Owolabi, John Ayodeji Owodipupo (1959–2013)

MICHAEL A. T. SENNE-AYA

Michael A. T. Senne-Aya, D.Min. (Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya) has been the pioneer president of the Edo Conference in the Western Nigeria Union Conference since 2012. He previously served as the last president of Edo-Delta Mission before its formal reorganization into two separate conferences.
John Ayodeji Owodipupo Owolabi was a pastor, educator, and church administrator from Nigeria.

**Early Life**

John Ayodeji Owodipupo Owolabi was born to the family of Jonah Owoseni and Ruth Fola Owolabi of the Iloye compound, Ikun Ekiti, Nigeria, on August 30, 1959. He was the third male and fourth child in the family of six. At the age of six, he started elementary school at Christ Anglican Primary School in Idanre, Ondo state, and completed primary four before his uncle, Moses Oribolade, took him out and enrolled him at the Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, in Agodi, Ibadan, between 1969 and 1973, where he obtained his primary school leaving certificate. He proceeded to the Adventist Grammar School (AGS) in Ede, Osun state, in September 1973 and finished in June 1977. While at AGS, the young John Owolabi distinguished himself as a promising minister of the gospel, which he embraced at an early age. His meticulous lifestyle and disposition were the bedrock that prepared this man for pastoral ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This became obvious when he gained admission to the Adventist Seminary of West Africa (ASWA) to study religion between 1977 and 1982.

**Education and Marriage**

The love of Christian education was paramount in the life of John Owolabi. He graduated from ASWA, Ilishan-Remo, with a bachelor’s degree in religion with a health minor. To enhance his ministerial ability, he obtained an MA in Pastoral Ministry and a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) from Andrews University in 1992 and 2010 respectively. While serving as an intern at Ilesa, Osun state, John Owolabi not only developed the church, but he also met a pastor's daughter, Lydia Olufunmilayo Alade, whom he married on August 31, 1986, at Oke Bola, Ibadan, Nigeria. The union was blessed with two children, Johnson Ifeoluwa and Johnette Oluwasayo Owolabi.

**Career/Ministry**

The ministry of Pastor John Owolabi started at Ilesa, Osun state, after graduation from the seminary in 1982. He was a disciplined, determined, and devoted man. He was transferred from Ilesa to Maryland, Lagos, in the 1980s where his gift of language, visitations, and passion for details were used for the work of God. He was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1989 at the age of 30. The Nigeria Union Mission (NUM) then voted him to be the first non-Igbo president of East Central Mission (ECM), Umuahia, Nigeria, in 1991. At Umuahia, John Owolabi carried out the relocation and construction of the mission secretariat from Enugu, as voted by the church. John Owolabi was a builder of human and material resources, building people for the kingdom of God and housing for the people of God. He worked with H. B. Ekeh as secretary/treasurer between 1991 and 1994, when the membership rose from 8,094 to 9,454, and organized churches grew from 49 to 53. John Owolabi was later moved to Benin City as Edo-Delta Mission (EDM) president from 1994 to 1998, and served along with Pastor Okei E. Okonkwo, the secretary, and Amos Ibhiedu, the associate treasurer.

At EDM, Pastor J. O. Owolabi distinguished himself in terms of administrative competence and in other areas of church development. He accomplished mission through stewardship promotion and evangelism drive, and he witnessed monumental achievement. For the first time the mission became debt free. Owolabi’s administration, including the laity, completed and dedicated the mission secretariat complex, and the membership increased from 4,525 with 18 organized churches to 5,599 with 21 organized churches at the time of his exit in 1998. John Owolabi was reassigned as a departmental director at the NUM, Maryland, Lagos, between 1998 and 2000; before he was invited to Babcock University as an Assistant Dean of Men and Student Development, before moving to Food Services, and finally ending at the University Bursary as director in charge of purchasing. He died October 1, 2013, at the age of 54, having given 31 years of service to the Church, and was buried at his home town of Ikun-Ekiti, Ekiti state, on October 23, 2013.

**Contribution/Legacy**

The entire span and legacy of Pastor John Owolabi can be summarized as the epitome of resilience, commitment, and hard work. He was a man who dared to swim against the current of human limitations and uncertainties. He was the first indigene of Ikun-Ekiti to receive a DMin in the SDA Church. Certainly, John Owolabi will be remembered for his devotion, tenacity, and passion for excellence in ministry. Though the initial project was inherited, J. O. Owolabi, the fourth president of Edo-Delta territory, completed the mission office secretariat complex in record time. The needed impetus for the conference status was provided by him, but the dream and goal of conference attainment was actualized during the presidency of Dr. James B. Kio on February 2, 2002. John Owolabi will be remembered by the church in Nigeria as a crusader for excellence in ministry; a man of uncommon integrity in the workplace; a trailblazer; an astute administrator; grassroots mobilizer; and a shepherd of the flock for Christ.
SOURCES


NOTES


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.


