



East Central Rwanda field office.

Photo courtesy of the East Central Rwanda Conference.

East Central Rwanda Conference

NIYONAGIZE KIBIBI JEAN BAPTISTE

Niyonagize Kibibi Jean Baptiste

The East Central Rwanda Conference (formerly East Central Rwanda Field) is part of the Rwanda Union Mission in the East-Central Africa Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Organized 1965; reorganized 1984, 2011; renamed 2012; reorganized 2014.

Territory: Bugesera, Gicumbi, sectors of Gakenke, Kigali City, and Rulindo districts.

Statistics as of June 30, 2019: churches 215; membership 152,117; population 2,708,492!¹

Territory and History

The beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist mission in Rwanda coincides with the end of the First World War in 1919. It was begun by a Belgian missionary named David Elie Delhove, who was soon joined by a young man from Switzerland called Henri Monnier. The first Adventist mission started by Delhove in 1919 was the Gitwe Mission in the southern province of Rwanda. It was later named the Central Rwanda Field and located in the Ruhango district. The second mission, opened in 1921, was Rwankeri Mission in the northern province of the country. It was opened by Henri Monnier who moved there from the Buganza Mission.² This mission was later named North Rwanda Field and located in Nyabihu district. The third mission to be opened in 1931 was Ngoma Mission, in the western province of Rwanda, bordering Lake Kivu. It was opened by Alfred A. Matter and Dr. Sturges, who came from the Democratic Republic of Congo where he worked as a medical doctor in the Songa Hospital. The missionaries were assisted by two Rwandan nationals, named Barnabas Bisomimbwa and Petero Rukangarajunga.³ While Barnabas had accompanied Henri Monnier from Central Rwanda, Petero joined them from Rukoma, and he settled finally in Rwankeri, according to oral sources. In 1965, three years after the independence of Rwanda, the Adventist message reached Kigali, which was by then a small town and the capital city of Rwanda, a country of a thousand hills.⁴

SDA Mission in Kigali City: Birth of the East Rwanda Field

The city of Kigali was a small village in 1962, when Rwanda got its independence. Its population was about 6,000, with an urban area of approximately three square kilometers.⁵ According to various oral sources, it was around 1963 that the first Adventist pioneers explored Kigali and started to teach Bible doctrines. These first pioneers were mainly pastors and laymen coming from Gitwe Mission, the first SDA mission in Rwanda. The first targeted place to evangelize was Nyamirambo, because it was by then the center of Kigali city and more populated than any other section of the city.

In 1963 the first evangelism campaign in Nyamirambo town was led by Pastor J. G. Evert, while Pastor Rutwa Zephaniah was the first Rwandan pastor to evangelize the town and the first leader of the Nyamirambo church in 1964. According to various oral sources, those who attended the meetings were few and they gathered in a tent located where the first building of the East Rwanda Field (ERF) headquarters was later erected.⁶ The Nyamirambo SDA Church was organized in 1964. It was the core church in the city of Kigali and, along with a few churches which were born later, gave birth to the East Rwanda Field in 1965.

According to the 1967 *SDA Yearbook*, the East Rwanda Field (ERF) was organized in 1965, with 20 churches and 2,459 church members out of a population of 900,000 inhabitants of Kigali city and the eastern province of Rwanda, which formed the whole territory of the ERF. The leadership of this field was Pastor Stefano Baraburiye (president and secretary-treasurer) and, Pastor Zephaniah Rutwa (departmental secretary). The nine ordained pastors were, Stefano Baraburiye, Eliazari Bwiruka, Daniel Ndagije, Nikodemu Rubuguza, Zephaniah Rutwa, and

Timoteyo Rwamihigo. There were two honorary pastors, namely Abel Mpagazehe and Malakia Rwamirindi, and one licensed minister, Amiel Bahoranyinzika.⁷

The headquarters of the East Rwanda Field which was located in Nyamirambo remained there until it changed its name in 2011 and became the East Rwanda Association. It was renamed one year later, in 2012, as the East Central Rwanda Association,⁸ before it attained conference status in 2014. The East Rwanda Field is the mother SDA mission in the eastern central part of Rwanda, comprising almost a half of the geographical area of Rwanda and covering 10,193 square kilometers.⁹

Growth and Split of East Rwanda Field (formerly East Rwanda Association)

