

# Burkina Faso Mission

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## BEN ISSOUF OUÉDRAOGO

Ben Issouf Ouédraogo, B.A. (Cosendai Adventist University, Cameroon). Ouédraogo is the president of Burkina Faso Mission. He is married to Emma and has a daughter and a son.

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The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Burkina Faso is directed by the Burkina Faso Mission, which is part of the Eastern Sahel Union Mission in the West-Central Africa Division. As of June 30, 2018, in Burkina Faso there were 12 churches, 2,025 baptized members, and a total population of 20,258,000.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, the Burkina Faso Mission had five ordained ministers.<sup>2</sup> The mission headquarters is in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.<sup>3</sup>

## Brief Organizational History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Burkina Faso

Pastor Henri Kempf, from France, was the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary to Burkina Faso. He arrived in the country, known then as Upper Volta, in 1971, and the mission was established in 1972 and organized in 1973. When the work began in Upper Volta in 1971, the country was one of the four French-speaking countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Upper Volta, and Benin) of the West African Union in Accra, Ghana.<sup>4</sup>

For a long time, the Francophone and Portuguese missions of the West African countries, such as Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Senegal, were part of the West Africa Union Mission whose headquarters were in Lagos, Nigeria, and later moved to Accra, Ghana. In 1981, at the creation of the new Africa-Indian Ocean Division, the Francophone and Portuguese-speaking countries of West Africa were grouped together to form a new entity known as the Sahel Union Mission with headquarters in Dakar, Senegal.<sup>5</sup>

It was around 1965 that the union executive committee began to look towards the Upper Volta. Brother Warren, editor-in-chief of the Advent Press in Ghana, was sent by the committee to make a prospecting trip to Ouagadougou, the capital city of the Upper Volta. In 1970, Bert B. Beach, Education secretary of the North European and West African Division, upon his return from a board meeting in Accra, made a stop in Upper Volta to contact various religious leaders. Little by little, the plans to open the work in the Upper Volta took shape. In January 1971 it was decided at the union executive committee meeting to send Pastor Henri Kempf, who was at that time on study leave at Andrews University, to Upper Volta.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent to a service request in France by the West Africa Union Mission for the establishment of the SDA Church in Upper Volta, Brother R. Erdmann, the administrator of the Adventist Mission Society in France, sent correspondence to the Minister of Interior Affairs of the Republic of Upper Volta on November 17, 1971,

requesting authorization to start the SDA work in Upper Volta under the supervision of Pastor Henri Kempf. On December 13, 1971, the state minister wrote Brother Erdmann granting authorization for the establishment of the SDA Church in Upper Volta.<sup>7</sup> Alf Lohne, the former secretary of the Northern European-West Africa Division said: "Since we already proclaim the message in most countries, it makes big news when our workers cross borders into unentered territories. On November 2, 1971, Pastor Henri Kempf did just that. He moved to the city of Ouagadougou, capital of Upper Volta, in the heart of West Africa."<sup>8</sup> The first constituency session of the Adventist Mission of Upper Volta was held on December 3, 1971. The executive committee of the mission was composed of Pastor Henri Kempf (president), Josette Josephau (secretary-treasurer), Bernard Amekuwodi, John K. Oti, and Mathias Goulébouna Boussoum.<sup>9</sup>

In 1972 a one-acre parcel of land was purchased in the center of the capital, Ouagadougou, where an open-air evangelistic center was established. In relation to this purchase, Alf Lohne said: "It does, however, cost a lot of money. When all funds are put together, there is still about twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) lacking. A special offering, therefore, has been or will be taken in our churches in Northern Europe and West Africa, to boost the funds available to get the land."<sup>10</sup> The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering overflow for March 1970, provided most of the funds needed. The rest came from appropriations, special gifts, and offerings. Pastor Kempf's personal commitment to God, his ministry, and his concern for people in need fostered the creation of the first Adventist company at the current site of the Burkina Faso Mission.<sup>11</sup>

To succeed in his mission, Pastor Kempf teamed up with two literature evangelists, Bernard Amekuwodi and Goulébouna Mathias Boussoum and their families from Togo. Bernard and Matthias moved around town to place books and take addresses of prospects for Bible studies. From January to February of 1974, Pastor Antoine Rase came from Brussels to hold a five-day plan to quit smoking, then an open-air evangelistic meeting. Later, Doctor Nagel, who had worked 25 years in Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone, held an evangelistic series at the chamber of commerce for four weeks in August 1974. It took five years of intense labor before the first converts were baptized in 1977. In that same year, Pastor Ralph Seechurn arrived from Mauritius to reinforce the missionary team.

