

Republic of Zimbabwe

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Zimbabwe (officially Republic of Zimbabwe) is one of the countries that constitute the territory of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (SID) of Seventh-day Adventists.

Vital Statistics

The Republic of Zimbabwe is one of the 18 countries in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division of Seventh-day Adventists (SID). Zimbabwe accounts for three out of the 12 union conferences of the SID; namely, the Zimbabwe Central, Zimbabwe East, and Zimbabwe West Union Conferences. Each union conference in turn has two local conferences under their administrative care. SDA Church statistics for Zimbabwe in 2020 were as follows: Churches–2 523; Companies–2091; Church Membership–972,592; Ordained Ministers–111; Licensed Ministers–66. The country's population is estimated at 14,863,000, resulting in an Adventist to non-Adventist ratio of 1:15.

A breakdown of the statistics for each of the union conferences and their respective local conferences were as follows:

Zimbabwe Central Union Conference (ZCUC): Churches–1 085; Church Membership–324,968. *Central Zimbabwe Conference*: Churches–480; Church Membership–161 993; Ordained Ministers–22; Licensed Ministers–19. *North-West Zimbabwe Conference*: Churches –605; Church Membership–162,975; Ordained Ministers–18; Licensed Ministers–16.

Zimbabwe East Union Conference (ZEUC): Churches–984; Church Membership–346,686. *East Zimbabwe Conference*: Churches–526; Church Membership–167,243; Ordained Ministers–32; Licensed Ministers–14. *North Zimbabwe Conference*: Churches–458; Church Membership–167,243; Ordained Ministers–31; Licensed Ministers–5.

Zimbabwe West Union Conference (ZWUC): Churches–454; Church Membership–300,938. *South Zimbabwe Conference*: Churches–212; Church Membership–115,906; Ordained Ministers–27; Licensed Ministers–4. *West Zimbabwe Conference*: Churches–242; Church Membership–185,032; Ordained Ministers–26; Licensed

Ministers–6.

Additional church statistics for Zimbabwe were as follows: Adventist Deaths Per Thousand–0.84; General Population Deaths Per Thousand–8.00; Church Membership Per Ten Thousand Population–654; Population Per Member Ratio–15; Percentage Net Membership Growth–2 percent, which was a decrease over the previous year and a growth of 47 percent increase over the last 10-year period.

Overview

Located between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers to the north and south respectively, the Republic of Zimbabwe is a member of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), a body that is “committed to regional integration and poverty eradication within Southern Africa through economic development and ensuring peace and security.”² The Victoria Falls, one of the seven wonders of the world, is on the Zimbabwean–Zambian border along the Zambezi River. Zimbabwe has 16 official languages, but the most widely spoken are ChiShona, IsiNdebele, and English. The majority of the citizens speak at least two of these languages. In 1890 Zimbabwe was colonized by Britain, and the occupation lasted for almost a century until 1980.

Racial segregation and partisan colonial land legislation resulted in the dehumanizing dispossession of arable land from the black people by white settlers. This led to wars of liberation that immediately commenced. The first war fought was the Anglo-Ndebele War of 1893. It ended with the defeat of the Ndebele people and the disappearance of their last monarch, King Lobhengula. A second widespread war then followed, beginning in Matabeleland in 1896 and spreading to Mashonaland in 1897 before it ended in 1898 with the defeat and brutalization of the indigenous black people by the colonial administration.

In the early 1900s black resistance to British colonialism took the form of trade unionism spearheaded by the likes of Benjamin Burombo and Masotsha Ndlovu. In the mid-1960s the struggle for independence from Britain intensified with blacks forming liberation movements with external support mainly from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and China. Two of these liberation movements, the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (PF ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo and the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) led by Robert Gabriel Mugabe collectively fought until the attainment of black majority rule in 1980. The Lancaster House Conference held in Britain in 1979³ led to the holding of general elections that were won by ZANU PF in March 1980. Independence was granted on April 18, 1980.

However, it seems that the Lancaster House agreement was inconclusive, and some grey areas were left, resulting in lingering tensions among the warring parties. First, the merger of the three military wings of the protagonists ZANU PF, PF ZAPU, and the Rhodesia Front (RF) of Ian Douglas Smith left some demobilized soldiers from PF ZAPU and the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) very bitter. Consequently, some of them took up arms against the new government. The government then responded by declaring a ‘gukurahundi’ (ChiShona word meaning, remove the filth) and sent the Fifth Brigade in Matabeleland and the

Midlands. It was estimated by various independent groups, including the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, that 20,000 lives of innocent civilians were lost mainly in Matabeleland.

Somehow, it seems most regrettably that the war took tribal routes, resulting in the genocide of innocent IsiNdebele-speaking civilians. Although an armistice was eventually reached and the Unity Accord of 1987 signed, on the whole, tribal relations at various social levels, including within the church in Zimbabwe, in the aftermath of the disturbances, have up to date largely remained somewhat cynical, politically toxic, and fragile.

