

Northern Ghana Union Mission

KWAME BOAKYE KWANIN

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Northern Ghana Union Mission (NOGH) covers Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Northern, Upper West, and Upper East Regions. The union headquarters is in Kumasi, Ashanti Region.

In early 2005 the leaders of the Adventist Church in Ghana felt an urgent need to reorganize the Ghana Union Conference (GUC) into two unions. The reasons for reorganizing the union were:

1. Due to increase in membership and the large size of the Ghana territory, creating two unions out of the existing one would greatly enhance administration and ministry, thereby bringing administration closer to the people.
2. It would ensure a greater utilization of talents for effective evangelization and expansion of the gospel work and reveal previously unused administrative qualities of church workers.
3. Increase in membership has resulted in the training of young people and they need to be mentored to foster the growth of the Church. Lowell C Cooper has written, "Leadership is not just a matter of seeing what can be done today. It is also about preparing people and the organization for tomorrow."⁴
4. A second union would offer a more cost-effective disbursement of funds. For instance, it would make it easier for the union personnel to travel across each territory for supervision of church work.



Northern Ghana Union Mission headquarters, Kumasi, Ghana.

Photo courtesy of Kwame Boakye Kwanin.

5. The church in Ghana had enough personnel to man two unions and even to send some to do missionary work outside Ghana.² For example, there are Ghanaian church workers employed by Seventh-day Adventist entities in Europe, America, and at the General Conference.

At the yearend meeting in 2005, the Executive Committee of the GUC took action to officially begin the process of reorganizing the territory into two unions. Subsequently, a committee was formed in 2007 to provide a proposal to present to the Executive Committee of the West-Central Africa Division (WAD) to enable the union to be reorganized by the end of the quinquennium (2010). The committee members included Pastor E. O. Abbey (chair), Pastor J. K. Badu (secretary), Dr Seth A. Laryea, Pastor Emmanuel Denteh, and Elder Francis Danford, the Strategic Planning Director of the WAD.³ Church members across the territory were sensitized to appreciate the importance of the reorganization of GUC. Finally, the committee prepared a proposal which recommended two union conferences to the GUC Executive Committee. The GUC Executive Committee forwarded the proposal to the WAD Executive Committee. Unfortunately, the 2009 yearend meeting of the WAD Executive Committee turned the proposal down because of the indebtedness of GUC to WAD.⁴

It was a blow to the entire membership of GUC. However, the GUC leadership never relinquished this noble idea of reorganizing the union. As the Yorubas of West Africa say, "You can go to bed when there is a snake on your thatched roof, but you can't do it when the thatch is on fire."⁵ So, intensive stewardship promotion was carried out in all the union fields to improve upon the finances of the church in Ghana. In GUC's 2010 yearend meeting which coincided with its quinquennial session, the reorganization issue was passionately promoted. In 2012 a committee was constituted to work on the reorganization. A six-man committee, namely E. O. Abbey (Chair), F. Y. Adu Gyamfi (Secretary), Adu Sampah, E. A. Odonkor, Solace Ahlorzi, and Dr S. A. Laryea were tasked to draft another proposal to WAD, given the finances of the union had improved.⁶ Consequently, a proposal was prepared recommending two unions: Southern Ghana Union Conference (comprising Volta, Greater Accra, Eastern, Central, and Western Regions of Ghana), and Northern Ghana Union Mission (which included Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Northern, Upper East, and Upper West Regions of Ghana).⁷ This time WAD accepted the proposal and recommended to the General Conference Executive Committee the GUC proposal for two unions: one union conference and one union mission. Great excitement came to the entire membership in GUC when the news came in November 2012 that an inspection team from the General Conference was coming in 2013 to inspect GUC territory and ascertain facts about the union's preparedness for reorganization. The GC team was made up of six people, namely G. T. Ng (GC secretary and chair), Rosa Banks (GC associate secretary and secretary), Ray Wahlen (GC associate treasurer), Israel Leito (Inter-America Division president), Benjamin Schoun (GC vice president), and Daniel Jackson (North America Division president), together with the three officers from WAD: Gilbert Wari (president), Onaolapo Ajibade (secretary), and Emmanuel Manu (treasurer). The team undertook the inspection in Ghana from February 13-17, 2013.⁸

From the proposal presented, membership of GUC as of the third quarter of 2012 stood at 493,016, and there were 1,229 churches and 1,784 companies.⁹ Also it had six conferences and one mission; namely East Ghana