In the aftermath of recurring droughts, in 1974 the government offered the church a piece of land of 50,000 acres in the province of Bazèga for irrigation farming. Supported by Peter Wright<sup>12</sup> and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA),<sup>13</sup> Pastor Kempf used the opportunity to extend the Adventist message there by establishing a school of agriculture, then known as the Adventist Mission's Horticultural Center (CHOMA) in Lillebourrè, 85 kilometers from Ouagadougou. For the first promotion, the school trained 40 students at a time in water conservation and the growing of potatoes, carrots, beans, tomatoes, etc. This important relief program helped to supply some of the immediate needs of the surrounding population. Victor Agbeko, Julien M. Thiombiano, Gérard Layous, and Olivier Guth, subsequently managed CHOMA.

Some years later the school was renamed the ADRA Agricultural Training Center (Centre ADRA de Formation Maraîchère, CAFORMA) and it continues to be part of a plan to provide a permanent solution to the recurring drought and famine which are a threat to the country. A small dispensary was opened next to the school to provide basic healthcare to both students and the surrounding community. On January 28, 1987, Pastor Daniel Cordas laid the foundation stone of a 250-seat chapel on the site of the school.<sup>14</sup> The ADRA Agricultural Training Center was used to facilitate the expansion of the Church throughout the country. Many people who converted to Seventh-day Adventism were trained there and later on employed as Bible workers in their respective provinces. The center has made a great impact on national development by equipping young people with skills that made them self-reliant in agriculture.

As the result of this hard work through literature evangelism and the school of agriculture, the first converts to be baptized between 1977 and 1982 included Sévérin Ahossouhé (May 14, 1977), Vincent Sibiri Tiendrebéogo (May 15, 1977), Barthélémy Ki (August 20, 1977), Léopold Daniel Thiombiano (May 14, 1977), Kagoné Guesserima Paul (December 30, 1978), Antoine Kinané (May 5, 1979), Mandia Julien Thiombiano (March 29, 1980), Abiba Thiombiano/Nassouri (March 29, 1980), Rakia Ki/Lalé (April 26, 1980), Véronique Kinané/Ki (April 26, 1980), Philippe Kaboré (November 8, 1980), Zarata Kaboré/Ouédraogo (November 8, 1980), Gustave Guinko (May 9, 1981), Marie Cécile Guinko (May 9, 1981), Salmata Ahossouhé/Yago (May 30, 1981), Dénise Apiou/Gomgnimbou (May 30, 1981), Hamadou Zougmoré (March 21, 1981), Kagoné S. Thérèse (December 25, 1981), Gombraogo Ouédraogo (January 2, 1982), Valentin Souma (April 24, 1982), Jean François Bouda (May 8, 1982), Hortense Coulibaly/Kadeba (May 8, 1982), and Adiza Kouon/Zampaligré (May 8, 1982).

The first executive committee board of the mission was officially put in place on April 17, 1978. With the increase in membership, the first general assembly of the Association of Adventist Churches in Upper Volta was held from May 7 to 10, 1982. This assembly voted to carry the Adventist message to other strategic cities such as Dédougou, Bobo Dioulasso, and Kongoussi, with the help of lay members, trainees of CAFORMA, and literature evangelists.<sup>15</sup> Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Burkina Faso is present in almost all the provinces of the country.

