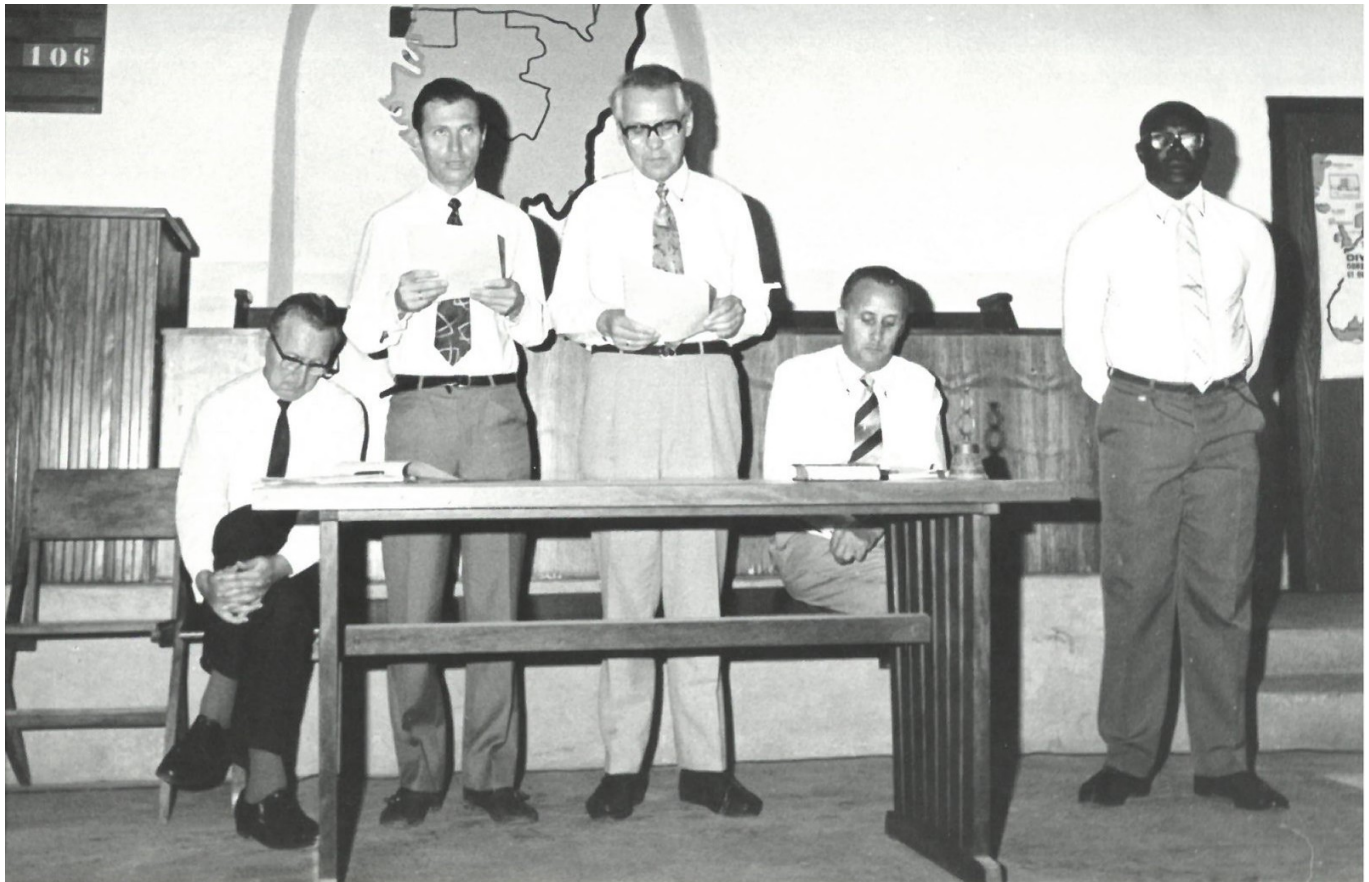




Edwin Ludescher sitting on the right.

Photo courtesy of the Archives of Seventh-day Adventists in Europe, Friedensau, Germany.

Ludescher, Edwin Johann (1929–2012)

GERD LUDESCHER

Gerd Ludescher, Ph.D., M.D., is

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urrently the medical director of PrimaVita Health Centre in Waldfriede Hospital, Berlin, Germany. He is a specialist in general medicine with additional areas of qualification, which include naturopathy, nutritional medicine-DAEM/DGEM, and sports medicine.

Edwin Johann Ludescher was a missionary to Africa and president of the Euro-Africa Division.

