

# Nyazura Adventist High School

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Nyazura Adventist High School (previously Nyazura Secondary School) is a Seventh-day Adventist boarding school under the East Zimbabwe Conference. The school is recognized by the government of Zimbabwe. It is situated about ten kilometers from Nyazura town, in Makoni district of Manicaland (also known as Mashonaland) province of Zimbabwe. The school has an enrollment of 775 students and has 40 teachers according to 2017 records. There is also a boarding primary school nearby with an enrollment of 845 students, taught by 25 teachers as of 2017. A clinic is located on the same mission campus. This article focuses on the development of the Nyazura Adventist High School, which at times may be referred to as Nyazura Mission.<sup>1</sup>

## Developments that Led to the Establishment of the Mission

It took 16 years from the establishment of Solusi Mission in 1894 to the introduction of Adventism among the Shona people in the eastern part of Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia). The establishment of Nyazura Mission was thought to be the only way to penetrate Mashonaland with the Adventist message. The pioneer missionary who led in the establishment of this institution was Melvin G. Sturdevant (1865-1933)<sup>2</sup> Before 1910 he visited the area and its farms. His vision was to establish an industrial school which would help to civilize, as well as evangelize, the Mashonaland residents. With this determination, he wrote a letter to the director of land settlement in Salisbury (now Harare) on March 21, 1910.<sup>3</sup>

As the superintendent of the Seventh-day Adventist missionary work for Southern Rhodesia, Sturdevant requested a grant of land to establish an industrial school in Makoni district of Mashonaland, like the one then operating in Matebeleland. Sturdevant was interested in two farms situated in the north and east of the Inyazura siding, namely the Tsungwesi Source and the Tsungwesi Ridge on the Tsungwesi River. The first farm consisted of about 1833 morgen (1 morgen = ½ to 2½ acres), while the second one consisted of 1250 morgen, together making up a total of 3083 morgen.<sup>4</sup>

In his letter, Sturdevant explained the church's vision as follows:

The principle industry must necessarily be to teach, through farming and gardening, stock raising and dairy work, building work, etc., etc., such as we are able to find work to do. Sewing and all kinds of domestic work for

girls. And if possible other industries as fast as we are able to introduce them. Besides the usual education of books and general line of study for natives. We hope in a short time to make our work self-supporting. Therefore, we desire not less than a farm of from three to four thousand morgen.<sup>5</sup>

Sturdevant went further to seek a favorable offer, saying, "We ask if possible a free grant of this land as given to other denominations and our-selves in Matabeleland allowing a nominal yearly rest or tax."<sup>6</sup> He pointed out the urgency of his request as he wished to start his work that same year (1910), before the grass for building purposes was all burned up. The supporters to back up his request were Mr Coghlan, member of the Legislative Council in Bulawayo, and Mr. Taylor, Chief Native Commissioner, also in Bulawayo.

On April 16, 1910, the acting director of land settlement, Frank W. Inskip, ESO, wrote a supporting letter, affirming the great importance of granting Nyazura farms to Seventh-day Adventists. The letter reads as follows:

With reference to your confidential letter No. G. S.33/829, Misc. S. 131/10, regarding an application by the Seventh-Day [sic] Adventist Mission, I am able to speak favorably of the work of this body, which besides educational instruction, trains its male pupils in Agricultural work and its girl pupils in sewing and domestic service. The general training of the Mission appears to be beneficial in the direction of civilization and Christianising natives, and the only objection, from a native administration point of view, and a very slight one, is the fact that they observe Saturday as, the Sabbath Day [sic], which tends to cause confusion in the native mind.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, the inspector for land settlement had replied to Sturdevant that one of the farms—Tsongwesi Source—had already been acquired. The church agreed to acquire Tsongwesi Ridge, although it was considered small. On May 30, 1910, the commissioner in Bulawayo recommended to the Salisbury [Harare] office that it grant the Seventh-day Adventists permission to establish the mission station with the following conditions, "The proprietors shall not alienate the land or any portion of it without the written consent of the company [and] shall use the land for the purposes of a mission station only."<sup>8</sup>

