

**Thoughts on Communication Challenges** – Dorothy Hanson – PCUSA  
mission co-worker – April 2007 Ethiopia Mission Network Conference

The network's interest in communications provides a platform for me air a new "aha" gained from conversations with Harold Kurtz in the past and Caroline Kurtz who is here right now.

I am constantly aware that my communication and thought process is very different from my Ethiopian colleagues. The young Dr. Habtamu with whom I work very closely is an MD educated in this country with excellent English skills, both written and spoken. Most of our communication is direct and received as sent. Dereje, my office mate, a nurse and health educator, is next on the scale. He sometimes asks me to define a word that he reads or hears. Recently he wanted to know what is mutual masturbation - as the AIDS Consultant, I should have told him but I shrugged instead!

One day Dereje and I spent nearly the entire day talking about healing - those who are HIV+ who attend healing services but are not healed, how depressed they become. He described his own healing experience a few years ago, from pericarditis (inflammation of the lining of the heart - serious). Finally he said, "Healing is God's mystery". Both of these team mates are God's blessing to me, teaching me about the culture here, healing, deliverance from demonic influence, etc. etc. But . . . they are literate, schooled in English, use it for daily work, etc.

Then there are those in our Synods who are literate, schooled in English and can communicate with us. They too are examples of Ethiopians who have come to our way of communicating. They support literacy training, so people can read the Bible. I don't believe that they support itinerate evangelists who can pray, but cannot read the Bible. But Ethiopia is a land where literacy is still below 50% - worse for women, coming up for the children.

That means that the rest of the wise, beautiful Ethiopian people are oral learners but we are ignoring their learning and communication style. My most recent teaching experiences (HIV Prevention in two places and Scripture-Based Counseling for pre and post testing (HIV)), I prayed earnestly before each session - allowing God to lead the session, not Dorothy. As an experienced teacher, control of the program has always been important to me. In these situations control was with God. I found that most of my teaching was stories rather than the usual lecture, outline of content based on goals and objectives, etc. These stories brought my audience to a point of understanding that met goals and objectives. Was I finally learning how to communicate with Oral Learners?

Now Caroline has brought a guest from Kenya and there are others waiting to teach us how to tell stories (they are in South West Bethel Synod right now, returning Friday). Making Disciples of Oral Learners, Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 54, from Lausanne committee for World Evangelization and its national committees around the world ([info@lausanne.org](mailto:info@lausanne.org) or [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org)) - I am attempting to read some 50+ pages and I have a lot to learn!!!!