



Eswatini Conference headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Sabelo Mthunzi.

Eswatini Conference

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Eswatini Conference (formerly known as Swaziland Conference) is a subsidiary church administrative unit of the Southern Africa Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It was organized in 2021. Its headquarters is in Manzini, Eswatini. The name of the Swaziland Conference was changed to Eswatini Conference on November 14, 2021 in order to accommodate the change of the country's name from Swaziland to the Kingdom of Eswatini.

Current Territory and Statistics

The Eswatini Conference covers the entire small Kingdom of Eswatini.¹ The Kingdom of Eswatini is a landlocked country in the eastern flank of South Africa, where it adjoins Mozambique. It extends about 110 miles (175 km) from north to south and about 80 miles (130 km) from west to east at its widest dimensions, covering a total area of 17,364 km². It is one of the world's last remaining absolute monarchies. After the Second South African Civil (Boer) War, the kingdom, then known as Swaziland, became a British Protectorate from 1903 until it regained its independence on September 6, 1968. In April 2018, the official name was changed from Kingdom of Swaziland to Kingdom of Eswatini, mirroring the name commonly used in Swazi, the official national language. The country now derives its name from a later king named Mswati II and Ngwane, named for Ngwane III.

Recent statistics (June 30, 2019) indicate that there are 26 organized churches in Eswatini Conference, with a membership of 9,163. Compared to the national population of 1,096,000, the member to non-membership ratio of Eswatini Conference is 1:120.² The Eswatini Conference operates two high schools, one in the south-western region in Mahamba named Mbukwane High School, and Kaphunga SDA High School in Kaphunga, which started operating in 2022. Four primary schools are currently operated under the auspices of the conference, namely, Mbukwane, Phongolwane, Manzini Central, and Mbabane Primary SDA schools. Hlushwana and Vulamehlo Primary Schools used to be owned and operated by the church as well. Although the Conference acquired Hlushwana Primary School in 1981, after the conversion of Babe Sibandze, a leader of the Zionist sect, along with his entire congregation, the conference later lost control of the school when it went back to the community because of the lack of strong Adventist presence in the locality. A similar occurrence took place later with Vulamehlo Primary School, which was given to the church around 1990, only to be taken back later by the community.

Origin of Adventist Work in the Territory of the Conference

The first recorded attempt to establish the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Swaziland was made in 1920, by J.C. Rogers, a veteran American missionary then in Nyasaland (now Malawi). He felt that the time had come to preach the soon coming of Christ in Swaziland.³ Traveling on horseback, he visited the Queen Regent Labotsibeni Mdluli, hoping to acquire land for mission work from her. However, his appeal was denied because the law of the kingdom did not allow for land to be allocated to foreign missionaries.

Prior to 1920, Joseph Metcalf Hlubi converted to Adventism together, with his wife Alice (nee Nxumalo) in 1918, through the preaching of Mr. Smith from Pietermaritzburg in South Africa. Both Joseph and Alice were teachers at Ermelo, but originally from Swaziland, at Makhosini area. Hlubi, by then a lay member, seized the challenge to trek back to his native Swaziland with his devoted wife, Alice, and family to launch the Adventist work.

Upon arrival, he endeavored to introduce Adventism in his own community and the surrounding areas. Previously a devout Methodist in a predominantly Methodist community, he worked to share his newfound light to the people. According to Dr. Phetsile K. Dlamini, the Hlubis arrived in Swaziland in September 1920. The prince in charge of kaDlovunga, Prince Hlubi of Prince Makhahleleka, grandfather to Dr. Phetsile K. Dlamini and Siphon Dlamini, gave them land at Mbukwane. This followed extensive consultations with King Sobhuza II, with whom Joseph Hlubi had been acquainted while studying at Lovedale College, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The land was granted with the assurance that it would always remain under the Chieftdom of kaDlovunga and not be sold.

The Hlubis sought wisdom from God as to how to win the people into this new faith that was still unheard of in the country. In 1921 the Hlubis, being teachers at heart, set up a school, with an enrollment of five children, whom they taught in their house. This strategy allowed them to share their doctrinal teachings with their students and touch the hearts of the older community members. The anticipated results were enthralling when laMkhaliphi (Mrs. Mabhunu Dlamini) Mgiza and Gladys' and Mrs. Shongwe's mother, surprisingly became their first converts to Adventism. Mabhunu was not happy when laMkhaliphi, his wife, was baptised. However, the fire had been kindled, and he later joined the church and became an ardent member of the church.

