

# Togo

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## ENYONAM KOKOUTSÈ AGBEDIGUE

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Togo is a small state in West Africa with an area of 56,785 square kilometers and an estimated population of 7,900,000. It is bounded on the north by Burkina Faso, on the south by the Gulf of Guinea, on the east by Benin, and on the west by Ghana. The Adventist message arrived in Togo in 1959 through Georges Vaysse, a literature evangelist.<sup>1</sup> The first Adventist mission station was established in 1964, organized into a mission in 1987, and then into a conference in 2017. In 2018 the Seventh-day Adventist membership was 9,325 and there were 65 churches, 119 companies, and 13 ordained ministers.<sup>2</sup>

## Beginnings of Adventist Church in Togo

Introduction of the Adventist message in Togo began in 1959 with the arrival of a European literature evangelist named Georges Vaysse who had come from Ghana to Togo and Benin to distribute pamphlets and Christian books.<sup>3</sup> One year later, in 1960, a man named Alotso, a retired Adventist from Nigeria, returned to the country and had his house in Pas de Souza Street.<sup>4</sup> Papa Alotso (as he was affectionately known) began by worshiping with his family in Lomé. Anxious to see the message of the three angels settling in the country, he regularly requested that the administration of Ghana Union send a missionary for the evangelization of the Togo.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, an Adventist man named Guidiguidi settled in the western part of the country, in Kpalime Town.<sup>6</sup> This man also appealed to the Ghana Union to send a missionary. The period of independence of African countries caused a delay in the administration of Ghana Union sending a missionary to Togo. It was not until October 1963 that the persistent appeals of these first Adventists who had settled in Togo finally found a favorable response and a French pastor, Henri Kempf, was sent as the first Adventist missionary to Togo.<sup>7</sup>

Pastor Kempf arrived in Lomé with his family. He relied on two means to spread the message: evangelization and the creation of schools. The pastor carried out Bible studies from door to door and began to look for places to open Adventist schools. The first place of worship was the garage of Pastor Kempf's house in Kodjoviakope.<sup>8</sup>

Pastor Kempf took the required steps to officially open the church in Togo, and the church received the official agreement receipt on October 20, 1964.

In accordance with the evangelization program he established, Kempf went to Kpalime where he learned that Guidiguidi's family already worshiped God on the Sabbath. It was during these regular trips to Kpalime in 1964

that he met the Catholic catechist Agbedigue Kodjo Raphael who was teaching in a primary school in Vétrome village.<sup>9</sup> Impressed by Agbedigue's zeal, Kempf offered to give him religious books to increase his knowledge. Agbedigue accepted and he began selling Adventist books while he was still a Catholic catechist. It was through the reading of these books that Agbedigue Kodjo discovered the truth about the Sabbath and decided to give his life to Jesus. Thus Kempf and his new translator, Agbedigue Kodjo Raphael, began searching the villages of the prefecture of Agou for opportunities to give Bible studies. Their efforts led to the baptism held on September 18, 1965, in Messiwobe, in which four people, including Agbedigue Kodjo Raphael and his wife, were baptized!<sup>10</sup>

Following the baptism, Kempf and his translator, who also served as an evangelist, returned to Lomé and the first Adventist school was opened in Segbe in 1965 with Agbedigue Kodjo as headmaster. Other schools have opened one after another for the education of children throughout the Togolese territory.

Anxious to have a suitable place of worship, the church left the garage of Pastor Kempf to move to the ground floor of the Social Center of Nyekonakpoe. The first worshipers in this place were the Kempf family, Papa Alotso and his family, Agbedigue Kodjo and his family, Pastor Kempf's night guard and his wife, Robert and Laurent Ayigan, and Christophe Dakou. On Sabbath afternoons and some Wednesday evenings, the group went to Papa Alotso's house on Gaitou Street for worship.

In 1966 Pastor Kempf bought a piece of land in Quartier des Etoiles.<sup>11</sup> It was on this piece of land that the Togo Mission Station office and church were built.

During the travel of Kempf and Agbedigue to the village of Mesiwobe, they heard of a man who did not work on Saturdays, but instead sat the palaver tree teaching. They decided to meet that person who was Hilaire Senyega. This trip allowed Kempf and Agbedigue to meet, Agbodza Koffi Ehon, who was a childhood friend of Agbedigue Kodjo. Agbodza Kofi received the message and was baptized in 1966.

## Brief Organizational History of the SDA Church in Togo

In this early Adventist history of Togo, the first districts were the districts of Lomé and Kpalime. The first church in Lomé district was Temple Maranatha. In the district of Kpalime, there was the church of Kpalime city (now Temple Jerusalem) and the companies of Mesiwobe and Kati. The first camp meeting was held under the leadership of Kempf in Mesiwobe in 1965.

Pastor Kempf spent seven years in Togo to consolidate the church. He sent the first Togolese, Agbedigue Kodjo, for pastoral studies in Nanga Eboko in 1968. Pasteur Kempf left the country in 1970. Before his departure, he organized a baptismal ceremony on January 17, 1970, for a few new converts, including a future pastor, Segla Comlan.<sup>12</sup>

Kempf was replaced by the Mauritian, Roland Fidélia, who spent two years at the head of the mission station. Under his leadership, the second Togolese, Agbodza Felix, was sent to the seminary in Bouaké in 1971.

