

Nigeria

DAVID O. BABALOLA

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Nigeria is the most populous Black country in the world. It is located on the west coast of Africa and covers 356,668 square miles (923,770 square kilometers).¹ The southern part of the country is the most developed. All of the country's oil fields and major industrial centers, as well as seaports, are located in that region.²

The countries that border Nigeria are Benin to the west, Cameroon to the east, Chad to the northeast, and Niger to the north. The country is blessed with many natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas, tin, iron ore, coal, limestone, niobium, lead, zinc, and arable land. Nigeria often experiences natural hazards like drought and flooding. Oil pollution has become a major problem in recent times, and water, air, and soil have suffered serious damage from oil spills.³

History

The history of Nigeria can be traced as far back as 500 BC. It was toward the end of the 15th century when the European explorers and traders started their lucrative slave trade with the Yoruba and Benin peoples. Lagos was colonized by the British in 1861, and in 1914 the entire country became the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, but received its independence in 1960.⁴ The history of the country is divided into three sections—pre-colonial, colonial, and since independence.

Pre-colonial History

Studies on Nigerian political history show that it had its own system of government before the colonial era. "A common feature in Nigerian pre-colonial history has been the attempt of the various ethnic groups to organize themselves into varied systems of governance in the past. These systems varied from place to place as each was considered appropriate to their needs and in response to their environment."⁵

The political system could be classified in three broad categories: empires or confederacies, centralized states or kingdoms, and non-centralized governments. The empires served as bonds of unity among various groups. Each empire had a ruler who served as the political authority. The most prominent among them included Kanem-Borno, Oyo, Benin, Jukun, and the Sokoto Caliphate.⁶ Moreover, the centralized states or kingdoms may be categorized in four ways: (1) kingdoms where the kings had control over both the external and internal affairs;

(2) kingdoms where the kings mainly had control on the external policies, even though they also controlled the provinces through overseers; (3) kingdoms where the kings had control only on the external affairs; and (4) kingdoms where the council of chiefs headed by the king was responsible for regulating the external policies. The non-centralized form of political system brought the leadership close to the people.⁷

Colonial History

Slave trade began in Nigeria towards the close of the 15th century. In the 1820s and 1830s many of the slaves exported were seized by the ships of the Royal Navy and deposited in Sierra Leone under missionary tutelage. While in the 1840s some of the slaves migrated from Sierra Leone in search of their homes, they did not go alone, but invited the missionaries to follow them. Thus, they became agents through which the missionaries and British traders gained access to such places as Abeokuta, Bonny, Brass, Calabar, Lagos, Lokoja, and Onitsha.⁸

Since Independence

After many years of colonial rule, the country gained independence on October 1, 1960, and became a republic in 1963.⁹ The country later became a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and joined the United Nations.¹⁰ “In 1991 the capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja.”¹¹

When the country became independent, it was divided into three regions: Northern, Eastern, and Western. The Mid-West region was created out of the Western region in 1963. In 1967 Col. Yakubu Gowon, then the military leader, turned the regions into 12 states: six in the north, three in the east, and three in the west. Gen. Murtala Mohammed created an additional seven states in 1976. Gen. Ibrahim Babangida created 11 more states—two in 1987 and nine in 1991—for a total of 30. In 1996 Gen. Sani Abacha added six more states.¹²

Political Condition

The history of political parties in Nigeria can be dated back to 1923 when legislative councils were given to Lagos and Calabar. This led to the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party that same year.¹³

In 1944 the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) was formed under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay. The second major party was the Action Group (AG), which was formed in 1948 and was itself an offshoot of the Yoruba cultural association, Egbe Omo Oduduwa (association of the children of Oduduwa, the mythical ancestor of the Yoruba speaking people) started in London around 1945 by Obafemi Awolowo who was then a law student. The third and the most influential party of the first republic was the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which could be said to have been formed in 1951 and, somewhat like the AG, was the offshoot of a “Cultural” association, the Jam'iyyar Mutomen Arewa (JMA) (the association of peoples in the North).¹⁴

The electoral and political process of 1966 witnessed corruption and fraud which led to a series of military coups. The first was in January which led to the imprisonment of the opposition leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo; and General Johnson Agui-ironi, the head of the army, became the head of state. Another successful coup followed which led to the installation of Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon as head of state. This series of coups led to an increase in ethnic violence and tension.¹⁵

The violence against Igbos increased their desire for autonomy and protection from the military's wrath. By May 1967 the Eastern region had declared itself an independent state called the Republic of Biafra under the leadership of Lt. Colonel Emeka Ojukwu in line with the wishes of the people. The Nigerian side attacked Biafra on July 6, 1967 at Garkem, signaling the beginning of the 30-month war that ended in January 1970.¹⁶

Gowon ruled for nine years after which a bloodless coup was staged against him in 1975 that placed Army Brig. Murtala Rufai Mohammed in leadership. Olusegun Obasanjo succeeded Murtala after his assassination. In 1979 Nigeria experienced a brief moment of democracy when Obasanjo relinquished power to the civilian regime of Shehu Sagari, but in 1984 the military seized power again. The following year the country experienced another military coup. Maj. Gen. Ibrahim Babangida promised to hand over the government to civilian rule, but he voided the results of the presidential election of June 12, 1993. The opposition leader, Mashood Abiola, who allegedly won the presidential election, was imprisoned.¹⁷

However, Babangida resigned as president in August and put an interim government in place. In November the defense minister, Sani Abacha, seized power. He died of a heart attack in 1998 and another military ruler, Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar, succeeded him. He handed over the reign of power to a democratically elected government in 1999. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, a former member of the military elite, overwhelmingly won the presidential election of February 1999 and became the president. He was re-elected in April 2003. In April 2007, the country witnessed the first transition from one democratically elected president to another.¹⁸ The untimely death of Umaru Yar Adua placed his vice president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in power for the next six years as the president. As of 2015, President Muhammad Buhari is in charge.

