



The Namibia South Conference office building

Photo Courtesy of Luxson Matomola.

# Namibia South Conference

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Namibia South Conference is a subsidiary church administrative unit of the Southern Africa Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division territory.

## Current Territory and Statistics

The country of Namibia, the land of the brave, comprises fourteen political regions with a population of 2.5 million. Geographically, the country is one of the largest countries in Africa with an area stretching about eight hundred twenty-five thousand km<sup>2</sup>. Namibia has a fairly stable economy sustained by mineral resources and tourism. Namibia is home to thirteen tribes and ethnic groups, including the Himba and Herero who constitute minority groups in the Adventist Church. The ratio of Adventists to non-Adventists countrywide is 1:288.

The territorial area of Namibia South Conference lies within the Red Line, also referred to as the Veterinary Cordon Fence (VCF), which includes the regions of Erongo, Hardap, Karas, Khomas, Kunene (South), Omaheke, Otjozundjupa, and Oshikoto Region (south from Oshivelo).

The Namibia South Conference has twenty-eight (28) organized churches from Opuwo in the northern part of our country down to the Orange River in the south, with a total membership of 6,214 members. The population of this territory is 609,778 people.

## Origin of Adventist Work in the Territory of the Conference

In order to understand the Seventh-day Adventist church's origins and mission work in Namibia, one should first understand the background of the history of the Christian faith in the country. Christianity in Namibia comprises of more than 90 percent of the total population of 2.5 million, this is according to the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA) report.<sup>1</sup> The largest Christian group is the Lutheran Church, which is divided into three church bodies. The first is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), which grew out of the work of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (earlier known as the Finnish Missionary Society) that began in 1870 among the Owambo and Kavango people. The second largest Christian movement is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), which grew out of the work of the Rhenish Missionary Society from Germany that began working in the area in 1842, and the third largest is the German-speaking Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN-GELC). In 2007 the three church bodies established the United Church Council of the Lutheran Churches in Namibia, with the ultimate aim to become one church body?<sup>2</sup>

The second-largest Christian denomination is the Roman Catholic Church. There are also smaller numbers that are affiliated with the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), New Apostolic Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Brahmanism, a number of Zionist Churches (a mixture of traditional African beliefs), and Pentecostal Christianity. The Dutch Reformed Church of Namibia is predominantly made up of members of the Afrikaner ethnic group.

Speaking to His disciples about the sign of His imminent return, Jesus gave them signs, and one of those signs will continue until the time He will appear in the clouds of heaven. Jesus said to His disciples, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a sign to all nations; and then the end will come"

(Matthew 24:14). Henceforth, this article traces the origin of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Namibia South Conference territory in line with the missiological proclamation of Jesus as mentioned above.

Seventh-day Adventist mission work in Namibia (then known as South-West Africa) began in 1922. Namibia was however not the direct mission target, but Angola, and the missionaries used the South-West Africa territory as a launching pad for the Angolan mission. Pastor W. H. Branson, then president of the African Division, whose dream for mission outreach burned like fire in his bones, asked W. H. Anderson, a pioneer missionary worker who was attending a division meeting, to consider traveling to Angola.<sup>3</sup>

The humble, fifty-one year old W. H. Anderson rose up to the challenge, and said, "I am like Caleb, I feel as strong today as when I first came to Africa twenty-six years ago. I am prepared to go wherever the brethren feel I can do the most good."<sup>4</sup> I call this a stone of reformation and transformation for mission in South-West Africa. Days later Anderson waved goodbye and bound for Windhoek, Namibia, three full dusty days as in the words of Dr. David Livingstone, "I will go anywhere, provided it be forward."

This was the starting point for Anderson's pioneering work in the west. Upon arriving in Namibia, he called the tribal chief for permission to travel through Owamboland to his destination in Angola. Through God's providence, Anderson linked up with the northern train destined for Tsumbe (in Angola), where he met Mr. Hansen, who was about to head to Angola too. What a missiological coincidence!