The second issue resulting from the tensions of the Lancaster House Agreement was the Land Reform Program that began in the year 2000. At the time, Zimbabwe had approximately four thousand white farmers occupying more than half of the fertile land in a country with about ten million black people. Suddenly President Robert Mugabe ordered war veterans to seize all white-owned farms. Unfortunately, some precious lives and livelihoods were lost in the skirmishes, but also critically in the long term, the events resulted in broken relations between Zimbabwe and western countries led by Britain and the United States of America. So-called targeted sanctions were imposed on ZANU PF leaders, but the impact of these punitive measures has been roundly felt within the politico-socio-economic spheres of the whole nation.

The economy of Zimbabwe, reeling under heavy sanctions, inevitably nosedived from the year 2000, resulting in inflation reaching unprecedented levels by 2008. Suddenly monetary transactions left the banks and began to be done in the streets in urban areas. The local currency reached worthless trillions in figures during the first quarter of 2009. In January 2009, ZW\$10 trillion was equivalent to US\$0.50 in the streets.

A Government of National Unity (GNU) of ZANU PF and Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) briefly came into force following disputed elections in 2008, lasting five years, between 2009 and 2014. But the politico-socio-economic environment remained largely polarized, fragile, and volatile. Ultimately, in November 2017, the former Head of State, R. G. Mugabe, dramatically resigned from the presidency amid mass demonstrations perhaps triggered by growing discontent with his rule from within his own party and the military.

Overall, the poor socioeconomic conditions, coupled with the sanctions, have negatively impacted the lives of the general population, including the church in Zimbabwe. As a result, in 2007 the Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division (SID) relocated from Harare in Zimbabwe to Pretoria in South Africa for ease of air traveling and economic prudence.

Notably, Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 ushered in a new constitution that gave the citizens freedom of religion. Christians and African Indigenous Religion (AIR) adherents constitute the largest part of the population. However, Islam is steadily growing while Judaism, Hinduism, the Bahai Faith, and others continue to have small followings in Zimbabwe.

Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Work in Zimbabwe

The General Conference (GC) of Seventh-day Adventists' meeting of 1893 voted that "the gospel should penetrate through Africa from the southern side of the continent."⁴ Pieter Wessels, a pioneer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa, attended these meetings and pledged \$15,000 for taking the mission to the indigenous people of Africa.⁵ Asa Theron Robinson, the South African Conference president at the time, was tasked to meet Cecil John Rhodes, the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony and head of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) to negotiate for land to establish an Adventist Mission in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).⁶ The BSAC had acquired land rights in Zimbabwe through the Rudd Concession of 1888.⁷ Robinson and Wessels met Rhodes in early March 1894.⁸ At the end of the meeting Rhodes gave them a sealed envelope addressed to Dr. Starr Leander Jameson, his friend and administrator of Rhodesia.⁹

Robinson then tasked Wessels to assemble a team to go and hand over the sealed envelope to Jameson and hopefully get a positive response to the request of the church. The team he assembled comprised seven men, namely, Fred Sparrow, I. Barry Burton, J. Landsman, Alma Druillard, E. J. Harvey, A. Goepf, and Pieter Wessels himself as head of the delegation. The party left South Africa for Bulawayo, Rhodesia, on May 7, 1894.¹⁰

After two months by railway and ox-cart they finally reached Bulawayo on July 4, 1894.¹¹ They met Jameson on the following day, and after he read the letter, the anxious travelers were elated to hear that Rhodes had directed that they be given for free 12,000 acres of unoccupied land in any direction from Bulawayo so that they could build a school.¹² After consultation with other settlers, the place now called Solusi was chosen, about fifty kilometers southwest of Bulawayo. They informed the General Conference about the free gift and settled on the land right away, since the law required that occupation be made within six months of issue.¹³

However, the church leaders did not receive the news with equal jubilation at the General Conference. They questioned the moral implications of the free gift and suggested to rather purchase the land. Eventually counsel was sought and received from Mrs Ellen G. White, whose letter from Australia (where she was living at the time) paved the way for the establishment of the first mission to the indigenous people in Africa. She replied that the "...owner of the land could use even the heathen to grant land to God's children for His work."¹⁴

The Foreign Mission Board then recruited workers in America to join those who had begun work in Rhodesia in 1894.¹⁵ It selected George Byron Tripp as head of the team, accompanied by his wife Mary and their nine year old son George Byron Jr. William Harrison Anderson and his wife Norah, Dr. A. S. Carmichael and Mrs. Harvey (wife to E. J. Harvey) completed the team. They arrived at Solusi on Thursday, July 25, 1895.¹⁶

Unfortunately, the nascent work was suddenly disrupted by war between the Ndebele and the white settlers, which began in farms around Bulawayo in March 1896. The missionaries took refuge in Bulawayo, and the men only returned to Solusi in July 1896, while the women followed two months later in September.¹⁷ The aftermath

of the war was followed by severe hunger and starvation among the indigenous people. Hordes of people came to the mission station in search of food. As a result, an opportunity to evangelize presented itself. The missionaries admitted thirty orphans, and so began the Solusi Mission School. John Ntaba Luthuli and his friend Alvin Mlema Tshabangu, South African refugees who the missionary team met while in Bulawayo, were engaged to teach the orphans.

In September 1897 Frank Benjamin Armitage and his wife Anna Olsen arrived from America to commence the mission work at Solusi.¹⁸ Heavy rains experienced in the same year caused an outbreak of malaria. Dr. Carmichael became its first casualty on February 26, 1898.¹⁹ George B. Tripp, Amy Sparrow (three year-old daughter of Fred Sparrow), and John Ntaba Luthuli all died in March. The young George Byron Tripp Jr. died in April. Mrs. Armitage succumbed in June. These deaths inevitably shook the mission, but astonishingly the work was not halted.

