Pastor (Prof.) Joel Dada Awoniyi was born on June 20, 1928 to Pa. Anisingin Awoniyi Babatunde and Ma. Bolajoko Awoniiyi at Oba – Isin but settled in Oke-Ode in Kwara State of Nigeria. His parents were adherents of Africa Traditional Religion.

**HIS EARLY LIFE, CONVERSION AND BAPTISM:** His elder brother, Fadun Romanus Awoniyi had a great influence in the early life and educational career of Joel Awoniyi. Romanus led his younger brother Joel to the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), which was the only known Christian Mission in their area at that time. Fadun Romanus was baptized into the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), which later became the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) in 1926. By 1936, Romanus had become affiliated to the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Mission and in 1937 he and Joel were baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church by Pastor W. Till, an expatriate missionary to Nigeria.
HIS EDUCATIONAL CAREER: Romanus became the headmaster of the SDA Primary School at Ipoti-Ekiti in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Afterward he brought his younger brother, Joel to the school in 1942 for some formal education. Since Joel had received home schooling before this time, he was admitted to Standard three. He earned his Standard six Certificate in 1945.

Joel Awoniyi’s passion for education and self-development made him to go for a qualifying examination in Jos, at the famous College of Arts in Zaria. It was during this time that he received information that Pastor Grover C. Winslow, the newly appointed principal for the Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA) at Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, was on a student recruitment drive. He was told that there was not a single Yoruba student among the prospective students. As a result of the information he received, he made up his mind to attend the school, if only to represent his people. In 1950, Awoniyi was sent to the Teacher Training School at Ihie in Southeastern Nigeria, for further studies. The school was the most advanced Seventh-day Adventist Institution in Nigeria at the time, and he was there until 1952.

Thus, on September 17, 1959 at the groundbreaking event of the new Liberal Arts College that Joel Dada Awoniyi became one of the seven "foundation" students of the Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA) now known as Babcock University. He graduated with a diploma in 1962 and proceeded to Newbold College in Bracknell, United Kingdom where he obtained a Bachelor of Theology degree in 1963. While at Newbold, Awoniyi held three different student work-study activities in order to raise the needed funds for his tuition. On completing his study at Newbold College he proceeded to Andrews University, Michigan, United States of America, from 1963 to 1967. At Andrews University he obtained a
Bachelor of Arts in Theology (BA.Th) and Master of Arts (M.A), Master of Theology (M. Th) respectively.

**HIS MINISTERIAL AND TEACHING CAREERS:** Joel Dada Awoniyi began his ministerial career as a pastor and as well as a teacher in the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the Church’s Primary School, Ikun-Ekiti, a position he held until 1947. The next year he was posted to Omu Aran in Kwara State, but did not stay long there since his elder brother, Romanus who was the then Church Pastor at their hometown, Oke-Ode, was transferred. Joel Awoniyi was sent there to succeed him and he was there until 1949.

As a newly trained teacher, he was sent to Erunmu, the birthplace of the Seventh-day Adventist mission in Nigeria, to teach in the elementary school. Erunmu is twenty-five kilometers from Ibadan, the capital of the old Western Region. By 1954, Awoniyi was back at Ihie for further training. He graduated in 1956 and was posted to Oke-Ila, in present day Osun State. His stay there was brief, as he was called back to Erunmu to serve in the newly established Secondary Modern School from 1957 to 1958. His career seemed to alternate between the teaching profession and pastoral duties, as he was called to serve as the pastor of the Otun-Ekiti SDA Church in 1959.

He also served at the Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School at Ede, Osun State. Based on his academic qualifications, he was sent as a lecturer to his alma mater, ACWA. He taught courses in Systematic Theology, New Testament and Old Testament. He was ordained into the gospel ministry along with his friend and
compatriot, James Kio, in early 1969. He was also appointed dean of men and head of Religion and Theology department at the seminary. Awoniyi taught until 1974, when he decided to go back to Andrews University for a Doctor of Theology degree (Th.D). The Theology degree required students to have proficiency in German, French, Hebrew, and Greek, in addition to the class work and dissertation. Awoniyi was awarded the Doctor of Theology (Th.D.) degree, with distinction, in 1979. He immediately returned to ACWA, which had been renamed, Adventist Seminary of West Africa (ASWA) between 1982 and 1983.

**MARITAL STATUS:** Pastor (Prof.) J. D. Awoniyi married his wife, Vertibelle Awoniyi, in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. They are blessed with two children, Andrew and Deborah.

