

The Bible Training Center (BTC)

The notion of a Bible Training Center in French West Africa was but a figment in the mind of native Ghanaian George Akpabli before he ever even heard of Benton, Kentucky. George's relationship with the Benton church of Christ began when he was identified as a missionary for the work in Mauritius that is supported by the Benton congregation. George agreed to a three-year commitment to the Mauritius mission but was hindered when the government there would not grant him a permanent visa.

George was forced to leave Mauritius after three months, and upon his request, the Benton church moved him to the country of Benin in West Africa. George was familiar with this country from previous missions in Nigeria and Togo.

In 1992, George began the work in Benin with his wife, his son, and one convert from Togo. At the time, not a single Christian could be identified in Benin, but within two years, two small congregations began. The first was in George's home in the city of Cotonou and the other was in the village of Se', where a Christian from Ghana came to teach in the public school.

George began petitioning the elders of the Benton congregation for funds to begin a preacher-training school taught in the native French language. The notion was intriguing to the Benton eldership, but the men felt it was a project too large in scope for them to handle. Nevertheless, Benton elders Bill Morgan and Ed Jones traveled to Benin in the spring of 1994, surveying the work in Benin as well as similar efforts in Ghana and Kenya. By the time they returned to the United States, Morgan and Jones were on board with George Akpabli's vision and submitted a proposal to the Benton congregation that was ultimately approved.

With the Benton congregation securing funds, George searched for a facility, developed curriculum, and recruited students. In 1995, Ed Jones and fellow Benton elder Charles Cavitt traveled to Benin for the opening of the Bible Training Center in rented facilities with 18 students from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, and Togo.

By the time the BTC was established in 1995, there were five congregations in Benin comprising 150 Christians. That number quickly grew due to the efforts of BTC students putting their training to use. The curriculum at BTC mandates that students travel into the villages on Wednesday evenings and weekends to preach and teach. Thanks to these efforts, there are currently about 59 congregations in Benin with 3,000 members. Of the 96 BTC graduates, 92 have remained faithful and are responsible for 200 congregations comprising 6,000 members or more in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Mali, Togo, and Niger.

Soon a need arose for the BTC to produce graduates every year instead of every three years, so in 2003, 15 acres was purchased outside of Cotonou, Benin, to develop facilities that could accommodate 80 students. Currently, the BTC campus includes eight structures that provide housing for 60 students and administrative staff as well as all the support facilities needed for their education.