

Andersen, Helge Samuel (1928–2019)

SVEN HAGEN JENSEN

Sven Hagen Jensen, M.Div. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) has worked for the church for over 50 years as a pastor, editor, departmental director, and church administrator in Denmark, Nigeria and the Middle East. Jensen enjoys reading, writing, nature and gardening. He is married to Ingelis and has two adult children and four grandchildren.

A visionary, hardworking pastor, departmental director, and administrative leader with entrepreneurial skills, Helge S. Andersen left his mark on the Seventh-day Adventist church in Denmark, Norway, and Nigeria. Youth work, building projects, relief work, personal care for employees, and promotion of evangelism characterized his time of service. He was supported by his wife, Arna, to whom he was married for 68 years.

Early Years

Helge Samuel Andersen was born October 23, 1928,¹ to Adventist parents, and grew up in Skodsborg, Denmark, where his parents worked in the Sanatorium. He was baptized May 8, 1943, by Louis Muderspach² and attended secondary school at Holte Gymnasium, graduating from the Mission classes at Vejlebjerg Højskole in 1948.³ In 1949 he fulfilled his national service.⁴ In January 1950 he began a two year-internship as a Bible instructor (internship).⁵ Before this he had met Arna Nicolaisen from Norway, and the couple were wed on May 2, 1951.⁶ For the period 1952-1958 he worked as a pastor in different churches (Slagelse, Næstved, and Roskilde) in the East Denmark Conference,⁷ and was ordained on May 23, 1958.⁸ In 1958 Andersen was elected a conference departmental director, where his work for the youth and welfare and relief work came to play a major role.⁹



Helge Anderson

Photo courtesy of the Historic Archive of Seventh-day Adventists (HASDA) in Denmark.

Among Andersen's responsibilities was the Copenhagen Welfare Center, where 15-20 welfare workers kept busy at 15 sewing machines, and in the reception and storerooms. Clothing and meals were distributed to the needy of the city in close cooperation with the city authorities. In addition, loads of clothing were collected from other welfare societies in the conference and sorted, packed, and sent to places including Greenland, Poland, Ethiopia, Yugoslavia, and even India.¹⁰ He helped organize relief trips to North Africa and Southeast Europe as well. After the end of the Algerian War of Independence in Algiers in 1962, Andersen organized the collection of tons of food stuff and clothing and accompanied trucks with emergency aid to Algeria.¹¹ In 1963, after the earthquake in Skopje, Yugoslavia, he traveled there with a team to raise temporary buildings for the rehousing of families!¹²

From 1958 to 1964 Andersen helped organize seven children/ junior camps, three Sunday school camps, six Pathfinder camps, three youth camps or congresses, and three bus trips for youth, at different sites in Denmark, Faroe Islands, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Holland, and Austria. Many of these, especially for the children and Pathfinders, were co-organized with his counterpart in the West Denmark Conference.¹³ In 1962 Andersen gathered a group of volunteers (craftworkers and other willing hands) to help build a new youth center, Ungdomsgården Kikhavn, in Nordsjælland (North Zealand), close to the ocean. The center was finished in June 1963, and became the setting for numerous camps, church outings, and Bible correspondence evangelistic weekends.¹⁴

In the United States

From 1964-1968 Andersen was granted study leave and travelled to the United States. He completed his B.A. at Columbia Union College (1966) and his M.A. in Religion at Andrews University (1968). He financed his studies and supported his family by running a painting firm and later a house building company. While in the U.S. he received a call to be president of the West Denmark Conference.¹⁵

The West Denmark Conference Years

Andersen served ten years as president of the West Denmark Conference (1968-1978).¹⁶ His presidency was marked by building projects, evangelism, developing evangelistic materials, fundraising, and finding a new place for a youth center in West Denmark. In 1971 the conference dedicated a new church and conference office building in Aarhus. Andersen himself led out in the building project. The new church building with its 300 seats became a center for many activities.¹⁷ This was followed by building a church with 220 seats in Randers in 1974, and next to it the nursing home "Solbakken."¹⁸ Also, a church building was raised in Nyborg in 1974. For all these projects his close friend, Helge Bull Nielsen, was the architect and builder.^{19 20}

