Rivers West Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rivers state, Nigeria. It is part of the East Nigeria Union Conference in the West-Central Africa Division. Formerly part of Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference, it was organized in 2013, and reorganized and renamed in 2015. Rivers West Conference comprises the following territories of Rivers state: Abua-Odual, Ahoada East, Ahoada West, and Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni. Its headquarters is in Abarikpo, Rivers state, Nigeria.\(^1\)

As of June 30, 2018, Rivers West Conference had 82 churches, 16,385 church members, and a total general population of 1,455,888.\(^2\)

**Early Missionaries in Nigeria**

Thomas B. Freeman and Henry Townsend were the first Christian missionaries to enter Nigeria. The former was from the Methodist Church Mission and he arrived in Badagry on September 24, 1842; while the latter was from the Church Missionary Society, arrived the same year, and settled in Abeokuta. By 1860 the Baptist Church was represented by Thomas J. Bowen. The Baptist Mission was established on Ogbomosho, which is an inland off the coast. Adventism entered Nigeria in 1914 with the coming of the first official missionary, David Cladwell Babcock.\(^3\)

The Adventist message reached Otari, Abua, in 1912 through Edmond Naka, also known as Mr. Lovinggood, a native of Otari. Mr. Lovinggood had earlier accepted the faith in the Gold Coast (Ghana) during his prison service there. In 1915, the arrival of evangelist Jessey Clifford in Otari was a great boost in formalizing the establishment of the Adventist church in the region. The primary aim of Jessey Clifford in going to Otari, Abua, was to locate and cement his ties with his friend Lovinggood and to spread the gospel of Christ.\(^4\)

Some of the early converts were Julius Sokari, Wilson Amiofori, Dbia Amiofori, Paul S. Orlu, Dick Akatawani, and Smart Pasisi Egbagiri. These and others joined efforts with the missionary in spreading the gospel throughout Abua and beyond.\(^5\)

Mr. Lovinggood introduced Evangelist Jessey Clifford to Chief Amiofori. The chief was the traditional minister of Abua Kingdom. He was a signatory to the charter that handed over Abua to the British government. He was also the first convert in Otari, Abua. He made his house available for Sabbath worship. The message spread in Abua and neighboring villages. Evangelist Jessey Clifford was given a portion of land in Otari for a church parsonage on June 28, 1922, and Pastor Edmond wrote the land agreement that year.\(^6\)

Converts were baptized in the first camp meeting held at Otari in 1921 at the Omokwa waterside. After the church had acquired land for the parsonage, a mud house with a zinc roof was erected as a rest house for Evangelist Clifford and other missionaries. The church building was a thatched house.\(^7\)

In 1915 the Adventist message spread to Odiabidi, Edeoha, and other Ekpeye villages. In 1923, Pastor Jessey Clifford, who was responsible for the work in the Eastern Zone of Nigeria, proceeded to Aba and established Adventism there. He then returned to Elele to establish Adventism. In 1927 the first baptism at Odiabidi took place at the Omokwa Abua waterside. In 1928 Pastors Jessey Clifford and Edmund penetrated the Ogoru land with the Advent message.\(^8\)

Pastor Jessey Clifford was succeeded by Pastor L. Edmund. In 1929 the message went to the Agbo-Nchia and Etche areas, and mission stations were established at Elele and Aba. In 1930 a wooden building was erected at Elele, and a church was established there in 1931. In 1932 the Adventist message arrived in Port Harcourt, and in 1934 it reached Degema through Tom Sekiro who had been converted in 1923 at Abua. The second camp meeting was held at Etche in 1939, while the second baptism was conducted at Degema in 1940. Those who were baptized included W. Limejuice. At the 1942 camp meeting which included Abua, Ekpeye, and Ogba, Pastor Nwogu conducted a baptism at Ahoada River. In 1952 the Adventist message penetrated Emago-Kugbo. A clinic was built and operated by Dr. Cyril C. Huntman in 1960. The operation ended during the Nigerian civil war. Relics of that hospital still exist in Kugbo.

