

North Mara Field

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The North Mara Field (NMF) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church under the [Northern Tanzania Union Conference](#) (NTUC), which itself is part of the [East-Central Africa Division](#) (ECD). The Field was officially organized in 2025 following a reorganization of the Mara Conference, reflecting the continued growth and expansion of the Church in northwestern Tanzania. The North Mara Field oversees the Seventh-day Adventist work in key districts of the Mara Region, namely Rorya, Serengeti, and Tarime. At the time of its establishment, the Field reported a membership of approximately 107,511, making it one of the rapidly growing mission territories within the union.¹

Historical Background

The history of the North Mara Field is deeply rooted in early Adventist missionary efforts around Lake Victoria in the early 20th century. The foundation of organized work in this region can be traced to the establishment of the Utimbaru Mission Station, originally referred to as the Lake Field, with its headquarters at Kibumaye. This mission station was officially opened in 1912 under the leadership of [V. E. Toppenberg](#), one of the pioneering missionaries in the region.² He was subsequently joined by Ernst Raessler, J. Person, and F. Bornath, whose collective efforts laid a strong foundation for evangelistic outreach and institutional development.³

The early missionaries faced considerable challenges, including linguistic barriers, unfamiliar cultural contexts, and limited infrastructure. Nevertheless, they demonstrated remarkable commitment by learning local languages and engaging closely with indigenous communities. Their work emphasized not only evangelism but also education and social engagement, which became central features of Adventist mission strategy in the region.⁴

However, the outbreak of World War I (1914–1918) severely disrupted mission activities. Many missionaries were forced to leave their stations, and communication with supporting institutions in Europe became difficult. As a result, the growth and expansion of the mission were temporarily halted.⁵

Following the war, missionary work resumed with renewed vigor. Among those who played a critical role during this period were [F. H. Muderspach](#) and his wife, who arrived to continue the work at Kibumaye. Their

contribution marked a significant phase in the development of the mission, particularly through their integration of medical ministry with evangelism.⁶ Although they temporarily departed in 1925 to serve in other parts of Africa, they later returned and continued their service in the region.⁷

Muderspach eventually became the director of the mission station and served faithfully until his death in 1960. His leadership coincided with a period of increasing stability and expansion in the Adventist work. In the same year, a major administrative milestone was achieved with the formation of the Central Nyanza Field, signaling a transition from mission station-based work to more structured church organization.⁸

Subsequent leadership in the region included Pastor [Simeon Dea Otieno](#), Pastor [Z. Bina](#), and Pastor M. Rutoryo. These leaders contributed to the consolidation of church structures and the expansion of evangelistic outreach. Over time, the territory evolved administratively into what became known as the Mara Field, laying the groundwork for further reorganizations that would eventually result in the establishment of the North Mara Field in 2025.⁹

Organizational Development and Growth

The development of the North Mara Field reflects a broader pattern of growth within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tanzania. Early administrative units such as the Majita-Ukerewe and Ururi Field, organized in 1909, and the East Lake Field, organized in 1912, provided the initial framework for mission work in the Lake Victoria region.¹⁰

By 1960, the expanding membership and geographical spread of the Church necessitated further administrative restructuring, leading to the creation of the Central Nyanza Field and East Nyanza Field.¹¹ These developments marked a shift toward more localized governance and improved coordination of mission activities.

In 1977, the Mara Field was officially organized, representing a significant milestone in the institutional growth of the church. Continued expansion led to the formation of the Mara-Kagera Field in 1982, which later attained conference status in 1987. The establishment of the Mara Conference in 1990 further strengthened the administrative capacity of the church in the region.¹²

Over the following decades, sustained evangelistic efforts, population growth, and increased institutional development contributed to a substantial rise in church membership. This growth eventually necessitated the reorganization of the Mara Conference, resulting in the creation of the North Mara Field in 2025. At the time of its formation, the Field comprised 302 churches and a membership exceeding 100,000, reflecting both numerical growth and organizational maturity.¹³

Tarime

The Tarime District represents one of the earliest centers of Adventist missionary activity in the North Mara Field. Mission work in this area began in 1912 through the efforts of V. E. Toppenberg, Ernst Raessler, and J. Person. A significant development during this period was the establishment of a mission school at Kibumaye by F. Bornath and his wife.¹⁴ Recognizing the importance of effective communication, the Bornaths dedicated themselves to learning the Kurya language, which enabled them to engage more meaningfully with the local population.

Bornath was assisted by Mwita Mukira, who served as a translator from Kiswahili into Kikurya. This collaboration facilitated the early spread of the Adventist message among the Kurya people. Evangelistic work gained further momentum during the leadership of Chief Siongo, who allowed the preaching of Christianity following the death of Chief Werema.¹⁵

A significant milestone was reached on April 23, 1914, when the first group of converts was baptized under the leadership of Pastor Ernest Pearson.¹⁶ This event marked the beginning of an enduring Adventist presence in Tarime.