Early Life

Edwin Johann Ludescher was born January 17, 1929, in Parthenen, in the federal state of Vorarlberg, Austria, to August Ludescher (1884-1971) and Maria Heidegger (1888-1936) as the sixth of eight children. Edwin was baptized according to the Roman Catholic rite on January 20, 1929, in the parish church of Gaschurn and raised in the Catholic faith by his very pious mother, who regularly went on pilgrimages. His father, a former owner of an embroidery factory, had lost his wealth through speculation after the First World War, and was a restaurant tenant at the time of Edwin's birth.

Edwin spent his early childhood in Salzburg where his carefree days abruptly ended when his mother became ill and died when he was only seven. His father, being overwhelmed and unable to raise him alone, put him and two of his brothers into the custody of an aunt, and later into a Catholic boarding school (Edmundsburg in Salzburg) where he was badly treated by nuns and eventually kicked out.

War Years

When the Second World War broke out, Ludescher started living with his father again. After attending school during the day, he worked in an armament factory producing hydraulic pumps for submarines. During the summer hard labor on the farm awaited him. Despite the ideological brainwashing he received in Hitler Youth, Ludescher was not an opportunist. Following eight years of school, he was supposed to be admitted at a NAPOLA (Nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalt), an elite national political training institution of the Nazi regime. But he forfeited this "opportunity" by slapping a supervisor.

Having a talent for music, Edwin and two of his brothers would sing a variety of songs for wounded soldiers in military hospitals during the war, and after the war they also entertained the allied troops. At age 15 he wanted to join the submarine base in Riga (Latvia) on the Baltic Sea, but this plan was thwarted by the rapid advance of the Red Army. He was drafted into the German Wehrmacht at age 16, but he and a fellow soldier deserted while under orders to defend a mountainous ridge (Pass Lueg) in the Alps against the approaching American troops. Consequently, he was captured by the American troops, and he spent the next six months as an American prisoner of war.

Conversion and Education

The young Ludescher thought that his life was shattered when World War II came to an end. He had dreamed of a career in the German navy. In his disappointment, he turned to spiritual things, hoping to find what he termed "an inner meaning for my life."¹ As a good Catholic, he took Communion each morning before attending classes at the business academy in Salzburg (1945-1946), from which he graduated in 1946.

God rewarded his search in an unusual way. One spring Sunday in 1946, his stepmother was sitting on a park bench when an Adventist woman invited her to a series of evangelistic meetings being held in the Adventist

church in Salzburg. Accepting the invitation, Mrs. Ludescher invited her stepson to the Sunday evening meeting. After watching a soccer game, he ran to the church in order to get there on time.

The topic presented that evening was based on Daniel 7 and 8. Of this meeting he recalls: “The description of all the strange beasts and their meanings was very confusing and did not make sense to me, but the atmosphere of the meetings and the friendliness of the Adventist youth who were present, impressed and attracted me, so I kept attending the evangelistic meeting regularly, and as time went by everything made sense to me.”²

From July 1946 to October 1948, Ludescher worked as an accountant at the Austrian Import Association for food and agricultural goods³ in Salzburg before he followed a call to the ministry made by the Austrian Union president.

From October 1, 1948, to September 15, 1949, he worked as a student mission worker on a probationary basis in Vienna, taking training classes in the morning and then practicing in the afternoon by doing mission work door to door.

When the Austrian Adventist Theological Seminary opened in 1949, Ludescher was among Bogenhofen’s first students. There he completed the three-year mission course in 1951 as a straight-A student. Being without financial support, he excelled as a colporteur in order to provide for his personal needs and tuition during his ministerial training.

Early Ministry, Marriage, and Move to Africa

On August 15, 1951, he began his first job as a regular ministerial worker in Vienna and was employed by the Danube Conference (Donau-Vereinigung) until September 30, 1953.

On September 10, 1954, Ludescher married Gerda Elsa Rosa Stöger. Gerda was born June 11, 1932 in Bruck an der Mur, Styria, Austria. Gerda had lost her father through illness when she was seven and had been raised by her widowed mother in the Adventist faith. She had just graduated from a nursing school in Vienna. Deeply moved by Dr. Albert Schweitzer’s life as a Christian medical missionary to Gabon, Africa, the Ludeschers decided to serve God as missionaries in Africa.

In order to prepare for service in French-speaking African territory, Ludescher enlisted in the Adventist Theological Seminary of Collonges-sous-Salève, in January 1954. There he took French, English, and theological classes, while serving as dean of the residence hall for students until September 30, 1956.

