



W. Duncan Eva.

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Eva, William Duncan (1914–1997)

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William Duncan Eva worked for the Adventist Church as a teacher, missionary, evangelist, and president of a number of administrative fields before serving as a general vice president of the General Conference.

Early Years

William Duncan Eva was born on May 19, 1914 in Indwe, Cape Province, South Africa.¹ His parents were Eigene Ingram Eva who was born in Whittlesea, South Africa, in 1881, and Rose Duncan Eva born in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, in 1890.² William had two sisters, Doris and Audrey.³ In 1927 William was convinced of the Adventist faith.⁴ He attended the Aliwal North High School in 1928 and 1929 and was baptized on May 17, 1930.⁵ In 1930 he started attending the Helderberg College in South Africa and graduated in 1933.⁶

Working for the Church and Further Studies

In January 1934 Eva began working as a schoolteacher in Bethlehem, South Africa. He continued working as a teacher until 1935.⁷ Eva married Gloria on July 4, 1937.⁸

Between 1936 and 1937 Eva was working as a missionary among the Indians in Natal, South Africa. This was followed by three years of mission work in the Natal-Transvaal Conference from 1937 to 1939.⁹ On December 14, 1940, he was ordained in Bulawayo, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).¹⁰ In 1940 Eva began working as a pastor and evangelist in the Rhodesia- Bechuanaland Conference.¹¹ His first child, Marilynne-Rose Eva, was born during this time on February 11, 1941.¹²

In 1944 Eva was elected president of the Southern Rhodesia Mission, a position he held until 1947.¹³ His second child, Bulawayo Willmore Duncan Eva, was born on April 19, 1944.¹⁴

Eva was a powerful speaker. A 1945 report mentions many people accepting Christ after his talk at the Rhodesia-Bechuanaland Conference camp meeting.

A convoy of motor-cars and lorries brought nearly a hundred persons to the Rhodesia-Bechuanaland Conference Camp-meeting during the Easter weekend. Elder Eva, the conference president, gave a very stirring opening talk on the preparation for the great and solemn events that lie before us. The ministers and helpers spent time in talking with those who had never given their hearts to God, those who had backslidden, and those who were discouraged. When Sabbath came, many of these were ready to surrender all to God!¹⁵

Eva declared his passion for literature evangelism in the *Southern Africa Division Outlook* on March 1, 1946, "Colporteurs, church members, we have in our literature one of the mightiest agencies for the spreading of the

truth.”¹⁶

Eva left Africa on study leave in 1948 to attend Walla Walla College in Washington, U.S.A. where he completed a B.A.¹⁷ This was followed by studies at the Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Michigan, U.S.A., where he completed an M.A. in Biblical Languages in 1950.¹⁸

East and South African Unions and Southern Africa Division

In 1950 the *Southern African Division Outlook* announced that the president of the East African Union, Hubert Martin Sparrow, was advised by his medical doctors to lay down his presidential duties and seek a quieter life to rebuild his health. Eva was appointed as the new president of the East African Union.¹⁹ On April 13, 1950, Eva left the United States for East Africa to commence his new duties.²⁰

At the Ninth Missionary Council of the Southern African Division, April 16-21, 1951, E. D. Hanson was elected as the president of the East African Union.²¹ Eva said the following in his farewell speech,

The time has come when the message must enter new areas and when the work must be built up in greater strength where the lines are thinly held. An essential part of such a programme is the transferring of more responsibility to qualified African leaders and for the laity to bear a larger and more just share of the financial burden of the work. The rapid increase of literacy among the Africans of East Africa presents a most effective method of reaching thousands whom we could not otherwise contact. Our literature is an ideal entering wedge.²²

On April 19, 1951, during the same Missionary Council, Eva was elected president of the South African Union.²³ He continued in this role until the General Conference Session on May 25, 1954, when he was elected as secretary of the Southern Africa Division.²⁴

In a speech given at Helderberg College in 1955, Eva emphasized “the need for greater consecration and a closer walk with God so that we might be enlightened and enabled to meet the rapidly changing situation in Africa where the methods found effective years ago are today useless.”²⁵ A change in how to carry out mission was important in Africa, as elsewhere, due to the rapid changes in society.

Eva was re-elected as secretary of the Southern Africa Division at the General Conference Session in Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A., June 19-28, 1958.²⁶ He was again re-elected for the same position at the General Conference Session in San Francisco, California, U.S.A., July 26- August 4, 1962.²⁷

A Passionate and Skillful Writer

Eva was a passionate and skillful writer. His articles in the various church publications demonstrate his love for God and God’s Church and his honest and insightful approach to spiritual growth and challenges. On September 5, 1964, Eva wrote, speaking of the church,

In this last age, to a world in its dying agonies, to sinners goaded by demons into the last great revolt against God, through her might be made manifest the final and full display of the love of God. How sad it is that she falls so far short of heaven's standard. What a shame that we who have been given so much light, who have been promised so much power, live so far below our privileges! Why is it so? What will bring the change that will help us to discern the greatness of our need and find the true remedy for our ills? It is only our Saviour who is able to give us the help we need.²⁸