Fred L. Mead arrived on April 5, 1899, from America to take the place of Tripp.²⁰ He arrived at a time when Solusi had not made a single convert. However, history was finally made on December 1, 1900, when Mead baptized James Jim Mayinza, a pioneer student, who became the first person to be baptized at Solusi. However, Mead's tenure at Solusi came to a tragic end when he died from pneumonia while in South Africa to attend a conference meeting in 1901. He was replaced by Melvin C. Sturdevant, who was sent by the GC in 1902.²¹ Sturdevant's arrival increased the momentum of the gospel work. Solusi soon became the springboard of the gospel work in Zimbabwe and beyond. Despite many lingering challenges militating against the mission work at Solusi, the church in Zimbabwe was now poised for growth.

Pioneers of Adventism in Zimbabwe

The pioneers of Adventism in Zimbabwe were the ones who labored for the salvation of souls among the indigenous people. We have two categories of such pioneers. On one hand, we have western missionaries, who were appointed and sent by the General Conference of the church in America to evangelize in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, we have black African evangelists who were essentially local converts of the western missionaries.

Western Missionaries

The earliest western missionaries were among the seven-member team led by Pieter Wessels, which founded Solusi Farm in 1894. On July 25, 1895, they were joined by the first group of missionaries from America comprising George Byron Tripp, the first principal of Solusi, his wife Mary and their nine-year old son, George Byron Jr., William Harrison Anderson and his wife Norah, Dr. A. S. Carmichael and Mrs. Harvey, who had come to join her husband. Two years later Frank Benjamin and Anna Olsen Armitage also arrived from America in September 1897.²² In 1901 Armitage led the team of evangelists who pioneered the work in Lower Gwelo.

As already mentioned above, Fred L. Mead came to Solusi to replace George Tripp in 1899. He was accompanied by his wife, their daughter Lena, and son Walter. Mead's most celebrated achievement at Solusi was that of conducting the first baptism—that of James Jim Mayinza on December 1, 1900.²³ Melvin C. Sturdevant, Mead's successor, arrived in 1902.²⁴ He reached Bulawayo on April 15, 1902, accompanied by his wife and son Jonathan.²⁵ He is fondly described as "an indefatigable leader of Solusi Mission."²⁶ He held the second baptism at Solusi on June 25, 1902,²⁷ baptizing twelve souls. Finally W. H. Anderson, who arrived from America in 1895 with Elder Tripp, was a teacher and administrator. He is known for laying out plans for evangelism. He contributed immensely to the spread of Adventism in southern Africa. He took Adventism to Zambia, Namibia, Angola, and the Congo. His work in Africa spanned forty years, longer than all those who came with George Tripp in 1895 combined.

Black African Evangelists

Black African pioneers of Adventism in Zimbabwe are too many to mention. They include James Jim Mayinza, who was of Zambian origin.²⁸ He was a man of firsts, and his pioneering works in the church are too numerous to recount. For instance, Mayinza was among the pioneering students at Solusi in 1896 and became the first person to be baptized at that mission. He was the first indigenous Adventist preacher in Zimbabwe. Most of the pioneer black Adventist pastors were his converts. He was among the team that went to open Lower Gwelo Mission with Frank B. Armitage in 1901.²⁹

Other African agents of Adventism in Zimbabwe were Harry Sibagobe Tshuma, who was one of the pioneer students among the thirty orphans at Solusi in 1896, Register Ndlovu, a convert of Mayinza, and Peter Fayi Mpofu, one of Mayinza's friends,³⁰ to mention but a few among many who enhanced the spread of the gospel to all corners of Zimbabwe.

The GC continued to dispatch missionary workers to serve in various capacities at Solusi until it was granted university status by the government of Zimbabwe in 1994. Moreover, Black African evangelists were essentially the ones who bore the burden of evangelizing among their fellow indigenous people as the work expanded beyond Solusi as a result of the training of pastors begun at Solusi in the early 1900s.

Spread and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Message in Zimbabwe

Solusi Mission was founded in 1894 by pioneer missionaries sent by the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.³¹ One of the early pieces of evidence of the growth of the work in Zimbabwe was the organizing of Solusi Mission Church in 1902 with a membership of 29. From then on Solusi became the springboard of Adventism to the rest of Zimbabwe and sub-Saharan Africa.

The earliest expansion of Solusi Mission work was when its influence was felt in Tsholotsho to the southwest direction. Beginning in 1900, outposts were established in many areas of Tsholotsho leading to the late 1920s.³² Tsholotsho Mission was established in 1929 as Gwai Mission. The people displaced from Solusi Farm in the early 1900s led to the growth of the Gwai Mission. It covered Tsholotsho, Nyamandlovu, and Lupane.