Ordination, Cameroon

In October 1956 the Ludeschers, with their firstborn son Jürgen (1955-), took a ship to Cameroon. This was one of the oldest African mission fields in the Southern European Division. Here Edwin served as an associate pastor.

On February 28, 1957, Ludescher was ordained as a pastor.²

He began his ministerial work in North Cameroon, which is predominantly Muslim. There his second son Gerd was born (1958-). Responsible for the mission station at Dogba (district of Maroua), located about 80 km from the Adventist hospital in Koza, he worked relentlessly and fearlessly for long weeks at a time, traveling into the surrounding mountains, sometimes on horseback, to preach and reach out to the indigenous population in the most remote areas, visiting and encouraging people at the more than ten outposts of Dogba. Often alone, his wife Gerda took care of their sons and the dispensary. Although without medical training, Ludescher managed to provide crucial medical care for the sick and injured while out in the bush. Gerda had prepared a simple written guide with a list of the most common symptoms, their corresponding diagnoses, and treatment. With the medical drugs stored in a metal chest, he was able to save many a life.

In 1959 Ludescher was called to South Cameroon to be in charge of the main mission station at Nanga Eboko. This he did until August 30, 1965.

Austria

From September 1, 1965 to April 15, 1969, Ludescher worked as Secretary for home Mission, Sabbath School, and Bible Correspondence Study at the Austrian Union.⁴ In this position he focused his efforts on holding public evangelistic meetings, giving Bible studies, and pastoring the main Adventist church in Vienna. His exceptional organizational talents were evident at the European Adventist Youth Congress in the Austrian capital in 1967.

Equatorial Africa

During the Quadrennial Council of the Southern European Division in 1968, Ludescher was elected president of the Equatorial African Union Mission, consisting of six countries with 12 million inhabitants at the time. This was the largest French-speaking mission field in the division,⁵ including 10,761 baptized members and 25,312 Sabbath School members.⁶ Ludescher's years as president were marked with progress.⁷ Under his leadership the Equatorial African Mission Union grew to 18,834 baptized members and 38,148 Sabbath School members.⁸ New territories were also entered, including Gabon, the Central African Republic, and Niger.

In 1972 Ludescher became a member of the African Publications Coordinating Committee. Remembering Ludescher's years in Africa, Pastor Eliseo Cupertino, Italian missionary and a close colleague declared: "Great progress was made under his direction until 1975, both in terms of development of new activities in new territories, and in terms of development of new institutions."

President of Euro-Africa Division

Pastor Edwin Ludescher was a talented administrator and organizer.⁹ Although never interfering with the different areas of responsibility of his colleagues he was always supportive of them. His style of governance was leadership by delegation.

Although Ludescher had never been offered the possibility of getting a degree in higher education, one of his main priorities was to promote talented young people and to develop a continuing education program for ministers. It gave many pastors in the Euro-Africa Division the opportunity to attend a United States institution for higher education, preferably Andrews University, in order to complete a Master or a Doctorate of Divinity. This included those from the mission field or communist countries, like Angola, Mozambique, Madagascar, and especially the former German Democratic Republic. He was also very supportive of leadership seminars and conventions for literature evangelist leaders and treasurers.

Ludescher's first and foremost interest was evangelism. For that purpose, he recruited internationally known evangelists such as Roland Lehnhoff and Brad Thorp to hold evangelistic campaigns in large German-speaking cities: Hamburg, Vienna, Nuremberg, and Cologne. Under Mark Finley's direction the first mobile evangelism institute took place in Munich in 1986.¹⁰

During the Cold War period, Ludescher regularly visited the countries of the Socialist Block, bringing encouragement, comfort, and hope to the churches in those difficult times. He felt especially close to the war-torn countries of Angola and Mozambique, which he visited for long periods of time, regardless of the perils awaiting him there.¹¹

Using the opportunity of the political changes with the fall of the Iron Curtain and German reunification, Edwin was instrumental in a farsighted and resolute move to merge the former Theological Seminary Marienhöhe in Darmstadt, West Germany, with the university-level theological institution in Friedensau, East Germany. The latter had just obtained that status in 1990, making it a high profile and beneficial institution in the public perception.

