

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Eastern Theological College (ETC), as the premier theological and training institution of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India, plays a leading role in promoting theological education in the North Eastern region of India. By adopting a need-based programme, it caters to the ever growing and diversifying needs of the CBCNEI and other sister Churches of the region and beyond. Its history goes back to the early years of the century when the American Baptist missionary, the Rev. P. H. Moore, made a small and yet significant beginning by starting the Assam Valley Bible School at Nowgong (now Nagaon) in 1903 with just three students. It ran for six months a year – April to September. Later the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (now the International Ministries – IM – of the Baptist Churches in the United States of America) decided to shift the Bible School programme to Jorhat. Accordingly, on 12 January 1905, the Rev. S. A. D. Boggs pitched his tent by the side of the Tocklai river near the present College bridge. After a year's preparation the Bible Training Centre got started in April 1906 with 18 students – 5 from the Nowgong batch and 13 fresh ones. In this pioneering work Boggs was ably assisted by the Rev. Henry Goldsmith since the Nowgong days in 1904. The institution later grew into a group of schools called the Jorhat Christian Schools which included the Bible School (1906), a Middle English School, a Normal School and an Industrial School (all in 1907) and later a High School (1914).

Though the adverse circumstances of the period that followed made things difficult for some of the schools to prosper, others did well and were able to cater the leadership needs of the nascent churches. But soon it was evident to some perceptive leaders – missionaries and nationals – that the Bible School and the High School training would not be enough in the years to come if the churches in the region were to effectively meet the challenges of the fast changing times. In 1944, the idea of College level theological education was discussed seriously for the first time in a missionary conference. The proposal was accepted in principle, but it was not materialized till the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI) was formed in 1950. Therefore, in the fall of 1950 a historic step was taken when the Jorhat Bible College was established with the Rev. J. W. Cook as its first Principal. After the Second World War and the advent of Indian independence the High School faced a number of problems that resulted in its closure in 1955. When the High School and the English Medium Bible School were closed down in 1955 and 1957 respectively, the College (then renamed as the Assam Baptist Theological Seminary since 1953) inherited the land and the property. When ETC shifted to the high school campus, the building was transferred to the local Assamese church. At the same time and to suit the changing times, the name of the College was once again changed to the Eastern Theological College as it is known today.

The College struggled during its early years due to low enrollment, meagre facilities, and Cook's resignation from the mission in 1952 was a serious setback. Though classes continued under the Acting Principal of Rev. M. J. Chance, significant development took place under the leadership of Dr. J. Douglas Duffy who became the Principal in 1953. During his leadership the infrastructure of the College buildings were developed – the Men's hostels, the dining hall and the women's hostel and the enrolment of the students was also increased. Following the departure of Dr. Duffy in 1958 Rev. James M. Wood was appointed as Principal. Wood stabilized the finances of the college and prepared the way for important developments during the 1960s under the leadership of Rev. George W. Peck (1962-1963), Dr Frederick S. Downs (1963-1966) and Dr Jonathan H. Thumra (1966-1987), the first Indian Principal.

Since 1957 the name of the College remains unchanged but not its status. As stated at the beginning the growing needs of the churches necessitated the upgradation of the institution several times to various levels. As a College it started out with the Graduate of Theology (G. Th.) Diploma course in 1950. Soon it was followed by the Bachelor of Theology (B. Th.) Diploma course of its own together with the Certificate in Biblical Studies (CBS) course until 1963-64 academic year. From July 1964 the College was affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College (University), Serampore, West Bengal, for the Licentiate in Theology (L. Th.) Diploma course and from 1970-71 session it was upgraded to

the Bachelor of Theology (B. Th.) Degree course of the same University. Then up gradation was at the Bachelor of Divinity (B. D.) Degree level of the Senate of Serampore College (University) in July 1980. This was another milestone in the history of the College and a significant step to meet the changing needs of the churches for higher and better trained ministry. At the same time the B. Th. Degree course too continued to cater to the needs of smaller and younger churches up till 1995 when the last batch of B. Th. students passed out leaving the field free for the B. D. and other higher programmes. Fittingly the same year (1995) also witnessed the inauguration of Tribal Studies and Postgraduate Programme with a view to develop a contextual theology relevant for the North East India. The M. Th. Programme started during the year 1996-97 in the field of Christian Theology specifically relevant to the region. The M. Th. Degree course in the field of the History of Christianity was also added during the year 1997-98 and M. Th Degree course in the New Testament field was started during the year 2006-07. Now, we offer M. Th. course in Christian Theology, History of Christianity, Christian Ministry in both Counseling and Christian Education, and New Testament. From 2018 onward ETC became one of the doctoral study centres offering D. Th. in Christian Theology, and History of Christianity and New Testament. ETC is again one of the campuses for SATHRI students as they are being placed here and supervised by the faculty members of the College.

There is also a constant development in another front. Over the years a faculty development programme has been going on and today ETC have 19 teachers of which 14 are doctorate degree holders. Three teachers are under doctoral study programme who are expected to complete soon.

The qualitative growth of the College described above has been constantly matched by a quantitative growth as well. The table below shows the numerical growth of the student population who year after year passed out from the College, and the yearly average beginning from the 1950s through the 2000s.

1. 1950s	.....	6
2. 1960s	.....	9
3. 1970s	.....	20
4. 1980s	.....	34
5. 1990s	.....	70
6. 2000s	.....	90

Beginning from the low figure of 5 students passing out successfully in 1953, it has gone up to 103 in 2023. Altogether over two thousand successful candidates of various diploma and degree levels have gone out to the field and are now serving in the churches in various capacities including many key positions in the CBCNEI and other sister church organizations in the region, nationals and in international levels.

The Eastern Theological College has celebrated 100 years of its existence on the 13th February 2005 with the theme: **Advancing With Christ** and coincidentally hosted the Convocation of the Senate of Serampore College on the 12th February 2005. We are successfully running the College.