On June 14, 1910, the church proposed that since they had no cash, it would be best to exchange a 600-morgen piece of land from Solusi farm for the farm in Nyazura. On September 6, 1910, Sturdevant received a response from Brownle, the Secretary for the British South Africa Company in Bulawayo, informing him that the board had approved the free grant to the Seventh-day Adventist Mission of a farm of 1833 morgen in the Makoni district of Mashonaland, on condition that the mission abandons an equal portion of the farm it was holding in Matabeleland. Thereafter, on September 19, 1910, Sturdevant wrote a letter of acceptance highlighting that although he had wanted more land, he accepted the smaller part. He also accepted the idea of abandoning an equal portion of the farm they held in Matabeleland, marking the beginning of Nyazura Mission.<sup>9</sup>

## Founding of the Mission School

During the final week of September 1910, Sturdevant and his wife and a few African helpers, who included Pastor Mlalazi, began their journey to Nyazura on foot with one American wagon, 12 little donkeys, a few fowls, and some household goods. They arrived there on November 6 of the same year. Tsungwesi Ridge farm which they had acquired was comprised of 1250 morgen. Previously known as Folks Farm, its name was changed to Mutungwazi Mission (after the Mutungwazi clan who previously stayed there) in 1910, and was later changed to Tsungwesi Mission in January 1911. Later the name was changed again to Nyazura Mission in 1920.<sup>10</sup>

Since the rainy season was near, the missionaries were happy to take advantage of the four huts built by Mr. Folks, the previous farm owner. The grass thatched roofs needed a renewal to afford them temporary shelter. A plow, a harrow, and a few hoes and axes were purchased and the clearing of land begun as it was a wooded tract. During the first season 18 acres of farm land were planted with crops.<sup>11</sup>

According to F. G. Reid, "The pioneers of this new venture experienced the most difficulties of opening up new work in Southern Rhodesia. Attacks from lions and inevitable sickness, added to the hard work and long hours that made life a heavy burden and it was obvious that help was urgently needed."<sup>12</sup> The missionaries could not buy cattle during that period because of the prevailing cattle sickness. The donkeys were too small for farm work. But during the second season, 60 acres were planted because the mission had bought cattle to plow with, since the government had lifted the cattle quarantine. Lion-proof cattle kraals and mule stables were built.

In January 1911, the school opened with 12 students who were boarders at the mission. By the end of 1912, student enrollment had increased to 73, out of which 40 were boarders. Meanwhile, starting from 1911, bricks were made and baked, resulting in the building of the mission director's six-room cottage by the end of the year. That same year, a classroom measuring 7.3 x 12.5 meters was constructed using poles, while plastering it with mud and roofing it with grass. The classroom seats were made of brick and plastered with mud. A dining hall was constructed and roofed with iron sheets.<sup>13</sup>

Late in 1912, C. L. Bowen (1881-1913) and wife joined the mission, enabling Sturdevant and his wife to go to the United States on furlough. Bowen worked hard so that by 1913 the mission had 85 head of cattle and 200 acres of cultivated land. There were more than 20 buildings, comprised of native huts, a church, a school house, a dining and night study room, a storeroom, a wagon and tool shop, and two five-room European-style houses, each made of brick with cement floor and corrugated iron roof. The mission made its own bricks and constructed its own buildings.<sup>14</sup>

That same year, 12 converts were baptized. At the end of the year, Sturdevant returned to the mission with F. B. Jewell and his wife.<sup>15</sup> According to oral tradition, when he got to the mission station, Sturdevant saw black African girls who he had seen in a dream years earlier in the United States, who had called him to come to Africa and help. The two girls came with the intention of buying salt at the tuck-shop and then disappeared. Sturdevant was satisfied that he had arrived at the place of his call.<sup>16</sup>

