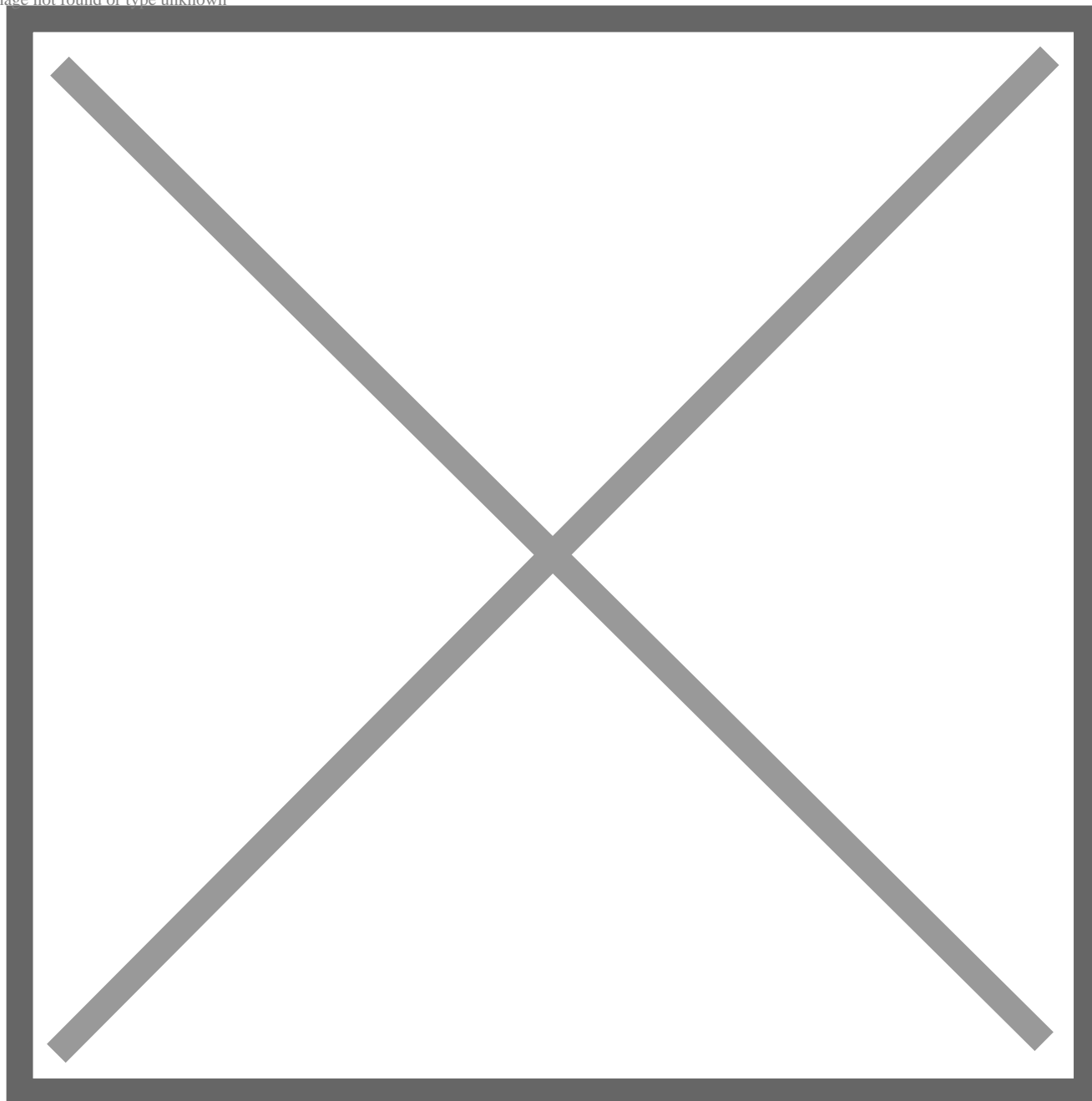


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Adventist Women and Mission in Kenya

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The mission carried by women in Kenya dates back to when the Adventist church was established in Kenya in 1906. Missionary women performed important ministerial work, which included educating the African women on contemporary aspects of living. They trained the African women on such important issues as home care, general hygiene, child care, home nursing, caregiving for the elderly, among others.

