Akwa Ibom Conference

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Formerly part of South East Conference, Akwa Ibom Conference was organized in 2015. It is overseen by Eastern Nigeria Union Conference in the West-Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Territory: Akwa Ibom State.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches, 14; membership, 4,977; population, 5,845,565.

Background

The people are culturally homogenous with a common identity. There are three major dialectal groups: Ibibio, Annang, and Oron. Other sub-groups include Eket, Ibeno, Itumbonuso, and Andonis.

Akwa Ibomites were introduced to Christianity through the work of missionaries in the nineteenth century. The Presbyterian Church, led by Pastor Samuel Alexander Bill, started their work at Ibeno, where Bill established Qua Iboe Church in 1887. The Methodists established their presence in Oron in 1893. In 1851 the Lutherans established their church in Ibesikpo. Samuel Ajayi Crowther (later a bishop), led a team of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) into the Niger Delta in 1857, and in Ikot Abasi in 1902. The Presbyterian Church, led by Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell, started work at Calabar on April 10, 1846, where it spread to the hinterland of Akwa Ibom State. Others include the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Apostolic Faith, and other independent churches that came into the area in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Origins of Adventist Mission in Akwa Ibom state

The history of Seventh-day Adventism in Akwa Ibom can be traced back to Annang, precisely Nto-Akan/Nto Essien Abasi in the Ika Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State in 1934. According to the welcome address presented by the late Josiah Akpan, at the Cross River Mission Station Camp Meeting held at Nto Akan in 1982. Akpan had been worshiping with a local Sabbath-keeping group, called Omuma in Igbo language, or Holy Sabbath. He came in contact with the Adventist message at Akarika when he met with Mr. Idawariogbonna from Azumini, Ndoki, a palm produce trading partner, in Abia State. Idawari taught him more about the Sabbath and other Adventist teachings.
When Josiah demanded further clarification, Idawari directed him to meet a white missionary—Pastor L. Edmonds at Agbor Hill, Aba Ngwa. Pastor Edmonds was excited with the interest expressed by Josiah’s newfound faith, and took pains to answer every question that burdened him. The first request the new convert made was that an Adventist church be established in his village, Nto Akan/Nto Essien Abasi. Josiah enthusiastically shared his newfound faith with some of his village members, who had a common belief on Sabbath day as the day of rest but held many other beliefs contrary to those of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.\(^3\)

This group of Sabbath-keepers held such beliefs as payment of money for intercessory prayer, animal sacrifice to appease God in order to answer prayers, avoidance of cooking food on the Sabbath day, spiritualism, the lighting of different kinds of candles, drumming, ritual dancing, and others. Some members of the Holy Sabbath Church were Akpan Ibanga and his wife; Ezekiel Monday; Michael Eduo; and many others who later accepted and joined Josiah Akpan in his newfound faith.

Josiah Akpan then donated a piece of land for a church building in 1935. According to the report, the whole of Aba Ngwa District came with building materials (sticks and bamboos) and their food and erected the first Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nto Akan (mud walls and thatched roof). The report also had it that the first indigenous missionary sent to Nto Akan was Brother James Meruka from Ikwere Asu; followed by Brother Jacob Ukaegbu from Aba Ngwa, Brother Sam Eze, and others.\(^4\)

From Nto Akan, the Adventist Church spread to Nji in Okon, Ikot Ekefre, Ikot Ukoeto in the former Ikot Ekpene Division (now Essien Udim Local Government Area) in 1936. Samson Udo Uko and his family became the first to embrace the faith there. The church further spread to Umon, Okon, Ikot Ekpenyong, and Achan Ika, where Dan Akpan and Dickson Jimmy became the church leaders. According to Friday Akpan, Nji-Okon was the first administrative headquarters of Seventh-day Adventist Mission in the defunct South Eastern States. In 1940, when the first missionary, Thomas L. Gillet came, he relocated the headquarters to Ikot Ekefre due to its accessibility to a clean stream of water. He got the service of John Akpan Enang, who always accompanied him to interpret the messages from English to Annang and Ibibio languages.

John Akpan Enang later became the first indigenous evangelist who also worked and became the first ordained Adventist minister in the Akwa Ibom Field. The chiefs of the Ikot Ekefre Community, including Mr. Udo Iko, warmly welcomed the church and donated a sizable portion of land. In 1941, Pastor Gillet built a big multi-purpose (mud-and-thatched roof) mission house. He operated a health center, as well as a school, where he taught members of the community how to read and write.\(^5\)

Pastor Farrow succeeded Pastor Gillet, and in 1944 he remodeled the school into the Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, still standing today but administered by Akwa Ibom State government. E. E. Ekanem and J. U Idiong were among the first set of teachers.\(^6\) Meanwhile, one of the church’s foremost leaders, James Ununna, became severely ill and suddenly died. Also, there was incessant vandalism of the missionary’s properties, and
the effect of this led to the missionaries’ unexpected departure. These incidents brought a setback to the church, but in the long run, God saved His church from these destructive tendencies. The health center discontinued after their departure. 