The school was named Mbukwane after the stream which flows in the area, and it continues to be a center of influence in Swaziland. The Hlubis soon learned that the parents of the learners appreciated the Bible lessons which were taught at the school. Hlubi took advantage of this and started to conduct Bible studies in the surrounding villages. The first Seventh-day Adventist Church in Swaziland was organized at Mbukwane School.

Following the success of the establishment of Adventism at KaDlovunga, with Mbukwane becoming a mission station, there was ardent need for infrastructural development. In 1924 Hlubi built a family house at his own expense. This house subsequently accommodated many pastors and teachers. In 1926 he constructed the first classroom, where both he and his wife taught the children. Sometime later, Pastor J.R. Campbell, superintendent of the neighbouring Transvaal-Delagoa Mission Field, visited Swaziland. He recommended that some money be allocated to Swaziland for building works. This budget allocation assisted in expanding the work.

Having become a pastor, Hlubi engaged Philip Dlamini (father to Mrs. Simangele Khumalo of Kwaluseni and grandfather to Sindi Dlamini of Matsetsa SDA), a brick layer by profession from Lushikishini in Mankayane, to assist him with the construction of the building. As they worked, Pastor Hlubi evangelized Dlamini, and he in turn accepted the Adventist message. Philip Dlamini shared his new beliefs with his family in Lushikishini, who

accepted the message, and other relatives were also won through his witness. These new members faithfully observed the Sabbath at Dlamini's house every week, with some coming on foot from Musi community. Even after Dlamini relocated to Mbukwane and later to Kwaluseni, the Lushikishini branch continued to meet, although it lacked nurturing. Make Mhlanga, wife to Dlamini, in Lushikishini, continued to rekindle the fire without any assistance until her death. As of late, unfortunately Adventism is no longer known in that part of the country.

Later on, Brother Daniel Nhlapho joined as a teacher to assist the Hlubis at Mbukwane since the number of enrolled children had increased. The school gained government recognition in 1934 when it reached Standard 6 level. In 1985 the high school was started at Mbukwane. The first church building was built in 1925 at Mbukwane, and the rondavel⁴ that still exists was built in 1935. Brother Philip Dlamini of Kwaluseni also helped in the construction of the rondavel, which served as a guest house for visiting pastors. In 1929 Pastor Hlubi was ordained to the gospel ministry by Pastor J. Simons. After his ordination he was employed as a district pastor in the Transvaal-Swaziland Mission while Mrs. Hlubi continued to teach.

The preaching of the gospel later led to the establishment of churches in Mahandle (kaMabhunu) and Goedgegun, now Nhlanguano, where Pastor Nhleko and family, Ernest Nxumalo and family, Mhlongo, Bothas, and Rhodah Mavuso, and many more members worship. Among the first families to be converted were the Dlamini, Simelanes, Mthunzis, Kunenes, Mdlulis, and Vilakazis, including more families around Mbukwane area.

Evangelization of the Makhosini area was led by Samuel Mdluli, father to Pastor Dan Mdluli, where Mkhizes, Mabhunu's daughters, and grandchildren worshiped together. Sister Madlala started a church in the Mehlwabovus area in Nkwene. Mbukwane Mission station had realized the birth of the Jojo, Mazombizwe, Hlathikhulu, Matimatima, and many other companies within the vicinity of Nhlanguano. In 1938 the Sinceni Company was started with the Dladlas and Ngwenya families, through the influence of Josiah Robert Sangweni.

In 1946, Pastor Hlubi and his family were transferred to Durban Natal, where he started a church in Clermont, Durban. He worked there for eleven years. Josiah Robert Sangweni, who had been working with Pastor Hlubi, continued preaching in other areas, such as Phongolwane. There Mrs. Shabalala, mother to Pastor Shabalala, was converted with many others, including Aaron Shongwe and his family, around 1954. Mrs. Shongwe, Mabhunu Dlamini's daughter, whose parents were the first converts in Mbukwane, married Aaron Shongwe. Brother Shongwe later donated the land where the Phongolwane Adventist Primary School was constructed in 1957. The Phongolwane Church was subsequently organized in 1968.

