

Zambia

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Zambia (officially the Republic of Zambia, formerly Northern Rhodesia) is a landlocked country in south-central Africa. As of 2025, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zambia is organized into two Union Conferences—the Northern Zambia Union Conference and the Southern Zambia Union Conference—comprising multiple local conferences and fields. The combined membership exceeds 1.5 million baptized members, with over 4,500 organized churches across the country.¹ The denomination operates an extensive network of educational and medical institutions, including [Rusangu University](#), [Mwami Adventist Hospital](#), [Yuka Adventist Hospital](#), and numerous secondary schools, clinics, and health centers.² The Church's history in Zambia began in 1905 with the establishment of Rusangu Mission by pioneer missionary William Harrison Anderson.³

Overview of Zambia

Zambia covers approximately 752,618 square kilometers and is bordered by eight countries: Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. The country's population was estimated at approximately 20 million in recent years. Under the 1996 constitution, Zambia is designated as a Christian nation.⁴ The population comprises numerous ethnic groups, including the Bemba, Tonga, Lozi, Ngoni, Lunda, Kaonde, Luvale, and Chewa peoples. Christianity is the predominant religion, with the Seventh-day Adventist Church ranking among the largest and fastest-growing Protestant denominations in the country.

Before the arrival of European missionaries, the territory now known as Zambia consisted of well-organized African societies with sophisticated political institutions, established systems of customary law, and vibrant religious traditions. These communities maintained an integrated understanding of life in which spiritual and physical realities were inseparable. Religious practices provided explanations for illness, death, fertility, misfortune, and communal well-being.⁵

The political transformation of the region began with the expansion of the British South Africa Company under Cecil John Rhodes. The territory gradually came under British administration and became a formal protectorate known as Northern Rhodesia in 1924. Colonial rule introduced new administrative structures, transportation

networks, commercial agriculture, and wage labor while simultaneously accelerating social and cultural change.⁶ Northern Rhodesia achieved independence as the Republic of Zambia on October 24, 1964, with Kenneth Kaunda as its first president.⁷

Origins of Adventism in Zambia

The Adventist message first reached the territory of modern Zambia through the efforts of American missionary [William Harrison Anderson](#). In 1902, while returning from England, where he had attended the coronation of King Edward VII, Litunga Lubosi Lewanika of Barotseland met Anderson in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia (modern Zimbabwe). Having witnessed advanced civilization in Britain, the king strongly urged missionaries to enter his territory and open mission work. Anderson accepted the invitation.⁸

In 1903, Anderson and his helpers—Jacob Detcha, Philip Malomo, [Jack Mahlatini Mpofu](#), and Andrew Nyakana—embarked on a mission expedition into Northern Rhodesia from Solusi Mission near Bulawayo. They crossed the Zambezi River near Victoria Falls and proceeded to Kalomo, where the Northern Rhodesia government had its headquarters. A government official encouraged Anderson to go northward to Chief Monze's area, hoping that the introduction of Christianity would pacify the Tonga people that David Livingstone had visited about half a century before.⁹

Anderson continued his northward journey through Choma and Pemba and finally arrived at Chief Monze's homestead near Chisekesi. After receiving authorization from the chief, they traveled by foot northeast of Chisekesi in search of land with a sufficient water supply. A few kilometers into the bush, they found a swampy spring where water was gushing out of the ground, known locally as "Tinti." When Anderson saw this spring, he was convinced that this would be the ideal place to establish a Seventh-day Adventist Mission station. He proceeded to mark the location and then returned to Chief Monze and to Kalomo to file a claim.¹⁰

Founding of Rusangu Mission (1905)

Anderson returned to the United States on furlough, and it took two years before he came back to open the new Mission station. In July 1905, Anderson left Solusi Mission with his wife, his young daughter Naomi, and several teachers from Solusi. Upon arriving at the farm, the Andersons immediately began building a house. The poles were cut and the frame was put up in one week.¹¹ However, before they could even offload their belongings, the first student arrived. Anderson was not yet ready to welcome a student since nothing was prepared. The language of the Batonga people of Chief Monze had not yet been put into written form. As the school began, lessons were taught phonetically, and the missionary had to prepare his own readers, keeping one jump ahead of the students.¹²

