

## **A PERSONAL SHORT HISTORY OF THE SDA CHURCH IN SIERRA LEONE.**

I have been asked to write and present a short personal history of the Adventist work in Sierra Leone. I do not think there is one person who is alive today that can execute such a task accurately and without major gaps. My effort in this presentation is the product of some research and my own recollections since I joined the Church in September 1977 in Waterloo. I was born in Bo some seven decades ago, grew up in Waterloo and had my secondary education at the Peninsula Secondary School (P.S.S.), Waterloo operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After my GCE "O" levels from P.S.S. in 1968, I went to Magburaka Boys Secondary School for sixth form studies. It was after my return from graduate and post-graduate studies in England which took place between September 1971 and December 1976, that I was baptized by Pastor Nnaji, a Nigerian and the Bible teacher at P.S.S. at that time, into the Church in September, 1977. It was while I was attending P.S.S. that I was convicted of the Advent Message and realized that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the place where I should be, based on what the Scriptures teach. I come from a family of Sunday worshippers. Pastor Hulbert (from England) who was a Bible teacher at the School for a number of years, was instrumental in my early acceptance of the Advent Gospel Message of salvation into God's kingdom through Jesus Christ alone. My principal mentor at the Church in Waterloo (late Pastor J.B. Leigh), was a committed and faithful servant of God, who taught me many things, speaking and living the truth as it is in Jesus.

A good source for relevant information on the early history of the work in Sierra Leone can be gleaned from the internet at [www.sdachurchsierraleone.org](http://www.sdachurchsierraleone.org). and I can recommend it to all our young people in the Church. Other sources include books such as that written by Pastor Walton Whaley and his wife, (who played a crucial role in the construction of the Samuel Town SDA Church), recalling their experience as missionaries to Sierra Leone for several years from 1968. Another useful source of information is a delightful book in two volumes entitled "Precious Memories of Missionaries of Color". These sources will inspire us with the sacrifice, faithfulness and heroism of those who went before us. My father (Johnny Valentine Thomas) who passed away on 8 March 1993 attended the Waterloo Training School (WTS) with the late Pastor J. B. Leigh. That School was the first training and educational facility of the Church in Sierra Leone which played a pivotal role in moulding the characters of both my birth father and human spiritual father. Interestingly both were born in 1900 and grew up together in the same community in Waterloo.

My researches disclose that the Sierra Leone Mission was organized in 1913 and soon became an important source for denominational workers in West Africa who got their training at WTS. I am informed and verily believe that it was in 1918 that the church work in West Africa was organized with headquarters in Waterloo, Sierra Leone. It was my

singular privilege that the WTS compound where my “fathers” got their education was the same compound where I started my early elementary education in the present-day Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, Waterloo.

During World War II, (1939-1945) the Colonial Government in Sierra Leone compulsorily acquired the WTS compound from the Church for the war effort and so the church work on that compound was disrupted. After the end of the War, the Government offered the land to the Church on payment of some financial consideration. By that time the Church headquarters had been moved to Bo, the second largest city in the country and where I was born in 1950. The Conveyance by the then Director of Surveys and Lands of Sierra Leone of the old WTS compound to the Church is dated the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1961. I was informed and verily believe that the money for the repurchase of the land which had been compulsorily acquired by Government was provided by Sister Sarah Thompson-Smart, a veteran matriarch of the SDA Church, Waterloo (now New Jerusalem SDA Church, Waterloo). She was a trader in the village whom I knew as a firm and disciplined old lady.

The Mission headquarters was moved from Waterloo to Bo in the Southern Province when the Church had to compulsorily give up the WTS compound to the Government in support of the war effort. The Mission headquarters was subsequently moved again from Bo to Wilberforce in Freetown, and Pastor Taiwo J. Roberts (a native of Hastings, Kossoh Town in the Western Area of Sierra Leone) now retired and living in Ghana, was the first African President of the Sierra Leone Mission with headquarters in Freetown following in the steps of a number of previous presidents who were missionaries from overseas. Today, the Church headquarters is housed at a magnificent four storey building located at the junction of Jones Lane and Savage Street in the centre of Freetown and serves various purposes. It was built with funds provided by the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the U.S.A. and the construction work managed by a group of faithful leaders of the Church to the glory of God. It was my privilege to serve as chairman of the building committee during its construction.

