

South Sudan

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Clement Joseph Arkangelo Mawa, D.Min. in leadership, currently serves as the president of South Sudan Attached Territory of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Previously, Mawa served as the president of Dreater Equatoria Field of Seventh-day Adventists. He is married to Doreen Okech Arkangelo with a son and three daughters.

Overview

The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Sudan goes back as far as 1892 when the General Conference voted to send a missionary to Sudan. However, at the time Sudan was partitioned between the Christian denominations that entered the country ahead of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This early attempt failed because there was no space left to be allocated to the Adventist Church. The second attempt to enter Sudan was during the leadership of Neil C. Wilson when he was president of the Nile Union Mission. According to the magazine the *Columbia Union Visitor*, in 1950 Neil C. Wilson “was elected President of the Nile Union Mission, comprising Egypt, Sudan, Aden, and the Arabian Peninsula.”¹ It was around this time, in 1953, that another attempt was made to send missionaries from Egypt to the Sudan. That is why the Egypt-Sudan Field writes, “work in Sudan began in 1953; reorganized 1984.”² Accordingly, a husband and wife were sent to settle in Khartoum. However, when they left, there was no established congregation.

After gaining independence from Anglo-Egyptian rule, Sudan was plunged into its first civil war that ensued from 1955 to 1972. During this civil war many South Sudanese fled into exile in the neighboring countries. At the signing of the Addis Abba agreement in 1972, many southerners returned to their homeland from the neighboring countries where they had taken refuge. The South Sudanese who were in Ethiopia and Uganda returned with the Adventist message to the Upper Nile region and the Equatoria region. Prominent among these returnees were Riet Chol—who was actually the first Seventh-day Adventist representative assigned to Sudan. Apparently, Riet Chol chose politics instead. The work could not progress. At this very time when progress seemed delayed, God prepared Fulgencio l’da Okayo—a carpentry instructor—to become the instrument through which the Adventist message would be established in the southern region of Sudan. Okayo started sharing his faith in 1976.³ The civil wars became catalysts in ensuring that the message of the soon advent of Christ was preached in Sudan and South Sudan. The Sudanese returnees were the instruments God chose to use.

The Civil Wars (1955-2005)

The root of the civil wars in Sudan, which later led to its separation into the two nations of Sudan and South Sudan, go back to the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium which was from 1898 to 1956.⁴ During this time the British kept southern Sudan as part of Eastern Africa which included few developmental activities besides intensive Christianization that offered basic education and health systems.⁵ On the other hand, northern Sudan, which was considered part of the Arab world, benefited from huge developmental investments.⁶ This included robust political systems, making the northerners more sophisticated politicians as compared to their southern colleagues, thereby creating a huge political advantage for the northerners.⁷ High quality hospitals and educational facilities were built, mostly in the northern part of the country. This meant that the northerners had superior education compared to their southern counterparts.⁸ As James Copnall puts it, "...generally the British looked more favourably on the north than the south."⁹ The civilization in the North of Sudan goes back to the Christian Kingdom of Nubia, between 700-1200 AD.¹⁰

Consequently, by the time of independence on January 1, 1956, there was already a simmering discontent and the government based in Khartoum began to encounter military mutinies by the southern soldiers in the southern parts of Sudan.¹¹ Instead of trying to understand the issues, the government in Khartoum attempted to quell the mutinies by force of arms and thereby plunged the country into a full civil war in 1956. This war was exclusively waged in the southern part of Sudan. Inevitably, many southerners went into exile in the neighboring countries of Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, DR Congo, Chad, Central Africa, and others until the Addis Abba agreement in 1972.¹² In 1972 when the Addis Abba agreement was signed, many southern Sudanese repatriated back home. The returnees brought with them the Adventist message to share with their people. The war acted as a catalyst that launched the first sustainable church planting in Sudan and now South Sudan.