The East Rwanda Field is a twin field to the East Central Rwanda Conference. They had been one field known as the East Rwanda Field. As seen previously, the East Rwanda Field resulted from evangelistic campaigns by Rwandan pastors and laymen from Gitwe Mission. Having planted Nyamirambo church in the city of Kigali in 1964, they extended the evangelistic activities into the northern and eastern parts of Rwanda. As a result, the East Rwanda Field was established in 1965. Five years later, in 1970, the number of the church members had almost tripled, from 2,459 members (1965) to 5,626 members in 34 churches. The post of secretary-treasurer was now held by Eneas Nunguyubundi.¹⁰ In 1984 the East Rwanda Field was reorganized as a result of its growth. The membership reached 18,679 in 64 churches. The field president was Pastor Stefano Sembeba, while Esdras Ngayabatinya was the secretary-treasurer.¹¹

April 7, 1994, was the beginning of a 100-day genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. It took many lives of Rwandans, including many Seventh-day Adventists. At the end of this genocide, former Rwandan refugees, among them a large number of Adventists, returned to Rwanda from different countries. The majority of them stayed in Kigali and in the eastern province. In addition, the mass population tendency was to move from the small urban centers to Kigali city. Thus, East Rwanda Field membership became so large that in 2011 it was divided into two fields, namely East Rwanda Field with headquarters at Kayonza (eastern province), and East Central Rwanda Field with headquarters at Nyarutarama, Gasabo district, in Kigali city. This field which includes Kigali city, Bugesera district, parts of Gicumbi (Byumba), Rurindo, and Rwamagana districts became the first mission field to attain local conference status in 2014 with Pastor Isaac Ndwaniye as its first president.

Inauguration of the East Central Rwanda Conference

From the spectacular growth of the East Central Rwanda Field, in terms of membership, finance, and church leadership in 2011, the former field was reorganized in 2014 when it attained conference status, and it is now known as the East Central Rwanda Conference. The date of the inauguration of this first conference of the SDA

Church in Rwanda was on September 9, 2014.¹² The inauguration took place at Nyarutarama, headquarters of the conference, and was officiated at by Dr. Blasious M. Ruguri, ECD president, Dr. Nathanael Walembe, ECD executive secretary, and Pastor Jerome Habimana, ECD treasurer. Leadership of the Rwanda Union Mission included Dr. Hesron Byiringiro, president, Pastor Issacar Ntakirutimana, executive secretary, and Abel Habiyambere, treasurer. The purpose of this conference was to “facilitate the proclamation of the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages to all peoples within its territory, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Saviour and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.”¹³

Field Territory

The territory of the East Central Rwanda Conference (ECRC) consists of the following geographical regions: Kigali city, Bugesera, Gicumbi, and Rurindo districts, plus sectors Muyumbu, Nyakariro, Nzige, Gahengeri, Karenge, and Fumbwe of Rwamagana district in the eastern province. The sectors of Kivuye, Gatebe, Bungwe, and Ruhunde of Burera district are also part of the East Central Rwanda Conference; including the sectors Rushashi, Coko, Gashenyi, Minazi, Ruli, and Runazi of Gakenke district in the northern province. The elected officers of the new conference were, Pastor Isaac Ndwaniye (president), Pastor Naphtal Karangwa (executive secretary), Pastor Elly Nkuba Kageruka (treasurer). The departmental directors of the conference were, Pastor Alexis Niyonagira (youth and publishing ministries); Pastor Edison Nsengiyumva (evangelism); Pastor Jolay Paul Umuremye (Sabbath School and personal ministries, and chaplaincy ministries); Pastor Kagimba Safu (stewardship and health ministries); Mathilde Mukagacinya (children and family ministries); Myriam Umuhoza (education and women’s Ministries); Rachel Mushimiyimana (shepherdess ministries). The membership of the conference was 107,809.¹⁴

East Central Rwanda Conference Today (2015-2019)

From its inauguration on September 9, 2014, until the end of 2019, the East Central Rwanda Conference (ECRC) has seen tremendous growth in terms of church membership, baptisms, evangelism efforts, faithfulness in returning of tithe, church leadership, education, and health ministries, just to mention some areas of church growth. The following comparison shows the growth of the East Central Rwanda Conference during this quinquennial period, from its establishment in 2014 until 2019. In the year 2014 (3^d quarter), it had 199 churches, 107 companies, and 107,809 members; while in 2019 there were 220 churches, 131 companies, and 156,177 members—an increase of 45 percent in church membership in less than five years. A total of 60,585 new members were added to the membership of the ECRC from 2015-2019. This is a record number, equivalent to the total membership of this field during the 30 years of its existence, from 1965 to 1995. There was also a record number of baptisms in Rwanda—20,121—due to the TMI evangelism initiative of Pastor Ted Wilson!¹⁵