Conference (EGC), South Ghana Conference (SGC), South West Ghana Conference (SWGC), Central Ghana Conference (CGC), Mid-West Ghana Conference (MWGC), South Central Ghana Conference (SCGC), and North Ghana Mission (NGM). The officers of GUC (Samuel Adama Larmie, president; Kwame Boakye Kwanin, secretary; Isaac Owusu Amponsem, treasurer) were asked to answer a set of questions regarding membership data, constitutions for the two new unions, personnel, finances, strategic plans for the two unions, retirement plan for Ghana, appropriation, headquarters for the new union mission, Seventh-day Adventist Church representation before the Ghana government, how the two unions would manage the joint institutions like Valley View University, ADRA, Education, Advent Press, and many others. The inspection team was impressed with the concise and pertinent answers given by the officers of GUC. On February 19, 2013, the team traveled to Kumasi to inspect the proposed office building for NOGH and a parcel of land in Amanfrom, which would be the permanent site of the headquarters of the union. To encourage unity among the two unions, a National Adventist Advisory Council, made up of the two unions' administrators and an agreed upon number of members from the two unions, was empowered by the Bylaws to address issues of national interest.¹⁰ One percent of tithe income from all GUC fields was to be used for infrastructure needs of the NOGH. This fund would be used to build residences for the three officers and six department directors of the NOGH. In their exit interview on February 20, 2013, the inspection team applauded and expressed appreciation for the team spirit infused in the reorganization in order to grow the work in Ghana.

"April 14, 2013, the GUC's proposal for two unions was voted by the GC, at the Spring Meetings at Battle Creek, Michigan, USA. By this vote come January 1, 2014, Ghana will operate two unions—Southern Ghana Union Conference and Northern Ghana Union Mission . . ."¹¹

Consequently, on November 5, 2013, during the yearend meeting of WAD held at Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria, three officers for the NOGH were elected. They were Kwame Boakye Kwanin, president; Kwame Annor-Boahen, executive secretary; and Dickson Sarfo Marfo, treasurer. Furthermore, on December 11, 2013, during the joint yearend meeting of SGUC and NOGH held in Accra, the Operating Policy of NOGH presented by WAD Secretary, Onaolapo Ajibade, was voted and the department directors were elected. The directors included Daniel Owusu Ansah, Youth and Health Ministries; Eric Mensah Aborampah, Personal Ministries and Sabbath School; F. Y. Adu-Gyamfi, Ministerial Secretary, Family life, Communication, and PARL; Daniel Oduro Sarpong, Stewardship, Strategic Planning, and Trust Services; Philimon Nsor Aboungo, Publishing, Adventist-Muslim Relations, and Chaplaincy; Vida Linda Gyasi, Women's and Children Ministries; Kwaku Owusu Yeboah, Education; and Wilberforce Obuor, associate treasurer.

The NOGH Executive Committee was put in place on December 12, 2013, to govern the union. Members were Kwame Boakye Kwanin (Chair), Kwame Annor-Boahen (Secretary), Sarfo Marfo, F. Y. Adu Gyamfi, Mensah Aborampah, Daniel K. Owusu Ansah, P. N. Aboungo, Oduro Sarpong, Owusu Yeboah, Vida Linda Gyasi, Florence Ayia, Danso Abeam, Amoh Mensah, Lawyer Akwante, Yeboah Amoako, Annor Boafo, Agyei Baah, Paul Twumasi

Danquah, Wilberforce Obuor, Peter Yaw Frempe, W. Y. K. Brown, Dr. Daniel Buor, Rebecca Owusu Nkwantabisa, and Pastor M. A. Bediako. Accordingly, there was large service in the Bantama S.D.A. Church, in Kumasi, on Saturday, December 14, 2013, to inaugurate the NOGH. Pastor Gilbert Wari, WAD President, charged the Executive Committee to discharge its duties in accordance with the Bible and the policies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Again, in July 2015, at the GC Session in San Antonio, Texas, a vote was taken by delegates to officially accept NOGH into the sisterhood of unions of the world Church.

Office and Residence

It was planned that NOGH would temporarily operate from SCGC and move to Amanfrom in the foreseeable future. It was a challenging time for the union mission. But as King David affirms, “Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved” (Ps 55:22 ESV). In June 2013, an Adventist businessman and committed layman, Elder Isaac Owusu, came with an offer of a four-story building as an office for NOGH at the cost of GHC 1,250,000. A committee of six—Lawyer Ameley, Lawyer Adaare, Pastor Annor-Boahen, Owusu Amponsem, Vida Gyasi, Ampomah Mensah and Akwasi Boateng—was chosen to meet the landlord for negotiation.¹² He agreed to accept a down payment of half of the amount with the rest to be paid on an installment basis. Instead, a loan was granted from the Ghana Adventist Heritage Fund and full payment on the building was made. He graciously completed this office complex and it was dedicated to the glory of God on February 25, 2014, by Pastor Gibert Wari, WAD President. Thankfully, this great edifice continues to serve as the NOGH office in Kumasi. Workers are living in rented houses; however, in 2013 a three-and-a-half-acre section of land was secured for workers’ permanent residences in Nketiah on the Kumasi-Barekese road. The building project is in an advanced stage. In 2017, a seven-acre piece of land was acquired for a school in the same Nketiah community.

