

# Gabon

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Gabon is a mission field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Gabon Mission is one of the five missions that make up the Central African Union Mission, which in turn is part of the West Central Africa Division. Statistics (June 30, 2017) for Gabon: 18 organized churches; membership of 2,004; population 1,990,000.<sup>1</sup>

## Overview of the Country

Gabon was a colony of France and became an independent republic in August 1960. Its first president was Leon Mba. The country is located on the Atlantic coast of central Africa, and it is bordered on the north by Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon, on the east and south by the Congo, and on the west by the Atlantic Ocean. Gabon has an area of 267,667 square kilometers. In 2016 the population was estimated to be 1,375,223, mainly composed of Bantu, divided in more than 40 local ethnic groups with different dialects and cultures. The official language is French. About 91 percent of the people are Christian, five percent are Muslim, and four percent animist. Gabon has never experienced war, but there are political and social tensions.<sup>2</sup>

## Origins

In 1975 the Central Africa Union Mission, which was made up of Gabon, Central African Republic, Chad, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea, with its headquarters in Cameroon, decided to send Ondoua Raymond, a Cameroonian, and his family to Gabon as missionaries. This family was the first Adventist pioneer family to work in Gabon. Through literature evangelism, Ondoua Raymond started to work in Libreville, the capital city. One year later, Pastor Kempf was sent by the Central Africa Union Mission to direct the affairs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Gabon and Congo, with residence in Libreville. On arrival, Pastor Kempf worked to get a visa for Pastor Daniel Cordas, who was coming from Portugal. In June 1976, Pastor Daniel Cordas and his family arrived in Libreville, Gabon.<sup>3</sup>

On April 28, 1978, Pastor Daniel Cordas sent a request to the Central Africa Union Mission in Cameroon asking for official recognition of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Gabon, with the status of mission. On May 8, 1979, the Adventist Church in Gabon was granted official status as a mission, with its headquarters in Libreville. In June of that year land was purchased on which to build the mission headquarters.<sup>4</sup>

## Spread and Development of the Message

The Adventist message was first shared in Libreville with the arrival of the Ondoua family. Between 1988-1989, the message was brought to Makokou. Later Pastor Jean Trebeau baptized a prisoner called Elie. Elie and his brother Eboth Emmanuel became the leading figures of the Adventist church in Makokou. In 1991 the message was brought to Port-Gentil.<sup>5</sup> A major outreach program brought the message to Franceville at the initiative of Pastor Max Jose Pi re in 1993. Among the people who were baptized during this public evangelism campaign was Nkouba Roseline. Later, in 1994, Samson Assoumou established the Adventist church in the region of Oyem.

Many people were instrumental in the initial spreading of the Adventist message in Gabon. Among the first Adventist missionaries were Ondoua Raymond and his wife, Danielle Cordas and his wife, and Max Jose Pierre and his wife. Among the native workers, one can mention Emmanuel Wora, the first Gabonese pastor to be ordained as a minister; Guillaume Bahanak, one of the first literature evangelists; Darius Djanivenda, the first member to be baptized into the Adventist Church in the region of Port-Gentil; and Samson Assoumou, who established the Adventist church in the region of Oyem.<sup>6</sup>

Since 1975 when the Adventist message was preached for the first time in Gabon, the church in Gabon has grown in terms of membership. From the small group of people who gathered to keep the Sabbath in 1976, the church had in 2006 a membership of 3,103 with a growth rate of 8.50 percent. Though there had been a regression between 2007 and 2013, the church had in 2016 a membership of 3,141 with a growth rate of 3.29 percent.<sup>7</sup>

## Institutions

Gabon has several institutions which were established under the leadership of Pastor Jean Nenko Chuntu between 2001 and 2008. The first educational institutions were the nursery and primary school established in October 2001 with the help of people who came from France. Sister Isabelle Taylor was the first person to be in charge of the nursery school. The Adventist Secondary School was established in October 2006, and the first headmaster was Samale Skangwa.<sup>8</sup>

The Health Center came to existence in 2005, with the aim of providing health services to the community. Germaine Assoumou, Frederique Kusemvula, and Zue Essono Thierry are the first people who worked to bring the Health Center up to standard. In 2007 the radio station was established.<sup>9</sup>

These institutions have played a major role in the spreading of the Adventist message in the country, especially in Libreville where there are all located.

## Adventism's Place in the Country

Since its official recognition by the government of Gabon in 1981,<sup>10</sup> the Adventist work has proceeded without any major difficulties. The Adventist church has impacted the country through its institutions. The primary and secondary schools have provided Christian education for the community. The dispensary has provided health facilities and services to the community. The radio program “It Is Written” has been broadcasting the three angels’ messages. Through all these institutions, many people have received the gospel and have felt the contribution of the church to the development of the community. However, the contribution to the country has been limited and many parts of Gabon have not yet been reached because all of these institutions are based in Libreville, the capital of Gabon.

## Presidents serving in Gabon Mission

Daniel Cordas, from Portugal (1976-1982); Daniello Barrili, from Switzerland (1983-1987); Alphonse Bouala, from Congo (Interim, 1987); Jean Trebau, from France (1988-1990); Max Jose Pièrre, from United States of America (1992-1997); Rodolfo Segorbe Natch, from Equatorial Guinea (1997-1998); Mongo Jean Claude, from Cameroon (1999-2000); Jean Nenko Chuntu, from Cameroon (2001-2008); Wora Emmanuel, from Gabon (2009-2013); and Medou Eyi Georges, from Gabon (2014-).<sup>11</sup>

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### NOTES

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2. “Gabon,” Wikipedia, accessed March 12, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabon>.
3. Emmanuel Wora, retired pastor from Gabon, interview by author, Libreville, Gabon, January 17, 2018.
4. Jean Moukoko, executive secretary of the Central African Union Mission, interview by author. January 17, 2018.

5. Djanivenda Darius, retired layman from Gabon, interview by author, Port-Gentil, Gabon, June 25, 2018.
  6. Emmanuel Wora, interview by author.
  7. "Gabon Mission," Statistical Reports, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, accessed November 21, 2017, [http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view\\_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10167](http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10167).
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  9. Germaine Assoumou, retired nurse, interview by author, Libreville, Gabon, September 21, 2017.
  10. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Gabon."
  11. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/old-yearbooks>.
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