaders and church members understand their relationship to the worldwide church

To do all other activities related to the assignment

To make the necessary recommendations to the Division Executive committee<sup>7</sup>

Based on the report of the above survey teams, at its year end meeting of 2017, the Rwanda Union Mission executive committee implemented the division of ERA into two fields and selected the officers for the new fields. In the North-East Rwanda Field, Ngamije Dan became president; Ntampaka Reuben, executive secretary; and Niyomugaba Etienne, treasurer. For the South-East Rwanda Field, Ngirinshuti Samuel was elected president; Ngerero Ami Fidele, executive secretary; and Ngirabatware Samuel, treasurer.<sup>8</sup>

To officialize the birth of the new fields, RUM organized an inauguration ceremony held on February 26 and 27, 2019. ECD officers were invited to conduct the ceremony. The guest of honor was Blasious Ruguri, president of the ECD, accompanied by Alain Coralie, executive secretary, and Jerome Habimana, treasurer of the same division.

The organization of the South-East Rwanda Field marked a significant achievement for the Rwanda Union Mission because as this field was the eighth one organized after the Central Rwanda Field, the North Rwanda Field, the West Rwanda Field, the East Central Rwanda Field, the South Rwanda Field, the North-West Rwanda Field, and the North-East Rwanda Field.

## Development of South-East Rwanda Field

At the time of its founding in the last quarter of 2017, the South-East Rwanda Field had 94,428 church members worshipping in 185 churches and 98 companies.<sup>9</sup> Those churches were grouped into twenty church districts. It also supported two secondary schools, Kirehe Adventist Technical and Vocational Education and Training School (KATS) and Nyarubuye O'level, and two primary schools, Rwamagana and Nyarubuye. As of October 2021, SERF had made little growth due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, it had 114,292 church members, 189 churches, and 95 companies grouped into twenty-one districts:<sup>10</sup> Butama, Gatore, Kabarondo, Karembo, Kayonza, Kibungo, Kigonge, Kirehe, Mabare, Matahiro, Munyaga, Nyankora, Nyarubuye, Rugango, Rugarama, Rukira, Rukumberi, Rurambi, Rusumo, Rwamagana, and Rwinkwavu.

Since 2017, SERF has added two more primary schools, Nyakarambi and Nyamirama. At the time of writing, its administration was managed by three officers: Jacques Nkinzingabo, president; Jerome Rukanika, executive secretary; and Meschac Habumugisha, treasurer. Peday Ntihanabayo was in charge of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, education, publishing ministries, and youth Ministries; Batamuriza Mignone Joselyne was in charge of children's ministries, family ministries, and women's ministries; and Michel Kanomero was in charge of Sabbath School, personal ministries, and stewardship ministries. The executive officers also directed other departments. Communication and evangelism were directed by Jerome Rukanika, while Meschac Habumgish oversaw health ministries and Adventist Mission, and Jacques Nkinzingabo directed the ministerial association, public affairs, and religious liberty.<sup>11</sup>

## Presidents

Samuel Ngirinshuti (2018-April 2019), Jacques Nkinzingabo (April 2019-)

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### SOURCES

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East Rwanda Field Secretary's Statistical Report, 2011, 2016 and 2017. Rwanda Union Mission archives, Kigali, Rwanda.

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South-East Rwanda Field Statistics Reports. South-East Rwanda Field archives, Avenue Musamvu, Eastern Province, Rwanda.

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### NOTES

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2. East Rwanda Field Statistical Reports, Term 1, 2011.
3. East Rwanda Field Statistical Reports, Term 2, 2016.
4. Rwanda Union Mission Minutes, RUM 017-046, May 2017.

5. Rwanda Union Mission Minutes, RUM 017-103, July 2017.
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  7. East Central Africa Division Minutes, ECD 2017-025, May 2017.
  8. Rwanda Union Mission Year End Meeting, 2017.
  9. South-East Rwanda Field Statistical Reports, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, 2017.
  10. South-East Rwanda Field Statistical Reports, 3rd Quarter, 2021.
  11. "South-East Rwanda Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2020), 59.
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