From 1973 to 1982 Sudan enjoyed peace under the presidency of Mohammed Jafar Nimeiri. However, in 1983 another civil war erupted between the government in Khartoum and the southern mutinied soldiers that were later led by Dr. John Garang in a full-fledged rebellion. This second war lasted from 1983 until the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (commonly known as the CPA) was signed in 2005.¹³ Again, many South Sudanese were displaced from their villages in the south to the neighboring countries and to northern Sudan, mostly to the capital Khartoum and the surrounding towns. This second war (1983-2005) helped the Adventist Church to grow in exile. The refugees were cramped into camps where they became captive audiences and the Adventist Church maximized on the opportunity. Thus, the two wars—even though brutal and costing many lives—were used by God to allow the Church to enter Sudan and to consolidate the presence of the Church in South Sudan.

The Early and Mid-1900s Attempts

The early exploratory mission by the Seventh-day Adventist Church into Sudan began in 1927 when the country was part of the European Division.¹⁴ After 1927 the next attempt, says Ted N. C. Wilson, was during the time

when his father, Neil C. Wilson, was president of the Nile Union Mission based in Cairo, Egypt.¹⁵ At the time a Lebanese couple, Pastor Ferris Bashir and his wife Laurice Akar Bashir, was sent to start the work in Khartoum, Sudan. After five years of working in Khartoum, they had a few converts and then they returned home.¹⁶ Two of the converts the couple witnessed to went to study at Middle East College. However, the civil war created so much turmoil in the Sudan that by 1969 these converts could not be traced and Sudan was once more declared an unentered territory.¹⁷ Thereafter, Yousif Farag came in the mid-1970s and sold books in Khartoum. At this time the civil war had just ended and one of the people to whom he sold some books was Joseph Lagu. In their subsequent meeting in Juba in September 1977, Mr. Farag asked Lagu for a piece of land that resulted in the current Munuki compound in Juba hosting the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁸

The Entry of Adventism in Sudan and South Sudan

The entry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sudan and South Sudan was as a result of the returnees. The returnees from Ethiopia took the Adventist message to the Eastern Upper Nile, while those who came from Uganda shared the message in the Equatoria region of South Sudan. The first returnee who was appointed to carry out the Adventist ministry in Sudan was Riet Chol, who was one of the early South Sudanese graduates of Middle East College, now Middle East University. However, Mr. Chol did not do much to advance the work of the SDA Church in Sudan. God used Fulgensio I'da Okayo—a carpentry teacher who returned from Uganda—to advance His work.¹⁹

Ustaz Okayo—as he was fondly called—taught while advancing the gospel message. By 1977 his faith made it impossible for him to continue to teach as Sabbath keeping became a problem. Nevertheless, the more he was persecuted the more ardent he became in sharing the word. In the middle of this turmoil Yusif Farag, Tom Staples, and Y. Lusingo visited Juba after hearing that there were a few locals of Advent heritage working together in Juba. Apparently, during the visit of these men of God, Okayo had gone to the village. Elder Staples left his business card with the others in Juba and in September 1977 Mr. Okayo wrote the first request for a missionary to be sent to South Sudan.²⁰

Pastor David Ogillo and His Family

The coming of Pastor Ogillo and his family was heaven ordained. It is said that the first missionary requested by Afro-Mideast Division to come to the Sudan was a Rwandese pastor who declined. Pastor [David \(Daudi\) Ogillo](#) was the second one requested. This Tanzanian missionary did not hesitate to come as soon as the call was placed. He did not even consider coming for an exploratory journey before bringing his family. As Werner, Anderson, and Wheeler put it, “So, in 1979, a Tanzanian pastor, David Ogillo, came to Juba to organize the Sudanese Adventist Church.”²¹ The Seventh-day Adventist Church was seen as a Sudanese Church, based on the fact that prior to the coming of the missionaries, Pastor Fulgensio I'da Okayo and others were already

worshipping. Later Dr. Samuel Ogillo—one of the four children who came on this first missionary journey—and this father told the story this way:

It was a hot Tuesday afternoon on September 18, 1979, when a British Airways jet touched down [on] the runway of Khartoum International Airport. Inside was a Seventh-day Adventist pastor and his family: Pastor David Ogillo, his wife Rebecca Wanga Ogillo and four children, Joyce, Moses, Samuel, and Baraka. This was the first official Adventist missionary family sent by the church to the Sudan.