Demographics

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups. The following are the most populous and politically influential: Hausa and Fulani 29 percent, Yoruba 21 percent, Igbo (Ibo) 18 percent, Ijaw 10 percent, Kanuri 4 percent, Ibibio 3.5 percent, and Tiv 2.5 percent.¹⁹ The current population of Nigeria is estimated at 170 million. Statistics reveal that there are more young people than adults.²⁰

The Origin of the Three Nigeria Union Conferences (Eastern, Northern, and Western Nigeria Union Conferences)

The origin of the Nigeria union conferences could be traced back to the December 1913 conference held in Sierra Leone, where the West African Coasts Mission was divided into three fields—Nigeria, Gold Coast, and Sierra Leone and Liberia. What is now known as the Nigeria Union Conference began as Nigeria Mission under the leadership of Pastor David Babcock. Perhaps it may be useful to know a brief biography of Pastor David C. Babcock.

Babcock—Birth, Training, and Places of Labor

The first Seventh-day Adventist missionary in Nigeria, David C. Babcock, was born in New Hampshire, Ohio, United States, on September 12, 1854.⁸ He began his ministerial work as a local church pastor and later became the president of the Virginia Conference of SDA (1897-1900). Towards the end of 1900, he was appointed the director of the British Guiana Mission where he served until 1905.

Babcock in West Africa

At the 1905 General Conference Session Babcock was appointed to take charge of the work in West Africa, which he supervised from Sierra Leone. Under the able leadership of David C. Babcock, the Adventist message put down its permanent roots in West Africa. He was directly in charge of the work in Sierra Leone and Ghana and administered them as a single mission until 1913.²¹

By the end of 1913, it became necessary to divide the West African Mission into smaller separate missions for more effective and easy administration. Therefore, on December 2-11, 1913, a missionary conference was held in Freetown where the plans were made to establish a permanent work in Nigeria. It was recommended that the West African Mission be divided into three separate fields; (a) Nigeria, (b) Gold Coast (Ghana), (c) Sierra Leone and Liberia. David C. Babcock and some national workers were to be in charge of the Nigerian Mission.²²

A few weeks after that conference, Babcock arrived in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria in 1914.²³ From there he made a trip into the interior part of Yorubaland and looked for a suitable location to establish a mission, while the others were busy in the town gathering building materials for mission houses.²⁴

Establishment of Seventh-day Adventist Church in West Nigeria

The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria would be incomplete without the West Nigeria Conference. As stated before, 1914 was the beginning of the Adventist Church in Nigeria. David Babcock went to Ibadan and later to Erunmu, Egbeda local government of Oyo state. At the time, it was a sign of prestige and of popularity for a local chief to have white missionaries reside in his domain. That was the reason why the Chief of Erunmu invited D. C. Babcock to stay with him.

The first thing he did was to erect a house and he later dug a well which, for many years, served as a source of potable water for gospel workers and the entire community of Erunmu. One of the chief's sons, Samuel Oyeniyi, was very helpful to the cause of the gospel. He understood both the Hausa and Yoruba languages and English as well, so he was able to interpret fluently for the missionaries.²⁵

Equally important was Jacob Alao who hailed from Inisa and who also became an effective interpreter. According to D. T. Agboola, "J. Alao was spared to Babcock by a Baptist Missionary stationed in Ibadan."²⁶

The chief and a few adults embraced the Adventist faith. Where he could not reach the adults, he made his impact felt by establishing village schools for the children.²⁷ The aim of the missionaries was to preach Christ to these children and, in turn, make use of them as media or avenues for reaching the hearts of their parents. The first formal school was established in 1918 at Sao.²⁸

The remarkable transformation of life at Erunmu encouraged Babcock to leave the station in the hands of R. P. Dauphin and S. Morgue, while looking for another site for his mission. He left for Ilorin, the capital town of the area now known as Kwara state, which is about 250 miles from Lagos.²⁹ The people of Ilorin are predominantly Muslim. As a result, Babcock proceeded to Sao, a town about seven miles from Ilorin, where he could obtain a suitable station.³⁰

The first thing he did at Sao was to open a village school, which later developed into the first Seventh-day Adventist formal school in Nigeria where the early national workers were trained. Babcock came to Ipoti preaching from house to house. The Holy Spirit convinced the people of the truth of the message, which they accepted with joy and enthusiasm.³¹ The impact of Adventism was great in Ipoti and, as a result, nearly all of the former Anglican Church members embraced the new faith.³²

