

# Gambia Region

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## EMMANUEL TAWIAH TETTEH, AND SAMPA DOMINIC KOREA

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Sampa Dominic Korea, B.A. in theology (Valley View University, Ghana), is currently (2020) the Ministerial secretary, Chaplaincy director, and Banjul District pastor of the Gambia Region of SDA. He is married with six children.

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Gambia Region is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Gambia. It was organized in 1977, reorganized in 2013 and renamed in 2017. Gambia Region is part of Western Sahel Union Mission in West-Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventists.

Pastor Delbert Harrison is considered to be the first missionary sent by the then West-Africa Union Mission (WAUM) headquartered in Ghana to open the work in Gambia. Elder Daniel Cudjoe, a colporteur from Ghana, had been creating interests in the Adventist Church's teachings, and it was time to open the work.<sup>1</sup>

The number of Adventist members in Gambia was 405 as of June 2018, in a population of 2,730,000. There are five organized churches, six groups (companies), five pastors, and six Gospel Outreach.<sup>2</sup> In Gambia 90 percent of the population are mostly Sunni Muslims, making them the largest religious group, followed by 9 percent for Christians, and 1 percent who still practice traditional beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

## Brief History

The history of the church in Gambia starts with the strong desire of the church leaders in the then West Africa Union Mission, headquartered in Ghana, under the leadership of the then union president, Pastor S. B. Johannsen, to expand the Adventist message to unentered countries/territories. At this time Gambia was one of their targets. The first step taken to bring the Adventist message to Gambia was to send a literature evangelist, Elder Daniel Cudjoe. Elder Cudjoe arrived in Gambia in the year 1973 with his wife and one child. He would later have two other children in Gambia. As he sold health and religious books to the people of Gambia during the day, Elder Cudjoe would also conduct Bible studies with individuals and small groups in the evenings. After about two years of conducting Bible studies and canvassing, the then union decided to send in a team of three, made up of one pastor, Pastor Cartwright, who was the director of the work in Burkina Faso, and two evangelists, Elder T. J. Roberts and Elder Sandy, who were from neighboring Sierra Leone, to come to Gambia to conduct an evangelistic effort. At the end of this evangelistic effort, only one soul was baptized; she was Elizabeth Frazer. She became the first Gambian to be baptized in the year 1975. This evangelism was conducted in Banjul, the capital city of Gambia, at King George V Park, also known as Half-die Park. The team from Sierra

Leone returned after the evangelism program terminated. The outcome of this program didn't discourage Elder Cudjoe but motivated him to work even harder. He had later got five individuals who began studying the Bible with him and started worshipping with him every Sabbath at his residence at Cameron Street in Banjul<sup>4</sup>

In May 1976 the same team from Sierra Leone returned to Gambia to conduct another evangelistic campaign to reap the harvest of the continuous efforts of Elder Daniel Cudjoe. At this evangelism campaign four (4) people, Charles Frazer (the father of Elizabeth Frazer), Rachel Joiner, Susan Roberts, and Benjamin Roberts were baptized. The group at this time was moved from Cameron Street to No. 4, New Street, in Banjul in the year 1976. Finally, in the year 1977, the number of Adventist believers began gradually increasing, hence the need to finally move from No. 4, New Street to a rented building where worship services were being conducted in 33A Allan Street.<sup>5</sup>

Elder Daniel Cudjoe continued to nurture and led this small group of Adventist believers until the union found the need to send the first missionary, Pastor Delbert Harrison. Pastor Harrison, an American, was serving as mission evangelist in Liberia and acting as mission president when the call came from the then union president, Pastor S. B. Johannsen, asking him if he would be willing to move to Gambia to open the gospel work there. He arrived in Gambia in the year 1975. Considering the enormity of work ahead of him, Pastor Harrison requested an assistant, and Donald and Susan Vietz, who were anxious to serve the Lord overseas, were introduced to him. They and their two children joined him in Gambia a year after he had arrived and worked for two years. Having taken the baton from Elder Daniel Cudjoe, Pastor Delbert Harrison propelled the Adventist message by going to villages to give out clothing sent by ADRA from the USA and the UK and organized several evangelistic efforts in villages. On September 28, 1978, Pastor Harrison baptized four souls, which included the now Pastor Sampa D. Korea, who would later become one of the first two Gambians to be ordained as Seventh-day Adventist pastors. This baptism was conducted at the Banjul Beach where currently WAECs head office is located.

