



South Rwanda Field headquarters

Shared by the author.

South Rwanda Field

NAPHTAL KARANGWA

Naphtal Karangwa, doctorate degree (Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya) has served the church for 29 years in Rwanda in different positions. He served as district pastor, field departmental director, union departmental director, field executive secretary, and field president. Currently, he is the Central Rwanda Field president. He wrote an article about the history of the West Rwanda Field for the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*.

South Rwanda Field (SRF) is a subsidiary administrative unit of the [Rwanda Union Mission](#) (RUM) in the [East-Central Africa Division](#) of Seventh-day Adventists.¹ Its headquarters are in Butare (Huye District), and the field serves a large Adventist membership distributed across organized churches and companies. As part of the national Adventist structure, SRF works in harmony with RUM policies and the global Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Territory and Demographics

The South Rwanda Field covers the government territory of Huye, Gisagara, Nyaruguru, and Nyamagabe districts, and part of Nyanza District in Rwanda's Southern Province. According to the 2022 Rwanda Population and Housing Census (RPHC5), the populations of these districts were: Huye (381,900), Gisagara (397,051), Nyaruguru (318,126), Nyamagabe (371,501), and Nyanza (365,718).² The field reports a membership of approximately 156,897, organized in more than 225 churches and 75 companies, with the administrative seat in Butare.³ The field borders Central Rwanda Field to the north, East Central Rwanda Field to the east, West Rwanda Field to the west, and the Republic of Burundi to the south.⁴

Origins of Adventism in the Territory

Adventism reached the southern region of present-day SRF through the early work connected to the Gitwe Mission, founded in 1921. From this nucleus, evangelists and lay pioneers extended the message throughout the neighboring districts. Over subsequent decades, churches, schools, and small health initiatives helped consolidate the Adventist presence in the Southern Province.⁵

In its formative decades, the SRF territory presented significant challenges for Adventist evangelism. The area had long-standing Christian communities, particularly Catholic, with established parishes and educational institutions that shaped local religious life. Economic constraints also affected outreach capacity.⁶ The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi devastated communities and disrupted church life nationwide, including within SRF's territory, leaving complex spiritual and social wounds that required sustained ministry of healing, reconciliation, and discipleship.⁷

Events Leading to the Organization of the South Rwanda Field

Rapid membership growth and administrative demands in the 1960s and 1970s prompted reorganization within Rwanda's Adventist work. Gitwe Mission—then a major center of Rwandan Adventism—was divided to better serve expanding districts in the south. This process culminated in the creation of a southern administrative unit with its headquarters in Butare, paving the way for the independent organization of South Rwanda as a distinct field.⁸

Organization of the Field

The reorganization of Gitwe Mission was completed in November 1970, and the new Southern Rwanda unit commenced operations in 1972, with their headquarters in Butare. When the Rwanda and Burundi work was separated in 1984, the Rwanda Union Mission was organized, and South Rwanda continued under the new

union structure. Later adjustments in nomenclature led to the former “South Rwanda Field (Gitwe)” being designated “Central Rwanda Field,” while the newly formed unit at Butare retained the name “South Rwanda Field.”⁹

Outlook

SRF continues expanding evangelistic, educational, and health ministries. Recent plans include constructing a modern administrative office near the University area in Huye to align with government urban planning and leverage technological infrastructure.¹⁰ The Field administers several primary and secondary schools and a health center, and partners with RUM initiatives to nurture discipleship, youth and chaplaincy ministries, and community health education.¹¹

Presidents

Eliakim Ngwije (vice president of Gitwe Mission, overseeing South Rwanda, 1970); Sembega Etienne (1971–1974); Samuel Sebugisho (1974–1981); Stefano Baraburiye (1982–1986); Elizaphan Ntakirutimana (1987–1992); Amon Iyamuremye (1992–1993); Jérémie Simbayobewe (Jan–Apr 1994); Esdras Kayonga (1996–2005); André Mujyarugamba (2005–2010); Gérard Karasira (2010–2011); Abidhan Ruhongeka (2011–2021); Elie Hakizimana (May 10, 2021–).¹²

SOURCES

Adventist Directory. “South Rwanda Field.” Updated March 13, 2024. Accessed November 7, 2025.

<https://www.adventistdirectory.org/viewAdmField.aspx?AdmFieldID=SRWA>

African SDA History. “Rwanda.” Accessed November 7, 2025. <https://www.africansdahistory.org/rwanda/>.

Jerome, Ngabo Birikunzira. “Rwanda Union Mission.” *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*. April 6, 2021. Accessed November 7, 2025. <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=CFI4>.

National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census (RPHC5), District Profiles (2022). Accessed November 7, 2025. <https://www.statistics.gov.rw/>.

Rwanda Union Mission. “Who We Are.” Accessed November 7, 2025. <https://www.rumadventist.org/who-we-are/>.

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

NOTES

1. "Rwanda Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13510>. Accessed November 7, 2025; Ngabo Birikunzira Jerome, "Rwanda Union Mission," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, April 6, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=CFI4>. Accessed November 7, 2025.
2. National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census (RPHC5), District Profiles: Huye (2022), Gisagara (2022), Nyaruguru (2022), Nyamagabe (2022), and Nyanza (2022), <https://www.statistics.gov.rw/>. Accessed November 7, 2025.
3. "South Rwanda Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13514>. Accessed November 7, 2025.
4. "South Rwanda Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13514>. Accessed November 7, 2025.
5. Jerome, "Rwanda Union Mission," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=CFI4>. Accessed November 7, 2025; "Rwanda," *African SDA History (ASAH)*, <https://www.africansdahistory.org/rwanda/>. Accessed November 7, 2025.
6. Jerome, "Rwanda Union Mission," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, April 6, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=CFI4>. Accessed November 7, 2025.
7. Ibid.
8. "South Rwanda Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13514>. Accessed November 7, 2025; Jerome, "Rwanda Union Mission," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, April 6, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=CFI4>. Accessed November 7, 2025.
9. "South Rwanda Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13514>. Accessed November 7, 2025; "Rwanda Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13510>. Accessed November 7, 2025.
10. Rwanda Union Mission, "Who We Are," *rumadventist.org*, <https://www.rumadventist.org/who-we-are/>. Accessed November 7, 2025.
11. "South Rwanda Field," *Adventist Directory*, updated March 13, 2024, <https://www.adventistdirectory.org/viewAdmField.aspx?AdmFieldID=SRWA>. Accessed November 7, 2025.
12. "South Rwanda Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13514>. Accessed November 7, 2025; "South Rwanda Field," *Adventist Directory*, updated March 13, 2024, <https://www.adventistdirectory.org/viewAdmField.aspx?AdmFieldID=SRWA>. Accessed November 7, 2025.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

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