

Madsen, Jens

Nikolaj

(1923–2007)

SVEN HAGEN JENSEN

Sven Hagen Jensen, M.Div. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) has worked for the church for over 50 years as a pastor, editor, departmental director, and church administrator in Denmark, Nigeria and the Middle East. Jensen enjoys reading, writing, nature and gardening. He is married to Ingelis and has two adult children and four grandchildren.

As an evangelist and leader in the Adventist Church in Denmark and Norway for many years, Jens Madsen was well known and appreciated for the contribution he made. In a time when secularism and moral decline increasingly impacted the society around him, he was steady like a rock, when the church needed a calm and firm hand at the helm. His focus on the soon coming of Christ, and the hope we have in Him, characterized his leadership and preaching.

Early Years

Jens Nikolaj Madsen was born in Hundborg, Thy, Denmark, on November 9, 1923.¹ He grew up in the countryside with his parents Peter and Ane Marie Madsen,² his sister, Elly, and his brother, Egon, in a home where the Bible was read daily.³ His mother was a sincere Christian and belonged to the Indre Mission, an evangelical branch of the Lutheran State Church.⁴ Early in his childhood she talked about the coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, and how some were taken with him and others left behind. This made a great impression on the mind of the young boy, and right there he decided that he would serve God.⁵

At sixteen he left home and worked as a farmhand to make a living for himself. As it often happens to young people, bad company and the worldly pleasures led him further and further away from his childhood convictions. At times he felt the emptiness in his life and an oppressive insecurity. As the realities of World War II



Jens Madsen.

Photo courtesy of Jena Kvingeare.

painted an increasing gloomy picture of the future, he felt an urge to look for something better.⁶ He went to work on a farm where the wife and daughter were Seventh-day Adventists. The wife, Martine Nielsen, encouraged him to read the Bible and some religious books.⁷ However, Jens Madsen wrote later,

That which I first noticed was not so much the biblical truths, but more the practical side of their Christianity.... Furthermore, I read from time to time the magazines that came to this good home, among them *Advent-Ungdom* (the Adventist youth paper), which I greatly appreciated. Before long I was aware that to be an Adventist was to be a wholehearted Christian that loved God and therefore wanted to do what He commanded.⁸

Gradually Jens came to the realization that Saturday was the true day of rest and holiness. He decided to keep the Sabbath. Germany was occupying Denmark at the time, and Jens received a tempting offer to help build German bunkers on the west coast. There was lots of money to earn, but he wouldn't get the Sabbath off. Jens prayed for guidance.⁹

In the Adventist Church paper *Adventnyt* he had seen an advertisement for a farmhand at Peter Skov's farm in Skaarup, Fyn, and he sent an application for the job. The day before he was to start work for the Germans, he looked deep into the mailbox, but there was no letter. After closing time, he went to the post office and asked if a letter for him had arrived. And yes, it was there. He was being offered the job he had applied for. His prayer had been answered. He went to work for Peter Skov, an Adventist employer, and was able to keep the Sabbath.¹⁰

He was 19 years old and began to attend the nearby Adventist Church in Svendborg. After a short time, he wrote to Pastor Hakon Muderspach and requested baptism.¹¹ The following Sabbath he took the train to the church in Odense, about 40 km away, and was baptized on March 27, 1943.¹² In 1945 a person from the conference convinced him to sell Christian books, and he worked all the summer as a colporteur. At that time he didn't know that he later in life would play an important role in the publishing ministry.¹³

In the fall of 1945, Madsen went to Vejlelfjord Højskole, where he studied for six years, taking his preliminary exam and then continuing in the ministerial course. To earn money for the school fees, he canvassed in the summers and in his free time. At Vejlelfjord he also met Edith Jensen from Viborg, whom he married on July 15, 1949.¹⁴