Many overseas missionaries, who made significant contributions to the advancement of the education work in the country, include my principals for many years at P.S.S in the persons of Messrs Boram and Read and my English teacher, D. P. Rao, who were respectively American, English and Indian nationals. As far as “local missionaries” are concerned, late Elder J. K. Alie of Sahn town and Pastor Samuel Yokie working in the Southern Province, labored long and hard to grow the churches in that Province so that their people will also benefit from the hope we have in Jesus Christ, in a language that the people understood. In the northern part of the country, an exemplary leader was Pastor S.C. Nicol-Kamara of the Church in Magburaka. During my days at Magburaka Boys Secondary School between

1968 and 1970, I knew of him as a spiritual leader who led his people in the paths of righteousness and when he passed, his mortal remains were buried in the Magburaka SDA Church compound awaiting the soon return of his Saviour. His people loved him dearly as an exemplary pastor and teacher of the truth as taught by Jesus, leaving us a sterling example that we all will do well, to follow. Pastor Myers of Matotoka was another leader from the North who left his mark, and long after he had passed, those who knew him well, talk of the work he faithfully did in promoting the advent message among his people. Pastor J.A.B. Palmer (now late) worked tirelessly both in Bo (Southern Province) in the Education Department and Waterloo, (as my pastor) for many years.

The Church's education and health messages have been taught and preached in our institutions which we have operated all over the country for many years to the glory of God. Peninsula Secondary School in Waterloo, Comprehensive Secondary School in Bo and Yele Secondary School in Yele have contributed as beacons of light which provided Christian education in the Adventist tradition for many years so as to reduce the impact of the secular, Babylonian education provided at other institutions in the country. Many of the students who graduated from the above-mentioned three schools operated by the Church have stayed in the Church and are now leaders in various fields both within Sierra Leone and in the diaspora. They continue to support the work of the Church which will soon elevate to the level of a conference of churches in Sierra Leone after some one hundred and twenty-two years since organization as a mission. Our hope for the future is that the Sierra Leone Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church will soon establish a wholly private secondary school in the country, fully practicing the Adventist system of education, whose graduates together with others can be further trained in our tertiary institution of Chadwick Adventist College, which will soon start operations. This institution has been named after Lawrence C. Chadwick who introduced the Three Angels message of **Rev. 14:6-12** to a local preacher in Freetown. I can boldly state that this was the true seed planted many years ago in this country which has given birth to much valuable fruit today.

Masanga Leprosy Hospital, situated in Masanga and owned by the Government of Sierra Leone, was for many years operated by the Church until rebels seriously damaged this medical facility during the rebel war of the nineties. When it was operated by the Church it was a facility which provided both physical and spiritual healing to many who went there from all over the country. Many missionaries from overseas selflessly worked there for many years. Such missionaries include Dr. DeShay, Dr. Rosten, Dr. Roland Kazen, Glenn St. Clair and Grete Tofterup. The contributions they made in collaboration with many others in the steps of Jesus Christ such as Elder Fokuoh from Ghana and many Sierra Leonean workers in relieving pain and suffering, are all recorded in the records in Heaven. Jesus has

promised us as recorded in **Rev. 22:12** that He is coming quickly and His reward is with Him to give to everyone according to his work.

Let me conclude this short personal history of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sierra Leone by recognizing that the number of churches grew exponentially after the Second World War and the country's political independence in 1961. I believe that for the work of continuing to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the people of Sierra Leone and so hasten His return, belongs to God's called-out people who are committed, take the work seriously, and are prepared to support its advancement sacrificially. The missionaries from overseas have done their part and will receive their just reward in the end. It is now left to us, Sierra Leoneans, both young and old to sober up, follow in the steps of Jesus Christ who is the true head of the Church, and do our own individual parts faithfully. At this Investiture Service today the 26<sup>th</sup> November 2022, it is my hope and prayer that the trained master guides and others will take up their individual batons in this Christian journey and run the race that is set before us in spreading the Three Angels Messages as we await the soon return of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

  
ELDER VALESIOUS V. THOMAS.