After the departure of Pastor Hlubi, the leadership baton was left in the hands of Pastor P.V. Msimango from the Transvaal, who moved to Swaziland, and Pastor E.J. Khuboni, who made frequent visits to ensure that the mission flames kept burning.

In the mid-1950s, Babe Jeremiah Dlamini, Msabatha, a member of the Zion Church, met Mr. Kheswa, from the Eastern Cape, who was the Veterinary Assistant (Madibhane) at Ka-Lokhayiza Dip-Tank at Kalanga. Mr. Kheswa

was a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who worked at that Dip-Tank. Through Bible studies conducted by Kheswa, Msabatha accepted the message. When Kheswa left the area, he referred Msabatha to the Voice of Prophecy institution in Cape Town, where he continued to learn more.

Msabatha was also encouraged by his cousin, Ms. Eleanor Dube (Dubazana), who originated from Ka-Langa, and at that time was working in Manzini as a Bible worker. She had commenced preaching to Emakhosikati of King Sobhuza II at Lozitha under the leadership of Pastor Hlubi. Subsequently, Msabatha shared the message with Ambrose Masuku, who was also from Ka-Langa and of the Zion faith. Masuku, together with his wife, La-Msweli, accepted the message, as well as Zeblon Mashwama and his wife laMagagula. Others who later became part of the new congregation were Mr. and Mrs. K.T. Samketi, Mr. and Mrs. Bothma, and later Mr. A.M. Motsa and his wife laDlamini, from Lushikishini, in Mankayane. Cyril P. Nxumalo, a government agricultural extension worker, was baptised in 1958 with his wife la Simelane at the Mpolonjeni Company. He became the first Swazi pastor following his training at Bethel College. It was in that year that the pioneer, Joseph M. Hlubi, lost his beloved wife, Alice Hlubi.

Around 1955-1956, Pastor P.V. Msimango went to Kwaluseni, preaching the Adventist message. He was with Philip Dlamini, who also assisted in building a church structure. Church membership growth was slow. As a result campaigns were conducted annually, and a tent was pitched where the current church building stands today. Few converts were baptized at Mtilane River. Pastor E.J. Khuboni also contributed a lot towards church growth in this region.

Eleanor Dube was a remarkable evangelist who did a tremendous work. Affectionately referred to as "Gogo Dubana," she converted many people at Kwaluseni, including some members of the royal family, including Inkhosikati LaMasuku, mother to Princess Dlalilise and Princess Msindvose, who are current church members in good and regular standing. Inkhosikati LaHlophe of Lozitha was the mother to the late Prince Tjekedi, who was also a member in good and regular standing. The current Queen Mother Inkhosikati LaTfwala, mother to the current King, Mswati III, was among those converted to the Adventist faith. The king was never baptized into the church because at the time anticipated for his baptism, he relocated to the United Kingdom. All these people were won into the faith through the courageous effort of the late sister Eleanor Dube.

Among other individuals and families who offered themselves for the Lord's service is the Sibeko family. They offered transportation whenever there was need, free of charge. After Pastor Msimango returned to Mbukwane, Pastor C.P. Nxumalo took over around 1968/9. The church was organized around the 1970s. The present church building was built through a donation from Brother Jacobs, who drew the plan and donated all the building materials, and church members assisted with brick laying.

Pastor Joseph Hlubi returned from the KwaZulu-Natal Field in 1957, following his retirement, and stayed in Manzini. It is said that this was due to the influence of King Sobhuza II, his schoolmate at Lovedale College. The emissary for his return was Norman Elias Nxumalo (father to both Brother Rhodes Nxumalo and Pastor Cyril P.

Nxumalo). The king appointed Pastor Hlubi as one of his senior and close advisors. He studied the Bible with him to such an extent that the king confessed to be converted to Adventism, although he could not publicly proclaim it so as not to alienate his other subjects from other denominations. His Majesty King Sobhuza II allowed Pastor Hlubi to preach freely in the Royal House. As a result many there were converted to be Adventism.

Pastor Hlubi continued to spread the gospel to the Zombodze area, near the Mdzimba Mountains. One of the converts was the mother to K.T. Samketi, who later became one of the pioneers of the Siteki and Vuvulane Seventh-day Adventist church.

