

Eyira Adventist Vocational Academy (EAVA)

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The Establishment of Eyira Adventist Vocational Academy (EAVA)

The Eyira Adventist Vocational Academy (EAVA) was officially established in 1996, becoming the first Seventh-day Adventist Church operated secondary school in the then “liberated area” of South Sudan.¹ The start of the school is miraculous at best, and it was the boldest decision the church leaders at the Middle East Union took at the time to advance the mission of Jesus Christ. The civil war in South Sudan started in 1983. By 1996 the Equatoria region of South Sudan was undergoing intense civil war. The only access to South Sudan was through United Nations’ Operation Lifeline Sudan airplanes.² It was amidst this civil war that the Middle East Union leaders made the decision to send Pastor Nathana Bathuel Beriye into the Western Equatoria region of South Sudan.

After his arrival, Pastor Beriye found the greatest concern of the local church leadership was how to educate the growing number of adolescents filling the churches. He took the initiative to take 18 young people who had joined the church to Uganda for further education, as it was difficult at the time to establish a secondary school in war-torn Southern Sudan. It was the near-death stories told by these 18 youth who had walked for ten days, arriving in Uganda with swollen feet in December 1994, that got the church leaders thinking. It was at the gathering of church leaders in Koboko, Uganda, in 1994, that the idea was born to establish a vocational secondary school in the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) controlled area of Maridi, Western Equatoria. ADRA was charged with the responsibility of looking for funds and Pastor Nathana was charged with the responsibility of finding land for the establishment of the school.³

After his return in 1995, Pastor Beriye acquired the land where the school is established. In the same year he also went to school. ADRA got funding from Sweden that year through the support of the Middle East Union. In March 1995 Pastor Clement Joseph Arkangelo was sent as the district pastor for the Western Equatoria region. As soon as the funding became available, the church engaged an American missionary, retired teacher Monroe Morford, who was previously the mathematics teacher of Pastor Clement Joseph Arkangelo at the Nile Union Academy in Egypt. With the presence of Mr. Monroe as the first principle, EAVA opened its doors for the first 11

students, four girls and seven boys, on February 26, 1996.⁴

The Growth of EAVA

It has now been 23 years since the establishment of Eyira Adventist Vocational Academy 1996. EAVA has had a positive impact on the lives of both South Sudanese and Sudanese. The school attracted students from all over Sudan. Students came from as far away as the Nubba Mountains of Sudan. At its peak, the school had more than 500 students.⁵ Through EAVA, many young people came to the true knowledge of God, thus accepting Jesus as their personal Savior. As a result of the positive church influence, many former students of EAVA continue to be committed church members. Today, numerous former EAVA student are successful people with a positive influence in their respective communities, in government, and in all sectors of life. Consequently, both local and national authorities have recognized the positive contribution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church through EAVA.⁶

Accreditation of the School

EAVA remains the only school in South Sudan that is accredited by the Adventist Accreditation Association.⁷ Education directors from the General Conference and the Trans-European Division visited EAVA in 2000 to ascertain its readiness for accreditation.⁸ Consequently, in 2002 the school became a fully accredited Seventh-day Adventist institution.⁹

Contribution of EAVE to Church Growth

The school was established in the heartland of the Avokaya tribe who was largely an unentered tribal group as far as the Adventist message was concerned. The establishment of the school drew the attention of this tribe, and many students came to the school from this tribal group. These became a captured audience at the school. Like most Adventist schools, worship was part of the activities at the school and many of the students attended Bible studies and were baptized. Among these were several Avokaya boys and girls who went back home and started sharing their newfound faith.¹⁰

The Major Contributors to the Establishment of EAVA

The idea of establishing Eyira Adventist Vocational Academy was envisioned when Svein B. Johansen was the Middle East Union President from 1988 to 1995. However, it was during the time of Sven H. Jensen as the Middle East Union President (1995-2001) that the school was established¹¹ with funding from ADRA Sweden. At this time Rigmor Nyberg was the country director of ADRA Sweden.¹² Her contribution to the establishment of EAVA was pivotal, without which the school could not have existed.

Another person whose work was key to the establishment of EAVA was Jerry Lewis, who was the first ADRA South Sudan country director when it was established in 1993.¹³ He worked in close collaboration with the Church (South Sudan Section), led by Pastor Faustino Kapilitan, a Filipino missionary, and later by Timothy Scott (an American missionary) to recruit teachers and missionaries to work at the school. The other people who gave their time to building the school were Sisto Ridi Silvio, dean of students; Emmanuel Walla, science and mathematics teacher; Guyson Androga Adikobaa, business and finance manager; Doreen Okech Arkangelo, home economics teacher and dean of girls; Anthony Mario, farm manager/driver; Aloysius Amadra Sarafino, mathematics and physical science teacher; and Morris Haroun. These were the early teachers who joined the school in 1996 or soon thereafter.¹⁴ There were other teachers who subsequently joined when the school was undergoing challenges.

