

Women's Ministries in West-Central Africa Division

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Women's Ministries started in the West-Central Africa Division (WAD), formerly known as Africa Indian Ocean Division, in the 1980s when an office was created for Women's Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.

In Ghana Women's Ministries was dated back to 1948 when missionaries worked earnestly to spread the Advent message in west-central Africa. The missionaries quickly realized that for the success of the present truth, women must be wooed to embrace the message and to influence their children to accept the message. The wives of missionaries such as Mrs. David Cowin, Mrs. Doreen Gibson, Mrs. N. B. Nielson, and Mrs. H. J Welch gathered women together to teach them Bible stories, how to cook some healthful food, and introduced the Dorcas society to them.¹

Women's Ministries in WAD

Through this department women have contributed to the mission of the church in the area of evangelism. Women were engaged in Bible reading, teaching, and organizing public evangelistic programs that have resulted in many baptisms. Literacy programs for the women in the community are successful tools used by women to reach their neighbors with the gospel message in the countries that comprise the West-Central Africa Division.

Through a literacy program women are empowered, and access is gained to present the Advent message in the neighborhood. Skill acquisition training programs are very popular in Women's Ministries whereby women are trained on how to use their hands to create wealth such as training in sewing, soap making, hat and cap making, fabrication of yogurt, soya milk making, and bread making. With these training programs women learn to be independent financially from husbands who maltreat them often.

The programs help women to have a high esteem of themselves and also help in their emancipation; women thus helped open the door of their hearts to the gospel message. Seminars on house keeping, baby care, simple remedies to sickness, et cetera, have contributed to make Women's Ministries relevant in the communities

where Adventist churches are situated. GC leadership certification trainings have contributed to the empowerment of professional women, both Adventists and non-Adventists. Program “enditnow” is another important program in the Women’s Ministries department to end violence against women and children. Churches and communities are sensitized against abuse, and governments are influenced to make laws against all forms of abuse.²

West-Central Africa Division Women Ministries Directors: Thelma Nortey (1991-1995);³ Priscille Metanou (1995-2010);⁴ Omobonike Adeola Sessou (2010-present).⁵

Women’s Ministries in Nigeria

Adventist history in Nigeria is dated back to 1914. When Babcock brought the message to the western part of Nigeria, nothing was mentioned of women’s activities until when the wife of one of the missionaries, Mrs. Mary McClement, contributed immensely toward the formation of the Dorcas Welfare Society in 1926. She introduced the Dorcas Welfare Society to the late Madam L. A. Ogunrombi, who had a sewing institute at Agbokojo, near Oke-Bola, Ibadan. Both Mrs. McClement and the late Madam Ogunrombi taught the late Madam Comfort W. Adeogun, Madam Sarah Fabuyi, Madam Adeoye, and Madam F. O. Apata sewing and food preparation.⁶

These women were the founding members of the Dorcas Welfare Society in Nigeria. Just like Dorcas of old (named Tabitha), who was always doing good and helping the poor with robes and other clothing, the women who learned sewing and food preparation including baking, imported the skills into other women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Dorcas women of old were always prepared to share whatever they had including their talents, skills, and means. No wonder the society that started with less than ten members has now grown to more than five hundred thousand members, just like the parable of the mustard seed told by Jesus in Matthew chapter 4:31, 32.

The Dorcas Welfare Society developed over the years from the local church to the district, state, conference, and national levels. The society’s first national convention was held in Aba, East Nigeria Conference, in 1978, under the able leadership of Mrs. Oludumila as the director. She was succeeded by the late Mrs. Grace Nwosuas, director. Since then national conventions in different parts of the country have been held every three years.⁷

In 1990 the Women’s Ministries office was created at the General Conference world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This led to the transformation of the Dorcas Welfare Society into Adventist Women’s Ministries in Nigeria. Mrs. Janet Ola became the first Women’s Ministries director in Nigeria.

