



Pastor Ezra Mpyisi

Shared by the authors.

Mpyisi, Ezra (1922–2024)

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Ezra Mpyisi was a Rwandan Seventh-day Adventist educator, pastor, and church administrator whose ministry extended across Central and East Africa. Shaped by the early Adventist school system in [Rwanda](#), he served as a teacher, school administrator, evangelist, theological instructor, and church leader in Rwanda, the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), [Burundi](#), [Tanzania](#), [Kenya](#), and [Uganda](#).¹ He is remembered for his devotion to the Scriptures, his defense of Adventist identity, and his counsel to younger workers to serve God faithfully

regardless of position or circumstance.²

Early Life and Family Background

Ezra Mpyisi was born in Rwamwata, in what is now the Nyanza District, Southern Province, Rwanda, during the reign of King Yuhi V Musinga (1896–1931).³ His father, Rutarira, belonged to the Abanyiginya clan, historically associated with Rwanda's royal line, and his mother, Nyirankebya, came from the Abega clan, known for producing royal mothers.⁴ At the time of his birth, maternity care in Rwanda was provided by traditional midwives at home. Because his parents were not literate and vital records were not systematically kept, he did not know his exact birthdate, but throughout his life, he identified 1922 as the most likely year of his birth.⁵

Of eight children born to his parents, only two survived to reach childhood. To “hide” him from death, his parents gave him the name Mpyisi—“hyena”—believing that an unpleasant name might discourage malicious spirits and protect his life.⁶ He grew up deeply loved, especially by his mother, who died when he was about seven years old, and later by his stepmother, whom he described as kind, orderly, and morally upright.⁷

His father was respected locally for fairness and was chosen by neighbors to act as a village judge. The household kept cattle, and as a boy, Ezra learned traditional cattle care, including herding, milking, and watering the animals. He later recalled being blessed daily by his father when he returned from the fields—an experience that shaped his sense of identity and responsibility.⁸

Education

At a time when many Rwandan families resisted colonial-era schooling, Ezra's parents believed that education would give their son literacy, discernment, and opportunity. They hoped he might become a local clerk or village head.⁹ Schooling for girls was rare and socially discouraged, but boys were expected to study if the family supported it.¹⁰

Ezra began his education at the Adventist primary school in Rwamwata, where he studied reading, writing, arithmetic, social studies, and the Bible. Instruction depended on memorization and oral recitation. It was during this first cycle that he accepted baptism and publicly identified himself as a Seventh-day Adventist believer.¹¹

After completing the first grades at Rwamwata, he advanced to Gitwe Mission Station, one of the foundational Adventist training centers in Rwanda. Gitwe offered grades 4 through 6, and later grades 7 and 8, and it attracted students from Rwankeri, Ngoma, Burundi, and eastern Congo.¹² Traveling to Gitwe on foot required walking long distances—he estimated about 17 kilometers each way—often with little food or rest until a local family agreed to host him near the school.¹³

Gitwe combined academic instruction with practical training such as first aid, construction, and basic pastoral work. Graduates of the eighth year could be appointed as “teacher-evangelists,” and were expected to teach in the classroom and assist in lay pastoral ministry. Ezra excelled; after completing the eighth year, he received a teaching diploma and was hired at Gitwe as both classroom instructor and administrative clerk. His duties included registering students, typing examination papers, and preparing church reports.¹⁴

He later pursued further secondary-level study (grades 9–12) while already married and working. In 1960, the Church’s union headquarters—then covering Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo—selected him to study theology at [Solusi](#) in present-day [Zimbabwe](#). He attended with his family and completed advanced ministerial training entirely within Adventist institutions.¹⁵

Ministry in Rwanda

After receiving his early teaching commission, Ezra served first at Gitwe and then was assigned to his home area, Rwamwata, to help establish grades 4 and 5. Because qualified teachers were scarce, one teacher was often responsible for multiple grade levels and for every subject, including Bible.¹⁶ Classrooms ranged from simple thatched structures to outdoor lessons under trees.¹⁷

He later taught and worked in Ngoma, where an Adventist medical work and school had developed. There he combined teaching with clerical responsibilities, a pattern that reflected both his reliability and the Church’s need for workers who could teach, organize, and report.¹⁸

By the mid-1950s he had been called back to Gitwe to serve as chief clerk for the union office and assistant to the principal of the expanding secondary program. Gitwe, by then, drew students from across Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo, and functioned as a regional training hub for Adventist workers.¹⁹

Between 1957 and 1959, Ezra represented Seventh-day Adventists on Rwanda’s National Council (Conseil National) under King Mutara III Rudahigwa. His appointment signaled recognition of Adventists as part of Rwanda’s emerging public life and reflected the monarchy’s desire to include multiple faith communities rather than only the dominant Roman Catholic Church.²⁰ In later years, members of the royal family formally expressed appreciation for his service on behalf of Adventist believers.²¹

Regional and International Service

After national tensions and ethnic targeting in Rwanda during the 1960s, Ezra’s safety became uncertain. Colleagues warned him of threats, and he eventually left Rwanda.²² His ministry then continued across the Great Lakes region, where he was repeatedly called to teach, preach, and help stabilize Adventist institutions.²³

