South Botswana Conference

OTHIBETSE NELSON SIMANKANE

Othibetse Nelson Simankane, M.B.A. (Solusi University, Zimbabwe), currently serves as the chief financial officer of the South Botswana Conference. Pastor Simankane previously served as treasurer for the Botswana Field, then the North and South Botswana Fields. Between 2001 and 2003 he worked as president for North Botswana Field and thereafter as Botswana Union Mission internal auditor from 2004-2006. He is married to Dr. Leah Simankane and they have four adult children and three grandchildren.

South Botswana Conference is a subsidiary church administrative unit of the Botswana Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

South Botswana Conference region covers the Ghanzi, Kgalagadi, Kgaleng, Kweneng, Southern, and South-East districts. The territory extends for several square kilometres, with a population of 1,178,740. At the time of writing, it had 21,554 baptized members situated in 70 organized churches and 40 companies. The conference had 52 employees. The official languages spoken are Setswana and English. Other tribal languages spoken include: Sengologa, Sesarwa (San), Sekgothu, and Afrikaans.

Origin of the Adventist Work in South Botswana Conference

According to Adrian Khumalo (previously known as Adrian Mpofu), the Seventh-day Adventist message entered South Botswana Conference territory in the early 1920s. While it is generally believed that Dr. Arthur Kretchmar was the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary into Bechuanaland protectorate (as Botswana was known then), the
missionary preparatory work was already underway before his arrival in 1922.4 Prior to his posting, William Harrison Anderson and his wife Mary had moved from Cape Town to Kimberly to learn the Setswana language so they could be ready for entry into Bechuanaland protectorate. They were taught Setswana by a Roman Catholic priest who also helped them translate their literature into the Setswana language, much to the displeasure of his church.5 After that the Andersons went to Mafikeng (now Mahikeng), the administrative town of the Bechuanaland protectorate. Mafikeng also served as a transit point into the interior.

When the Andersons got to Mafikeng they established good relationship with a non-Adventist physician, Dr. McRae, who was a government medical official responsible for the medical work in Bechuanaland.6 Dr. McRae had an especially good working relationship with Mary Anderson, who told him of their desire to establish mission work within the protectorate, specifically in Kanye. The London Missionary Society (LMS) was already in Kanye and this society opposed establishment of mission work by any other missionary society. Dr. McRae advised Mary Anderson that the colonial administrator who could give permission for work to start would not tolerate any religious request. So, she therefore told him of their desire to start medical work. Their request was accepted and a request for Dr. Kretchmar was sent to the General Conference.7

However, when the administrator learned that Dr. Kretchmar was a Sabbath-keeper, he objected. Then the administrator made them an offer that he would authorize them as long as they agreed to do medical work only and signed a concession that they would not preach their religion.8 When Dr. Kretchmar arrived in Mafikeng he was discouraged by the news that he would have to forget about preaching the Adventist message and focus on medical work only. Mary Anderson encouraged him to sign the agreement and then just practice his peculiar Adventist lifestyle while conducting his medical work. She assured him that the Africans would be curious and would ask. He agreed to go and work in line with her advice.

Mary Anderson was a very influential missionary who was well known in Mafikeng for her use of natural remedies and hydrotherapy. A story recounts how there was once a terrible outbreak of typhus which killed many people, except those who went to her to receive her remedies, even though they did not want her religion. Sadly, some Roman Catholics who did not trust Adventists, chose not to consult her, saying they would rather face death and purgatory than go to her for help.9

Dr. McRae was dispatched from Mafikeng to accompany Dr. Kretchmar to present him to His Royal Highness Dikgosi and the colonial administrators in Kanye. Dr. Kretchmar then opened a small hospital in a mud house which also served as his residence. The royal family members were his first patients, and because of the success of his medical work, many people started coming to see him. Out of curiosity, the royals and the ordinary people started to ask him many questions about his peculiar lifestyle, but he reminded them about the contract he had signed that he would not mention anything about his religion. The royals were persistent and they ended up petitioning the colonial leadership about the contract. Finally, they prevailed and publicly tore up the contract document.10

With the demise of the contract, Dr. Kretchmar organized an evangelistic effort and started preaching. This resulted in 46 souls being baptized. The baptism was conducted by W. H. Anderson. Prior to the baptism, the London Missionary Society spread malicious rumors that Adventists baptisms were dangerous and always resulted in deaths. As a result, baptismal candidates asked Anderson how many people he had baptized before, and they learned that it was more than one thousand without any incidents of death. The day of baptism was a dramatic event with royal members among the candidates. The son-in-law of the royal family was the first to test the waters so, in case the rumor was true, he would die and the royal family would be safe. The whole ceremony went smoothly without any incident with the Queen Mother Ntebogang as one of the new converts.11

