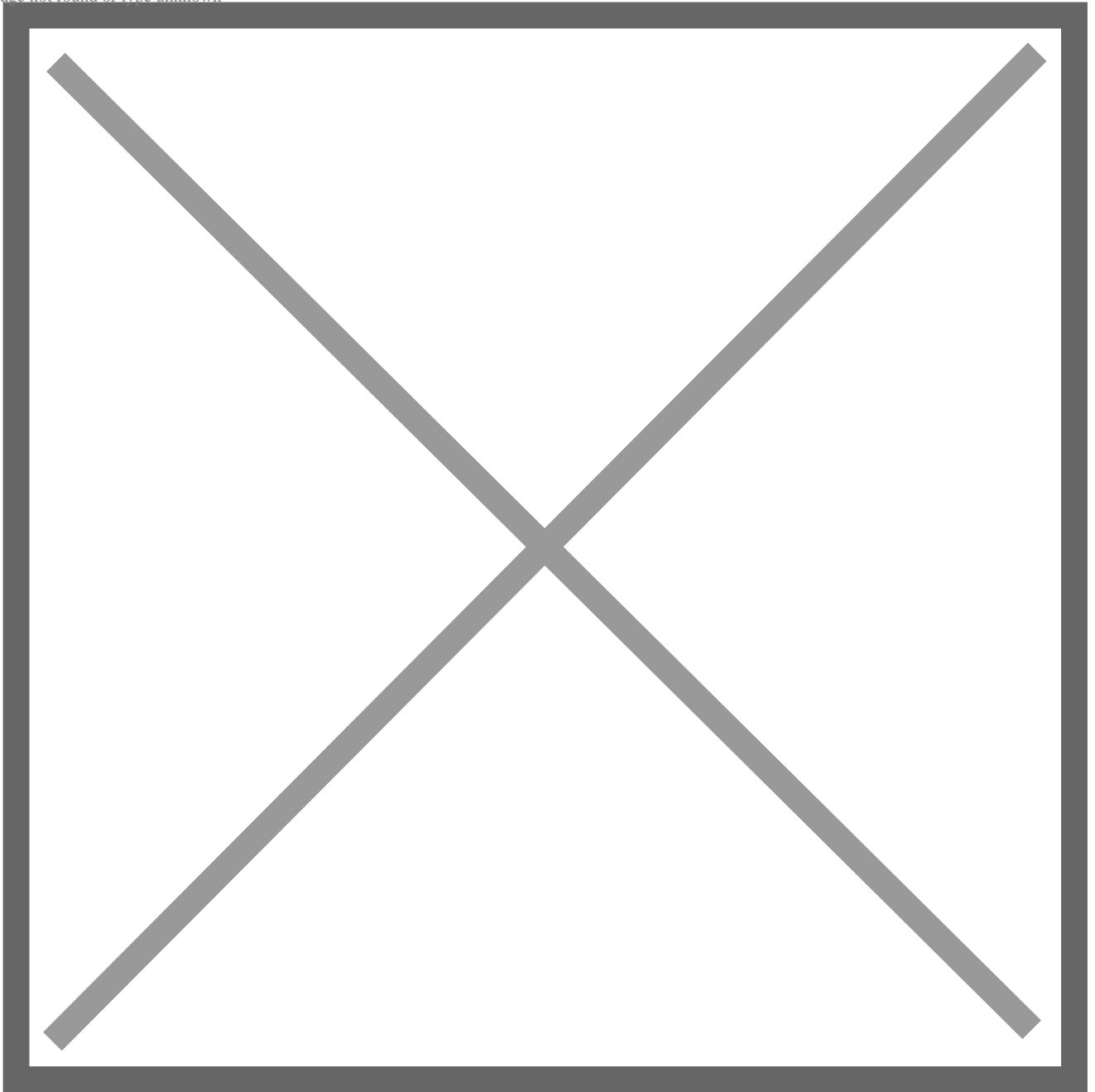


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# Rivers East Conference

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**JOHN ABBEY**

John Abbey

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Rivers East Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rivers state, Nigeria. It is part of Eastern Nigeria Union Conference in the West-Central Africa Division. Rivers East Conference was formerly part of Rivers Conference and was organized in 2015. It consists of the following local government areas of Rivers state: Andoni, Bonny, Eleme, Gokana, Khana, Opobo/Nkoro, Oyigbo, and Tai. Its headquarters is in Eleme, Rivers State, Nigeria.<sup>1</sup>

