

East Central Mission/East Central Conference

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East Central Mission (ECM) was organized on January 8, 1986. Pastor Silvanus N. Chioma was the pioneer president of the ECM. Pastor Chioma, an indigene of the mission, led it from 1986 to 1990.¹ East Central Mission covered Enugu state, Ebonyi state, and parts of Imo and Abia states, all in the Eastern part of Nigeria.² In March 2002, the East Central Mission assumed conference status and became East Central Conference.³ On March 31, 2012, the East Central Conference became Abia North-Central Conference, with Enugu and Ebonyi states carved out of it, leaving parts of Imo and Abia states as the territory of Abia North-Central Conference.⁴

The Laymen Movement

Since the organization of East Central Mission (ECM) eventually gave birth to ANCC, the history of the creation of ECM needs to be reviewed to give the necessary background to the evolution of ANCC. The creation of ECM was initiated by the laymen from the territory of ECM. The move started with the elders' meetings in Seventh-day Adventist churches across Bende and Owerri zones. The elders' meetings were organized by Pastor J. N. Odinma. The first meeting was held at Ubakala in a school hall on October 15, 1978. The laymen were burdened by the sparse and negligible presence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Imo, Anambara, Enugu, and Ebonyi states and the north senatorial zone of Abia state including Umuahia, the capital of Abia State.⁵

Creation of East Central Mission

Eventually, the lay movement got the attention of church administration at the Nigerian Union Mission level. The union responded positively and set things in motion for the creation of the field. Pastor J. U. Nnaji, who was serving as the secretary of East Nigeria Conference proposed the name "East Central Mission," for the new field. ECM was voted into being at the Nigeria Union Mission constituency meeting that took place at the Adventist Seminary of West Africa (now Babcock University) at Ilishan Remo, Ogun State in December 1985, with Pastor S. N. Chioma as president and Elder Ihuoma Jonah as secretary-treasurer. The first constituency meeting of ECM occurred January 12-13, 1986, at the East Nigeria Conference headquarters in Aba.⁶

Territory and Membership

The East Central Mission started in 1986 with 14 districts, namely Abakiliki, Amuzu, Arochukwu, Enugu, Etiti, Igbere, Itu Mbaise, Nkwere, Ohafia, Okigwe, Ubakala, Ugwulangwu, Umuahia, and Umuedemkpa. These constituted the entire territory of the new mission field, with a total baptized membership of 5,689. The workforce included ten ordained ministers, two credential ministers, nine licensed ministers, 18 literature evangelists, two regular workers, and one part-time worker.

In 1990 the membership of the conference grew to 6,671 and the workforce increased to 62, thanks to the world Church "Harvest 90" program. Consequently, four districts were organized, namely Eha-Amufu, Uburu, Umuahia Township, and Umuogo/Nsukwe, and this brought the total number of districts to 18.⁷

Permanent Headquarters

During the second biennial session held at Ubakala District headquarters in 1988, the issue of permanent headquarters for the East Central Mission was resolved. The delegates voted to move from the temporary location at #27 Udi Road (formerly #17) Asata, Enugu to permanent headquarters at Umuoriehi Isingwu, Umuahia, Abia State.⁸

Choice of Umuahia as ECM Headquarters

The leadership of ECM, with the cooperation of members, began building the headquarters on a piece of land shared with a primary school which used to belong to the church before the government took over schools after the Nigeria-Biafra civil war.

Elder J. C. Alozie and Chief J. C. Emeaghara, along with other members, were mandated to ensure speedy development of the mission headquarters. They succeeded in acquiring the land where the residential building of the mission officers is now located. It was not part of the school's land. They also acquired another piece of land nearby on which the treasurer's quarters now stands.

Since there was no space to locate the secretariat, the committee, along with leaders of the community and Abia state government, agreed to separate the church's land from the school's land. The military administrator of Abia state, Navy Commodore Temi Ejoor, approved the separation. The traditional ruler of Isingwu, Eze Ihuoma, the village head of Umuoriehi, Dr. E. O. Ezebuio, the president-general, Chief S. O. Ajunwa, the permanent secretary, Ministry of Education, Mr. N. A. N. Ogbonna, and the permanent secretary, Political, Mrs. Rose Ekeleme, all agreed that the church should demolish the old dilapidated classroom hall on the portion of the land approved for church use; but that the church should erect a five-classroom block for the school first. The church did that and demolished the dilapidated classroom on the church land.