Ludescher loved unity. According to his own words Ludescher felt very saddened and burdened by intradenominational conflicts, strife, partisanship, and moves which threatened church unity. As a shepherd of the Church, the words of Matthew 11:28-30 were very dear to him.¹² Unfortunately, he could not solve the decades long conflict which had split the Adventist Hungarian Church before his tenure, despite numerous EUD initiatives for reconciliation between the two groups, at times even with the participation of General Conference leaders.¹³

Ludescher also took a special interest in the support and nurturing of children and youth. The largest youth congress in the history of the Adventist Church took place in 1994 in Luanda, Angola, where 30,000 young people, mostly non-Adventists, gathered. While there, 1,000 of them decided to be baptized.¹⁴

Later Life

After retirement, Edwin stayed in Berne and kept serving the denomination. He preached regularly and gave seminars in churches in Switzerland, Southern Germany, and Austria. He also helped out with deacons' work and pastoral care at his local church in Berne.

When Gerda, his wife and companion of 56 years, died in October 2010, he was already seriously ill. Two years later, Edwin Ludescher died peacefully on June 11, 2012, the same day his wife had been born and his mother-in-law had died.

Contribution

During Ludescher's 35 years of service as a missionary and a division president, he spent 60 to 70 percent of his time away from home, tirelessly traveling through the vast territories of his areas of responsibility. During his tenure as president from 1975 to 1994, the division, spanning from Germany to Angola and Mozambique, grew from 169,000 members and 1,946 churches to 403,296 members and 3,594 churches.¹⁵ New countries (Malta, Gibraltar, Tunisia, and Monaco) were entered. MISSERM—a mission organization for reaching Muslims—was created in 1982.¹⁶

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NOTES

1. Otto Riegler and Theodor Pfingstl, "They Work for the Whole World," *Mission: A Quarterly Report of World Mission*, July-September 1987.
2. "1957 Overseas Ordinations," *Ministry*, April 1958, 46.
3. Österreichische Importvereinigung für Lebensmittel und Landwirtschaftlichen Bedarf.
4. Josef Stöger, "Wachet und Betet!" *Adventecho*. February 1968, 7.
5. Jean Cazeaux, "Highlights of the Division Quadrennial Council 1968," *Quarterly Review*, March 1969, 1-2.
6. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *107th Annual Statistical Report of Seventh-Day Adventists 1969*, 18.
7. Remembering Ludescher's years in Africa, Pastor Eliseo Cupertino, Italian missionary and a close colleague declared: "Great progress was made under his direction until 1975, both in terms of development of new activities in new territories, and in terms of development of new institutions." "Edwin Ludescher: A Man of Vision for the Church," Adventist News Network, June 13, 2012, accessed June 6, 2017, <http://news.eud.adventist.org/en/all-news/go/2012-06-13/edwin-ludescher-a-man-ofvision-for-the-church>.
8. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *113th Annual Statistical Report 1975*, 10.
9. Erich Amelung, email message to Gerd Ludescher, May 4, 2017. Erich Amelung is a retired treasurer of the former Euro-Africa Division (EUD) and a long-time colleague and friend.
10. Edwin Ludescher, "The Lord on High Is Mighty," *ARH*, July 11, 1990, 18.
11. Ludescher was known to have a caring consideration for his fellow workers. It was important for him to host his guests, especially from Africa and the Eastern Bloc, in a personal manner, making sure that they got invited to eat in private homes during the annual meetings at the division headquarters. In this regard, he and his wife Gerda set a good example. After 44 years of ministry, Edwin Ludescher decided to retire as president of the Euro-Africa Division in December 1994. He bid farewell to his colleagues at the division's year-end meeting in Jongny, Switzerland, November 4-9, 1994. Among all participants who thanked Ludescher for his long, dedicated, and blessed service, the president of the Mozambique Union stated: "you were and will always stay a friend of the Africans." See John Graz, "Jongny 94: Aktuelles von der

Jahressitzung der Euro-Afrika-Division," *Adventecho*, February 1995, 20.

12. Edwin Ludescher, interview by *Adventecho*, "Fragen zum Abschied an Edwin Ludescher, den scheidenden Vorsteher der Euro-Afrika-Division," *Adventecho*, January 1995, 7.

13. "The Hungarian Situation," *Ministry*, April 1985, 11, 21.

14. Graz, "Jongny 94," 21.

15. Newsbreak, "EUD President Retires," *ARH*, December 15, 1994, 6.

16. Ulrich Frikart, former EUD president and for many years a colleague of Edwin Ludescher, said: "He has marked the lives of thousands of people in Europe and Africa. By his administrative talents, his love and vision for the church, and especially his deep and balanced faith, Edwin Ludescher has left lasting traces." See "Edwin Ludescher: A Man of Vision for the Church," *Adventist News Network*, June 13, 2012.

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