Babcock was attacked by the dreaded sleeping sickness in 1917. Initial treatment was given and he was able to perform some of his duties. During this period, he was called by the Emir of Ilorin to supervise a suspension bridge in the town which he did successfully. Today the area is known as "Amilegbe bridge" area (an Amilegbe bridge is a bridge that shakes while walking over it).³³

In June 1917 David Babcock left Sao for Ipoti-Ekiti to help lay a foundation for a new church building. His sickness grew worse while at Ipoti-Ekiti. "In a miraculous way, his wife and children had started out to look for him on the same footpath through which he was being carried by members of Adventist Church at Ipoti."³⁴

From Oshogbo, he left by train to Lagos. According to David Agboola, "It was in this unceremonious way that a stop was put to the work which Elder D. C. Babcock ably started in Yorubaland in 1914."³⁵ He was compelled to return to England with his family.

The sudden departure of David Babcock meant the mantle of leadership fell on his assistant, E. Ashton of England, who served as the acting superintendent until 1919 when Pastor William McClements of Northern Ireland succeeded him.

On one of McClements regular visits to Ipoti from Sao, in 1922, he and his men were approached by delegates from the Oke-Ila community in Oshun state. They appealed to the missionaries to send a teacher to establish a church in their town. Before the delegation met with McClements and his team, two men from Oke-Ila, Pa Adaramola Oshundina and Aina Odedun, had already contacted the Adventist members in Ipoti and implored them to come with the gospel message. The Adventist members honored the call and sent two members from Friday to Sunday each week to instruct them in the way of the Lord. That went on for some time until the missionaries came in 1922 and provided public preaching where many converts joined the group. Pa James Ojo was sent to them and became their first shepherd.³⁶

In 1922, the year the Adventist message entered Oke-Ila, Pastor McClements sent Isaiah A. Balogun to open up a new mission station at Otun-Ekiti in Ondo state. Otun-Ekiti proved to be the fertile ground long sought for. At Otun-Ekiti many more people accepted Adventism than in Sao, Erunmu, and Ipoti. It is in this town and surrounding area that the majority of Adventists live today in Yorubaland.

In addition to Otun-Ekiti, more towns and villages were illuminated with the light of the gospel.³⁷ Because of the rapid growth of the work in the eastern part of Nigeria and that in Otun-Ekiti district, it was decided in 1930 to organize the country into a union mission.³⁸ The field was then divided into four sections and were respectively called Southeastern, Southwestern, Northeastern and Northwestern Missions.³⁹

With the new organization, Yorubaland came under the administration of Northwestern and Southwestern Missions until 1944, when they were merged together to form West Nigeria Mission. At the same time there came a reorganization of all Adventist work on the west coast of Africa, and McClements became president of the West African Union in 1943 with his headquarters in Ghana.⁴⁰ Another important missionary who made the impact of the Adventist Church felt in Nigeria was W. G. Till. He was sent to Otun-Ekiti in 1923 to reinforce the work of Isaiah Balogun. He married Gladys Morgan, and they labored together for 30 years in Nigeria.

Brother Till combined medical and gospel work among the Moba people with good success.⁴¹ One is tempted to state that W. G. Till worked harder than any missionary in Otun-Ekiti. He worked as a nurse, pastor, financial controller, accountant, and builder. He became the director of the North-Western Mission in 1930 and later became the president, both of the North-Western and South-Western Missions until his transfer to the East Nigeria Mission as the secretary-treasurer from 1947-1951.⁴²

During the last three years of his service in Nigeria, he was president of the North Nigerian Mission. Barely a year after he left Nigeria, W. G. Till died at the age of 57 in London, on April 29, 1954.⁴³

It is thrilling to note that the pioneering work was not exclusively done by white missionaries. Many of the mission stations were opened by national workers.

G. M. Ellstrom was the last expatriate, who served from 1956 to 1960, at which time he returned home. In 1961 Pastor J. A. Adeogun became the first national president, a position he held until 1968. Under his leadership the

membership of the mission grew to 4,949. Pastor D. K. Omoleye was the second national president. He began his tenure in 1969 and led for about two years. J. A. Adeniji began his leadership in 1972 and labored until 1981. Babalola began his presidency in April 1981 and worked until November 1990. The West Nigeria Mission changed its status to that of a conference in June 1989. Pastor J. A. Ola took over from him and led until 1995. He was succeeded by Pastor Onaolapo Ajibade, who became the missionary to Ibaji land, Kogi state of Nigeria. Pastor Ezekiel A. Oyinloye took over from the indefatigable leader Onaolapo Ajibade. Ezekiel Oyinloye piloted the premier field until the conference was reorganized into five conferences, which are:

Kogi Conference

Formerly part of the West Nigeria Conference, organized 2013.

Territory: Kogi state.

Statistics: churches, seven; companies 35; membership 654; population 4,362,491.

Superintendent, Augustine Ojomah.

Kwara Conference

Formerly part of the West Nigeria Conference, organized 2013.

Territory: Kwara state.

Statistics: churches 25; companies 68; membership 2,677; population 3,171,737.

President, Gideon Atolagbe; secretary, Emmanuel Ayeni; treasurer, Funminiyi E. Owolabi.

