

# **A Brief History of Ghana Baptists**

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The earliest Baptist work in Ghana was by one Mark C. Hayford, a Ghanaian, who received his call and ordination to the ministry in Nigeria. By 1926 Hayford had planted about forty-five churches, but after his death in 1935 these churches began to die. The current Ghana Baptist Convention's early beginnings were associated with the Nigerian Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention of USA. Nigerian Baptist brethren came to Ghana (formerly known as Gold Coast) to trade in the early part of the 1900's. These Yoruba Baptist traders later grouped themselves to form Baptist churches in Ghana.

In 1947 the Yoruba Baptist Association, which these Yoruba churches in Ghana formed in 1935, made an appeal to both the Nigerian Baptist Convention and the Nigerian Baptist Mission (NOTE: the mission is made up of Southern Baptist Convention missionaries working in Nigeria) to send some missionaries to start Baptist churches among the Ghanaians. The Yoruba Baptist churches were failing to attract Ghanaians, because the Yoruba language was used in all their worship services. In response to the request of the Yoruba Baptist Association, the Nigerian Baptist Mission in 1947 sent the Reverend and Mrs. H R. Littleton to Ghana to start Baptist churches among the indigenous people. Their efforts resulted in the establishment of the first indigenous Baptist church in 1952 at Boamang in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.

In 1947 the Yoruba Baptist Association changed its name to Gold Coast Baptist Conference to enable the emerging Ghanaian Baptist churches to be part of the group. When Ghana gained her independence from Britain in 1957, the conference was renamed Ghana Baptist Conference. From its beginning as the Yoruba Association, this conference was under the Nigerian Baptist Convention. In 1963, the Nigerian Baptist Convention granted the conference independence. The conference was renamed Ghana Baptist Convention in January 1964.

The convention works in partnership with the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention, USA. In the past few years, the IMB has changed her mission strategy, whereby that body is now pursuing the people group concept. Thus the IMB's support sent to the convention in terms of personnel and finance has dwindled greatly. The Ghana Baptist Convention is now seeking partnership with other Baptist bodies or churches to carry out the vision(s) God has given to her in Ghana and beyond.

Currently the Ghana Baptist Convention has approximately 1,000 churches with a total membership of over 65,000. About twenty percent of the convention churches have their own church auditorium where they worship. The remaining eighty percent of the churches worship in public or private classrooms or temporary sheds or structures. Most of the convention churches are in deprived and rural areas, and there is a need to plant more churches in the cities and urban areas as well as a need to mobilize more resources to help in rural church planting work. The

majority of the convention church's members are young and/or unemployed. These people need help in learning job skills and in finding employment.

The convention has about 450 trained ministers serving in the 1,000 churches. The convention has had two traditional training institutions for ministers, one in Abuakwa-Ashanti and the other in Tamale. These two institutions have recently been absorbed into a newly established Ghana Baptist University College as the School of Theology and Missions.

## **Sectors**

To enable the convention to operate effectively, the country has been divided into four (4) main sectors that include all the twenty-three (23) local associations.

1. NORTHERN GHANA SECTOR comprises six (6) local associations, namely: Tahima Baptist Association, Tamale Baptist Association, Liberty Baptist Association, Bolgatanga Baptist Association, Nalerigu Baptist Association, and Nakpanduri Baptist Association. The Sector Head is Reverend Issac Wuni, Senior Pastor of Tamale First Baptist Church.

2. MID-GHANA SECTOR comprises seven (7) local associations, namely: Kumasi South Baptist Association, Kumasi North Baptist Association, Kwahu Baptist Association, Adansi Baptist Association, Adorn Baptist Association, Sunyani Baptist Association, and Mampong Baptist Association. The Sector Head is Reverend Ossei Mensa-Sarpong, Senior Pastor of New Tafo Baptist Church, Kumasi.

3. SOUTHEAST GHANA SECTOR comprises six (6) local associations, namely: Accra Baptist Association, Tema-Dangbe Baptist Association, Eastern Baptist Association, North Volta Baptist Association, KLO Baptist Association, and Volta Baptist Association. The Sector Head is Reverend Kofi Annan, Senior Pastor of Hope Baptist Church, Accra.

