



Lesotho Conference headquarters

Photo courtesy of Lerato J. Thotolo.

Lesotho Conference

LERATO J. THOTOLO

Lerato J. Thotolo (B.A. in Theology, Rusangu University, Monze, Zambia) currently serves as the executive secretary for the Lesotho Conference in Maseru, Lesotho.

Lesotho Conference is a subsidiary church administrative unit of the Southern Africa Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Current Territory and Statistics

Territory: Lesotho.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches, 47; membership, 10,639; population, 2,142,000

Lesotho Conference has its headquarters at 154 Cathedral Area, next to Iketsetseng Primary School, in Maseru, the capital city of Lesotho. Lesotho Conference runs eight schools (three high schools and five primary schools), one hospital with a nursing training college, and six clinics and health centers. Lesotho Conference also operates a humanitarian agency, ADRA Lesotho, which delivers services to the community. The conference currently employs sixteen pastors, seven conference office staff, nine ADRA Lesotho staff, and 123 school teachers and staff.

Origin of Adventist Work in the Territory of the Conference

The Adventist message arrived in Lesotho (then called Basutoland) in 1896 when Stephen Haskell visited the small village of Kolo. Haskell teamed up with David Kalaka, a Mosotho man who became interested in Adventism but not yet a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In 1899, Adventist missionaries J. M. Freeman and his wife came to Basutoland to establish the first Adventist mission.¹ The Freemans, assisted by David Kalaka, opened a mission station in Kolo. Kolo became the first Adventist mission station in the Kingdom of Lesotho, then a protectorate of Britain. The Foreign Mission Board did not have the means to support the mission financially, and therefore all the Sabbath Schools worldwide were asked to send their offerings for the first two quarters of 1900 to Basutoland to “enable the mission to expand and develop.”² The first baptism in Kolo Mission was on August 17, 1901, when two sisters joined the church.³

Early in 1902, a school was started at Kolo Mission.⁴ The work progressed slowly, and it was difficult to win the confidence of the Basutos. Literature work played a big role in the earliest evangelistic efforts to reach the Basutos. Ellen G. White’s books *Steps to Christ* and *Coming of the Lord* were translated into the Sesotho language and vigorously distributed. In addition to these books, the Church also published a pamphlet on the seventh-day Sabbath. Kalaka and Freeman took turns to use a horse and a cart to travel across the mission field, visiting many villages, selling literature and preaching to the people. By the end of 1902, twelve Basutos were baptized besides Kalaka and his two sons.⁵

Shortly after Kalaka’s sudden death in 1904⁶, J. M. Freeman moved to the Orange Free State in South Africa to work among the Dutch speaking people. J. A. Chaney and his wife, Minnie, settled at the Kolo Mission to continue the Adventist work. The Chaney’s were from the United States and had served in Natal, South Africa. They were assisted by Murray Kalaka, one of David Kalaka’s sons. The first congregation in Kolo Mission was formally organized in March 1906.⁷

In 1908, when the Chaney's left Basutoland, the Kolo Mission had 19 members.⁸ M. E. Emmerson and his wife replaced the Chaney's at the Kolo Mission. The Emmersons studied hard to learn the Sesotho language. Within one year, they were able to converse with the local people in Sesotho.⁹

The Adventist missionaries in Lesotho were very much interested in contributing to the health and education sectors of the country. In 1910, Emmerson traveled to the north of Basutoland to search for land with the hope of establishing another mission station. Emmerson secured land by God's intervention. The principal Chief Jonathan of Leribe had a dream that prepared his heart for Emmerson's visit. Chief Jonathan welcomed Emmerson and gave 25 acres of land for the new Adventist mission.¹⁰ He also provided the stones for the mission headquarters building. The new mission station was named Emmanuel Mission, and H. C. Olmstead took charge of this new mission.¹¹ The church established a children's home, a school, and a clinic at the Emmanuel Mission.

Organizational History of the Conference

The Adventist work in Basutoland was overseen by the South African Union Conference. Basutoland and Orange Free State were attached mission fields under the Cape Conference. In 1913, the South African Union Conference organized the Free State Conference, and placed the mission stations in Basutoland under this new conference. When the General Conference organized the African Division in 1919, the Basutoland mission stations, along with the Kaffirland, Zululand and Bechuanaland Mission Fields, were organized into the Southern African Mission Field and were attached to the African Division.

At the General Conference committee session of 1926, the Church allotted the largest appropriation ever given to South Africa until that time for the work in South Africa.¹² The funds made it possible for the African Division and the South African Union Conference to plan together and reorganized the work among the native people of Southern Africa. The Southern African Mission Field had been growing steadily and had the potential for even greater growth. The African Division committee met on December 5-6, 1926 to discuss how to assist and improve the Adventist work in South Africa.¹³ As a result, the Southern African Mission Field was reorganized into three mission fields: Kaffirland Mission Field in the southern territory of South Africa; Transvaal-Delgoa Mission Field in the northern territory of South Africa; and Basuto-Bechuana Mission Field, comprising the Basutoland Missions and the Bechuanaland Mission.