At the international passengers' terminal were Mr. Tom Staples and Pastor Yusuf Farag, who were the Middle East Union Treasurer/secretary and the Middle East Union publishing Director respectively. Another person at the airport was a Tanzanian who was a lecturer at the University of Khartoum, an Adventist and a relative of the missionary, Mr. Jared Kiore. He too had turned up at the airport to see the historic event, an event that was meant to be a secret to the Sudanese government authorities; a secret because the Islamic central government of Sudan had denied any kind of visa that would allow the missionary's family to preach the word of God in the Sudan.

Pastor Ogillo and his family had come to Sudan with just a one-month tourism visa, and all was in God's hand to open a way for [a] work permit. The Middle East team had booked a Sudan Airways flight that would take them to the town of Juba, the capital of Southern Sudan, on the following day, Wednesday, 19 September 1979.²²

This self-sacrificial move of the Ogillo family encouraged the Middle East Union to send more missionary families. Key among these was the Whitehouse family.

Dr. Jerald Whitehouse and His Family

Dr. and Mrs. Jerald Whitehouse and their three daughters—Jeralyn, Lavelle, and Yvette—were originally sent to Libya to work at the mission hospital there, as both Dr. Jerald Whitehouse and his wife Judy Whitehouse were medical practitioners. Their stay in Libya was a brief one as not long after their arrival, Muammar Gadhafi expelled all missionaries from Libya. The Whitehouse family was temporarily evacuated to Beirut, Lebanon, before they were relocated to Juba, Sudan.²³ Late in November 1979 the General Conference called the Whitehouse family. Dr. Whitehouse reached Sudan in December 1980, and finally the family also came in May 1981. By this time Pastor David Ogillo and his family were already in Juba and Jerald Whitehouse had made arrangement for John Sine and his wife Linda to come in as development leaders to develop the Munuki Compound. Thus, the work of God rapidly grew in the south of Sudan. Ogillo preached in and around Juba while Dr. Whitehouse became the first field president and also led the medical work of the church.

The Munuki Clinic was established in 1982. The first South Sudanese laboratory technician, later on Pastor Charles Okwera Okuka, was trained. The rapid expansion of God's work in Sudan—now Sudan and South Sudan—meant that there was need for support of missionary volunteers and other short-term missionaries.

The Early Supporting Missionaries

Those who came to support the work of God in South Sudan were many. However, there are some names that are not easily forgotten. Judy Whitehouse remembers the situation as follows: Rebecca Ogillo, fondly called Mama Ogillo, was a vital part of her husband's outreach. She was an ardent colporteur, selling Adventist books in the hundreds each month. One person who joined her in the work at this stage was a Ugandan named Napagi Levi. They worked tirelessly to share Adventist literature with many Sudanese. Napagi also worked with John Sines in the workshop.

John and Linda Sines, newly married on September 14, 1979, arrived in Juba. John was the first builder tasked with construction on the 17-acre site. They spent three weeks in a hotel prior to a house being rented for them at Hi Malakal in Juba, which would double as storage for construction supplies. John had worked with engineers in Nairobi to plan the buildings and procure trusses and building materials.

Leonard and Betty Walker, with their children Jodi and Jonathan, arrived September 30 to continue construction. The Sines had built a first-class workshop and a guesthouse "tukul" in which they lived. When the Walkers arrived, the Whitehouses vacated the "tukul" for a rental home at Nimra Tlatha (a section of Juba town), and the Walkers moved into the guesthouse on the compound. In March 1981, the Whitehouses returned to the compound to their nearly complete house. In May 1982, the multi-purpose building was complete, and the clinic supplies were shelved. Patients began coming, with no advertisement and no clinic sign. Only word of mouth had circulated in the neighborhood. Within days several patients came, mostly infants, often suffering from diarrheal diseases or malnutrition. Charles Okwera had in April 1980 gone to Kendu Bay Adventist Hospital for three months of lab training. And providentially, two MercyCorp trained Ugandan nurses were located. Even with these staff the clinic was consistently at full capacity, often with less critical patients being turned away for another day. Neonatal tetanus was at epidemic proportions because mothers were not immunized against tetanus. Mrs. Walker began teaching, but their stay was abbreviated when Jodi, her daughter, needed more consistent medical care due to relapsing tick fever. They left around July 1982. In September 1982, Richard and Lois Helms arrived. She taught not only the expatriate children, but Sudanese children as well, and Richard became auditor.

