

Adventism in Eastern and Central Parts of Kenya

JEREMY MWENDA MARAMBI

Jeremy Mwenda Marambi is an ordained minister currently serving the church as the Executive Secretary, Central Kenya Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and a student pursuing a Doctor of Ministry at the Adventist University of Africa, Main campus.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kenya was preceded by other Christian denominations, which include the Church of Scotland Mission, Church Missionary Society, Africa Inland Mission, and the Roman Catholic Missions. Having been introduced in Kenya for the first time in Nyanza in 1906, it was not until 1933 that Adventism became active in Central Kenya at Karura. The Karura Station first reported to Kisumu, where the headquarters of the East African Union was from 1943 to 1949.¹ Later, due to expansion of the work outside Nyanza, the headquarters was relocated to Nairobi in 1950. Nairobi remained the headquarters of the Adventist Church in Kenya until it was reorganized into two unions so that the second union had its headquarters returned to Kisumu.

Adventist Mission Activities in Kenya

The first Seventh-day Adventist mission in Kenya was organized in 1906 at Gendia by Pastor Arthur Asa Carscallen and one Malawian, Peter Nyambo.² Later, F. Thomas from the United States arrived. In 1907 they were joined by J. D. Baker, Mrs. Baker, and Helen Bruce Thompson. J. H. S. Sparks came in 1908, B. L. Morse, and H. Horace Brooks came in 1909, and Leonard Lane came in 1912.³ In 1909, J. D. Baker established a mission in Kanyadoto, where he was supported by R. Sparks in 1913. The next two missions were opened in Kamagambo and Nyanchwa by A. A. Carscallen in 1912-1913 among the Abagusii.⁴

Adventist Missionary Activities in Central Region of Kenya

The Karura Station in Nairobi, at the border of Kiambu and Nairobi, was opened by W. W. Armstrong who became its first director. This became a base for work among the two principle tribes of the region: Kikuyu and Kamba. From there the church grew at a snail's pace because the Kikuyu community was not receptive to the new faith. However, between 1934 and the 1950's, the church experienced significant numerical growth and work expanded to other parts of the upper and lower eastern section of Kenya.⁵

Mission Work in the Lower Eastern Region

Adventism reached the lower eastern region (Ukambani) in 1934 under the leadership of Pastor Jeremiah Oyiko from Karura Station. On arrival in Ukambani, he was received in the home of Jonathan Kitaka Sila.⁶ Jonathan Kitaka Sila introduced Pastor Jeremiah Oyiko to his fellow elders (Jeremiah Kimuyu, Moses Kyuli, Mulwa Kulanga, John Kithoi Mauta, and Daniel Muasya Ngwili) who became the first converts⁷ in Kitooni, Masii. In 1936 Pastor Jeremiah Oyiko was transferred and Pastor Maxwell, a white man, was deployed. He joined the elders and they built a mud church on Mutava Wambua's land, with the help of Daniel Muasya Ngwili, Jeremiah Kimuyu, and Joseph Kulanga. In 1939, Pastor Maxwell left and Mutava Wambua demolished the church. Thereafter, Pastor Light was transferred to Kitooni and negotiated with Uvaa Ngovi and Kimee Uvaa for land on which to build another church. They donated a piece of land on which members built a church of bricks and iron sheets which Pastor Light had brought from Karura, Nairobi. This church building is used now as a grade four classroom at Kitooni SDA School. Pastor Light did not stay long and, when he was transferred, Pastor Paul Mutheke from Nzaini was appointed as the first native pastor. Then the gospel spread to Mutitu, Mbooni, Musoa, and Kitui, among other areas.⁸

Expansion of the Work in the Coastal Region

The mission among the Kikuyus was very difficult because the church was perceived as a white man's church. Under the leadership of W. C. S. Raitt, the mission work expanded from Karura station to Changamwe in Mombasa, which is currently the headquarters of the Kenya Coast Field. Just as work among the Kikuyus and the Kamba proved difficult because of traditional religion, work in this region was equally difficult because of Islamic domination.

