

# Manipur Conference

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Manipur Conference is a constituent part of Northeast India Union Section, which is part of the Southern Asia Division. The territory of the conference is the state of Manipur, India, with the state's population being over 2.94 million. The conference was organized in 1982 after being a mission, and reorganized in 2013. The conference has 41 churches with a membership of 7,049 at the end of 2017.<sup>1</sup>

## The Beginnings

The Seventh-day Adventist message entered Manipur through a soldier of Southeast Asia Command of the Allied forces of World War II who had left a copy of the Adventist publication, *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* with Luikai of Tolo village. In the 1950s Ninghei Luikham, a Baptist evangelist, borrowed the book and began studying the Bible lessons outlined in the book. From his systematic and prayerful study of various biblical doctrines, Luikham discovered Bible truth and its enabling power in a new way. After personally accepting the new-found truth, Luikham was on a personal search to get in touch with the publishers of the book, even as he shared the new found truth with his church members and fellow pastors. Eventually, he organized a "reformed" church of his own in his home town of Ukhrul.<sup>2</sup> Soon he located the Adventist headquarters for Assam State in Shillong, a city some 340 miles west of Ukhrul, and there he enrolled in the Voice of Prophecy Bible correspondence course.

Twenty years before Luikham's book find, in the 1930s, Tom Ashlock, young son of J. F. Ashlock, the president of the Assam Mission, in Northeast India, was looking at a map of the union with pins marking wherever there was Adventist presence. Young Tom asked his father why there was no pin in the vast Manipur area and was told that nobody had gone there yet with the message. The young boy declared that he would take the message there one day.<sup>3</sup> That day came in 1951, when Tom Ashlock, now grown and fully trained with a college degree, and having worked already as publishing director of Assam Mission at Shillong, travelled to Ukhrul and met with Luikham and others interested in Adventist truth. In June 1952, Ninghei Luikham and his son Benjamin Luikham were baptized. By the end of that year Ashlock's ministry and the work of Luikhams, with the help of Zuala Sailo from Shillong yielded in the Ukhrul area the baptism of 14 people: Pangaireo Zimik and his wife Pamreiphi, A S Luinam, Yangmachung, Ngathingkhui, Chilang, Mangarin Shimray, Hongyar, Tuingapai, Yangmi, Khavangsin Zimik, A S Naomachum, Kahaoching, and A S Tungamaso. With these as the first fruits of Adventist

mission, the church had its start in the Manipur-Nagaland area.

Shortly thereafter a Thangkhol-speaking church with forty members was organized in Ukhrul with Ninghei Luikham as the elder. In 1953, Luikham was appointed circle leader by the office in Shillong. In 1955 H. T. Burr, president of the Assam Mission, visited Manipur. Together with Luikham, the two visited three persons in Champung village where the new believers were examined and baptized by Burr, the first missionary to visit the area.<sup>5</sup>

In 1956 Ninghei Luikham retired and the mission office was shifted from Ukhrul to Imphal, the capital city of Manipur State. Here Don James Donesky and his wife Jean took over the leadership of the work as the circle leader. Donesky travelled tirelessly to the interior towns and villages of Manipur to care for the spiritual needs of churches, conduct weddings, officiate in baptisms, and generally oversee and strengthen the churches all over the state.<sup>6</sup> However, due to governmental restrictions the Doneskys moved out of the state of Manipur.

## History of the Organization

The Manipur Nagaland Section was organized in 1982 with 28 churches and 2,913 members with the elected officers: R. Hungyo president, K. A. Shimray, secretary, and G. G. Kandulna treasurer. The section operated out of rented quarters at Chekon for a year and shifted to Sanjenthong compound in 1983. In 1986 the headquarters was shifted to its present location in Chingmeirong. The section was reorganized in the year 2000 when the Nagaland Region was separated and organized with 2 churches and several companies totaling 520 members, and the Manipur Section was left with 32 churches and 6,352 members.<sup>7</sup>

Upon the request of the Northeast India Union, the Southern Asia Division appointed a commission to study the viability of the Manipur Section becoming a Conference. The commission consisting of Jothi Anbiah, V. P. Singh and M. M. Rimsu studied the field and recommended on December 5, 2011 that the Manipur Section be organized into a conference. The Manipur Conference was organized on December 7, 2012 with Barnabas Zimik, president, Graceson Kamei, secretary, and Michael Sangma, treasurer.<sup>8</sup>

The Manipur Conference has had a steady growth in Christian education. Although the first school, Good Shepherd church school was established in 1966 and closed shortly thereafter due to lack of funds, it was revived as Kingsway English School in 1982<sup>9</sup> when the Manipur Section was organized. The Manipur Boarding School was established in 1968 and has a 2019 enrollment of over eight hundred students.<sup>10</sup> Several church leaders have gained their education at this school. In 1991 Worngayung English School was started to meet the need of Adventists at the Section headquarters with 20 students. By 2018 the school, functioning under the name of Orion Adventist School, has an enrolment of over a thousand students.<sup>11</sup>

Manipur Conference Presidents: R. Hungyo, 1982-1984; L. Hmingliana (acting), 1984; Yumi D. Luikham, 1984-1996; Kunsong Wanbe, 1996-2000; Johnny Shimray, 2000-2006; K. A. Shimray, 2006-2010; Barnabas Zimik, 2010-

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## NOTES

1. "Manipur," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017), 400, accessed May 16, 2019, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/old-yearbooks>.
2. Manipur Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *The History of Manipur Conference*, (unpublished manuscript, no date), 1.
3. Information shared by the Ashlock family when they attended the Annual Meetings of Manipur Conference in 2008.
4. *The History of Manipur Conference of SDA*, 2. Tom Ashlock had been designated in charge of developing the work in Manipur. See N O Dahlsten, "The Naga Story," *Eastern Tidings*, July 1, 1952, 5; and P K Peterson, "The Work in Assam Needs Your Prayers," *Eastern Tidings*, Nov 1, 1952, 6.
5. W. F. Storz, "The Mission Outposts of Northeast India," *Review and Herald*, Oct 27, 1955, 19, 20.
6. *The History of Manipur Conference*, 2, 5.
7. *Ibid.*, 7.
8. *Ibid.*, 2, 5, 16.
9. *Ibid.*, 9.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 10, 11.

12. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1952, 1982, 2012, 2017. <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/old-yearbooks>.

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