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## North West Nigeria Conference

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### YOHANNA M. DANGANA

Yohanna M. Dangana, D.Min. (Adventist University of Africa), is the current executive secretary of North-West Nigeria Conference. He is married and has three children.

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The North West Nigeria Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria. It is part of Northern Nigeria Union Conference, which in turn is part of the West Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists. North West Nigeria Conference was established 1932; organized 1993; reorganized 2000; reorganized, and territory divided 2013. Its headquarters is in Gonin Gora, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Territory: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara States.

Statistics: Churches, 108; membership, 17,003; population of territory 51,136,893.<sup>1</sup>

## Seventh-day Adventists in Northern Nigeria

In 1931 John Jacob and Louise Hyde, the first Adventist missionaries to northern Nigeria, arrived at Ibadan from Sierra Leone.<sup>2</sup> The entire territory of northern Nigeria then consisted of the provinces of Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Ilorin, Kabba, Kano, Katsina, Nassarawa, Niger, Plateau, and Sokoto. A reconnaissance tour of Northern Nigeria was embarked upon, with a view of establishing an Adventist mission station in the region, by West African Mission Fields President W. E. Read, Mission Superintendent William McClements, and J. J. Hyde, the director designate of the mission in Northern Nigeria.<sup>3</sup>

The team came to Plateau province on February 9, 1931, and visited the office of the resident in Jos. The purpose of the visit was to ask for a site in the Plateau province to establish an Adventist mission station in Northern Nigeria. The resident directed the team to apply for the site through the Christian Mission Council. But, as the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not belong to such an organization, the resident advised the team to apply directly to the Secretary of Northern Nigeria at Kaduna for a site in the Pankshin Division. W. Read and Wm. McClements returned to their duty posts, while the Hydes waited for a reply to the application. The reply of the divisional officer of Pankshin stated that earlier Christian missionaries had claimed all the places as their sphere of influence, so they were advised to search for a site either at Birnin Gwari or Zangon Kataf in Zaria province. When J. J. Hyde chose Zangon Kataf, he was asked to apply to the resident of the province in Zaria. The application for the site was approved, but when Hyde started to build the mission station, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) at Kagoro protested vehemently that Zangon Kataf was within their sphere of influence. Though construction work at the station had reached an advanced stage, the colonial government reluctantly closed the site and the mission was compelled to vacate it and searched for elsewhere. The Hydes finally settled at a site in Jengre village, where the first mission station in Northern Nigeria was established in December 1931. Hyde's effort resulted in the first baptism of 18 souls in 1934.<sup>4</sup>

The mission station at Jengre started with a dispensary and a Bible School. Louise Hyde, a trained nurse, ran the dispensary, while her husband taught the Bible School. The dispensary attracted a large number of patients suffering from the epidemic attack of jigger and malaria fever. Louise Hyde treated the malaria patients, removed the jiggers, and dressed wounds and other ulcers. Young adults were attracted to attend the literary classes, where Hyde taught how to read and write in the Hausa language. In 1943, one year after the Hydes were transferred from Jengre mission station to Sierra Leone, a Standard Four Primary School was built and opened. By this time their son John Ashford was attending a medical school in the United Kingdom. On the completion of training he returned and built Jengre Adventist Hospital in 1947, and was appointed the first medical director when the hospital officially opened in 1948. At the same time he also served as the Superintendent of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Northern Nigeria.

During the Hydes' long ministry, several village churches opened in Northern Nigeria, but the towns remained largely unentered fields. Villages, where churches opened, included Baban Fadama, Fadaman Shanu, Kadmo, Lemoro, Gurum, Lishin, and Tidere. Subsequently, churches were established in more distant villages such as Kono, Ci-jaki (Maigamo), Arum-Tumara, Doka, Gidan Waya, Kuzamani, Bundun, and Kahugu.<sup>5</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s churches were established in the towns, joined by new members including traders and government employees. Among the towns were Jos (1952), Kaduna, and Kano, and later Maiduguri, Minna, and Sokoto.

## Organization of North-West Nigeria Conference

The Northern Nigeria mission field was formally organized as North Nigeria Mission in 1952. The area covered by the field was 450,000 square kilometers, more than half the landmass of the country. This posed a formidable challenge, and at the same time, great opportunities for evangelism. As baptisms increased, more congregations were established over the years. It became imperative to deploy gospel workers to the towns, but the mission suffered from a shortage of workers.