## Nyazura Mission School's Evangelistic Outreach

In 1914 Sturdevant left the mission he had founded on account of poor health. A. P. Tarr briefly took over the leadership of the mission. Under Jewell's leadership that year, the school enrollment increased to more than 100.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile the church membership had risen to 20. Evangelization was done among the families who lived close to the mission station, namely the Mutungwazi, Tsoka, Mberi, and Gwasira families. These families were removed from the school's adjacent land after 1915, following a recommendation by the colonial government. By 1917, the Nyazura church membership was higher than that of any other mission station in Zimbabwe.<sup>18</sup>

The second group that was being evangelized were the students who were enrolled at the school. Once converted, the students played a big role in evangelizing their families. Students were also used in evangelistic campaigns as preachers and singing groups, and people admired the new way of life these pupils exhibited after their conversion. Pastor Harry Dumba would many years later, in 2006, lead lay evangelists in seeking converts which then enabled the mission district to open eight strong companies, four of which became organized churches by 2017.<sup>19</sup>

Nyazura played a major role in opening several out-schools in Mashonaland, especially during the leadership of Christopher Robinson from 1923 to 1933. By 1925, for example, nine out-schools were already opened, with three or four more expected to be added shortly.<sup>20</sup> Three years later, in 1928, the hard work that Robinson and his wife had done at Nyazura earned them accolades.<sup>21</sup> Robinson introduced camp meetings and teachers' meetings, and he sourced funds to run the mission and saved the mission from being taken over by white commercial farmers. It became the center for camp meetings until 1986 when additional camp sites were opened. Youth camps also were held at the school until the mid-1980s.<sup>22</sup>

## Nyazura Mission School's Extremely Challenging Moments

Opening mission stations was often filled with difficult challenges. One of the first tragedies Nyazura Mission School faced was the unfortunate death of C. Bowen in June 1913. He died at the mission station and was buried in the mission cemetery. According to F. G. Reid, "the years 1917 and 1918 brought much tragedy to the mission, as one epidemic after another swept through the country and several children and adults were laid to rest."<sup>23</sup>

Bowen's son, born in 1911, also died in 1917 and was buried near his father's grave at the mission cemetery.

Despite the losses, the missionary work moved forward and the mission grew. Though tears ran down their cheeks and their faces were often sad due to discouragements, the work went forward. As more workers arrived, more developments took place and the excitement among the local people increased. More land was cultivated, as well, and more souls were won.

Another period when Nyazura Secondary School (name changed in 1967)<sup>24</sup> experienced extreme challenges was when Zimbabwe's liberation war reached its peak in 1976. The secondary school closed, while the primary school remained open until July 17, 1977, when it also closed. The Mashonaland Field Office, also situated at Nyazura, also closed with pastors and other workers seeking shelter in Harare. The circumstances were that Lenos Zembe, who was the field education director was killed and the government responded by arresting most of the teachers, including Pastor Harry Dumba and Pastor Ephram Ushewekunze, who were the field president and executive secretary. They spent 33 days behind bars at Nyazura Police Camp.<sup>25</sup>

The mission was deserted, leaving Mr. Matsilele and the caretaker Michael Zembe guarding the station. But God kept the mission premises safe and intact during that difficult period. Those who remained at the mission paid electricity bills for the institution from their own incomes. In 1978 the primary school reopened with Matsilele as acting headmaster and field education director, as well as holding other responsibilities. Later that same year, J. T. Kanyangarara arrived to head the primary school. The secondary school reopened in 1979 with Mr. Chituku as the principal.<sup>26</sup>

More problems followed in 1981 when volunteer missionaries Donald Lale and his wife, Annie, from Great Britain were murdered.<sup>27</sup> They went to Nyazura Mission at the request of the Zambezi Union Mission in 1981. They taught at the secondary school until February 4. After the Sabbath was ended, teachers were assigning work for the next day to students. Then gunshots were heard at Lale's house. His wife was killed after being bludgeoned with a stool. Shortly after that he entered the school headmaster's office bleeding, and his assailants attacked him with a hoe in the presence of the headmaster, C. C. Masunda. Lale died instantly. The two armed assailants disappeared into the dark and were never caught. Lale and his wife were buried at Solusi Mission cemetery in Matabeleland.<sup>28</sup>

