

# **ETHIOPIA**

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(Scanned from the original report. Errors are the responsibility of Mary Rhodes.)

The visit to Ethiopia was a tremendous experience for me and I learned a lot, but I struggle a bit as to how best relate this information to others. I will try to report on those things that I feel the Presbytery would be interested in and include some highlights of my activities while in Western Wollega Bethel Synod.

## **Sunday Church Services**

I spoke at two Sunday morning church services; Qage and Dembi Dolo

Dembi Dolo - About 1100 persons attended. The church was packed and people standing. Dugassa Beyene translated and seemed to do a great job. Very nice, new church.

Qage - About 400 attended and people standing. I was told that attendance was down because four weddings were scheduled for that afternoon and since people walk they could make only one trip for the day. Qes Wereti was the translator and also served as Pastor.

At both church services there were choirs. The musical instrument was a drum. Near the end of these services the congregation was asked for prayers and thanksgiving. At both churches people came forward (some crawling) for the special prayers or thanks. The services were 2 to 2 1/2 hours long.

## **Church Buildings**

During the last four or five years each Presbytery has experienced rapid growth in membership. They have added 100 new congregations in this time frame. Congregations are defined as having churches or meeting places. Many churches are in need of repair and/or need to be enlarged. At least a third have thatch roofs. The Synod would like to replace thatch with corrugated metal. New churches need to be built to serve the growing membership and to reduce the walking distance for the members. During every Presbytery visit we visited the Presbytery offices. Some were just under construction and they all lacked any kind of office equipment including tables and chairs.

Churches are used for Synod-wide literacy programs but there are no blackboards, pencils or paper.

Some land around many churches is farmed by members of the church and the

proceeds from the sale of the products are used for church expenses.

It is a 7 to 12 twelve hour walk between the most distant churches in a presbytery.

The Synod officers said communications with the Presbyteries are most difficult. They are the only Synod without a radio communications system.

### **Synod Outreach - a part of their holistic ministry**

The Synod seems to have some very effective outreach programs in which all Presbyteries participate. They seemed very modest when speaking about them but the effectiveness of these programs is reflected, I think, in a growing and active church membership.

### **Literacy**

Literacy programs are important for them and apparently are quite effective. One Presbytery, Dale Sadi, has 500 people in the program. There are no "qualified" teachers. All are volunteers. If they had the money, they would hire a teacher. The program attracts their own following as well as people from the Eastern Orthodox faith and they said even Muslims enter their church to participate in the literacy program. And, no blackboards or chalk.

### **Health**

Counseling for health is another program although I do not have a lot of details. They do have an individual working out of the Synod that conducts programs on **HIV** and **AIDS**. He said 350,000 people have AIDS and 1.7 million are carriers (I assume this is all of Ethiopia). He rode with us one day.

A new **health clinic** has been built in the Dale Wabera Presbytery - way out in the middle of some fields It consisted of 3 buildings; one building with examining rooms and offices, a second building with delivery rooms and a third building under construction to be used as a residence for staff. They have people that want to work there but the government will not release them from their present job in a government clinic. Thus, the Synod cannot have the clinic government certified. Adjacent to the clinic they are using overflow water from the spring to irrigate and grow off-season vegetables. There are other health services but I do not have information on them.

### **Infrastructure**

Building **bridges** is important because of the nature of the landscape and one rainy season with a lot of rain. I saw one bridge recently completed using cinder block. It formerly had been a pole bridge and they said 10 to 20 people per year had been killed there trying to cross the stream.

**Spring protection** seems to be a major effort. Concrete pads are constructed above

springs or duo wells and a hand pump installed. This helps protect the water quality and makes the job of getting water easier.

**Veterinary Services** are provided when possible. I saw several herds of native cattle being inoculated when we were out in the "boonies".

**Education** for children was mentioned in several contexts and I don't have an understanding of what is being done by the Synod except what is going on in Dembi Dolo. During Presbytery visits it was often mentioned that the Communists had burned down the schools (as well as a lot of the churches). Some schools have been rebuilt but I think by the government. One Presbytery, Aleku, said they had a school but it had been destroyed by the Communist and has not been replaced.

**Hostels or orphanages** There are two operated by the Synod and one is on the compound in Dembi Dolo.

**Integrated Rural Development** is part of their overall program but the major effort is in the Dale Wabera Presbytery. Here the major thrust is by the Germans and the "Bread for the World Program". The Ethiopian in charge, Mitiku Hunde, is a well educated and bright person. I was very impressed with him.