In the Manzini Area, Pastor Hlubi initially worshiped at his house with the family, then relocated to Norman Nxumalo's place, and later moved to Kwaluseni Church, but due to long distance they reverted to their house. When the Fortunes and Sangwenis joined them in 1959, they first worshipped at Moneni, and then later moved to the Old Manzini Trade Fair site, where they were joined by the Huttons, Craigs, Devegass, Jacobs, Allison, Hlanzes, Frasers, and Oswins. Through the influence of Pastor Evert and support of Brother Isaac Fortune, and donations from all the other churches in Swaziland, the Manzini church was completed in 1971-1972. This was to become Manzini Central Church and the Field office headquarters. Pastor Hlubi died in 1968, at the age of 83, while the Manzini Central Church was still under construction. The Hlubi's son, Pastor Allen C. Hlubi, took the baton and joined the ministry.

Josiah Robert Sangweni also went to Hhohho, in the northern part of the country, to preach, and laSimelane wife to Magwegwane, was one of the first converts. Later the Ginindzas, Cekos, Dlamini and Malingas from Badplaas were also converted. Although Magwegwane himself did not fully convert to Adventism, he embraced the faith to the extent that he consented to holding worship services at his home every Sabbath. Later the Bothmas donated a portion of their farm, about 27 hectares of land, which forms part of where the Hhohho Church stands today. Daniel Dlamini contributed a lot to the building of the church in Hhohho, while Pastor Khanyile was instrumental in ensuring growth of this church in the area. After the Hhohho church was established, branches were established at Emandleni, Ntintinyane, and Timphisini, which unfortunately over a period of time subsequently became extinct. Of late other branches have been established at Luhlangotsini, Bulembu, Msumpe in the Ntfontjeni area, Sihhoye, and Madlangempisi.

In the early 1960s almost all the families who constituted the Mpolonjeni Company, with the exception of the Bothma family, secured agricultural plots/farms in Vuvulane where they grew sugar-cane and vegetables. The Mashwamas left for Vuvulane prior to the other families, even before the meeting with Samketis, and as such they were stuck with the truth when they were in Vuvulane with nowhere to meet. The Samketis joined the Vuvulane Scheme, and met with the Mashwamas. When the other families joined them this then meant the demise of the Mpolonjeni Seventh-day Adventist Company due to this relocation. Other members who formed part of the Vuvulane Company were the Motsas, Ginindzas from Hhohho, Shibas from Sinceni, and Mthembus.

Notwithstanding this development, these families were subsequently responsible for the 'birth' of the Vuvulane Seventh-day Adventist Church, as they then commenced congregating in Vuvulane.

Around 1961 Adventism found its way to Sigombeni, a rural community in Manzini. Washington Mkhonta and the family of Solomon Masinga were the first pioneers of Adventism at Sigombeni. Mkhonta came to know about Adventism while working in the mines in Germiston, South Africa. When the Masingas came to Swaziland, they reconnected with Mkhonta. Though at that time Mkhonta had stopped practicing the religion, Masinga encouraged him to rejoin the faith. The church officially started at the old Masinga residence in 1962. Through the first aid skills of Mrs. Masinga, a Dlamini family was discovered and added into the fold. Many pastors loved the Sigombeni community, and as a result a proper church structure was erected in 1975, through the assistance of Pastors Smith and Hayter, the then treasurers of Swaziland field, respectively. Significant growth began in the 1980s, and presently continues.

In 1961, John and Evellinah Madonsela, from Badplaas, South Africa, came to Swaziland with the Adventist faith. They first attended in Manzini under Pastor Hlubi. Later they started worshiping in their home, and were joined by the Gina family from Lavumisa. Angel Dlamini from Manzini joined them and helped with Sabbath School lessons. In 1980 Esther Nxumalo joined them from South Africa. As the numbers grew they started worshiping in a classroom in a nearby Luhlokohla Primary School. Later Sister Esther Nxumalo asked for land from the chief of the area. The church was built on this site in 1998 and the building was dedicated in 2006. As membership grew the church became organized in 2017.

