John M. Sitwala.

From *Trans-Africa Division Outlook*, January 15, 1980. Vol. 78. No. 1.

Sitwala, John Miyambu (1934–2008)

MAYBOY C. MUCHABWE

Mayboy C. Muchabwe, M.A.B.T.S. (Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya), began his ministerial work in 1999. Since 2015, he has been an adjunct lecturer for Rusangu University and, since January 2016, he has concurrently served the Midlands West Zambia Conference as stewardship director. Previously, Muchabwe served the church as a literature evangelist and rose to the position of district literature evangelist leader. He was also a local church pastor, district leader, and school chaplain.

John Miyambu Sitwala was a pastor, church administrator, and mentor to the youth and to young leaders.

Early Life

John Miyambu Sitwala was born on January 1, 1934, in Nesika Village (now Sitwala Village) in Sesheke Town in the Western Province of the Republic of Zambia. His father was Saboi Maboshe Sitwala, and his mother was Muyebe Sihole Matome Sitwala. He was the fourth of their twelve children. He spent his early life in the villages of Silolo, Makusi, and Nesika in Sesheke.[1]

John's conversion occurred in 1961 when he was 27 in Silolo Village, and he was baptized at Silolo Seventh-day Adventist Church by Pastor George L. Parsley, the director of Sitoti Mission at that time.[2] His conversion might have been influenced by the fact that his grandfather, Sihole Mwanoota, was one of the first converts to Adventism through the influence of missionaries like Pastor Owen in Namibia.[3]

Early Education and Marriage

From 1942-1947, Sitwala completed his lower primary school education, Subs A-B, and Standards I-IV at Silolo Mission School. Then, he went to Rusangu Mission School in Monze District of the Southern Province, where he pursued his upper primary school education from 1948 to 1952 and completed Standards V, VI Lower, and VI Upper.[4] Between 1956-1962, he pursued his junior secondary school education at Solusi Mission School in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), obtaining Form I and II Certificates.[5]

Sitwala celebrated his marriage to Elizabeth Nasilele Muso (1936-2007) on April 4, 1953, at Silolo Mission Church in Sesheke, his hometown. They did not have a child of their own, but they raised a stepson named Luka Sitwala (1954-1994), who died at the age of 40. The couple lived and ministered together for 54 years until Elizabeth died on August 30, 2007.[6]

Career and Ministry

John Sitwala began his working life as a tour guide at Zambezi Boat Club in Livingstone in the Southern Province of Zambia from 1955 to 1961. He began working for the Seventh-day Adventist Church on September 25, 1962, at Rusangu Mission as an assistant farm manager until 1964. From 1965 to 1966, he was sponsored to attend Solusi College and pursue a ministerial training course, where he obtained a diploma. When he returned to Zambia, he was assigned to work at Sitoti Mission Station in Senanga in December 1966. He then moved to Sala Mission District west of Lusaka and stayed from July 1967 to 1971. Sitwala was then called to Rusangu Mission at the Zambia Field headquarters, where he worked as a youth department director, a church planter, and a Lozi translator from 1971 to 1972.[7]

During the time Sitwala worked at the field office, he was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1971 by Pastor Ernest H. B. Siamaundu, President of the Zambia Field. Other pastors ordained with him were E. C. Mainza and Samson Brown Michelo in fulfillment of a recommendation that had been made by the late James Muyeba, the first indigenous President of the Zambia Field.[8] Also between 1969-1972, Sitwala began correspondence studies with Home Study International Institute based in Salisbury (Harare), Zimbabwe, to earn a diploma in management.[9] In 1974, Sitwala was appointed to serve as the Youth and Temperance Director of the Zambia Union Mission.[10]

Thirsty for more knowledge, Sitwala pursued further correspondence studies to obtain the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level from Salisbury between 1974-1978. He took accounting courses at the same time.[11] In 1979, Sitwala was appointed to serve as President of the West Zambia Field, and he later moved to Mongu in Western Province, where he also served as Youth, Lay Activities, and Temperance Director for the same field.[12]

During his tenure as a field president from 1979 to 1983, he continued to serve as an administrator and departmental director for the field since West Zambia Field was an attached entity of the Zambia Union Mission.[13] The West Zambia Field office was located in the guest wing of his residential house at Wenela in Mongu. Later, it was moved to Mongu Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, south of the city, and, later on, to the Kanyonyo area, where it is located today.[14]

Although Sitwala was 49 years old, he felt the need to obtain a better ministerial education. Hence, from 1983 to 1987, he studied for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theology at Solusi College, which was affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Michigan, United States of America.[15] Upon his return to Zambia in 1987, Sitwala was appointed to serve as Principal of the Zambia Adventist Seminary at Rusangu Mission. When the Zambia Union territory was realigned to increase the mission fields from three to six, he was transferred to Kabwe in Central Province to serve as the pioneering Executive Director (President) and Ministerial Secretary for the newly organized Central Zambia Field from 1988 to 1990.[16] During the Zambia Union Mission session of December 1990, Sitwala was transferred to Zambia Union Mission in Lusaka to serve as the director of Youth Ministries.[17]

Sitwala's employment as a minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church ended on July 21, 1991. During the years that followed, he accepted a government civil service appointment to work as a district administrator for Sesheke for three years.[18] At 65, he applied for and began receiving his retirement benefits from the church for the 33 years he served (1959-1992).[19] Sitwala died on November 11, 2008, at the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka at age 74. He was buried on November 14, 2008, in Sitwala Village in Sesheke, his birthplace.[20]

His Contribution and Legacy

In the church organization, Sitwala became well known in the 1970s for his passionate interest in youth programs such as the Missionary Volunteers Society for the youth and Pathfinder clubs. He also worked as a church planter and mentor to young church leaders. Among the leaders he mentored are Dr. Harrington S. Akombwa, Dr. Warren S. Simatele, the late Pastor Henry Mwalye, Pastor Goodwin Kaluwe, and Pastor Moses Muyunda, most of whom are still active as of today in the gospel ministry.[21]

The impact of Sitwala's ministry reached the highest levels of the Barotseland territory in 1980 when he baptized the *Litunga*, the paramount chief of the Barotse people.[22] The *Litunga* had read the book "Free at Last," which had been given to him as a gift. He had asked for more information, which led to Bible studies. Although only royalty or state presidents were allowed to shake hands with him, the *Litunga* waived this cultural restriction and allowed Pastor Sitwala to baptize him.

Sitwala demonstrated energetic enthusiasm in areas of his leadership responsibilities. He motivated church workers and members to contribute funds for the establishment of the Zambia Adventist Press in the Zambia Union.[23] In 1989, he presided over plans to extend the Central Zambia Field offices,[24] which were completed during his tenure in 1990 as Executive Director.[25] Furthermore, during his presidency, the Field Executive Committee adopted the Zambia Union resolutions on the "Harvest 90 Evangelism Strategy."[26] This event prompted a service call to Fitz Henry, a Jamaican lay evangelist, to be the speaker for the successful "The King is Coming Campaign" held in Lusaka in 1990.[27]

In his zeal to move the field to conference status, Sitwala recommended a committee vote for the Zambia Union Mission to withhold financial appropriations to the Central Zambia Field from May to December 1988 to test its financial strength.[28] He was also instrumental in organizing an institute for pastors' wives with the objective to enhance their working relations as pastors' coworkers in the Lord's vineyard.[29] Lastly, his influence in his community resulted in Nesika Village being renamed after his family: Sitwala Village.

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NOTES

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