Women’s Ministries has been registered by the federal government of Nigeria as a non-profit making, charitable non-governmental organization.⁸

Women’s Ministries directors in Nigeria: Janet Ola (199-1995); Jael Kwakfut (1995-2001); Grace O. Adeoye (2001-2010); Sal Okwubunka (2004, for Eastern Nigeria Union Mission [ENUM]); Comfort Nnenna Abali (2010-2018,

ENUM); Palu-Ziri Amala (2011-2014 for North-Western Nigeria Conference and since 2014 later became the first Women's Ministries director of the Northern Nigeria Union Conference till currently); Victoria Omodan (2014 to date, Western Nigerian Union Conference).⁹

Women's Ministries in Ghana

Like in Nigeria, the Women's Ministries began in Ghana when the missionaries' wives gathered women and taught them how to cook different kinds of foods that were different from what the Ghanaian women knew. They also taught them how to sew, and the materials sewn were given to the poor in the church and in the society around where the churches were situated. These groups of women were called the Dorcas Welfare Society, and it started in 1948. In 1963 the leadership of the Dorcas Welfare Society was handed over to the Ghanaian women by the missionaries.

As churches were being planted, the work of the Dorcas Welfare Society grew from strength to strength. It was no longer centered at Hansen Road SDA Church, it spread throughout the country under the able leadership of Mrs. Constance M. Laryea, the first African Dorcas Welfare Society leader and the following veterans of the Dorcas Welfare Society: Mrs. Christiana Lokko, Mrs. Comfort Kuma, Mrs. Christiana Mensahand, and Mrs. Esther Addotey.

In 1990 Adeakuk Ekronk Tetter was privileged to attend the General Conference session in Indianapolis with her husband the then Advent Press manager. She became impressed with the women at the session who contributed to the discussions. She described them as: "women of education, of means, and of Christian character. They were tireless, energetic, enthusiastic, and hardworking." She brought a lot of materials for women and children, and materials about marriage from the session. When she returned home, she mopped up plans to organize the women in her church in a united service for God.

In 1991 after the election of Thelma Nortey as the director of Women's Ministries (WM) at the division (formerly Africa-Indian Ocean Division), she went around the fields to set up the Women's Ministries Department in the various union missions within the division. On July 21, 1992, the West Africa Union Mission (WAUM), comprised of the Ghana Conference, Liberia Mission, Sierra Leone Mission, and Gambia Mission, inaugurated the Women's Ministries Department. Adeakuk Ekronk Tetter was appointed as the first director for the department.

Around the same time, the conferences in Ghana had seen the need for women's representation at the conference level and appointed Madam Margaret Osei, who was a member of the then South Ghana Conference Executive Committee as the director for the South Ghana Conference. In 1995 she succeeded Adeakuk Ekronk Tetter as director.

The name change from the Dorcas Welfare Society to Women's Ministries was not smooth at all. There were initial challenges that had to be overcome. The major challenge was that the operations and activities of the

Dorcas Welfare Society were well known over decades before the introduction of Women's Ministries; so, many women felt the name change was unnecessary, and it became strongly repulsive.

Also, the Dorcas Welfare Society was made up of the men's organization called the Good Samaritan Society. Their main activities were to donate to the needy in the society and the welfare of members. Monthly dues were paid to support members in time of bereavement, sickness, weddings, and outdooing. There was strong opposition, which made the operations of the Women's Ministries very difficult until the nominating committees of most churches decided to merge the Women's Ministries and the Dorcas Society. The men were also organized under the Adventist Men's Organization (AMO). That brought a sort of relief to the directors of Women Ministries.

Many women also had the view that Women's Ministries was for young educated women and thought there was no need to join as illiteracy was one of the challenging issues of women in Ghana. The tension calmed down, and a smooth changeover was effected as the women realized that the Dorcas Welfare Society focused on just one ministry, helping the needy like Dorcas in the Bible, but Women's Ministries encompasses different ministries of all women including the helping of the needy.

Women's Ministries directors in Ghana: Adeakuk Ekong Tetter (1992-1995, West Africa Union Mission: Ghana Conference, Liberia Mission, Sierra Leone Mission, and Gambia Mission); Margaret Osei (1995-2015, the first Ghana Union Conference director); Vida Linda Gyasi (2013-till present, Northern Ghana Union Mission director); Christiana Agyenim-Boateng (2015 till present, Southern Ghana Union Conference director).¹⁰

Women's Ministries in Eastern Sahel Union Mission

Women's Ministries in the then Sahel Union Mission comprising 11 countries, namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinee, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Togo began in 1995 by Mrs. Ellen Mayr, a missionary.

It is worth mentioning that during her tenure of office, Mrs. Mayr ensured that almost all the department's materials were translated into French, and she also produced many more. This is a great achievement for the work of women to progress in these French-speaking countries, therefore we give a tribute to this woman of value.

