



Map of the current territory of West-Central Africa Division (2015-present).
Photo courtesy of West-Central Africa Division archives.

West-Central Africa Division

ONAOLAPO AJIBADE

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West-Central Africa Division (WAD) is one of the 13 world divisions of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. WAD was organized in 2003 and reorganized in 2013. WAD covers the following territory: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo; comprising the Eastern Nigeria, Northern Nigeria, Southern Ghana, and Western Nigeria Union Conferences; and the Cameroon, Central African, Eastern Sahel, Northern Ghana, West African, and Western Sahel Union Missions. WAD's headquarters is located in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.¹

Statistics (June 30, 2019): Churches, 4,633; membership, 846,614; population, 446,383,000.

Historical Development

When the Northern-Europe Division (NED) was organized in 1929, "West Africa (was) assigned to (it), along with

those parts of French West Africa that adjoined Ghana and Nigeria.² NED had changes in nomenclature. In 1950, it was named North Atlantic Division. From 1950 to 1971, the name “Northern European Division” was re-adopted. To accommodate the church in West Africa in its name, it was called Northern Europe-West Africa Division from 1971-1980.³ But “West Africa” was dropped from the name in 1980 when the church on the African continent was re-organized, resulting in the following Divisions: Africa-Indian Ocean Division, Afro-Mideast Division (organized in 1970), Euro-Africa Division (organized in 1971), and Trans-Africa Division (organized in 1980)⁴

The territory of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division (AID) included all the countries in West Africa and the following countries in Central Africa: Chad, Central Africa Republic, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Principe and Sao Tome, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Peoples’ Republic of Congo, and Zaire. AID’s territory extended to Madagascar, Mauritius, Rodrigues, and Seychelle Islands. There were seven unions in AID: namely, Central African Union, Indian Ocean Union, Nigerian Union, West African Union Mission, West Central African Union, Zaire Union, and Northwest African Union.⁵

In 1981, AID had 1, 789 churches and a membership of 320,924.⁶ After about 22 years (in 2002), the membership had increased to 1,521,307, and the number of churches had grown to 5,311.⁷ Other parts of the Church in Africa had also grown greatly. With this phenomenal growth, it was time again to reorganize the church in Africa; So, on October 8, 2002, the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee took the following actions:

Seventh-day Adventist Church membership on the continent of Africa exceeds 4,000,000 with continued rapid growth anticipated in the future. Territorial realignments in Africa have been made from time to time in order to provide appropriate leadership and supervision in the face of changing circumstances. A review of current social, political, and economic realities and of Seventh-day Adventist Church infrastructure serving the African continent indicates new opportunities for more efficient and effective alignment of division territories. Therefore, it was

VOTED, 1. To authorize, effective January 1, 2003, the realignment of territory in Africa and surrounding island nations, thus establishing a third division based in Africa with territorial configuration of the three divisions as follows:

- a) East-Central Africa Division (ECD) comprised of Burundi Association, East African Union Mission, East Congo Union Mission, Eritrea Mission Field, Ethiopian Union Mission, Rwanda Union Mission, Tanzania Union Mission, Uganda Union Mission, and West Congo Union Mission.
- b) Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (SID) comprised of Angola Union Mission, Indian Ocean Union Mission, Malawi Union Mission, Mozambique Union Mission, North Botswana Field, Southern Africa Union Conference, South Botswana Field, Zambia Union Mission, and Zimbabwe Union Conference.
- c) Western Africa Division (WAD) comprised of Central African Union Mission, Ghana Union Conference, Nigeria Union Mission, Sahel Union Mission, and West African Union Mission.⁸

As of June 2003, the East-Central Africa Division had a membership of 2,012,030; the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division had a membership of 1,569,033, and West-Central Africa Division had 669,620 members.⁹ Euro-Africa Division, organized in 2002, and Trans-European Division, reorganized in 1999, were two divisions that still had parts of Africa included in their territories in 2003, but their headquarters were located in Europe.¹⁰

Reorganization of West-Central Africa Division

In the reorganization of 2003, the unit that became the Western Africa Division was the former AID without the following unions: East Congo Union Mission, Indian Ocean Union Mission, Rwanda Union Mission, West Congo Union Mission, and Burundi Association.¹¹ Thus, the territory of WAD was limited to all the countries of West Africa and some countries in Central Africa; namely Central Africa Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.¹² Since the territory of WAD included unions in Central Africa, the name of the Division was changed to “West-Central Africa Division” by the following action of the Annual Council of the Executive Committee of the General Conference on July 1, 2003: “VOTED, To change the name of the Western Africa Division to the West-Central Africa Division (WAD).”¹³

