

2022-01

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## Book Review

### *The Power of the Word, A History of the Seventh-day Adventism in Central Kenya: Highlighting the Role of Mama Eunice Njoki Wangai*

By Mary Getui<sup>23</sup>

The book *The Power of the Word, A History of the Seventh-day Adventism in Central Kenya*, published by Grandmaster Empire in 2021, is authored by Pastor Dr. Frederick Kimani Wangai. According to the back cover of the book, Wangai was ordained a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church in 1960. He served as an evangelist, a church pastor, and an administrator in various positions until his retirement in 2002. After retirement, he took up a new challenge that culminated in a PhD in Christian Counseling. He now operates a counseling practice. He is often called upon to perform ecclesial activities such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals and he also regularly participates in evangelism and preaching of the Word.

Drawing inspiration from the transforming power of the Word, he integrates his experience as a pastor with his counseling skills to offer his clients not only counseling services, but also an introduction to the Mighty Counselor as the real and lasting solution to life's challenges. Together with his wife Eunice, Wangai divides his time between his homes in Nairobi and Murang'a. He is particularly passionate in his support of the initiatives of his local church, Kagwathi, the pioneer congregation of the SDA church in Central Kenya. He also enjoys spending time with the few living pioneer gospel workers and his family, particularly his grandchildren.

In the book, Wangai provides a personal reflection on 60 years of working life, stretching from the colonial period to the contemporary times, covering Kenya, other parts of Eastern Africa, and Southern Africa. He captures well the key role of the missionaries in the establishment and growth of the SDA church in Kenya—particularly Central Kenya. He also provides an overview of worldwide Adventism and highlights some elements of discontent in the SDA Church in Central Kenya, as well as the implications of Mau Mau for Christianity

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<sup>23</sup> Dr. Mary Getui is Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (Kenya). She has published widely on religion, culture, gender, education, peace, family and health. She is a member of the DACB [International Editorial Board](#).

in Kenya. The book includes a gallery of the presidents who served in Central Kenya from 1953 to 2020.

According to the SDA administrative structure, Central Kenya covers a large section of Kenya. Wangai lists the areas and describes the various clergy and the few lay persons—the majority of them men—who broke ground for the mission and served in various capacities in these regions. The accounts include his personal experiences and also those of parents, friends, relatives, and acquaintances. It is noteworthy that there is only one female clergy. Nevertheless, it is commendable that, for each individual, Wangai gives the name of the spouse and, as much as possible, describes the role each spouse played in the work of evangelism and mission.

Wangai acknowledges the significant part his wife Eunice played on the mission field and he lovingly dedicates the book to her. In the dedication, he states that it was Eunice who urged him to write the book. He describes how, being a professional teacher, Eunice used school holidays to train Adventist ladies on how to spread the good news to their neighbors. Her work with the Dorcas Society ladies in particular received accolades from the church leadership. As a result, she received support to reach out in East Africa and Southern Africa. Eunice is credited with initiating the Shepherdess Program for pastors' wives. With Eunice they established Kitui Primary and Secondary schools as well as Emale Primary School. Wangai also credits Eunice for the construction of a modern school and a dispensary in Gatumbi, both of which also served for evangelization.

Understandably, the book does not provide many other details about Eunice. But those close to her have provided further information on her life that it is appropriate to share at this point.

As of 2022, Eunice is 86 years old. She was the first-born child in a polygamous home. Her mother Ruth was converted to Adventism in the 1940s. This caused friction with her husband because she could no longer brew beer for him. Ruth, however, had the support of a key family member, Ngoroi, who was already practicing Adventism. This same relative encouraged Ruth to send Eunice to school. Eunice's father Gitau was enraged because this would deny him bridewealth. Ngoroi told Gitau that the time had come when the clan had to make decisions for the common good of the wider community. Under these circumstances Eunice began attending Karura, an Adventist school where she was converted, and eventually met and married her teacher, Wangai.

Before her conversion, Eunice was the star village dancer. She and her peers found it unbelievable that she had quit dancing and reveling to become a Christian. It was a testament to the transforming power of the Word. She testifies

that it was through prayer that she was able to overcome temptation. Eunice wanted to become a pastor but she found out from the missionaries that this would not be possible, given that the SDA church did not ordain women. When she decided to receive Christ as her Savior, she also committed to serve God.

She accompanied her husband to theological school where she deepened her knowledge on hygiene, home making, serving and learning the ropes of being a pastor's wife. She trained as a teacher and has served exceptionally well, mentoring young minds on issues regarding school as well as on eternal questions. She considers her employment an opportunity to evangelize.

Eunice and Wangai raised three children: Paul, Marion and Lois. Paul is a medical doctor based in Nairobi, active in church ministry. He has dedicated time, money, and effort to reaching out to busy executives of the elite and the echelons of the urban upper class. Marion is an academic and is equally engaged in evangelism. She is a member of Mothers Voice, an all-female singing group. Marion has teamed up with friends in church planting initiatives in Central Kenya. Lois is an educator. In the book, her father describes her as a business partner with her husband, Ngenye Kariuki. Lois and Ngenye have been instrumental in establishing churches in Nairobi and Murang'a. They have also donated land and money to open a church education center. That the Wangai children are independently involved in church ministry is a testimony to the effort of their parents, and indeed their own personal convictions about the Word.

Eunice's desire and dream of being a pastor did not come to nought. She has supported her husband by being a committed wife and mother, thus providing a conducive environment for Wangai to perform his ministerial duties. It is befitting to end with the famous saying: "Behind every successful man, there is a strong woman."