Adventism reached Bulawayo in 1910, but no conversions took place until 1918. The first white man to convert to Adventism in Zimbabwe was P. W. Hendrie. He was converted after listening to the preaching of Pastor W. Straw.³³ The Jameson Church, along Jameson Street (now Hebert Chitepo), was organized with a membership of 12 white Adventist believers on July 16, 1918. Makokoba was organized in 1919 and became the mother of all indigenous Adventist church members in Zimbabwe.³⁴ Jim Mayinza played the leading role in the founding of this church. He came to Bulawayo to evangelize the urban center. He was the first Adventist preacher to use the method of crusades or efforts to evangelize. After Makokoba Church other churches followed in quick succession. Luveve was organized in 1936.³⁵ Pumula was opened in the 1950s, whilst Phelandaba was established in 1959.³⁶

By the 1920s Adventism had spread far and wide in the regions of Matabeleland, Midlands, and Masvingo areas. Filabusi was reached in 1919.³⁷ Adventism entered Kezi in 1920.³⁸ Kezi was evangelized by preachers sent from Solusi. Shashane School was set up, and the first four converts were made. This encouraged the evangelists, and work was intensified in the area, resulting in the opening of churches at Njelele, Dewe, Domboshawa, and Mahusumani.

However, Adventism arrived late in Plumtree. The first church was established in 1964.³⁹ The spread of Adventism to this area is credited to civil servants and people who were displaced from other places in Zimbabwe.

Growth of Adventism in Midlands Region

In the Midlands region, Lower Gwelo Adventist Church was organized in 1905 with a membership of 19. The church was founded by a team of evangelists led by F. B. Armitage in 1901.⁴⁰ Lower Gwelo Mission became the springboard for the evangelization of the Midlands area.

For instance, the work in Selukwe (Shurugwi) was spearheaded by A. H. White, the acting principal of Lower Gwelo Mission in 1905 when Armitage was on leave.⁴¹ Negotiations for the establishment of Selukwe Mission were completed in 1912. It later became known as Hanke Mission. This mission helped the gospel to spread to areas in the eastern part of the Midlands, including Masvingo urban area.

The dispossession of land belonging to blacks from places like Rhodesdale in Chiwundura near Kwekwe, which had a concentration of Adventists (won by Harry Sibagobe Tshuma and Register Ndlovu), took some Adventists to Gwelo (Gweru) town. Organized in 1956, Mtapa congregation was the first Adventist church for blacks in

Gweru town, becoming the springboard for the spread of Adventism in the Gweru urban area.⁴² Soon Adventism reached Senga, Mkoba, Ascot, Ivene, and other locations in town.

Still in the Midlands, Adventism spread to Gokwe through various routes. Mutimutema, in Chief Nemangwe area, was reached through the work of Mashiri Nemadziva, also known as Brown Ncube, who was a tireless preacher.⁴³ With the help of others who joined him from other areas of the country, they were able to spread the gospel to Masakadza, Gwave, Tare, Siyabuwa, Kalungwizi, Madzivazvido, and Chireya.

Pastor Vincent Ncube, the first Adventist pastor in Gokwe area, was sent by the Southern Rhodesia Mission Field in 1949.⁴⁴ He ministered in areas such as Sanyati, Nembudziya, Kana, Sayi, Zhombe, Bova, and Nemangwe. In 1953 Adventists who arrived from Rhodesdale took the Adventist message to areas such as Mtanke, Maliyami, Mbembeswane, and Sanyati.⁴⁵

The spread of Adventism to Zhombe is associated with a Mr. Njikigwa from Rhodesdale. He was joined by Brown Ncube. He arrived in Zhombe in 1950, and with others he was instrumental in the spread of Adventism to other places such as Bomba, Njelele, Nhliziywana, Ngondoma, and Chemwiro.⁴⁶ Many other Adventists who arrived from Rhodesdale and other areas around Kwekwe such as Maliyami spread Adventism in the Sengezi and Navata areas, Chevecheve, and Maliyami in Gokwe. The Silwangani Ncube family arrived in Gokwe from Maliyami in 1950 and established Somalala 2 Church after its sister church in Zhombe, where part of the family was resettled. The most prominent evangelists who spearheaded the spread of Adventism and the establishment of Somalala 2 Church in the area were Fusi Silwangani Ncube, Philemon Mnkandla, and Samuel Ncube. Others who came after them were Never and Joseph Hlangeni, as well as Imon Fusi, a Solusi alumni and composer of the famous song, *Yatsh'iGomora le Sodom*.

Mberengwa, to the southeast of the Midlands, was reached in the 1920s. Adventism spread to Mberengwa and Nyamhondo areas through the Mkhwananzi (Ngungumbane) royal family, which had been displaced from Malungwane, Esigodini area in 1919.⁴⁷ They opened Ngungumbane Adventist School, and Adventism began to be felt far and wide in Mberengwa and the western parts of Masvingo.

Growth of Adventism in Masvingo

In Fort Victoria (Masvingo), the church acquired 1,900 acres of land in 1913⁴⁸ and established Glendale Mission. From Glendale, Adventism reached areas such as Mafuba, Gutu, Zaka, Bikita, and Mwenezi. Although Glendale was later abandoned, it had served its purpose of disseminating the gospel in the Masvingo area.

People who moved from Glendale Mission entered into Fort Victoria (Masvingo) town. The first church congregation in Masvingo urban area held its services at Mucheke Government School. In 1974, the church applied for and was allocated land to build its own structure.⁴⁹

Further westwards of Masvingo Adventism is Chivi, evangelized through the work of a woman called Erita Midzi.⁵⁰ She, her young sister and their children, began to conduct services under a tree. A church resulted as new members came from their neighbors, and it grew in due course. In 1960 a grass-thatched church was built, accommodating about fifty congregants.