Reorganizations of Unions in WAD

As indicated above, WAD had five Unions when it was organized in 2003, namely Central Africa Union Mission, organized in 1949; Ghana Union Conference, organized in 2000; Nigeria Union Mission, organized in 1972; Sahel Union Mission, organized in 1981; and West Africa Union Mission, organized in 1973 and reorganized in 2000.¹⁴ In 2004, the Nigeria Union Mission was reorganized into two Unions: Eastern Nigeria Union Mission and North-Western Nigeria Union Mission.¹⁵ This brought the number of Unions in WAD to six. A more extensive reorganization of unions took place in 2013. The following actions of the Spring Meeting of the Executive Committee of the General Conference in that year show the Unions that were created.

The reorganization of Central African Union Mission was voted as follows:

121-13GS CENTRAL AFRICAN UNION MISSION—REORGANIZATION

VOTED, To reorganize the Central African Union Mission in the West-Central Africa Division into two union missions, as follows:

1. The Central African Union Mission with constituency from Central African Republic Mission, Chad Mission, Equatorial Guinea Mission, Gabon Mission, and Republic of Congo Attached Mission Station, with headquarters in Bangui, Central African Republic, effective December 31, 2013; and
2. The Cameroon Union Mission with constituency from Central-South Cameroon Conference, East Cameroon Mission, North Cameroon Conference, and West Cameroon Mission, with headquarters in Yaounde, Cameroon, effective December 31, 2013.¹⁶

The reorganization of Ghana Union Conference was voted as follows:

122-13GS GHANA UNION CONFERENCE—REORGANIZATION

VOTED, To reorganize the Ghana Union Conference in the West-Central Africa Division into a union conference and a union mission, as follows:

1. The Southern Ghana Union Conference with constituency from East Ghana Conference, South Ghana Conference, and South West Ghana Conference, with headquarters in Accra, Ghana, effective December 31, 2013; and
2. The Northern Ghana Union Mission with constituency from Central Ghana Conference, Mid-West Ghana Conference, North Ghana Mission, and South Central Ghana Conference, with headquarters in Kumasi, Ghana, effective December 31, 2013.¹⁷

The reorganization of North-Western Nigeria Union Mission was voted as follows:

123-13GS NORTH-WESTERN NIGERIA UNION MISSION— REORGANIZATION VOTED, To reorganize the North-Western Nigeria Union Mission in the West-Central Africa Division into a union conference and a union mission, as follows:

1. The Western Nigeria Union Conference with constituency from Delta Conference, Edo Conference, Ekiti Conference, Kogi Mission Station, Kwara Conference, Lagos Atlantic Conference, Lagos Mainland Conference, Ogun Conference, Ondo Mission, Osun Conference, and Oyo Conference, with headquarters in Maryland, Lagos, effective December 31, 2013; and
2. The Northern Nigeria Union Mission with constituency from North Central Nigeria Conference, North East Nigeria Conference, and North West Nigeria Conference, with headquarters in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, effective December 31, 2013.¹⁸

The reorganization of Sahel Union Mission was voted as follows:

124-13GS SAHEL UNION MISSION—REORGANIZATION

VOTED, To reorganize the Sahel Union Mission in the West-Central Africa Division into two union missions, as follows:

1. The Eastern Sahel Union Mission with constituency from Benin Mission, Burkina Faso Mission, Cote D'Ivoire Conference, Niger Mission Station, Togo Mission, with headquarters in Lome, Togo, effective December 31, 2013; and
2. The Western Sahel Union Mission with constituency from Cape Verde Conference, Guinea Mission Station, Guinea-Bissau Mission, Mali Mission, and Senegal/Mauritania Mission, with headquarters in Dakar, Senegal, effective December 31, 2013.¹⁹

Thus, the four new unions organized in 2013 were Cameroon Union Mission, Northern Ghana Union Mission, Northern Nigeria Union Conference, and Western Sahel Union Mission. This brought the total number of unions in WAD to ten, the present number of unions in the Division.

