

Nagaland Region

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One of the last states in India to be entered by Christians, Nagaland Region is now one of three states in India with a Christian majority. Nagaland Region was organized in 2000 and is a part of the Northeast India Union Section in the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists. Its headquarters is in Dimapur, Nagaland, India.

Territory: The state of Nagaland.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches, 3; membership, 505; population, 2,166,995.¹

Entry of the Adventist Message

Although ninety percent of the population of Nagaland had declared themselves Christian as early as the 1950s, it was almost impossible for overseas missionaries to obtain permission from the government to enter the state due to political unrest in the area. Somehow, Adventist literature and literature evangelists still found their way into the homes of the Nagas.² Musical programs, the radio messages of *The Quiet Hour*, *Signs of the Times* magazine, gift books such as *The Great Controversy*, *Desire of Ages*, *Health and Happiness*, and *Patriarchs and Prophets* played a tremendous part in the evangelistic outreach in Nagaland.³

In the 1940s Principal Lange of the Assam Training School in Jowai collected names and addresses of people belonging to different tribes of the northeast who could read English. To these addresses students mailed *Signs of the Times*, and when readers responded, they were enrolled in the *20th Century Bible Correspondence Course*. Some of this literature reached into the Naga Hills of Manipur.

In 1952 several leaders from the division and union report having travelled by Jeep to the Naga Hills, where they met with deeply interested persons and recruited young people for Assam Training School. However, these were Tankhul Nagas, who are not part of the state of Nagaland or the Nagaland Region.⁴

Opportunity for Seventh-day Adventists to enter Nagaland came in the 1960s, after Naga students who attended the Assam Training School carried back to their hills the distinctive teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁵ Over the years hundreds from the Naga area completed *The Voice of Prophecy* courses.⁶

In 1964, Publishing Secretary Mapu Zemba visited Nagaland. He was successful in placing many Adventist books in the Naga community. One Sunday morning he was invited to visit a church service in the Mokokchung area. As he sat in the church, he noticed that instead of listening to the speaker, a number of people were absorbed in reading copies of the book *Your Bible and You*. After the meeting he asked one worshiper why so many had brought these books to church. He was surprised to hear the response, "We get far more Bible truth from reading this literature than from the pulpit."⁷

In 1966 a library in Nagaland asked to purchase a copy of each Seventh-day Adventist publication. They willingly paid Rs. 5,000 for the books which were sent. The new label for Northeast salesmen became "soulsmen."⁸

In Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, a lay person gave literature and studied the Bible regularly with three Nagas who were in prison. The three of them began to keep the Sabbath and eventually were set free. When news of the three prisoners' release reached the Northern Union office in New Delhi, arrangements were made for Pastor Y. D. Luikham to visit Nagaland, contact these released men, and prepare for a city-wide evangelistic campaign.⁹

Pastor John Willmott, the union ministerial secretary, was asked to conduct these evangelistic series in Nagaland with a team of dedicated workers. Six languages were represented among the 13 people who were baptized in 1976. Simultaneously, two other villages were contacted by Adventist worker teams. Thirty were baptized in one village and 17 in another.¹⁰

The Manipur Boarding School choir arranged to visit Nagaland and sing for ten days. Most of the young people who attended were non-Adventists and non-Christians. A special Bible study program was conducted for them, and 22 young people declared their desire to be baptized.¹¹

First Naga Adventist and First Naga Minister

In 1958 a physician from Nagaland, Dr. K. K. Angami, the acting medical superintendent of the government Ganesh Das Hospital in Shillong, attended a series of meetings conducted in Shillong. She was among the first 22 baptized by D. K. Down, an Australian missionary serving as an evangelist in the Northeast Union.¹²

Sometime before 1966 Pastor Yuimi Luikham was the first Adventist minister in Nagaland, and his father was the first to accept the Adventist truth.¹³ Pastor Luikham's father had been a Christian minister, part of a group of people who got together three times a year to study the Bible, often for several weeks at a time. When it was Yuimi's father's turn to preside over the study of Revelation, a set of the *20th Century Bible Correspondence Course* found its way into his hands. A member of the group also had a copy of *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* that was left behind by an American soldier of World War II. The group then contacted the Seventh-day Adventist mission director, who sent Yuimi's father a copy of *Daniel and Revelation*.¹⁴