Among the local church leaders who really worked hard for the growth of EAVA were Pastor Nathana Bathuel and Pastor Fulgencio I'da Okayo. Pastor Faustino Kapilitan and his wife, Naira Kapilitan, and Elder Timothy Scott also played a major role. These were those who were helping the South Sudan Section before 1998 when South Sudan became a field. Admittedly, the person who really contributed immensely to the growth of EAVA was Pastor Beat Odermatt, a Canadian missionary to South Sudan.¹⁵ He and his wife, Ursula Odermatt, worked hard and supported EAVA so it flourished between 1999 and 2005. Several support staff also joined the school. Key among them were Alfred Rubo, Lilian Sebit Apollo, and Lavrick Ndrago Njele, who served as the driver for the school and sometimes helped as the public relation officer, and Apollo Sebit.¹⁶

The beginning of the school was challenging, as it was not easy to feed the first 12 students. Mr. Morford used some of his personal money to buy food, and he moved from village to village in search of food for the students. There is no Seventh-day Adventist secondary school that has such a great impact in the mission of God in South Sudan as EAVA. The school was used on several occasions for training pastors and other church workers.¹⁷ The work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church flourished during the 22 years of civil war (1983-2005) partly due to the institution of EAVA in 1996.

The Leadership of EAVA

Over the years, various individuals led EAVA as principal of the school:

Monroe Morford (1996-1997) an American missionary, was the first principal of the school. He operated as principal and as ADRA Project Manager. This required reporting to the church for the management of the school, and accounting to ADRA for the implementation of the project. He was instrumental in the establishment of EAVA. Some of his workers were his former students at Nile Union Academy in Egypt.¹⁸ On other occasions, he requested assistance from NGOs like Oxfam, who gave the school some food. In addition to food shortage, the dilemma of which syllabus to follow was another challenge. In a war-torn part of Sudan, there was no access to an official Sudanese curriculum. Attempts were made to use a syllabus from either Kenyan or

Uganda.¹⁹

Ralph Staley (1997-1998), an American missionary, replaced Monroe Morford as the ADRA project manager/school principal in late 1998. By September 1999 the school was in crisis, as Ralph Staley was neither an educationist nor had he ever been a project manager. This being his first experience, it did not go well. However, under the leadership of Sven H. Jensen, the situation was addressed before the school collapsed beyond repair. It was at this time that the principal of the school and the project manager became two separate positions.

Pastor Clement Joseph Arkangelo Mawa (1998-2002), was the first national principal. He came to the school with a BA in theology and education, as well as vast experience working as a district pastor where he oversaw the start-up of primary schools in the district. At this time, John Ochan Silvio was at the school. The two were colleagues at Nile Union Academy even though Pastor Mawa was a class ahead of Mr. Silvio. With the two men working together and engaging all the teachers and support staff at the school, the atmosphere in the institution changed and there was a clear direction for the school. Student attendance surged to 501 and hope was instilled in the students of sitting for examinations for credible certificates. Cambridge certification was identified and an arrangement was made with Lincoln International School in Kampala for the students to sit for the examinations there. Effectively, this made Eyira the only school in the southern part of the Sudan (or the so-called liberated area of Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army/Movement) offering a credible certification at the secondary level. This newfound energy made the school the center of mission and winning souls for Christ.²⁰

John Ochan Silvio 2003-2005. After Pastor Clement was reassigned, John Ochan Silvio became the principal and the school continued to do well.²¹

Suleiman Samson (2005-2006). Samson's leadership was short lived as the school started facing problems arising from a stiff competition from other emerging secondary schools.²²

Aloysius Amadra Sarafino (2006-2008). The long-serving teacher at the school took over as principal. He led for two years and decided to go for further education.

Charles Lasu Denis (2008-2012). During this time there was a resurgence at the school and several students sat for the South Sudan Secondary School Leaving Certificate. It was at this time that it became relevant for the students to take the national exam.²³

Levi Kalome (2014-2017). One of the first 67 students to attend EAVA became the principal.

Christopher Gumbe (2018-present). The school continues to experience insecurity within the area and in the school. Students come in and out of the school due to insecurity and now the coronavirus has exacerbated the situation. All schools are closed until further notice. Now that the country is peaceful, it is envisaged that the school will continue to contribute to the progress of the gospel of Christ in South Sudan.²⁴

Missionaries to EAVA After the Independence of South Sudan (2011-2020)

The school went quiet for a time, but between 2015 and 2019, Lowell Jenks and his wife Neria Jenks joined EAVA as missionaries. They worked hard in building the vocational section of the school and by the time they left, the school offered an amazing vocational education.²⁵

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