After Pastor Delbert Harrison took over, the office of the mission station was then located in his residence at Kairaba Avenue. Through the help of Pastor Matthew Bediako, who later became the president of the then WAUM headquartered in Ghana, a property in Faraja, adjacent to the private residence of the former president of Gambia, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara. This property was later taken by the then president, Jawara, on security reasons, and the church was compensated.<sup>6</sup>

Pastor Harrison desired to spread the gospel among the local people; hence, he needed to train a Gambian who spoke the local language to help with the work. Among the new converts was Benjamin Robert, who, for the sake of the Sabbath truth, had resigned from working as a senior clerk with the Central Bank of Gambia. Benjamin Robert, after accepting the Sabbath truth through Elder Daniel Cudjoe, decided to worship on the Sabbath days instead of going to work. He was called by his bosses to reconsider his decision of staying away from work on Saturdays or resign. Young enthusiastic Benjamin didn't find it difficult to resign so as to obey the

laws of God. Benjamin, though he had lost his job, dedicated himself to telling others about his newfound faith. As a result of his dedication, he was employed by the church in 1977 as a “pupil” evangelist and to oversee the Adventist group in Banjul as efforts were made to reach other territories in the country. Benjamin Robert, hence, became the first local person to be employed by the mission station. As a pupil evangelist, though he was reaching out to everyone, Elder Roberts paid more emphasis to preach to young people in schools and clubs. In 1977 he met young Sampa Dominic Korea, who had been visiting him with a friend, Samuel Mendy. Sampa became interested in the Adventist message and desired to learn more. He began worshiping and studying with the Adventist believers and was finally baptized with a group of four others on September 28, 1978. Elder Benjamin Robert was later sent by the church in 1979 to Newbold College, England, to be trained as a pastor.<sup>7</sup>

After Benjamin Robert’s departure to England, the union sent in Pastor Peter Osei Mensah (Pr. P. O. Mensah) from Ghana, who had recently graduated from ASWA to come and support the work in Gambia. Pr. P. O. Mensah became the pastor of the Adventist group in Banjul. In 1980 Pastor Harrison finally left Gambia, and Pastor P. O. Mensah became the acting director until the union sent in a substantive field director, Pastor Louie Neilson, who arrived in 1982. At his departure, Pastor Harrison donated his personal property purchased in Kanifing to the church. This property was used for block making and wood processing. It was later converted to a poultry farm during the time of Pastor Neilson.<sup>8</sup>

## The Threat To Shut Down

The Adventist message, including the Sabbath-keeping doctrine, had troubled other Christian denominations in the country who viewed the teachings of this newly formed group as a false one and a threat to Christianity in Gambia. Around this time, the church was having regular Sabbath worship attendants of around twenty-five out of about seven were baptized members. Some prominent Christians had influenced leaders of the National Muslim Association (now Supreme Islamic Council) to pressure the government to shut down the newly formed Adventist group as soon as possible before it would be too late. Dr. Malick Samba, who was the secretary general of the National Muslim Association in late 1977, gave an ultimatum to the leadership of the Adventist group to shut down within 24 hours. The new believers, though few in numbers, had nothing but unwavering faith and courage. After holding a series of prayer and fasting sessions, the members booked an appointment to have an audience with the then president of the republic, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara. The group, made up of the seven baptized members, was led by Mrs. Rachel Joiner, who went to meet the president to demand the respect of their religious rights. It was tough getting to the president, as his secretary-general demanded the group to present their concerns to him and he would relay it to the president. Unconvinced, these determined and courageous young Adventists demanded that they would speak only to the president of the republic.