The Beginning of Adventist Church in West Africa

Strange as it may sound, the first seeds of the Third Angels' Message were sown in West Africa by Miss Hannah More, an American missionary of another Christian denomination. More was visiting in Connecticut while on furlough from Sierra Leone when she received from S. N. Haskell a copy, among other books, of John N. Andrew's new work, *History of the Sabbath*. She returned to Africa as a teacher in a Protestant Episcopal orphanage in Liberia and studied the books carefully. Haskell made sure she received more books by mail. She studied them all.

She soon became convicted on the Sabbath and other distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She found it hard at first to switch from worshipping on Sunday to worshipping on Saturday, "but by the time she

wrote her first letter published in the *Review* on January 2, 1864, she had already won another missionary to the third angel's message, the Australian, Alexander Dickson.²⁰

On discovering her new convictions, her missionary society relieved her from her duties. She was not discouraged, but rather visited the other mission stations on the west coast of Africa and left literature at each one. Then she returned to America, was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, and continued to distribute literature.²¹

The Third Angel's Message first arrived in Ghana through the printed word. In 1888, a ship dropped some literature sent by the International Tract Society at Apam, a coastal city in Gold Coast (now Ghana). Mr. Francis I. U. Dolphijn read the literature and became convicted about the Sabbath doctrine.²² In 1892, the General Conference asked Elder Lawrence Chadwick to survey the missionary potential of the west coast of Africa. When his vessel reached Apam, Gold Coast, he was welcomed enthusiastically by three or four dozen Seventh-day Adventists led by Francis I. U. Dolphijn. Chadwick had also found another group of converts waiting for him in Sierra Leone, led by a Pastor Coker, and yet another group in Liberia led by Mr. Gaston, who had heard the Advent Message on a trip to South Africa and returned to tell it to his people.²³

Chadwick's report about the missionary potential of the west coast of Africa must have been favorable because in 1894, the General Conference sent the first group of official missionaries to Gold Coast. This was also the first group of missionaries to be sent to Africa. They were Karl G. Rudolph and Edward L. Stanford. Stanford, the leader of this expedition, stayed for only five months and had to return to America because of ill health.²⁴

Thus, Rudolph was left to continue the work alone. The Foreign Mission Board of the General Conference sent the following, who arrived at Cape Coast, another coastal city in Gold Coast, on October 3, 1895: Dudley Upton Hale of Texas, G. P. Riggs of Florida, and George T. Kerr and his wife, who had a one-month-old son. The leader of the group (the superintendent of this Adventist Mission) was Hale. Kerr and his wife were nurses, and Riggs was a literature evangelist. Karl Rudolph went back to the U.S.A. on February 1, 1896. In three months, Riggs had sold books worth \$180.²⁵

Challenges and Hardships

In 1896, Elder Hale wrote in the *Review and Herald*:

Our health, generally speaking, has been very good since the first of February. Brother Kerr has had almost perfect health, but Sister Kerr was sick quite a while. It has been sixty-two days since I have had any malarial fever. It has not been because of any precautions I have taken that I have not had it, but I attribute it to direct divine protection. Brother Riggs has had good health all along. I have not seen him since February; but at every word I get from him he is in good health, and enjoying his work. This is all the Lord's doings, and not ours; and it is marvelous in our eyes. We often think how wonderful it is that five white people came to this Coast together, have been here seven months, and not one of them dead yet. How wonderful it is when we remember that last year there were thirty-eight deaths to every forty white people in Cape Coast!²⁶

So Elder Hale saw it as a miracle that in seven months, none of his team of five had died in a city where there were 38 deaths out of every 40 Caucasians. No wonder a vice president of the General Conference called the west coast of Africa "the white man's grave."²⁷ It was as if the testimony of Elder Hale invited tragedies. On July 4, 1896, little William Kerr, the twenty-five month-old son of the Kerrs, died of dysentery. Four months later, Francis Marian Kerr, another child of the Kerrs, born on June 19, 1896, also died.²⁸ In July 1896, Elder Hale himself suffered a very severe attack of the "black-water fever." He wrote in the *Review and Herald*:

I had a very severe attack of the black-water fever the last of July. There was a profuse hemorrhage from the kidneys for fifty-six hours, and the fever rose to 106.8°, but God in his mercy preserved my life, and I am enjoying good health, it having been two months since I had any fever. In the eyes of the natives my getting well was so much of a miracle that they gaze at me on the streets as though I was one raised from the dead like Lazarus. Mr. Somerville, the Wesleyan white man on the coast, took the same fever at the same time I did, and died.²⁹