It was through this trip that contacts in Namibia were made and mission work was opened by these two pioneers, from Kunene to Tsumeb. In 1923 O. O. and Mrs Bredenkamp settled and began working in Windhoek among the Owambo and Nama-speaking natives. The couple studied the language of the natives as a tool to reach the hearts of the people with the gospel. Their strategy was to start with Windhoek as the epicenter for introducing the gospel to all ethnic groups. In the process all the local native chiefs from Grootfontein to Kunene heard the news and began to enquire with interest. At the same time, missionaries were given permission to evangelize in those areas belonging to the chiefs.

Later in the 1930s, Pastors J. Van der Merwe and R. Visser conducted campaigns in Windhoek. Beginning on February 13, 1938, Pastor Visser carried out a successful campaign in Windhoek from which 13 candidates were baptized on June 5. Together with five other members baptized by Pastor Van der Merwe the previous year, they constituted the first fruits of the work in the territory covered by the Namibia South Conference.<sup>5</sup> Eleven more baptisms followed in quick succession, and the members were added to the company in Windhoek. After the group in Windhoek was established, evangelistic efforts were launched in smaller towns surrounding Windhoek, including Gobabis, Mariental, and Usakos.

Early in 1940 South African Union Conference president, A. Floyd Tarr, traveled through South-West Africa and visited Adventists who were scattered in the territory and held series of meetings.<sup>6</sup> In all his visits, Tarr was accompanied by Visser. Most of the members visited were Adventists who had accepted the truth in South Africa, or from the fruitful campaigns of Pastors Van Der Merwe and Visser. Tarr visited the believers to

encourage them and to conduct meetings in places where they lived. The places visited were Kalkfeld, Usakos, Grootfontein, Walvis Bay, Swakopmund, Windhoek, and Witvlei.

At the same time, three colporteurs also visited South-West Africa, traveling from farm to farm. Great portions of the South-West Africa territory were desert-like and the country was sparsely populated. As the colporteurs canvassed from farm to farm, they would travel from early in the morning and only settled and slept at past 8 p.m. in the veld.<sup>7</sup> These colporteurs canvassed throughout South-West Africa for three weeks, in which each successive week saw more orders for Adventist literature.

In 1940 Pastor Visser was recalled from South-West Africa to labor in Uitenhage, South Africa, due to the ill health of his daughter. Since then there were no church workers living in the entire country until formal organization took place years later. The believers in South-West Africa lived in places that were scattered far and wide. These few believers were placed under the pastoral care of Pastor S. J. Fourie of Upington, South Africa. Pastor Fourie, and sometimes administrators from the Cape Conference and the South African Union Conference in South Africa made occasional visits to South-West Africa, to meet all the baptized members and interested persons in one trip, and to baptize new converts. The work was carried on at a slow pace, but carried forward nevertheless. When Pastor Fourie visited the members again in 1946, at least one new member was baptized, which made each visit to South-West Africa worthwhile.

## Organizational History of the Conference

Since the 1950's Namibia has seen a rapid growth of mission work from both entrances (Caprivi and Windhoek). The South African Union Conference (SAUC) sat for a special session called to study the constitution "with special reference to the method and time for selecting union and local mission field officers and committees, departmental secretaries, and institutional boards."<sup>8</sup> Delegates to this session took action to recommend that the work in South-West Africa be organized as a mission field. SAUC president, W. D. Eva, reported that the SAUC lacked the financial capital at the time and reached out to the Southern African Division for aid. The South-West Africa Mission Field was organized later that year, and Pastor J. J. Bekker was appointed as the first president and became the first resident pastor in South-West Africa since R. Visser left for Uitenhage. At the time when the South-West Africa Mission Field was organized, it had a membership of 54 and no organized church yet. Pastor Bekker continued to labor in South-West Africa until his sudden death in 1965.

At the time when the South-West Africa Mission Field was organized, Pastor Walter Cooks was responsible for the work in the Caprivi under the auspices of the Bechuanaland Mission, which was a part of the Zambezi Union Mission. The two mission fields in South-West Africa were merged in 1999 into what became the Namibia Field. At that time, the South-West Africa Field had 13 churches and 1,345 members. Together with the North-East Namibia Field, the combined statistics for the reorganized Namibia Field was 12,232 members in 54 churches. This became the beginning of great tidings for the territory. In 2001 the Namibia Field was mandated by the

Southern Africa Union Conference to start the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) work that has thus far grown to become a nationwide Christian organization working to provide Christian compassion and mercy.