In 1954 the message entered the Andoni area. In 1957 the Elele General Hospital was built at Elele Alimini by the country council and was handed over to the Seventh-day Adventist Church for operation.\(^9\)

**Early Adventist Workers in Eastern Nigeria from Rivers State**

The following people from Rivers state served as workers in the defunct Eastern Region Mission: Georgewill Chinwah of Obagi (first African school teacher, S.D.A School, Aba); and Benjamin I. Tikili (took over operation of the Aba SDA School from Jessey Clifford’s wife because she didn’t have a government-approved certificate to head the school). Tikili was transferred from Elele School to T. T. C. Ibadan in 1939; Harry U. Elekwa from Odiabidi; Robinson Orukwowu taught in the SDA School Elele; John Uwame; W. Limejuice; Reuben Nwaomah; Goldman Onokwa; Marlin Emejuru; Wilfred Obuzor; Mr. Okoroma; Reuben Esukpa; Amadike; Denis Dokubo; and Wilfred Lali.
Other Adventist workers who served in the Eastern Region area included: David C. Babcock, Jessey Clifford, L. Edmond, Mac Clement, A. E. Farrow, A. C. Vine, Till, Newman, Walton (read the Igbo Bible fluently and preached in Igbo language), Mead, and S. Thorderson.¹⁰

**The Birth of Rivers Mission**

Rivers Mission was born in 1970 and was organized in 1971. The mission was nurtured by the East Nigeria Mission which later became East Nigeria Conference with its headquarters at Aba. The headquarters of Rivers Mission was first located at No 49 Aggrey Road and later relocated to Rumuokwuta all in Port Harcourt City. Pastor K. F. Miller was the first coordinator of the mission field.

During the formal organization of Rivers Mission in 1971, Pastor W. Limejuice served as president while Pastor R. W. Nwuzor served as secretary/treasurer. The churches in the southeastern part of Nigeria were merged with the churches in Rivers state, hence the name Rivers/South East Mission during the organization. In 1971, the mission had 23 organized churches, 3,190 members, nine credential ministers, and three licensed ministers.

In 1973 South Eastern state was detached and joined to the East Nigeria Mission. At this time Rivers Mission had few workers and few members. It struggled for existence with support from higher organizations. It survived and existed amidst many difficulties from different angles. Many people thought it would not stand, but God has been its help.¹¹

**Constituency Session**

Rivers Mission has held several constituency sessions.¹²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLACE HELD</th>
<th>DATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elele-Alimini</td>
<td>January 20-22, 1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elele-Alimini</td>
<td>January 24-27, 1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist Centre, Rumuokwuta</td>
<td>January 28-31, 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist Centre, Rumuokwuta</td>
<td>March 9-11, 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist Centre, Rumuokwuta</td>
<td>January 23-26, 1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. T. T. C. Rumuokwuta</td>
<td>February 2-5, 1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist Centre, Rumuokwuta</td>
<td>February 13-17, 1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist Centre, Rumuokwuta</td>
<td>January 7-10, 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist Centre, Rumuokwuta</td>
<td>March 15-18, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist Centre, Rumuokwuta</td>
<td>January 22-25, 1992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to an interview with the historian, Elder E. E. Owotor, below is a list of presidents, secretaries, and treasurers of the Rivers Mission and Conference:
Leadership of Rivers Mission


Leadership of Rivers Conference (1993-2013)

On March 3-6, 1993, Rivers Mission became a conference led by Pastor S. J. Okochi as president. Presidents: S. J. Okochi; R. E. Eti; R. W. Nwuzor; M. O. Okai; Dave M. Nyekwere

Secretaries: R. E. Eti; S. W. Amadi; M. O. Okai; Solomon Kara; Godwin Kakiri; Nnunukwe Anyalebechi; Ugochukwu Lucky Ahiamadu; Charles Goodhead

Treasurers: Grant Esukpa; E. G. Manilla; V. C. Marcus; I. N. Uhumabe; Isaac Aseki; Ozioma Egbunkonye; F. T. Otuya; Emmanuel Njoku.

The Initiative to Restructure Rivers Conference

The idea to restructure Rivers Conference into two conferences was the outcome of the meeting which Pastor Clifford C. Anwusonye attended at Aba in 2000. He saw at Aba that arrangements were in progress to restructure conferences there. If that dream came true, Rivers Conference would lose out. When he returned home from the meeting, he sold the idea to the Rivers Conference Executive Committee under the leadership of Pastor Reuben E. Eti. The executive committee members began to consider this idea. This led to the formation of a Committee on Conference Restructuring on September 18, 2000. The committee was made up of the following: Dr. C. E. Hekerem (chair), Dr. N. H. A. Nwafor (secretary), Pastor C. C. Anwusonye, Mrs. Gold Igwe, Pastor S. A. Barikor, Elder E. E. Owotor, Elder E. G. Manilla, Pastor R. E. Eti, Pastor M. O. Okai, Mrs. Comfort Woy, and Elder E. C. Mgbere.

