

# Kanyamfwa Mission Station

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LUKA OGAYO

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The Kanyamfwa Mission Station in Kenya is located on volcanic plateau land on the eastern part of Homa-Hills where agricultural activities are supported by the fertile volcanic soil. This area has long spells of dry seasons with heavy rainfall between March and June every year. The available crops—maize, finger millet, sorghum, ground nuts, and other foodstuff—encourage human habitation in this region.

## Kanyamfwa Mission Station's Context

The Kanyamfwa Mission Station includes the Kanyamfwa church and the Kanyamfwa Primary and Secondary Schools. In its larger contexts are: Gogo Primary and Secondary, Oriwo Primary and Secondary, Wagwe Primary and Secondary, Oindo Primary, and Kanam Primary and Secondary Schools. The Kanyamfwa Mission Station encompasses Kanyamfwa Upper, Kanyamfwa Lower, Oriwo, Gogo, Wagwe, Nyamila, Kanam, Kanam South, Ngow, Osakwe upper, Osakwe Lower, Nyaola, and Kodhoch church districts, with a total of 120 churches. These 13 districts began from small church groups initiated by those who later went back to their communities but remained faithful to biblical teachings.

## Historical Background

The Kanyamfwa Mission church came into existence as a result of the work of the missionaries.<sup>1</sup> The first SDA missionaries to work in Kenya were Arthur Carscallen, his wife, and Malawi native Peter Nyambo, who left England and reached Kenya, east Africa on October 1, 1906.<sup>2</sup> By November 27, 1906, this team reached Gendia Hill which is on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria-Kendu Bay.<sup>3</sup> This region was inhabited by Luo of the Southern Nyanza. The Luo is one of the 42 tribes in Kenya and they are the third largest ethnic group and make up 13 percent of the people in the Republic of Kenya.<sup>4</sup> The mission that began at Gendia Hill resulted in the baptism of the first 12 converts. It is from there that the mission spread to Kanyamfwa through Elder Abala of Achuth, and Aluoch Adede, a native elder, but the church was not welcomed by the natives.

Arthur Carscallen and W. T. Bartlett visited Kanyamfwa Hill around 1920 with the Adventist message.<sup>5</sup> The first church services were conducted under a big sycamore tree near Elder Aluoch's home.<sup>6</sup> The willingness of Aluoch's family attracted his counterparts like Saka, Oriaso, Odero, and Miyoma, who were notable elders of the Kateng' community. These converts were baptized in 1921 and through their concerted efforts, Bartlett and

Carscallen launched the construction of a temporary grass thatched church.

Based on the knowledge Luka Amayo had gained as one of the first converts at Gendia, he was sent to Kanyamfwa as a teacher-evangelist in 1922. With the spiritual support from Ibrahim Orwa and Jacob Olwa, many converts joined the church and attended the elementary school where they received their first education. Many people were converted and enrolled in Sabbath School classes to acquire both spiritual knowledge and an education which gave them a major spiritual influence.

## Positive Spiritual and Educational Influence

Among the first converts and students were: James Aluoch Adede, Elijah Saka, Mika Mitoko, Elisha Arunga Odero, Silah Oriaso Ogwen, Malaki Awala, Mariko Okisho, Petro Adara, and Ezra Mitoko. After gaining both spiritual and literary advantages, these converts from Kanyamfwa were sent on missions. Pastor Elisha Arunga went to Chebwai in Luhya land, Pastor Ezra Mitoko went to Uganda, Elder Elijah Saka was the first colporteur to take the message to Kericho, Jacob Olwa took the message to Gusii land, and Mika Mitoko became a teacher. The church was assisted in its expansion from Kanyamfwa by Jacob Olwa or Orwa in Ekigusi<sup>7</sup>

Those who were converted to Adventism moved away from the influence of their former community members and settled around the church compound. Even though they suffered scorn from some of their clansmen who tried to entice them to join in drumbeating, alcoholism, and polygamous marriages, among other things, they remained faithful to the ministry. As a result, these elders prospered both in wealth and health since they became teachers in the church schools as well as spiritual custodians. Through the effort of the church, most of them were sponsored to institutions of learning like Kamagambo in Kenya and Bugema in Uganda<sup>8</sup>

Out of these privileges, their children got access to the best education of that time and subsequently were employed by the church as teachers, accountants, and nurses, while others were employed by the government and in the private sector. Currently these homes manifest testimonies of faithfulness with positive impact among the young and old. Out of these pioneers of Kanyamfwa Mission Station have come elites who have and who still serve nations at various levels, including the Honorable Lazarus Amayo who is currently serving as ambassador to the United States of America (2019).

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### SOURCES

Aswani, Nixon. "Kenya population by tribe: Which are the largest and smallest tribes?" Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://www.tuko.co.ke/269810-kenya-population-by-tribe-which-largest-smallest-tribes.html#269810%202018>

Gusii. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://www.gusii.com/2016/01/index.html>.

Mbwana, Geoffrey. "Like a Mustard Seed." *ARH*, 2014.

## NOTES

1. John Akach, elder and a long-serving teacher at Kanyamfwa Primary School, Kenya Conference, West Kenya Union Conference, interview by the author, June 1, 2019, at Kanyamfwa SDA Church compound.
2. Geoffrey Mbwana, "Like a Mustard Seed," *ARH*, 2014.
3. Ibid.
4. Nixon Aswani, "Kenya population by tribe: Which are the largest and smallest tribes?" <https://www.tuko.co.ke/269810-kenya-population-by-tribe-which-largest-smallest-tribes.html#269810%202018>.
5. Nereah Ogal, interview by the author, June 1, 2019.
6. John Akach, interview by the author, June 1, 2019.
7. Elder Nereah Ogal a widowed shepherdess of Kanyamfwa SDA Church and teacher John Akach, a long-serving elder at Kanyamfwa Mission Station, interview by the author, June 1, 2019, at Kanyamfwa SDA Church compound. Gusii, accessed July 15, 2019, <https://www.gusii.com/2016/01/index.html>. The church was started by an American missionary named Pascal Armstrong together with a Luo named Jacob Orwa. From there, the Kendu Bay Church opened a branch at Kamagambo, South Mugirango in Kisii county in 1910. Through the continuing efforts of Pascal and Orwa, the church further proceeded to the rest of the Gusii highlands in 1918, opening a branch at Nyanchwa.
8. Ochungo Gworo, a long-serving elder, an experienced high school teacher, and grandson of one of the pioneer elders of Kanyamfwa mission station, Ndwarra. The author interviewed him on May 25, 2019, at Ndwarra SDA church compound.

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