Mission Activities in Upper Eastern Region

The first church in this region was at Chiakariga, where a branch Sabbath School of the Changamwe Station met with the help of evangelist Ismail Mainda⁹ in 1937. Subsequently, the church reached Kanyuru in 1941, then Kirua in 1960. Also, in 1960, the church reached Karachine through the families of M'Thiringi and M'Thanara. Adventism in this part of Kenya faced challenges different from those faced in the Kikuyu and Coastal regions. The challenge here was mostly the result of the Adventist preacher's approach to the health message: preaching against planting or using tobacco, coffee, tea, and miraa. The other issues that posed challenges were spending the whole day in church (that was very strange) and going to church on Saturday (a market day and the day for other social activities). These factors had a negative impact on church growth, so the Church had to devise more effective methods of evangelism. One such approach was the introduction of the Voice of Prophecy Correspondence Bible School that was established in 1954. Despite the initial negative impression, people still loved the church and, in 1974, the church reached Muthara Nathu through Moses Mutuma M'Karia,¹⁰ who was

employed as a shopkeeper, but who resigned after his conversion to Adventism.

From Karachine, the church took about 16 years to reach Mikinduri. Some members of Karachine who lived in Mikinduri requested that a company be organized and the request was granted in 1978. The next place members in Karachine planned to reach was Miathene, about 15 kilometers from Mikunduri. They invited Pastor Boniface Kimuyu from Isiolo and Pastor Joshua Njuguna, who was then assistant publishing director in Meru. Pastors Kimunya and Njuguna were accompanied by the SDA choir from Isiolo, where a few families accepted the Adventist faith in 1982. These members went to Mikinduri every Sabbath. The choir organized another campaign in 1985 and about 20 people joined the Adventist Church.¹¹ Miathene membership grew to about 40 members and the company was organized as a church in 1987.¹²

Conclusion

The spread of the Seventh-day Adventist work in parts of Kenya other than the Nyanza region went at a slow pace. Nevertheless, between the 1990s and the present, there have been a high number of converts in the central and eastern regions that have contributed to the growth of the church nationally. This was due to the active local evangelists who were instrumental in carrying out the work of evangelistic campaigns in new territories. The high growth in membership is in contrast to the old days when the central region had three churches. In the same region there are now more than 210 churches and about 38 pastors. The lower eastern regions had only one church, and now there are 230 churches. The upper region where the author comes from had only four churches in the 1970's, but now there are about 220 churches and 46 pastors.¹³

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1943-1949, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.
2. Bishop Morris Otunga, *History of SDA Church in Gusii* (Historical Society [BOHS], unpublished manuscript, 1985), 63; "Arthur Asa Carscallen obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, February 24, 1964, 7.
3. A. A. Carscallen, "Reinforcements," *The Missionary Worker*, June 23, 1909, 104; E. E. Andross, "President's Address," *The Missionary Worker*, August 28, 1907, 138; G. Emm, "At Rest Leonard Ernest Alfred Lane," *British Adventist Messenger*, February 6, 1959, 12; and H. Horace Brooks, "Farewell!" *The Missionary Worker*, October 27, 1909, 173, 174.
4. M. Getui, *The Establishment and History of the Activity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1912-1985* (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, Kenyatta University 1985), 31-36.
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1935-1950, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.
6. The story is narrated by the grandson of Jonathan Kitaka Sila, Tobias Mumo Kitaka.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ismail Mainda Wikira, a convert from Meru who was a businessman in Mombasa and heard about Adventism in Meru and resolved in 1941 to go back home to Chiakariga among the Tharaka people.
10. Moses Mutuma M'Karia was introduced to Adventism by Harris Solomon, a literature evangelist who sold books to him in September 1973. After reading the book *The Great Controversy* he joined the church in Meru and was baptized by Pastor Methuselah Katuku in October 1973. In 1974 he moved to Mombasa as a literature evangelist under the leadership of Gilbert Kirunja until April 1974. Later he returned to Meru where he conducted an evangelistic campaign and formed a church which stands today. He moved to Leeta in 1975 as a literature evangelist under the leadership of Dancan Wanderi and the district Pastor Nathanson Ng'ang'a. The pastor was in charge of the Meru district which included the churches at Kirua, Gituiki, Kirukuru, and Karachine. M'Karia became a pastor under the Central Kenya Conference from 1982 until his retirement in 2018.
11. The evangelistic campaign was conducted by Pastors Joshua Njuguna and Boniface Kimuyu and the choir from Isiolo main church in 1985.
12. CKF Executive Committee Minute 40/87 that voted to authorize Church Organization – Miathene S.S of Karachine Church as a full-fledged church on April 12, 1987.

