

Rutolyo, Mispereth Taralius (1916–1994)

PAUL SEMBA

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Mispereth Rutolyo was an educator, an administrator, and a front-line pastor who built the first church in the town of Tanzania.

Early Life, Education, and Marriage

Mispereth Rutolyo was born in April 1916 in the Bhujaga Village in rural Musoma in Mara Tanzania. He was born and raised in a humble and peasant family consisting of their father Rutolyo Mabuba and Nyarusanyu, his wife. He was the third-born among five children. He spent his childhood in the Bhujaga Village. At the age of 12, he attended Buringa Primary School for three years (from 1928 to 1931). Then, he went to Ikizu Training School from 1932 to 1934. Rutolyo married Nyamisi Zerulia Zakaria, from Kurugeye, Majita Musoma Rural. Together, they had 14 children, of whom five are still alive, namely: Nyanyama Eunice Rutolyo, Tabu Rutolyo, Pendo Buinda Rutolyo, Zakaria Mbilima Rutolyo, and Suzan Rutolyo. In 1966, he joined Bugema Adventist College, now university in Uganda, for a six-month ministerial course.¹



Pastor Rutolyo
Photo courtesy of Paul Semba.

Service as a Teacher

After three years of teacher training at Ikizu, he was employed as a teacher at Mwagala School, Maswa, in 1934. He worked there for three years and was then transferred to the Bupandagila School at Ntuzu Mission Station. In 1941, he was transferred to be the headmaster and a teacher of a four-classes school, Kibumaye Primary (now Mudersparch Memorial Primary School) in the Utimbaru Mission Station. During that period, the fourth grade was the highest and most prestigious class. In 1945, he was transferred to Bwasi School, Majita, to teach fourth grade. During that period, all Majita and Ukerewe schools had grades one through three. So, when the students finished third grade, they were given a test to continue on to the fourth grade at Bwasi School. After a year and a half, he transferred to Rusoli School, where he taught for only four months before being transferred to Nyambitwa, Ushashi, which is now in the Bunda District. He taught at that school for eight years, from 1948 to 1956. On January 28, 1966, he was transferred to the Ikizu Training School to serve as preceptor² and a member of Tanganyika Mission Field executive committee.⁴

Ministry

In 1960, while at Ikizu, he received a pastoral call from East Lake Field to go to the town of Musoma, 20 miles from the headquarters in Busegwe.⁵ There were no church buildings, and the members who gathered for worship in a cinema theatre were very few in number. He organized the Sabbath School and revived personal ministries, helping the Gospel penetrate every house in the entire town. He contacted the Mennonite Church leaders, asking them to allow him to use their church building for worship. The request was granted, so he and local church leaders transferred their worship services to the Mennonite church from which he built the Musoma Church, now Kamunyonge Seventh-day Adventist Church, the first church built in any town in Tanganyika. In 1963, the church was completed and dedicated on May 5 in the same year⁶ in conjunction with the pastor's house.⁷ In that same year, he

was ordained into the Gospel ministry.⁸ At the end of 1966, East Lake Field, based in Utimbaru, Tarime, appointed him as their stewardship and Y.P.M.V Director.⁹ At the end of 1970, he was elected to be the director of stewardship and church development of the Tanzania Union,¹⁰ a position he held until 1976. At the end of 1973, he was elected to serve as East Nyanza Field president.¹¹

In 1977, he was assigned to the Mbeya Mission Station. This mission had only two churches: one being in Mbeya town and the other in Iganzo, Mbeya rural. Mbeya Mission Station was very large, including Matwiga company on the north, the Mkuyuni company on the east, and the Tunduma company on the west-south bordering Zambia. After five years, three churches were organized to make the fifth church. As the work progressed, some members of Mbeya Church conducted themselves contrary to the order of the Church. They opposed the Church manual, withheld tithe and offering, and even insulted the clergy to the point of bringing them down from the pulpit. This apostasy attracted Church disciplinary measures that resulted in the removal of some members from Church membership. Afterwards, behavior in the churches had settled down, the Gospel moved forward, and believers continued to thrive in personal development.

Later Life and Contribution

Pastor Rutolyo retired in 1982. He returned to Suguti Kusenyi in the Musoma village. Here he spent his retirement years in fruit farming and cattle raising. In 1987, after five years of hard work in the mountains and the cold region in Mbeya Mission Station, he experienced health complications. These challenges kept getting worsened each year. On November 25, 1994, he passed away and was laid to rest on November 27, 1994.

Pastor Rutolyo vehemently opposed female genital mutilation, a practice that was widespread in some places in Tanzania at the time. He was the first pastor to construct an Adventist church in any town in Tanzania.¹²

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Stefan Höschele, *Christian Remnant-African Folk Church: Seventh-Day Adventist in Tanzania, 1903-1980* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 280.?
2. Nyanyama Rutolyo, phone interview by the author, March 23, 2020, Kendu, Kenya.?
3. Tanzania Union Mission, "Minutes of the Tanzania Union Mission Executive Committee," (Busegwe, Musoma: Tanzania Union Mission, 28 January 1965), 227.?
4. General Conference, *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1959), 171.?
5. Nyanyama Rutolyo, phone interview by the author, March 23, 2020, Kendu, Kenya.?
6. Naomi Glass, "Dedication of Musoma Church," *Southern African Division Outlook*, July 15, 1963, 3.?
7. Tanganyika Union, "Minutes of the Tanganyika Union Committee," (Busegwe, Musoma: Tanganyika Union, 20 June 1963), 71.?
8. *SDA Yearbook* 1963, 211.?
9. *SDA Yearbook* 1968, 272.?
10. *SDA Yearbook* 1973-74, 99.?
11. *SDA Yearbook* 1975, 101.?
12. Lameck Mwamukonda, personal interview by the author, March 24, 2020, University of Arusha, Tanzania (Lameck Mwamukonda is a retired pastor and administrator who worked with Rutolyo in various capacities.)?

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