Adventism in Manicaland

The mission to Manicaland was launched from Solusi. Adventism came to Nyazura, courtesy of Melvin Sturdevant in 1910,⁵¹ from where it spread to the rest of Rusape, Manicaland, and Mashonaland. Tsungwesi (Nyazura) Adventist School was opened on January 1, 1911,⁵² and an Adventist influence reached many places in Rusape. The first indigenous pastors to minister in this area, Edward Janda, Enock Waungana, Jonah Chimuka, and Noel Zembe were part of the class of 1911.⁵³ From there it spread to Rusape, Manicaland, and Mashonaland. The impact of Nyazura was felt as far as Buhera and the Save areas, where some former students of Nyazura went to settle. Outside Nyazura, camp meeting sites were established in Save, Wedza, and Murambinda.⁵⁴

Adventism was slow to reach Mutare, east of Nyazura, near Zimbabwe's eastern border with Mozambique. The first Seventh-day Adventist church in Mutare Hilltop was established because of the Nyazura impact. Pastors from Nyazura Mission went to hold crusades in Mutare, and as a result Hilltop Adventist Church was born. It is from this church that Adventism spread to Dangamvura, Florida, and the rest of the sprawling urban area.⁵⁵

Adventism Spreads to Harare

Salisbury (now Harare) was reached in the early 1900s. Adventist presence in Salisbury is recorded as early as 1910. Pastor D. F. Tarr mentions being hosted by a Mr. Wessels, an Adventist who was related to Pieter Wessels of the church in South Africa.⁵⁶ The first Adventist church in Harare was the Salisbury Adventist Church. Now located in Highlands, it was opened around 1911. It resulted from the canvassing work of E. Enochson.⁵⁷

The first church to be opened for black people in Salisbury was Harare Adventist Church (now Mbare Adventist Church).⁵⁸ It became the mother of Adventist churches for the indigenous people in Salisbury. It is believed that immigrants from surrounding reserves and countries such as Malawi and Zambia came with Adventism to Salisbury. After Harare Church, Highfield was the second church for black people, and the third was Mabvuku. All these early churches in Salisbury were established in the 1930s.⁵⁹

Adventism Enters Mashonaland West and Central

In Mashonaland West, Karoi was reached in the 1950s.⁶⁰ Adventism was taken there by migrants from various areas of the country, including Ruya, Gunde, and Lalapansi.

As for the Mashonaland Central area, Chief Nyambiri invited Adventist missionaries in 1929 to go and set up a mission in Mhondoro.⁶¹ However, his call was not immediately heeded. In the Mhondoro area the gospel arrived rather fortuitously or perhaps by divine providence in the 1950s. It was taken by the people who were displaced from other areas such as Rhodesdale. They spread the gospel to Marirangwe Purchase Area. Marirangwe North Primary School was opened through their labors.⁶²

In Mashonaland Central, Aaron Mujokwane Ngirishi moved to Chinhoyi, northwest of Harare, in the 1970s. He began preaching in the area, but Chief Hwata was strongly opposed to his teachings. He requested Chief Muzarabani, to the northeast of Chinhoyi, toward the Zambezi valley, to accommodate Ngirishi in his area. Chief Muzarabani obliged, and Ngirishi began his work in Muzarabani.⁶³ Notably, Adventism had somewhat reached all corners of Zimbabwe by the time of the country's independence in 1980.

Church Institutions

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has institutions that execute its mission programs in Zimbabwe.

Educational Institutions

Solusi, one of the oldest of all the Seventh-day Adventist institutions was founded in 1894. The Solusi Mission School was opened in 1896. It started with a small intake of orphans who had been surrendered to the mission by villagers due to famine.⁶⁴ For many years Solusi offered primary and secondary education. However, in the 1950s plans were put on course to turn Solusi into a college, offering a four-year course leading to a degree in theology. Those plans came to fruition in 1958.⁶⁵ Since then Solusi offered a theology degree program from Andrews University in the United States of America. The church applied for university status from the government of Zimbabwe, and in 1994 Solusi was granted a university charter. To this day Solusi University is government and denominationally accredited with six faculties offering one diploma, 32 Honors degrees, and five master's degrees courses.⁶⁶

In 1902 Lower Gwelo Mission was established at about two hundred kilometers from Solusi by a team of evangelists led by Frank B. Armitage. It became a springboard for evangelism and development of outschools in the area. The earliest outschools established were Sogwala, Sikhombingo, Vunku Sheamer, Makhulambila, Jonkola, Mkoba, Shagari, and others. In due time a teachers' college was opened at Lower Gwelo. The college however, was closed in the 1970s.⁶⁷

Work at Selukwe (now Hanke) Mission started in 1905, when A. H. White, who arrived to relieve Elder Armitage who was on leave, began canvassing work in the area. Plans to set up a mission intensified in 1910 when Chief Mudzengi of the area was approached by the team of T. J. Gibson, J. Ngono, and Paul Mbono, the son of the chief. The lease arrangement for the establishment of Hanke Mission was finally completed by D. F. Tarr in 1912.⁶⁸

