

Sande, Hezron (1937–2010)

MARTIN DIGOLO SANDE

Martin Digolo Sande holds a B.A. in Education degree and is pursuing an M.A. in Education at Moi University, Kenya. He is a church elder at Maseno SDA Church with an interest in translating church manuscripts into Dholuo and Kiswahili. Currently, he is a part-time translator with African Herald Publishing House and Central Nyanza Conference.

Hezron Sande was a pastor and administrator in Kenya.

Early Years

Hezron Sande was born in 1937 in the Makhua Village, the North Gem location, Siaya County, Kenya.¹ He was the first-born son of Abednego Obuga and Agneta Achola. He was the only boy of the four children. His father was polygamous, his mother being the last of four wives. His father was a very wealthy man for the time. He was generous in giving to religious affairs. He donated the land upon which Malanga Seventh-day Church is standing today. This he did after breaking ranks with the Anglican Church, which was dominant before the Adventist faith entered the area. Though some of his clan men tried to fight him over the land he donated, he stood his ground.

The young Hezron Sande's mother embraced the Adventist Church. In my interview with him on December 3, 2005 at his home, just three days after Thanksgiving Day following his retirement, he said, "...I was told that when I was hardly 6 years, during camp meeting sessions, I would be taken to the podium and recite books of the Bible which I had memorized. This made people marvel at how my brain could contain all these. To me, this was a preparation for what I would be years later..."²

His father had died in 1952 when he was 15 and had not started schooling yet. His father was not keen on educating him since his older cousins had dropped out of school. He had become his father's trusted herds-boy. After his death, his polygamous family disintegrated as a result of rivalry. Sande and his siblings were denied their rightful inheritance. The young Hezron Sande left home for Uganda to escape the harsh environment and to find work. Without any education, he had no choice but to find work as a casual laborer for four years.

While away in Uganda, his mother kept on praying for him as she tried to get him to come back home. After several years of such attempts without success, the nostalgic mother decided to travel to Uganda in 1955. By God's grace, she found him and brought him back. Sande had longed for formal education. He had saved a meager Sh. 10 (then about £0.5) from his labor in Uganda.

Education and Marriage

He began his education in 1955 and used the little savings he had to secure admission in Class One at Maliera Adventist School at the age of 19. He recalled how his fellow learners would ridicule him about his advanced age. That did not discourage him. He continued with his education and also became deeply involved in church activities. He was baptized in 1959. His active involvement in church activities made the church pastor ask the school to allow him to assist in the services at Malanga Adventist Church. The rest of the learners were restricted to worship at Maliera Church to ensure their attendance. Pastor Nikolao Opiyo, who was then the Maliera Mission Station director, loved him for his dedication to the worship services.³ He was quite intelligent, and the school administration made him accelerate by skipping class five, among other favors. Due to lack of school fees, he had to work on people's farms to raise the money to pay for his schooling.

Sande successfully sat for his KAPE (Kenya African Preliminary Examination) in 1961. He later joined Nyanza Commercial College, where he trained in Book Keeping and Accounts. After the training, he joined Kisumu Municipality where he was employed as water operator, a job he enjoyed tremendously. He also continued serving God in the Church. It did not take long before Pastors Nikolao Opiyo and H. Obat visited him one evening with the news of his appointment as an untrained teacher at Luanda Dudi Mission School. He didn't disappoint them since they had recommended him as a diligent member of the Church who had longed for service in Church institutions.

In 1966, he joined Kamagambo Adventist Teacher Training College to train as a P2 teacher. The previous year, he had sat for the Kenya Junior Secondary Education Certificate as a private candidate. After graduating from Kamagambo Adventist College, he taught for 12 years before receiving another call to join the African Herald Publishing House, a Church printing press at Kendu Bay. Prior to that, Hezron Sande had sat for the O-Level certificate and was promoted to P1 teacher status. He was also a devoted member of Malanga SDA Church where he served as their Lay Activities leader. He also served on various School Boards, Maliera Secondary School being one of them. In 1979, he resigned from teaching under Teachers Service Commission to serve as a translator at the Publishing House, a job he performed with diligence and dedication.

Hezron Sande married Alice Aketch in 1967 at Maliera SDA Church. They had 10 children, namely: the late Prisca Achieng', Loice Atieno, Caleb Wasonga, Mary Awuor, David Abwao, Martin Digolo, George Akwenda, Joash Diemo, Samwel Ochieng', and John Omondi.

Ministry

Hezron Sande worked at the publishing house for three years translating manuscripts, among them Bible Study Guides and Mission Emphasis in Dholuo language. In 1983, Hezron Sande joined the ministry as the first district leader of the Kisumu South District. It was under his leadership that the foundation of the Kisumu South Church was laid. He served the district for one year before moving to Busia District in 1984. In 1986, he joined the Kamagambo Ministerial Training Institute to earn a Diploma in Ministerial Studies.⁴

In 1987, Hezron Sande was transferred to Koru District where he served until 1990 when the North Nyanza Field was born. He was ordained as a minister of the Gospel in 1988 at the age of 51. In 1991, Pastor Sande became the first station director for Ahero Station, where he served for one year before being elected the first Stewardship director, North Nyanza Field, in 1992. He served at the helm of the department for four years until 1995. In December 1995 at the East African Union Session held in Mombasa, Hezron Sande was elected the Second executive director of Central Nyanza Field, a position he held until 2000.

Hezron Sande retired from service in 2004 after serving the Church actively for 25 years. His last station of service was in the Buholo District, Maliera Station. His wife Alice Sande was with him wherever he served. She never engaged in any formal work other than the shepherdess role.

Sickness and Death

Pastor Hezron Sande never lived long enough to enjoy his retirement life. Throughout his active service, he had never complained about a serious health condition until December 2006 when he fell ill and was diagnosed with acute Diabetes. It was on a Sabbath that he slipped while at the church pulpit at home and almost collapsed. He then was kept under close medical watch. His condition kept on deteriorating, and he succumbed to his illness on November 8, 2010, at his home. On his death, the condolence message from the West Kenyan Union was delivered by Elder Dan Agwena, Union treasurer. He described him as a mentor to many pastors who was tolerant and a great motivator in the Lord's Vineyard. He was survived by his wife Alice Sande, nine children, and 26 grandchildren.

Contribution

Pastor Hezron Sande was an important figure in the growth of the Central Nyanza Conference (formerly Field). Being the first stewardship director of the newly created field and with low income, he had to traverse the region with the Gospel of faithfulness to God. Later he would be the chief administrator of the field and initiated projects on the newly acquired land where the field headquarters are based. The construction of workers' quarters and the field offices were given prominence. Today, the Central Nyanza Conference headquarters beautifully shares the same compound with the West Kenya Union Conference. His tenure saw expansion in the workforce, growth in income and planting of many churches within the Central Nyanza Conference.

NOTES

1. Unless stated otherwise, this article is based on the author's personal knowledge as Hezron Sande's son.

2. Alice Sande, interview by author, October 22, 2018.

3. Jane Obuya, interview by author, October 22, 2018.

4. David Sande, interview by author, October 12, 2018.

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