

Zanzibar

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Elisante J. Mshama Jr., B.A. in theology (University Of Arusha, Tanzania) is currently (2020) serving as a front line pastor in South East Tanzania Conference of Southern Tanzania Union Mission. Elisante is married to Subira Mshama and together they have 3 children.

Zanzibar is sovereign state within the Republic of Tanzania. The state consists of two islands, namely Unguja and Pemba, in the Indian Ocean off the shore of the Tanzania mainland, formally Tanganyika.¹ Most of the area is at sea level, with the highest point being 119 meters above sea level.² The population was estimated to be 1,300,000 residents by the 2012 census. The residents of Zanzibar consist of people of different origins, including the Africans who are the majority, Arabs, Indians, and others.³

Zanzibar was the center of the Arab slave trade, and in 1822 the British consul in Muscat put pressure on Sultan Said to end the slave trade. The first of a series of anti-slavery treaties with Britain was signed by Said which prohibited slave transport south and east of the Moresby Line, from Cape Delgado in Africa to Diu Head on the coast of India. Said lost the revenue he would have received as duty on all slaves sold, so to make up for this shortfall he encouraged the development of the slave trade in Zanzibar itself.⁴

Islam is most prominent religion on the semi-autonomous Zanzibar archipelago which could be considered the Islamic center in the United Republic of Tanzania. About 98 percent of the population on the island is Muslim.

The History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zanzibar

A long time ago, some pastors and evangelists attempted to bring the Adventist message to Zanzibar, but they were refused and forced to return home. It was in 1984 when one of the church members, Laban Irhenē (who conducted regular Sabbath services in his home), was working as a teacher at Nyuki Secondary School (a school belonging to the Tanzania Peoples Defense Forces), met the president of Tanzania Union Mission, Pastor Yohana Lusingu. They discussed the possibility of opening missionary work in Zanzibar. Following the discussion, Pastor Zakayo Kusekwa, Tanzania Union publishing director, was asked to provide follow-up. In March 1985, Pastor Kusekwa managed to go to Zanzibar. On July 25, 1985, the president of the Tanzania Union sent Yohana Lukwaro to Zanzibar as the first literature evangelist. The result of his work became evident in 1987 when Moses Doto Makadilo and Ezekiel Manota were baptized by Pastor Kusekwa.

In 1989 evangelist Yohana Lukwaro returned to the mainland and the Tanzania Union Mission sent Pastor Alex Ibrahim Juma to carry forward the gospel work. He was the first church pastor in Zanzibar. His cooperation with the church members who were there (fewer than 20) expanded the work further and additional members were

added to the church through baptism. The following year, when the first camp meeting was conducted in Zanzibar, there were already 51 church members.⁶

Zanzibar SDA Dispensary Established

In 1987 Tanzania Union Mission in Arusha formed a committee with the following people: Pastor Elisha Okeyo (executive secretary), Haire Zerai (treasurer), and Dr. Godfrey Chamba (health ministries director), to look into the possibility starting a health facility in Unguja (Zanzibar). The team visited Zanzibar Island to meet the leadership of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar and inquire about the possibility of establishing a Seventh-day Adventist Church-owned health facility in Zanzibar. After the team met the chief minister, the Honorable Mr. Sharif Hamad, and shared the mission of the Adventist health department and its vision for the Zanzibar Islands, he showed great interest in allowing the Church to provide health services to the people of Zanzibar. He said that he once visited one of the Church-owned health facilities and got the best service when attending a parliament meeting in Dodoma, and he was very impressed by the quality of the service that he received.

Those in charge of the health facility include: Dr. Josiah Tayali (director), transferred from Kamunyonge SDA Dispensary in Musoma-Mara; Mrs. Rosemary Biseko (nursing officer) and Sylvester Biseko (pharmacist) from Heri Mission Hospital; Twalib Khamis (retired laboratory technician) from Zanzibar Government Hospital; Mr. and Mrs. Zawadi Mbwambo (nurses) from Heri Adventist Hospital; and Miss Magdalena Mdee (nursing assistant) from Magomeni SDA Dispensary in Dar es Salaam.⁷

The church members prior to 1987 conducted regular Sabbath services at Laban's home. Apart from Laban's home, they occasionally went to Kidimuni, which is about eight kilometers from town, where there were a few other church members. Beginning in 1987 the venue for Sabbath services changed from Laban's home to Sylvester Biseko's home, and when the number of members increased to about 50, the services were conducted at Kariakoo, inside a public hall which had to be rented for each service.⁸

Church Building in Zanzibar

Under the leadership of Pastor Eldard Mlwambo, president of the East Tanzania Field, and Pastor Fadhili Manento, treasurer, in collaboration with the leadership of the Tanzania Union Mission, there was regular follow up. Eventually a plot of land on which to build a church was acquired and the church was completed in 1994 and officially dedicated on January 25, 1995, by Pastor Robert Folkenberg, president of the General Conference.

The church has continued to grow from about 80 members when it was dedicated to 1,066 members in 2018. This tremendous growth was achieved through various evangelistic campaigns which have been conducted using the Adventist Muslim Relation approach or evangelistic meetings focusing on health services. As signs of

growth, branch Sabbath Schools have opened in several places to facilitate regular Sabbath services for members who are living far from the main church which is located in Zanzibar town. Opening of Sabbath School branches outside the town is also a strategy for evangelism.⁹ Currently in Zanzibar (Unguja and Pemba Islands) there are three pastors, six churches, five branch Sabbath Schools, one primary school (Standards 1-4), and one nursery school. There are 110 students (60 Muslim, 30 other Christians, and 20 Adventists).

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