

Greater Rift Valley Conference

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The Greater Rift Valley Conference is one of two conferences created when the Western Kenya Conference was divided in 2015.

The Greater Rift Valley Conference of the West Kenya Union Conference in the East-Central Africa Division comprises the counties of Baringo, Keiyo/Marakwet, Nandi, and Uasin-Gishu, including parts of Bungoma, Kakamega, Kericho, and Trans-Nzoia Counties. The conference has 541 churches comprising 65,216 members among a population of 6,932,499.¹

Introduction

The Adventist faith came to Western Kenya in 1912 when a South African farmer named David Sparrow and his wife Sallie settled at Eldoret and began sharing his faith with the local Nandi people. He brought to the faith Caleb Kipkessio Busienei and by 1928 had established a congregation of about two dozen Nandi faithful on his Ndege farm near Eldoret. Another early native Adventist is Ezekiel Kimenja Maswai, who was introduced to the faith when he went to Gendia, Nyanza, where the Adventist faith had earlier taken root. When he joined them in 1928, they moved to open the first Adventist church in the Nandi reserve Kaigat, which was organized in 1931.²

The North West Kenya Mission Field

The Greater Rift Valley Conference has its roots in the North West Kenya Mission field founded on January 25, 1933, by Spencer G. Maxwell, then president of the East African Union Mission.³ The North West Kenya Mission was to be in charge of the Adventist work in Western and Northern Kenya. Maxwell was also the first superintendent of the North West Kenya Mission while serving as the president of East African Union Mission. Ezekiel Kimenja was the first missionary licentiate.⁴

Kenya at this time was under the Northern European Division. By 1933, Kenya had four mission fields: the South Kenya Mission under G. A. Lewis, incorporating the Kisii, Kericho, and Maasai territories; Central Kenya Mission under W. W. Armstrong, incorporating the Kikuyu and Ukamba areas and up to the Northern Frontier District; North West Kenya Mission under Maxwell, incorporating Nakuru, Eldoret, North Nyanza, Kitale, and through to

West Pokot and Turkana; and the Southwest Kenya Mission based at Gendia, incorporating the Luo Nyanza. This was under A. F. Bull.⁵

Maxwell handed over to Pastor Matthew C. Murdoch, who arrived in Kenya in 1936. Murdoch became director of the Northwest Kenya Mission, whose headquarters was moved from Nakuru to Chebwai in North Nyanza (now Kakamega County). Pastor Murdoch left Kenya in 1943 and was replaced by Pastor D. M. Swaine. Swaine, in turn, paved the way for Pastor K. J. Berry, who was succeeded by Pastor L. D. Browne.⁶

The Central Kenya Field

In 1953, the North-West Kenya Mission Field was dissolved and incorporated into the Central Kenya Mission Field.⁷ This now became the largest field at that time, covering Central Kenya, Western Kenya, Northern Kenya, and the Island nations of Pemba and Zanzibar. The president of the Central Kenya Mission Field was Robert J. Wieland, and the secretary was M. Gwen Clarke.⁸ In 1960, the East African Union (EAU) was reorganized to include the nations of Kenya and Uganda. The EAU comprised Central Kenya, Kenya Lake, South Kenya, Uganda, and the Highlands Fields.⁹ The Highlands Field was a part of the EAU incorporated to take care of the work among the Europeans. It covered much of the territory of Central Kenya, to which it was amalgamated at independence.

Western Kenya Field

The Western Kenya Field (WKF) was incorporated in 1981 from the Central Kenya Field. The territory of the new field at organization comprised 60 churches, drawn mainly from Western Kenya, with a total of 8,890 members.¹⁰ It comprised the administrative districts of Kericho, Nandi, Kakamega, Bungoma, Busia, Uasin Gishu, Trans-Nzoia, West Pokot, and Turkana. The first executive director was Pastor Aggrey Juma Kutondo, and the first secretary-treasurer was Pastor Peter K. Obegi. The inaugural Executive Committee members were A. J. Kutondo, J. Bore, Peter Butuk, S. Chesimet, Johana Keror, P. Kesis, Peter K. Obegi, J. Opembe, and P. Siundu.¹¹ At this time, the executive director of the East African Union was Elder D. K. Bazarra from Uganda (the EAU still included both Kenya and Uganda). Pastor Fred K. Wangai was the administrative secretary. The executive director at the Central Kenya Conference who incorporated the WKF was Pastor Elijah Njagi. The new offices of the WKF were moved from Chebwai to Eldoret.

