

Kihurio District

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Kihurio occupies an important place in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in [Tanzania](#). Located on the plains below the South Pare Mountains in present-day Same District, Kilimanjaro Region, Kihurio became the second Adventist Mission station established in the country, following Friedenstal in 1903. The Kihurio station was opened in 1905 and soon developed into an important center for education, evangelism, and the training of African Church workers.¹

The establishment of a Mission school contributed significantly to the development of Adventism in the area. In 1908, the first group of six Adventist converts in Tanzania was baptized in the Pare Mission field. During the years that followed, Kihurio became one of the strongest centers of Adventism in Pare. Despite the disruption of World War I, African teachers, evangelists, elders, and other believers maintained much of the Church's work until missionary leadership was reestablished after the war.²

Denominational records were already using the name "Kihurio District" by the early 1920s, with Kihurio serving as the head station and Friedenstal, Vuasu, and Vunta listed as other stations within the district.³ In subsequent decades, the district underwent further organizational development and produced pastors, teachers, evangelists, and missionaries who served both within Tanzania and in other parts of East Africa.

Developments that Led to the Establishment of Adventism in the Area

Kihurio is situated on the plains at the southeastern foot of the South Pare Mountains. In the early 20th century the area was an economically active settlement located along older trade and caravan routes. The population consisted mainly of Pare people, although the area had also experienced the influence of Islam and interaction with neighboring ethnic communities.

Seventh-day Adventist missionary work in what was then German East Africa began in the Pare region in 1903. The first Mission station, Friedenstal, was established at Mamba-Giti. From that base the missionaries sought additional locations from which educational and evangelistic work could be extended to the surrounding population.⁴

Kihurio offered access to settlements on the plains as well as communities in the Pare Mountains. In 1905 Bruno Ohme and Ernst Kotz participated in opening the Kihurio mission station. Contemporary denominational sources identify Kihurio as one of the earliest centers of the Adventist mission in German East Africa.⁵

Education quickly became an important component of the work. A school was established, and by 1906 Helene Ohme was conducting educational work among girls at Kihurio. The school provided instruction in reading, writing, and the Bible and became one of the principal means through which the Adventist mission interacted with the surrounding community.⁶

Founding of Adventism in the Area

The formal establishment of Adventist work in Kihurio dates to 1905. Bruno Ohme, his wife Helene, Ernst Kotz, and other German Adventist workers were associated with the early development of the Mission station. The school established there attracted young people who later became important in the development of the Church.

Among those connected with the early Kihurio Mission were Yohana Kajembe Mseli and Petro Kime Risase. Risase, a native of Kihurio, became one of the early pupils of the Adventist school and later assisted the missionaries with language and translation work. He subsequently became a teacher, evangelist, missionary, and ordained minister whose work extended beyond Tanzania to Uganda and Kenya.⁷

A major milestone occurred in 1908 when six young men were baptized. A contemporary report by Guy Dail records that the baptism took place in the Saseni River, where several hundred people gathered to witness the event. This group constituted the first known Adventist baptism in Tanzania.⁸ Further baptisms followed in 1909 and succeeding years.

The early converts became an important foundation for the development of indigenous Adventist leadership. Some served as teachers, evangelists, and Church leaders, carrying Adventist teachings into surrounding villages and later to more distant parts of Tanganyika and East Africa.

By the years immediately preceding World War I, Kihurio had become one of the strongest Adventist congregations in the Pare region. Kihurio had approximately 96 members in 1914, and the wider South Pare mission had developed an extensive network of schools, teachers, and congregations.⁹

History of Adventism in Kihurio

World War I significantly disrupted Adventist missionary activity in Tanganyika. German missionaries experienced restrictions, internment, or removal, and normal communication and financial support from the denomination were interrupted. Conditions, however, varied from station to station, and the work in the Pare region did not disappear.

African Adventist workers assumed considerable responsibility during this period. One of the most prominent was [Ezekiel Kibwana Marecha](#), who was given responsibility for work at Kihurio and helped supervise the Adventist schools in Pare. African teachers, evangelists, and elders maintained worship, education, and pastoral care under difficult circumstances.¹⁰

The survival of the Pare congregations during the War became an important demonstration of the growing role of indigenous leadership. When postwar missionary leadership returned, substantial numbers of believers remained. Contemporary and later records indicate that the Pare churches had preserved a remarkable degree of continuity despite years of disruption.