Foundation of Women's Ministries in Kenya

The first female missionaries to Kenya were Mrs. Anne Baker and Ms. Hellen Thompson. They left London on the same boat for Mombasa on June 8, 1907.¹ Traveling with them was Anne Baker's husband, Pastor J. D. Baker, who was to assist the pioneer missionary Arthur Carscallen at Gendia. They arrived in Mombasa in early July 1907, and were received by Carscallen, who had travelled to Mombasa to marry Ms. Thompson. Carscallen and Hellen Thomson were married in a ceremony officiated by Pastor Baker in Mombasa.² The couples then returned to Gendia, and shortly afterwards, the Bakers left for Wire Hill, where they began the second mission station after Gendia.³

At Gendia, the first students to join the mission were Hannah Marindi from Rusinga Island, Maritha Awiti; Sarah Ayaro; Awuor, the daughter of Akal from Karachuonyo; Rebeca Ogowe; and Pete, the daughter of Gori from Kowak in Tanganyika.⁴ Ms. Thompson, together with newly arrived Mrs. B.L. Morse, took charge of the girls' training, teaching vital lessons in hygiene, childcare, and methods of food preparation, among others. The women were also taught how to read and write, and given lessons on Christian doctrine.⁵ Mrs. Anne Baker relocated to Wire Hill, where she continued to work with the women.

After their baptism in 1911, the women were allowed to marry but only the Adventist men who had likewise been baptized. Their training aimed at establishing exemplary Christian homes where the next generation of Adventists would be nurtured. Okeyo (1989) states that the good example set up by the women in their homes caused the once skeptical parents to send their daughters to the mission for similar training. The women-focused work not only involved the students admitted at the Gendia School, but also those at the local churches established at this period.

Grace Clarke and the Women of Kenya

Women-focused ministry took a higher level when, in 1922, Grace Clarke founded a girl's training center at Kamagambo. This goes down in history as the first Adventist educational institution specifically for girls in the entire region. The school was designed for middle to late teen girls who were mature enough to learn without having attended elementary classes. Getting the girls to go to school was such a challenge that Ms. Clarke was forced offer them pieces of cloth to make clothes so that they could agree to attend the classes.⁶ From 1922 to 1933, Ms. Clarke devoted herself to the school and developed a comprehensive curriculum of training, which included sewing and dressmaking, nutrition and food preparation, hygiene and homecare, child welfare and caregiving, as well as gardening, among others. This was in addition to the regular academic program of the schools, which also included spiritual teaching and music.

By establishing the school, Ms. Clarke did tremendous groundbreaking work for the material and spiritual development of the women of Kenya.⁷ Her greatest motivation was to create women who would go into ministry in their own right. Although she was not married herself, Ms. Clarke helped prepare the women for the challenges of modern family living and uplift the ministry of the Adventist church through service at her home and in the church. Most of the girls were married to the men joining the service of the church, who needed wives who could offer tangible support to their ministry. These women carried out lessons in their respective churches working with the women in particular. Besides running the school at Kamagambo, Ms. Clarke also went around the villages teaching women aspects of hygiene and home-nursing, child welfare, and caregiving for elderly persons, among others.⁸

In December 1930, Ms. Clarke returned from furlough accompanied by Ms. C. Schuil, who joined her at the Kamagambo Girls School.⁹ Ms. Schuil helped Ms. Clarke in working with women, moving it to the next level. At the start of 1934, Ms. Clarke moved to Nyanchwa, where she helped establish yet another school for girls leaving Ms. Schuil at Kamagambo.¹⁰ The school at Nyanchwa helped develop the girls along the same lines as the school at Kamagambo.