Elder S.B.S. Nkabinde narrates that in Mbabane in 1966, a man who had drifted away from the church enquired whether there were other Adventists in town. He was advised that Makhanya, from Coronation Park, with her four daughters, and V.S. Maphalala from Msunduzi Township, with her children, were Adventist families. A search for these families immediately ensued, resulting in the first church services held at Coronation Park. Given the increased membership, Sabbath services were then relocated to V.S. Maphalala's house.

From this little group additional Adventists were discovered around Mbabane, in the northwestern part of the country, and through door to door visits over 145 people registered with the Voice of Prophecy Correspondence Bible School in Cape Town. Other members found included Brother Mdlalose, a former Adventist. Soon a few young men joined whose background was Mbukwane, and some women, including one Mary Simelane. Other members found at Sidwashini included Sister Gertrude Themba, whose activities resulted in Miss Dunn joining the church.

Given the increase in membership, the congregation moved from Mrs. Maphalala's place to e-Thangeni, a pre-school structure, at Sandla next to the present DIVT offices. In the early 1970s the Swaziland Mission Field arranged a revival campaign at the current Central Bank Buildings, under the leadership of Pastor Cook from the General Conference. The likes of Brother Ephraim Hlophe and his family, a Maseko family, and Lungile Mabuza, wife to Br. Joshua Mabuza, joined the church. Brother Sandile Ceko (Snr) and Sister S'phiwe Ceko also joined the

Mbabane Church, as well as Brother Godwin & Sister Nozi Nxumalo. Sister Nozi was originally an Adventist member who came from the Transkei and stayed with her sister and brother-in-law, the Pilanes, who were non-Adventist before her marriage to Godwin. Nozi Nxumalo led the other Nxumalos, Sam, Richard, Solomon and Louis Nxumalo, her in-laws, to accept the Adventist message.

The Field secured the services of R. Basini, who joined the church from the Transkei with his family. He was able to soon open many doors for the Adventist message through Bible studies, which resulted in Sister and Brother Maseko and Nkambule's conversion. Through the help of Brother Devega, the Mbabane congregation established their church building around 1984 at Thembelihle Township, and dedicated it in 1991. The Mbabane SDA Church was organized in 1983.

In 1967 a Sabbath School branch commenced at Ngwenya, near the Oshoek border post at Peter Dube's house. The authorities soon made the soup kitchen available for the members' use in this mining village, and Sister Khoza, Sister Shabangu, and Brother Nkonyane, a mechanic, joined the Ngwenya group. Sister Ngwenya, who worked at the Ngwenya Border Gate, on the South African side, and a member from Ermelo Adventist Church also joined. David Molène, a preacher from Meadowlands, Johannesburg, was a constant visitor, and often preached when present. Unfortunately, the Bhunya Village was also reached whereas the souls were left alone after the series of meetings, and the 'fire' died.

In the late 1970s, Selby Nxumalo, who was staying in South Africa, during the height of the apartheid era, decided to have his children stay at his parental home at Nkhamba. His parents were members of the Anglican Church, whereas Selby Nxumalo converted to the Adventist message, and wanted his kids to be brought up through same. He knew Elder S.S. Nkabinde and Mrs. Nkabinde, and he asked them to arrange for a children's Sabbath school at his parents' home. The number of children attending grew such that members of the Anglican Church became concerned that their potential members were being recruited to Adventism, and a conflict ensued.

At that time, the Masekos, Nkambules and Mhlongos relocated from Mbabane to Mhlosheni. Elder Nkabinde then engaged these families, and the membership convened at the Masekos. These were later joined by the Makhanyas and Malaza families. As the number grew, land was sought from the chief where the church was built. Elder Nkabinde had an evangelistic mind, and encouraged the youth to go out and preach, conducting weekend campaigns. The likes of Robert Khumalo of Nkhamba and Augustine Mnisi of Mbabane were products of this school. This church was ultimately organized in 1983 and the church building was dedicated in 1991.

