

Report on the Ethiopia Network Conference

Western Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C.

April 24-26, 2008

Submitted by Giny Roundy, convener

First of all, the conference was wonderful! There was some kind of synergy that happened that made it much better as a whole than the planning committee had envisioned. Partly it was due to the presence of several Ethiopian ex-pats, most of whom were educated at BESS. We had Ethiopians with us in Minneapolis and LA, but they were mostly just observers, while these were participants.

Thursday

Harold Kurtz started us off with a great history of his own ministry and how his time at the School of World Mission impacted the strategy of the Presbyterian mission there and encouraged indigenous churches. He talked about what he called "the circumcision party" – those who would impose their culture on the people they are evangelizing.

We also learned how God can use bad things to advance the kingdom and how, when the DIRG threw out the missionaries and burned the hymnbooks, it helped the church become indigenous and grow.

Petros Tsanu, representing the Bethel Synods, had time to respond. He talked about the time under the DIRG, when lay people baptized their own children and served Holy Communion after dark and worshipped in their homes. Now the church serves as a "voice of the voiceless" – the poor, AIDS orphans and victims of injustice, telling them there is hope in God.

Caroline Kurtz did a presentation on short-term mission, which has grown by a factor of 20 in the past 25 years. She pointed out that short-term used to mean 2-3 years. Now about 54% of short-termers go from 1-2 weeks and \$1.6 billion is spent on their travel costs alone. Ralph Winter calls this the reamateurization of missions.

She stressed that those who go must understand cultural issues like time and individualism. They must learn about poverty, development vs. aid, etc. She talked about the need for our people to sit and listen and not "do" for the people what they can probably do for themselves. Doing things with the people is fine.

She suggested the class – How to do Short Term Missions Without Doing Long Term Harm. You can find it at Chalmers.org. She also recommended a book entitled "Faith in Action", available from Louisville.

Friday

Petros Tsanu gave us an update on BSCO. BSCO runs the upper and lower guesthouses and the "white house" across the compound. They have eight workers and are now hiring another accountant. They also run the girls' school (K-5th grade), with 85 workers (many

part-time). The 2008 budgets run approximately \$47,000 for the BSCO office, \$246,000 for the school, and \$24,000 for the guesthouses.

BSCO plans to build another guesthouse for synod leaders who need space to work when they are in Addis for meetings (about \$27,000). Then they have an impressive plan to build a large new multi-storied guesthouse that would have shops on the ground floor. They think the cost will be about \$900,000. They are looking at providing meals and other guest services.

Rachel Weller offered to help getting info for people. She suggested that we copy Michael Weller (both by email and hard copy) when we send gifts to or through BSCO.

Doug Welch, in charge of the Africa Office, responded and added some things. We should copy Michael Weller and EECMY on planned visits. He mentioned that in November there will be a conference for all Africa people on water issues. It will be in Sacramento. January 17-18, 2009 will be a celebration of 50 years of mutual mission. It will precede the General Assembly, which will be Jan 20-25. We are invited.

Advocacy Panel

That afternoon we heard from three people who spend a lot of time advocating for the poor and disenfranchised. We heard from Bobby MacDonald of the Sudan Advocacy Group – a part of the Sudan Mission Network, and representatives of International Justice Mission and Bread for the World. Bobby encouraged and challenged us to be persistent.

Larry Martin from International Justice Mission told us that they had spent quite a while talking with people in Ethiopia and had decided to do a 7-month trial run there. They expect to be doing mostly abuse of women cases – including not just beatings, but kidnappings, and female circumcision. IJM really tries hard to see the stigma removed from the victim and placed firmly on the perpetrator. They help the community celebrate justice.

Erin Tunny, an advocate with Bread for the World, shared some facts about aid to Ethiopia. Seventy percent of US aid to Ethiopia is for HIV/AIDS. And although over 80% of Ethiopians are farmers, the US gives only 1/100 as much money toward helping them produce more efficiently as they do to simple food aid. She also said that aiding the poor is not the only criteria for the aid we give and that it is all mixed up with helping our own farmers, shipping companies, etc. There are 12 departments and 25 agencies working in the area of foreign aid in the US government.

After these three presented a thumbnail sketch of their ministries, the Ethiopians present were invited to respond. They agreed that the problem was not that they could not grow enough food, but that they have administrative problems. People in Ethiopia were getting rich at the expense of the poor. And aid disappears without helping the poor. Over a dozen people signed up to become part of an Ethiopia Advocacy Group.

After a delightful Ethiopian dinner, we settled in to hear Dr. Jerman Disasa tell about his Ethiopian roots. He is now an adjunct professor of Education at a Presbyterian College in South Carolina. He was educated at BESS and told us how poor he was – coming to BESS as a little fellow with only a shirt. He has set up a program somewhat like BESS in a poor area of South Carolina and their graduates are just now heading off to college.

Saturday

Gail Bingham shared on behalf of Joy Raatz and Dorothy Hanson about AIDS and other health issues in Ethiopia. The life expectancy in Ethiopia is 41 and there is 1 doctor for every 39,000 people. One sixth of the children die before turning 5 and over half of those who live to five are stunted by malnutrition. Throughout Ethiopia only 60% have access to protected water within two miles of their homes.

She talked about the health ministries in the different Synods. Two million people were helped by the DASSC ministries in the Bethel Synods. She talked about the need for medical training. Rachel Weller also talked about the follow-up training that she is giving to those with only a certificate. She invited us to send medical personnel to teach at these follow-up sessions. Someone mentioned the free wheelchair mission and asked if we, as a network, could do that with the whole EECMY.

After Gail's talk we had three breakout sessions: one on AIDS and other health issues, one with Bruce and Lora Whearty (new educational missionaries to Ethiopia), and one on how the network could function better.

We also had worship each day and communion at the close of the conference with an American and an Ethiopian woman elder serving.

Our next conference will be April 23-25, 2009 in Sacramento, California.