Eventually a Sabbath school was organized, with thirteen Naga members. This led to the establishment of a church. The interest spread, and ten companies were organized.¹⁵

Samzuiram Village – First Church

In 1966 a group of Rongmei migrated from Manipur State to Samzuiram village, about fifty miles from Kohima, the capital of Nagaland. The migrants cleared the thick forest, which was inhabited by wild elephants, and cultivated the land. Among this group were two Adventist families. The other villagers warned the headman, "It would be better if everyone in the village were of the same religion. Otherwise, there will be endless difficulty."¹⁶

The Adventist families prospered, and as a result of their witness, Pastor H. B. Lalkhawliana, the circle leader of Manipur, baptized 14 people on July 15, 1970. These believers met in a thatched church building which the members built for themselves.¹⁷

Seeing their progress, the original dwellers became jealous. In 1975 the Adventist group was severely persecuted by the local people. Their houses were cut down, and they were threatened with death if they did not leave their places immediately. The Adventist families refused to leave or change religion, and so continued to live there patiently.¹⁸

Dr. John Willmott, president of the Northern Union, organized the first church congregation on September 26, 1977, at Samzuiram.¹⁹ Many people inquired about Adventism in the Samzuiram village. As their membership increased, the old church building became too small, so work on a new church building began.²⁰ On January 15, 1986, Willmott dedicated the first Adventist church building in Nagaland.²¹

Paul's Missionary Band

By the late 1970s there was still only one paid Seventh-day Adventist worker in Nagaland and Manipur. A group of dedicated Adventists got together and formed the group Paul's Missionary Band to lead out in church services, Sabbath Schools, and youth meetings, and to finance and assist in evangelistic meetings. Not only did they earn their own living, they supported the church with their tithes, offerings, and time.²²

In 1963 K. B. Peter Keingamba, a Rongmei Naga from Manipur, attended meetings conducted by Pastor C. Pheirim, and eventually turned from being a drinker-smoker-gambler to a committed preacher. As part of Paul's Missionary Band he pioneered Adventist work in 132 villages, bringing 81 people into the church, before returning to Manipur in 1977.²³ Keingamba continued to witness in Nagaland, giving Bible studies from time to time. At the General Conference session in 1980 Peter Keingamba gave his testimony during the Southern Asia Division report.²⁴

In early 1978 Paul's Missionary Band financed a 30-day evangelistic series, led by Pastor Y. D. Luikham, in the Hukhai village. At the end of the meetings the village chief, Mr. Hoito, also chairman of the Western Sema Village

Association, chose to be baptized. Learning of the Paul Missionary Band's support in the Hukhai meetings, he joined the band.²⁵ He was the first chief in Nagaland to join the Adventist church.²⁶

After three years, the work in that area grew to 200 church members, 500 Sabbath school members, and over 600 students studying in four Sunbeam English Schools run by Paul's Missionary Band in 1979.²⁷

The Manipur and Nagaland Section of the Northeast India Union

At the 1983 year-end meetings of the Southern Asia Division Executive Committee, under the chairmanship of Pastor G. J. Christo, the committee formally voted to divide the Northern Union into the western and eastern areas.²⁸

The new union was known as the Northeast India Union, and was divided into the Meghalaya Section, the Manipur and Nagaland Section, the Mizo Section, and some fields attached to the union.²⁹

Nagaland Region of the Northeast India Union

As membership grew, church administration decided to separate the state of Nagaland from the Manipur-Nagaland Section. They formed it into the Nagaland Region in April 2000, with Renthlei Zohruaia as its first director.³⁰

Executive Officers

Directors: Renthlei Zohruaia (2000), A. Khashiprii (2001-2003), Moses A. Shimray (2004-2013), Dhormo Kamei (2014-2018),

Secretary-Treasurers: David Das (2004-2005), Akham Kamsuan (2012-2015), Wungreiyo A. Shimray (2016-2018), Adahe Chara (2018-),

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NOTES

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