Statistics as of June 30, 2018: Churches 37; membership 6,371; population 2,143,973<sup>2</sup>

## History of the Organization of Rivers East Conference

The beginning of the Rivers East Conference is traceable to two towns—Bodo and Nchia Eleme. Pioneer work began in these two towns in 1918 and 1931, respectively. Festus Choo Obari of Alesa community brought Adventism to Eleme in 1931. In 1923, Pastor and Mrs. Jesse Clifford assumed duty and pioneered the work as the first Adventist missionaries in eastern Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta area of which Rivers East Conference is a part. In 1926, Pastor and Mrs. L. Edmonds joined Pastor Jesse Clifford, and both of them worked and planted Adventism in Ogbaland, Ekpeye, Elele, Eleme, and Ogoniland.<sup>3</sup>

In 1932, Benjamin Okereke, a native of Umuahia, and John Okar from Obowo, were sent as supervising leaders to Nchia Eleme. From this point, Adventism spread and covered Nchia Clan and other communities in Odido Clans such as Ebubu, Onne, and Eteo, as well as part of Ikwereiland, Asa, Ndoki, Okrika, Ogu, and the Port Harcourt metropolis. Records show that the Adventist brothers in Umubiakwa, in cooperation with Pastor L. Edmonds, conducted evangelism in Bodo and the first Adventist church in Ogoniland was founded in the Bodo community.<sup>4</sup> As the name implies, the Rivers East Conference (REC) is an integral part of the administrative geo-political entity of the government of Nigeria known as Rivers state. The conference is made up of 15 districts with 38 organized churches

Rivers East Conference was born out of the need for expansion and restructuring to bring administration closer to the people and ensure that visions are driven by mission throughout the mission territory.

The creation of zones at the 4<sup>th</sup> Triennial session of the Rivers/Bayelsa Conference on January 16-20, 2002, under the leadership of Pastor Simeon Job Okochi as president, brought about the need for reorganization of the conference in order to facilitate the mission of the church. Consequently, the districts in Eleme/Ogoni zones and the adjoining areas worked collectively towards the actualization of a conference of their own. In the Rivers Conference Executive Committee Action No. 074 of March 29, 2012, presided over by Pastor Dave Nyekwere, Rivers East Conference, comprising the areas of Ogoni, Oyigbo, Eleme Andoni, Asa, Ndoki, Opobo/Nkoro, and Bonny, was proposed and voted, and subsequently at the Eastern Nigeria Union Mission yearend committee meeting of December 17-20, 2012, presided over by Pastor Bassey Udoh, approval for the creation of the Rivers East Conference was given and all the required processes for its actualization were set in motion.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, on April 13, 2013, Rivers East Conference came into existence as an administrative unit in the Eastern Nigeria Union Conference. The pioneer officers of the conference were Dr. Godwin Kakiri, president; Pastor Joyful Norbana, executive secretary; and Elder Festus Juongwa, treasurer. The inaugural ceremony marking the pronouncement of Rivers East Conference as an entity of the Church was conducted by Pastor Bassey Udoh, president of Eastern Nigeria Union Conference accompanied by other officers and directors of the union.<sup>6</sup>

The Upland-Riverine terrain of the territory and the traditional lifestyle of the people poses a great challenge in soul winning and compliance with Adventist principles of living, especially in the area of nutrition, food, and drink; but, with much commitment to education, evangelism, and exemplary conduct by church members, victory is assured. Two significant mission-driven evangelistic programs recently conducted in the territory include:

1. An outreach program conducted by the wives of all the pastors in the territory in the month of November 2017 at Ataba in Andoni District.
2. A mega-city revival program for Eleme zone titled "More Than Conquerors" led by the Eastern Nigeria Union Conference president, Dr. Bassey Udoh, with Pastor Joyful Norbana, the president of Rivers East Conference as chief host.

## Administration (2015- )

Godwin Obari Kakiri, president; Joyful Norbana, secretary; Festus Ubadire Juongwa, treasurer<sup>7</sup>

### SOURCES

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## NOTES

1. "Rivers East Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2019), 394.?
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5. Ibid.?
6. Godwin Kakiri and Joyful Norbana, "Brief History of Rivers East Conference," April 13, 2013, Rivers East Conference archives, Eleme, Rivers state, Nigeria.?
7. "Rivers East Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2015-2019).?

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