Lagos Atlantic Conference

Formerly part of the West Nigeria Conference, organized 2013.

Territory: The following local government areas in Lagos State: Ajeromi/Ifelodun, Amuwo-Odofin, Apapa, Badagry, Eti-osa, Ibeju Lekki, Isolo, Lagos Island, Lagos Mainland, Mushin, Ojo, and Surulere.

Statistics: churches 22; companies 52; membership 6,193; population 6,597,862.

President, Jacob E. Umoru; secretary, Joseph Olajide; treasurer, Mrs. Folashade Ogungbesan.

Osun Conference

Formerly part of the West Nigeria Conference, organized 2013.

Territory: Osun state.

Statistics: churches 27; companies 78; membership 5,466; population 4,584,405.

President, Joseph Adebomi; secretary, David O. Adewuyi; treasurer, Michael Awoniyi.

Oyo Conference

Formerly known as the West Nigeria Conference, established 1914; organized 1930; reorganized 1989, 1998; reorganized and renamed 2013.

Territory: Oyo state.

Statistics: churches 32; companies 76; membership 3,928; population 7,485,515.

President, Ezekiel A. Oyinloye; secretary, Cornelius Ajani; treasurer, Ayotunde A. Afolabi.

South West Nigeria Conference

South West Nigeria Conferences areas of operation include Ekiti, Ondo, Ogun, and part of Lagos states with its headquarters at Akure, Ondo state. Since the inauguration of the West Nigeria Conference, the second in Nigeria, in 1980, all hands have been on deck to carve more missions and conferences from her territory. The Africa-Indian Ocean Division yearend meeting in 1997 granted the request to reorganize West Nigeria Conference into two. On January 14-17, 1998, the West Nigeria Conference held her triennial constituency meeting and an action to create a South West administrative unit with its headquarters at Akure was voted. Joshua M. A. Oyinloye was appointed as the pioneer president. His administration gave way to that of H. B. Smith after a session. Pastor Ezekiel Adeleye took over from Pastor H. B. Smith, and by 2013, the field was reorganized into the following conferences:

Ekiti Conference

Formerly part of the South West Nigeria Conference, organized 2013.

Territory: Ekiti state.

Statistics: churches 31; congregations 67; membership 9,332; population 3,187,974.

President, Samuel Olufemi Alofe; secretary, Christopher O. Ogah; treasurer, Gbenga Afolabi Anisere.

Lagos Mainland Conference

Formerly part of the South West Nigeria Conference, organized 2013.

Territory: The following local government areas in Lagos state: Agege, Alimosho, Ifako-Ijaye, Ikeja, Ikorodu, Kosofe, Oshodi, and Shomolu.

Statistics: churches 35; congregations 73; membership 7,531; population 5,450,408.

President, Ibraheem A. Jimoh; secretary, Uchegbue Umezuruike; treasurer, Adeyemi B. Adedokun.

Ogun Conference

Formerly part of the South West Nigeria Conference, organized 2013.

Territory: Ogun state.

Statistics: churches 22; congregations 86; membership 9,123; population 4,892,918.

President, Ogunsanya Sunday; secretary, Abel Akinpelu; treasurer, Hezekiah O. Onatunde.

Ondo Mission

Formerly known as the South West Nigeria Conference, organized 1998; reorganized and renamed 2013.

Territory: Ondo state.

Statistics: churches 17; congregations 37; membership 2,320; population 4,611,467.

President, Nurudeen Agbabiaka; secretary-treasurer, Adekunle Bamishaye.

Edo-Delta Conference

Edo-Delta Conference (EDC) which once covered the territories of Edo and Delta states was granted conference status on February 2, 2002, with headquarters in Benin-City, Edo state, and was reorganized into two administrative units in December 2011 which became full-fledged conferences (Edo and Delta Conferences) on December 29, 2012.

Edo Conference

Formerly known as the Edo-Delta Conference, organized 1977; reorganized 2002; reorganized and territory split 2013.

Territory: Edo state.

Statistics: churches 23; congregations 66; membership 3,696; population 4,302,954.

President, Senne-Aya Michael; secretary, Gabriel Umhebaita; treasurer, Edwin Okoro.

Delta Conference

Formerly part of the Edo-Delta Conference, organized 2013.

Territory: Delta state.⁴⁴

Statistics: churches 27; congregations 102; membership 6,771,⁴⁵ population 5,477,470.⁴⁶

President, Joshua Idahose Arebun; secretary, Amos Opeke; treasurer, Daniel Edafe.

Establishment of Seventh-day Adventist Church in East Nigeria

The year 1923 was significant to the planting of Adventism in the eastern states of Nigeria, among the Igbos of the Ngwaland. It is pertinent to state that the presence of Adventism was already felt in Abua, Rivers state of Nigeria through the effort of Bankole Loving-good who happened to attend the Adventist school at Waterloo, Sierra Leone, before the arrival of the missionaries.⁴⁷

The year 1923 was the official date for beginning the Adventist church in the Ibo Country of Nigeria at the arrival of Pastor and Mrs. Jessie Clifford. Pastor Clifford and his wife arrived at Aba from the Ivory Coast where they previously served as missionaries before going to Nigeria. Pastor William McClements was the superintendent of Adventist work in Nigeria when they arrived in the country.