In the early 1980s, Mrs. Mashwama (La-Magagula) and Mrs. Dlamini (La-Cebe) relocated from Vuvulane to Mpolonjeni and ka-Langa, respectively. The two families alternated meeting in their respective homes each Sabbath, joined by their neighbors. In 2002, Jobe and Thandie Mashwama, already members of the church, relocated from Big Bend to Mpolonjeni. The Mpolonjeni Branch Sabbath School's membership increased. Members came up to join the branch, including the Mngometulu sisters, Philile Nhlabatsi and Ntombifuthi

Mbhamali, as well as Thulile Dvuba, who were now married to residents of Mpolonjeni, and Nonhlanhla Mashwama, who had also relocated from Mbabane. Also in 2002, Pastor Rhodah Mavuso and the local church leader, Johannes Mamba, arranged for a revival meeting under the leadership of Elder Mandla Sangweni. Over fifty souls were baptized. A local community member, Luhlwitsi Magagula, offered a piece of land for constructing a church structure, and the chief of the area, Babe Dvuba, endorsed the proposal. Subsequently, Mpolonjeni Adventist Church was “re-born,” and currently it has two companies, ka-Langa and Lukhula. In 2006 the church was dedicated and thereafter organized.

More churches have now been organized in the Manzini region. The Manzini East District now includes Manzini Central, Manzini City Church, Ngwane Park, Timbutini, Hhelehhele, Mount Mjingo, and Nhlambeni, with a high number of companies and Sabbath School Branches. In the Manzini West District are the Kwaluseni, Sigombeni, and Luyengo churches, as well as their companies. There are also Lozitha, Zombodze waMagugu, and Mbekelweni in the Manzini West District.

The Hhohho region has eZulwini, Mbabane, Cooperation, Mhlosheni and Hhohho North, plus some companies. In the Lubombo region, there is Vuvulane, Siteki, Matsetsa, Mpolonjeni, Big-Bend, and Mahlabaneni, coupled with regional companies under each mentioned church. The mighty Shiselweni region has Mbukwane, Nhlanguano, and Phongolwane.

Organizational History of the Conference

During its formative years, the Mbukwane Mission in Swaziland (Eswatini) remained an attached field of the missions in the northern territories of South Africa, including the Transvaal-Delgoa, South African, and North Bantu Mission Fields. The Zulu Mission which was established in KwaZulu-Natal also contributed to growth of the work in Swaziland, especially since Swazis and Zulus are closely related in many ways.

The North Bantu Field strongly emphasized evangelistic outreach through public efforts. In 1953, the North Bantu Mission Field deployed workers “to different parts of the field to conduct what was called *reaping efforts*. These were a series of doctrinal lessons conducted mainly in tents throughout unentered communities.⁶ Such incredible church growth occurred as a result of these campaigns that Swaziland was able to send two delegates to the North Bantu Mission business session in 1954.

In 1960, an attempt to empower Black leadership and to encourage church growth in the mission fields, spearheaded by G.S. Stevenson, led to the dissolving of the North Bantu Mission Field. Nine smaller mission fields were organized in its stead, including the Swaziland-Eastern Transvaal Mission Field. With the election of A.M. Lukhele as president, the Seventh-day Adventist Church work in Swaziland was overseen by a Black African for the first time. In 1960, a mission in Shiloh, South Africa, had to be sold due to the South African government declaring Shiloh a “Whites Only” territory and prohibiting Black South Africans from owning property in this area. In 1962, the South African Union Conference Group II executive committee agreed to use the proceeds from the

sale in the Shiloh Mission towards the purchase of a plot in Bremersdorp (now known as Manzini), Swaziland, for the purpose of building offices.⁶

In 1963, the South African Union Conference Group II decided to reduce the nine mission fields organized three years earlier to five missions. In the same year, the church in Swaziland submitted a memorandum to the South African Union Conference titled, *Application for a Field in Swaziland with headquarters in Manzini, formerly knowns as Bremersdorp*. The memorandum read as follows:

While we appreciate the objects of the leading brethren in reducing the fields in the South African Union Conference from nine to five, the Swaziland Adventist Preachers' Council and a special representative of the church in Bremersdorp feel that it would be in the best interest of the Lord's work if a field could be re-established in Swaziland with headquarters in Bremersdorp.

There is a crying need for the work to be more centralised (sic) here. The other churches such as the Roman Catholics and the church of the Nazarene have stolen a march on us in this respect. We have been looking forward to the erection of a central station and officers with fervent expectation.⁷

From 1963 to 1968, the work in Swaziland was combined with the Black African work in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. The organization was named the Natal-Swaziland Field. Deliberations continued throughout the six years while Swaziland was attached to the Natal-Swaziland Field, with headquarters in Natal. In 1968 "the Swaziland area was detached from Natal and organized into the Swaziland Field."⁸ At the time of this organization, A.M. Lukhele became the president-elect, and the church in Swaziland had seven organized churches, with 336 members.