In 1937, Pastor Edmonds visited Nkwot Ikot Ebo, in today’s Etim Ekpo Local Government Area, and met with the leaders of the Seventh-day Sabbath Church, which included David Ikono, Dickson Akpan, Tommy Uko Essien, Jonah Udoudo Uwa, Daniel Jonah, and others. The people accepted the Seventh-day Adventist message. The first converts baptized in March 1939 were John Akpan Enang, David Ikono, Reuben Akpan, Abraham Udo, and Rebecca Ntia. Others include Jumbo Josiah Udofa, A.R. Etuk, and many others. As the Nkwot branch continued to grow, Evangelist James Ananaba from Akanu Ndoki was sent to lead the young converts. This vibrant congregation built their first place of worship with a thatched roof, which was dedicated December 18, 1939 by Pastor Onwere. 

**Abak and Ikot Ekpene**

Abak became the next place to welcome the Seventh-day Adventist church. A Seventh-day Adventist Sierra Leonean, J.D. Bestman, a goldsmith, settled in Abak in 1943. He solicited missionary support from Aba for evangelism and in 1944, and Evangelist John Akpan Enang and others were sent to establish a branch Sabbath School in Abak. The missionaries’ endeavors were blessed with many souls baptized into the church. Although the branch had some challenges which affected its growth, a vibrant church exists there today, with many branch church companies within and around Abak.

Literature evangelism played a vital role in the success of the Adventist message in Ikot Ekpene. In 1945, Thomas M. Orchingwa and Ugwuga were posted there from Abato to take the printed pages of Adventist messages from door-to-door. They started a branch Sabbath School at Ikot Ekpene with their families before others joined. In 1962, Pastor Sievert Gustavsson, a former secretary-treasurer of the West Nigeria Mission, and a team of evangelists including Moses J. Nkwa, Alala and others, conducted evangelistic meetings that lasted for three months in Ikot Ekpene Town. Many souls were baptized, including Thomas Mendie, Sylvester U. Essien, David U. Essien, Kenerick Erasmus, Lawrence O. Udoma, Etim F. Utin, and others. As a result of this, branch Sabbath Schools were established at Adiasim, Eka Uruk Essiet, and Nto Edino. Pastor Moses J. U. Nkwa, the first evangelist to Ikot Ekpene, was given the responsibility to nurture the new branches, a task too great for one person.

In 1962, Pastors Gustavsson and Onwere visited the area. Former members of the Seventh-day Reformed Movement and their pastor, S. Ekpenyong at Nto Edino, were happily received into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. On May 2, 1962, a new branch church company was established in Ntong Uno, and Pastor Monday Isaac was sent to Nto Edino to pioneer the work there. After the Nigerian civil war, according to Elder Friday Akpan,
the district headquarters was moved from Ikot Ekefre to Ikot Ekpene for ease of administration in 1967.

Expansion to Ibibio Land

Chief Adam Akpan Etuk of Mbioto No.1 accepted the Sabbath in 1944. When he shared this newfound truth with his brothers, Ebong Akpan Etuk and John Akpan Etuk, they graciously accepted it, but confusion set in as they heard of a Sabbath-keeping group locally known as Abuma at Nyaodiong, in the defunct Opobo Division, now Mkpat Enin Local Government Area. This group is noted for fortune telling, animal sacrifice to atone for one’s sin, and appeasement for healing and other beliefs. Based on this, Michael Adam was sent to J.D. Bestman at Abak with a letter of invitation, but he could not find him. When he made an inquiry, he was told that Bestman had traveled to Sierra Leone, and he was advised to drop the letter in his post office box. After a long time, Evangelist John A. Enang, who always visited Abak, cleared the mail in Bestman’s post office box, including the letter from Mbioto, and took it to the missionary at Aba.13

Response from Aba

In September 1945, a team of foreign and Nigerian missionaries came to Mbioto. Some members of the team were Pastor E. A. Farow; Pastor Newman, a European evangelist; John Akpan Enang; Elder Afangide from Adiasim-Ekpenyong Atai; and others. After teaching the Bible Sabbath and other Adventist doctrines, the three brothers accepted the faith. In response, the Mbioto pioneers set up a small thatched church building in John Akpan’s compound. Later that year, another missionary team, led by Pastor Newman, visited Ikot Udobia and met with the prospects, Jack Obot and Ambrose, who earlier had fellowship with the local Sabbath-keeping group (Abuma). Ikot Udobia interests led by Pastor Moses Jacob Nkwa joined Mbioto converts before the first Sabbath Rally.14

