Okwera, George (1956–1994)

PASKWALE PACOTO OKENY
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George Okwera was a frontline evangelist/pastor. He is one of the two South Sudanese who were the first trained and ordained ministers in Sudan. He served as the district pastor for Loa in South Sudan and was also the first Seventh-day Adventist district pastor in Khartoum.
Conversion

George Okwera was born in 1956. He received the Adventist message while at Wau May Vocational School, a technical institution, through Bible study with an Adventist teacher who later became Pastor Fulgencio I'da Okayo. After completing his studies at the May Vocation School, he was baptized in Juba in 1980 by Pastor David Ogillo, an Adventist missionary from Tanzania. As a committed church member, he started sharing God's Word with his family members and the neighbors in his village of Magwi. In July 1983 he was the translator to Pastor David Ogillo when the first public evangelism meetings were conducted in Magwi. As a result of the evangelistic campaign, 43 believers were baptized and a Seventh-day Adventist church was established in Magwi.

Ministerial Training

The leadership of the church at the time recognized his commitment and gift in sharing God's Word, so he was sent with his family to Tanzania Adventist College and Seminary in Arusha (1981-1983) where he received his pastoral training. While in Tanzania George and his wife, Regina Achilo, served in several places as pioneer workers. He returned to Sudan after ministerial training in Tanzania and was assigned as the district pastor for Loa in 1985. Due to the civil war that started in 1983, he relocated with the family to Juba (1983-1986). The civil war escalated all over southern Sudan. This caused many south Sudanese to migrate to the northern part of Sudan. However, Pastor Okwera continued to work in his district in Loa. Once the government in Khartoum arrested him, accusing him of supporting the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). The government police took everything from him, but George begged to have his Bible, even if he had to go naked into the prison. This was the level of dedication, commitment, and love he had for preaching the Word of God.

Ministry in Khartoum

As the war intensified, the headquarters of the church was relocated from Juba to Khartoum in 1985. As the needs for ministry arose and there was no national pastor in Khartoum, Pastor Okwera was transferred with his wife and three daughters to Loa where he was assigned as the district pastor (1987-1991). His ministry was blessed and in 1991 he was ordained in Khartoum and served as a member of the executive committee of the Sudan Mission. George Okwera and Fulgencio Okayo were the first two ordained ministers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sudan.

Ministry in Port Sudan and Death

As the work continued to grow in northern Sudan, Global Mission Pioneers were trained and sent to various towns, so he was transferred to Port Sudan to provide pastoral leadership and support to the Global Mission Pioneers in Port Sudan (1992-1994). While in Port Sudan his wife died in 1993, and Pastor Okwera died a year later. The cause of his death was polyneuropathy. He died in Egypt on November 11, 1994. Pastor George Okwera is remembered through the three daughters he left, even though the elder daughter died later on in an accident and now there are only two daughters surviving. Both of them are married and have children of their own.

SOURCES


Death Certificate of George Okwera. Issued November 14, 1994 in Cairo, Republic of Egypt.

Juba Central Church of Seventh-day Adventists. First Membership Record Book, 1984. Juba Central Church Archives, Greater Equatoria Field.


NOTES

1. Abui George Idi and Regina Anyek, A brother and a sister of the late George Okwera, interview by Odera Wllaim, Magwi, Torit State, South Sudan, July 23, 2019.
3. Fulgensio Ida Okayo, Retired minister of Seventh-day Adventist Greater Equatoria Field, interview by author, by phone from Adjumani, Uganda
July 22, 2019.

4. Ibid.