After a long struggle, the president said he would like to talk to these young Christians. In addressing the president, the leader of the group, Rachel Joiner, told the president that Seventh-day Adventists in Gambia had

right guaranteed by the constitution but were denied that constitutional right by some entities. The president in response said he was not aware of an order for any Christian group to shut down. He immediately signed a handwritten note, which was given to his secretary-general. From then on Adventists in Gambia had freedom to worship unrestrained.<sup>9</sup>

## The Expansion of the Gospel Outside Banjul

In 1978 Pastor Sampa Korea, who had completed his Junior Secondary Education, was employed and sent to Serrekunda as a pupil evangelist together with two colporteurs, Samuel Mendy and Boniface Mewu. As soon as Sampa Korea completed high school in 1982, Pastor Louie Neilson informed him of plans to start an Adventist primary school in Kanifing (where the church office is currently located). So, he was employed by the church to head three others, Joseph Wright, Elizabeth Frazer, and Matthew Gibba, to start the first Adventist school in Kanifing in 1982 in a makeshift structure beginning with primary one. This school was later moved to New Jeshwang in 1983 after the church had acquired the property and had constructed a primary school (SDA Education Centre) there.

In 1984 the newborn Adventist group could not get a permanent place to worship and as the church was growing, the leadership of the church decided to move the church from Banjul to New Jeshwang, where the church had built a primary school. This decision didn't go down well with some of the believers, but due to the fact that the majority of the members were coming to church from Serrekunda and its environs, the decision was overwhelmingly accepted. Hence, the Adventist group moved from Banjul to worship in one of the classrooms in the newly constructed SDA Education Centre in New Jeshwang. Later in 1992, during the tenure of Pastor Frank Teeuwen, he was able to mobilize funds to construct a permanent church building on the campus of the SDA Education Centre. Hence, Pastor Frank Teeuwen was the first missionary to construct a church building and the Gambia SDA Church and the New Jeshwang SDA Church became the first constructed in Gambia. The church was dedicated and officially organized in 1992 by Pastor Teeuwen.<sup>10</sup>

## The Adventist Message to Lamin

Around 1979 Pastor P. O. Mensah helped expand the church to Lamin village in the West Coast region. In Lamin he had organized an evangelistic effort and had baptized some souls. The outcome of the evangelistic series caused the church to acquire property there in 1979, and a church was built in 1982 for the small group there to worship in. In 1998 a three-classroom block was constructed on this property by Pastor Adjei Kwei to begin a junior secondary school. This school was shortly closed down by the government due to the facility not meeting minimum standards. In 2007 under the leadership of Pastor Emmanuel Peter Smith, the church in Lamin was officially dedicated and organized.<sup>11</sup>

## The Adventist Message to Farafenni

Shortly after opening the church in Lamin, Pastor P. O. Mensah was sent to plant the church in faraway Farafenni of the north bank region. In Farafenni Pastor P. O. Mensah, who was a Ghanaian and does not speak the Gambian local language, started with adult literacy classes so as to train some of the locals to speak English and recruit some into active evangelism. In between the adult literacy classes, which were conducted in the evening, Pastor P. O. Mensah gradually introduced his students to Bible lessons. This continued until he had eight people who decided to give themselves to Christ in baptism. All these converts, which included Mark Bah (who later became an evangelist of the church), were originally Muslims. The fact that these converts were Muslims and baptizing them in Farafenni would expose them to life-threatening attacks, caused the church to make arrangements to transport the candidates from Farafenni to the mission station's office in Fajara for baptism. Pastor P. O. Mensah continued to care for the church until he ended his service in Gambia in 1984.<sup>12</sup> After his departure from Gambia, Sampa Dominic Korea took over the work in Farafenni in June 1985 and left there in 1988.<sup>13</sup>