Working for the Church

From 1951 to 1958 he worked first as an intern in Aalborg and then as a pastor in his own churches in Viborg, Silkeborg, Holstebro, Lemvig, Skive, and Thisted. In 1955 he was ordained to the gospel ministry.¹⁵ "He quickly became known for his pastoral skills in the best sense of the word, but at the same time he developed a rare ability to preach the gospel in a way that helped lead many new people to the fellowship in the churches that he was responsible for."¹⁶ From 1958 to 1959 he studied at Columbia Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., U.S.A.¹⁷ When he came back, the West Denmark Conference moved him to Aalborg, where he continued his

successful ministry. It was in Aalborg he and Edith became parents to their daughter Jena.¹⁸

Then something extraordinary happened; in 1961 he was called to Copenhagen to be the president of the East Denmark Conference at just 37 years old.^{19 20} He was an evangelist by heart, and together with his administrative responsibilities he each year conducted an evangelistic effort in the city of Copenhagen.²¹

After six years in Copenhagen and at the union session in 1967, Madsen was elected to be the president of the West Nordic Union,^{22 23} so the family moved to the union headquarters in Oslo, Norway. The West Nordic Union served the territory of Denmark, Norway, Greenland, and the Faroe Island with its five conferences and many institutions. During his 18 years (1967-1985) as the union president, he regularly chaired 18 boards.²⁴ He was known to have his finger on the pulse, and was always well prepared, when he parked his small blue Volkswagen outside the school, office, or health institution where the board meeting was held. He did not spare himself. Sanity and diplomacy were his leadership style. His strategy was to work toward consensus. In addition, he attended the yearly camp meetings, workers meetings, and other major gatherings where people listened to his profound Christ centered messages, delivered with a calm and measured pace, so that even the Norwegians could follow his Danish dialect.²⁵ He quickly oriented himself to the evangelistic work in Norway, as he had done in Denmark, and became an inspiration, as well as an urgent force for his coworkers in the field.²⁶

In 1973, while Madsen was union president, he wrote the book *Den skjulte sandhed* (The Hidden Truth), which was published in 60,000 copies.²⁷ It was published as well, in Norwegian and Greenlandic with the following titles: *Det er senere enn du tror* (It is later than you think),²⁸ and *Ilumoortoq Torqortaq* (The Hidden Truth).²⁹ The 149 pages are evangelistic and filled with hope in its description of salvation and the last days. In addition, he wrote a good number of tracts and articles.

After his time as president of the union, he spent one year as a district pastor in Aalborg, Denmark, before he was called to be the general manager for Dansk Bogforlag (Danish Publishing House) in Odense, a position he held from 1986 to 1992.³⁰ When he retired at 69, he became the leader of the literature work³¹ in Denmark till he was 80. The literature work always had a big place in his heart, and with enthusiasm he led literature evangelists and laypeople to share our truth-filled books and magazines.³²

For the last 16 to 17 years, until the year of his death, he went to Greenland for the Harvest Ingathering campaign, made many friends, and gathered each year around one hundred thousand DKR (14,000 USD), in addition to the funds he collected for the needy in his permanent ingathering districts in Denmark.³³

Madsen also had a turn as leader of Adventisternes Pensionistforening (The Adventist Pensioners' Association) in Denmark.³⁴ He himself liked to travel, and as a travel guide, he arranged tours to the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Israel for the benefit of many Adventists. He would say: "I love to travel, and soon we set off on the great journey towards heaven."³⁵

Jens Nikolaj Madsen died in Odense on February 25, 2007.

Legacy

Some of his close associates give the following characteristics of Jens Madsen:

“He was a well-known person in our congregations. Every Sabbath he preached the word of God. His sermons always contained the message of salvation, Jesus’ life, His death, His resurrection, and he always managed to bring the second coming of Christ into his presentation. Jens Madsen stood for a good and balanced Christian faith. He knew his God, believed in Him, and lived for Him.”⁸⁶

“We remember Madsen as a solid Seventh-day Adventist Christian. He was not superficial nor fanatic; he had both feet planted in the reality and the truth. With his gentle nature he was a person that showed genuine care for the ones with whom he was in contact. The goal seemed always to be to help people receive Jesus Christ and prepare for His return. His preaching was most often about the signs of the times and that Jesus will soon return. The style both as shepherd and evangelist made his sermons current and serious and appealed both to renewed repentance and self-examination.”⁸⁷

SOURCES

B. D. “Formandsskifte i unionen” (Change of President in the Union). *Adventnyt*, August 1967.

Hartmann, Walder. “Mindeord” (Words of Commemoration). *Kristeligt Dagblad*, March 3, 2007.

