

Adventist Dental Services, Zimbabwe

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Eddina Zvidzai Ngirishi, Dip. Information Technology (Business & Computing Examinations, London), worked as dental assistant for the Adventist Orthodontic Services of the Eastern Africa Division in Harare, Zimbabwe, from 1988 to 2007. Since 2016, she has been a dental assistant for the Adventist Dental Services of the Zimbabwe East Union Conference. She and her husband, Pastor Andrew Ngirishi, have two adult children.

The Adventist Dental Services (formerly known as Adventist Orthodontics Services) is one of the Zimbabwe East Union Conference medical entities located in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe (formerly known as Rhodesia). It is situated in Newlands, Highlands Suburb, at the corner of old Enterprise Road and Princess Drive. It was established in 1982 by the Trans-Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists under the name Adventist Orthodontic Services.

Developments That Led to the Establishment of the Institution

The clinic originally started operations in a rented apartment on Park Street in the then-Salisbury (Harare) central business district. The Division bought the dental equipment that belonged to a South African orthodontist who had been renting this apartment and was leaving the country. By 1984, the clinic relocated to a new house purchased by the Division. The house located at 4 Princess Drive was renovated and turned into a clinic. The clinic was now more conveniently located, being adjacent to the Division offices situated at 2 Princess Drive.

Around that time, in 1980, Zimbabwe had gained its political independence. Between 1980-1985, the new government instituted free health care services for those whose monthly income was less than Z\$150, which comprised the majority of the population.¹ The health services in the country were still largely managed by the private sector, as 60% of doctors were not in government service. The proportion of doctors in the public sector only increased by 10% between 1980-1989, while the number of doctors graduating from the University of Zimbabwe increased by 40%.² The Adventist Orthodontics Services opened at just the right time to enhance the medical missionary work of the Adventist Church in a country whose population had new expectations of their political independence after a long period of colonial subjugation.

In 1982, the Trans-Africa Division comprised twelve countries in the sub-Saharan region with a population of nearly 49 million.³ There were 1,163 churches and a church membership of 172,656. The East Zimbabwe Field with a population of almost 3.5 million, 94 churches, and 14,345 baptized members would provide the majority of clients for the envisioned clinic.⁴

The clinic relied on the services of missionary physicians from the Loma Linda University Medical Center in California, USA. It offered specialty dental therapy to European and Asian families and especially to school children living in Harare and its surrounding areas at a reasonably affordable fee. The collected fees were enough for the clinic to be self-sustaining.⁵

The Adventist Orthodontics Services consisted of a reception area, three operatory rooms in the central area, an x-ray room, a laboratory, a business office, a private office, and restrooms. Because the clinic was located near the church's regional headquarters, and because the headquarters had many international personnel, the clinic would draw a significant portion of its clientele from the headquarters' expatriate families.

Founding and History of the Institution

The General Conference Executive Committee voted on February 25, 1982, to request the services of Dr. Lothar Guttschuss and his wife, Heather, for the clinic and relocate them to Salisbury (Harare), Zimbabwe.⁶ In late 1982, the Adventist Orthodontic Services opened its doors under the leadership of Dr. Guttschuss, who was the institution founder and the first orthodontic physician. This was the first orthodontic clinic to be established in Zimbabwe as well as the Trans-Africa Division territory.⁷

The Adventist Orthodontics Services opened to the public after successfully registering the clinic with the City of Harare, obtaining the Health Registration Certificate, and registering with the Health Professions Authority of Zimbabwe. The institution's dentist also had to be registered with the Medical and Dental Practitioner Council of Zimbabwe to obtain the practicing certificate. The initial staff consisted of an orthodontist, an orthodontic assistant, a receptionist, and a part-time cleaner, and three operating chairs had already been installed in the clinic.

With the help of his wife, a registered nurse, Dr. Guttschuss ran the clinic from 1982 to May 1989.⁸ Then, upon a General Conference Executive Committee vote, he returned to the North American Division for educational purposes.⁹ Dr. John Milford Anholm, the retired professor of orthodontics at Loma Linda University, replaced Dr. Guttschuss and served until 1994.

In 1994, Dr. Lyndle Merle Lamberton was appointed to serve at the Adventist Orthodontic Services in Harare, Zimbabwe.¹⁰ Dr. Lamberton was accompanied by his wife, Janet, who served as the clinic's accountant. Upon Dr. Lamberton's return to the United States of America in 1996, he was replaced by Dr. David Wilkinson, who became the new director for the clinic. In 1997, Dr. Wilkinson expanded the services of the clinic by providing specialized services to Botswana, Malawi, and Zambia. Dr. Wilkinson saw about 2,880 patients during his first two years with an average of 4-6 new patients per day. Dr. Wilkinson and his wife, Pamela, who was also the clinic's accountant, served from 1996 to 2003. During the administrative years of Dr. Lamberton and Dr. Wilkinson, the clinic experienced its best years of operation based on the clientele that had been established during their decade of service.

When the Wilkinsons returned to the United States in 2003, Dr. Lamberton returned to serve until 2007. The period between 2003-2006 was the clinic's worst operating period due to the socio-political and economic woes Zimbabwe was experiencing. On account of the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe, the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, which managed the clinic, relocated to Pretoria, South Africa, in 2007. Dr. Lamberton decided to retire and return to the United States of America. With no available orthodontist to replace him at the clinic, the Adventist Orthodontic Services temporarily closed at the end of 2007.