In May 1983 the McNeilus family came with their three young sons. Dr. McNeilus staffed the clinic along with an experienced retired nurse, Chris Savage, during the Whitehouses' furlough. At the conclusion of their furlough in September, Carl and Dorothy Rusk and family arrived in Nairobi as a builder/nurse combination. They drove their newly purchased used Land Rover to Juba, accompanied by Jerald driving in a Japanese Suzuki newly delivered to Mombasa for use in the project.²⁴

Charles and Norma Witter arrived in the spring of 1984 after Helms left. She taught and he was an auditor. They were initially called as teachers for expatriate children in Beirut, but due to the civil war raging in Beirut they spent most of their time in bomb shelters. Their two boys were Eric and David.²⁵

Throughout all these months Pastor Ogillo was doing evangelism, not only in Juba, but in many surrounding and distant villages, so church membership was swelling. Fulgensio I'da Okayo, who later on became a pastor, had already prepared the first seven people who were baptized by Pastor Ogillo. Instead of depending on public transportation (lorries), he used a Toyota pickup the union supplied. He not only did evangelism, but he was a rigorous and enthusiastic pastor for the Juba church. When the workshop was finished on the mission compound, the place of worship became the workshop. Then during the week, it became the waiting room of the clinic, and finally the Mother Child Health building where help was given to severely malnourished infants. Student nurse Cindy Dietel from Union College worked many months in the clinic. In the autumn of 1983, Karen Wilhite, newly graduated nurse from Loma Linda University, came to support the medical team.

In October 1984, Dr. [Kenneth Sturdevant](#), a 78-year-old surgeon, and his wife Evelyn, age 75, came as relief physicians. They served with devotion and expertise and finished their term in 1985. In May 1985, Leonard and Betty Walker and family returned to Sudan. Dr. Kenneth Oster remained as the interim director when the Whitehouse family decided in 1985 to go on permanent return to the United States.²⁶

Developing Sudanese for Sustainability

Dr. Whitehouse and Pastor Ogillo, as visionary leaders, took it upon themselves to train Sudanese nationals so that the work of God in Sudan would continue beyond the missionaries. This decision was very important. There was also a need to have a clear financial strategy. It was decided that Youssef Farag and his wife Fadiya Farag would train the Seventh-day Adventist youth in Sudan to become student colporteurs. This plan went very well, especially with the first and the second groups of the students sent to Nile Union Academy. The first students were all boys: namely, George Philip Imuro, Philip Olweny Otoviano, Martin Okeny, and Paulino Orem Bongomin. The second group were: Clement Joseph Arkangelo, Adel Elias Bullen, Isaac Bunduki Yose, Mary Lamunu, Awadia Kulida Jonathan, Margret Morris, and Nadia Samuel.²⁷

Prior to sending students to the academy, the families of Fulgensio I'da Okayo and George Okwera were sent to Tanzania where these men were trained as the first Sudanese pastors.

While building human capital was going on in the southern part of Sudan, in the eastern Upper Nile, God was also developing workers. These early pastors who trained at the Adventist College in Ethiopia were Pastor John Pel, Pastor Paul Katluak Toang, and others.²⁸

The training also prepared them for medical work. The first South Sudanese medical worker trained by the church was Charles Okwera Okuka who eventually became a pastor and the first Sudanese Field president. Pastor Charles and Pastor John Moi were trained at Middle East University during the most difficult times of war in Beirut. Pastor Moi and Pastor Okwera returned to Sudan to serve their communities. Both served in various departments, and both served as field presidents, and the two ended up resettling in the United States. This

initial vision of the early Adventist missionaries to train local leadership remains the major approach to the work of God in Sudan and South Sudan.

