

# Isabirye, Difasi Idude (1929–2013)

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## MOSES LUUTU GOLOLA, AND NATHANIEL MUMBERE WALEMBA

Moses Luutu Golola, Ph.D. (Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda), is a retired educator, having served as deputy secretary of Inter-University Council for East Africa, deputy director of National Council for Higher Education, Uganda, and vice chancellor of Bugema University. Prior to that, Golola served as dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya. He is married to Irene and they have four grown up children.

Nathaniel Mumbere Walemba, D.Min. (Andrews University, Berrien Spring, Michigan U.S.A.), retired in 2015 as executive secretary of the East-Central Africa Division (ECD) of Seventh-day Adventists. In retirement, he is assistant editor of this encyclopedia for ECD. A Ugandan by birth, Walemba has served the Seventh-day Adventist Church in many capacities having started as a teacher, a frontline pastor, and principal of Bugema Adventist College in Uganda. He has authored several magazine articles and a chapter, "The Experience of Salvation and Spiritualistic Manifestations," in Kwabena Donkor, ed. *The Church, Culture and Spirits* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2011), pp. 133-143. He is married to Ruth Kugonza and they have six children and fourteen grandchildren.

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Difasi Idude Isabirye was a pastor and administrator in Uganda and Kenya. Isabirye's commitment to church leadership was displayed during the difficult days of the oppressive regime in Uganda in the 1970s.

## Early Life

Difasi Isabirye, a Musoga by tribe, was born to Fenekansi Idude and Robina Kafuko on June 15, 1929, in Butale village, Bugulumbya subcounty, Kamuli district, Eastern Uganda. He was the younger of the two sons and only children of their parents. Although his father had two wives, the other wife did not have any children. He and Sofatiya his brother grew up taking care of their father's animals, which was the work of all boys in the village.<sup>1</sup> Difasi attended Nawanende SDA Primary School from where he joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church through baptism in 1945.<sup>2</sup> From Nawanende he proceeded to Nchwanga Training College in present day Kakumiro district, Western Uganda. Nchwanga was the first Seventh-day Adventist station in Uganda, having been established in 1927 by S. G. Maxwell, a Briton, and Petero Risase, a Tanzanian.<sup>3</sup>

## Conversion and Marriage

In 1941 the Seventh-day Adventist Church conducted an evangelistic meeting at Nawanende, which was very successful. Even though they were not serious with the church, Difasi's parents considered themselves members of the Church of Uganda (Anglican) and expected their children to be the same. For that reason Difasi's father told his children not to go to the Seventh-day Adventist meetings. As it is the custom of most African children to obey their parents, especially in those days, the boys obliged. However, his father wanted Difasi to be an agricultural instructor, and for that reason, in 1943, he allowed him to attend Nawanende Adventist Primary School, which had just been established, so that he could lay a foundation for becoming what he wanted him to be; and "While at the school, I came face to face with an entirely different way of life. I joined a

school that felt more like a large family; a family where each member was cared for, and Christ was allowed into the life of the pupils and teachers in a dramatic and meaningful way. Indeed, it was while at this school that Christ became a reality to me, not an abstract concept like He was while I mingled with the Anglican community.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1944 during a week of prayer, Difasi took a stand for Jesus, but for fear of his dad, he did not present himself for baptism. Baptism came a year later when he decided to be baptized on December 5, 1945, by Pastor M. Kabala. As had been expected, his dad, upon learning of his baptism, sent him away from his home, and he only returned after a few days upon the intervention of his mother, who had prevailed upon her husband<sup>5</sup>

While a student at Nawanende, he had met a young lady, Ruth Zewulensi, who was born on December 24, 1937. This young Musoga lady who had attracted him finally became his wife on January 24, 1952, at Nawanende. At the time of their marriage, he was a worker at Nchwanga, where he had been posted as a beginning teacher<sup>6</sup>. Difasi and Ruth were blessed with four children; namely, David Isabirye, Samuel Isabirye, Joyce Isabirye, and Stephen Isabirye.

## Education and Ministry

In 1953 Isabirye attended a two-year ministerial course at Bugema Missionary College, which was conducted by a British missionary, Pastor Conrad Hyde, and an Ugandan Pastor Yekoyada Bamanya.