Women in Church Administration in Kenya

In 1929 Ms. M. Wharrie, from England, was appointed secretary-treasurer of the East African Union.¹¹ This was at a time when not many women held such senior positions within the administrative structures of the church. This was a powerful position, as Wharrie ran the daily affairs of the union, which at that time was one of the fastest-growing administrative units of the global church.¹² In 1933 Ms. Clarke replaced her as the third secretary-treasurer (the first was F. H. Thomas).¹³ Ms. Wharrie proceeded to Nigeria, where she served as the secretary-treasurer of the Nigeria Union Mission.¹⁴

Under Clarke the Union headquarters moved from Gendia to Nakuru, operating there from 1933-1937.¹⁵ It was still under her when the headquarters moved to Nairobi (remaining there until 2013, when the East Africa Union was split to create the East Kenya Union Conference, which remained in Nairobi, and West Kenya Union Conference, which moved to Kisumu). Grace Clarke left the position in 1939, paving the way for C. Bannister to take over from her.¹⁶

Women's Ministries in Adventist History

Sarepta Myrenda Irish Henry (1839-1900) was the first Adventist woman to suggest the adoption of what she called a 'woman ministry.' She became an Adventist in 1896 after visiting the Battle Creek Sanitarium as a patient. Prior to that, she was connected with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, where she was appointed the superintendent of evangelical work and an evangelist. She married James W. Henry in 1861 but became a widow only a decade later. She then raised her three children as a single mother, and one day in 1874, while living in Rockford, Illinois, she was horrified when one of her children was enticed to enter a bar.¹⁷ She immediately organized the Christian women of Rockford to promote temperance. She now devoted her time to the call for the prohibition of alcohol and health and lifestyle reform.¹⁸ After becoming an Adventist, she developed a plan for 'woman ministry,' emphasizing the role of women in the moral development of their children.¹⁹ On March 30, 1898, she was granted a ministerial license by the General Conference.²⁰ Ellen G. White, who at that time was in Australia, wrote to endorse her appointment and ministry.

Writing in the *Review and Herald* in 1899, she said, "This work which the Lord has given us to do must go on. Each woman must carry on her part of it, regardless of any other, or lose the greatest opportunity and blessing that have been accorded to women in any generation."²¹ She carried on with her weekly column at the *Review and Herald* until her death in 1900. On January 6, 1900, the first Seventh-day Adventist deaconesses were ordained by William Clarence White (son of Ellen White).²²

The Dorcas Welfare Societies in Kenya

It was not until 1973 that the Adventist Church gave special attention to the role of women in the church. Prior to that, much of the mission work carried out by women was limited to the welfare work done under Dorcas Welfare Societies. This organization traces its origins to 1880 with the organization of the Battle Creek Church Maternal Association.²³ This organization changed its name to the Dorcas and Benevolent Association, with a focus on disaster aid and help for the needy.²⁴

The Winter Council of the Northern European Division in December 1936 adopted a resolution that the Dorcas Welfare Societies be adopted in all churches within the division.²⁵ That included Kenya.

Although Dorcas Societies rapidly took root in Southern African churches, it was not until the early 1960s that the societies were organized in Kenya. The pioneer leader and trainer of Dorcas Societies in Kenya was Eunice Wangai, wife of Pastor Fred K. Wangai. She studied the model in Nyasaland (now Malawi) and adopted the same to Kenya. She planned a rollout in the major churches in Kenya, starting with Central Kenya Field where her husband worked. She designed the iconic blue uniform and the training programs to be implemented in every church within the territory. She began with the churches in Nyeri and Central Kenya, moving all the way to Western Kenya.²⁶ In a few short years, practically every church in Kenya had its own Dorcas Society, although the leader was not allowed to sit in the church board.