Pastor and Mrs. Clifford opened an informal school with the help of two national teachers for the purpose of evangelism. The main objective was to get more young people trained to spread the message in the nearby villages. The Bible lessons were the most important aspect of their teaching.⁴⁸

The Era of National Leaders

The exit of Pastor Edmond ushered in the era of the indigenous leaders. Perhaps the first was Pastor Albert Job Dike (1887-1992).

In 1940 Dike was issued a ministerial license and in 1943 he was ordained to the gospel ministry. In 1957 he was elected mission president and served until 1961. Pastor Dike served for two terms and was succeeded by Pastor Philip Onwere.

The second indigenous president was Pastor P. E. Onwere of Obiete, who served from 1961 until he was succeeded by Pastor Z. N. Imo. One of the accomplishments of Pastor P. Onwere was that he introduced primary schools in all the mission stations. During his tenure, Northern Ngwa Country Hospital was handed over to the Seventh-day Adventist Church for effective operation.

Pastor Z. N. Imo became the third national president of the East Nigeria Mission, shortly before the Nigerian Civil War. His tenure was interrupted by the war.⁴⁹

Field Reorganization

Field reorganization made the East Nigeria Mission Session of 1971 an eventful and historical one. The present five conferences of the newly created East Nigeria Union Mission were operated under one administration with the headquarters at Ogbor Hill, Aba. At that session, one of the actions taken was that beginning January 1, 1971, the East Nigerian Mission was to be reorganized into two missions as follows:

1. East Central Nigeria Mission of Seventh-day Adventists with headquarters at Aba, and
2. Rivers/South-Eastern States Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, with headquarters at Port Harcourt.

Pastor Z. N. Imo led the East Nigeria Mission for 11 years before he was succeeded by Pastor Isaac Nwaobia in 1977, when the field became a conference.⁵⁰

Maiden Conference

The inaugural session took place in January 1977 at Aba. Pastor Imo brought progress and stability to the cause of God in Eastern Nigeria.⁵¹ The Lord used him to lay a very solid foundation for the conference, which resulted in a smooth transition from the status of mission to conference.

One of the major events during the session was the election of Pastor Isaac Nwaobia as the first president of the East Nigeria Conference. The East Nigeria Conference became the first conference in Nigeria and the second conference in the West African Union Mission.⁵²

The major achievements of Pastor Isacc Nwaobi included the establishment of the Adventist Secondary Technical College, formerly known as Owerrinta Vocational School. During his tenure a modern conference secretariat building was erected. And finally, the Seventh-day Adventist Health Center, which is now Adventist Hospital Aba, and Maranatha Printing Press were established. Next came the administration of Pastor Friday Ubani.

Pastor Friday O. Ubani's Presidency, 1986-1987

Pastor Friday O. Ubani was the second president of the East Nigeria Conference. It soon became apparent that the three officers did not get along well together in their day-to-day operations. The directors and other members of the executive committee of the conference polarized to the degree that they could not really function. That crisis led to a special constituency meeting on December 29-30, 1987. Thus, the officers and the directors were relieved of their posts and the executive committee dissolved.⁵³

Pastor Johnson O. Achilihu's Administration

Pastor Johnson Achilihu became the second graduate to be elected as the president of the conference. The other two officers were Pastor Isaac Ekpendu, secretary, and John Onuoha, treasurer.

One of the blessings recorded during the tenure of Achilihu was the provision of potable water through a borehole at the conference headquarters, Aba. Achilihu said, "Through the help of the Nigeria Union, ADRA has sunk a borehole on the Health Center premises. We have extended pipes to the whole compound and we do not spend money buying water anymore."⁵⁴

Pastor Gideon C. Nwaogwuwu's Administration

Following the tenure of Pastor Johnson O. Achilihu came the era of Pastor Gideon C. Nwaogwuwu.

At the 2004 session of the Nigeria Union Mission, held at Owerrinta, Abia state, under the leadership of Pastor Dr. Joseph Adebisi Ola, the union mission was reorganized into two union missions—North-Western Nigeria Union Mission and East Nigeria Union Mission. Pastor Gideon Nwaogwuwu was the first president of the East Nigeria Union Mission.⁵⁵ Pastor Dr. Bassey Udoh, the former union secretary, took over from Pastor G. C. Nwaogwuwu. Under the leadership of Bassey Udoh, the union mission changed its status to that of a conference.

Another landmark event during Pastor Udoh's administration was the reorganization of the union conference in 2013 into 14 local conference fields for more effective administration. These are:

Rivers East Conference

Formerly part of the Rivers Conference, organized 2015.

Territory: The following local government areas of Rivers state: Andoni, Bonny, Eleme, Gokana, Khana, Opobo/Nkoro, Oyigbo, and Tai.

Statistics: churches 38; congregations 82; membership 6,772; population 2,041,468.

President, Godwin Obari Kakiri; secretary, Joyful Norbana; treasurer, Festus Ubadire Juongwa.

Rivers West Conference

Formerly known as the Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference; organized 2013; reorganized and renamed 2015.

Territory: The following local government areas of Rivers state: Abua-Odual, Ahoada East, Ahoada West, Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni.