The course was for people who did not necessarily have an ordinary level (secondary school) certificate. It was for this reason that after a spell of service in the church within Uganda as will be shown, he returned to school and completed a secondary school certificate course (O-Level) at Bugema Missionary College in 1965. In 1968–1971 he pursued a bachelor’s degree in religion at Solusi College (now a university) in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).<sup>4</sup> In 1981 and 82 he pursued a master’s degree in religion at the Far Eastern Seminary in the Philippines, obtaining the said degree in 1982.<sup>7</sup>

Difasi Isabirye first joined church service in 1951 as a teacher/evangelist at Nawanende, in Eastern Uganda. In 1952 he worked as a teacher/evangelist at Nchwanga. The following year he joined Bugema Missionary College for a two-year ministerial course, and upon its completion he was posted to Nsube Church District in Eastern Uganda as an evangelist. Between 1957 and 1967 he was a publishing director and in charge of the Voice of Prophecy department. It was during this period that he was ordained as a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in September 1960 at Najjanankumbi SDA Church in Kampala.<sup>8</sup>

In 1972 he was director of Rwenzori Mission Station in Fort Portal, Western Uganda.<sup>9</sup> In 1973 –1979 he served as the executive director (president) of Uganda Mission Field. This was a particularly difficult period for the church. His predecessor, Robert Carter (a US citizen) had been declared a persona non grata and had suddenly returned to his homeland for being an American with whom Idi Amin had fallen out and had been given 72 hours to

leave.<sup>10</sup>

In 1980–1981 he was director of the Voice of Prophecy of the East African Union headquarters based in Nairobi, Kenya. His office was at Karura where the Voice of Prophecy was based. In 1982–1986 he was appointed instructor in the ministerial course at Kamagambo Training School in Kisii, Kenya. He left Kamagambo to serve for one year (1987) as executive director of the Western Uganda Field. In 1988–1990 he was the executive secretary of the newly organized Uganda Union, which was formally constituted in 1987 under the leadership of an American missionary Dr. Jack Bohannon. Pastor Isabirye retired from the services of the church in 1991<sup>9</sup> and returned to his home in Kasambira, Kamuli district, Eastern Uganda, not far from the city of Jinja.

He died on March 19, 2013, and was buried at his home at Kasambira in Busoga. His wife Ruth who had been his right hand in his ministry for close to fifty years also rested on July 30, 2020, and was laid next to her husband in Kasambira.<sup>10</sup>

## Legacy

Isabirye was a strong promoter of literature evangelism in Uganda and Kenya, and urged many young people to work as colporteurs.

Isabirye's commitment to church leadership was displayed during the difficult days of the rulership of Idi Amin Dada. In 1977 Idi Amin's government declared a ban on 27 denominations, which included the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>11</sup> Isabirye, as leader of the Adventist Church in the country, did not waver but advised the membership of the church to adopt a low profile and worship in their homes. This was sound advice. Together with the then Uganda Mission Field treasurer, Sekikubo Sendawula, Isabirye jealously protected the church funds and ensured that all employees during the period of the ban received their salaries and all appropriate allowances. Under his stewardship of the church during the period of the ban, the majority of SDA Church institutions and property in the country (apart from Ishaka Hospital) remained untampered with by the government until the regime's collapse in April, 1979. With God as his guide, he led the church with firmness and hope.<sup>12</sup>

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### SOURCES

Difasi Isabirye, *Service Record*, Uganda Union Mission, 1991. Uganda Union Mission archives, Kampala, Uganda.

Isabirye, Difasi. *Through the Tempest*. Unpublished manuscript, 2009. A copy in Moses Golola's private collection.

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### NOTES

1. Difasi Isabirye, *Through the Tempest*, unpublished manuscript, 2009, a copy in Moses Golola's private collection.
2. Ibid.
3. Daniel M. Matte, "Uganda," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*. June 01, 2020. Accessed September 15, 2020.  
<https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=AFKH>.
4. Isabirye, 18.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Difasi Isabirye, Service Record, Uganda Union Mission, 1991.
8. Ibid.
9. Difasi Isabirye Service Records, Uganda Union Mission, 1991.
10. Stephen Isabirye, telephone interview with the author, September 12, 2020.
11. Moses L. Golola, A History of the Seventh day Adventist Church in Uganda (Under preparation), in the author's private collection.
12. Christian Aliddeki and J. R. Kasibante, telephone interview with Moses Golola, September 3, 2020.

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