Andersen set about to revive the spirit of evangelism and invited evangelists from Australia and the United States to teach and inspire pastors. John F. Coltheart was the first with his series on biblical archeology and prophecy, "Dead men do tell tales," and Sabbath seminars (1970-1971),²¹ followed by others with multiple

projectors and exciting materials. Slides, talks, and materials were copied and used by many of the pastors with good success. To make it more authentic, Andersen took some of the younger workers with him on a tour through Bible lands so they could take their own photos. This was followed up by sending other interested pastors from both Denmark and Norway on similar tours.²² At this time Andersen wrote his book on evidence for the Biblical world view in space, nature, and history, *Sporene viser vej (The Tracks Show the Way)*.²³

The well-being of employees of the Adventist church was close to Andersen's heart. From his own experience as a young worker, he saw the need for a more sympathetic attitude to the needs and well-being of workers. Andersen introduced improvements in living conditions, remuneration, study opportunities, and personal encouragement. One of the older pastors said, "We never experienced such an interest in the pastor and his family as with Andersen as president."²⁴

For years the annual conference camp meetings and the biannual sessions were held at Vejlefjord Højskole, where accommodation could be secured at the school, and in the adjacent Aunsborglejren (old German barracks from the war), where camps for children, Pathfinders, and youth were held. Later the meetings were moved to halls in major towns. Andersen found a conference center, Fuglsøcentret, in natural surroundings less than 50 kilometers from Aarhus. This became the venue of the camp meetings for a few years.²⁵ In 1977 the last children's camp was held at Aunsborglejren,²⁶ and the camp site was used for a new church building at Vejlefjordskolen. The conference started searching for a suitable place for a new Pathfinder and youth center. A property was bought, and drawings were made, but meanwhile Andersen came across a former Home Guard facility for sale. Andersen immediately started fundraising, and within a year the property, with more than 100 acres of forest, heather, and buildings for a youth center was bought and came to serve the church in years to come.²⁷

The Call to Nigeria

In 1977 Helge Andersen received a call to be president of the Nigeria Union Mission.²⁸ At the time of his arrival in 1978 there was one conference and four missions, and a membership of about 39,000. When he left, less than six years later, a mission station had been added, and the membership had grown to 57,000.²⁹ Andersen replaced the acting union president, Thorvald Kristensen, who had served in West Africa for many years. The occasion was marked by planting a coconut tree on the union compound, donated by Michael Adams, a Mbioto church elder and the son of a chief in Cross River State.³⁰

Early in his term Andersen had the opportunity to meet the Nigerian head of state and the U.S. president and his wife. "Helge Andersen and Daryl Meyers, Nigerian Union Mission president and communication director, respectively, represented the Seventh-day Adventist Church at a Baptist church service in Lagos, where U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Mrs. Carter were guests of honor. The Adventists greeted Lieutenant General Obasanjo, head of the state of Nigeria, and the Carters. They also presented books to the Carter family and two

King's Herald quartet albums to Andrew Young, United States Ambassador to the United Nations.³¹

Nigeria experienced political unrest throughout Andersen's service in the country. In 1979 Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria was elected president of the country. Shagari served for almost four years, but on New Year's Eve 1983 he and his government were removed by a military coup d'état, and Major General Muhammadu Buhari became head of state. Buhari was overthrown by another military coup d'état in 1985. In spite of this competition for power, the changing governments were able to keep a certain state of stability in the country. In 1976 the government had nationalized Jengre Adventist Hospital in the northern part of Nigeria and more or less ran it down. In September 1981 the national news media suddenly announced, without prior consultation with Andersen and the union leadership, that the Adventists would take it back again. Hectic days followed trying to get new doctors and other staff in place.