After the mission headquarters moved from Jengre to Bukuru in 1961, three Adventist families settled in Kaduna. They were Ofumba, a literature evangelist; Mrs. Jimoh; Mrs. R. Talatu Adamu; and Mrs. B. Sarki. These families began to meet for Sabbath worships at Mrs. Sarki's house. With time the mission sent workers to Kaduna. With an increase in membership, a church was built along Ilorin Street. Gradually another duplex was built at Ogbomosho Road, where the family of D. Johnson from America stayed and opened a primary school. With the reorganization of Northern Nigeria Mission in 1993, two administrative mission fields were organized: North East Nigeria Mission with headquarters at Bukuru, and North West Nigeria Mission with headquarters at Kaduna.<sup>6</sup>

The church in Sokoto, seat of the Sultan (Grand Commander of Muslims in Nigeria), was started by Adventists employed by the government who were deployed to the city. The nucleus of the church in Sokoto consisted of the families of Gabriel Ahkaine, Daniel Ayali, A. Balogun, and Ajayi. These families usually alternated the venue of worship from house to house. With an increase in membership public buildings like schools and town halls were used. The trend in other cities and rural communities has been the same. The biblical and time-tested 'House-Church' method of evangelism and establishment of churches proved fruitful in the spread of the gospel ministry in the North West Nigeria Mission.

The advantages of the reorganization of Northern Nigeria Mission into two mission fields were obvious. The distance from headquarters at Bukuru to Sokoto in North West has been 666 kilometers and from Maiduguri in the North East has been 600 kilometers. It was to cut down on the cost of officers visiting these towns that the administration considered dividing the field into two. The proposal was recommended to the Nigeria Union Mission at Lagos in 1976. Members of the executive committee were President L. T Daniel, Secretary D. O Babalola, Treasurer M. A. Belo, and Ministerial Secretary I. A. Ekpendu. Though the union approved the proposal, reorganization took a long time.

North West Nigeria Mission consisted of eight states: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, and Zamfara. A list of the elected officers at the beginning of the new field was as follows: Yakubu M. Musa – president, Public Affairs/Religious Liberty; Marcus M. Dangana – secretary/treasurer /Trust Services; G. N. Nwaehigbe – Church Ministries; E. Akpan – Health and Temperance; E. A. Kimba - PMD, SOP, VOP; A. G. Mavalla – Evangelism/Stewardship Campus Ministry; N. T. Karima – Adventist Youth Ministries.

## Constraints and Religious Intolerance

The Muslim *ummah* (community) constitutes the majority that has dominated the political and economic life of the North West Nigeria Mission right from its inception. The seat of the Sultanate, the headquarters of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Nigeria, and Jama'atul Nasril Islam are located there. The radical and fundamentalist sects of Islam are also found in significant proportion. This has had far-reaching effects on the progress and spread of the gospel in the North West Nigeria Mission. Christian religious activities are severely restricted, and land acquisitions for church buildings are often denied. No permission is ever granted for any form of evangelism in most parts of the mission field.<sup>7</sup>

From 1993-2000 riots and crisis were rampant, with thousands killed and properties and churches destroyed. In 2000 alone, scores of churches were burnt to ashes and hundreds of people were murdered, including Adventist church members. This caused profound setback to the development and progress of the church's mission.<sup>8</sup>

Without a dime in the treasury at the mission's inauguration, initial membership was 5,450, with only 9 ordained ministers and one duplex building. The challenges in the terrain taxed the administration to map out strategic plans to proclaim the gospel in all nooks and corners of the field. The first strategy was the promotion of systematic giving of tithes and offerings. Money was needed to preach the gospel and to acquire a 1000-acre piece of land to erect the headquarters building and houses for field officers.

Towards the realization of the goal, a plea was written to Elder Thomas Lindsey in California, to assist in soliciting financial support from donors for the fledgling mission field. Lindsey responded by coming personally with some missionaries to train lay evangelists. In December 1995 he organized a two-week training for 45 lay evangelists, and over 450 were baptized. For eight years he sustained their work. During the period membership of the field grew and new Sabbath school congregations and districts were organized. Lindsey also supported a similar program for the North East Nigeria Mission.<sup>9</sup>

By 2000 the North East and North West Nigeria Mission territories were both increasingly able to support their workforce. This led to the upgrading of the mission fields to the status of North-East Nigeria Conference and North-West Nigeria Conference, with consideration for a further reorganization of a third conference.<sup>10</sup>

## Expansion Period (2001-2017)

This period saw courageous efforts taken by conference workers to spread the gospel to unentered areas, particularly among large pockets of non-Muslim Hausa communities (*maguzawa*) into the far north. Adventist Youth Ministries, Adventist Women's Ministries, Adventist Men Organization, and the gospel ministers conducted several missionary activities through youth camps, women's conventions, medical evangelism, and other methods of evangelism peculiar to Nigeria. Today, an Adventist presence has been planted in many *maguzawa* communities, including Tsigu, Zuru, Kebbi, Gusau, Riba, Yar-Ali, Barbada, Magami, Irika, Maraban-Kanya, and Jan-Dutse.