Nyazura (formerly known as Tsungwesi) Mission School was opened on January 1, 1911⁶⁹ with twelve students. The mission was founded by Melvin C. Sturdevant, who left Solusi with a strong team of twenty evangelists, including Paul Mbono, Mark Mlalazi, Joseph Mathe, and others. Nyazura Mission became the mother of Adventist missions in Mashonaland.⁷⁰

The surviving secondary school educational institutions in Zimbabwe include: Bulawayo Adventist High School in Bulawayo; Gunde Adventist High School in Gweru; Maranatha Secondary School in Nkulumane, Bulawayo; Nyahuni Adventist High School in Murehwa; Nyazura Adventist High School in Nyazura; Ruya Adventist High School in Mt. Darwin; and Solusi Adventist High School in Solusi, Bulawayo.

Health Institutions

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zimbabwe's commitment to health-care provision has never been in doubt. From the onset a medical doctor, Dr. A. S. Carmichael, was part of the team to open the Adventist mission at Solusi in 1895. Dr. Carmichael opened a clinic that became the first Adventist health care institution in Zimbabwe.⁷¹ J. N. De Beer was part of F. B. Armitage's team that started work in Lower Gwelo in 1901 as the health care provider. A previously hostile chief of the area became cooperative and supportive to the Adventists when he saw De Beer's work.⁷² Lower Gwelo Mission Hospital was established in 1931.⁷³

Today the following Seventh-day Adventist church health care institutions are operational in Zimbabwe: Adventist Dental Practice in Bulawayo; Bhazha Seventh-day Adventist Clinic; Chikwariro Clinic in Mutare; Hanke Clinic in Shurugwi; Lower Gweru Clinic in Gweru; Mwerahari Seventh-day Adventist Clinic in Chivhu; Nyazura Clinic in Nyazura; Seventh-day Adventist Orthodontic Services in Highlands, Harare; and Solusi Clinic.

Church Administrative Units in Zimbabwe

When the South African Union Conference was organized in 1902 after the Seventh-day Adventist Church underwent major reorganization, the Rhodesian Mission Field was organized and placed under its administrative care. In 1916 the Rhodesian and Nyasaland Union Mission was established with its offices in Bulawayo.⁷⁴ It covered Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), and Nyasaland (Malawi). In 1919 Botswana was added, and it became the Zambezi Union Mission with a membership of 953.⁷⁵ When the African Division was organized in 1920, the Zambezi Union Mission was placed under its administration, which relieved the South African Union Conference from its responsibilities toward the expansion of the work in Rhodesia.

In 1925 Nyasaland was removed from the Zambesi Union Mission in order to organize the South East Africa Union Mission, which incorporated the new developments in Mozambique. The Zambesi Union Mission eventually organized the Matabeleland/Midlands and Mashonaland Mission Fields in 1964.⁷⁶ The work in Zambia progressed to the point where the Zambia Union Mission was organized in 1972, thus removing the work in

Zambia from the Zambesi Union Mission's jurisdiction. The long liberation struggles of Southern Rhodesia finally concluded with the country's gaining independence on April 18, 1980. Southern Rhodesia was renamed Zimbabwe.

In 1929 the Rhodesia Conference was organized to cater for the work among the White and Colored population in Rhodesia. Unfortunately, since the headquarters of the Adventist work of the African Division was in South Africa, where racial segregation was enforced by the Apartheid government, the trend of separation spilled over to the neighboring nations. Many years later, in 1968, the Zambesi General Field was organized to look after Colored congregations in Rhodesia, thus leaving the Rhodesian Conference to exclusively function as White entity only. After the Zambia Union Mission was organized in 1972, the Rhodesian Conference and the Zambesi General Field were merged again to form the Zambesi Conference.⁷⁷

Meanwhile, the work among the Black people in Zimbabwe grew such that it became necessary to further reorganize the two mission fields. Shortly after Zimbabwe gained independence, the Mashonaland and Matabeleland-Midlands Fields were reorganized into the East, Central, and West Zimbabwe Fields. The tense racial situation in South Africa eventually caused the South African Union Conferences to be detached from the division entities in Africa in 1983. During the same year, the Botswana Field was also detached from the Zambesi Union Mission and attached to the newly formed Eastern Africa Division.

When the General Conference mandated the South African and Southern Union Conferences in South Africa to merge their racially divided entities, the Eastern Africa Division wrote to the Zambesi Union Mission in June 1991 to also merge its racially divided entities. The General Conference assured the Eastern Africa Division of its support and assistance toward the unification of the field entities in Zimbabwe. The General Conference described the racially divided church entities in Zimbabwe as "an embarrassment and an anomaly."⁷⁸

The proposal was to dissolve the Zambesi Conference and incorporate its churches into the Central, East, and West Zimbabwe Fields. The members of the Zambesi Conference did not welcome the recommendation, and during its special session voted to secede from the Zambesi Union Mission and form its own independent Zimbabwe Conference, completely detached from the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁷⁹ The Zambesi Conference was eventually dissolved, and many attempts have since been made by church leaders to regain the members who were under the Zambesi Conference.

