

Napagi, Levi (1956–2002)

JACOB FRUNGUS

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Levi Napagi was a literature evangelist and lay preacher who contributed to the Adventist mission in Uganda.

Levi Napagi was born on December 18, 1956, in Bugusege, Sironko district, Buwalasi Sub-County in Uganda. He was born to Wanzira Elian and Nubuyobo Christine.¹ After completing secondary school, he joined Moyo Technical Institute in a district bordering South Sudan. After completing his training, during the reign of Idi Amin, Napagi ran to Juba where he looked for a job in 1978. He already possessed a limited knowledge of Adventism and was excited about spreading the little truth he knew with others even before he was baptized. He appears to have been among the first converts of a literature evangelist, Mrs. David Ogillo.²

In September 1979, a Tanzanian pastor, David Ogillo, arrived in Juba as a missionary. Mrs. Ogillo met Napagi at the market and invited him to the Adventist compound. This happy encounter was the one which led Napagi to be baptized later. During his first job interview in a boat-building company, he was not afraid to tell them his conviction concerning the Sabbath. The manager of boat building company told him that no one would employ him with this strange belief about Sabbath. Strangely however, the manager employed him because of his sincerity. His coworkers believed that he was following a Jewish religion. After his baptism, he quit his job with the boat building company and became an enthusiastic literature evangelist, traveling widely to unentered areas. For quite a long time, he sold books and studied the Bible intensively.

One time Napagi was riding home to Juba from Western Equatoria in a truck which got stuck in the mud just outside a Catholic Church. Making the most of this opportunity, he canvassed the priest and sold him a copy of *The Desire of Ages* and of *Radiant Health*. The next day he was arrested and jailed in Maridi for selling Christian books. The chief of police examined all of his books and exclaimed, "These are good books! We cannot stop God's message, Mr. Napagi. Go ahead and sell your books. Report it to me if anyone tries to disturb you."³ To safeguard him, the officer wrote an official letter so that Napagi could sell the books in other provinces as well. Besides literature evangelism, Napagi became the foreman for the construction of churches. He did this work with awesome dedication.

In early 1984, Napagi visited his homeland of Uganda to look for a life partner. He married Sarah Nawita Ambrose on May 25, 1984, in the Buwalasi Seventh-day Adventist church and they had five children, Ruth, Esther, Naomi, Enoch, and Rehab. After the wedding, Napagi returned to Juba with his wife. When the civil war resumed and SPLA/M threatened to shoot down passenger planes in and out of Juba, Napagi moved his family

to Khartoum in the early 1990's. He had been canvassing in Khartoum and other towns in the north before he finally moved his family there. In the north he continued to labor for the Lord. Throughout his ministry, Napagi was known as a tireless, devoted layman. In his curiosity to know and expand the gospel, Napagi started receiving and reading magazines from independent ministries. These publications influenced his interpretation of some prophecies and compelled him to start preaching and giving seminars. He also preached the Advent message in a number of Sunday-keeping churches.⁴

Although Napagi struggled with serious health problems, he continued to do hard manual construction work and preached at every opportunity. In the final days of his life, he complained of severe heart pain. On May 30, 2002, Napagi died unexpectedly, leaving his wife, children, and the church devastated. Despite this tragedy, the family's missionary spirit did not dim. His wife, Sarah Nawita, enrolled in the pastoral ministry program at Middle East University and graduated with a BA in pastoral ministry on March 20, 2010. She served as women and children's ministry director in Sudan Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Napagi's contemporaries repeatedly described him as a quiet, hardworking, and self-sacrificing man who never took credit for his accomplishment, but was content with seeing the work done. The extent of his work became more evident after his death through the buildings in the Munuki Seventh-day Adventist compound.

Source

Whitehouse, Jerald. "Pioneering in Juba." *Missions Quarterly*, June 6, 1985.

NOTES

1. Sarah Napagi, interview by author, Frungus, Kampala, August 23, 2019.
2. Jerald Whitehouse to Natana Bathuel, July 14, 2019, private letter, personal collection of Natana Bathuel.
3. Jerald Whitehouse, "Pioneering in Juba," *Missions Quarterly*, June 6, 1985, 23.
4. Jacob Frungus, personal knowledge from working in the Sudan Field from 1996-2011.

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