Laitry has played a commendable role in supporting the mission of the church. Out of the current 39 pioneers, West Central African Division Global Mission is sponsoring 3, while 36 are sponsored by lay people. Following the attainment of conference status, current statistics show more than 15,000 members, 28 districts, 95 organized churches, and 177 branch Sabbath schools and companies in the conference mission field.

To further enhance and promote Adventist work, following the counsel of E.G. White, during the December 9, 2000 constituency session, delegates unanimously voted to establish a boarding coeducational secondary school

within the territory. A committee was set to make a feasibility study for the proposed school. The search for a suitable site took the committee to many places, led by Conference Education Director Daniel M. Dangana. Finally, in close consultation with union officers, Kujama, a rural setting some 25 kilometers from conference headquarters in Kaduna, was recommended and voted. The school was constructed, and in August 2008 union officers, with President J. A. Ola, Secretary O. Okonkwo, Treasurer M. M. Dangana, and Ministerial Secretary O. Ajibade, commissioned and dedicated the school. Today the conference operates six nursery/primary schools, at Maigamo, Saminaka, Kaguma, Marmara, Kahuta, and Tuddai. In a mini-constituency meeting held in Saminaka in July 2011, the conference voted to cede Niger state to form part of the new North Central Nigeria Conference, with headquarters in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja.<sup>11</sup>

## Challenges

As of 2020, North West Nigeria Conference territory consists of seven states, having a population of about 51,136,893, with 17,003 Adventist members.<sup>12</sup> The large majority of members are concentrated in only one local government area, Lere.

There are many unentered people-groups in the territory. Of about 100 different ethnic groups in this territory, only about seven have been entered with organized churches.

The great challenge has been the tight restriction against the expansion of Christian mission work within the greater part of the territory. Islamic extremists oppose the spread of the Christian faith. There has also been a firm restriction on the purchase of landed properties for the construction of church buildings for Christians. In many places, worship can only be done clandestinely.

Motivating church members for mission work and finding funds for evangelism represent an ongoing task and challenge.<sup>13</sup>

Against this background, the current administration of NWNC organized an evangelism summit, September 16-17, 2016, to refocus the vision and mission of the Conference. This has led to the mobilization of the entire laity and ministers on the need for total commitment and consecration to proclamation of the gospel.

## List of NWNC Officers

Presidents: Yakubu M. Musa (1993–1996), Ayuba Gimba Mavalla (1996-2000), Iliya Ishaya Kwarbai (2000-2006), Ibrahim Bamaiyi Maigadi (2006-2014), Istifanus Ishaya (2014-).

Executive Secretaries: Marcus M. Dangana 1993-1997), Iliya Ishaya Kwarbai (1998-2000), Ibrahim Bamaiyi Maigadi (2000-2003), Markus Danladi Akwai (2003-2007), Daniel F. Chiroma (2007-2010), Istifanus Ishaya (2010-2013), Yohanna M. Dangana (2014-).

Treasurers: Marcus M. Dangana (1993-1998), Danladi F. Maisamari (1998-2006), Gyang, Rwang Cwang (2017-2010), Thomas Ayuba Laiya (2010-).<sup>14</sup>

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## NOTES

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2. Alao, Dayo, ed. *90 Years of Adventism in Nigeria 1914–2004*, Communication/PARL Department, SDA Church in Nigeria 2004, 94.?
3. John G. Nengel, "History of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Northern Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities" (an unpublished paper), 4.?
4. Yakubu Matajini Musa, "A Brief History of North Nigeria Mission." A report presented at the Triennial Constituency, Jengre, March 10, 1993.?
- 5.

Baba Abednego Kimba and Baba Iliya Kimba, who, both were among the lay preachers who participated in planting churches in these areas, interview by the author, May 6, 2017.?

6. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 2019 edition, "North-West Nigeria Mission," <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2019.pdf>.?
7. Personal knowledge of the author as worker of the conference.?
8. Ibid.?
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