Seventh-day Adventist World Service (SAWS)

The visionary work of Dr. Whitehouse in Sudan included the Seventh-day Adventist World Service (SAWS), which was later renamed the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). By 1983 Dr. Whitehouse saw that it would be important to register SAWS in Khartoum.²⁹ This was initially meant to facilitate the spread of the Adventist message in the north and also to support humanitarian activities. The pioneers of SAWS/ADRA when it was registered in 1983 were David Taylor, country director, and Kargil, finance and programs director, as well as Aventure Bilal and other locals who serviced as liaison officers. The development of SAWS and later ADRA in the north was phenomenal. One sees the hand of God in every attempt to spread the gospel of Christ.³⁰

The Two Sudans

As already mentioned, Sudan suffered constant civil wars. The 1972 Addis Abba agreement broke down in 1983 when the government in Khartoum disregarded the agreement and issued Islamic Sharia as the only rule of law in Sudan. God continued to use the treacherous civil wars to advance the gospel. Many southerners ran to Khartoum and to the neighboring countries. The church continued to thrive in Khartoum, in what was then called the liberated areas and in the refugee camps wherever Sudanese were. Conversely, a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) signed in January 2005 gave South Sudan an autonomous government with a real possibility of becoming an independent country through a referendum. This happened in July 9, 2011, when South Sudan became an independent country. Unfortunately, just two years later another civil war began that is still ongoing. Nevertheless, the Church continues to expand and the mission of God is moving forward in the countries of South Sudan and Sudan.

South Sudan currently has three fields and one mission station, which are: the Greater Bahr el Ghazai Field (GBF), the Greater Equatoria Field (GEF), the Greater Upper Nile Field (GUNF) and the Eastern Upper Nile Station (EUNS). A body known as the South Sudan Attached Territory (SSAT) headquartered in Juba administers the three fields and the one station. The statistical report for the second quarter of 2019 shows the total membership of the territory is 46,486.³¹ The work in South Sudan falls under the supervision of the East-Central Africa Division (ECD).³² At the time the ECD president was Dr. Blasious Ruguri, the executive secretary was Dr. Nathaniel Walemba, and the treasurer was Elder Jerome Habimana.³³

Meanwhile, the work of God in Sudan falls under the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission (MENA). The SSAT officers are: Clement Joseph Arkangelo Mawa, president; Daniel Ogwok Deng, secretary; and Dani Harelimana, treasurer. The president and the executive secretary are South Sudanese while the treasurer is a

Rwandese.

Conclusion

Many South Sudanese believe that the early attempts to enter Sudan all failed because God foresaw the situation in Sudan and knew that the Adventist message would be preached in Sudan by the Sudanese themselves. This, they say, will happen when the scattered people of Sudan will return from the diaspora to their homeland. They base this belief on Isaiah 18 and other biblical texts.

Accordingly, the proponents of this view conclude that any prior attempts would not have been sustainable without the clear involvement of Sudanese or South Sudanese in the work. They argue that the unbearable conditions of working in Sudan were foretold. Thus, such situations will be borne by the natives. The expatriates, they say, will be the supporting arm of the Church but will not lead or be frontline missionaries as they are in other parts of the world.

This argument advances the idea that the work in Sudan and South Sudan will be done in tough conditions. Conversely, at the end God will bring immense blessings and the Sudanese will greatly contribute to the mission work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide.

Officers of East-Central Africa Division (ECD) (2010- 2015)

Blasious Ruguri, president

Nathaniel Walembe, executive secretary

Jerome Habimana, treasurer

Officers of the Fields (2011-2015)

Greater Bahr Elder Ghazal Field: Daniel Ogwok Deng, president; William O, Kabi, executive secretary; Phillip Odiya, first treasurer/Stephen Kepkoech, treasurer.

Greater Equatoria Field: Clement Joseph Arkangelo Mawa, president; Isaiah Malek Garang Ok and Jacob Frungus Bani Rangu, executive secretaries; Philip Javaid/Harvil Valenciano, treasurers.

Greater Upper Nile Field: Mark Igga Mona Odolpere, president; Gak Ngaw, executive secretary; Kubach Giel, treasurer.

Officers of South Sudan Attached Territory (2015-2020)

Clement Joseph Arkangelo Mawa, president

Daniel Ogwok Deng, executive secretary

Dani Harelimana, treasurer

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