This committee was charged with the responsibility of working out arrangements for restructuring the conference into two conferences. At the Rivers Conference enlarged Executive Committee Meeting held at Rumuokwuta on May 6, 2001, it was “voted (a) to restructure the present Rivers Conference into two Conferences, (b) that the proposed Rivers West Conference comprise of groups and districts like Abua, Ahoada, Brass, Egi, Egbeama, Igbuduya, Kugbo, Mbiama, Odiokwu, Ogba, Ogbia, Omoku, Ubeta, Umu Obor/Usomini, Upata I, Upata II and Yenagoa, (c) to accept Ahoada town as the Headquarters of the Rivers West Conference, (d) that a twenty-year plan be made to create three (3) other Conferences out of what remains of Rivers Conference, (e) to accept the Report of the sub-committee on the Restructuring of Rivers Conference.”

Inaugural Meeting of the Proposed Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference

February 8, 2002, Elder Edwin E. Owotor met with people from the Abua, Ekpeye, and Ogba zones at an inaugural meeting at the SDA church in Ahoada. Thirty-one people responded to the invitation to attend the meeting. During this period, Elder E. E. Owotor was the zonal coordinator appointed by the Rivers Conference Executive Committee while Elder G. N Lazarus served as the general secretary.

Based on the unanimous acceptance of the idea to restructure the Rivers Conference, a planning committee was appointed, as follows: Elder Solomon O. N. Adira (chair), Elder Sunday Ajie, Mercy N. Walson, Comfort Woy, Pastor R. O. Onwuamegbu, Elder Anthony Ilueme, Elder G. N. Lazarus, Pastor Chimezie S. Obuzor, Mrs. Gold Igwe, Pastor J. E. Igwe, and Elder E. E. Owotor.

After several meetings, the general house voted to transit to the election of officers. They were: E. E. Owotor (chair), S. O. N. Adira (treasurer), and G. N. Lazarus (general secretary).

At the same meeting, an enlightenment committee was appointed to create awareness in the Abua, Ekpeye, and Ogba zones.

On July 2, 2002, the house was advised to elect an ordained pastor to chair the meeting, hence the change of leadership to Pastor David O. Jonathan.

As awareness grew among the people, there was the need to enlarge the committee, hence the following were elected: Mrs. Gold Igwe (assistant General Secretary), Elder Charles A. Itari (financial secretary), Elder Sunday Ajie (replaced Elder Solomon Adira as treasurer), Elder Isaac Aseki (assistant financial secretary), Barrister N. M. Ogbanagba (legal adviser), and Pastor R. E. Eti (adviser).

Committee Requested for Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference
On October 12, 2003, the house constituted an Application Drafting Committee as follows:


Terms of reference were given to the committee to draft the application to send to the African-Indian Ocean Division through the union and through Rivers Conference. Pastor David O. Jonathan and Elder Solomon O. N. Adira submitted the endorsed application to the Nigeria Union Mission (NUM), Ikeja Lagos.

Territory of Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference

The territory of the proposed Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference includes the following districts of churches: Abua, Ahoada, Egi, Egbema, Igbuduya, Kugbo, Odiokwu, Ogba, Omoku, Ubeta, Umu Obor/Usomini, Upata I, Upata II, and Yenagoa.

After the organization of the conference, the following districts have been added: Agili-Mini, Ahiahu, Akoh-Oluko, Amah, Echi-Upata, Eka-Oshi Upata, Emughan, Erema, Igburu, Obakata, Okpeden, Okporowo, Ubio, Ula-Okobo, Usomini.

Formation of Project Ways and Means Committee

In a Rivers Conference Executive Committee presided over by Pastor Dave M. Nyekwere, president, the appointment of a Project Ways and Means Committee for the proposed Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference was voted. The members were as follows:


The terms of reference of the Project Ways and Means Committee were to determine the readiness of the Rivers West-Bayelsa Field for organization as a conference. Previously formed committees now became part of this committee. Additional people were added to this committee to facilitate its work.