The 5,436-acre (2,200-hectare) site at Rusangu offered fertile agricultural land, dependable water supplies, accessibility to surrounding villages, and sufficient space for educational and agricultural development. Rusangu rapidly developed into the administrative and educational heart of Adventism in Northern Rhodesia, providing the institutional foundation from which subsequent missionary expansion occurred.¹³

The Rusangu Model and Institutional Expansion

The establishment of Rusangu Mission introduced a distinctive missionary model that combined biblical proclamation with education, healthcare, agricultural development, and leadership formation. Schools, farms, clinics, and churches were not independent ministries operating alongside evangelism but rather constituted integrated expressions of a single theological vision rooted in the ministry of Christ.¹⁴

Educational Development

Among all missionary institutions established in Zambia, education became the denomination's most effective instrument for sustaining long-term growth. Schools served purposes extending far beyond literacy or vocational preparation—they functioned as centers of biblical interpretation, character formation, leadership development, and community transformation.¹⁵ The educational philosophy implemented at Rusangu reflected Adventist convictions concerning the relationship between faith and learning. Students were expected to acquire literacy, agricultural skills, vocational competence, and biblical knowledge within a single educational environment where Christian discipleship permeated every aspect of school life. By the time 40 boys were boarding, providing meals became a real problem, yet the school continued to grow.¹⁶

[Rusangu Secondary School](#) was established as a Mission station in July 1905 and remained a major component of the Rusangu Mission Station in the training of church workers and in the expansion of Adventism in Northern Rhodesia. The school was moved to a new site and officially opened under its present name, Rusangu Secondary School, in 1970.¹⁷

The educational emphasis proved strategically significant for several reasons. Literacy enabled church members to engage Scripture directly, which was essential for doctrinal continuity. Educational institutions produced indigenous leadership, as teachers frequently served simultaneously as evangelists, Bible instructors, Church elders, and community leaders. Adventist education strengthened institutional continuity across successive generations, becoming the principal mechanism through which leadership was continually renewed and denominational identity transmitted.¹⁸

Medical Ministry

Healthcare represented a second pillar of Adventist missionary strategy. The establishment of medical institutions reflected the Church's theological conviction that God's redemptive work encompasses the whole person. Yuka Adventist Mission Hospital, a 120-bed hospital located in Yuka Village along the Kalabo-Sikongo road in the Kalabo district, developed into one of northern Zambia's most important centers of healthcare while simultaneously serving as an influential missionary institution.¹⁹

The history of Christian mission in the western part of Zambia, formerly known as Barotseland, should be understood in light of collaboration between indigenous peoples and missionaries. Despite the success at Rusangu, missionaries were determined to expand their presence as far as Barotseland. Their first station in the region was at Kalimbeza, in the present Zambezi region of Namibia. From Kalimbeza, a medical missionary, Samuel M. Koningmacher, persisted until he was allowed to establish a Mission at Liumba Hill in the present Kalabo District in 1928. Liumba Hill Mission developed into a Mission station of significance, with a boarding school, a dispensary, and a church. Yuka Mission Hospital started as an out-station of Liumba Hill Mission dispensary.²⁰

Expansion of Mission Stations

The Rusangu model was replicated across Zambia as the Church expanded. Later Mission stations—including Mwami, Musofu, Liumba Hill, and others—adopted remarkably similar institutional structures because they shared the same theological assumptions concerning the relationship between evangelism, education, healthcare, and community development. The replication of this missionary model contributed significantly to the remarkable institutional coherence that continues to characterize the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zambia.²¹ Seventh-day Adventism officially reached eastern Zambia on July 4, 1927, when Dr. George E. Marcus came to Mwami from Malamulo Mission in Nyasaland (modern Malawi). It is noteworthy that Adventism came to eastern Zambia through medical missionary work

African Agency and Indigenous Leadership

Perhaps the most significant development in the history of Seventh-day Adventism in Zambia was the gradual emergence of an authentically African Adventist identity. This transformation occurred neither through the abandonment of Adventist theology nor through uncritical accommodation to local religious traditions. Rather, it emerged through the faithful interpretation of biblical teaching by increasingly indigenous leadership capable of communicating Christian faith within African cultural contexts.²³

The long-term sustainability of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zambia was driven primarily by African agency rather than foreign missionary initiative alone. While pioneer missionaries established the institutional framework, it was indigenous teachers, evangelists, and translators who integrated Adventist theology into the local cultural landscape. Graduates from the Rusangu training center quickly assumed dual roles as educators

and gospel workers.²⁴

Indigenous teachers and evangelists were indispensable to the expansion of Rusangu Mission. They translated Scripture, established schools, organized congregations, trained new believers, and provided cultural understanding unavailable to foreign missionaries. Their contribution fundamentally reshaped the character of Adventist mission by transforming it from a missionary enterprise into an African Church.²⁵