## The Adventist Message to Ghana Town

Ghana Town, as the name depicts, is a community founded by Ghanaians who had migrated to Gambia in the 1950s. The Adventist message got to this community in 1992 through the work of literature evangelist Elder Julius Twum from Ghana. Elder Twum first came to Ghana Town community in August 1992 to organize a Bible Correspondence Course. Six people were enrolled in this course. One of these was Elder Samuel Dadson who would later become the first baptized Adventist in the community. The Bible Correspondence Course ended in September 1992 with a beautiful graduation ceremony held in the community center on a Sabbath. After the graduation ceremony, Elder Twum came to the community the next Sabbath to have further Bible studies with the new Bible Correspondence Course graduates. By the third Sabbath, the people suspected Elder Twum to want to form a "Sabbath church;" hence, all except Elder Samuel Dadson stopped attending gathering with Elder Twum every Sabbath. Elder Dadson worked with Elder Twum to get more people to study the Bible. In the follow up to the work of Elder Twum, the then mission station's director, Pastor Frank Teeuwen, began a series on evangelism in the community. He held evangelistic meetings every Monday evening for several months. Many people showed interest in the teaching of the church and decided to accept the Adventist faith. Pastor Teeuwen continued to conduct other evangelistic efforts that won more souls into the church. The baptisms of these souls were conducted in the baptistry that had been constructed at the Lamin church premises during a joint service. The group continued to grow and began worshiping in an abandoned military camp (now a para-military police station). With the Catholic Church in the community losing some of its members to the Adventist group, they began having confrontations with the Adventist group claiming that where the group was worshiping belonged to them. It was in the height of this dispute that three key members of the Adventist group, Elder

Peter Tetteh, Elder Samuel Dadson, and Elder Emmanuel Donkoh donated part of the land they had jointly acquired for the construction of a church. This part of the donated land shares a border with the Catholic Church's land. The construction of the Adventist church building brought about disputes with the then Catholic Church's priest, Father Sharp, claiming part of the Adventist portion of land. Finally, the dispute was resolved with the Adventist group compromising a part of their land for peace to prevail. The church building was completed and dedicated for worship on September 2, 1994. The nucleus of the church were Samuel Dadson, Augustus Brako, Clement Ansah, Peter Monnie, Hayford Dadson, Peter Mensah, John Bentum, Philip Effrim, Emmanuel Quaye, Agnes Opoku, Peter Tetteh, Emmanuel Donkoh, Beatrice Enchil, Ester Tawiah, Peter Akyin Abban, and Isaac Atandoh.<sup>14</sup>

## The Adventist Message to Kanifing

After the former president had taken the church's property in Fajara, the mission office was moved to Pipeline where the residence of the mission station's director was. As the church was growing, it became inconvenient to continue to have the church's office in a residence. At the time, the personal property of Pastor Del Harrison, which was used for a poultry farm, had been abandoned. Pastor Adjei Kwei, who had recently taken over as the station's director, decided to renovate this property and convert it to the new office of the mission station. An old structure that served as the residence for Allen Jorgorsen was renovated to be the office. In 1994 a group of believers who were worshipping with the New Jeshwang SDA church, moved to form a company in the Latrikunda Junior Secondary school, LK, on Kairaba Avenue. This group of believers grew steadily but was faced with several challenges. There was a need for them to have their own worship place. With the mission office now moved to Kanifing. Pastor Adjei Kwei, who was the mission station's director at this time, put in a lot of effort to renovate the abandoned poultry house into a church building so that the brethren worshipping in LK school could move into it and worship there. In 1999 the renovation work was completed and worship began to be held in this building. On Monday April 25, 2005, the church in Kanifing was officially organized and dedicated. Pastor Gilbert Wari, who at the time was the executive secretary of the West-Central Africa Division (WAD), was the officiating minister at this church-organization ceremony.<sup>15</sup>

## The Adventist Message to Brikama

Evangelist Mingou was employed by Louie Neilson for the work to begin in Brikama, the regional capital of the West Coast region. The church started in the compound of Mr. Mendy in Brikama Nyambai who voluntarily gave his home for the Adventist believers. The group of believers later moved from the compound of Mr. Mendy to Brikama Junior Technical School (Now Brikama Methodist Junior/Senior Secondary School) owned by Mr. William B. Foster. In 2004 Columbia Union Conference chose Brikama as one of the three centers for a two-weeks crusade. This was followed by another evangelistic effort in Brikama Jamisa in 2005 by the then union president,

Pastor Errki Haapasalo (from Finland). The growing Adventist group had Pastor Haapasalo arrange for a plot of land to be bought at Brikama Nyambai where a church building was constructed. The Brikama Church was officially dedicated and organized in 2007 by Pastor Emmanuel Peter Smith.<sup>16</sup>