Dr. Kretchmar was thereafter allowed to establish a church in Kanye. Many other converts later came from among the London Missionary Society members. As time went on the church established branches in Moshupa and Manyana. At one time Manyana was the largest church in Botswana, which even opened branch in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana. Adventist mission work spread to areas in Kgalagadi district and was strengthened by the flying medical missionary services from Kanye SDA Hospital. These services also impacted areas like Tshane, where a clinic was established, and Hukuntsi and Lehututu, where churches were built.12

The Adventist mission work grew in Botswana and some missionary workers came from South Africa to help. Workers like Pastors Ndlovu, B. Tshukudu, Moralane, E. A. Tsotesi, and Daniel Mogegeh joined the mission work. Most of them were not trained pastors but teachers who came from Bethel College in South Africa. Moralane was the first pastor in Moshupa. The church and the hospital became very popular and later nurses training was incorporated into the medical work. Because of the familial relationships between the Ngwaketse and Ngwato royal families, the Adventist mission work found its way to Gammangwato (central part of Botswana).13

Royal family members converted to the Adventist faith, and to this day many are still Adventists. In early 1967, there were efforts made to enter Serowe area by Alvin Cook.14 The work in Serowe is in large part due to the influence that came from Kanye. The churches that were organized in the Bechuanaland protectorate (now Botswana) formed Botswana Field in 1959, of which the current territory of South Botswana Conference was part.15

Organizational History of South Botswana Conference

During the 1970s, members of the Botswana Mission Field desired to become a union mission and acquired land in Mogoditshane for that purpose. The officers of Botswana Field were Pastor Jonathan Mathaba Dube (president) and
Pastor Othibetse Nelson Simankane (secretary/treasurer). At that time, Botswana Mission Field was administered by the Zambezi Union Mission, under the Trans-Africa Division (TAD). When the lay people communicated their desire to be organized into a union mission, the supervising union indicated that for a union to be established, growth must be evident in such areas as membership, finances, and workforce, and there must be at least two or more mission fields.  

The criteria for attaining union mission status seemed impossible to reach at that time. When the lay members mounted pressure for their demand to be met, it resulted in a call for an emergency constituency meeting, for which lay members and pastors willingly paid their own travel expenses to attend the meeting. The meeting was convened on May 2, 1982, at Francistown Secondary School. The Trans-Africa Division and Zambezi Union Mission leaders were present at that emergency meeting. Pastor Kenneth J. Mittleider, the president of the division, gave the devotional message, addressing the need for unity. He also chaired the meeting, while Pastor H. C. Currie, the president of the Zambezi Union Mission, offered the opening prayer. Meanwhile, Pastor Lance L. Butler, General Conference treasurer, gave the closing prayer at the end of the meeting.  

The others present at this meeting were: J. Wilkens (TAD treasurer), Allan Handysides (health and temperance), R. R. Ndhlolvu (field secretary), and T. Nkungula (education director). Those attending from Zambezi Union Mission were: H. C. Currie (president), R. G. Pearson (treasurer), C. S. J. Chinyowa (executive secretary), and E. Munetsi (department director). Attending from Botswana Mission Field were: J. M. Dube (president), O. N. Simanakne (secretary/treasurer), and district pastors. The church congregations that were represented were: Francistown, Maun, Mahalapye, Lobatse, Mafhikana, Kanye, Gaborone, Moshupa, Selebi-Phikwe/Mmadinare, Tonota, Serowe, and Senyawe. Kanye Adventist Hospital was represented by Dr. R. Snide (medical superintendent), R. L. Robinson (business manager), and B. Moahi (assistant business manager). Lastly, Botswana Adventist Medical Services (BAMS) was represented by Dr. K. Seligmann (medical director).  

The initial proposal made in the meeting by the members was that the Botswana Mission Field should be detached from the Zambezi Union Mission and that it should be attached to the General Conference, because they were dissatisfied with the services rendered by the supervising union. There were no church schools in Botswana, no workforce development, no financial support, etc. The division and union leaders managed to persuade the meeting attendees to call for a duly authorized emergency session in December 1982. The meeting they were holding was unconstitutional and as such could not make any official resolutions.  

After a heated debate, an agreement was reached to call for a duly authorized constituency emergency session from December 19 to 21, 1982. The Botswana Field secretary/treasurer was assigned to provide a proposal before the December 1982 meeting which would recommend the distribution of membership and finances for the creation of two fields that would form the union mission. The proposed territorial boundary for the two fields was recommended to run along a natural demarcation line, such as the Dibete/Koke Gorden fence.  

