

**Baptist World Alliance – Heritage and Identity Commission
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A Brief Sketch of Evangelical Baptist Convention, Manipur, India

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Pre-Christian Era

The Evangelical Baptist Convention consists mainly of the Paite tribe scattered all over Mizoram, Manipur and Assam. Their background, culture and religion are not too different with those of the Mizos, Hmars, Kukis etc. that live in the same area. The gospel arrived here less than a hundred years ago.

Before the coming of Christianity, the Paites were animistic in their religion and belief. They spent all their treasure to placate the evil spirits who continually troubled them. They believed in a benevolent God, but did not bother to placate Him because, He did not give any trouble like the evil spirits. One way to earn direct entrance to heaven was to kill at least a person and bring home the head of the person killed. Inter-village, inter-clan, and inter-tribal wars were very frequent. The people were extremely poor and ignorant, and they lived extremely miserable lives. They were known for head hunting. One English daily from Kolkata called them “irreclaimably savage”. Before leaving them, a missionary termed them as a creature between human being and the monkey - and even closer to the monkey than to humans.

The arrival of the Gospel:

Our forefathers killed Dr. William Winchester, manager of a tea estate in Assam. That was in 1823. The British government sent a large contingent of army from the north, the south and the west and dealt a heavy blow, wiping out 20 villages. The saints in Europe knew that military might would not solve this problem – only the gospel would. They prayed. The Lord sent missionaries in answer to the prayers of His saints.

The Evangelical Baptist Convention (India), EBC was founded by an European missionary, Watkin Roberts in the year 1910. He came to Southern Manipur Churachandpur via adjoining Mizoram which was then known as Lushai Hills during the British regime. In the beginning, he, along with the first tribal converts, started worship groups in the hill villages from Senvon,

slowly and steadily approaching towards our present town of Lamka (Churachandpur). Then the name or designation of the church had little importance. The villagers were mass-converted by the Holy Spirit through this ministry.

It is a historical fact that our American Missionary namely Paul Rostad and his wife Ella were Baptist theologians. They opened a Bible school from which all our first church leaders were trained in solid Biblical doctrine. We can now see how wonderfully the Lord had been leading us.

After some time, attention was paid to designation/denomination. Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission, North East India General Mission (NEIGM), Manipur Christian Convention (MCC), Evangelical Convention Church and the Evangelical Baptist Convention (of India) were/are some of the transformational names (designations) in our history.

For some years, all the different tribal language groups had their own annual conventions under the erstwhile NEIG Mission. But even during those early days, the “human rights” awareness might have its roots in the hearts of our leaders. Slowly, the impact and importance of combined convention under the aegis of NEIGM began diminishing. Side by side, “language or dialect based ministry” and grouping started growing and developed better and faster. The budget of such language group denominations is multiplying due to regular tithes by all members while the parental budget of NEIGM did not grow much higher due to decreasing support from the Congregational Church in Pennsylvania, known as the Home Board in the USA. Language-wise denomination has popular appeal (mass appeal) or attraction because of better understanding of the scripture and the hymns. Our first leader who took over the charge from the last American missionary Royal C Paddock was Rev H Nengzachin.

When the Paite speaking group started to have our first separate annual convention in 1948, we had only Rs 30/-. Due to common poor living standard and non-availability of food grain in the hills of our land, revenue grow very slowly. But, as we were taught to give tithes honestly and cheerfully from whatever we get and have such as firewood, food grain, pepper/chilli, ginger, cotton and each and every item of productions in the shifting/Jhuming cultivation, the Lord multiplied his blessings wonderfully increasing by leaps and bounds. As a result, the Paite speaking tribe became the first self-supporting, indigenous, independent church among our six sister denominations under the NEIGM in 1975. From such a humble beginning with Rs 30 in 1948, we now have a current budget of Rs 21,100,000.

As of today, we have 144 local congregations, total membership 46917, baptized members . 30045, regular tithers 10563, administrative district/divisions .6, mission fields 3 : Nepal,

Assam (Karbi-Anglong) and Manipur Valley, local churches in cities 3: Aizawl, Delhi and Shillong.

The following additional statistics would help you to better understand EBC:

- (1) Regular workers: 283
- (2) Outreach Worker/missionary in the 3 mission fields
of Nepal, Karbi-Anglong in Assam and Manipur Valley: 83

- (3) Retired EBC Workers who are paid regular pension : 89
- (3) Theological Institution: M. Div level (170 students) : One
- (4) EBC-run Mission schools in the hill countryside : 60
- (5) Evangelist Teachers : 97
- (6) Students in all grades: Primary to Class X/High School : 6567
- (7) Rehabilitation and Research Centre: for drug abusers : One
- (8) Evangelical Book House : One
- (9) Printing & Publication facility: We have an offset printer : One

Please pray for EBC projects and needs:-

1. Rehabilitation and Resettlement of Victims of the 1997-98 ethnic war. The BW Aid funding goal that have been approved for three consecutive years is still awaited.
2. The Hospital Project: Tribal Area Developmental Fund from the Central Government in New Delhi has been lying pending since the last 2 years. The BJP-led coalition government in New Delhi has been lukewarm to this Christian project since the last 3 years. It is not yet clear if there will be any difference under the present Congress government.
3. EBC is in need of a partner church or convention/Union from BWA family who are interested in partnership in missions and developments.
4. Up-grading of Ebenezer Academy to full-fledged Christian College-Building, infrastructure, science laboratory, etc.
5. For leadership development, we are in need of full scholarship for post-graduate higher study in the Baptist Seminaries in the USA.
6. Grace Bible College Girls' Hostel project and library development program.