In 2012 the education department of the Namibia Field started a church school in Caprivi. Mavuluma Adventist School today has more than six hundred learners from grade one to seven. This work gave birth to four other schools in Rundu, Opuwo, Katutura, and Windhoek Eden Adventist Primary School. During the same time, the Namibia Field was organized into the Namibia Conference, covering the whole country, and opened the Adventist World Radio studio that is now working to open the Adventist Television-Hope Channel. The conference grew to 80 churches and 12,806 members.

With all these developments in the conference, Namibia Conference was realigned into two Conferences; i.e. North Namibia Conference and South Namibia Conference. The South Namibia Conference retained 21 churches and 5,489 members. Later in 2019 both conferences were renamed upon counsel from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist to have the name of the country precede the wind direction. During the 2019 session, which took place from September 26–28, delegates voted to rename the territories as Namibia South and Namibia North Conferences respectively.

## Future Outlook

The Namibia South Conference aims to acquire properties and more specifically, farm land in the near future. The conference is currently working on developing a farm that was recently purchased with the intention of developing and constructing a Seventh-day Adventist High School--a first for Namibia. The same piece of land is also to be developed into a green vegetable scheme to feed the surrounding community.

At the national level, the Namibia South Conference and the Namibia North Conference are working toward being organized into union conferences by 2022. In order to achieve this goal, their strategic plan includes improving and equipping the ministers in the field and increasing the pastoral work force to ensure at least a pastor per town/district. The conference will also prioritize training and equip the laity in the years from 2021–2022 under the “I Will Go” initiative of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

ADRA Namibia will also partner with the government of Namibia in fighting COVID-19. ADRA made a financial contribution to the value of N\$140,000 to assist the country with its humanitarian work and also provided medical equipment worth N\$130,000 to help fight the pandemic.

Namibia South Conference will also seek to expand the scope of its mission by increasing the Voice of Prophecy Bible School enrollment and conducting other Bible studies to ensure that everyone is reached with the gospel of the kingdom.

## List of Presidents

### South-West Africa Field

J. J. Bekker (1954–1965); W. H. J. Badenhorst (1965–1970); J. D. Coetzee (1970–1972); W. J. J. Engelbrecht (1972–1975); N. M. Strydom (1975–1978); J. T. Rautenbach (1978–1979); J. A. Ackerman (1980–1983); C. F. Venter (1983–1989).

### Namibia Field

W. H. Bohme (1991–1995); V. D. Coombs (1995–2000); L. Mubonenwa (2000–2006); M. S. Mukubonda (2006–2012).

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M. S. Mukubonda (2012–2016); G. F. Feris (2016–2018); E. Barron (2018–present).

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Visser, R. "The Work in South-West Africa." *Southern African Division Outlook*, November 1, 1939.

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### NOTES

1. Wikipedia, "Christianity in Namibia," accessed December 3, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity\\_in\\_Namibia#cite\\_note-report-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Namibia#cite_note-report-1).
2. Ibid.

3. Lee L. Mubonenwa, *Seventh-day Adventist Church History in Namibia* (Windhoek, Namibia: John Meinert Printing), 199.
  4. Virgil Robinson, *Desert Track and Jungle Trail* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1968), 99.
  5. R. Visser, "The Work in South-West Africa," *Southern African Division Outlook*, November 1, 1939, 4.
  6. A. Floyd Tarr, "Visit to South-West Africa and Uppington," *Southern African Division Outlook*, March 15, 1940, 1.
  7. C. S. Pike, "Literature Work in South-West Africa," *Southern African Division Outlook*, May 1, 1940, 5.
  8. W. D. Eva, "South African Union Conference President's Annual Report," *Southern African Division Outlook*, February 1, 1954, 3.
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