Together with missionaries E. G. Olsen, wife of the Central Kenya Field secretary-treasurer, Jean Barnabas, and her sister Lois Gitau, Wangai organized a ten-day Dorcas institute with 42 women at Shiongo in Kakamega in July 1962.²⁷ During this time, Wangai's husband served as the director of the Chebwai Mission (then part of the Central Kenya Conference). This was only one of numerous training programs in the North Nyanza churches focused on women. During the training, attended by numerous facilitators, women learned about their role in the work of the church, in the welfare ministry with the needy, food, making wine and bread for holy communion, child welfare, caregiving for the sick at home, first aid, home nursing methods, social recreation, and home worship. They also learned how to conduct Bible studies and do visitations for those in need.²⁸

In subsequent years Dorcas Welfare Societies were organized in practically every church in East Africa. Women were given vital skills for ministry, and training helped them become better spouses and serve in various departments within the church, particularly as deaconesses.

History of West Kenya Union Conference Adventist Women's Ministries

The action taken during 1995 General Conference session was fully implemented in Kenya during the 2000 East

African Union Mission session, where Pastor Maureen Aseno (née Okundi) was elected as the first woman to lead the department.²⁹ In subsequent sessions at conference/field levels four out of eight entities in Kenya elected women to head the department in the same year. They were Pastor Roselyne Ayayo of the then Ranen Field,³⁰ Pastor Sibiah Miyienda of the South Kenya conference³¹, Pastor Dorcas Ongaga³² of the Nyamira Conference, and Margaret Juma³³ of the Central Nyanza Field. All except Margaret Juma were already trained pastors at the time of their election, though she was already heading the Publishing department so for her it was just an additional responsibility as a department head.

In 2003 Maureen Aseno was replaced by Jerusha Muga³⁴ as East Africa Union Mission Women's Ministries Director, because she was proceeding for her Master of Divinity at Andrews University. Dr. Jerusha Muga was the first and the only ordained woman elder in Kenya.³⁵

Also in 2003, the East Africa Union Mission took an action to upgrade its workforce so that both male and females in ministry held degrees rather than just from certificates or diplomas.³⁶ This action created an opportunity for more women to be trained to take their part in the advancement of the church's mission. Out of 244 enrolled in the upgrading and training, 18 were women. The entities, which had not organized the ministry for women, did so and elected women to lead the department. Thus, all the union entities complied with the action taken at the General Conference Session eight years later, when Lydia Jeptoo was elected to lead women in the Western Kenya Field (now Greater Rift Valley Conference), Monica Omeny at Kenya Lake Field, Agnes Ngala at Kenya Coast Field,³⁷ and Jane Ndung'u at Central Kenya Conference.

In 2010, the East Africa Union Mission was reorganized into Kenya Union Mission.³⁸ In 2013, the Kenya Union Mission was subdivided into East Kenya Union Conference³⁹ and West Kenya Union Conference.⁴⁰ Since then, the West Kenya Union Conference has grown from the initial four conferences to five, with two fields. Currently the women heading the Women's Department are all trained as pastors. These are Pastor Roselyne Ayayo of the West Kenya Union Conference, Pastor Rose Ademba of the Central Nyanza Conference, Pastor Emmah Nyabanga of the North West Kenya Conference, Pastor Abigael Gichaba of the Greater Rift Valley Conference, Pastor Pamellah Omenge of the Kenya Lake Conference, Pastor Hellen Owino of the Ranen Conference, and Pastor Grace Oyugi of Lake Victoria Field (LVF).⁴¹

West Kenya Union Conference Women and Mission

Women comprise about 53.2 percent of recorded membership in the West Kenya Union Conference. Women in WKUC have taken the counsel in the book *Evangelism* seriously, "When a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work, and it will feel the loss if the talents of both are not combined."⁴² Hence they adopted slogan illustrated below.

Women working together becomes a team that forges a synergy to accomplish mission. West Kenya Union Conference leadership seeks to encourage every woman to take her position in the line of mission according to who she is, where she is, and what she is gifted to do.