Some decades later the Adventist message reached many other parts of Burkina Faso through missionary programs such as Global Mission, Gospel Outreach USA and Canada, and Adventist Frontier Mission (AFM). In 1992 two Adventist Frontier missionaries (Kurt Unglaub from the United States and Herbert Prandl from Austria) took the Adventist message to the Lobi in the southwestern part of the country. Their strategy consisted of establishing a good rapport with villagers, helping them with basic needs, and then giving Bible studies. Their first converts were baptized in 1994. In 2015 there were about 438 Lobi Seventh-day Adventists in Burkina Faso.

<sup>16</sup> The mission currently manages nine primary schools, a secondary school, an Adventist Book Center, and a dental clinic.<sup>17</sup>

## Past and Current Mission Presidents

Henri Kempf (1971-1978); Joachim Lérius Roland (1978-1981); Daniel Grisier (1982-1985); Claude Anthelme Lombart (1986-1989); Arlyn Sundsted (1990-1992); Araujo Gilsenberg (1992-1993); Araujo Gilberto Carlos (1993-2000); Richard Parent (2001-2002); Sylvain Ballais (2002-2005); José Luis Santa Cruz (2005-2010); Léopold M. Agbossassa (2011-2013); Jean K. Agboli (2014 -2015); Ben Issouf Ouédraogo (2016-present).<sup>18</sup>

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### SOURCES

*2019 Annual Statistical Report: 155<sup>th</sup> Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2017*. Seventh-day Adventist Church, Silver Spring, Maryland, 2019.

Lohn, Alf. "Seventh-day Adventists enter new country." *Northern Light* (European), vol. 22, no. 9, 1972.

Lohne, Alf. "Trusting down Adventist roots in Upper Volta." *ARH*, April 26, 1973.

Lombart, Claude and Jack Mahon. *ARH* (French version), May 15, 1987.

Sanou, Boubakar. *A Biblical and Missiological Framework for Cross-cultural Mission: A Case Study of the Lobi Funeral Rites in Burkina Faso*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 2015.

Scragg, W. R. L. and M. Carol Hetzell, "School of Agriculture opens in Upper Volta." *Advent Messenger*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1976.

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1972-2019, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org>.

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### NOTES

1. "Burkina Faso Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2019), 395.
2. *2019 Annual Statistical Report: 155<sup>th</sup> Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2017* (Seventh-day Adventist Church, Silver Spring, Maryland, 2019), 68.
3. "Burkina Faso Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2019), 395.
4. The 1971 records, Archives of SDA Mission in Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
5. The 1981 records, Secretariat Archive of the East Sahel Union Mission, Lome, Togo.
6. Archives of the SDA Mission in Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

7. Ibid.
8. Alf Lohn, "Seventh-day Adventists enter new country," *Northern Light* (European), vol. 22, no. 9, 1972, 2.
9. Archives of the SDA Mission in Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
10. Alf Lohne, "Trusting down Adventist roots in Upper Volta," *ARH*, April 26, 1973, 15.
11. Kougwindiga Sougrinoma Amos, essay on the history of Burkina Faso Mission, senior research project for Bachelor Degree in Theology, June 2008, 21-22, Valley View University, Accra, Ghana.
12. ICCO stands for Interchurch Organization for Development Co-operation. This was a Danish NGO in support for training and agricultural activities. Peter Wright, the first director of the project, was solicited by the Church to create CHOMA and thus helped young people in skills development and job founding. Most of the Church Bible instructors are converts from this training center.
13. W. R. L. Scragg and M. Carol Hetzell, "School of Agriculture opens in Upper Volta," *Advent Messenger*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1976.
14. Claude Lombart and Jack Mahon, *ARH* (French version), May 15, 1987, 3.
15. Paul G. Kagoné, who passed away March 15, 2016, was a literature evangelist who extensively helped to establish the Adventist presence in many parts of Burkina Faso and Niger.
16. Boubakar Sanou, *A Biblical and Missiological Framework for Cross-cultural Mission: A Case Study of the Lobi Funeral Rites in Burkina Faso*, PhD Dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 2015.
17. The ADRA Dental Clinic has become Amaria Dental Clinic currently managed by Dr. Daniel Thiombiano on the basis of a rental contract based on the mission-owned building.
18. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1972-2019, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org>.

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