## Historical Role of the School

Nyazura Secondary School was an outstanding institution, but as former Nyazura students relate, living at this mission was not easy in the early days. Their quest for education made them endure the hardships. Notable Shona evangelists who were the first to graduate from Nyazura Mission School were Edward Janda, Jona Chimuka, and Enoch Waungana. Teacher-evangelists who were also the first to graduate from there were: William Mberi, M. Mutungwazi, and Gibson Dumba, the father of Harry Dumba. Noel Zembe was the school registrar for a long time.<sup>29</sup>

Nyazura's influence reached its peak when it was chosen to be the location for the headquarters of Mashonaland Field in 1964. In 1966 the junior secondary school was introduced with two teachers, Harry Dumba and J. H. Wright. The government did not approve such an arrangement. Nevertheless, the students continued learning as a study group and wrote their examinations the following year in 1967. The junior secondary school was finally approved after the arrival of one more teacher, Matambo, in addition to H. Dumba

and J. H. Wright. The period between 1967 and 1971 witnessed more massive infrastructural developments. Junior and senior secondary school science laboratories, new dormitories, and staff houses were built.<sup>30</sup>

The arrival of E. A. Brewer in 1972 as a registrar was a blessing to the school as he became the secondary school science teacher from 1973 until the secondary school closed in 1976. He developed the science laboratories to meet national standards by acquiring equipment and furnishing the junior and senior science laboratories. He continued staying at the mission, despite the war, until 1977 when the entire school temporarily closed.<sup>31</sup>

Absalom M. Mhosva joined the school in 1982, marking the beginning of a tremendous transformation of the institution. He constructed a dam whose water would be used for irrigation. Modern houses for mission workers and teachers, plus red brick modern classrooms and a library were built. A-level science laboratories and a beautiful administration building, probably the best one among all Adventist schools in Zimbabwe, were added. Dormitories for the Ordinary and Advanced level students and a 1,000-seat church building were also added. At the farm, dairy and beef production farming were thriving, and crop production reached its highest level ever. Students were allowed to work to earn money to pay school fees. Mhosva, whose tenure lasted until 1992, helped to rebuild many churches, such as Dzamwai, Chinembiri, and Mukarakate, which had been destroyed by the political liberation war.<sup>32</sup>

Between 1992 and 2000, during Domie T. Mashoko's administration, improved academic pass rates rose to greater heights, reaching 96 percent at O level and placing the school at number 12 in Zimbabwe. A new Home Economics department block was added, and another bigger dam on the Tsungwezi River, as well as more teachers' houses were constructed. The school bought a 76-seat bus. Meanwhile, the mission also sponsored evangelistic projects in the newly formed Nyazura mission district. In 1994 the government granted Nyazura Secondary School "A" level status, allowing it to offer subjects in arts, commerce, and sciences.<sup>33</sup> This led to the changing of the institution's name from Nyazura Secondary School to Nyazura Adventist High School.<sup>34</sup>

During the next decade, between 2000 and 2009, under Edith Tichiwanhuyi's administration, efforts to beautify the campus, build more staff houses, and maintain good academic results were made. Nyazura became a beacon of light for the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church when it became the only Adventist high school in Zimbabwe that achieved a grade A accreditation granted by the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division Education Department in 2007.<sup>35</sup>

Building on previous achievements, Onias Tendere's administrative period from 2010-2017 introduced modern irrigation methods and gave A-level science laboratories a state-of-the-art status, as well as introducing e-learning and internet use in the school. Newer modern dormitories for A-level students were built. The school grounds were fenced, more teacher's houses were added, and a new lawn was planted on campus. Regarding the school's transportation fleet, a state-of-the-art bus, UD truck, another small truck, and a 16-seat kombi were purchased. The school also introduced the use of bio-gas.<sup>36</sup>