Due to widespread corruption, Nigeria twice changed its currency during the Andersens service there, affecting the financial situation of the Adventist Church. In the North two Muslim organizations, the Back Scorpions and Yan Tatsine, carried out attacks on the population, burning down church buildings, and killing indiscriminately. In the South superstition and witchcraft were prevalent.³²

On the positive side, the Adventist publishing work in Nigeria thrived. Some of the more experienced literature evangelists planted new companies and churches in the unentered cities. The books came by truck from the Adventist publishing house in Accra, Ghana. This was not without risks. There could be hold ups on the way when armed robbers stopped the truck, but mostly the books reached the HQ in Lagos safely. Church health ministries included two hospitals or community medical centers, mobile rural clinics in the north and west, and clinics on boats in the rivers in River State. Local radio programs reached out to the population with the Three Angels Messages. Youth and Pathfinder work grew, while active Dorcas societies conducted their own evangelistic programs. In addition, traditional public evangelism helped increase union membership by an average of 3,000 a year.³³

While missionaries from Britain and the Nordic countries had, to a great extent, filled leadership positions in the past, Andersen saw the potential among the nationals and worked to prepare the transition from missionary to national leadership. Together with the division he sought to balance the composition of the future leadership and departmental secretaries by considering the three main population groups in the east, west, and north of the country. Scars from the Nigerian Civil War (also known as the Biafran War) had not healed completely, but as the church was growing in numbers and new ministerial workers trained at the Adventist Seminary of West Africa in Ilishan-Remo in Ogun State, when Pastor Andersen left the Adventist church in Nigeria was able to fill leadership positions in almost all areas from its own ranks.³⁴

Back in Denmark and ADRA

Malaria was a constant challenge to Pastor Andersen while serving in Nigeria, and, together with other tropical diseases, took his strength. After nearly six years it was time to return to Denmark and receive the necessary rest and medical treatment. Andersen served about a year as a pastor in the West Denmark Conference, and was then called as a field secretary to the West Nordic Union. Among his responsibilities was the organization of a department of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) for Denmark and Norway. This enabled funding to be secured from government agencies for development and relief projects in needy and underprivileged countries. Andersen's earlier experience of relief work was a great help. Initially ADRA Denmark/Norway was created as a department of the West Nordic Union in 1985, and in 1987 as an independent organization. In 1992 the organization was divided into ADRA Denmark and ADRA Norway, with their own country offices. From 1988 Andersen served as joint director for ADRA both in Denmark and Norway. When ADRA Norway appointed its own director in 1993, he continued as director for ADRA Denmark until 2000. Through these years ADRA Denmark went through a progressive development and became one of the biggest country organizations within the ADRA network.³⁵

In 1992 Andersen served a term of 7-8 months as interim president for the West Nordic Union,³⁶ while the union went through a financial and organizational crisis, leading to its reorganization as the Danish Union of Churches and the Norwegian Union Conference. A firm hand was needed at the helm to steer the church through this difficult experience. Andersen continued as chair of the executive committee for the Danish Union of Churches another three years, together with his ADRA leadership.³⁷

After retirement Andersen and his wife, Arna, lived in their house outside Randers and attended the local Adventist church. In his last days he lived in the nursing home "Solbakken," that he and his administration had built 45 years earlier.

Legacy

Helge S. Andersen was a strong leader, who will be remembered in Nigeria for his contribution to building up the church and preparing the way for national leadership.³⁸ In Denmark his legacy includes the youth work, building projects, his crisis management in a difficult time, and his building up of the ADRA organization.

SOURCES

Andersen, Helge. "Church Members Dedicate Randers Sanctuary." *ARH*, March 14, 1974.

Andersen, Helge. "Help for Suffering Algeria." *ARH*, March 14, 1963.

Andersen, Helge. "Nyborg, Denmark." *ARH*, April 3, 1975.

"East Denmark Conference." *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1959.

Employee Service Record, Helge Samuel Andersen, HASDA. Accessed September 28, 2022.

Faddersbøll, Kurt. *Adventkirken Århus*. Århus: Private publication, 1995.

"For the Record." *ARH*, May 11, 1978.

Jensen, Sven Hagen. "Helge Andersen spillede en stor rolle i nødhjælpsarbejdet" (Helge Andersen played a great role in the relief work). *Randers Amtsavis*, September 25, 2019.

Kristensen, Thorvald. "The Copenhagen, Denmark, Welfare Center." *ARH*, April 13, 1961.

