

Report on Meeting of Ethiopia Mission Network

May 20-22, 2005 – Stony Point Conference Center, New York

The second meeting of the Ethiopia Mission Network was held at the Stony Point Conference Center in New York on May 20-22, 2005. The leadership team, who call themselves the “Balinjera,” - an Amharic word meaning “a passionate friend who shares bread, welcomed 41 people from a wide variety of professions. In attendance were retired and active missionaries, PCUSA and presbytery staff, physicians, pastors, engineers, musicians, skilled builders, teachers and nurses.

Below is a brief summary of the work of the network prior to the meeting and during the meeting.

Ethiopia Mission Network’s First Two Projects

The Balinjera met throughout the year by conference calls during which the development of the new network was planned. Jon Chapman, Area Coordinator for Southern and East Africa, PCUSA, shared that there were several immediate projects at the Bethel Synods office needing support and encouragement. The team devoted some work toward developing support for the replacement of the wall around the Bethel Synods Coordination office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Funding was secured for this one-time need from among the network members and those who have traveled to Addis frequently over the years. Funds were sent in March of 2005 and work has begun on the replacement of the wall.

PCUSA funding for the support of the Bethel Synods Coordination Office (BSCO) was set to end in 2004. The Balinjera was asked to look into the possibility of gathering support for the continuation of operations of this office. Research from several different sources enabled the creation of a document describing the work of the BSCO staff and the functions of the BSCO compound. This document became the funding base for developing support for the ongoing operation of the BSCO facility. Contributions to its work have been sent from several sources, but the total support for the office is not yet secured.

2005 Meeting of the Ethiopia Mission Network – Stony Point, NY

Friday Evening

The event opened after dinner Friday evening with a plenary gathering. The evening’s events included a period for introductions during which attendees shared where they were from and their connections to Ethiopia. This was a wonderful time in which the group learned about each other and learned about the breadth of mission experience within the group. Jon Chapman presented a video of Will Brown, Associate Director for Ecumenical Partnerships, which focused on the changing face of mission within the PCUSA. One of the points Will made was that today’s mission focus of the PCUSA is that of “missions broker”, connecting churches and congregations with those missionaries and mission projects needing support.

There was also a time for each person to select two areas of interest for the small group sessions being held on Saturday. The list was narrowed to 10 topics, as those in attendance indicated areas of common interest. This was followed by a time for fellowship as the evening came to a close.

Saturday Morning

Saturday's morning schedule included addresses by Dr. Urgessa Biru, President of Light of Hope Outreach Ministry, and by Janet Guyer, HIV/AIDS Consultant for Southern Africa. Dr. Biru gave us a brief history of mission development in Ethiopia which led to the formation of his ministry of outreach within the Arssi-Oromo region of Ethiopia. His presentation then focused on the progress of his work and challenged the group to encourage and support this mission.

Janet Guyer presented an update on the progress of the PCUSA's AIDS ministry in Ethiopia. She discussed the problems of orphans of AIDS and how the communities and churches are working to raise awareness of AIDS prevention. Janet also offered 4 ways in which we could support our Ethiopian partners as they address the AIDS problem:

1. Ask questions and listen to what they are doing. Get to know how they are addressing the problem.
2. Talk about the options for addressing the problem together with our partners. Use the church's ministry of "hospitality" as a way to open discussion in the communities
3. Encourage an Ethiopian solution. Do not focus just on financial support. Help partners to seek ways to use their funding to develop sustainable solutions
4. Encourage our new AIDS Consultant for Ethiopia, Dorothy Hanson, with prayer. Always keep her informed on our activities and work there.

The first of the day's two small group sessions was held just before lunch, with discussions continuing over lunch. Small group topics were Micro enterprise, SWBS Partnership, HIV/AIDS and Health Concerns, Advocacy/Women's Issues, and Education.

Saturday Afternoon and Evening

The afternoon's schedule offered members of the network an opportunity to make presentations about their work to the whole group. Those making formal presentations were Shenandoah Presbytery with an overview of their partnership projects, Susquehanna Valley Presbytery with a presentation on their Rural Education project, and Fremont Presbyterian church on their recent trip to install water projects for the Shekicho. Jane Kurtz informally discussed the need for books in Ethiopia and explained the Ethiopia Books for Children and Education Foundation. Gemechis Desta Buba, representing a Lutheran synod in Atlanta, expressed his intent to build a similar ELCA network and integrate it with the PCUSA network.

These presentations were followed by plenary speaker Dan Stevens, executive director of Lifewater, Inc., on their work with water projects. Discussion followed about Lifewater's concepts and about the needs for water assistance in Ethiopia. The afternoon small groups met around another set of interests and enjoyed the chance to be at picnic tables outside in the warm sun. Afternoon topics were the Arssi Oromo work, Congregational Partnerships, Water Projects, Finding Funding, and Mission Trips. Following dinner, Caroline Kurtz led a presentation and interesting discussion on ministries to Unreached People Groups in Ethiopia as supported by the PCUSA's Frontier Mission Program.

Sunday Morning

Harold Kurtz led the group in an "Illiterate Worship" service, Ethiopian style. There were no programs or bulletins or Bibles, song books or sermon notes. Harold encouraged the group to draw on the Spirit and their memories as scripture and songs were drawn from their hearts. The sermon was also delivered without Bible or script by Dr Urgessa Biru. He shared his moving

testimony about how he chose to become a Christian, was separated from and later reconciled with his family, and about the activity of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Those gathered shared the Lord's Supper, again Ethiopian style using injera and tomato juice as the fruit of the vine and serving each other saying "Remember Jesus. You are not forgotten." With the singing of "We Are One in the Spirit", the worship and conference came to a close, having gathered around the table and being sent out to serve in our communities.

Other Topics of Interest Discussed During the Meeting

- The Report on the Ethiopian Elections sent to us from Ato Solomon Nega
- The Report on the work and concerns of the Bethel Synods from Ato Solomon Nega
- The Report from the Missionaries serving the PCUSA in Ethiopia sent to us by Rachel Weller on behalf of the those in Ethiopia
- Direction and vision for the network
- A larger global view about the work & mission of the church within Ethiopia
- Updated reports on the added costs for construction of the BSCO compound wall
- A welcome to church and presbytery groups new to the network who are seeking to develop partner relations in Ethiopia
- A challenge to look outside of reached people groups to those thousands of people who have not yet heard about Jesus
- Many, many stories told by those retired missionaries about their work and about the great pioneering efforts that have brought Christianity to Ethiopia

On behalf of the Balinjera, we would like to thank everyone who attended this 2005 meeting of the Ethiopia Mission Network. Your presence and open sharing about your work and vision have presented new vistas and challenges for us all. You have also enhanced our deep appreciation for the most excellent work already done in the name of Jesus throughout Ethiopia.

It is our hope that the 2006 network meeting will be in the western portion of the US and that in the meantime, dialogues and friendships begun at Stony Point will continue throughout the year until we meet again.