Following the relocation of the Division to South Africa, the ownership and management of the clinic was transferred to the Zimbabwe Union Conference. Almost a decade passed before the clinic reopened on September 25, 2016, under the leadership of Dr. Blessing Sayi. The clinic's name also changed to Adventist Dental Services in view of its diversified, multi-racial, and broadened scope of the delivery of its services. The clinic opened with a limited staff consisting of Dr. Blessing Sayi, two dental nurses (Eddina Ngirishi and Portia Manuhwa), and one helper, Oscar Nyakusengwa.

The Historical Role of the Institution

As an institution owned and operated by the Division, the Adventist Orthodontic Services promoted numerous evangelistic outreach programs in the Division's territory. Proceeds from the clinic generated scholarships for the training of pastors in church colleges and universities. The clinic also assisted to fund church construction, prison ministries, and the purchases of furniture and library books for church institutions. On the public health front, the clinic sponsored "Five-Day to Stop Smoking" campaign workshops, printed and distributed thousands of copies of Heather Guttschuss' book, "Your Child from Birth to Five Years," and printed 1.5 million HIV/AIDS prevention posters. In various unions and conference organizations of the Division, the clinic sponsored pastors' lending libraries and lay-evangelistic campaigns in non-evangelized areas. The clinic annually received literature from overseas for free distribution to enhance the church's evangelistic outreach. Its ministry fulfilled the proverbial "right hand of the gospel" role of the health message.

During its successful operating period, the Adventist Orthodontic Services was frequented by the upper-class non-white citizens of Zimbabwe such as the country's Finance Minister, Dr. Simba Makoni, and his family. A recent study recognized the role of the private sector in the provision of health services in Zimbabwe. In 2017, Mugwagwa, Chinyadza, and Banda found that the participants in the private sector have played a significant role in the delivery of health services since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 and continued increasing in the last ten years. This is due to the fact that "Zimbabwe's once vibrant health system still suffers from the effect of a prolonged network of hospitals, clinics, and other health service centers severely incapacitated in terms of personnel, equipment, and drug supplies."¹¹

Future Outlook of the Institution

Academic researchers on health-related areas found that, looking to Zimbabwe's future, "the state-missionary partnership in health care indicates that the church remains a critical development partner in the post-colonial state, and that social service provision is a key area of cooperation."¹² Despite suffering a decade of non-operational existence, the Adventist Dental Services is slowly but surely reclaiming its role in providing dental services to the public. Judging by its location, history, and efficient delivery of health care services, the Adventist Dental Services will continue to be a sought-after competitive service provider. The clinic will fulfill its role of enhancing the church's mission through sponsoring health nurturing activities and evangelistic outreach programs.

List of Name Changes

Adventist Orthodontics Services (1982-2007)

Adventist Dental Services (2016-present)

List of Directors

Adventist Orthodontic Services Directors:

Dr. Lothar Guttschuss (1982-1989); Professor John Milford Anholm (1989-1994); Dr. Lynn Lamberton (1994-1996); Dr. David Wilkinson (1996-2003); Dr. Lynn Lamberton (2003-2007).

Adventist Dental Services Directors:

Dr. Blessing Sayi (2016–Present).

The current address is Adventist Dental Services, 4 Princess Drive, Highlands, Harare, Zimbabwe.

SOURCES

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General Conference Committee minutes, March 16, 1989. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists archives, Washington, D.C.

General Conference Committee minutes, May 3, 1990. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists archives, Silver Spring, MD.

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NOTES

1. David Sanders, "Health Care in Zimbabwe Since Independence: The Potential & Limits of the Health Sector Reform," *Critical Health* no. 40 (September 1992): 53.

2. *Ibid.*, 54.

3. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 315.

4. *Ibid.*, 324.

5. Lovemore Zinyama and Richard Whitlow, "Changing Patterns of Population in Zimbabwe," *Geo-Journal* 13, no. 4 (December 1986): 365.

6. General Conference Committee, February 25, 1982. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists archives.
7. The Trans-Africa Division, which managed the clinic, was reorganized in 1983 and renamed the Eastern Africa Division. Furthermore, in 2003, it was reorganized and renamed the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook Online*, "Eastern Africa Division," accessed June 13, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1983.pdf>; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook Online*, "Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division," accessed June 13, 2019, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/2003.pdf>).
8. Lothar Guttschuss, e-mail message to author, September 26, 2018.
9. General Conference Committee, March 16, 1989. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists archives.
10. General Conference Committee, May 3, 1990. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists archives.
11. Julius T. Mugwagwa, Janeth K. Chinyadza and Geoffrey Banda, "Private Sector Participation in Health Care in Zimbabwe: What is the Value Added?" *Journal of Health Care Communications* (February 28, 2017).
12. Ivo Mhike and Eric K. Makombe, "Mission and State Health Institutions: 'Invisible' Public-Private Partnership in Zimbabwe, 1980-1999," *Studia Ecclesiasticae* 44, no. 1 (2018).

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