## Other Expansion Work

Even though Gambia has a very high Muslim population of over 90 percent, the Adventist message has been progressing, albeit slowly. The desire to spread the message made small groups spring up over time in communities such as Sinchu, Tabokoto, Latrikunda Sabiji, Sukuta Gidda, Sifoe, Kachumeh, Madina Salem, and Galloya. Though some of these communities have been merged with other churches and some closed, the majority of them still exist to carry on the task of spreading the gospel. The existing communities are Sinchu, Tabokoto, Sukuta Gidda, Banjul, Kachumeh, Madina Salem, and Galloya.<sup>17</sup>

## Expansion of the Gospel Through the Establishment of Schools

*SDA Education Centre.* During his tenure, Pastor Nielson worked tirelessly by spreading the gospel through establishing schools. He approached the chief and elders of New Jeshwang and Ebo Town communities who donated some land to the church for the construction of a school and other developments. Pastor Nielsen and Pastor Frank Teeuwen quickly began mobilizing funds to start construction on the campus. Funds were secured from the European Union (EU), ADRA (Sweden), and ADRA (Netherlands) for construction of classrooms for adult education to be held on the campus. In 1983 the Adult Education Centre was constructed. The donors later agreed that the church could run an elementary school during the day while the adult-education classes were held during the evenings. Around 1993 to 1994, Pastor Frank Teeuwen, who was then the mission director, had acquired funds to build the junior and secondary school. In 1996 the construction of the junior and senior secondary schools in the SDA Education Centre was completed by Pastor Adjei Kwei. The SDA Education Centre had been headed by the following people: Pastor Louis C. Nielsen (1983–1985), Mr. Oivin Gjertsen (1986), Pastor Frank Teeuwen (1987–1994), Pastor Adjei Kwei (1994–1998).<sup>18</sup> The school is currently headed by Elder Arnold Sowah in the junior and senior secondary school section and Ms. Flora Bioma in the primary and nursery school section.<sup>19</sup>

*Farato Sotokoi SDA School.* In the Farato community the villages had approached Pastor Korea to find a school in their community. Pastor Korea relayed the information to the then field director, Pastor Kwei, who arranged for adult literacy classes to begin as funds became available to construct a more permanent school. In 1996 the community donated their community football field to the church for a school. Thatch rooms were made for adult literacy classes to begin. In 1997 the community, knowing that their children needed education more than the adults, offered to help the church construct solid structures for classrooms. They helped mold mud blocks for the construction of a solid structure for school to begin for the children. In 1998 funds that had been

previously secured by Pastor Frank Teeuwen were used to construct a permanent structure. In 1999 the Farato Sotokoi Primary School was established and registered to begin operation with 37 children. The first headmaster of the school was Pastor Sampa Korea (September 1999–July 2001), Elder Edward Kyei (August 2001– February 23, 2006), followed by Elder Evans Agyeman (February 24–July 2010), Pastor Simon Mendy (September 2010–December 2010), Elder Marvins Obasi (February 11, 2011–July 31, 2012), Elder Edward Kyei (September 1, 2012 to date). The school was expanded to a junior secondary school during the current leadership of Pastor Karamba Jassey in 2015.

*Kachumeh SDA School.* In the year 2005, Pastor Errki Haapasalo had organized an evangelism campaign in Kachumeh community, which is predominantly a Christian (Catholic) community and had got a good number of people who accepted the Adventist teaching. The then Catholic priest of the community, Father Sharp, who was also overseeing Kachumeh and running a nursery school, was not happy about some of his church members leaving the Catholic Church for the SDA denomination. He, therefore, decided to dismiss the children of all Adventist converts from the Catholic ran nursery school. One of the newly converted Adventists, Ensa Mendy, told the Adventist church leadership that he is willing to donate part of his land for the church to build a school so that their children's education will not be truncated because of their faith. The church thanked him for his generosity but offered to pay for the land rather than to be given it free. This offer was accepted. Right away thatch rooms were made for classrooms to begin for the children of the newly converted Adventists. Very soon other non-Adventist parents were bringing their children to this Adventist run school. There was a need for expansion and a more permanent classroom. In 2006 under the leadership of the mission station's director, Pastor Emmanuel P. Smith, a three-classroom block was built to cater for children from nursery 1 to primary 6. Currently there is an expansion of the classrooms to six classrooms and an office with funding from ADRA Gambia.