These local leaders successfully navigated the integrated spiritual and physical worldviews of traditional Zambian societies. By utilizing local languages and framing biblical doctrines—such as the state of the dead and the wholeness of life—in ways that addressed existential community questions, they achieved widespread contextualization. Crucially, this cultural integration was managed through a strict adherence to sola Scriptura, ensuring that the emerging African Adventist identity maintained complete doctrinal continuity with the worldwide denomination.²⁶

The educational philosophy implemented at Rusangu proved decisive in this regard. By integrating biblical literacy, vocational competence, spiritual formation, and leadership training, Adventist education prepared generations of African Christians who assumed responsibility for the denomination's continued expansion. Teachers became evangelists; evangelists became pastors; pastors became administrators; administrators became institutional leaders. Consequently, leadership development became the primary mechanism through which Adventist mission achieved long-term sustainability.²⁷

Administrative Development

As the Church grew, administrative structures evolved to support the expanding work. The Zambesi Union Mission eventually gave way to more localized organization. In 1972, the Zambia Union Mission was organized, thus removing the work in Zambia from the Zambesi Union. After the Zambia Union Mission was organized in 1972, the Rhodesian Conference and the Zambesi General Field were merged again to form the Zambesi Conference.²⁸ The Zambia Union Conference operated from 1972 to 2014, overseeing the work throughout the country. In November 2015, the Zambia Union Conference was realigned into two Union Conferences: the Northern Zambia Union Conference and the Southern Zambia Union Conference.²⁹

By June 30, 2025, the Northern Zambia Union Conference reported 2,594 churches and a membership of 817,143, with a population of 11,601,209 in its territory.³⁰ The Southern Zambia Union Conference reported 1,906 churches and a membership of 712,173, with a population of 9,713,791 in its territory.³¹ Combined, the two Unions represent over 1.5 million Adventist members in Zambia, a remarkable growth from just 20,000 members in 1972.³²

The South Zambia Conference, one of the constituent Conferences of the Southern Zambia Union, is made up of the Southern Province of Zambia, with a population of 1,858,547. The total territorial area is 85,823 square

kilometers, divided into 13 districts. The province has three tribal groups (Tonga, Ila, and Toka-leya), with Chitonga being the major language spoken. The Seventh-day Adventist Church membership in the South Zambia Conference is 347,111, with 564 churches and 1,249 companies. The Conference has 26 ordained ministers and six licensed internees. The South Zambia Conference office is situated at Rusangu Mission, in Monze District, Zambia.³³

Legacy and Contemporary Significance

The historical development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zambia offers insights that extend well beyond national denominational history. The Church's numerical growth, institutional expansion, and organizational maturity are significant historical achievements. From modest beginnings at Rusangu Mission in 1905, Adventism has developed into one of Zambia's largest Christian denominations, distinguished by its extensive educational, medical, publishing, and humanitarian ministries.³⁴ Rusangu Mission, once dubbed the "Mother of Adventist Missions" in Zambia, remains a symbol of the Church's enduring presence. The Mission site now hosts Rusangu University (formerly Zambia Adventist University), a private coeducational Christian university, as well as Rusangu Secondary School, [Rusangu Rural Health Centre](#), and the [South Zambia Conference](#) headquarters.³⁵

The Zambian Adventist experience demonstrates how biblical fidelity, holistic mission, contextual engagement, and indigenous leadership can interact to produce a resilient Christian movement capable of sustained expansion without sacrificing doctrinal coherence. The transition from missionary administration to African leadership represented not merely organizational succession but the maturation of the missionary enterprise itself. A Mission achieves its greatest success not when missionaries remain indispensable, but when local believers become fully capable of extending, governing, teaching, and sustaining the church through their own leadership.³⁶

The Church continues to expand its presence throughout Zambia, with significant growth in both urban and rural areas. Adventist educational and medical institutions remain vital components of the country's social infrastructure, serving communities across all ten provinces. The denomination's commitment to holistic ministry—integrating evangelism, education, healthcare, and community development—continues to shape its witness in contemporary Zambia.³⁷

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NOTES

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