

# Ndabiye, Nahum

## (1920–2020)

### JETHRON NSABIYAREMYE

Jethron Nsabiyaemye, D.Min. (Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya) and a licence in geography (Burundi University). Nsabiyaemye has served as president of the Adventist Church in Burundi for ten years. Prior to that he had served in other capacities. Currently, he is a frontline pastor in North Burundi Field.



**Pasteur Nahum NDABIYE**

Nahum Ndabiye

Photo courtesy of Jethron Nsabiyaemye.

Nahum Ndabiye was a teacher, evangelist, and district leader in Burundi.

## Early Years

Nahum Ndabiye was born June 20, 1920, at Gahungenge, Rubona zone, in Mugina Commune, Cibitoke province, Burundi.<sup>1</sup> His parents were Ntibakunze (1892-1986) and Nayuburundi(1912-?), who eked out their living through agriculture. His parents, followers of African traditional religions, participated in the occult practices of many Burundians at that time.

Nahum Ndabiye's father lived in a polygamist situation. Nevertheless, from his mother, Nahum Ndabiye was the third and the only boy child among his siblings, Ndabatamije Veronique, Barasokoroza Rahab, Bagaza Esther, and Nsananikiye Berenice.

## Conversion

Based on his family's religious background, Nahum would have seemed destined to remain unchurched. Fortunately, God intervened, softened his heart, changed his mind, and led him to accept the Adventist message. By his conversion he set an example for all his sisters to follow, and they also became Adventists. His sister Barasokoroza Rahab married a pastor, Stephan Baryimare, and served with him in the church<sup>2</sup>

To reach people, missionaries had developed strategies to attract the local population. They would organize camp meetings that presented the gospel and other topics such as health and family life. Then, after the local rulers had allocated a plot to the church, it would become a center of influence. From there a church worker

would spread the Adventist message to the surrounding areas. The center organized morning and evening meetings. The morning sessions offered classes to teach people to read, write, and count. Evening sessions included visiting families to get closer to them and share the word of God. That is why those church agents were called “Abavunyi.”<sup>3</sup> That is how the Adventist message spread across different localities. Obviously, it reached Nahum Ndabiye. A Pastor John baptized him in 1942.

## Education

A political development greatly affected the education system in Burundi after World War I. On August 21, 1925, Belgium attached the former German-ruled Rwanda-Urundi region to its Congo territory as one administrative entity under Belgium regulations.<sup>4</sup> It led the Belgian colonial authorities to apply the same educational strategy they used in the Congo. In fact, Belgium believed that “The religious missions are better qualified and better equipped than any other institution to spread the benefits of education widely throughout the country.”<sup>5</sup> The decision also reflected former German educational influence in Burundi. As a matter of fact, except for two public schools in Gitega and Usumbura, the Germans, after their defeat in World War I, left the responsibility for education to missionaries.<sup>6</sup> Adventist missionaries definitely followed the practice. Wherever they established a church site, they launched a school as well.

In fact, they used each temporary church building for both worship and as a school classroom. The educational curriculum comprised a three-level school program. After its completion, a student could go either to another locality to start a new nucleus or to undertake the second level school program. Nahum Ndabiye reportedly had a second level of secondary education at Ndora. He held an educational certificate granted to him in 1958.<sup>7</sup> As did early Burundians who worked with missionaries, Nahum Ndabiye spoke Kirundi and Swahili.

## Marriage

Nahum Ndabiye married a Burundian woman, Ntibatingeso Elizabeth (born in 1926 to Biregeya and Niyombono) in a ceremony conducted by Pastor Jonas Kaduha on July 20, 1942. God blessed the couple with nine children: three girls and six boys. In 1988, Ntibatingeso Elizabeth died. Two years later Nahum married Nsanganiye Priscilla, and to them four children were born.<sup>8</sup>

## Mission Work

Nahum Ndabiye entered denominational service as a school teacher August 16, 1946. He started teaching in Mabayi, where he spent five years (1946-1950). His next places of teaching were Muyinga (1951-1956),<sup>9</sup> Ndora (1957-1958), and Buhayira (1959-1964). At Buhayira, church leadership upgraded him to a district leader and sent him to Muramba where he worked for five years (1965-1969). It is when he was at Muramba that he

received ordination to the ministry on August 8, 1968. Toward the end of 1968, Nahum Ndabiye transferred to Mugina and remained there until 1979 when he went to Bukinanyana (1979-1984) as a district leader. He retired on February 3, 1988.<sup>10</sup>

## Final Years

Nahum Ndabiye died October 10, 2020, when he was 100 years old. Although he had settled at Rubona in his native village, he was buried at Mugina where he had served for many years during his active ministry. Wherever he served, Nahum Ndabiye left a mark. At Muyinga (Kobero) he planted a tree that became huge and became known as Nahumu's tree. Encouraging church members to support the church's mission with tithes and offerings, he built houses for church employees at Mugina, Bwayi, and Rugombo.

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### SOURCES

Gahama, Joseph. *Le Burundi sous Administration Belge. La Période du Mandat 1919-1939* France, Paris: Karthala, 2001.

Pastor Nahum Ndabiye's Service Record, accessed December 2021, Burundi Union Mission Archives, Kiriri, Bujumbura, Burundi.

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### NOTES

1. Nderagakura Jean and Butoyi Johnson, sons of Pastor Nahum Ndabiye, interview by author, October 24, 2021.
2. Ibid.
3. "Abavunyi" derives from the verb "kuvuna". It is a Rwandan concept that means "getting people converted". This is to say, a church worker at a given site was at the same time both a teacher and an evangelist. Their role was to help people get an education and to develop their faith in Christ.
4. Joseph Gahama, *Le Burundi sous Administration Belge. La Période du Mandat 1919-1939* (France, Paris: Karthala, 2001), 243.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Pastor Nahum Ndabiye's Service Record, accessed December 2021, Burundi Union Mission Archives, Kiriri, Bujumbura, Burundi.
8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

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