Creation of Rivers West-Bayelsa Administrative Unit

According to a brief History of Rivers West-Bayelsa Administrative Unit booklet, the administrative unit was inaugurated on March 8-9, 2012, by Pastor B. E. O. Udoh, president of the Eastern Nigeria Union Mission (ENUM), who led out in the inauguration ceremony. Its headquarters was temporarily at Ahoada, and its officers were: Pastor Ugochukwu L. Ahiamadu (director), Pastor David. O. Jonathan (executive secretary), Elder Freeborn T. Otuya (treasurer).

The administrative unit was created to bring the administration closer to the people, for more effective spreading of the gospel, to foster unity among the people, to increase personnel, to increase stewardship, and to prepare for conference inauguration.

On March 9, 2012, Pastor B. E. O. Udoh performed the ground breaking ceremony of the proposed Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference office at the permanent site in Abarikpo. The building is one story. The West-Central African Division sent a team led by the executive secretary, Pastor Onaolapo Ajibade, to inspect the field for readiness as a conference. The outcome of the inspection led to the organization of Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference in 2013.

Inaugural Session of Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference

The inaugural constituency session of the new conference took place December 20-22, 2012. Officers elected were: president, Ugochukwu Lucky Ahiamadu; secretary, David Odianani Jonathan; treasurer, Vincent C. Marcus.

At the time of its inauguration, the conference had 11 ordained ministers, 25 districts, 75 organized churches, 81 companies, and membership of 13,275.

Major Landmarks of Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference

A befitting office complex erected at the permanent site at Abarikpo has been completed. The health institution is functioning.

Educational Institution: Adventist Mission High School Obite, then Mission High School Obite. The school was established in 2004 with full assistance from districts, churches, and individuals. It is government approved and continues to function.

Evangelism: As a result of mega-city evangelism conducted by Pastor U. L. Ahiamadu, president of Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference, there is an increase in church membership. There were 439 converts baptized as a result of the mega-city evangelistic meetings held at Omoku, Ahoada, Egbema, and Erema. There is unprecedented unity among
the people.

Manpower Development: There is an increase in human manpower development. The conference sponsors staff to run programs ranging from diploma to doctoral degrees. Inservice training is encouraged.

Acquisition of Land: The present administration has acquired plots of lands. Two plots of land measuring 100 feet by 708 feet, at a cost of N350,000 (350,000 naira) was acquired at Ula-Upata town. Full payment has been made. Fourteen plots of land were also purchased at Ogbo along Omoku Road in Ahoada East local government area of Rivers state. This is the permanent site of the Great Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference.

Nine new districts were restructured from old ones. These include Usomini, Agili-Mini, Akoh-Mini, Echi-Upata, Eka-Oshi Upata, Okporowo, Amah, Obakata, and Erema.

The Bayelsa Administrative Unit was created for the spread of the Adventist message in that area. The Rivers West-Bayelsa Executive Committee endorsed the creation of Bayelsa Administrative Unit which was inaugurated by Pastor B. E. O. Udoh, president of the Eastern Nigeria Union Conference on September 23, 2013.

Members of the Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference administrative committee are: Ugochukwu L. Ahiamad (chair), David O. Jonathan (secretary), Freeborn T. Otyua, Vincent C. Marcus, Obioma Ohia Sunday, Beniah E. Ojum, Helen Morgan Ogiri, Monday Obudu, and Abraham Dienibo.


Moments of Challenges

While the field was preparing for organization, there came a black flood in August 2012. The entire Orashi zone that is in the territory of the Rivers West Conference and covers three key local government areas was flooded with water as a result of heavy rains. Members’ homes were submerged, businesses closed, farms and other sources of livelihood were destroyed. The water was so deep that at the conference headquarters 800 cartons of the book Great Hope were destroyed.

Many families were left without homes, and many churches, schools, and other public places were deserted. This had a very serious financial implication for the conference as economic, political, and religious activities were greatly affected. Many church members and inhabitants of the area lost their lives and property to armed robbery.

Establishment of New Churches

The following six new churches were planted between 2017 and 2019: Bethel Sanctuary, Erema District (2017), Sanctuary of Hope, Omoku Distinct (2018), Abogwe, Obohia Group (January 2019), Anyu, Odual Group (March 2019), Emmanuel Sanctuary, and Ahoada District (April 2019).

Leadership

Administration (2015- ): Chimezie Simeon Obuzor (president), Destiny Aloni Job (secretary), and Isaac Obubere Aseki (treasurer).

SOURCES


NOTES

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.