G. P. Riggs, the literature evangelist, also took ill. Despite his sickness, he did not want to leave the work. Pastor Hale reported on his sickness thus:

Brother Riggs's health failed, and we had to send him to England, where we hope he has now safely arrived. It is a sad loss to our work here. He was very loath to go, and even after Brother Kerr told him it would be best to go home, he remained several weeks, hoping that he might get better and do more work here for the Master. But God seemed to point very plainly that his work here was finished, and we hope he did not wait too long, but is safe in a better climate, and is ready for the Master's use in another field. He did good work while here, and we hope to see fruit spring up all along the coast from the literature he scattered.³⁰

Riggs had dysentery. He was hospitalized in Liverpool but, unfortunately, he died on January 8, 1897.³¹ On April 16, 1897, George and Eva Kerr sailed for Liverpool because they had suffered repeatedly from black-water fever. They served for 18 months on the Gold Coast. Thus, three of the four missionaries that arrived in Cape Coast on October

3, 1895, had left, leaving Dudley Hale alone. But he also had to sail for England on June 3, 1897, because he was then suffering from chronic severe malaria. He recovered and served briefly in the Caribbean, returned to the Gold Coast in 1903, but was again forced by malaria to leave almost immediately.³²

David C. Babcock replaced Dudley Hale in 1905. He came with Wilhelmina, his third wife, and their children, settling in Sierra Leone. Babcock had served for five years in the West Indies where his second wife died. In 1908, two new missionaries, Thomas and Katherine French, joined Babcock. Both were teachers. They served for two and a half years, teaching in church schools while Thomas, also the pastor of the Freetown Church, trained nationals to serve as missionaries in West Africa. Late in 1910, they were transferred to Axim in Gold Coast to teach in mission school there. They arrived very early in January 1911, but Katherine got a severe case of black-water fever on January 17, 1911. She died the following day, on January 18, 1911. "Exhausted mentally, spiritually, and physically, (Thomas) French left the Gold Coast in February, 'to return home to regain his health'".³³

C. F. E. Thompson and his wife replaced Thomas and Katherine French at Axim. Thompson and his wife were Jamaican. The belief in those days was that people of African descent had a natural resistance to diseases endemic in the tropical regions. Sadly, this theory was proved wrong. At any rate, after serving for less than four years in Sierra Leone and Axim in Gold Coast, Thompson, the first Adventist missionary from Jamaica, died in Freetown on March 25, 1912, of kidney failure, leaving his wife a widow. Thompson was not only a teacher, but a soul winner. In less than a year, when he was in Axim, he won about 30 converts.³⁴

After about 12 years of work in West Africa, Nigeria being his last station, Babcock had to sail to England in 1917 to receive treatment for his disease. He never returned to West Africa.³⁵

More Missionaries Sent to West Africa

The danger to health and the possible loss of life involved in being a missionary to West Africa could not deter people from accepting the call to come to the region as missionaries. W. H. Lewis arrived in Ghana in September 1914 to take charge of the work in the Gold Coast while David C. Babcock took the message to Nigeria that same year.³⁶ Jesse Clifford took the Third Angels' Message to Eastern Nigeria in 1923³⁷ while John Jacob Hyde arrived in Northern Nigeria in 1931 to begin the Adventist work there, establishing a church there in 1932.³⁸

It was not Caucasian missionaries that first took the Adventist message to all the countries of West Africa. The case of Cote d'Ivoire is an example. Two Ivorian laymen, John Bley and John Essien, both businessmen, used to come to Gold Coast for trading. They received the message there and were converted. They, in turn, took the Adventist Message to their people and convinced many through the Holy Spirit. In fact, when the first official missionary, Gordon Ellstrom, and Jespersion arrived, they met a group of converts already keeping the Sabbath holy.³⁹

Today, the headquarters of WAD is in Cote d'Ivoire. As a show of gratitude for the great work the missionaries had completed, the biggest university in West Africa, situated in Ilishan Remo in Ogun State, Nigeria, is named after David C. Babcock, who was the pioneer missionary there. Another university, in Eastern Nigeria is named after Jesse Clifford, who brought the message to that area of the country.