## Expansion of the Gospel Through ADRA

ADRA started work in Gambia in 1978 when the then field's director, Pastor Delbert Harrison, was receiving donations in terms of clothing and other things from the ADRA office in the USA and UK. This continued during the time of Pastor Louie Nielson, who did some work on relief and development. He was able to initiate a poultry-farm project in Kanifing (where the current mission office is located) and a vegetable-gardening project in New Jeshwang SDA Education Centre. Pastor Frank Teeuwen was the project director supervising these projects. Pastor Teeuwen supported the work of ADRA through various development and relief projects and through his efforts, ADRA Gambia was officially registered with the government in 1984. From 1984 after ADRA Gambia was registered, Pastor Frank Teeuwen became the first director of ADRA Gambia until 1988 when he was appointed also as the mission station director. He served as mission station director as well as ADRA Gambia director from 1990 to 1994. After his departure in 1994, Pastor Adjei Kwei, who was the mission

station's director, succeeded Pastor Frank Teeuwen and doubled by acting as the ADRA Gambia country director until Elder Ephraim Palmero came in to be the substantive ADRA director from 1999 to 2002. ADRA was able to initiate several relief projects going as far as Kiang in Lower River region with its interventions. The office was briefly closed in 2004 and then reopened in 2007 with Elder Samuel Mendy as the programs director while Beryl Aseno Nyamwange was the country director for both Gambia and Sierra Leone. Beryl Aseno Nyamwange became the country director of ADRA Gambia (as well as Sierra Leone) from January 2007 until September 30, 2010. Pastor Emmanuel Tawiah Tetteh succeeded as the programs director for ADRA Gambia from April 2011 and then as country director from March 2012 till date.<sup>20</sup>

## First Gambian Adventist Ordained Pastors

In 2006 Pastor Sampa Korea had returned from studies at Valley View University in Ghana and started work in the field. In June 2010 he was joined by Pastor Karamba Jassey and Simon Mendy, who are all Gambian-trained pastors from Valley View University. Pastor Karamba Jassey was appointed in December 2010 to succeed Pastor Emmanuel P. Smith. He, therefore, became the first indigene (Gambian) to head the Gambia Mission Station of SDA. In mid-2011 Pastor Karamba Jassey and Pastor Sampa Dominic Korea were ordained into the gospel ministry. Pastor Emmanuel P. Smith (who was then the ministerial secretary of the West Africa Union Mission), Pastor Joseph Conteh, the union secretary, and Pastor James Golay, the union president, officiated at the ordination service.<sup>21</sup>

## Reorganization of the Church in Gambia

The church in Gambia from its inception has been a mission station because of its slow progress, largely due to its high Muslim population. Gambia was part of the West Africa Union Mission, headquartered in Ghana. When Ghana went off the WAUM to form its own union, the headquarters of WAUM was moved to Liberia, comprised of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Gambia. In the year 2015, a restructuring of the union in WAD saw Gambia being part of the West Sahel Union Mission, headquartered in Dakar.

In 2018 the church in Gambia was renamed Gambia Region instead of Gambia Mission Station that it had been hitherto called.<sup>22</sup>

## Directors of the Gambia Region

Daniel Cudjoe (Ghana), a volunteer (1973–1978); Del Harrison (U.S.A.) (1975–1980); P. O. Mensah (Ghana), interim (1980–1982); Louie Neilson (Denmark) (1982–1985); Glen D. Wade (U.S.A.) (1985–1987); Auzelle Gibson (Liberia) (1988); Peter Cooper (U.S.A.) (1988–1989); Frank Teeuwen (Netherlands) (1990–1994); Adjei Kwei (Ghana) (1994–2004); Emmanuel P. Smith (Liberia) (2004–2010); Karamba Jassey (Gambia) (2010– )<sup>23</sup>

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## NOTES

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