4. SOUTHWEST GHANA SECTOR comprises four (4) local associations, namely: Central Baptist Association, Sekondi-Takoradi Baptist Association, Hope Baptist Association, and Bethel Baptist Association. The Sector Head is Reverend Edward John Enim, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Sanko, Winneba.

The convention has also four (4) main boards that carry out some specific functions. The boards are these: Church Development Board; Theological Education Board; Evangelism and Mission Board; and Socio Economic Development Board. In addition to the boards there are some committees, such as Ministerial Recognition Committee, Nominating Committee, Finance Committee, Human Resource Committee, etc., put in place to perform some duties for the convention.

The current officers of the Ghana Baptist Convention are:

1. Reverend Steve Asante - President
2. Reverend Doctor Nii Amoo Darku - Vice-President
3. Reverend Kojo Amo - General Secretary

4. Reverend David Ocansey - Assistant General Secretary (Management Services)
5. Mrs. Stella Laryea - Recording Secretary
6. Mrs. Erica Wilson - Assistant Recording Secretary

**The convention also has auxiliaries/bodies that perform various ministries:**

1. National Ministers' Conference. This body is made up of recognized ministers (both male and female) of the convention. The Ministers' Conference has formed local Ministers' Fellowships in the associations, where both recognized and non-recognized ministers gather to have fellowship and to deliberate on issues affecting their ministries and the convention. The current Chairman of the National Ministers' Conference is Reverend Samuel Out Pimpong, Senior Pastor of Legon Baptist Church, Accra.
2. Men's Ministry. This ministry supervises the Royal Ambassadors, which is made up of boys between the ages 10 - 20.
3. Women's Missionary Union (WMU). WMU supervises the following groups:
  - a) Sunbeam Band, which comprises both boys and girls between the ages 5 - 9.
  - b) Girls' Auxiliary, which is made up of girls between the ages 10 - 18.
  - c) Baptist Young Ladies. This group is made up of young women between ages 15 - 30 who are not married.
  - d) Women's Missionary Society, which is made up of women (both married and single) of ages 30 and above.
4. Youth Fellowship: This group is made up of both males and females who are between the ages 18 - 30.
5. Children's Ministry: There are organized programs and activities at the local church level, the associational level, and the national level for nurturing and educating our children. Some of the big churches in the convention have introduced Teen Ministry/Service.
6. National Union of Baptist Students: This body comprises all the Baptist Student Unions (BSU) in the tertiary institutions in the country. The Unions undertake an evangelistic / outreach program annually known as Student Holiday Outreach Program (SHOP). The Baptist Student Unions hold meetings to study the Bible, pray, and worship the Lord. They also organize activities to help themselves. Through the BSU ministry, the convention has been able to raise some leaders who serve in the local churches and hold key positions in the convention.
7. Association of Baptist Business Executives (ABBEX). This body's main aim is to mobilize resources to help the convention to promote evangelism and mission. The group is formed into chapters that operate in Accra, Kumasi, and Tema.
8. Association of Ghanaian Baptist Overseas (AGBO). This group is made of up Ghanaian Baptists living overseas, including those studying in various institutions. The aim of the body is

to mobilize resources to assist the Ghana Baptist Theological Seminary at Abuakwa-Ashanti. ABBO is currently active in the USA.

**Ghana Baptist Convention is a member of the following bodies:**

1. Baptist World Alliance (BWA)
2. All African Baptist Fellowship (AABF)
3. Christian Council of Ghana (CCG)
4. Ghana Evangelism Committee (GEC)

(After presenting this paper, Kojo Osei-Wusuh referred to the section on Baptists in Ghana in *Baptists Around the World; a Comprehensive Handbook*, edited by Albert Wardin (Broadman, 1995). Kojo had written the major portion of that section-about the Ghana Baptist Convention. Wardin had added information about other Baptists in Ghana, work supported by three other Baptist bodies from the USA: National Baptists; Baptist Mid-Missions; and Seventh Day Baptists. Kojo stated that he knew nothing of these other Baptists.)