Total Women Involvement

Women in the West Kenya Union Conference have a sole purpose coined as Total Women Involvement in a comprehensive and supportive program of mission, training in ministry, evangelism, discipleship, and nurture, by employing their varied gifts and talents at home, workplace, church, and community, as well as in different status of life, whether young or old, married, single, or widowed, or married to non-believer as listed below.

Prayer and Love saves (PALS). One to one or through small group/seminar style Bible study/fellowships used interchangeably, including a church or public gathering, usually climaxed during the annual women day's of prayer on the first Sabbath of March.

I Married A Potential Adventist (IMAPA) is a discipleship program about living what you believe within family circles. It is an elaborate program involving women married or related to non-Adventists. It is implemented in two ways, first at the beginning or end of the annual week of emphasis scheduled the second week of June where non-believing husbands/ relatives/friends are invited to a specific venue for social & fun events that build friendship with them. Secondly, through a series of Pearl of Precious Price Bible study and family enriching seminars culminating in gala night outs and retreats. This work is coupled with forming teams of strong Adventist and non-Adventist couple or group fellowships to facilitate the adoption of discipleship as a lifestyle, thereby reaching across to non believers in family circles, including husbands, children, and relatives, or friends, neighbors, and workmates.

Professional Women Fora (PWF) is a place of meeting either at work or at home where women of diverse profession who profess Christ as their personal savior and soon-coming King meet to share and exchange/discuss ideas and views on a particular issue. Its goal is to help them harness their giftedness and talents for Total Women Involvement in Mission.

Women Health Festivals is a platform of discipleship through women's health advocacy and intervention. Women in medical and allied health professions conduct advocacy and intervention events to address issues affecting women's health, e.g. gender-based violence, abuse, adverse effects of sedentary lifestyle, and addictions. It is an annual activity done during annual End It Now/ Abuse prevention days, and as an event preceding women-led evangelistic

campaigns.

Spur Club. This is a discipleship program where older women mentor younger ones through different seasons of their lives. The PALS program is incorporated for its effective implementation.

My Sisters' Keeper is a ministry for reclaiming women who have stopped active participation and are missing in church.

Leadership certification program is a discipleship program in which women are equipped and empowered as leaders through the leadership certification program by the General Conference Women's Ministries Department. Besides mentoring women leaders, it also offers mentorship programs for mothers to teens, and woman to woman support, e.g. experienced older widows supporting younger widows in coping with the changing life situations.

Advocating Christ the Savior (ACTS). This is a crowning strategy where women of different backgrounds, e.g. widows/singles, young women, moms of teens, grandmothers, IMAPA, PWF, and others gather from their evangelistic endeavors souls which are ready for baptism during organized public evangelistic campaigns. It encompasses all evangelistic activities by women.

West Kenya Union Conference women are ever ready to perform what they were created to do, heeding God's call in Psalm 68:11 that the Lord announced the word and many women, "a great host," proclaimed that word to the people of Israel. Just as God called Deborah and she answered the call and preserved the story of the great deliverance in a song. God gave Huldah a message to teach, and she taught that message to the men of Josiah who came to her to know the word of God.

Conclusion

The number of women responding passionately to the call to serve continues to rise. Currently the West Kenyan Union Conference has one woman treasurer, Rebecca Ruto of the Greater Rift Valley Conference; seven women heading the women's department; one female publishing director at the Central Nyanza Conference, Pastor Rose Ademba; one administrative assistant; four assistant publishing directors, two school chaplains, four district pastors, two global pioneers, and one employed by the Laos movement stationed at Kendu Bay, Kenya.

Altogether there are 23 women directly involved as clergy and heads of departments. There are also several still undertaking their studies in theology waiting to join ministry. There are many women doing mission at local churches and the district or station level of church leadership in different departments. Women have a story to tell in their God-given unique way like Miriam, Deborah, and so many others. The resolve of West Kenya Union Conference women is to preach, involving each in total women involvement.

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