ECRC has also seen a considerable growth in tithes, with an increase of 160 percent between 2015 and 2019, while offerings increased by 150 percent in the same period. God has blessed the ECRC with clergy and laity who are skilled and committed to mission. Today 92 percent of the workers are equipped with university degrees, and among them 20 percent have master's or doctor's degrees. Today the conference has four primary schools, one secondary school, and very soon its polyclinic health center will open at Nyarurama, in the Kigarama sector, Kicukiro district, in Kigali city.

The leadership of the conference, both clergy and laity, work in unity toward the development of all aspects of church ministries. Their mission is to proclaim the everlasting gospel to all people within the ECRC territory, leading them to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His Second Coming.

Presidents

S. Baraburiye (1965-1975); T. Rwamiheto (1976-1982); S. Sembega (1982-1989); A. Rugerinyange (1990); A. Rwakigarama (1991-1992); A. Iyamuremye (1993-July 1994); I. Ndwanaye (August 1994-1996); L. Gakuba (1996-2003); and I. Ndwanaye (2004-present).

SOURCES

East Central Rwanda Conference Inauguration on September 9, 2014, and ECRC Statistical Reports, 3^d quarter 2014. East Central Rwanda Conference archives, Kigali, Rwanda.

McChesney, Andrew. "Propelled by Total Member Involvement, Adventist Church Tops 20 Million Members." *Adventist News Network*, March 1, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2020. <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2017-03-01/propelled-by-total-member-involvement-adventist-church-tops-20-million-members/>

Niyonagize, Jean Baptiste. "Equipping and Empowering Church Elders for Effective Ministry in the Nyamirambo SDA Church, East Central Rwanda Conference." A Doctor of Ministry dissertation. Nairobi: Adventist University of Africa, August 2016.

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia. Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Various years. <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

NOTES

1. "East Central Rwanda Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13511>.

2. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1966), 1101.
3. Jerome Birikunzira, *L'Eglise Adventiste du 7e Jour au Rwanda*, in '*Histoire du Christianisme au Rwanda: Des Origines a nos Jours*,' under direction, Tharcisse Gatwa et Laurent Rutinduka (Yaoundé, Cameroun: Editions CLE, 2014), 104-105.
4. Jean Baptiste Niyonagize, "Equipping and Empowering Church Elders for Effective Ministry in the Nyamirambo SDA Church, East Central Rwanda Conference," a Doctor of Ministry dissertation (Nairobi: Adventist University of Africa, August 2016), 1.
5. Accessed December 2019, <http://www.kigalicity.gov.rw/spiphp?article4>. Like other Africans, Rwandans (Abanyarwanda) preferred to live together in their villages, not in cities, until the middle of the 20th century.
6. Niyonagize, 2.
7. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1967, Accessed March 30, 2020, <https://adventistdigitallibrary.org/adl-426331/seventh-day-adventist-yearbook-january-1-1967>.
8. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2012), 52.
9. Macmillan Rwanda, *Rwanda Social Studies Atlas*, 2nd Edition, (Kigali: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2013), 9. Rwanda has an area of 26,338 square kilometers.
10. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970), 272.
11. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), 43.
12. The second conference to be organized was the North Rwanda Conference, located in the north province.
13. Accessed February 12, 2020. Source: ECRC Secretariat, East Central Rwanda Conference Inauguration on September 9, 2014, and ECRC Statistical Reports, 3rd quarter 2014.
14. Ibid.
15. A record of 110,000 people were baptized in 2016 during the Total Member Involvement soul winning initiative led by the SDA Church worldwide president, Dr. Ted Wilson, in Rwanda (Andrew McChesney, "Propelled by Total Member Involvement, Adventist Church Tops 20 Million Members," *Adventist News Network*, March 1, 2017, accessed April 10, 2020, <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2017-03-01/propelled-by-total-member-involvement-adventist-church-tops-20-million-members/>).

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000