Pioneering Women's Ministries was not an easy task in Sahel Union Mission, situated in the 10/40 window. The main challenges are poverty, illiteracy, and the high presence of Muslim and indigenous religions. These inhibit the majority of women from stepping out confidently and taking up roles and responsibilities in society. However, after 23 years of existence, congresses and conventions have brought forth spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually matured and empowered women and young ladies, galvanized and ready to make disciples for the Lord. With the incorporation of literacy programs and seminars on reaching Muslim women, things are

changing gradually.

A reorganization of the Union in 2013 brought forth the Eastern Sahel Union Mission with five countries, namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, and Togo and the West Sahel Union comprising of the six other countries.

Women Ministries directors in Eastern Sahel Union Mission: Ellen Mayr (1995-2000); Clairine Agabus (2000-2013); Enyde Roger (2013 till present, the first director for West Sahel Union); Tabitha Kra (2015 till present).¹

Women's Ministries in Cameroun

Women were active members in Cameroun long before the notion of Women's Ministries was instituted. The year 1986 was a remarkable year that pushed women into being organized as the Dorcas Society. The president of the General Conference, Pastor Niel Wilson, visited Cameroun. This visit was a turning point in the history of women in this country because women caught the vision that they needed to be organized into the Dorcas Society. Unfortunately, the then union president was not in favor. This hindered the growth of the Dorcas Society until 1995 when Women's Ministries was officially inaugurated in the union. Since then Women's Ministries has greatly developed in Cameroun with a functional women's ministries department in each local field and churches.

In 1992 the first division-wide Women's Ministries convention was organized in Cameroun with the presence of the GC and division AWM directors. This brought a lot of progress to the Women's Ministries of Cameroun.

Women's Ministries directors in Cameroun: Jeanne Ribouem (1998-2000); Lydie Ntyame (2000-2005); Ondo Marie Josee (2006-2008); Bitti Christine (2008 till present).²

SOURCES

Adventist Women's Ministries records in Western Nigeria Union Conference, Eastern Nigeria Union Conference, Northern Nigeria Union Conference.

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Minutes of the Southern Ghana Union Conference constituency meeting, November 2013 and December 19, 2015. Southern Ghana Union Conference records, Osu, Accra, Ghana.

Minutes of the year end Executive Committee Meeting of Sahel Union Mission, November 2000 and November 2015.

NOTES

1. Christiana Agyenim Boateng, "History of WM in Ghana," unpublished manuscript, a copy in the author's private collection.
2. Women's Ministries departmental report to the Executive Committee, November 3, 2017, West-Central Africa Division archives.
3. Archives in Secretariat of West-Central Africa Division office. Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire.
4. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1995), assessed on December 26, 2019 from <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=20743>.
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2010), assessed on December 26, 2019 from <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=20743>.
6. Report from Mrs. Victoria Kojusola Omodan, from her interview with Madam Esther Modupeola Akinfenwa, SDA Church, Oke-Bola, Ibadan, February 23, 2018.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Adventist Women's Ministries records in Western Nigeria Union Conference, Eastern Nigeria Union Conference, Northern Nigeria Union Conference.
10. Minutes of the West Africa Union Mission constituency meeting, September 1995 at Legon; Minutes of Ghana Union Conference Executive Committee Meeting of November 2013; Southern Ghana Union Conference constituency meeting of December 19, 2015. Confirmed by Christiana Agyenim-Boateng, who had interviews with the following people: Eunice Miranda Brocke; Adeakuk Ekrong Tetter; Margaret Osei; Felicia Amponsah Duku; Pastor Zachaiah Asuboni; Pastor Daniel Owusu-Ansa; Pastor Kwabena Twum; Pastor Chris Annan Nunoo and other former conference Women's Ministries directors in Accra on February 25, 2018.
11. Minutes of the year end Executive Committee Meeting of Sahel Union Mission, November 2000; Minutes of the year end Eastern Sahel Union Mission, November 2015 and confirmed by Tabitha Kra, who had an interview with Nicole Assiobo, the first secretary of the Women's Ministries department of Sahel Union Mission on February 24, 2018 in Lome, Togo.
12. Bitti Christine, the current WM director of Cameroun Union Mission, who was present at the inception of the Women's Ministries in Cameroun, interview by the author.

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