Kvinge, Rolf. “Nekrolog” (Obituary). *Aktiv Pensionist* (Active Pensioner), No. 2, 2007.

Madsen, Jens. “I en mørk og usikker verden er intet så vidunderligt som at tjene Kristus” (In a Dark and Insecure World There is Nothing as Wonderful as serving Christ). *Advent Ungdom*, February 1954.

Nielsen, Bent. *Begravelsestale for Jens Madsen* (Funeral sermon for Jens Madsen). Daugård, Vejlefyrdkirken, March 5, 2007.

Nielsen, Bent. “Jens Madsen.” *Adventnyt*, April 2007.

Schantz, Hans Jørgen. *I troens bakspejl* (In the Rear-View Mirror of Faith). Nærum, Denmark: Dansk Bogforlag, 1998.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956, 1962-1986, 1987-1993.

NOTES

1. Biographical sheet of Jens Madsen kept in the files of the Historic Archives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Denmark (HASDA). Accessed June 22, 2022.
2. Jena Kvinge (daughter of Jens Madsen), telephone interview with author, on June 23, 2022.
3. Bent Nielsen, *Begravelsestale for Jens Madsen* (Funeral sermon for Jens Madsen), Vejlefyordkirken, March 5, 2007. In custody of HASDA, 1.
4. Hans Jørgen Schantz, *I troens bakspejl* (Nærum, Denmark: Dansk Bogforlag, 1998), 89.
5. Jens Madsen, "I en mørk og usikker verden er intet så vidunderligt som at tjene Kristus" (In a Dark and Insecure World There is Nothing as Wonderful as serving Christ), *Advent Ungdom*, February 1954, 15.
6. Ibid.,
7. Bent Nielsen, *Begravelsestale*, 1-2.
8. Jens Madsen, 15.
9. Bent Nielsen, *Begravelsestale*, 1-2.
10. Ibid., 2.
11. Ibid.
12. Bent Nielsen, "Jens Madsen," *Adventnyt*, April 2007, 22-23
13. Bent Nielsen, *Begravelsestale*, 2
14. Ibid., 3.
15. "West Denmark Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), 137.
16. Walder Hartmann, "Mindeord" (Words of Commemoration), *Kristeligt Dagblad*, March 3, 2007.
17. Hans Jørgen Schantz, 89.
18. Bent Nielsen, *Begravelsestale*, 3.
19. Ibid.
20. "East Denmark Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1962), 156.

21. Rolf Kvinge, "Nekrolog" (Obituary), *Aktiv Pensionist* (Active Pensioner), No. 2, 2007, 10.
22. D.B, "Formandsskifte i unionen" (Change of President in the Union), *Adventnyt*, August 1967, 16.
23. "West Nordic Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, (1968), 189.
24. Bent Nielsen, *Begravelsestale*, 4.
25. Rolf Kvinge, 11.
26. Ibid., 10.
27. Hans Jørgen Schantz, 90.
28. Jena Kvinge, email message to author, July 3, 2022.
29. John Pedersen, former missionary to Greenland (1973-1977), telephone interview with author, July 4, 2022.
30. "Danish Publishing House," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1987), 536.
31. "Danish Union of Churches," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1993), 312.
32. Bent Nielsen, "Jens Madsen," *Adventnyt*.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Rolf Kvinge, 11.
36. Bent Nielsen, "Jens Madsen," *Adventnyt*.
37. Rolf Kvinge, 11.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000