In support of this move, the Zambesi Union Mission executive committee later voted to mobilize resources for the creation of two mission fields in preparation for the organization of a new Botswana Union Mission. The voted action read as follows: “Voted to recommend to the Botswana Field committee that they give serious study to the possibility of creating two fields in their territory, one in the North of Botswana and one in the South, and that they prepare their recommendations with back up material for ZU year-end committee.”  

The Botswana Field executive committee received the union recommendations with appreciation and outlined the following items to be considered by the constituted “union status subcommittee,” which comprised 15 members from across the Botswana region:  

1. Need for two fields  
2. Feasibility for such  
3. Where to divide  
4. Finances  
5. Headquarters for each, where?  
6. Adequate personnel for proper operation of the two fields.

The December 19-21, 1982, emergency constituency session was held at the Teachers Training College, in Francistown. The session voted a recommendation for the creation of two mission fields that were to be attached to the Trans-Africa Division, which would lead to the dissolution of the existing Botswana Mission Field. The two new fields, whose names were to be: North Botswana Field and South Botswana Field, were to begin operating on January 1, 1984.  

Shortly it was discovered that the proposal for creating two fields would pose a challenge for the North Botswana Field because it would not have sufficient operating funds. To resolve this potential problem, it was recommended that South Botswana Field should give a specified appropriation per annum to assist the North Botswana Field to
balance its budget. The proposal was approved by the division committee.

In February 1984, a special constituency session was held at Mahube Primary School, Francistown, Botswana, which organized the two fields and elected officers to lead the new organizations. The elected officers for the North Botswana Field were: C. D. Mguni (president); Enos Mlotshwa (secretary/treasurer); E. M. Dzimiri (Sabbath School/lay activities and youth director); and Stephen Mpatane (publishing director). The elected officers for the South Botswana Field were: Adrian C. Mpofu (president); Othibetse N. Simankane (secretary/treasurer); Edward Leofitlhile (Sabbath School/lay activities and youth director); K. B. Gabasiane (publishing, Spirit of Prophecy, and Voice of Prophecy director).

January 1, 1984, marked the beginning of the existence of South Botswana Field, as a result of the initiative of the lay-members’ proposal on May 2, 1982. Information compiled by the Office of Archives, Research, and Statistics of the General Conference confirms that the field had a humble beginning, with two administrators, two department directors, two office staff, nine churches, 2,320 baptized members, and 609 youth organized into 17 youth societies. There were nine ordained and two licensed pastors, and five literature evangelists. There were 12 church buildings, but no staff houses, no offices, and no mission schools.

The appointed personnel for the South Botswana Field were chosen from among those already serving either as officers or department directors for the former Botswana Field whose office was in Francistown. Thereafter, the new leaders of the South Botswana Field were transported in one truck from Francistown to Mogoditshane Village, near the city of Gaborone, where they first settled in one house while they were looking for additional houses and office space to rent. The South Botswana Field president and the publishing director quickly found alternative accommodation in Mogoditshane, while the Sabbath School and lay activities (now personal ministries) director found accommodation in Gaborone city.

Meanwhile the secretary/treasurer remained in the house that was initially rented, which also served as the tentative South Botswana Field office for a while. Before then, land had been acquired on which to build the offices of the envisioned Botswana Union Mission. To begin with, a five-room temporary office structure was erected on the site. It was hoped that if a piece of land was acquired in Kanye area, the field office would be established there. This idea, however, never materialized. The current office premises are in Mogoditshane, on a piece of land legally owned by the South Botswana Conference.

Table 1: Shows the growth of the South Botswana Conference based on reports given during the constituency meetings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Tithe BWP</th>
<th>Offerings BWP</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>LEs</th>
<th>Organized Churches</th>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Wage Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2,320</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2,716</td>
<td>107,682</td>
<td>11,166</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>4,575</td>
<td>273,852</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>6,024</td>
<td>656,479</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>12,131</td>
<td>2,295,194</td>
<td>61,133</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>12,693</td>
<td>5,141,946</td>
<td>288,100</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table presented above illustrates the growth of the South Botswana Conference. This growth is reflected in the increase of membership, tithe, number of churches, employees, salaries, and wages. The conference leadership gives glory to God for the successes achieved in South Botswana Conference through the efforts of its leaders and members.