The Swaziland Conference was organized on October 23, 1999, at the twelfth business Session of the Swaziland Field, with a membership of 2,626, with 12 churches and 14 companies, in a population of 994,108. By 2020 the population stood at 1.148 million, with the Adventist church membership 9,070, with 26 churches and 41 companies. Swaziland Conference has five ordained ministers and five licensed pastors, inclusive of those serving at the office and in the districts.

On April 19, 2018, the name of the country was changed by His Majesty King Mswati III, on his 50th birthday, to the Kingdom of Eswatini. This change required that all organizations and entities bearing the name Swaziland accordingly adjust their names to Eswatini. The Swaziland Conference constitution states that any amendments, including the conference name, could only be considered at a regular business session of the constituency. In line with the constitution, the Swaziland Conference executive committee voted in their 2019 year-end meetings to recommend the conference change its name to Eswatini Conference at the next constituency regular business session.⁹ Consequently, when the 8th regular business session of Swaziland Conference convened on November 14, 2021, the name was changed from Swaziland Conference to Eswatini Conference.¹⁰

Future Outlook

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Eswatini does not own a hall or auditorium to conduct meetings for business sessions or camp meetings. They often have to rent schools or halls from other churches to conduct meetings and special combined programs, such as conference music days or church officers' meetings. The executive committee established a resource mobilization committee with the mandate to mobilize funds for conference development projects. One of the desired projects is to build a conference center. Plot 36, Daviot Township, Peebles Block in Manzini was deemed suitable. The purchase has been halted due to concern from church members that the practice and beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists may be infringed upon in the event of hiring the center to third parties and that the center may become a 'white elephant' if no thorough research was conducted as to the competitiveness of the center. Financial constraints faced by the conference further delayed the purchase of the conference center, which still remains a desired objective to obtain.¹¹

Another future goal of the Eswatini Conference is to build a health clinic. A donor from Minnesota, U.S.A., who formerly assisted with building material and other resources for Manzini Primary School, has offered to assist again with building material for the clinic. However, the financial constraints and unavailability of land have hindered this project from commencing.¹² The Eswatini Conference remains hopeful and prayerful that God will provide the means to reach this desired goal, so that the church may more effectively reach Swazis with the everlasting gospel.

List of Presidents

Swaziland-Eastern Transvaal Field: A.M. Lukhele (1960–1963)

Natal-Swaziland Field: P.M. Mabena (1963–1967); A.M. Lukhele (1967–1968)

Swaziland Field: A.M. Lukhele (1968–1971); J.G. Evert (1971–1972); C.P. Nxumalo (1972–1979); P.M. Mawela (1979–1984); J.M. Dube (1984–1989); S.M. Chauke (1989–1993); D.Q. Donga (1993–1999)

Swaziland Conference: D.Q. Donga (1999–2000); D.M. Mdluli (2000–2008); G. Hlanze (2008–2009); D.Q. Donga (2009–2011); J. Mahlangu (2011–2020)

Eswatini Conference: Z. Thikazi (2021–present)

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NOTES

1. Eswatini is the new name for Swaziland since 2018. Eswatini means “land of the Swazis.”
2. “Swaziland Conference,” *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, 2020), 311.
3. Don F. Neufeld, *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (SDAE)*, rev. ed. (1996), s.v. “Swaziland.”
4. Rondavels are ‘hut-like’ structures used for housing.
5. Clifford Nhlapo, *Tears of the Black Pulpit* (Wandsbeck, South Africa: Reach Publishers, 2012), 76.
6. *Ibid.*, 77.
7. *Ibid.*, 78.
8. Pieter H. Coetzee, “Southern Union,” *Trans-Africa Division Outlook*, March 15, 1971, 2.
9. Swaziland Conference, “8th Regular Business Session Report,” (Matsapha, Eswatini: Simpa, 27 June 2021), 80.
10. Sabelo Mthunzi, email to Grant Lottering, January 26, 2022.
11. *Ibid.*, 64.
12. *Ibid.*, 65.

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