**SHEPHERDESS VERTIBELLE AWONIYI:** Shepherdess Vertibelle Awoniyi a seasoned and experienced nurse served at the Adventist College of West Africa clinic from 1968 to 1973. As far back as 1964 there was the urgent need for a medical Centre for the students, members of staff and the Ilisan-Remo community. Shepherdess Veribelle, under the leadership of Chief J. S. K Osibodu was able to fulfill her dreams through her humanitarian services to the community then. The Clinic commenced when she was the College nurse and the Food Services Director as well as the Food Industry leader. Amidst this busy schedule, she still had time to attend to patients who throng the clinic. She trained other young women around her to take up duties and responsibilities. Her vision and advice to the then president of the college, Dr. Steward Berkeley
brought about the establishment of the Health Centre. Though her house was initially used as a clinic until 1971 and by September 1972 an action was taken by the College Board to have a clinic at Ilisan town which was to be housed at the Owoduni’s compound. Thus, on October 8, 1972 the clinic was officially opened. The clinic was a center for medical and humanitarian services for the students and staff of ASWA as well as the Ilisan-Remo and other neighboring communities.

Shepherdess Awoniyi also worked as the Principal of the Seventh-day Adventist Nursing School, Ile-Ife, Osun State for a long time before retiring from active service. She is a mother in Israel, very industrious, and hard-working. Though she is retired but not tired. She is still very vibrant and active. She supported the ministry and career of her husband in all ramifications. She is indeed a ‘Virtuous” woman.

**AFFILIATION:** Prof. Joel Awoniyi played an important role in making the affiliation of ASWA to Andrews University a reality. According to Alao,

One day, as Pastor J. D. Awoniyi, one of the Professors in the Seminary was delivering a lecture to a group of students, the issue of the recognition of ASWA certificate came up. It was while the discussion was going on that the Holy Spirit ministered an idea of affiliation to the discussants so as to raise the status of the school and the certificate being issued. Afterall it had been done before in the partnership between Newbold College in England and Colombia Union College in America. That of ASWA was not going to be any different, they concluded.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- The pioneering effort of the Awoniyis in the establishment of the SDA Clinic and Health Centre in the community of Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State is
well known amongst Seventh-day Adventists and the Ilisan Community at large.

- Joel Awoniyi was one of the students who helped to mould the blocks that were used to build the first college church on the campus.

- He was also involved in doing evangelism in the towns near the seminary, including Sagamu, Ikenne, Irolu, Akaka, and others. Scores of people were converted to Christianity as a result of his effort.

- His effort in Ilisan, where the college is located, was also significant, as he evangelized the people of the town and was responsible for the establishment of Ilisan Church No. I. He also helped to build it by doing bricklaying and by soliciting funds from the college and well meaning individuals.

- He worked fully at the service of the Nigerian Bible Society translating the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Yoruba from 1983 to 1985.

- He completed a project of the Bible Society of Nigeria in the translation of the New Testament from Koine Greek into Yoruba. His work and that of other scholars became IROHIN AYO, a new translation employing modern Yoruba orthography.

- He became at various times Vice-President for student affairs and acting President of the institution respectively in the absence of Dr. Roland McKenzie, who was substantive president between 1981 and 1983.

- He was the first staff member/scholar in the history of the institution to be promoted to the rank of professor when he was named Professor of New Testament in the early 1980s.
They established the Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School at Oke-Ode in 2002, and followed that by establishing the Seventh-day Adventist Nursery and Primary School No. I located at Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State in 2004. A second elementary school was established in the town in 2008. The schools are named after the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and they are jointly managed by the Church and the family of Prof. Awoniyi.

He was also a member of the West African Association of Theological Institutions (WAATI).

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS: In addition to several articles on various subjects, Prof. Awoniyi also published and translated many books. He translated the book: “Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing” to “Iwasu L’ori Oke Ibukun” into the Yoruba language in 2006. He also wrote a pamphlet titled ‘Which Day is the Lord’s Day? Which is the Sabbath Day? Which is the First? The Biblical Sabbath and the Attempted Change.’

HIS RETIREMENT DAYS: Joel Awoniyi retired from the services of the institution and of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1995. He went to Ile-Ife, the cradle of Yoruba civilization, where he supported his wife, who was the principal of the SDA School of Nursing in the 1990s. They both left for home at Oke Ode after her retirement. Joel Dada Awoniyi spends his time in retirement travelling, writing, publishing and playing with his grandchildren.

HIS LEGACY: The legacy of Joel Awoniyi cuts across evangelism, educational institutions, and pastoral ministry. There are testimonies of his accomplishments,
of his involvement in church planting, and of the help he provided for the erection of church buildings. Awoniyi not only provided for the education of his own children to the doctorate level, but also sponsored the education of numerous extended family members and other Christians. He broke down the prejudices that existed in his time, the barriers that denied blacks the opportunity of higher education. He persevered and received an education that helped him serve others as a better instrument in the hand of God.

CONCLUSION: The legacies and hard-work of the Awoniyi’s can only be summed up in the words of Solomon who through inspiration said: “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.” Proverbs 22:29. A person who diligently labors under the direction of the Spirit of God will possess power and influence, for all may see in him a spirit of untiring devotion to the cause of God in any department where duty calls him. Testimonies for the Church. Vol. 4, p. 458. The Awoniyi’s have proven to be people of honour, because they have left their mark on the sand of time never to be forgotten by many.

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