In 1921, [Spencer George Maxwell](#) was assigned to the South Pare Mission and made Kihurio an important base for his work. He found active African believers and workers who had maintained the mission during the absence of regular European leadership. Arthur F. Bull joined the work at Kihurio in 1922.¹¹

The denominational *Yearbook* demonstrates the organizational importance of Kihurio during this period. The 1921 and 1922 editions listed a “Kihurio District” within the South Pare Mission, with Kihurio as the head station and Friedenstal, Vuasu, and Vunta as associated stations.¹² This evidence indicates that the designation “Kihurio District” was in denominational use decades before the later organizational developments remembered locally in connection with 1960.

Education continued to play an important role. Kihurio and the other Pare stations produced teachers and evangelists who served the growing Adventist work. A. F. Bull's reports from the 1920s portray an increasingly active indigenous Adventist community in Pare, with African believers participating in evangelism, church support, and the development of congregations.¹³

Kihurio also contributed to Adventist literature and translation work. Ernst Kotz and Petro Risase participated in the translation of portions of Scripture, including the New Testament, into Chasu (Kipare). This work increased the accessibility of Christian literature among the Pare-speaking population.

[Petro Risase](#) became one of Kihurio's most notable missionaries. After serving as a teacher and evangelist in Tanganyika, he accompanied Spencer Maxwell to Uganda in 1927 and subsequently worked in Uganda and Kenya. He was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1934. His missionary service illustrates how workers nurtured in the early Pare missions contributed to the expansion of Adventism elsewhere in East Africa.¹⁴

Local oral history identifies 1960 as another important stage in the development of the modern Kihurio church district. According to Nicholas Mauya, son of Pastor N. N. Mauya, his father became the district pastor in 1960, when the district reportedly had 521 members. Mauya served until 1969, by which time membership was reported to have increased to 816.¹⁵ Because official denominational records used the designation “Kihurio District” much earlier, the 1960 development is best understood as a later reorganization or a new phase in the administration of the local district rather than its original establishment.

According to information supplied by local church leaders in 2026, Kihurio continued to function as an active Adventist district under Pastor Hamza A. Mwaihojo. Local reports gave the district membership as 3,691 and indicated that the district comprised 12 organized churches and nine companies.¹⁶ These figures should be preserved together with the relevant district records as part of the documentary history of Kihurio.

Historical Role of Adventism in Kihurio

Kihurio's historical significance rests first on its place among the earliest Adventist Mission stations in Tanzania. Established in 1905 as the second Adventist station in the country, it became an important center of the South Pare Mission and contributed to the extension of the Church's work into surrounding communities.

Second, Kihurio played a significant role in Adventist education. Mission schools introduced literacy and biblical instruction and prepared teachers who were subsequently employed at other Mission stations. Education became one of the principal instruments through which the Adventist Church developed an indigenous body of workers in Pare.

Third, Kihurio contributed to the development of African Church leadership. World War I placed local believers in positions of unusual responsibility. Leaders such as Ezekiel Kibwana helped preserve the Church's institutions and congregations at a time when normal missionary supervision had been severely disrupted. Their service demonstrated that Adventism in Pare had developed an indigenous leadership base capable of maintaining the church under difficult conditions.

Fourth, Kihurio contributed workers to the wider Adventist mission in East Africa. Petro Kime Risase is a notable example. Born in Kihurio and educated through the mission, he became a teacher, translator, evangelist, and pastor and later served in Uganda and Kenya. His career illustrates the transition of Kihurio from a receiving Mission station to a community that supplied workers for mission beyond its own territory.¹⁷

Kihurio's history also illustrates the close relationship between education, Bible translation, evangelism, and indigenous leadership in the establishment of Adventism in Tanzania. Its influence therefore extends beyond the numerical growth of the local congregations to the contribution made by Kihurio-trained believers to the wider Adventist movement.

Outlook

Kihurio remains an important site for the study of Seventh-day Adventist history in Tanzania. More than a century after the opening of the Mission station, Adventist congregations continue to operate in the area while the names and experiences of pioneer missionaries and African believers remain part of the historical memory of the local Church.

Further research is needed to document more precisely the organizational changes that occurred between the early “Kihurio District” recorded in denominational publications and the modern district structure remembered locally from 1960 onward. District minutes, membership registers, pastoral records, school records, photographs, correspondence, cemetery inscriptions, and surviving family documents would be especially valuable.

Preservation of the early Mission sites and collection of oral histories from descendants of pioneer believers would also strengthen the historical record. Such documentation would help ensure that Kihurio’s contribution to the development of Seventh-day Adventism in Tanzania and the wider East African region remains accessible to future researchers.

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NOTES

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15. Nicholas Mauya, first son of Pastor N. N. Mauya, interview by author, Kihurio, Tanzania, May 6, 2026.
16. Alex Kiondo, elder at Kihurio Mission, telephone interview by author, May 1, 2026.
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