Luukko, Heikki J. "Nigeria - Membership nears 40,000." *ARH*, July 27, 1978.

Medley, Carlos. "New President in the West Nordic Union," *ARH*, March 5, 1992.

Nissen, Henri. "Grundlæggeren af ADRA er død" (The founder of ADRA is dead), *Udfordringen*, September 29, 2019.

"Northern Europe – West Africa." *ARH*, September 15, 1977.

Schantz, Børge, and Schantz, Hans Jørgen, *Var det umagen værd?* (Was it worth the effort?). Nærum, Denmark: Dansk Bogforlag, 1999.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1969-1985, 1992-1996, 2020.

NOTES

1. *Employee service record*, Helge Samuel Andersen, copy from Historic Archive of Seventh-day Adventists, Denmark (HASDA). Accessed September 28, 2022.
2. Kurt Faddersbøll, *Adventkirken Århus*. Private publication, Århus, 1995, 102.
3. Obituary, *Adventnyt*, October 2019.
4. Kurt Faddersbøll, 184.
5. *Employee Service Record*.
6. Ibid.
7. Kurt Faddersbøll, 184.
8. *Employee Service Record*.

9. "East Denmark Conference." *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1959), 147.
10. Thorvald Kristensen, "The Copenhagen, Denmark, Welfare Center," *ARH*, April 13, 1961, 22.
11. Helge Andersen, "Help for Suffering Algeria," *ARH*, March 14, 1963, 14, 15.
12. Henri Nissen, "Grundlæggeren af ADRA er død" (The founder of ADRA is dead), *Udfordringen*, September 29, 2019. Sven Hagen Jensen, "Helge Andersen spillede en stor rolle i nødhjælpsarbejdet" (Helge Andersen played a great role in the relief work), *Randers Amtsavis*, September 25, 2019.
13. List provided by Helge Andersen in a letter to Hans Jørgen Schantz, HASDA, on March 31, 1995.
14. Preben Jalving, HASDA, email message, September 29, 2022. And personal knowledge of the author, Sven Hagen Jensen, who worked closely with Andersen as a departmental director under his conference leadership and later as a mission president in Nigeria, when he was the union president there.
15. *Employee Service Record* and personal knowledge of author.
16. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1969-1979).
17. Kurt Faddersbøll, 104-107.
18. Helge Andersen, "Church Members Dedicate Randers Sanctuary", *ARH*, October 3, 1974, 26.
19. Telephone conversation with Hans Grønbech Hansen, builder and elder of Nyborg church, on September 29, 2022, and personal knowledge of author.
20. Helge Andersen, "Nyborg, Denmark", *ARH*, April 3, 1975, 21.
21. Kurt Faddersbøll, 108.
22. Personal knowledge of author.
23. Published by Dansk Bogforlag, Odense, Denmark, ca. 1973.
24. Personal knowledge of author.
25. Ibid.
26. Telephone conversation with Preben Jalving, HASDA director, on September 30, 2022.

27. Personal knowledge of author.
28. "Northern Europe – West Africa," *ARH*, September 15, 1977, 20.
29. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979) and *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985).
30. Heikki J. Luukko, "Nigeria - Membership nears 40,000," *ARH*, July 27, 1978.
31. "For the Record", *ARH*, May 11, 1978, 24.
32. Personal knowledge of author, who lived in Nigeria most of this time.
33. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979-1983) and *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1984-1985. Personal knowledge of the author.
34. Ibid.
35. *Employee Service Record*. Helge Andersen, "Adventistsamfundets sociale hjælpearbejde og oprettelsen af ADRA" (The Adventist denomination's social aid work and the creation of ADRA), Børge Schantz and Hans Jørgen Schantz, *Var det umagen værd? (Was it worth the effort?)*, Dansk Bogforlag, Nærum, Denmark, 1999, 260-263.
36. Carlos Medley, "New President in West Nordic Union," *ARH*, March 5, 1992, 6.
37. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* (Hagerstown, MD.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1992-1996).
38. "Eastern Nigeria Union Conference," "Northern Nigeria Union Conference," and "Western Nigeria Union Conference", *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Silver Spring, MD.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2020), 399, 411, 420.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000