Meanwhile, the "positive income growth among black church members" and the economic freedom provided by the independent Zimbabwe allowed the mission fields to attain the self-supporting local conference status. The Central, East, and West Zimbabwe Fields became the Central, East, and West Zimbabwe Conferences respectively in 1993. These organizational developments led to the Zambesi Union Mission achieving union conference status, as well. In 1997 the Zambesi Union Mission became the Zimbabwe Union Conference.

Due to the continued growth of the church both in terms of membership and finances, the three local conferences in Zimbabwe became realigned to create six local conferences in 2015;⁸⁰ at which time the

Zimbabwe Union Conference had 2,084 organized churches and a membership of 845,213.⁸¹ Then the Central Zimbabwe Conference was divided to form the Central and North-West Zimbabwe Conferences; the East Zimbabwe Conference was divided to form East and North Zimbabwe Conferences; and the West Zimbabwe Conference was divided to form the South and West Zimbabwe Conferences. Thus, the Zimbabwe Union Conference now presided over six local conferences.

It then became clear to church leaders that the Zimbabwe Union Conference be also divided for effective ministry. Church leaders studied the situation and recommended a viable proposal to the General Conference Annual Council in 2017 to split the Zimbabwe Union Conference into three union conferences. After the proposal was approved, the Zimbabwe Union Conference was dissolved, and on January 1, 2018, the three new union conferences began to operate. The Zimbabwe Central Union Conference (ZCUC) comprised the Central and North-West Zimbabwe Conferences; the Zimbabwe East Union Conference (ZEUC) consisted of the East and North Zimbabwe Conferences, and the Zimbabwe West Union Conference (ZWUC) oversaw the South and West Zimbabwe Conferences.

The Adventist church in Zimbabwe continues to reveal positive church growth. Church membership is now tottering toward 1,000,000 according to the 2020 statistics.⁸²

Effects of Political Developments on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zimbabwe

Since the Seventh-day Adventist Church's establishment in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in 1894, the political developments affected the church in one way or the other. First, there was the Ndebele/Shona Uprisings of 1896/7. By then Southern Rhodesia was under British occupation and rule. Two ecological disasters stirred the natives into an uprising against colonialists. In 1895 a locust plague occurred in the territory where the American Adventist missionaries settled. This negatively impacted the harvest, which brought about a starvation. The witch doctors convinced the natives "that the spirits were angry because they had allowed the White men to invade their homeland."⁶³

The second calamity was an outbreak of rinderpest, which killed cattle. In an attempt to stop the spread of this cattle disease, the colonialists slaughtered many heads of livestock. The natives "accused the Whites of deliberately seeking to impoverish their nation by destroying their cattle."⁶⁴ This led to hostility between the natives and the colonialists, which resulted in a revolt that lasted from 1896 until 1897. Unfortunately, the natives were also suspicious of the Adventist missionaries who had settled at Soluswe (Solusi). The local people associated the White English-speaking missionaries with the White British colonialists. The missionaries had to endure so much prejudice that the first fruits of their faithful labor came only six years from the time they settled at the mission.⁸⁵ Even then their first candidate to be baptized was not a local native but rather a native from Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) by the name of Jim Mayinza.

Fearing the possible disastrous results of that uprising, the Adventist missionaries tried their best to dissuade the surrounding native villages from joining the uprising. Their efforts were in vain because the uprising broke out nonetheless. The missionaries feared for their lives and for their families and had to temporarily retreat into Bulawayo from their mission farm. This retarded the mission work temporarily.

Another political development that negatively impacted the gospel mission in Zimbabwe by causing contradictions in the church mission was racial segregation. Colonial racial laws separated Blacks from Whites in all spheres of life, including religion.⁸⁶ This had ripple effects on evangelism and church growth. For instance, Blacks were prevented from leading mission stations, and Black evangelists were denied ministerial licenses to practice.

Colonial laws also assigned most of the arable land to White settlers, displacing Black people in the process. Displacements increased around the 1930s when the Land Apportionment Act was promulgated.⁸⁷ It caused racial tensions in the country from which the church could not escape. For instance, the displacement of Chief Nyagumbo in the Rusape area of Mashonaland, around the time Nyazura Mission was established, caused anger and bitterness among the indigenous people who were being evangelized by the church.⁸⁸

Ironically, some of these displacements helped advance the Adventist mission. Affected church members took the gospel message wherever they went to settle. Racial segregation policies collectively precipitated the armed struggle against the colonial government. The liberation war in Rhodesia began in earnest in 1965 when Rhodesian prime minister, Ian Douglas Smith, announced the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI).⁸⁹ During the liberation war, education and evangelism work suffered the most. The work at Nyazura Mission was halted, and Solusi College was forced to close on June 14, 1978.⁹⁰ The college remained closed until the country's independence in 1980.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe had hosted the Seventh-day Adventist church division headquarters for a very long time. The African Division was organized in 1919. Its headquarters was situated along Grove Street, Claremont, in Cape Town, South Africa. For a long time division leaders desired that the division headquarters be located in a more central part of the territory. The accelerated growth of the church in territories beyond the borders of South Africa made it necessary to consider seriously that the division headquarters be relocated. In 1956 the Southern African Division's membership was as follows:

Congo Union Mission (Congo and Rwanda): 61,222 church members.

East African Union Mission (Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda): 44,747 church members.