Nyazura Adventist High School's academic ranking country-wide stood at number 12 in 1999, and number 7 in 2011. Throughout this period, academic results were maintained above 90 percent, resulting in the school being in the top 20 best schools in Zimbabwe to date. The school has received the following awards: The Secretary's Merit Award in 1990, presented by Dr. Isaiah Sibanda; Number one prize in national music competition in 2007; another Secretary's Merit Award in 2010 presented by Dr. S. Mahere; and finally, Nyazura Adventist High School celebrated its centenary anniversary on April 23, 2011, officiated by Pastor Paul Ratsara, president of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division.<sup>37</sup>

## Future Outlook

According to the ten-year strategic plan (2014-2024) prepared by the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) in collaboration with the East Zimbabwe Conference in 2014, the following goals are still to be achieved:

1. Modern restroom construction with modern toilets seats and tiled floors and walls.
2. Dormitory construction. The aim is to build modern dorms where each room accommodates two students.
3. Classroom construction to add to the existing classrooms which are now overcrowded.
4. Water distribution tank construction allows for the use of dam water for domestic and campus use.
5. Chipembere Road (3 km road from the Mutare-Harare highway) gravel surfacing as a way of upgrading the road to ensure accessibility.
6. Construction of staff housing to accommodate the increasing staff and eliminate house sharing.
7. Sports facilities, restrooms, and changing rooms by the fields to encourage the sporting spirit.
8. Updating dorms, specialist rooms, computer lab, and study rooms to make them beautiful and easy to clean.
9. Auditorium construction for assembly purposes and drama lessons. Relocation of the workshop to reduce noise.
10. Improving paths, landscaping grounds, and improving security. Improving the existing infrastructure—dorms, cafeteria, and staff accommodation.

The aim of the upgrading is to keep the mission to standard compared with other mission schools as well as recommendations from accreditation teams. The school should be able to continue attracting both Adventists

and non-Adventist students for evangelism purposes. The school plans to have fund-raising dinners and luncheons, PTA levies, and school budgets to fund the intended programs.

## Official Names

Mutungwazi Mission (1910), Tsungwesi Mission (1911-1919); Nyazura Mission School, (1920-1967); Nyazura Secondary School (1967-1994); Nyazura Adventist High School (1994-present).

## School Principals

M. C. Sturdevant (1910-1913), A. P. Tarr (1914), F. B. Jewell (1914-1918), W. M. Hodgson (1919-1922), C. Robinson (1924-1933), B. Ellingworth (1949-1950), R. Parkham (1951-1956), M. J. Bradfield (1957), A. P. Tarr (1958-1962), S. T. Palvie (1964-1965), M. O. Claussen (1965-1966), H. J. Wright (1967-1970), H. R. Fisher (1971), R. C. Kachelenga (1972-1973), Beil (1974-1977), J. B. Chituku (1978-1980), C. C. Masunda (1981);<sup>38</sup> A. M. Mhosva (1982-1992), D. T. Mashoko (1993-1999), E. Tichivanhui (2000-2008), N. Nembaware (2009-2010), O. Tendere (2010-2017), S. Kambuma (2017-present).<sup>39</sup>

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4. Ibid.
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6. Ibid.
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9. M. C. Sturdevant, "Letter," September 19, 1910.
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11. Ibid.
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13. H. Dumba, P. Machamire, and A. M. Mhosva, *Seventh-day Adventist Church 100 years in Zimbabwe* (Zambezi Union Publishing House, 1994).
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20. W. A. Spicer, "In Rhodesia," *African Division Outlook*, July 15, 1925, 15. Between 1925-1948, a few of the out-schools they opened were as follows: Matanhire village school in Chiduku district, establishing a church in the area in 1925. In 1934, he opened Gwasira village school in Makoni District. In 1937, the church reached Buhera by opening of Mukwasi village school. Handina village school was opened in 1942. Ruya Mission in Mt. Darwin District was opened in 1948. Anderson Mutiweshiri congregation, Wedza district 1956, Cheneka village in Makoni 1959, Daure and Manhu 1953 in Marange District, Nyakwima 1952, Kwarire Buhera 1963, and many others.
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