

Chepareia Adventist Health Centre

JOSEPH PARKLEA

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The Chepareria Adventist Health Centre in West Pokot in northwestern Kenya is one of the leading health facilities in the region, offering a range of medical services. Chepareria is a small town situated 18 kilometers north of Kapenguria which is the seat of West Pokot county. The Pokot people who live in Chepareria are predominantly nomadic pastoralists. They straddle a large area of northwestern Kenya and northeastern Uganda.

Background

The Adventist faith came to the Chepareria area north of Kapenguria in 1981 through the effort of Pastor Nathan Oyiengo and Elder Joseph Parklea.¹ Following a series of Bible studies with the people of Chepareria, the first baptism was conducted October 20, 1982. The Catholic Church was the predominant denomination in the area. Adventism did not grow as fast as was expected, prompting Pastor Oyiengo and Elder Parklea to think of a different strategy to reach the local community. They came up with the idea for a health facility to help in their evangelism efforts.

They visited the provincial administration seeking permission to establish the facility, but the leadership, including the district commissioner, was reluctant to grant the Adventists permission. In the 1980s the provincial administration in West Pokot was dominated by members of the Catholic Church and they had agreed among themselves that they would not allow any other denomination to enter the area.² Seeing no help coming, Pastor Oyiengo and Elder Parklea planned to visit the Rift Valley provincial commissioner Ishmael Chelang'a based in Nakuru. Mr. Chelang'a, a Muslim, was surprised that the Adventists wanted to provide health services to the people and yet the leaders were not in support. He wrote a letter and gave it to Elder Parklea to take to the West Pokot district commissioner at Kapenguria. It was this letter that finally started the process of establishing the dispensary.

Establishing the Facility

Oyiengo and Parklea discovered a 12-acre parcel of land that was for sale. They took a special offering, raised the money, and bought the land. In 1984, Pastor Oyiengo and Parklea, who had just converted from the Catholic

Church, went to the West Kenya Field offices and received permission to start construction of the health facility. It was a double joy when they found out that the facility would be funded by ADRA. During the commissioning of the project, Pastor Aggrey Kutondo, who was the executive director of the Western Kenya Field, was the chief guest. He came with an engineer from Nairobi who led out in the construction of the dispensary. Additional funding for the dispensary was provided by the East African Union.

Commencing Operations

In 1985 the first clinical officer, Isaac Melly, commenced the work. Prior to coming to Chepareria, Melly had been in charge of the Chebwai Dispensary. On learning that the Adventists had started a health facility, the Catholics in the area established one of their own, thereby offering direct competition. However, Melly turned out to be an excellent evangelist in his own right and helped expand the evangelistic effort of the Church in the area.³ In 1994 Melly left for Kagwathi Dispensary in Central Kenya.⁴ In his place, Doris Wasike came.⁵ She remained a year before being replaced by Philip Njeru Njiri.⁶ He served from 1995 through 2003. When he left the facility ceased to operate for lack of a medical practitioner. In 2011 Tabitha Nasambu came and during her tenure the Adventist Church was highly revered among the Pokot. She was a dedicated health worker who served long and with great compassion for the people of West Pokot. In 2015, shortly after the organization of the North-West Kenya Conference from the Western Kenya Conference, funds became available to restore the facility under the new conference. Nasambu left in 2017 and in her place came Joseph Korlem.⁷

Currently the facility serves people from all over the West Pokot county. It has greatly expanded the Adventist mission in West Pokot.

SOURCES

Sang Godfrey K., Kili, and K. Hosea. *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya*. Nairobi: Gapman Publications Ltd., 2017.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994.

NOTES

1. Godfrey K. Sang, Kili, and K. Hosea, *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya* (Nairobi: Gapman Publications Ltd., 2017).
2. Elder Joseph Parklea from Chepareria, telephone interview by author, July 3, 2019.

3. Ibid.

4. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 494.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 495.

7. Tabitha Nasambu from Chepareria, telephone interview by author, July 3, 2019.

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