The First Sabbath School Rally in Ibibioland

In 1945, the first-ever Sabbath School Rally held in Ibibio land outside Annang land took place in Mbioto. The immediate result was the launch of two branch Sabbath Schools, one in Mbioto, and the other in Ikot Udibia. The earliest evangelists posted to guide the new churches were John Akpan Enang and Nna Ata. Etidung Effiong E. Etuk, who was baptized in 1954 along with Etim Francis Utin and others by Pastor A. J. Dickay, related that after the Ikot Ekefre mission became defunct, the branch suffered a setback, though it was not closed down. Most of the Sabbath school backslid except Nkwot, Mbioto, and Ubon Akwa. The work was taken over by the then-East Nigeria Mission at Aba, and was administered by Umuabiakwa District, led by Pastor A. J. Dickay and E. E. Onumegbu. Mbioto and Ikot Udobia waxed strong and produced members such as Abedgeno Jim Obo, Arthur Matthew Etuk, Michael Adam, Miss Ime Adam, Bassey Adam, and Effiong Ebong Etuk, who worked as teachers
in the Ikot Ekefre School.\textsuperscript{15}

The Church came to Adadia

In the 1960s John Akpan Enang conducted evangelism in the Ikang fishing port, and many souls were baptized. Among the new converts were Effiong Okon Udoh, who later became a pastor, and Ekpo Edet Inyang, both from Adadia. They came back home and started the church in Adadia in 1963. Other people of Akwa Ibom origin who embraced the faith at Ikang were included Eyibio Okon, Akpan Jack Udosen, Robert Akpan, and Martim Assam.

The Church Comes to Uyo

The first branch Sabbath School in Uyo was held in 1954 in Elijah Udom Akpan's house at No. 97 Aka Road. Evangelist Jacob always visited the branch for nurturing. In 1957, the literature evangelist Ogwugwu was sent to do literature evangelism in preparation for soul-reaping evangelism. In 1963 Pastor Gustavsson came with his team of evangelists and conducted a public evangelistic campaign for three months, in a co-operative society hall along Oron Road in Uyo. The evangelistic effort resulted in a harvest of souls which included Mrs. E. B. Anwanane, Udom, and his family; Umoren and his wife; Idiong, and many other converts through baptism. Pastor J. Achihu and Pastor Chinoye were among the earliest ministers who served in Uyo just before the Nigerian Civil War in 1963.\textsuperscript{16}

The early Uyo church was characterized by movement of the place of worship from one member's house to another, and from one primary school to another. In 1982 Maurice J. Ntekop, a convert from the Catholic Church, donated land at Udo Iya by Nkemba Street. The Uyo church was organized November 3, 1984, with J.J Udofa as the first elder.\textsuperscript{17} He later became the mission publishing director. The Uyo Church has given rise to two districts of churches, Uyo Township and Uyo West, each with eight and seven branches respectively.

In Itu Mbon Uso

Robert Akpan from Ogu village in Itu Mbon Uso Clan was the first to accept the Sabbath message in the Annang area, as taught by a group called Holy Sabbath Church. In 1941 he shared this newfound truth with Oyuho U. Etukudoh, who became convinced and began to worship with him on the Sabbath day. These two friends took the Sabbath message to their village, Ogu. Mr. Etukudoh built the Holy Sabbath church in the village and got many converts such as Peter Akpan and Paul Odiong from the Presbyterian Church. In 1953 Robert Akpan received a Seventh-day Adventist message in Ikot Ekpene. He again shared it with Mr. Etukudoh, who did not accept the Adventism immediately but continued in the old faith until April 21, 1955, when he handed his church to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Mr. Oyuho U. Etukudo was employed into the gospel ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1961.
Many others also embraced the faith, and on November 3, 1956, 36 candidates prepared by Pastor M.J.U. Nkwa were baptized by Pastor E. E. Onumaegbu. The new church grew stronger in faith, and in December 1957 they hosted the first camp meeting at Ogu, Itu Mbon Uso. Today, Itu Mbon Uso Seventh-day Adventist Church is the headquarters of the Itu Mbon Uso district of churches, comprised of the following churches: Ogu, Obot Ndom, Mbiabet, Odoro Ikpe, and Ikweme.