Religions in West-Central Africa

According to the Joshua Project,⁴⁰ a group that categorizes populations of countries by their religions, half of the 22 countries in WAD indicate that Islam is their primary religion. The list below shows the countries in which Islam has the greatest number of adherents, and the percentages of their populations yet to be reached with the Gospel by any Christian denomination:

Country	Percentage of Unreached Population
Burkina Faso	25.2%
Chad	55.3%
Cote d'Ivoire	33.4%
Gambia	84.4%

Country	Percentage of Unreached Population
Guinea	86.9%
Guinea-Bissau	47.3%
Mali	91.6%
Mauritania	99.6%
Niger	98.2%
Senegal	81,3%
Sierra Leone	17.5%

The large Muslim population in the territory of WAD explains the reason why soul winning is difficult in the Division. This accounts for the fact that, of the three divisions in Africa south of the Sahara, WAD has the smallest membership. As of June 30, 2017, the membership of the East-Central Africa Division (ECD) was 3,650,375, the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (SID) was 3,779,368, while that in WAD was 746,467.⁴¹

Membership Audit in WAD

A membership audit is the examination of the local church record book to monitor church growth and account for missing members.⁴² In 2011, WAD began a thorough membership audit in its unions. It was the first time such an audit was carried out since Africa Indian-Ocean Division (that eventually gave birth to WAD) had been organized. By 2014, the audit was largely completed in most of the unions. In 2010, the membership of the Division was 834,899⁴³ As a result of the audit, by 2015, the membership had been reduced to 680,286.⁴⁴ It is to be noted that while the audit was going on, new members were also being baptized into the church. So, the number that the Division lost as a result of the audit was more than the result obtained by subtracting 2015 membership (680,286) from the 2010 membership (834,899). Thus, the number of people declared missing is considered to be about 200,000.

Having an accurate membership figure gave correct parameters like tithe per capita. In 2010, the tithe per capita for the Division was US\$18.84,⁴⁵ but in 2014, when the audit was almost completed, the tithe per capita was US\$31.11.⁴⁶ That the tithe per capita in 2014 nearly doubled that of 2010 was not only due to an increase in tithe, but also because the membership figure was more accurate.

Institutions

WAD owns and operates two universities and a press. They are:

Babcock University, established in 1959 as the Adventist College of West Africa, later changed its name to the Adventist Seminary of West Africa, then was chartered as Babcock University in 1999. It is located in Ilishan Remon, Ogun State, Nigeria

Valley View University, established in 1979 as "Bekwai Seminary," became the Adventist Missionary College in 1983, was accredited in 1997, and was then chartered in 2006. Location: Mile 19; Accra-Dodowa Road, Oyibi, Ghana.

The Advent Press, established in 1937 as the "Nigerian Advent Press", moved to the then Gold Coast (now Ghana) in about 1951 and was renamed Advent Press. Location: Adjacent La Polyclinic, Osu La Road, Accra.

Union-operated Universities

Adventist University, Cosendai, was established in 1979 and chartered. Location: Nanga Eboko, Cameroon.

Adventist University of West Africa was established and chartered in 2003. Location: Schiefflin Town, Roberts Field High Way, Monrovia, Liberia.

Clifford University was chartered in 2016. Location: Ihie, Abia State, Nigeria.

Africa India-Ocean Division Administrators

Presidents: R. J. Kloosterhuis (1980–1985); Jacob J. Nortey (1985–1995); Luka T. Daniel (1995–2003).

Secretaries: G. S. Valleray (1980–1985); Ted N. C. Wilson (1985–1990); Caleb O. Adeogun (1990–1995); Charles Montille (1995–2000); Paul S. Ratsara (2000–2003).

Treasurers: Jacob J. Nortey (1980–1985); P. N. Onwere (1985–1990); D. H. Thomas (1990–1993); Gordon R. J. Gray (1995–2000); Ceazar Hechanova (2000–2003).

West-Central Africa Division Administrators

Presidents: Luka T. Daniel (2003–2008); Gilbert Wari (2008–2015); Elie Weick-Dido (2015–present).

Secretaries: Gilbert Wari (2003–2008); Onaolapo Ajibade (2008–2015); Kingsley C. Anonaba (2015–).

Treasurers: Ceazar J. Hechanova (2003–2008); Emmanuel S. D. Manu (2008–present).

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