Despite this early progress, World War I interrupted missionary efforts and slowed the growth of the church. However, the return of F. H. Muderspach in the 1930s marked a new phase of development. Together with his wife, he employed medical missionary work as a means of evangelism. Their approach, characterized by compassion and inclusivity, helped to build trust and foster deeper relationships with the local community.¹⁷

Following Muderspach's temporary departure in 1934, H. A. Mathews continued the work, conducting public evangelistic campaigns that resulted in approximately 60 baptisms. Muderspach later returned in 1941 and continued to serve until his death in 1960. His legacy remains significant in the history of Adventism in the region, particularly for his holistic approach to ministry and his commitment to social equality.¹⁸

Rorya

The development of Adventist work in Rorya is closely associated with the efforts of Pastor Hugo Palm, who established the Shirati Mission in 1913. Palm had first visited Tanganyika in 1909 and returned in 1912 before settling in Shirati. He later moved to Michire, an area that came to be known as Kanyosingo.¹⁹

Palm's missionary strategy included evangelistic outreach to surrounding villages such as Michere and Minigo, as well as the study of the Luo language to enhance communication. His efforts yielded a small number of early converts, including Barnabas Gungu and Petro Ogilo, who later became important contributors to the spread of the Adventist message in the region.

The progress of the mission was tragically interrupted during World War I. On November 28, 1914, Palm was killed by soldiers who reportedly misinterpreted his actions as hostile. His death marked a significant setback for the mission, but it did not bring the work to an end.

In the years that followed, local converts assumed greater responsibility for evangelistic activities. Barnabas Gungu, along with Marko Onyango, Petro Ogilo, and Thadayo Okumu, was sent to Kenya for literacy training to enable them to read and teach the Bible effectively. This emphasis on indigenous leadership proved crucial for the sustainability of the mission.²⁰

Missionary L. A. Watson later expanded the work by establishing mission stations and schools in several locations, including Busanga, Kirogo, Minigo, Rwangenyi, Shirati, and Sota. Due to environmental challenges, he eventually relocated to Utimbaru. By 1929, evangelistic work among the Luo-speaking population was largely led by trained local workers, marking a transition toward indigenous leadership in mission.

Mugumu (Serengeti)

The expansion of Adventist work into the Serengeti area, particularly Mugumu, occurred later than in Tarime and Rorya. In 1963, Pastor Petro Marwa Gesase and his wife, Mbusiro Gibaka, played a central role in establishing the church in this region while serving in the Ngoreme district.

Their ministry was characterized by close collaboration with local believers, including early converts such as Jeremia Gekura and his wife Rahel, Jeremia Babere and his wife Tabitha, Yusufu Wanka and his wife Rahel, Elizabeth Weirungu, Samson Itembe, Zakaria Waitacha, and Isaka Nyansiri. These individuals formed the nucleus of the Adventist community in Mugumu and contributed to the establishment of stable congregations.²¹

The work in Mugumu highlights the importance of pastoral dedication, lay involvement, and community engagement in the expansion of the church. It also reflects the broader pattern of Adventist mission in Tanzania, where local believers increasingly played a leading role in evangelism and church growth.

Educational Institutions

Education has been an integral component of the Adventist mission in the North Mara Field. The field operates several educational institutions that contribute to both academic excellence and spiritual formation. Among these are Nyansincha Adventist Secondary School in Tarime District, Nyabehore Adventist Secondary School in Serengeti District, and Murderspach Memorial Adventist Primary School in Kibumaye.²²

These institutions serve a significant number of students and are staffed by trained personnel committed to holistic education. Their strong academic performance at district, regional, and national levels reflects the effectiveness of Adventist educational philosophy, which emphasizes intellectual, moral, and spiritual development.

In addition to providing formal education, these schools serve as centers of evangelism and community engagement. Through chaplaincy programs, Bible studies, and community outreach initiatives, they play a vital

role in nurturing faith and promoting the values of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Leadership

At the time of its organization in 2025, the North Mara Field was administered by a team of elected officers responsible for overseeing its operations and mission activities. These included Benjamin Ngarama Biha as president, Baraka Boniphace Nchama as executive secretary, and Grace Mwakobera as treasurer. Their leadership marked the beginning of a new administrative phase aimed at strengthening mission effectiveness and supporting continued growth within the field.²³

In conclusion, the leadership of Benjamin Ngarama Biha, Baraka Boniphace Nchama, and Grace Mwakobera provided a foundational structure upon which the North Mara Field could build its mission and administrative stability. Their collaborative efforts not only guided the field through its formative stage but also set a clear direction for future development, spiritual growth, and effective service. As the field continues to expand, this initial leadership remains significant in shaping its identity, vision, and commitment to advancing the work of the church in the region.

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