**Oron and Eket**

The Seventh-day Adventist missionary work began in Oron in 1955. Pastor E.E. Hulbert, who was stationed in Calabar, conducted evangelism in a primary school, Okopedi Okobo, in 1956 with his team of evangelists, including Pastor Samuel Ogungi Nwabi, Harry J. Awuloha, and Young Achor. The effort was blessed with many souls, though some backslid later. In 1957 another evangelistic effort was conducted in Oron main town, and many souls were baptized, including Effiong Esuka, Mma Eno Otoyo, Mma Iquo Anwankak, Asquo Okon, Mrs. Iquo Ita, and Iquo Ekendu Okokon. In 1960 Pastor Samuel Ogungi became the minister to Oron. In 1979 Oron Church built its first church permanent structure at No. 17A Murtala Street, Oron. Today Oron is a district with five vibrant branches.

In 1971 Mr. Eyo Thompson Essien, a photographer in Ikot Ekpene and a native of Ikpa Eket, attended evangelistic meetings conducted at Ikot Ekpene. He was so committed to the program that he did not miss a single night. He accepted Seventh-day Adventist teachings and requested that the message be brought to his village. An evangelistic meeting led by Pastor M.J.U. Nkwa and Pastors Etukudoh and F. M. Mbon was conducted in Ikpa-Eket, and the result was that Chief Frank Edoro, Friday Ette, Cecelia Frank, and Chief Ben Uyo were baptized. These members formed the nucleus of Ikpa-Eket Church. Pastor Etukudoh was the first Pastor sent to nurture the new converts and advanced the work in Ikpa-Eket.

In April 1974, South East Mission Station sent the literature evangelist Okon Udoh Nya to Eket. In 1975, Effiong Ise Okoko, an Adventist from Ogu, Itu Mbonuso, moved to Eket where he was employed in civil engineering. Mr. Okon U. Nya and his family and Effiong I. Okoko started a Sabbath service in Effiong I. Okoko's house. Desiring to build a growing church, they conducted house-to-house evangelism, and their first prospect was Orok Asuquo Elijah. As they continued they discovered Erinyana Udoh Ekon, a Seventh-day Adventist from Ikot Ntuen who had settled in Eket for business, and later another Adventist, Chief Court Registrar Mr. Ekpa J. and his family, who was on transfer from Calabar to Eket.

In 1977, Effiong I. Okoko's house could no longer accommodate the growing membership so they rented one classroom of Afaha Eket Main Primary School for worship. In the same year, the Mbioto district, led by Pastor M.J.U. Nkwa and Pastor Etuk Udoh, conducted evangelism for one month, and the Lord blessed the effort with six souls, including Mbuk and his two daughters. In subsequent evangelisms, Tunji Obawale, Jacob Tommy
Nduasa, and others joined the church through baptism. In 1994 Eket Church was organized by Pastor Caleb Adeogun, the then Nigeria Union Mission President. Through the effort of dedicated and sacrificial members like Elder J. T. Nduasa, Elder T. Obawale, K. Onyenso, and many others, the first church building was built and dedicated in 2000 by Pastor Luka T. Daniel. Today the Eket district of churches has eight churches.

The Nigerian Civil War and the Church

The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) affected the churches in Akwa Ibom State in no small measure. Members lost their lives, homes, families, and means of livelihood. Many others were displaced from their homes or places of business. The result was that many churches shut their doors.

In 1970, after the Nigerian Civil War, the surviving churches were grouped into three, Calabar, Ikot Ekpene, and Mbioto, with administrative headquarters at Calabar. Evangelism in places like Ikot Ekpene, Uyo, Abak, and Oron became the major focus of the church. These endeavors, through soul winning and nurture, resulted in expansion of the church in the territory of Akwa Ibom State. Consequently, more districts of churches were created, especially during the administration of Pastor S. O. Gbenedio.

Organization of Akwa Ibom Conference

The Akwa Ibom Conference was formerly part of the South East Conference before its organization in 2015. The field is a largely un-entered area, with the projected population of 5,085,691, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church membership of 3,860, a ratio of one Seventh-day Adventist to every 1,318 persons. To advance the mission of the church in this area, in 2013 local administrative units were carved out of South East Conference, with Pastor Josiah C. Nwarungwa as president, while Pastor Aniekan J. Umoh served as the secretary-treasurer. The West Central Africa Division in 2014 at its year-end meeting held in Abidjan voted the organization of churches in Akwa Ibom Field into a conference, with effect from January 1, 2015. The Akwa Ibom Conference is made of eleven Districts: Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Ikot Ntuen, ItuMbonUso, Mbioto, Nkwot, Oron, UbonAkwa, Uyo Township, and Uyo West, 29 branch Sabbath Schools and 20 Companies.

Presidents


 SOURCES


*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* [https://www.adventistyearbook.org/](https://www.adventistyearbook.org/).

NOTES


2. Ibid.


4. Ibid.


8. Eko, 142.

9. Ibid.


11. Ibid., 6.


14. Ibid.


17. Ibid., 149.

18. Ibid.


20. Ibid.


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