Activities include:

- bridge construction
- provide oxen credit
- provide sheep credit
- installation of grinding mills
- veterinary services
- agricultural demonstrations
- reforestation programs
- soil and water conservation
- termite control
- spring protection
- construction of health clinic
- nursery to provide tree seedlings

There are 14 tree species that provide a variety of uses (firewood N-fixers, construction, use on contours for soil conservation, leaves for animal forage, living fence posts, etc.) plus four forage species.

**A special project** has been initiated with a tribe, Majengir, 32 km from Dembi Dolo. This tribe has had no contact with outsiders. They have their own language, are nomadic hunters and use witch doctors and local medicinal plants for health. They are

losing hunting grounds and animal life is not as abundant as previously. The Presbytery in Dembi Dolo has started working with them by teaching them how to grow corn, bringing several of their children to the elementary school on the compound and would like to build a church in that area. Only two people from the Presbytery can speak their language.

**Bible translation** continues to be part of the work of the Synod. The Bible is being translated into languages such as Anuah. Also, I was told that the goal is to have all Bibles in Latin letters rather than their unique script.

**Gender issues** are also being addressed. It seems women make up over 50% of the membership in most congregations but they suffer under a long tradition of low status and being confined to household chores. The Synod said they are training to change this. We met several women church Elders. A young woman in Dembi Dolo teaches three days a week at the Bible Institute and preaches days a week at the prison. The Synod said they need to train and hire local teachers.

The Bible School has a sewing machine and a woman teaches other women how to sew but there are no sewing machines in the countryside. The Presbytery in Dembi Dolo said they want to teach women how to embroider and sew but need money to buy materials. Women do have their own association and go to different congregations but they must walk. There is no transportation and safety is a concern. When women walk to market they walk with a group of people and usually with a baby on their back.

## **Education**

We were told that about 75% of the children in the cities go to school and about 30-50% in the countryside. Many more males than females attend school. The ratio is about 3/1. In some of the Presbyteries we visited only 20 - 30% of the children go to school. In one Presbytery, Dale Leqaa, the only elementary school was right there at the church and children had to walk long distances to get there. A concern of this particular Presbytery is a lack of educated manpower.

In the Bethel Evangelical Secondary School (**BESS**) they have both residential and day school students. They have 325 - 350 students in a school year. The largest class size is 60. Ages of the children are 13 to 20 and the grades are 7 - 12. There is a shortage of teachers. They have 17 but need 21. They have 12 men and 5 women teachers. The school year is 40 weeks (300 days). Teachers must have at least a high school diploma plus 2 to 2 1/2 years teacher training. A four year college degree is preferred. Courses offered at BESS include: English, math, Amharic, Oromiffa, geography, history, physics, chemistry, biology, general science, wood working, metal working, auto mechanics, Bible and typing. The staff I met with at BESS see the church as a change agent.

## **Agriculture**

At least 85% of the population lives in the country side. Food security is a problem

although not as serious as in the eastern part of the country. Bethel Synod does need help in all aspects of agriculture. The only dairy, in or near Dembi Dolo is at BESS and it consists of 16 cows and only 8 of those were producing milk at the time we were there.

Help is needed with soil conservation, plant disease control, out-of-season vegetable production, etc.

One problem with food shortages in Western Wollega is that families are forced to eat the grain that is the source of seeds for the next planting. The area is rich in plants with genetic diversity. It is the **primary gene center** for:

tef, niger seed, garden cress, coffee and ensat

It is the **secondary gene center** for:

hard wheat, barley, sorghum, millet, pulses (lentils, chickpea, cowpea, and some others), safflower castor bean, onion and okra.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It was a rich experience for me. I want this partnership to continue to develop and succeed. A holistic ministry has many parts and many opportunities for participation. Programs were defined that need a few dollars or many. We need to decide where our priorities will be. The success of the ministry there is a result of this holistic approach.

The Synod staff spent a lot of time with us. There was at least one person with us from breakfast until we retired for the night. Their English language skills are excellent and they freely answered most questions. Teferi Dina did mention that we shouldn't ask Ethiopian visitors sensitive questions regarding internal political problems. He said he didn't mind but others probably would mind. I asked Ayele Bekerie about this after we returned and he said that people making unfavorable comments are "dealt with" by the government. Scott Hill has reported on the Presbyteries and I haven't attempted to do that. I am attaching a Fact Sheet about Ethiopia and the church that Teferi Dina gave us when we arrived.