As the demolition exercise was going on, the community attacked the committee members on the property and also called the police. When the police realized that approval for the separation and demolition was given by the military administrator of Abia state, they referred the matter to the Ministry of Education for settlement. In spite of the peaceful cooperation of both the church and government, Barrister Ajaegbu, a native of Umuoriehi, and the women leaders, Mrs. Joy Isiuwa and Mrs. Charity Nwokocha, took the church to court. Justice C. B. U Wogu visited the site himself and decided the matter in favor of the church. The church members arrested and sued were Elder J. C. Alozie, Chief J. C, Emeaghara, Elder Amanze, Elder Ehumabe, and Pastor Amanze.

There was persistent harassment of the church by the host community. They employed negative media reporting on the church. The Umuoriehi community went to court to challenge the approval given to the church by the government. The commissioner for education came out openly in support of the church but, unfortunately, he was removed from office within two weeks.

Mr. Monday Njinkeonye wanted an access road through the church premises. The church rejected such a request and started fencing the compound. The young man pulled down the fence and took the church to court. The church won the case.

The church has since been marching on from strength to strength within a peaceful environment. The people of Umuoriehi Isingwu are peace loving and have continued to exhibit a harmonious relationship with the church.

The church fondly remembers these prominent sons and leaders of the Isingwu community who assisted in achieving the lasting peace we now enjoy. They are, Eze Ihuoma; Ngwu II of Isingwu; Dr. E. O. Ezebuoro, the traditional prime minister of Isingwu; Chief S. O. Ajunwa, the president general; Chief Ikokwu; and Chief C. Nwakwuribe.

The church highly appreciates the role Mrs. Jessie Ibeabuchi played in using her position as chairperson, and the Nigerian Union of Teachers, in making useful contacts for the church during the saga. Others included Elder Onwukwe Uko and other civil servants at Owerri and Umuahia, too numerous to be mentioned one by one, who contributed in one way or the other to the resolution of the matter.⁹

Subsequent Administrators

Conference Status

Following resolution on a permanent site for the headquarters of the East Central Mission was the quest for conference status. The new field realized the need to continue to grow. To become a conference, the following demands must be met: dedicated Christian leadership, large membership, ownership of properties, financial independence, and adequate workforce.

All available human, financial, and material resources were put in place to make conference status a reality. Two outstanding events took place in connection with this new status for ECM.

1. Conference Status Seminar: This seminar was held at the mission headquarters April 10-12, 1998. Delegates were selected from all the churches and districts to attend the program, along with all ECM workers. Pastor C. M. Bayne, field secretary of AID, led out in the seminar. Among the important issues discussed were financial self-reliance, dedicated leadership, large membership, owning and holding properties, building churches and parsonages, etc. All these will help the church realize the dream of conference status. The field accepted the challenge to meet all these demands.

2. Nigeria Union Mission/Africa Indian-Ocean Division Conference Status Evaluation Team: To assess the readiness of East Central Mission to proceed to conference status, two evaluation teams visited us within the period under review. The first was a pre-evaluation team made up of the NUM President, Dr. J. A. Ola and NUM Associate Treasurer, Elder M. Dangana. This was followed by another evaluation team made up of AID and NUM officials. This team was in ECM June 25-28, 1999. At the end of their evaluation our mission was granted another six months of grace to work hard to raise our self-support, working capital, and liquidity each to 100 percent. A comparative report of these and other requirements is shown below:

	Conference Status Requirements	1997	1998	1999	2000
Self-support	100%	82.77%	81.86%	106.77%	108.15%
Working Cap.	100%	66%	3.38%	106.25%	128.79%
Liquidity	100%	68%	13.70	84.24%	141.91
No. of properties owned by ECM 100	100% (must be fully registered)	29%	29%	29%	29%
	Trust Funds sent to NUM Monthly.	100%	1000%	100%	100%