In an endeavor to broaden the scope of church growth, South Botswana Conference used its share of the 13th Sabbath Offering Overflow in 2001 to erect ten worship chapels for the San People (Bushmen) or Basarwa, to hear the Adventist message in the local language. Eight worship chapels were built in Kgalagadi and Gantsi districts, one in Kgatleng district, and one in Kweneng district. Places where these worship chapels were built are: Bere, Werda, New Xade, Charles Hill, East Hanahai, Tsabong, Kang, Tsootsha, Sojwe, and Sikwane.

To introduce the Adventist message in these areas, Global Mission Pioneers were engaged. Those chapels whose congregations have been organized into churches are: Tsootsha (organized before erection of the chapel), Werda, Charles Hill, Tsabong, Kang, and Sojwe. By time of this writing, the rest are still branch Sabbath Schools and companies which are yet to be organized into churches. Before these chapels were erected, Grootlagte building in Gantsi was constructed as a worship chapel by the Bushmen living in that village.

In 2003, under the leadership of O. B. Gabasiane (president) and B. Rana (secretary/treasurer), the executive committee voted to recommend a conference status application which was sent to the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division through Botswana Union to approve the organization of South Botswana Field into a conference. The request was granted and the date was set for organizing the field into a conference on January 27-30, 2005. Thereafter, a constituency meeting of the South Botswana Field was called to be held in Gaborone, Botswana, on the recommended dates to organize the field into a conference.

**South Botswana Conference Institutions**

The South Botswana Conference owns and operates the following institutions: Little Lambs Pre-School (LLPS) (established in September 2000); Mogoditshane Adventist Primary School (MAPS) (established in January 2002); and Emanuel Adventist Academy (EAA) in Molepolole (acquired in April 2010). There are also five preschools (four operating and one not yet) that are owned by local churches.

South Botswana Conference is host to other institutions owned and operated by the Botswana Union Conference. These institutions, whose services are making a positive impact in South Botswana Conference include:

1. **Kanye Adventist Hospital** - established in 1921, provides medical services in Kanye and other surrounding villages.

2. **Kanye College of Nursing** - opened in 1947 (though started informal training before that date), provides a basic diploma in nursing, a higher diploma in midwifery, and trains family nurses who work with doctors in the local community.

3. **Botswana Adventist Medical Service (BAMS)** - started by Dr. Karl Seligmann in 1980, operates as a private clinic in Gaborone, Botswana. Dr. Karl Seligmann worked at Kanye Adventist Hospital for several years (1954-1956; 1964-1979) after which he established BAMS in 1980 and worked there until he retired in 2009.
Moshupa Adventist Clinic – operated by Kanye Hospital to serve Moshupa village about 23 kilometers away from Kanye.

**Future Outlook of the South Botswana Conference**

South Botswana Field, though established with meager human and infrastructural resources, grew into a local conference owning and operating educational institutions, serviced by employees who are academically highly qualified. Changes in conference leadership provided the constituency with workers that have varied spiritual gifts that enhanced growth. The organization’s economy improved through the years of its existence. Such a positive historical performance gives the South Botswana Conference confidence to face the future in its passion to fulfill the mission of the Church.

**Name Changes**

South Botswana Field (1984-2004); South Botswana Conference (2005-present).

**List of Presidents**


**SOURCES**


Seventh-day Adventist Church (Francistown Secondary School Hall, Francistown, Botswana), Minutes of Botswana Field Laymen Conference Emergency Meeting, May 2, 1982.

Seventh-day Adventist Church (Bulawayo, Zimbabwe), Minutes of Meetings of the Zimbabwe Union Executive Committee, Meeting of (n.d.), 1982. Quoted from letter to Union Status Subcommittee, June 30, 1982.


**NOTES**


3. Adrian C. Khumalo, Interview by the author, Gaborone, Botswana, April 7, 2019.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7.
Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Othibetse N. Simankane, Personal knowledge from serving as chief financial officer for many years.
20. Ibid.
21. Seventh-day Adventist Church (Bulawayo, Zimbabwe), Minutes of Meetings of the Zimbabwe Union Executive Committee, Meeting of (nd), 1982, 196. Quoted from letter to Union Status Subcommittee, June 30, 1982. TS.
23. Othibetse N. Simankane, personal knowledge from servicing as chief financial officer for many years.
24. Ibid.
26. Othibetse N. Simankane, personal knowledge while serving as the first secretary/treasurer of the South Botswana Field.
27. Seventh-day Adventist Church (Mogoditshane, Botswana), Minutes of Meeting of South Botswana Committee, May 8, 2001, 83; Othibetse N. Simankane, personal knowledge from serving as chief financial officer for the field from 2001-2003.
28. Seventh-day Adventist Church (Mogoditshane, Botswana), Minutes of Meetings of South Botswana Committee, August 10, 2003, 405.
30. Ibid.