Running the Western Kenya Field

When they moved the WKF headquarters to Eldoret, Pastors Kutondo and Obegi had to put up the new field offices at a residential house. They did not have any physical office at the moment of incorporation; resources were low, and the obligations were many. Kutondo appointed Pastor Siundu as the director of the Education, Youth, and Communication departments. He gave Peter K. Obegi the position of Health and Temperance

director in addition to his duties as the secretary-treasurer. Kutondo himself took the position of Ministerial director and gave Publishing and Sabbath School to Pastor Peter Kesis. Kesis was assisted by S. K. Seroney, J. Kamau, and A. Muia. Kutondo also made Pastor John Keror the Stewardship and Lay Activities director.¹²

Kutondo had to work hard in a large area that covered many unreached areas in the western and northwestern parts of Kenya. There were many young churches, and the financial base of the field was quite weak. The giving of the members was low.

Kutondo ran the WKF with only 15 ordained ministers who served the 60 churches and about three times that number of Sabbath Schools. These were W. O. Alube, I. Aming'a, Patrick Kania, S. Biegon, P. K. Butuk, S. Chesimet, Johana Keror, B. Ngoni, J. Opembe, Nathan Oyiengo, Joseph Rono, S. K. Songol, John Thoya, S. A. Were, and Kutondo himself. At this time, the church was extended toward the Kapenguria area, and Pastor Nathan Oyiengo was in charge of the work in that area.¹³

Evangelism Campaigns under the Western Kenya Field

The first and probably the largest evangelistic campaign in the Western Kenya Field was the 1,000 Days of Reaping, which commenced on September 18, 1982. This effort consisted of an intense program of evangelism crusades held in many places, particularly in unreached areas. Pastors went into unreached areas led by the laity and preached the gospel message, leading thousands into the church. The highly successful campaign also benefited greatly from the presence of the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton (UEAB), whose students and faculty launched an outreach program, in which they went to various destinations in the Western Kenya Field to bolster the evangelistic efforts.

The 1,000 Days of Reaping ended on June 15, 1985, by which time well over 100,000 new members had joined the church through the entire East African Union, making it one of the fastest-growing administrative units of the church in the world. Kutondo hosted various visitors, including Pastor H. Cartwright, the ministerial director for the Eastern Africa Division. By 1985, the Western Kenya Field membership had grown to 13,081 members in 69 churches.¹⁴

In addition, the youth in the Western Kenya Field held a series of highly successful annual evangelistic campaigns in unentered areas. The campaigns were known as *Mashambulio*.¹⁵ Starting in 1968, they held annual campaigns lasting three weeks in the Central and North Rift. In December 1982, the teams from Uasin Gishu and Trans-Nzoia Counties held a crusade at Chepterwai on the edge of Nandi.¹⁶ In 1983 they moved to Barsombe in Uasin Gishu and to Moi's Bridge in 1984. In 1985, they held their crusade at Kiplombe in Uasin Gishu. In 1986 they moved to Kamoi in Elgeyo Marakwet district, and then in 1987 they went to Tugen Estate in Uasin Gishu. They went to Chebiemit in Elgeyo Marakwet in 1988, and in 1989 they left their traditional areas and went to Likuyani in Kakamega County. In 1991 they returned to Nyawa in Elgeyo Marakwet. They skipped the program in 1992 but returned in 1993, holding three crusades in Elgeyo Marakwet at Jepkogin, Chelingwa,

and Kipsoen, each lasting three weeks. In 1994 they remained at Elgeyo Marakwet, where they held three more crusades at Kibigos, Kogwongoi, and Yemit. For the third year in a row they remained at Elgeyo Marakwet holding *Mashambulio* at Kapsomai and Chogoo. Everywhere they went, they planted churches that are now thriving congregations.

Following changes at the Western Kenya Field leadership and because costs associated with hiring vehicles, food, advertising, and publicity were mounting, the youth movement slowed down their crusades, particularly those to distant lands. The last *Mashambulio* was held in 1995. The evangelism work now changed to emphasize personal evangelism.¹⁷ The *Mashambulio* program brought thousands to the faith, and many churches were planted as a result. The veterans of the *Mashambulio* program included Joseph Nabei and John Birgen.

Transitions at the Western Kenya Field

Pastor Kutondo served as the executive director of the Western Kenya Field until 1985, when he was replaced by Pastor Joseph Rono. Peter Obegi was replaced by James M. Momanyi. Pastor Rono ran the WKF until 1990, when he was replaced by Pastor Jonas Maina. E. K. Mursi took the position of secretary-treasurer. Under Rono, the membership grew to 23,256 in 112 churches.¹⁸ Maina continued leading the organization until 1996, when he was replaced by Pastor Joshua Kirui, who led for a short tenure that ended in 1998. The associate director at this time was Pastor Nathan Oyiengo. At the time of Maina's departure, the church membership had grown to 40,538 spread over 290 churches.¹⁹ The medical institutions within the WKF included Chebwai Dispensary, Chepareria SDA Health Centre, Kabokyek SDA Dispensary, Kaigat Dispensary, Kebeneti Dispensary, Segero Dispensary, and Sironoi SDA Dispensary.

