



Gishushu campus of Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA).

Photo courtesy of Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA).

Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA)

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In 1921 Henri Monnier, from Switzerland, and Alfred Matter opened Rwankeri Mission Station, northern Rwanda. After spending one year trying to establish a mission station at Kawangire in the east, they moved to the north. At Rwankeri Mission, Henri Monnier faced many problems, among which were lions killing people and their cattle. He protected the population by shooting the lions, which caused the people around to love him and accept his message. Contrary to other missionaries, he learned the local language and culture. He published a popular grammar book of the Kinyarwanda language for English speaking missionaries and also translated passages of the Bible, hymns, the baptismal manual, and Adventist doctrines into Kinyarwanda. The first baptism took place in 1924 with two candidates, Yohana Ruvugihomvu and Petero Rukangarajunga. Henri Monnier left Rwanda in 1944 after the inauguration of a very impressive church building at the mission station!¹

Because of the efforts of missionaries, the work grew. Members increased so much that when it became necessary to build a university for French speaking members, Rwanda was chosen. The university was first established in northern Rwanda in 1978 to serve the Francophone constituency of the then Africa-Indian Ocean Division which included the French-speaking countries of western and central Africa, namely, Zaire, Rwanda, and Burundi, as well as Madagascar, Reunion, Mauritius, and the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean. The university officially opened its doors on October 15, 1984. The board of directors was made up of 23 members representing the division, each Francophone union, the North Rwanda Association, and the Adventist Seminary of West Africa. The president of the division was the board chair, and the president of the Rwanda Union Mission the vice chair. The university was chartered in 1988 and became the first Adventist university to be chartered on the African continent. At that time the university was located at Mudende, in the former Mutura Commune, Gisenyi Prefecture, in northwestern Rwanda on 290 acres (118 hectares) overlooking beautiful Lake Kivu. It was located on the slopes of Mount Karisimbi, an extinct volcano that frequently was crowned with a light blanket of snow. In all directions there was a beautiful panorama of mountains. To the west, across the western arm of the Great African Valley, in which Lake Kivu is located, the Mitumba Mountains in DRC can be seen. The university was located 77 miles (124 kilometers) from Kigali, the nation's capital, and 19 miles (30 kilometers) by road from the resort town of Gisenyi, on the shores of Lake Kivu.²

It took a long time for Rwanda to acquire a Seventh-day Adventist Church-owned university. The idea of establishing a university for French-speaking African countries started early in 1966 by the then President of the Trans-Africa Division (TAD), Pastor Robert Pierson, at that time based in former southern Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe), at Salisbury, currently Harare. However, the idea was implemented by his successor, Pastor Merle Mills. There were many consultative meetings to found the university and the location to implant it. At last, Rwanda was selected among the other Francophone African countries to host the university.³

Initially, the university had seven faculties: business administration (accounting and information management); sciences (math-physics, biology and chemistry, human biology and public health); education (educational psychology); technology (A1); agriculture; languages (French and English), and theology. During the Rwanda genocide against Tutsis (1990-1994), there was a general breakdown in law and order, and the Mudende campus was damaged and looted. After the genocide, the vacant campus became "a sort of no man's land" for several years and the campus was stripped of anything removable.⁴

Following the genocide of 1994, AUCA temporarily suspended its activities until May 7, 1996 when the university reopened its doors on a transitional site at Gishushu, in Kigali City. At that time, the university could only run three of its original seven faculties (schools), namely: business administration, educational sciences, and theology. The 1.7 ha campus was not deemed large enough for a proper university, so a search commenced for a larger site, which was found at Masoro. The East-Central Africa Division, in collaboration with the administrative committee of the university, took significant steps toward building a new campus in signing a contract with the government of Rwanda to sell what remained of the old Mudende campus.

Many of the local people helped in building the university and a considerable amount of local material was used for the building of the university. A site was set up close to the university grounds where a large kiln was built. Wooden forms were made and the red clay earth of that area was mixed with water, poured into the brick forms, and set out in the sun to dry before being fired in the outdoor kiln. These were the bricks used for constructing all of the buildings and faculty houses on campus. Also, the volcanic rocks found everywhere on the campus land were used for constructing beautiful stone walls. Local people were hired to hand hammer the jagged volcanic rocks into smooth blocks that could be used for building walls all over campus. The campus was a magnificent feat of overcoming the hardships of primitive life in Africa at that time to use local materials and local workers to build a beautiful university.⁵

