West Kenya Union Conference headquarters.

Photo courtesy of West Kenya Union Conference office.

West Kenya Union Conference

JAPHETH OCHOROKODI

Japheth Ochorokodi holds an M.Th. degree from St. Paul's University, Machakos, Kenya. He is currently the executive secretary of West Kenya Union Conference. He has held other positions in the church including serving as a front line pastor. He is married to Vellah Nafula and they have four children.

West Kenya Union Conference (WKUC) is one of the two union conferences in Kenya and it covers a vast territory of 15 of the 47 counties of Kenya. These are Migori, Homa Bay, Kisumu, Siaya, Busia, Bungoma, Kakamega, Vihiga, Trans-Nzoia, West Pokot, Turkana, Elgeyo-Marakwet, Nandi, Uasin-Gishu, and part of Baringo.

It comprises five conferences, namely Central Nyanza, Greater Rift Valley, Kenya Lake, North West Kenya, and Ranen Conferences, and Lake Victoria Field.[1]

Statistics

As of the fourth quarter of 2019, the West Kenya Union membership stood at 456,501. The members worship in 3,294 churches and 1,831 companies. The total population of these counties stands at 15,127,684 according to the 2019 Kenyan census.[2] The territory is served by 274 ordained ministers and more than 200 licensed ministers spread across the area in what are known as trial districts.[3]

Organizational History

West Kenya Union Conference was born as a result of an action taken by the East African Union Mission to divide its territory. In 2010 the executive committee of East African Union Mission (EAUM) formed a commission to look into the possibility of dividing the union into two unions to mitigate the challenges of overseeing the fast growing membership.[4] The consideration for the division included not only membership growth, but also the vast territory which placed a huge burden on the shoulders of leadership. In addition, various parts of the territory were difficult to regularly visit from Nairobi—such the islands of Lake Victoria.[5]

In their first attempt to present the report to the union executive committee, the commission was met with some hesitance from members who felt that the rationale presented as reason for the subdivision was inadequate. Consequently, the commission's report was voted down. After some time, the same issues were brought back again for consideration in the presence of the three East-Central Africa Division (ECD) officers who shed more light on the request. The reconfiguration of the territory would include other territories within ECD which would be realigned to help better manage the work in the division. In 2012 the East African Union Mission finally voted to approve the subdivision and appointed three promoters: Pastor Kenneth Maena (chairman, to spearhead promotions), Pastor Japheth Ochorokodi (secretary, to keep records), and Elder Jared Cheruiyot (to manage finances). These names were forwarded to the ECD Executive Committee for consideration.[6]

The ECD office forwarded the request to the General Conference and, after all required procedures were met, the GC sent a team in mid-2013 to look into the proposal to subdivide the EAUM (which changed its name to Kenya Union Mission in 2013).[7] The team was led by GC vice president, Elder Pardon Mwansa. At the 2014 Annual Council, the GC Executive Committee voted to approve the organization of the Kenya Union Mission into the East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC), with headquarters in Nairobi, and the West Kenya Union Conference (WKUC), with headquarters in Kisumu, Kenya. At that time the Kenya Union Mission territory covered Kenya and Somalia; comprising Central Kenya, Kenya Lake, Nyamira, Ranen, South Kenya, and Western Kenya Conferences. It also included the Central Nyanza and Kenya Coast Fields. As of 2013, the KUM had 4,523 churches, 716,446 members (including 10,086 in Somalia), and a combined population of 53,099,000.[8]

Transitional Arrangements

The Kenya Union Mission Executive Committee under the leadership of Pastor Paul Muasya (president), Pastor Samuel Makori (executive secretary), and Elder Dan Agwena (treasurer), held a joint constituency meeting at

Kamagambo Adventist College to oversee the organization of the two unions. The division of assets and institutions for the two unions was led by George Egwakhe (GC associate treasurer). This exercise preceded the joint meeting. Some institutions fell under the union which covers the area where they are located, with the exception of Africa Herald Publishing House, ADRA Kenya, and the Home Health Education Services, all of which remain co-owned by the two union conferences through appointed boards.

