

Report on the 2010 Ethiopia Mission Network Conference

April 22-24, 2010 - Faith Presbyterian Church, Washington, PA
Prepared by Giny Roundy, convener, Ethiopia Mission Network

“Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) World Mission related “Mission Networks” bring together Presbyterians from around the United States who share a common international mission focus. Each Mission Network centers around a specific country, people group or program area of ministry. Organized by PCUSA World Mission, these networks are composed of Presbyterians who represent international mission partnerships established through their synods, presbyteries, congregations, and other PCUSA entities. Mission Networks facilitate building and maintaining healthy partnerships, and provide a place for representatives of various PCUSA partnerships to share information and coordinate their efforts.” *PCUSA World Mission Statement on Mission Networks*

The Ethiopia Mission Network is one of over 35 PCUSA World Mission “Mission Networks.” It was formed in 2004 with representatives from three PCUSA presbyteries who share partnership agreements with synods within the Ethiopia Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Also participating were representatives from congregations and from other PCUSA entities with a mission and ministry focus in Ethiopia.

The Seventh Annual Ethiopia Mission Network Conference was held on April 22-24, 2010, at Faith Presbyterian Church located in Washington, PA.

Arssi Oromo People Group Gathering

Prior to the opening of the Network Conference, 11 people who are working with the Arssi Oromo people group met to discuss blessings and issues related to the work of Light of Hope Ministry.

Pre-Conference Symposium

On Wednesday, April 21, 2010, Rusty Salminen (Washington Presbytery) arranged for a more general time of learning about missions to benefit both Washington Presbytery and others who wished to attend. The Rev. Jen Haddox, Associate Director, World Mission Initiative, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, took the group through the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation showing God’s heart for all the world and then talked about the status of world Christianity – the majority church in the southern hemisphere.

The Rev. Debbie Braaksma, Africa Area Coordinator, PCUSA World Mission, spoke about partnership relationships. She indicated they must be done prayerfully, wisely, sensitively, and humbly. She also pointed out that Ethiopia is near the bottom of the index of suffering list (171 out of 180). Fifty-one percent of the children are malnourished. There are 20 unreached people groups within Ethiopia and the country is 30-40% Muslim. She also talked about the new strategy for work in Africa – Community Health and Development.

Ethiopia Mission Network Conference

The conference began with the Rev. Debbie Braaksma, who oversees the PCUSA work in Africa. She told about her work with “Reconcile” in Sudan for the past five years and told us that working as partners slows you down and requires patience, but is so rewarding. We also worked from an article called The Values American Live By, by L.

Robert Kohls. We discussed in small groups some American Values and whether we thought they were values that were shared by our Ethiopian partners.

Glenn Schwartz, Executive Director, World Mission Associates, made his presentation on "When Charity Destroys Dignity." Schwartz was concerned with unhealthy dependency. He assured that poor people have resources and that, out of their extreme poverty, they can give as did the Corinthians. He provided numerous examples of poor people and churches who found they could support their own needs. He said that you foster an unhealthy dependency any time you do for people what they could do for themselves. But he also said that an unhealthy dependency is not a terminal illness and can be corrected.

After lunch, the Rev. Jen Haddox spoke on setting short term mission standards. She pointed out that short term mission trips are an inexpensive, effective way to educate. But that short term mission trips are an expensive and ineffective way to do mission (evangelize the world). She stressed appropriate and lengthy orientation and significant debriefing. Later all three speakers answered questions.

After a wonderful Ethiopian dinner, we heard from the Rev. Dr. Gemechis Desta Buba, who oversees African congregations in the ELCA. We enjoyed the stories of his youth and his first church in America, but then he pointed out the difference between the growth of the EECMY and the shrinkage of the PCUSA. He challenged us to go back home and get down on our knees and do what we can to see growth happen here, too.

On Friday, we began with Rev. Wakseyoum Idosa, President of the EECMY and special invited guest of the Network. He shared with us about the amazing growth of the denomination (20,000 to 5.3 million in 50 years), the new International Mission Society, and the ongoing reconciliation process within the EECMY.

Dr. Urgessa Biru, Executive Director, Light of Hope Ministry, was to then make a presentation on "Religion and Culture" but was unable to be with us because of ash from the Icelandic volcano. Several members of the network stepped up to fill Dr. Urgessa's spot on the agenda. Giny Roundy, Caroline Kurtz, Associate Director, Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, and Telile Firkru, Light of Hope Ministry, presented a plenary on "Religion and Culture." They based their presentation on Acts 11. First Caroline related the passage as a story, as would people in an oral culture. Then Giny explained how Gwen Haspels, PCUSA mission co-worker with the Suri, applied this lesson to the Suri people, who feel very "looked down upon," like the Gentiles did within Judea. It was surprising to the Jews and the Gentiles that God would also save them. Then Caroline shared a portion of a film of the Arssi Oromo singing and praying in their own culture and context. Now the Arssi Oromo Christians are learning that they can both sing and pray like their people have traditionally done.

On Friday afternoon those attending the conference broke into concurrent sessions on health and community development issues, short-term missions, and conversations with Qes Wakseyoum and with the Rev. Michael Weller, PCUSA Regional Liaison to the Horn of Africa.

After dinner many people shared about what their Ethiopian partners had taught them: taking time for people, nothing's simple in Ethiopia, patience, be happy with simple

things. Give God all of your life and time. The day and evening concluded with a concert of prayer for Ethiopia, our partners and ourselves.

On Saturday, we heard the personal reflections of Jo Ann Griffith, PCUSA mission co-worker and teacher at BESS in Dembi Dollo, and from the Rev. Malcolm Vandevort, long-time mission co-worker in Ethiopia. Jo Ann said that because she was single she felt free to stay during the DERGE time. She enjoyed the emphasis on prayer and was blessed never to serve on a committee. Mal talked about being trained for one thing and then being assigned to do another. His advice to young people was to be very serious about asking God what he wants for you and don't be too quick to determine how God has gifted you and then go ahead and follow that without asking God.

On Saturday morning we received the report from the Bethel Synods Coordination Office presented by the Rev. Michael Weller who brought us up to date on a variety of issues and concerns within the Bethel synods and the EECMY.

Rev. Wakseyoum also answered questions about the old "Evangelical Church Bethel" movement that is drawing some congregations away from EECMY in the South West Bethel Synod and the Ilubabor Bethel Synod mostly.

The conference then closed with an inspiring worship and communion led by Rev. Michael and Rev. Wakseyoum, sending us out carrying the gift of God's light into the world.