Construction of the central building on the new campus took nearly two years to complete. Nine years later, the university was relocated to its current site at Masoro, on land measuring 22 hectares on the outskirts of Kigali. On May 12, 2005, Pastor Jan Paulsen, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide conducted the groundbreaking ceremony for construction of the academic central block.⁶ Thereafter, a conference hall with a capacity of approximately 1500 persons was the first priority. Its construction began in February 2009 and was completed in September 2011, in which it was inaugurated by the ministry of the local government and high ranking officers of the Division. This multipurpose hall enables the university to gather the entire student population for various forums, such as academic gatherings, general assemblies, weeks of prayer, Sabbath services, and conferences of all types. Masoro and Gishushu campuses are connected to other parts of the city of Kigali by two paved roads built by the ministry of infrastructure. The strategic location of Gishushu campus has resulted in a magnificent school building, the Science and Technology Centre.⁷ The inaugural ceremonies were conducted by Dr. Pardon Mwansa, a Vice President of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on July 22, 2007.⁸

The university currently has six faculties/schools: business administration (finance, accounting, management, and marketing), information technology (information management, software engineering, networks and communication), education (educational psychology, mathematics, geography, English language and literature, information technology), theology, nursing, and midwifery, and medicine.⁹ Some programs are offered at master's degree level.

A third campus of the university, Ngoma Adventist College of Health Sciences, which opened in October 2015, is located at Ngoma in the western province, on the renovated premises of the former Ngoma Adventist Nursing School, alongside Mugonero Adventist Hospital. It currently hosts nursing and midwifery programs. The nursing program of AUCA was approved by the Higher Education Council (HEC) of the Ministry of Education of the Government of Rwanda, and on Friday, March 20, 2015, the ministers' cabinet meeting, which was chaired by the President of the Republic of Rwanda, approved the nursing program of Ngoma campus. Recent discussions among AUCA, Rwanda Union Mission, and East Central Africa Division centered around "resurrecting" the nursing education program. The initiative had its origins at the Ngoma facility with the Rwandan government

encouraging its development at that site in services to those communities of the region. The governmental approvals have already been secured and there is anticipation for AUCA to first begin the program at Ngoma, and later in Kigali.¹⁰

The Rwandan government encouraged AUCA to develop a program in medicine. Realizing the cost implications, the university administration took the government's request to the East Central Africa Division for counsel. In response, the Division Executive Committee, with the approval of the General Conference, decided to build a Division medical school at AUCA. On September 2, 2019 a state-of-the-art medical school was inaugurated by the President of the General Conference, Dr. Ted Wison and His Excellency, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda. The medical school is to cater primarily to students within east-central and southern Africa territories, and the world at large.¹¹ The government has offered AUCA clinical training sites at the busy provincial hospital in Ruhengeri, close to both the Uganda and Congo borders. The medical school is designed to become a center of excellence in the region, serving 11 countries, including Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Djibouti. It has several facilities, such as the Adrian Paul Cooper Science Complex, which will host nine laboratories of anatomy, physiology, immunology, microbiology, parasitology, biochemistry, and histo-pathology. The facilities also comprise a simulation and skills lab, as well as research and innovation labs.¹²

The buildings are the first phase of a larger project that the Church is undertaking in Rwanda. The four-phased project will also see the construction of a university teaching hospital for which the land has been donated by the government, and other facilities. The newly inaugurated medical school is one of the network of academic institutions that the Adventist Church runs worldwide. It is the second of its kind in Africa after Babcock University in Nigeria. The development makes Rwanda the seventh country in the world to have an Adventist medical school after Argentina, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Philippines, and the United States.¹³

Rectors/Presidents/Vice Chancellors of the institution since its inception: Elton Wallace, 1979-1990; Robert Pearson, 1990-1996; Gerald Vyhmeister, 1996-1998; Ruzibiza Stanislas, 1998-2003; Jozsef Szilvasi, 2003-2009; Abel Ngabo Sebahashi, 2009-2015; Verlyn Benson, 2016-2017; Ruterahagusha Roger, 2017-present.¹⁴

SOURCES

AUCA Staff and Faculty Handbook 2018-2022.

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NOTES

1. Ngabo Jérôme Birikunzira, *Implantation and Growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010), 62-72.
2. AUCA Staff and Faculty Handbook 2018-2022.
3. Birikunzira, 62-72.
4. <https://www.hrw.org/news/1997/08/26>.
5. Clyde Morgan, email to the ESDA managing editor, May 24, 2020. Clyde Morgan's father-in-law, Elton Wallace, was the first president of AUCA. Morgan and his family also served as missionaries on that campus in the 1980s with his in-laws for a time during the building stage of the university.
6. <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2005-05-12>.
7. Ibid.
8. <http://www.auca.ac.rw/about-auca/history-auca/>.
9. AUCA Bulletin 2018-2022, 23.
10. <http://www.auca.ac.rw/ngoma-college-health-sciences>.
11. David Mutero and Tsegaye Fesaha, interview by the author on September 2, 2019 at Masoro. Mutero and Tsegaye are education and health ministry directors of ECD, respectively.
12. Julius Bizimungu, "Kagame opens state-of-the art Adventist medical school," published September 2, 2019, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/kagame-opens-state-art-adventist-medical-school>.
13. Ibid.
14. Birikunzira, 62-72.

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