In 1972 a dynamic pastor, Paul Heise, arrived in Togo as the new director of the mission station. Under his leadership members were taught Adventist doctrines and localities of the country such as Aného, Atakpame, and others, received the Adventist message. These evangelistic efforts resulted in a baptismal ceremony on November 30, 1974, where 14 people were baptized. Among those baptized were future leaders of the church, including Adzo David who was later sent to the seminary in Nanga-Eboko in October 1980. Another baptismal ceremony in August 1978 saw several people entering the church, including Amegan Komlavi who would go to the seminary in Nanga Eboko, Cameroon, in 1981.<sup>13</sup>

It was under the leadership of Paul Heise that the first ordination took place on April 8, 1978, at the church of Quartier des Etoiles. Two pastors were ordained: Agbedigue Kodjo Raphael and Agbodza Koffi Ehon Felix.<sup>14</sup>

When Paul Heise left the country he was replaced by Pastor Michelet Cherenfant.<sup>15</sup> He spent three years as director of Togo Mission Station and brought to the church missionary activities like Adventist Youth Ministry. His three dynamic children organized the first Youth Club. Michelet Cherenfant's arrival in Togo allowed members to be involved in the missionary activities of the world Church. He trained Pastor Adzo David, who would become the first national youth leader.

Pastor Cherenfant left Togo in September 1981 and was replaced by the Ghanaian, Ebenezer Agboka.<sup>16</sup> He was director of the mission station until the arrival of a Brazilian, Pastor Marenus de Paula. The short tenure of Agboka was marked by the laudable efforts of the laity for evangelization in Lomé and Kpalime. One of the converts of the evangelistic efforts of the laity in Kpalime was Gameti, who was baptized on August 7, 1982, at Agou-Nyogbo by Pastor Agbodza Felix.

Pastor Paula arrived in Lomé in October 1982,<sup>17</sup> from Cameroon, where he was professor of theology at the Adventist Seminary of Nanga Boko.<sup>18</sup> He helped to change the image of the Adventist Church in the eyes of the Togolese authorities by organizing a large evangelistic campaign, VIVRE PLUS, from January 14 to February 1, 1985. The campaign led by the French International Evangelist, Bertrand Durband, drew nearly 1,500 people each evening, many of whom came from the high intellectual and economic class of Lomé. During this campaign, Pastor de Paula's wife took care of more than 300 children in the small tent. The fruits of this campaign are still visible today. It was also through this campaign that Amegan Martin discovered the Adventist message and was baptized by Pastor Segla Comlan on September 20, 1986.

It was through Pastor de Paula that the mission station was organized into a mission.<sup>19</sup> Also under his tenure, an ordination ceremony took place on May 19, 1984, in which two pastors were ordained—Segla Comlan and Ralph Seechurn.

In June 1988, Pastor Marenus de Paula handed over the presidency of the Togo Mission to another Mauritian, Pastor Ralph Seechurn, who spent three years in Togo. Under his presidency, the Togolese pastoral body was enlarged by the ordination of Pastor Adzo Kokou David on June 30, 1990.<sup>20</sup>

The socio-political crisis of the 1990s in Togo led to a slowdown and instability in the leadership of the Togo Mission. The mission had a succession of interim presidents and then a merger with Benin. Thus this period of instability from 1990-1996 had three interim presidents. The first was Pastor Daniel Bhookun, a Mauritian, who, from December 1991 to December 1992, held this post along with that of executive secretary of the Sahel Union Mission. Between December 1992 and December 1993, a Canadian, Pastor Gordon Gray, then president of the Benin Mission, also led the Togo Mission. Finally, Ivorian pastor, Elie Weick, also executive secretary of the Sahel Union Mission, assumed the interim presidency of Togo Mission from December 1993 to March 1996.<sup>21</sup>

The year 1996 marked a turning point in the life of the Adventist Church in Togo. It was in that year that the first indigene, Adzo Kokou David, was appointed as president of the mission.<sup>22</sup>

The presidency of Pastor David Adzo, from January 1996 to November 2000, was marked by an evangelism explosion in the mission and the gradual entering of all the unentered parts of the country. Many volunteer evangelists were engaged to bring the Adventist message to various localities of the country. These evangelists have succeeded in establishing churches in many prefectures. As an immediate consequence, the church experienced a quantitative growth in membership.<sup>23</sup>

From November 2000 to January 2006, Pastor Felix Ehon Agbodza was president of the Togo Mission.<sup>24</sup> This period was characterized by the acquisition of plots of land in the suburbs of Lomé and certain prefectures, the construction of the chapel of Kara, and the construction of the first large school complex of the mission in Anfamé.

From January 2006 to November 2010, Pastor Kwasi Sénanu Mawuko Gameti was president of Togo Mission.<sup>25</sup> He began with a program of revival, growth, and consolidation of the spiritual life of all the members with special emphasis on Christian life management. With the assistance of leaders of the Sahel Union, he introduced the techniques of strategic planning for a period of five years, which led to the mission achieving conference status. Under his leadership a thorough membership audit was carried out. At the end of the exercise, a very realistic membership figure was obtained for the mission.

Gameti was replaced by Amegan Komlavi Semenu as president of the Togo Mission from November 2010 to January 2017.<sup>26</sup> The presidency of Pastor Komlavi was marked by the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the church in Togo and the visit of General Conference president, Pastor Ted Wilson. With the assistance of the division, there were also mega evangelistic campaigns in Togo.

The main event of this presidency was the acquisition of conference status. The first constituency session of the Togo Conference was held January 4-7, 2017, in Anfamé.<sup>27</sup> The session elected the first leaders of the conference, namely: president, Pastor Gameti Kwasi; executive secretary, Pastor Agbedigue Enyonam; and treasurer, Agbodouamenou Joseph. These people took over the leadership of the new conference for a four-year term.

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