In another article in the *Trans-Africa Division Outlook*, he wrote that

true Christians are strangers and foreigners on this earth; it is not their natural element; heaven is their home. It is so easy for us, in the busy rush of life to look more to the things that are seen than to the unseen, eternal realities above, to fix our love on earth instead of heaven where Christ is at the right hand of God. What an unspeakably precious privilege it is to know the meaning of these times! How blest we are with an understanding of God's purposes! How close we are to the glorious fulfilment of them! Shall we not demonstrate our faith by identifying ourselves with it in generous support of the cause of God? To do so will deepen our love and devotion for not only to others does a stream of blessing flow from our gifts but it flows back to ourselves as well.²⁹

In an article published in the *West African Advent Messenger*, Eva said the following regarding what it meant to be an Adventist.

When we become Adventists we become part of the great last-day movement God has called into being to close up the work of the Gospel and bring the triumphant return of Jesus. God lays upon every believer two solemn duties, the first to be a personal witness of Christ's saving power, and the second, to contribute as God prospers him for the support and the finishing of the worldwide task that has been entrusted to the church.³⁰

For Eva, being an Adventist was a responsibility that involved personal witnessing and the act of contributing to God's work. Part of this was the continued giving of offerings and the return of tithes.

We speak sorrowfully at times of the decline of Sabbath school offerings as compared with tithe, and there is, as we have shown, real cause for this sorrow. But it is also fair to remember that the demands of local church projects have increased so much over the past twenty or thirty years that although members have not decreased the amounts of Sabbath school offerings, they have increased offerings to local church projects. We must carry forward the work at home and abroad for there are precious souls in both fields.³¹

Eva wrote the following about preaching,

In our preaching, the Bible must be the prophet rather than you and me.... We need revival that comes through the working of the Holy Spirit; but the Spirit works through the Word of God . . . We must be men of the Word.³²

The General Conference, the Northern European Division, and Return to the General Conference

In early 1965, Eva received a call from the General Conference to become an associate secretary of the General Conference. He and his wife, Gloria, left for Washington, D.C. at the end of March that same year.³³

At the General Conference Session in Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A., June 16-25, 1966, Eva was elected as president of the Northern European Division.³⁴ Soon, Eva would face a tremendous challenge in one country in his division. On May 30, 1967, East Nigerians named their state Biafra. Immediately, a conflict with the rest of Nigeria erupted and resulted in approximately 30,000 people being massacred within the next few days. Around two million people died of starvation in Biafra in the twelve months that followed. Eva spent many hours trying to help people on both sides of the conflict. The Northern European Division sought ways to send aid to the 15,000 baptized members and 40,000 Sabbath School members in Nigeria who urgently needed their help. In August, Eva travelled to West Nigeria to offer support and help from the Division.³⁵

During his leadership of the African fields of the Northern European-West Africa Division,³⁶ Eva visited Nigeria, Ghana, Upper Volta, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone. He took part in meetings, preached, and had many speaking appointments.³⁷

Eva continued as president of the Northern European Division until 1973. On October 9, 1973, the North American Division Committee on Administration, at their fifth business session of the Annual Council, elected Eva a general vice president of the General Conference.³⁸ He was to remain in this position for eight years and until his retirement in 1980.

Retirement and Legacy

Eva retired on October 1, 1980, after nearly 47 years of service to the Church.³⁹

Eva died in Clarksville, Maryland, U.S.A., on July 2, 1997. He was survived by his wife, Gloria, his daughter Marilynne-Rose Eva, his son, Bulawayo Willmore Duncan Eva, and daughter-in-law, Claire Eva, as well as two grandchildren, Amy Eva-Wood and Jonathan Eva.⁴⁰

Eva's legacy was his influence as a devout leader who showed he cared about people while upholding the processes and standards of the Church.

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NOTES

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23. "South African Union Conference Symposium," *Southern African Division Outlook*, June 15, 1951, 53.
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32. R. D. Vine, "New Evangelistic Approach," *The British Advent Messenger*, July 14, 1972, 2.
33. R. H. P., "W. D. Eva Called to General Conference," *Trans- Africa Division Outlook*, April 15, 1965, 3 "Eva W. Duncan," *ARH*, September 25, 1997, 29; 1965 GC Secretariat, Maryland, U.S.A., Record ID: 12483.
34. Herbert Ford, "Renewed Zeal for Finishing the Work Sensed as General Conference Session Ends," *Pacific Union Recorder*, July 4, 1966, 1.
35. Victor H. Cooper, "Problems of Starvation," *The British Advent Messenger*, November 22, 1968, 1-2.
36. Because of the close association of some of the West African countries that had come about because of missionaries from Northern Europe working there, the Northern European Division was renamed to the Northern European-West Africa Division in May 1971 and would keep that

name until October 1980 following the formation of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division at the Dallas GC Session in April 1980. For further details see D. J. Trim, *A Passion for Mission* (Bracknell, UK: Newbold Academic Press, November 2019), 167-188, 427.

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