

# Number, Mathew Onesimus Akuka (1933–1972)

EMMANUEL DARIYA BARDE

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Matthew A. Number, an Adventist educator and administrator in Nigeria, was born in 1933 to Kakwi, a member of the largest ethnic group, the Amo, of the Pengana Chiefdom of Bassa in central Nigeria. Kakwi was the father of thirteen children of which Mathew was the firstborn.<sup>1</sup> Though Kakwi's baptismal name was Simon (1898-1984), his original name, Lamba was a Hausa word which was translated "Number" in the English language by his son, Mathew, and that was the origin of Matthew Number's surname.<sup>2</sup> Kakwi's three younger brothers, Filibus Mayam, Bulus Mallum, and Samaila Yinwa, were among the core group of ordained ministers who laid the foundation of the Adventist mission work in Northern Nigeria established at Jengre by John Hyde in 1931.

Mathew was born shortly after the establishment of the Adventist mission station at Jengre. Though healthy at birth, at an early age he was attacked by polio, which retarded his normal growth as a child. He survived polio but had a deformed spine, and so lived the rest of his life with a hunchback. It was on account of the prolonged illness, which caused him to cry most of the time, that he was named Akuka, meaning a crying child.<sup>3</sup> He was, however, popularly known by his baptismal names Mathew and Onesimus.

Mathew was a member of the first group of students to attend the Jengre Seventh-day Adventist Primary School between 1945 and 1951, with his mates Jechilia Audu, Natu Saku, and Daniel Magaji among others.<sup>4</sup> He gained admission to the Nigerian Training College at Ihie, Nbawsi, in East Nigeria and was the first national of the



Matthew Akuka Number

Photo courtesy of Istifanus Ishaya.

Adventist Church in Northern Nigeria to be trained as a Grade Two Teacher. He completed the course in 1957, although his certificate was issued in 1958.<sup>5</sup>

In 1959, Mathew began his teaching career at Jengre Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, where his cousin, Emmanuel Dariya, was among his students in primary one. Mathew married Jenny, the daughter of Hananniya Manyi, in 1959. They had six children: Michael, Gabriel, Simon, Samuel, and Susanna. Another child, Danlami, died prematurely.<sup>6</sup>

Between 1965 and 1966, Mathew attended the School of Agriculture–Bauchi for his Grade One Teachers Certificate. On his return in 1966, he was appointed headmaster of the school. A position he held until the end of 1968.<sup>7</sup>

In January 1969, Mathew was appointed the mission education secretary and the director of the Voice of Prophecy Correspondence School, the first national to hold these key positions in the North Nigeria Mission.<sup>8</sup> He and his cousin, Ishaku Bulus Mallum, compiled the first edition of *Wakokin Yabo* (a hymn book in the Hausa language) in 1968.<sup>9</sup> During his tenure, Mathew encouraged the development and expansion of Adventist Christian education in northern Nigeria. An additional primary school was built at Laranto in the city of Jos in 1966. Several rural Bible schools were established which served as the feeders of the two primary schools at Jengre and Jos.

Mathew Number positively touched the lives of many young men. He inspired and motivated young men and women to study and specialize in different educational careers. Currently the Amo-speaking people have the highest number of educated professionals in northern Nigeria.

He was also remembered for his great communicative skills. He was fluent in both English and his native Hausa language, which he used effectively in teaching, preaching, and translating of the *Sabbath School Quarterly Lessons*. He died on July 15, 1972.<sup>10</sup>

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## SOURCES

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970.

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## NOTES

1. Yusufu Gagau, Mathew and Emmanuel Dariya's younger brother and Mathew's cousin, interviewed by author, June 29, 2021.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

4. Interview with Jechilia Audu, by Allen Number (Son), June 28, 2021, Jengre, Nigeria.
  5. Ibid.
  6. Ibid.
  7. Ibid.
  8. "North Nigeria Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970), 200; Letter of appointment seen by Pastor Istifanus Ishaya during a visit to the Pastor Simon Lamba Kakwi's archives in Jengre, Nigeria, July 18, 2021.
  9. The First WakokinYabo (SDAH), Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Northern States of Nigeria, 1967.
  10. Jenny Number, wife of Mathew, interview by author, June 7, 2021.
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