Statistics: churches 82; congregations 173; membership 17,161; population 1,386,280.

President, Ugochukwu Lucky Ahiamadu; secretary, David Odianaani Jonathan; treasurer, Vincent Chukwunem Marcus.

Bayelsa Mission

Formerly part of the Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference, organized 2015.

Territory: Bayelsa state.

Statistics: churches, nine; congregations 33; membership 1,758; population 2,200,670.

President, Obioma Ohia Sunday; treasurer, Chinenye F. Nwachekwu.

Port Harcourt Conference

Formerly known as Rivers Conference, established 1923; organized 1971; renamed in 2011; reorganized and split in two 2013; reorganized and renamed 2015.

Territory: The following local government areas of Rivers state: Akuku Toru, Asari Toru, Degema, Emuoha, Etche, Ikwerre, Obia-Akpor, Ogu-Bolo, Okirika, Omuma, and Port Harcourt.

Statistics: churches 86; congregations 125; membership 23,086; population 2,605,749.

President, Anyalebechi Nnunkwe; secretary, Amadi N. Nation; treasurer, Emmanuel C. Njoku.

Akwa Ibom Conference

Formerly part of the South East Conference, organized 2015.

Territory: Akwa Ibom state.

Statistics: churches 14; congregations 67; membership 4,656; population, 4,958,324.

President, Aniekan Jonah Umoh; secretary, Napoleon E. Obot; treasurer, Rebecca B. Ansa.

Cross River Conference

Formerly known as South East Conference, organized 1980; reorganized 2004; reorganized and renamed 2015.

Territory: Cross River state.

Statistics: churches, seven; congregations 27; membership 2,531; population 3,357,483.

President, Enebiene E. Eko; secretary, Edy-Bernard U. Ewoh; treasurer, Onyebuchi T. Opara.

Aba East Conference

Formerly known as the East Nigeria Conference, established 1923; organized 1930; reorganized 1971, 1977, 1986, 2003; reorganized and renamed 2013.

Territory: Aba North, part of Aba South, Obi Ngwa local government area of Abia.

Statistics: churches 95; congregations 126; membership 29,436; population 1,744,956.

President, Joel Nwanne Ubani; secretary, Vine Chinkata Nwosu; treasurer, Felix Meregini Nwaogu.

Aba North Conference

Formerly part of the East Nigeria Conference, organized 2013.

Territory: Isiala Ngwa North, Isiala Ngwa South local government areas of Abia state.

Statistics: churches 84; congregations 121; membership 24,092; population 2,344,785.

President, Victor C. Nwosu; secretary, Uzoma C. Iheanacho; treasurer, Okechukwu Ken Marizu.

Aba South Conference

Formerly part of the East Nigeria Conference, organized 2013.

Territory: Part of Aba South, Osisioma Ngwa, Ugwunagbo, Ukwa East, and Ukwa West local government areas of Abia state.

Statistics: churches 91; congregations 142; membership 24,644; population 1,741,061.

President, Josiah C. Nwarungwa; secretary, Goodluck O. Alozie; treasurer, Cyrus Kelechi Nwaji.

Abia North-Central Conference

Formerly known as the East Central Conference, organized 1986; reorganized 2002; renamed 2013.

Territory: The local government areas of Arochukwu, Bende, Ikwuano, Isukwuata, Umuahia North, Umuahia South, and Umunneochi in Abia state.

Statistics: churches 41; congregations 104; membership 10,063; population 1,359,352.

President, Enyinnaya Kalu Kalu Uguru; secretary, Chibueze E. Aphaeus; treasurer, Onyinyechi Ezinwayi.

Imo Conference

Formerly known as the Anambra-Imo Conference, organized 2003; reorganized, renamed 2015.

Territory: Imo state.

Statistics: churches 70; Congregations 125; membership 5,684; population 3,123,783.

President, Ephraim Uzodinma Okpolor; secretary, Okechukwu I. Mbaeri; treasurer, Godswill U. Uwalaka.

Enugu Conference

Formerly known as the Enugu-Ebonyi Conference, organized 2013; reorganized and renamed 2015.

Territory: Enugu state.

Statistics: churches 13; Congregations 46; membership 1,872; population 4,218,276.

President, Onyebuchi Pius Nwankpa; secretary, Francis Nwadibia Aja; treasurer, Hilary Ukah Nwosu.

Ebonyi Conference

Formerly part of the Enugu-Ebonyi Conference, organized 2015.

Territory: Ebonyi state.

Statistics: churches 37; congregations 82; membership 6,120; population 2,819,974.

President, Ikechukwu Kalu Egbe; secretary, Emmanuel E. Nweke; treasurer, Prince O. Onugha.

Anambra Mission

Formerly part of the Anambra-Imo Conference, organized 2015.

Territory: Anambra state.⁵⁶

Statistics: churches 16; congregations 42; membership 2,178;⁵⁷ population 5,133,599.⁵⁸

Secretary-Treasurer, Nnamdi Emmanuel Ukagbue.

Establishment of Seventh-day Adventist Church in North Nigeria

The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Northern Nigeria is associated with the arrival of Pastor and Mrs. John J. Hyde at Jengre, Plateau state in 1931 as missionaries.