Nyasaland Union Mission (Malawi): 16,294 church members.

South African Union Conference: 16,016 church members.

Zambesi Union Mission (Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana): 27,627 church members.⁹¹

South Africa, where the work began, no longer had the largest constituency in terms of membership. Considerations to relocate the division headquarters closer to the largest constituencies were therefore prudent. The division committee studied the matter during the mid-year meetings of 1956 and voted to seek counsel from the General Conference.⁹²

After reviewing the present developments of our mission program, and sensing the urgent need to more closely integrate African leadership into the denominational organization and also realizing the advisability of providing a closer supervision of our whole mission program, the General Conference committee at the 1956 Autumn Council voted to approve the removal of our Division headquarters to Salisbury as soon as possible.⁹³

The division purchased an acre of land in Newlands, Salisbury (Harare), Zimbabwe, and immediately disposed of the offices in Claremont to the Voice of Prophecy of the South African Union Conference. The land that was purchased along Princess Drive was developed in 1957. On April 1, 1957, the division office staff moved to temporary offices along 4 Park Street, Salisbury. The official opening of the new division headquarters took place on April 11, 1958. The grand opening was attended by esteemed guests, including Mr. E. Dumbuchena—a prominent African journalist, Councilor L. J. Boshoff—the mayor of Salisbury, and Sir Malcolm Barrow—Federal minister of Home Affairs.⁹⁴

After the organization of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division in 2003, the division headquarters remained in Harare, Zimbabwe. Due to the deteriorating economic situation in Zimbabwe, plus the fact that there were no direct flights into Zimbabwe from most of the countries that formed the SID territory, except via South Africa, the headquarters of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division needed to be relocated. It was then decided to relocate the SID headquarters to Pretoria, South Africa, to increase the organization's efficiency.

Two decades after Zimbabwe's independence, the political developments in general positively impacted the church. The constitution of the country gave citizens freedom of religion. Although there were some difficulties along the way, on the whole, the outlook was encouraging for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zimbabwe.

The Place of Adventism in the History of Zimbabwe

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is held in high regard in Zimbabwe. The church has never deviated from its gospel mission. As a result, state and church relations have largely remained cordial since its inception in 1894. The most fruitful relations were fostered after independence. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, who became the country's president after the signing of the Unity Accord of 1987, had a soft spot for Adventism. In the early 2000s, he declared that Adventist pastors were free to visit him at State House. On one such visit by the then church leadership in Zimbabwe, comprising the union president, Solomon Maphosa, executive secretary, Evans

Muvuti, West Zimbabwe Conference president, Hezekiel Mafu, and a visiting evangelist Pastor Muhando. In 2001, President Mugabe disclosed that he loved Adventist music because it had meaning unlike other music.

Overall, he recognized the contributions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church toward the spiritual and social development of the nation. It is believed that this was one of the reasons Solusi College was granted a university charter in 1994. To confirm those assumptions, he personally flew from Harare to Bulawayo to attend the conferment ceremony and deliver the university charter on June 11, 1995. He then became the first graduate of Solusi University to receive an honorary Doctor of Laws Degree in recognition of his personal and public commitment to education, as well as his national and international leadership.⁹⁵ True to what was believed of him, in his address he reiterated that "Adventism was expected to champion the spiritual and economic development of Zimbabwe."⁹⁶

Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a strong presence in all four corners of Zimbabwe both in terms of spiritual and social development. The church has contributed immensely to national development, particularly in the education, health, and humanitarian sectors. However, within the social development sphere, it is in education that the church has largely made the most contributions. Worldwide it is estimated that the Seventh-day Adventist Church school system is the largest in the Protestant world⁹⁷ and second to the Roman Catholic Church globally.

Unlike other Christian denominations whose presence remained in selected regions or territories as provided in Rhodesian colonial laws, the Seventh-day Adventist Church spread across all the country's provinces before and after independence. The statistics of Adventist schools in Zimbabwe are 103 primary and 50 secondary schools: Zimbabwe East Union Conference—36 primary and 23 secondary schools; Zimbabwe Central Union Conference—27 primary and 12 secondary schools; and Zimbabwe West Union Conference—40 primary and 15 secondary schools.

These statistics could have been even higher had some of the schools not been taken over by rural councils after independence. They had been closed during the war of liberation, vandalized and seriously dilapidated. Among the secondary schools, however, Solusi, Bulawayo, Lower Gwelo, Hanke, Anderson, Nyazura, Nyahuni, and Ruya Adventist schools are the most widely known.

Challenges to Mission and What Remains to Be Done

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has faced many challenges since its establishment in Zimbabwe in 1894. The climate conditions of Matabeleland almost aborted the mission work in the early stages. In March 1898 five people died from malaria at the mission, and by 1900 eleven victims had died of the same disease.⁹⁸

Funding remained a major challenge to the work at Solusi. Regardless of how much the missionaries labored to attain self-supporting levels, it was very difficult to fully accomplish that goal without sufficient final support

from the General Conference.

The liberation war, as mentioned above, led to the closure of schools in the countryside. Most notably, Solusi and Lower Gwelo were closed in 1978.⁹⁹ Moreover, Zimbabwe's economy negatively impacted everyone in the country, including the church. Otherwise, the church is steadily growing. However, a lot of work still remains to be done.

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