

Central African Republic

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Central African Republic is a mission field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is one of the five missions that make up the Central Africa Union Mission, which in turn is part of the West-Central Africa Division. Statistics (2017) for the Central Africa Republic Mission (established 1960; organized 1970): 51 organized churches; membership of 5,778; population 4,659,000.¹

Overview of the Country

The Central African Republic is a French-speaking, landlocked country in Central Africa. It is bordered by Chad to the north, Sudan to the northeast, South Sudan to the east, the Democratic Republic of Congo to the south, the Republic of Congo to the southwest, and Cameroon to the west. The Central Africa Republic covers a land area of about 620,000 square kilometers (approximately 240,500 square miles) and has an estimated population of around 4.6 million as of 2016. It was declared an independent country on August 13, 1960. The population is approximately 80 percent Christian, mostly Protestant (51 percent) and Roman Catholic (29 percent). Ten percent of the population is Muslim.²

Among the major ethnic groups are Baya, Banda, Mandjia, Sara, Fulani, Mboum, M'Baka, and Yakoma. The major local dialect, *Sango*, along with French, are considered the official languages of the country.

Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Work in the Country

The Adventist work was established in Central African Republic on January 14, 1960, when Jean Kempf and his wife settled in Bangui, the capital city of the country. They believed that one of the ways to reach the society was through education. They reached out to the community through printed pages, but on their arrival, they also bought a piece of land on which to establish the first preparatory school. By October 1960 Kempf and his wife had already established a school, and they had around 34 people who were studying the Bible with them.³

In 1961, seven people from the Central African Republic were baptized and trained by Jean Kempf as evangelists. Through outdoor evangelism, they worked to open new Sabbath School stations. On January 14, 1961, one was opened in Bangui, on April 8 one was opened in Alindao, on December 31 one was opened in Sika, and another station was opened January 2, 1962, in Koukouma-Ngaza. This expansion was a direct proof of

the intense development that was happening in the Central Africa Republic. Between the years 1961 and 1963, the number of Adventist members increased to 251 people.⁴

In 1968, with the arrival of Spanish missionaries, Manuel Martorell and his family, the Adventist message was brought to Zima in the eastern part of the country. In order to reach the community, Martorell opened a dispensary in 1968. By the end of 1970, an Adventist church was opened in Zima with an approximate membership of 68. In 1968, Manuel Martorell opened a Bible School in order to train gospel workers in the Central African Republic. One of the students, Nicolas Sangouet, was the one who took the Adventist message to Congo.⁵

In 1970 the Adventist work was formally organized in the Central African Republic by the union which was located in Cameroun. In 1971, Jules Agasson, a missionary sent by the union with his wife and two daughters, carried out the evangelistic work in Bouar. Through their ministry a church was opened in the western part of the country. By the end of 1980 the Adventist population was estimated to be 1,000 members.⁶

Pioneers

Among the pioneers one can mention Jean Kempf, who brought the Adventist message to the Central African Republic, especially to the capital of the country, Bangui. Manuel Martorell pioneered the Adventist message in Zima, the eastern part of the country, while in the western part of the country Jules Agasson was a pioneer.⁷

Institutions

The Adventist Mission in Central African Republic has one primary and secondary school, opened in 1960 by Jean Kempf. The primary school started with 11 students. Today the number has increased to approximately 200 students, which reflects the development of the institution. Unfortunately, the dispensary and the Bible School which were opened by Manuel Martorell in Zima in 1968 are no longer existing.⁸

Effect of Political Developments on SDA Work

Political instability has been the major challenge to Adventist mission in the Central African Republic. From its independence in 1960, the Central African Republic has had many political crises. Since 2013, much of the tension has been due to religious conflict between Muslims and Christians, as well as historical antagonism between agriculturalists and nomadic groups. All these contribute to the negative growth rate of the church in the country, which is estimated to be -3.70 percent in 2017.⁹

Because of political instability, many Adventists have left the country. Due to insecurity, international missionaries no longer come to the country in great numbers. In 2016 the mission had two ordained ministers and seven licensed ministers ministering to a population of over 4.5 million.¹⁰ Reports from church leaders in

the country speak of great opportunities for mission. Institutions like ADRA, schools, hospitals, Centers of Influence, radio and television stations, clinics, and other facilities would help to advance church mission in the country.

SOURCES

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NOTES

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3. Antoine Zengba, retired pastor from Central African Republic, interview by author, Bangui, Central African Republic, April 28, 2018.
4. Tita Samba Sole, Adventist journalist from Central African Republic, interview by author, Bangui, Central African Republic, April 28, 2018.
5. Elie Bromia, President of Central African Republic Mission, interview by author, Bangui, Central African Republic, April 28, 2018.
6. Ibid.
7. Antoine Zengba, interview by author.
8. Elie Bromia, interview by author.
9. "Central African Republic Mission," Adventist Statistics 2017, accessed May 30, 2019, <http://www.adventiststatistics.org>.

10. "General Statistics by Division for 2016," *2018 Annual Statistical Report*, pg. 72, accessed May 30, 2019,

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