Reorganization of NOGH Fields

The year 2014 witnessed massive reorganization of NOGH’s fields. Four fields were assigned to NOGH during the reorganization of GUC, namely, CGC, MWGC, SCGC and NGM.¹³ The membership of NOGH was 151,417 after the membership audit had been done in the first quarter of 2014.¹⁴ In order to position NOGH for effective and efficient evangelization and to bring administration closer to members, it became necessary to reorganize the three conferences into nine conferences. Therefore, six field units were carved out from the old conferences and proposed for conference status by July 2014. The proposal was accepted by WAD. Accordingly, an inspection team headed by WAD Secretary, Onaolapo Ajibade; Opoku Boateng, WAD Ministerial Secretary and Strategic Planning director; and Apollos Bello, assistant treasurer of WAD, together with the three NOGH officers inspected these six field units which were ready for conference status in September 2014. Subsequently, during the WAD yearend meeting, November 3-5, 2014, a report was presented to the WAD Executive Committee by

Prof. Opoku Boateng. The request for conference status for all the six new field units was overwhelmingly approved. The new conferences were Ashanti Central Ghana Conference with headquarters at Ashanti Newtown-Kumasi; Ashanti South Ghana Conference, headquartered in Bekwai-Ashanti; Green View Ghana Conference, headquartered in Goaso; Mid-Central Ghana Conference, headquartered at Bantama-Kumasi; Mid-North Ghana Conference, headquartered in Techiman; and Mountain View Ghana Conference with headquarters at Agona-Ashanti.¹⁵ By the first quarter of 2015 all these new fields had been inaugurated, with leadership and executive committees put in place to run them. However, during the inauguration of Mountain View Ghana Conference, some members returning from a joyous occasion at Agona on Sabbath, April 4, 2015, had a fatal lorry accident and nine members died on the spot; all the members were from Medoma North Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁶

Evangelism and Growth

With the reorganization of NOGH fields, members and pastors in each field rekindled their evangelistic spirit and engaged in intensive evangelism. In order to reduce the attrition rate of members, pastors and elders also embarked on small group training workshops in 2014. Thankfully, the union had been leading in evangelism for the entire WAD. The membership has grown from 151,417 in 2014, to 194,984 the first quarter of 2018;¹⁷ an increase of 43,567 within the period of three years, six months. Interestingly, the initial euphoria following the approval of the reorganization of the conferences has motivated leadership to do more outreach programs using small groups. In 2014 NOGH had 2,859 functional small groups. Pastors and local church elders received training in nurturing and mentoring. Between 2014 and 2017, 249 new churches and companies were planted across the union territory. Also, in 2014, the union had support from Maranatha International, USA, to build 50 lamb-shelters across the territory to provide places of worship for some of these newly planted churches. To encourage and sustain members' interest in evangelism, 43 literature evangelists were distributing Adventist books in 2014.

In order to provide higher educational to the youth and the communities where Adventist churches are situated, in 2014 NOGH took over and reconstructed a Teacher Training College at Agona-Ashanti which was established by CGC. From the college, 354 trained teachers have gone forth to teach in various basic schools in Ghana since 2017. In addition, in 2016 the union established a Nurses Training College at Asamang-Ashanti to cater to health needs and to give credence to Adventists' health reform messages in Ghanaian communities. Young pastors receive ordination within four to five years in the ministry, which could have taken them six to eight years had it not been for the reorganization of GUC. And most ministers have gotten the opportunity to study for graduate degrees to enhance their ministry.

Conclusion

The existence of NOGH is God's plan to expand the Adventist work for maximum impact in the Ghanaian communities. Many unreached areas in the union have now been impacted by the Church. Members have feasible access to their administrators and pastors; and information about the Church is readily available. Monitoring and evaluating church workers is done constantly. Now the members themselves own the church. Cooperation, unity, and commitment from pastors and members might even necessitate another reorganization of NOGH in the near future. New fields have acquired properties which might have taken the Church several years to acquire. The union will forever remain grateful and committed to God and to the Seventh-day Adventist Church mission to the world.

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