

Ezechiel, Munyenkiko (1912–2006)

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Ezéchiel Munyenkiko.

Photo courtesy of Erick Uwayo.

Munyenkiko Ezechiel served the Adventist Church in Burundi for fifty-six years in various capacities, including as president of the East and West Burundi fields.

Early Years

Munyenkiko Ezechiel was born at Gitwe, Rwanda, in 1912¹ to Ndahiriwe and Inamuja.² Not much is known about his siblings and extended family.

Gitwe was an important mission station from where the Adventist message spread to other parts of the region. For instance, Buganda Station in Burundi received the message from Gitwe. When D. E. Delhove settled in Buganda for the first time, he came from Gitwe, Rwanda. Gitwe was later upgraded to field status and played an important role in the history of the Adventist Church in Rwanda and Burundi. According to Ndikumana Samuel, Delhove "came together with some Rwandese converts who carried his luggage and could assist him in teaching

and preaching.”³ As Kirundi and Kinyarwanda languages are closer to each other, Delhove and his team quickly familiarized themselves with the local population. In fact, Delhove himself could speak eleven languages, including Kinyarwanda.⁴

Conversion

Munyenkiko Ezechiel’s name appeared among the very first four candidates baptized in the Kaburantwa River at Buganda in March 1927.⁵ Besides Munyenkiko Ezechiel, Gaza Simeon, Deborah (a Rwandan woman whose husband had already been baptized), and Matsuri Job (the first Burundian to be baptized)⁶ were also baptized. Munyenkiko was among the Rwandan converts who came with the missionaries from Gitwe. As he spoke Kirundi-Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, French, and English fluently, he was very useful as a translator for these early missionaries.

Marriage

Munyenkiko Ezechiel married a Burundian lady, Kayebe Rahab, in a marriage ceremony conducted by Elder Robinson on August 20, 1931. Kayebe Rahab was born to Bitarukira, a local chief, and Icizanye Nayemi on July 21, 1917. She accepted the Adventist message and was baptized on January 30, 1930. She had five years of education and could speak Kirundi and Kiswahili. As the son-in-law of a chief, Munyenkiko Ezechiel was able to be a spokesperson for the missionaries in matters of acquiring land for free and entering new territories.⁷ Munyenkiko Ezechiel and Kayebe Rahab were blessed with nine sons and daughters.

Education

Adventism made its way to Burundi from Rwanda. At the time Adventism made its way from Rwanda to Burundi, these two nations Rwanda and Burundi were jointly administered as Ruanda-Urundi. Missionaries came to Buganda as people moving to another section of the same country.⁸ Rwandese who came with them could assist in teaching and preaching because they were already experienced in those matters. Obviously, they were already impacted by years of Adventism in Rwanda. Ezechiel Munyenkiko received his rudimentary education at Gitwe, Rwanda. Thus, very early in 1926, only one year after Adventism entered Buganda, Ezechiel Munyenkiko was appointed school teacher at Buganda.

Ezechiel Munyenkiko later furthered his training for denominational work two times. From 1938 to 1940, he attended the seminary at Gitwe, Rwanda. He also went to Solusi, Zimbabwe, for leadership training in 1964.

Mission Work

Service records for Ezechiel Munyenkiko's indicate that he worked for the church in different places and in various positions. From the time he entered the organized work in 1926 until September 1, 1982, when his retirement became effective,⁹ he appears to have served the church for 56 years.

Munyenkiko was still single when he accepted the call to enter denominational work as a primary school teacher at Buganda in 1926-1927. The following year, he was moved to Gasenyi for the same task, teaching from 1928 to 1930. After that period, Ezechiel Munyenkiko was sent to Butahana, where he lived for seven consecutive years (1931-1937). Butahana became a place of blessing to him as he was married there in 1931. His first two children, Harerimana Onesim and Uwimpuhwe Ruth were both born there. It was also at Butahana that Ezechiel Munyenkiko was promoted to district leader.¹⁰

Following seminary studies at Gitwe, Munyenkiko returned to Burundi in 1940 when he was appointed to Ndora, where another daughter, Mukera Esther, would be born. From 1941 to 1942, he was district leader for Buganda. While he at Buganda, he was ordained to the ministry in 1941.¹¹