John Jacob Hyde (1893-1968) was a missionary to Africa. He was born in London, England, in 1893 to a family which had five ordained Seventh-day Adventist ministers. He was the eldest of 13 children. At the age of 15 he began his service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a worker in the International Tract Society which later became the Stanborough Press.⁵⁹ After his college education Hyde entered the evangelism ministry of the South

England Conference. A few years later he married Louise Ashford. Their union was blessed with children, the most notable of which was Dr. John Ashford Hyde, who was born in Plymouth, England. Dr. John Ashford Hyde later became a missionary, physician, and administrator.

In 1924, John J. Hyde was ordained to the gospel ministry and soon after his ordination he left the shores of England to take up the call in Sierra Leone on the West African coast as the president of the local field. At the time of his assignment to Africa, it must be noted that malaria was killing many missionaries and sending them to untimely graves. The Lord was merciful to the family and their lives were preserved. The Hydés added medical ministry to their preaching and teaching assignment.

As a matter of interest, Jesse Clifford had left Ghana for Aba in Eastern Nigeria before John J. Hyde came to lead out in Ghana. Coincidentally enough, the year John J. Hyde left Ghana for Nigeria was also the period Jesse Clifford left Aba to go back to Ghana on his second missionary journey. Hyde, however, did not go to Aba to take over from Clifford, rather, he was called to start a new mission field in the Northern part of Nigeria. On his arrival in February 1931, he met with the colonial officer, and he was permitted to look for a suitable site where he could establish his church in Southern Zaria. He quickly made an application that was forwarded to the secretary of the Northern Nigeria government. In April, John J. Hyde, in company of William McClements, was able to find a possible location for his mission near Zongon Kataf. He made a formal application to the government to construct his headquarters and paid with a check for two pounds.

However, their choice to locate the mission headquarters there was met with stiff opposition from fellow Christian missionaries who were already operating in the north. Perhaps one needs to understand the unwritten laws that guided the operations of the missionaries in those days in northern Nigeria. Islam arrived in the country several centuries before Christianity. In addition, Lord Lugard, the British High Commissioner in Nigeria, had promised the emirs that he would not interfere with their religion, and that he would not permit missionaries to enter the emirates unless they were invited by the emirs. The position taken by the British government was a great blow to Christianity, which was fairly strong in the east and west until the turn of the century.

In 1930 the Christian Council of Nigeria was formed to protect Christianity from external foes and to prevent Christian denominations from warring amongst themselves. In principle, the council forbade new missions from going to areas already occupied by other Christian churches. Therefore, when John J. Hyde came in 1931 to settle at Zangon Kataf, already occupied by the Sudan Interior Mission, it was viewed as a violation to the tenets of the Christian Council of Nigeria.

In 1932, Dr. Stirrett, from the Sudan Interior Mission, with the help of others, finished the Hausa Bible translation. This translation became the major tool in the hand of John J. Hyde to plant Adventism in the north. Because of the unwritten policy mentioned above, throughout the year 1931, John J. Hyde was not able to establish a mission station in any of the cities where other churches had a presence. However, he was advised

to go to the Jengre area of Plateau state where non-Muslims could be reached.

According to E. D. Magaji, quoted from the diary of John J. Hyde, on January 26, 1932, William McClement wrote to the president of Zaria that "after careful consideration and consultation with the missions (SIM, UMC, Anglican and Catholic), Government and Indigenous people, the SDA has decided to open a station in Jos Division."⁶⁰ With that letter to the president, the Zangon Kataf application was formally withdrawn and the check for two pounds was to be returned.

After that settlement, John J. Hyde with his wife and nine-year-old son went to Jengre. They were given a rousing welcome by the Chief of Jengre and his people. Hyde did not look for conveniences, but rather for the lost sheep of Northern Nigeria. Meanwhile, there was an outbreak of an epidemic in that district before the Hydys arrived there. People by the hundreds were infested with "jiggers." "Jiggers" are small fleas which lay eggs under the finger and toe nails, and also in the private parts, particularly babies' buttocks. It was a terrible and traumatic period for the inhabitants. That was the time when Pastor and Mrs. Hyde came to that community. Louise Hyde quickly rose to the challenge and extracted Jiggers daily from the fingers and the toes of the indigenes.

The news of the assistance rendered by the Hydys spread throughout the region like wildfire. People came to Jengre in great numbers to receive healing and obtain western education. While Pastor Hyde was busy preaching and offering medical aid to the people, he was also erecting his home with permanent structures. He engaged the services of the natives in molding bricks and other duties that were part of the building projects. To speak to the Hausa man who helped him mold bricks for his house, he would open to a verse in the Hausa Bible where the word he wanted to use appeared in the English Bible. He would guess the word from among those in the verse and say it to the man. If he was correct and the man understood, he would repeat the correct pronunciation after the man. He began also to teach the man to read the New Testament in Hausa. When the natives learned that Pastor Hyde would teach them how to read, they began to come to him.⁶¹

While extracting jiggers from their bodies, he spoke of the love of Jesus for them. Two years after his arrival at Jengre, Pastor Hyde baptized his first ten converts. Later he baptized another 19. Having learned how to read, the Kakwis and Istifanus Dariya began witnessing about their new found faith to their people, reading to them from the Scriptures while they attended Bible doctrine classes conducted by the Hydys. Later the Kakwis became ministers of the gospel. Istifanus Dariya became the first indigenous medical attendant at the Jengre SDA Clinic (now Jengre SDA Hospital).