He served in Kivoga, Burundi, where he is remembered as an early leader of the Adventist secondary school; in the Democratic Republic of Congo, including Rweze and Lulengele, where he trained ministers and supported

reconciliation among workers; and in Arusha, Tanzania, where he taught in Adventist ministerial and secondary programs.²⁴ Because his children were studying in Uganda—and because currency devaluation in Congo made school fees difficult—church administrators reassigned him to Bugema, Uganda, where he served as teacher and, for a time, as principal.²⁵

He was later called to Kenya, where he worked in Kamagambo and at Nairobi Central Seventh-day Adventist Church. At Nairobi Central, he became one of the first Black pastors to hold prominent leadership in that congregation, a role he understood as both spiritual responsibility and public witness.²⁶ Throughout these assignments, he emphasized repentance, reconciliation, obedience to Scripture, and loyalty to Adventist teaching.²⁷

Family

Courtship and marriage in Rwanda during Ezra's youth followed controlled family customs. Young men and women did not interact freely; families or trusted intermediaries helped arrange marriages, and church seating segregated men and women.²⁸ His first marriage, to a young woman named Thamar (Mukabatsinda), was arranged through a fellow teacher. They married in Rwamwata in a customary evening ceremony attended mainly by male relatives and one senior female witness from the bride's family.²⁹

Not long after the birth of their first child, childbirth complications led to his wife's death. The infant daughter was initially cared for by her maternal grandmother and later by extended family.³⁰ Some years later, he remarried. His second wife, Esther Nyirabakiga, was from the Nyamagana area near Nyanza. Together they had eight additional children. Of his nine children in total, six survived to reach adulthood. His second wife died late in his life, and in his final years, he lived largely surrounded by his children and spiritual "sons and daughters" in the SDA Church.³¹

Legacy and Counsel

In his later years, Pastor Ezra Mpyisi described his career as an unfolding call of God through Adventist education, pastoral ministry, hardship, sacrifice, and reconciliation. He urged future workers to accept God's call regardless of salary, title, or geography, and to serve with integrity rather than ambition.³² He especially emphasized obedience to Scripture and personal surrender to Christ, frequently citing texts such as 1 John 3:8 to describe Christ's victory over sin and the devil.³³

He remained active in counsel and preaching into advanced age and was widely regarded as one of the most senior surviving Adventist workers of his generation in Rwanda and the surrounding region. He died in 2024.³⁴

Internal records and recollections from Adventist mission schools and fields in Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya, along with union-level archival memory concerning “teacher-evangelist” appointments and ministerial training (1940s–1970s). These sources trace his Adventist education, teaching and administrative service, theological training at Solusi in 1960, and subsequent pastoral and academic leadership.

Oral history interviews with Pastor Ezra Mpyisi (1922–2024) conducted in Rwanda, supplemented by family testimony and biographical notes preserved by the authors. These sources document his origins, early life, family background, service in Rwanda, later years, and death in 2024. Documents in the author’s private collection.

Testimonies from former colleagues, administrators, church members, and civic witnesses in Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya describing his representation of Seventh-day Adventists on Rwanda’s National Council (1957–1959), subsequent postings in the Great Lakes region, and the political and ethnic pressures leading to his relocation from Rwanda. In the author’s private collection.

NOTES

1. Oral history interviews with Pastor Ezra Mpyisi (1922–2024) conducted in Rwanda; family testimony; and biographical notes preserved by the authors. These sources document his birth and clan background in Rwamwata (now Nyanza District, Southern Province, Rwanda); early life in a cattle-keeping household; parental influences; marriage customs; and his own account of his approximate birth year. They also include his recollections of service in Rwanda, his later years, and his death in 2024. Documents in the author’s private collection.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Internal records and recollections from Adventist mission schools and fields in Rwanda (Rwamwata, Gitwe, Ngoma), Burundi (Kivoga), the Democratic Republic of Congo (Rwese, Lulengele), Tanzania (Arusha), Uganda (Bugema), and Kenya (Kamagambo, Nairobi Central Seventh-day Adventist Church); as well as union-level archival memory for Rwanda–Burundi–Congo regarding “teacher-evangelist” appointments and ministerial training (1940s–1970s). These sources outline his educational path at Adventist schools, his teaching, clerical, and administrative responsibilities, his theological training at Solusi in 1960, and his later work in pastoral and academic leadership.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Testimonies from former colleagues, administrators, church members, and civic witnesses in Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. These testimonies describe his representation of Seventh-day Adventists on Rwanda’s National Council (1957–1959) during the reign of King Mutara III Rudahigwa; his later postings in the Great Lakes region; and the political and ethnic pressures that contributed to his relocation from Rwanda. in the author’s private collection.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Oral history interviews with Pastor Ezra Mpyisi (1922–2024) conducted in Rwanda; family testimony; and biographical notes preserved by the authors. These sources document his birth and clan background in Rwamwata (now Nyanza District, Southern Province, Rwanda); early life in a cattle-keeping household; parental influences; marriage customs; and his own account of his approximate birth year. They also include his recollections of service in Rwanda, his later years, and his death in 2024.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Personal counsel given by Pastor Ezra Mpyisi in preaching, interviews, and pastoral conversations in his advanced age. He consistently urged obedience to Scripture, repentance, and reconciliation, and he encouraged Adventist workers to follow God's call without regard to status, geography, or financial reward. He frequently cited 1 John 3:8 as a summary of the gospel mission.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

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