

Report on the 2012 Ethiopia Mission Network Meeting

April 26-28 at 1st Presbyterian Church, Spokane, WA

Prepared by Giny Roundy, Convener, Ethiopia Mission Network

Miriam Adeney, Professor at Seattle Pacific University, began our conference with a new word – eucatastrophe! It means when good comes out of bad situations and she gave as an example how the church in Ethiopia grew and matured even during times of persecution. She also talked about how we can help other people – maturing believers, serving the needy (through charity, sustainable development, and advocacy) and by witnessing to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Debbie Braaksma, coordinator for Africa for the PC(USA), gave us some background in pastoralism. Although 85% of Ethiopians farm, 40% of the land is devoted to pastoralism. Grazing is a good use of poor land and is environmentally friendly. Pastoralists share resources, are hospitable and democratic, and often have rich cultures (from isolation). On the negative side, they compete for cattle (steal), marginalize women, are vulnerable to climate change, have no schooling for children, and tend to be resistant to the Gospel. So we need a contextualized approach, helping them to adapt and using methods like CHE. She was asked about villagization and “landgrabbing.”

As part of Debbie’s talk, we heard from Ryan Smith, who is in the PC(USA) office at the UN on the subject of “landgrabbing”. He told us that the UN will not go in and make changes in a sovereign state.

After lunch, we again heard from Miriam Adeney, this time about “When Hurting Helps”. She encouraged us, before entering a new culture, to respect it enough to learn about its economic patterns, social network, worldview, and communication. She suggested that we might teach adults to read first, so they can teach their children. She applied all of these aspects of culture to health ministries (like what if they think that Allah brings disease, not germs, so why worry about clean water?) At the end, she talked about the problem of overpopulation – that life-prolonging health care came before the means to provide for more people.

After dinner we had our usual time of sharing what our members are doing and closed our day with prayer for Ethiopia.

After worship on Friday, Frank Dimmock, PC(USA)’s Africa Health Liaison, shared about vulnerable children. There are many kinds of vulnerable children: orphans, abused children, those affected by conflict, unregistered children, trafficked children, etc. There are many ways to address their needs, but a couple are: address the underlying poverty, teach Christian parenting in the Bible Schools, encourage the use of iodized salt, and reinforce the importance of children by including them in worship.

Mike Stemm of New Covenant Foundation, shared about how he uses Community Health Evangelism (CHE) in other parts of Ethiopia. He described the steps of screening of villages who request CHE, finding a “champion”, training the team, having the team

make visits with neighbors, seeing a transformation of the community and then spreading the vision on to new villages.

Gezahegn Bahiru, DAASC director, shared about how the South West Bethel Synod began and has changed. He described the Synod's health ministry (two nuclear health centers) and how it was difficult to keep up with the government demands. He showed the amount needed to support the health center and asked, "Should I turn it over to the government?" Caroline Kurtz shared about how the health center served those who were not welcomed with love at the larger hospital in town.

After lunch, Tafesse Kidane told us about the beginnings of revival in the Orthodox Church and the need for Bibles, which many cannot afford. He is working on setting up a printing operation to print bibles in Amharic.

Then we had two breakout sessions:

- STM Trip Organization (Randy Brothers)
- Ethiopia 101 (Giny Roundy/Teferi),
- Health challenges within the Bethel Synods (Frank Dimmock)

And

- Saving the Forest (Rusty Salminen /Art Pabst)
- Time with Miriam Adeney
- Understanding Islam in Ethiopia (Jim Milley)

Then we got Debbie's report on the work in Ethiopia. After listing our core values (dignity, empowerment, holistic ministry, partnership, and relevance to God's world), she shared the mission priorities of the PC(USA): addressing the root causes of poverty, proclaiming the Gospel, and bringing about reconciliation. The PC(USA) then, is bringing a message of hope and CHE and support for Muslim work, and leadership training.

After a delicious Ethiopian dinner, Owar Ojha shared about his early life in Ethiopia. His mother told him that he had to stay in school because there was no dowry money left to get him a wife. His uncle planted the seed of the Gospel, but after his mother's death, he became mad at God. God spoke to him a few months later and he now does teleconferencing with other Anuaks, teaching them Latin characters, so they will be able to read the Anuak Bible, which will soon be available in Latin characters.

Saturday morning, Jim Milley, a pastor at La Canada Presbyterian Church, spoke to us on ministering to university students. He and his wife had worked in Ethiopia for five years in student ministry. Now the government is building branches of the national university in many of our towns, which brings in more educated people from different people groups. Jim gave us a list of questions that we can ask our synod partners about how they are reaching out and what might be their struggles.

Then Qes Teferi, Director of the Bethel Synods Coordination Office, brought us up to date on the EECMY, the Bethel Synods and the way BSCO helps us link to them. He told us that the EECMY is the second largest Lutheran denomination in the world. The Bethel Synods alone have 1.14 million members. He reported that the International Mission Society is sending out fulltime missionaries (in Muslim countries), tentmakers, nanes (Ethiopians working abroad) and is organizing the diaspora.

Finally we were grateful to the church for providing us with a wonderful worship service with their pastor, John Sowers, bringing the message. We also want to give our thanks to Mary Beth Baker and the many people of 1st Church, who served us in so many ways.