Another AID inspection led to approval of the request for conference status, and in March 2002 well-wishers gathered in Umuoriehi, Umuahia, to celebrate the change from mission to conference status.¹⁰

In 1993 the three major indicators for the ECM stood as follows: working capital 67.17 percent, liquidity 88 percent, self-support 95.87 percent. It showed that a lot was needed to attain conference status because the minimum percentage average required was 100 percent in all three indices. From 1993 to 1999 the East Central Mission witnessed tremendous growth. Membership increased to 13,108. The number of ordained ministers increased to 23. Four new districts were organized, bringing the total number of districts to 22. The new districts were Amagu, Agba, Amasiri, and Obowo. It was during this period that the foundation of East Central Mission Secretariat was laid, on September 10, 1995. With the growth and the quest for conference status, the two-officer structure was changed to a three-officer structure. In 1997 the three officers were, Pastor P. O. Amanze as president, Pastor V. C. Onwubuariri as secretary, and Elder U. K. Emea as treasurer.

At the end of the 1999 triennial session, conference status was in sight, as the three main indices stood as follows:¹¹

Indices	1993	1999
Self-support	95.87%	106.77%
Working Capital	67.17%	106.25%
Liquidity	88.00%	84.24%

In 2001 the East Central Mission experienced major reorganization with the creation of the Anambra-Imo administrative unit. The reorganization gave ECM new leadership in the person of Pastor F. N. Awuloha, president, Pastor O. P. Nwankpa, secretary, and Elder U. K. Emea, treasurer.¹² The Anambra-Imo administrative unit took away six districts from ECM, leaving 16 districts; membership dropped from 13,934 to 11,286, and the work force fell to 42 from 62. However, the three major indices were not badly affected, as they were each at a 100 percent.

Conference Status

The attainment of conference status was celebrated as a dream come true. One of the leaders reported, “the entire membership of this field home and many abroad have worked together since 1986 to achieve conference status and to God be the glory. . . it is a cooperate [sic] success.”¹³

At the end of the 2002 triennium, East Central Mission was pronounced a conference; Pastor O. C. Anyaogu was elected president, Pastor O. Pu Nwankpa, secretary, and Elder U. K. Emea, treasurer.

East Central Conference (ECC), from its inception until now, has been characterized by the qualities that make for growth: love, peace, and unity. East Central Conference was reorganized into two conferences in 2012: Abia North-Central Conference (ANCC) and Enugu Ebonyi Conference.

The Executive Committee Members

Officers of the ECM (1986-2002) and ECC (2002-2012)¹⁴

Presidents: S. N. Chioma, 1986-January 1991; J. O. Owolabi, 1991-1993; P. O. Amanze 1994-2000; V. C. Onwubuariri, 2000-June 2001; F. N. Awuloha, July 2001-February 2002; O. C. Anyangu, February 2002-February 2011.

Secretaries/Treasurers: I. U. Jonah, 1986-1988; H. B. Eke, 1989-1993; I. N. Uhumabe, 1994-1997.

Secretaries: V. C. Onwubuariri, 1998-2000; F. N. Awuloha, January 2001-July 2001; O. P. Nwankpa, July 2001-2005; Aham Okpokiri, 2005-2011; O. P. Nwankpa, January 2011-March 2012.

Treasurers: U. K. Emea, 1998-2008; E. K. K. Uguru, 2008-2011.

Officers of the ANCC¹⁵

E. K. K. Uguru, president, 2012- .

C. E. Alphaeus, secretary, 2012-2017; K. C. Iheoma, secretary, 2017- .

O. E. Ogwo, treasurer, 2012- .

SOURCES

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NOTES

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6. Ibid.
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9. "Report of the Seventh Triennial/Conference Inaugural Session," held at Umuoriehi Umuahia, Abia State, February 6-10, 2002, 22
10. Ibid.
11. *2002 Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "East Central Conference," accessed March 25, 2019, adventistyearbook.org
12. "Report of the Seventh Triennial/Conference Inaugural Session op. cite," Abia North-Central Conference.
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