Soon after these events, the world experienced a financial crisis. "In April 1933 as a result of the Great Depression which had begun with the 'Wall Street Crash', financial appropriations from the General Conference to the church in South Africa had been reduced by more than 40%."¹⁴ The economic constraints pressed the Adventist Church in South Africa to rearrange its work in 1933, including merging all the mission fields within the territory of the Union of South Africa into one mission field named the South African Mission Field. Because of

Basutoland's proximity to the mission fields of South Africa, Basutoland was separated from the Basuto-Bechuana Mission Field and placed under the South African Mission Field. This arrangement lasted for three years, until January 1936, when the South African Conference constituency and the South African Union committee were in session and resolved to divide the work of the South African Mission Field.¹⁵ The South African Mission Field was divided into the North Bantu Field and the South Bantu Field.

North Bantu Field

North Bantu Field comprised Lesotho, Swaziland, Free State, Natal and the Transvaal.

The Adventist work in Lesotho was overseen by the Kolo and Emmanuel Missions. Both missions were under the direct supervision of the North Bantu Field. Workers from Lesotho, including E. A. Tsotetsi, had important leadership roles in the North Bantu Field. Tsotetsi became the first North Bantu Field youth director in 1944.¹⁶ He also became the first president of what was later called the South Sotho Field.

South Sotho Field

Prior to the organization of the Lesotho Conference, the church in Lesotho was administratively under two missions (Kolo and Emmanuel Missions) administered by the North Bantu Field, and then under the South Sotho Field. The South Sotho Field was organized when the South African Union Conference was reorganized in 1961. The South Sotho Field encompassed all of Basutoland and the Bantu work in the Orange Free State Province of South Africa.¹⁷ The South Sotho Field was disbanded in 1963, and the Lesotho Field was organized in its place in 1967. The most notable leadership of South Sotho Field were E. A. Tsotetsi and E. L. Nteso¹⁸.

Lesotho Field/Conference

Lesotho Field was organized in 1967 with 12 churches and 793 members.¹⁹ When Lesotho Field was organized into Lesotho Conference during the business session held in Maseru on October 16-18, 1999, the new conference had 3,959 members and 25 organized churches. As of December 2020, Lesotho Conference had 10,691 members, 47 organized churches, and 18 pastors (of whom 6 are ordained pastors).

Institutions

Below are the schools and health facilities that have been established in Lesotho since the arrival of the Church in 1896.

Educational Institutions: Kolo Mission School (1899); Emmanuel Mission School (1910); Maluti Adventist Hospital School of Nursing (1951); Adventville High School; Maseru SDA Primary School; Hangers Hope High School; Nqabeni Primary School; Ebenezer Primary School; MACSEM Primary School (1951).

Medical/Health Institutions: Emmanuel Mission Clinic (1910); Maseru Adventist Clinic (1910); Tsoinyane/Pitseng Clinic (1910); Kolo Mission Clinic (1940); Maluti Adventist Hospital (1951).

List of Presidents

South Sotho Field: E. A. Tsotetsi (1961-1963).

Lesotho Field: J. C. Schoonraad (1967-1969); D. M. Malotle (1969-1976); P. M. Mawela (1976-1977); D. W. Chalale (1977-1980); E. L. Nteso (1980-1981); E. T. Maqache (1981-1986); P. Masitise (1986-1994); P. M. Chobokoane (1994-2000).

Lesotho Conference: A. Mainoane (2000-2012); P. M. Chobokoane (2012-2015); C. A. Bohale (2015-).

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NOTES

1. Virgil E. Robinson, *Third Angel Over Africa* (the Ellen G. White Research Centre Archives, Helderberg College, Cape Town, South Africa: unpublished manuscript), 126.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 126.
4. L. Francois Swanepoel, "The Origin and Early History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa, 1886 – 1920" (M.A. Thesis, University of South Africa, 1972), 122.
5. Swanepoel, "Origin and Early History," 123.
6. J. M. Freeman, "Basutoland Mission, South Africa," *ARH*, March 10, 1904, 17.
7. Ibid., 124.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 127.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. W. B. Commin, "Annual Meeting of the Division Committee," *African Division Outlook*, December 15, 1926, 2.
13. J. F. Wright, "Report of Committee Meetings Held at Claremont December 5 and 6, 1926," *African Division Outlook*, January 1, 1927, 4.
14. Antonio Pantalone, "An Appraisal of the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Mission in South Africa A Missiological Evaluation" (M.A. Thesis, University of Durban Westville, 1996), 65.
15. A. Floyd Tarr, "Seventeenth Session – South African Union Conference – President's Report," *Southern African Division Outlook*, April 15, 1937, 2.
16. E. L. Nteso, *Ma-Seventh-Day Adventist* (Morija Printing Works: LS., 1996), 42.
17. G. S. Stevenson, "The Work in South Africa Reorganized," *Southern Africa Division Outlook*, March 15, 1961, 8.

18. Nteso, the long serving secretary-treasurer of the Adventist Church in Lesotho (from 1970 to 1993, with some breaks), published a book titled *Ma-Seventh-Day Adventist*, which was transcribed from his speeches at the centenary celebrations of Emmanuel Mission in 1996 that celebrated 100 years since the arrival of Adventism in Lesotho in 1896. For many years the book was the only published historical work on Adventism in Lesotho by an Adventist author in Lesotho.

19. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives and Statistics, *106th Annual Statistical Report for Seventh-day Adventists* (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1968), 20.

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