Kamagambo Adventist College went to WKUC. The University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, though located in WKUC, is co-owned by the two unions in Kenya. Prior to that, it was owned and run by the East Central Africa Division.[9]

The organizational meetings were held at Kamagambo Adventist College from November 27 to 29, 2013. The meetings were led by the East-Central Africa Division president, Dr. Blasious Ruguri; the executive secretary, Dr. Nathaniel Walemba; and the treasurer, Elder Jerome Habimana. The West Kenya Union Conference (WKUC) came into existence at this constituency meeting. The elected pioneer officers were Pastor Kenneth O. Maena (president), Pastor Japheth O. Ochorokodi (executive secretary), and David A. Sande (treasurer). The WKUC was organized with a starting membership of 360,615 in 2,367 churches, with a general population of 17,161,066.[10]

West Kenya Union Conference Office

The WKUC operated in a rented office belonging to the Central Nyanza Field in Kisumu for a period of three years. Upon organization, the WKUC immediately embarked on the construction of a modern office. Ground breaking was done on September 20, 2014, and the foundation stone was laid on November 3, 2014, by the ECD president, Pastor Blasious Ruguri. The work took 62 weeks and, upon completion, the building was officially dedicated on February 6, 2016, by the ECD president. The following day, February 7, it was officially opened by the president of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta. A fully operational studio was built and it was officially inaugurated in February 2017 by Dr. Derek Morris, president of Hope Channel International.

Initially the union purchased land jointly with HHES (Home Health Education Service) and Victory SDA Church along Kisumu-Kakamega Road; but upon consideration of the cost, the union bought land at Kanyakwar from the Central Nyanza Field (now a conference), and started building the office there. Within the same compound, there exists a church where the people of the community meet for worship. There are plans to put up a modern church in the compound.

Sources of Funding for Construction of the Office

The funds to build the office were obtained from the following sources: 12.5 percent of 2013 camp meeting offerings; fundraising in Kisumu, 2013; fundraising in Nairobi, 2014; fundraising in Kisumu, 2014; 25 percent of camp meeting offerings for 2014 and 2015; and a loan from East-Central Africa Division of Seventh-day

Adventists.

Current Organizations

Ranen Conference, Central Nyanza Conference, Kenya Lake Conference, North West Conference, Greater Rift Valley Conference, and Lake Victoria Field.

Institutions

Kamagambo Adventist College, Kendu Adventist Hospital, Africa Herald Publishing House, and the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, which is jointly managed with the East Kenya Union Conference.

Achievements

Since the inception of the WKUC, there has been tremendous growth in membership and institutions. The union currently has fully operational radio and TV stations. Plans are underway to put up staff quarters in Kisumu. Upgrading of Kamagambo Adventist College into a fully-fledged tertiary institution is ongoing. A new field called Lake Victoria Field has been organized and the former Western Kenya Conference has been reorganized into two conferences: North West Kenya Conference and Greater Rift Valley Conference.[11]

SOURCES

Kenya Population and Housing Census 2019, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Government of Kenya.

Official Statistics from the Secretariat, West Kenya Union Conference. West Kenya Union Conference archives, Kisumu, Kenya.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. https://www.adventistyearbook.org/.

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1. "West Kenya Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2020), accessed May 19, 2020, https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=52479.
2. Kenya Population and Housing Census 2019, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Government of Kenya.
3. Official Records at the West Kenya Union Conference, Kisumu.
4. East Central Africa Division action ECD2013-030.

5. Paul Muasya, interview with the author, ECD office, November 4, 2019. Paul Muasya was the union president then.

6. Kenya Union Mission action 1753 of 2013.

7. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2013), 49.

8. Ibid., 49.

9. Author's personal knowledge.

10. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2014), 42.

11. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2018).

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