At his retirement in 1957, Jacob Hyde had actively served the church for 45 years. In retirement he continued to work as a pastor until 1966, then as a church elder and a counselor to all who sought his guidance.

The first company to be organized was that of Tidere in Plateau state. Malam Bulus Mallum Kakwi was the first to be ordained into the gospel ministry in April 1956.⁶²

Jengre Seventh-day Adventist Primary School was established in 1944. The mission was formally organized in 1952, and soon after the headquarters moved from Jengre to Bukuru. It is good to note that Pastor W. G. Till also came to the north to serve as the local president between 1952 and 1953. Meanwhile, Dr. John Ashford Hyde (son of John J. Hyde) served as the acting president until Pastor B. A. Roberts came in 1957 and labored until 1963. In between Roberts' tenure, Pastor Halbert served the mission for one year in 1958. The next president was Pastor Dr. Borge Schantz. Pastor R. Faber was sent to the mission field when he left the West Nigeria Mission in 1970 and labored there until 1971. Pastor W. B. Ackah, the former WAUM Publishing director, was elected to lead the field in 1972. He became the first West African to head the mission. In 1975 Pastor D. C. Clothier took over from him and worked until 1978. Pastor and Mrs. Friise came for a short time to head the field in 1978 before the arrival of Pastor and Mrs. S. H. Jenson from Denmark.

The Era of Indigenous Leaders

The first Nigerian to lead out in the field was Pastor E. D. Magaji, who was elected in 1985 and served until 1995. Pastor Yakubu Musa replaced him when he was elected the director for Stewardship and Family Life for the Nigeria Union Mission, Lagos.

The North Nigeria Mission was formally organized in 1952 and regrouped in 1993 into two mission fields. The first became the North East Mission with its headquarters at Bukuru, headed by E. D. Magaji until 1995. The membership of the North East Mission as of June 10, 1999 stood at 12,912, with 53 organized churches.

Evangelism Amidst Insecurity

Plateau state, one of the strongholds for the work of the church in Nigeria, was often referred to as "The Home of Peace and Tourism." This slogan was upended by a religious/political crisis in which many were ruthlessly murdered and a state of insecurity ensued. As a result, 34 members were affected, four of which were reported killed in the September 2001 riot; and because of insecurity no camp meeting was held that year. In spite of the situation, the command to preach the Word remains binding, so a number of outreach programs were carried out in areas where it was possible to do so.

Northern Nigeria Union Conference

Northern Nigeria Union Conference was formerly part of the North-Western Nigeria Union Mission and it consists of three conferences as stated below. It was organized into a union conference in 2013.

President, Stephen Bindas; secretary, Francis Freeman Daria; treasurer, Marcus Musa Dangana.

North East Nigeria Conference

Established 1932; organized 1954; reorganized 1993; reorganized and territory divided 2013.

Territory: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Plateau, Taraba (excluding Takum), and Yobe states.

Statistics: churches 81; congregations 227; membership 19,324; population 29,505,046.

President, Emmanuel Gbazi Jugbo; secretary, Joshua Ezra Mallum; treasurer, Mary Lah Mallum.

North Central Nigeria Conference

Formerly part of the North East Nigeria and North West Nigeria Conferences; organized 2013.

Territory: The Federal Capital Territory; the states of Benue, Nasarawa, and Niger; and the local government area of Takum in Taraba state.

Statistics: churches 49; congregations 133; membership 7,236; population 15,251,669.

President, Micah Nasamu; secretary, Cartier Amos; treasurer, Abednego Chidawa.

North West Nigeria Conference

Established 1932; organized 1993; reorganized 2000; reorganized and territory divided 2013.

Territory: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara states.⁶³

Statistics: churches 104; congregations 277; membership 14,711,⁶⁴ population 47,677,641.⁶⁵

President, Istifanus Ishaya; secretary, Yohanna M. Dangana; treasurer, Thomas Ayuba Laiya.

Educational and Medical Institutions

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has impacted the citizens of Nigeria spiritually, socially, educationally, economically, and physically. Presently, the Adventist Church in Nigeria owns and operates the following educational and medical institutions:

Universities: 2 (Babcock University and Clifford University); School of Nursing: 1; High Schools: 20; Nursery and Primary Schools: 136; Hospitals: 3; University Teaching Hospital: 1; Clinics: 10; Medical Centers: 5; Children's Home: 1.

Conclusion

The Adventist members in Nigeria believe that God has sustained the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria since her inception in 1914. Missionaries have sacrificed their lives and endured persecution, suffering, humiliation, and hunger without regret. Although they did not see Jesus coming in their own day, they died in

the hope of seeing their Saviour one day in the Kingdom. The legacy bequeathed to the present generation is very rich, and the light of the gospel should keep on burning. Adventism has brought freedom to many in bondage of fearful traditions and customs. Christianity in general has broken the yoke of ignorance and superstition, and those who were languishing in abject poverty have received blessings.

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