In 1943, Munyenkiko was sent to Bukinanyana for more than ten years (1943-1955) where he served as a travelling pastor. He supervised the work in the districts of Buganda, Ndora, and Muyinga, visiting local churches to monitor their progress. He conducted seminars on stewardship and surveyed the education system. He would also carry books to sell wherever he went. While traveling, he administered Holy Communion to believers.¹²

Munyenkiko's family increased while they were settled at Bukinanyana. Four more children were born, two sons and two daughters: Nsengiyumva Jacques, Hakiziyaremye Samuel, Mukeshimana Marie Louise, and Ntakiyinanira Jean.¹³

In 1955, Munyenkiko relocated to Ndora, where he continued to work as a travelling pastor. His last two female children were born there: Munyenkiko Madeleine and Munyenkiko Marcelline.¹⁴ Ezechiel Munyenkiko was promoted to assistant director of the mission station in 1959 and to station director in 1960 while at Ndora. From 1961 to 1963, he served as vice president of the West Burundi Field, then as president of the same field from 1965 to 1967. In 1968, he accepted a call to serve as president of the East Burundi Field. In 1971, he returned to the West Burundi Field where he again served as president until he retired in 1980.

Contribution and Final Years

Ezechiel Munyenkiko contributed much to the church in Burundi. Beginning as an educational worker, providing rudimentary knowledge, he taught people how to read, write, and figure. Later, he became an evangelist and district leader. Using his good relationship with local rulers, he helped the church to obtain land for free. The sub-chiefdoms of Buhoro, Mabayi, and Butahana were reached through his work. He served as a public relations officer and a deputy legal representative for the Adventist Church, sometimes in a context where the white missionaries at the mission or union level had limited reach.¹⁵

Until his death in 2006 and 94 years of age, Munyenkiko Ezechiel lived in Bujumbura. He was buried in the cemetery at Mpanda, almost 15 kilometers from Bujumbura, near the Cibitoke Province.

SOURCES

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Sang, Godfrey K. "A Church Captured: The Battle for the Control of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Burundi." *Spectrum* 48/1, year 2020, 65-99.

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NOTES

1. Uzziel Habingabwa, retired pastor and former president of Burundi Attached Field (1995-2005), interview by author, Bujumbura, Burundi, December 23, 2021.
2. Before the entry of Christianity, Burundians and Rwandese bore only one name. The adoption of second names was a practice introduced by Christianity. The surname was associated with darkness and ancestral practices, while the new first name was appropriate for a baptized member. The first name was also called "Izina ry'ibatisimu," which means "baptism's name."
3. Samuel Ndikumana, "The Fruit of a Work String: Beginnings of Seventh-day Adventism in Burundi" (Research paper, Friedensau Adventist University, 2010), 9.
4. Samuel Ndikumana, *The Fruit of a Work String: Beginnings of Seventh-day Adventism in Burundi* (Research Paper, Friedensau Adventist University, 2010), 11.
5. Lydie M. Delhove, Lydie M. Delhove, *A Daughter Remembers: D. E. Delhove, Pioneer Missionary in Central Africa, Excerpts from His Life and Work* (Denver, U.S.A.: Master Printers, 1984), 35.
6. Samuel Ndikumana, *The Fruit of a Work String: Beginnings of Seventh-day Adventism in Burundi* (Research paper, Friedensau Adventist University, 2010), 11.

7. Uzziel Habingabwa, retired pastor and former president of Burundi Attached Field (1995-2005), interview by author, Bujumbura, Burundi, December 23, 2021.
8. Godfrey K. Sang, "A Church Captured: The Battle for the control of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Burundi," *Spectrum* 48/1, year 2020, 65-67. https://spectrummagazine.org/system/files/journal/spectrum48.1_13archive.pdf.
9. Burundi Union Mission Archives, Service Record Sheets, Kiriri, Bujumbura, Burundi.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Uzziel Habingabwa, retired pastor and former president of Burundi Attached Field (1995-2005), interview by author, Bujumbura, Burundi, December 23, 2021.

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