

Muderspach, John L. C. (1925–1990)

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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.

John Muderspach was a highly respected leader who was known for his professional skills in business and finance and who in the middle of the hustle and bustle of his work found time to be human in the best sense of the word. He served the church for 47 years in Denmark, West and East Africa, as well as at the Headquarters of the Northern European/Trans-European Division.

Early Life

John Louis Christian Muderspach was born on August 15, 1925, in Hutchinson, Kansas, U.S.A., where his Danish father Hakon Muderspach took his B.A. at the Danish-Norwegian Theological Seminary and taught history and religion (1922–1928).¹ His mother Maja (née Sinisalo) was from Finland.² And he had an older sister, Mary.³ When he was three, the Muderspach family returned to Denmark, where his father worked as an evangelist, Bible teacher, departmental director, and conference president, while John was still a young man.⁴ John completed his education at Vejlefjord Højskole before he began denominational employment at Skodsborg Badesanatorium near Copenhagen in April 1943. There he worked in the office for about ten years.⁵ In 1951 he married Kirsten Hedager,⁶ and over the years they raised a family of four children.⁷

Ministry



John Muderspach

Photo courtesy of the Historic Archive of Seventh-day Adventists (HASDA) in Denmark.

In 1954 the call came for Muderspach to go to West Africa,⁸ to work in Sierra Leone as secretary-treasurer, as well as publishing and Young People's Missionary Volunteer department director from 1955–1959.⁹ Together with other leaders at the mission office, he would participate in evangelistic efforts to set an example for the rest of the workers and members.¹⁰ From 1959–1962 he worked two and a half years as secretary-treasurer in the Ghana Mission.^{11 12} In 1962 he was asked to go to the West African Union Mission, where he first assisted Niels Balle Nielsen in the secretariat and treasury,^{13 14} and then took full responsibility as union treasurer from 1963–1969.¹⁵

After several years of negotiation in August 1964, B. S. Christensen, president of the Sierra Leone Mission, and Muderspach, representing the West Africa Union Mission, were able to sign an agreement on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the government of Sierra Leone for the operation of the Masanga Leprosarium, which for years to come was to become a successful Adventist institution.¹⁶

In 1970, after 14 years in West Africa, the family returned to Denmark, where Muderspach first worked as personnel manager at Skodsborg Sanatorium¹⁷ and later as an accountant.¹⁸

In 1979 a call came for the Muderspachs to move to Africa. This time to East Africa, where John Muderspach would work as secretary-treasurer in the East African Union of the Afro-Mideast Division, based in Nairobi.¹⁹ His work there lasted only 17 months before he and Kirsten were asked to move again.²⁰ At the General Conference session in Dallas, Texas, 1980, he was elected as treasurer for the Northern European Division and moved to St. Albans, United Kingdom. At the same time, he became responsible for the Stewardship and Development department in the division.²¹ One of his challenges was to see to the development of the division college that catered for nine Northern European countries. A new chapter in this development began when Newbold College was extended to seminary status in 1982 with a Master of Divinity program and the building of a new Seminary building.²²

At the General Conference session in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1985, the position of “world foods service director” for the division was added to Muderspach's portfolio.²³ From 1986 the Northern European Division was reorganized as the Trans-European Division still with Muderspach as the treasurer.²⁴ With 47 years of employment in the Adventist Church, it was Muderspach's intention to retire from active service in the summer of 1990. On February 24 John suddenly died at the age of 64, when he and Kirsten were visiting family and looking for a retirement home in Denmark.²⁵

Legacy

With unique insight into financial planning and an inexhaustible kindness and helpfulness, Muderspach helped making plans for the Adventist Church's evangelistic work, not only in the British Isles and the Nordic countries but also in Israel, Greece, Pakistan, Poland, The Netherlands, Hungary, and former Yugoslavia. His associates saw how he worked extra during fluctuating dollar rates and tried to support the work in the countries that were

having the hardest time coping financially. He worked hard for the relief work in Israel, Greece, and Pakistan. "He was always willing to help and did not know when to stop," one of his close associates said. "He always put a human face to administrative efficiency. Friends and associates knew that they never went in vain for help and information. Politely and encouragingly he found a way out of every situation. And he did not leave his office or meeting hall before it was ensured that everything was arranged in the best possible way."²⁶

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NOTES

1. Finn H. Opsahl, "In memoriam", *Evangeliets Sendebud*, April 1990.

2. Kurt Faddersbøll, "Biografier – Muderspach, H.," *Adventkirken Aarhus*, Private publication, Aarhus, Denmark, 1995, 205.

3. Mary Louise Muderspach Holst (1924 – 2012) was trained at Skodsborg as a physiotherapist and married Tage Holst. E-Mail from her daughter, Lisa Stigre, 20.11.2022.
4. Faddersbøll, 205.
5. Thorvald Kristensen, "Nekrolog" (Obituary), *Adventnyt*, April 1990.
6. Kirsten Hedager (1928-2020). Opsahl, and Lisa Stigre.
7. Erik, Steen, Frank, and Gitte.
8. "TED Treasurer John Muderspach Dies Suddenly in Denmark," Newsbreak, *Adventist Review*, March 15, 1990, 6.
9. "Sierra Leone," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956-1959).
10. Howard J. Welch, "Sierra Leone Leaders Hold Effort in Bo Church," *West Africa Advent Messenger*, September 1, 1959, 15.
11. "Ghana Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1960-1962); "John Muderspach," *Light*, March 1990, 1.
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14. Edgar A. Warren, ed., "Farewell to the Muderspach Family," *West Africa Advent Messenger*, June 1969, 2.
15. "West African Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1964-1969); "John Muderspach," *Dabrowski*, 1.
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17. "Skodsborg Sanitarium," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1971-1972).
18. "Skodsborg Sanitarium," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1973-1979); Opsahl.
19. "Euro African Union," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 109.
20. A newspaper clipping from unknown paper in Denmark, March 2, 1990 (in the author's private collection).
21. "Nominating Committee Reports – 6, 7," *ARH*, April 23, 1980, 24.

22. Helen Pearson, "England, Ground broken for seminary," *ARH*, January 14, 1982, 20.
 23. "List of officers and directors in the divisions," *Adventist Review*, July 18-25, 1985, 15.
 24. "Trans-European Division," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1986), 333.
 25. Opsahl; Ray Dabrowski, "Obituaries: Muderspach, John," *British Advent Messenger*, March 30, 1990, 7.
 26. Dabrowski, Opsahl, and a newspaper clipping from an unknown paper in Denmark, March 2, 1990 (in the author's private collection).
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