

**Report on the Ethiopia Network Conference
Fremont Presbyterian Church, Sacramento, California
April 23-25, 2009
Submitted by Giny Roundy**

First of all, the conference was wonderful! Again there was a oneness that was beautiful between the Americans and Ethiopians present. In view of two cancellations of plenary speakers during the last week, it was even more amazing.

Thursday

Harold Kurtz talked with us from his own missions experience. He talked about the Judaizers of the New Testament (what he called "the circumcision party") – those who would impose their culture on the people they are evangelizing. He told us again that we talk too soon, too much and too loud.

Harold taught out of Acts 10 – the story of Cornelius. He called the Spirit coming upon these Gentiles, the Gentile Pentecost. He also taught from Romans 1:18-20 – that God has revealed himself to all peoples. Before the missionary arrives, God has been there revealing himself within their culture. And God wants to be the fulfillment of the dreams of their culture.

He lauded St. Patrick as a missionary who had established an indigenous church and bemoaned the fact that often the missionary has been the greatest hindrance to the indigenous church.

Caroline Kurtz did a presentation on Orality. She talked about oral learning and the effectiveness of storytelling. She reminded us that storytelling is more than simply recording the words of Scripture on tape. It is telling the story in a way that will engage the audience. She told us a short story and then had us divide up into pairs to tell it to each other in order to get a small taste of the orality worships that have been happening in Ethiopia.

Caroline and Harold Kurtz and Telili Fikru told and showed us what happens when a people worships in an indigenous way. They told about the Arssi Oromo people, the ministry among them, and what happened when Harold came and talked with them about indigenous worship. Telili wrote a song (which she sang for us) and the Arssi people began to worship as they never had before. One element was that they realized that God loved them as Arssi people and they became proud of their culture. The Ethiopians present also shared about the benefits of indigenous worship.

Friday

Yonas Yigezu told about the 12 years of schism in Addis over the issue of worship language (Oromo or Amharic) and the healing that happened last year and the repentance and footwashing.

He also talked about how the bible was translated into Oromo very early and about the meaning of the Gospel to the Oromo people. He also pointed out cultural differences between clans – one clan sits while singing to show that they are not equal to God. They later dance to please God.

Yonas outlined their ideas for a missionary sending part of EECMY. Their target date to send their first missionaries is 2010. EECMY has been the recipient of donations in the past. But as they have freely received, now they will freely give. They are not rich, but Yonas says, "It is more important to be faithful and willing than capable." They are hoping to arrange for three-way missions with some veteran sending groups. Possible fields include China, India, Central African Republic, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Pakistan, Eritrea. And Ukraine. They also plan to send tentmakers to Arab countries.

Global Recordings International sent two representatives, who told us about their ministry of preparing and maintaining a store of recorded material to be used for evangelism among hundreds of people groups. They also produce sturdy cassette and MP3 players that work on batteries, AC or DC or solar or by handcrank.

In the afternoon, we had two times of breakout sessions (on outreach to Muslims, Partnership, Solar Cooking, When someone comes with a need, Ethiopian/American cross-cultural issues, and English for Ethiopia). We then got back together and shared some of what we had learned. After a delightful Ethiopian dinner, we settled in to hear Seifu Ibssa tell about his Ethiopian roots and his introduction to America..

Saturday

Harold Kurtz shared again about his journey in missions. Part of the topic was "What I would do, if I had it all to do over". But he shared about how God had used what he had done even though he made missiological mistakes. And Yonas said later that, "Despite missionary mistakes, God was revealed."

Yonas Yigezu and Michael Weller (and Harold) shared with us some of the challenges faced by the church in Ethiopia. Yonas shared that the strong missional Gospel is now in competition with a "prosperity Gospel". Michael shared about political challenges, the need for more long-term missionaries, and the economic challenges (60% inflation is more like 200% inflation in the marketplace).

We also had worship and prayer each day and a wonderful service of worship and communion at the close of the conference with an Michael Weller, Yonas Yigezu, and John and Anne Wheeler-Waddel participating.

We are hoping that our next conference will be in Washington Presbytery, south of Pittsburgh April 22-24, 2010.