By 1998, when Pastor Job Rotich took over as executive director, the membership had shot to 48,719 in 331 churches. The associate director remained Pastor Nathan Oyiengo, and the secretary-treasurer, Jared Maiyo. Pastor Job Rotich ran the WKF in a period of phenomenal growth. By the end of his seven-year tenure in 2005, the WKF had 609 churches with 65,219 members. In December 2005, Pastor Christopher Misoi took over. At this time the secretary was Pastor Alex Malayi, and the treasurer was Peter Onchari Kereri.

Western Kenya Conference

In the year 2010, during a special session, the Western Kenya Field was elevated to the Western Kenya Conference (WKC). By this time, there were 713 churches with a membership of 84,683.²⁰ Pastor Boaz Ouma replaced Peter Kereri as treasurer while Pastor Malayi remained the secretary.²¹ Four years later, the Western Kenya Conference underwent its first mutation when the Central Rift Valley Conference (CRVC) was established. The CRVC incorporated the work in the administrative district of Bomet, Kericho, Nakuru, Nyandarua, and Samburu Counties as well as portions of Baringo, Laikipia, and Narok.²² Portions of the Central Kenya Conference and the South Kenya Conferences were sectioned to create the CRVC. Even with the split to create

the CRVC, the WKC still had about 680 churches with some 85,429 members.²³

In 2013, the East African Union (EAU) was subdivided to create the East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC) based in Nairobi and the West Kenya Union Conference (WKUC) based in Kisumu. Pastor Japheth Ochorokodi became the first executive secretary of the WKUC in November 2013, and Pastor Benjamin Tanui was appointed to be the executive secretary for the WKC in December 2013. Western Kenya Conference now was under the WKUC some 90 miles south of Eldoret.

Greater Rift Valley Conference and North-West Kenya Conference

On August 2–3, 2015, there was a special session for the WKC, which was to set a major direction of the church in Western Kenya. The giant WKC sitting on 11 counties of Kenya was subdivided to pave the way for two new conferences: Greater Rift Valley Conference (GRVC) with 4 counties: Baringo, Elgeyo/Marakwet, Nandi, and Uasin Gishu; and North-West Kenya Conference (NWKC) with 7 counties: Bungoma, Busia, Kakamega, Trans-Nzoia, Turkana, Vihiga, and West Pokot.

Greater Rift Valley Conference

Pastor Misoi became the president of the new Greater Rift Valley Conference. Pastor Benjamin Tanui was named executive secretary, while Mrs. Rebecca Rutto became the treasurer—the first woman to hold that position.²⁴ The number of churches in the GRVC was 375, and the membership was 56,675. The North-West Kenya Conference, headquartered in Webuye, started with 404 churches and 35,970 members.²⁵

The Greater Rift Valley Conference now maintains the Kaigat Dispensary, the Segero Dispensary, and the Sironoi Dispensary. Among the schools, the Segero Group of Schools, with its multicampus facilities, remains the largest Adventist secondary school in Kenya.

Leadership

Executive directors of Western Kenya Field: Aggrey J. Kutondo (1981–1985); Joseph Rono (1985–1990); Jonas Maina (1990–1995); Joshua Kirui (1996–1998); Job Rotich (1998–2005); Christopher Misoi (2005–2010)

Executive director of Western Kenya Conference: Christopher Misoi (2010–2015)

Executive director of Greater Rift Valley Conference: Christopher Misoi (2015–)

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NOTES

1. Statistics as of June 30, 2018. "Greater Rift Valley Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, accessed November 18, 2019, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13623>.
2. Godfrey K. Sang and Hosea K. Kili, *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya* (Nairobi, Kenya: Gapman, 2017).
3. Minutes of the East Africa Union Committee held at Kamagambo January 25, 1933 (Session no. 139).
4. "North West Kenya Mission," *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1934), 148.
5. Ibid.
6. Sang and Kili, *Wings of a Sparrow*.
7. "Central Kenya Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1953).
8. "Central Kenya Mission Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1954), 183.
9. "East African Union," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1961), 175.
10. "Western Kenya Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1982), 82.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.; Aggrey Kutondo, interview by author, July 8, 2015.
13. Sang and Kili, *Wings of a Sparrow*.

14. "Western Kenya Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1985), 85.
15. The word in Kiswahili language means "coordinated attack."
16. Sang and Kili, *Wings of a Sparrow*.
17. Elder Joseph arap Nabei of Ziwa, interview by author, July 12, 2015.
18. "Western Kenya Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1990), 64.
19. "Western Kenya Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1996), 107.
20. "Western Kenya Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing, 2010), 45.
21. Ibid.
22. "Western Kenya Conference," (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2015), 72.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. "Greater Rift Valley Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2016), 71.

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