

Report on the 2011 Ethiopia Mission Network Meeting

April 28-30 at St. Luke's Presbyterian Church, Washington, GA

Prepared by Giny Roundy, Convener, Ethiopia Mission Network

Prior to the network meeting, the leadership team for the Arssi Oromo network met to discuss blessings and issues related to the work of Light of Hope.

We began our conference with Dr. Rob Weingartner, Executive Director of the Outreach Foundation, speaking to us about what it means to be a missional church. At the core, this means that the church feels that it exists to serve others as Christ would. It is not there just to meet the felt needs of the members. The church is not about us – it is about God and what he wants to do in the world.

Our next speaker was Debbie Braaksma, who oversees the PCUSA work in Africa. She had recently visited Ethiopia and brought us up to date on their approach to evangelism of Muslims. There are now 43 graduates of the Christian/Muslim Relations program at the seminary. They are overcoming the attitude that evangelism of Muslims can't be done. She also talked about the number of forms in which converted Muslims could "do church".

In the afternoon, Caroline Kurtz spoke on ways in which we are seen to (and hence do) have power in our relationships with Ethiopians. She started by sharing Jim Milley's Top Ten Mistakes made by the rich and powerful. Then she talked about the power distance in different types of societies and about the degree of directness in different cultures, etc.

Then we heard from Tom LePage, from the Chalmers Center, on "When Helping Hurts" – not only hurting the low self-image of those we help, but adding to our "savior" self-image. Instead of asking about their needs, we need to find out what resources they already have. God is already at work there and we are silly to try to take his place. The Kingdom already has a King. We were particularly thankful for Tom's presence among us, since he had to leave his family in the wake of major tornado damage to his yard.

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

Friday morning, we heard from our EECMY representative, Girma Borishie, who heads up the department of administration and finance. He told us that the priorities of the EECMY are mission, unity, and economy. So he updated us on the International Mission Society – which has 50,000 members now supporting it. He went on to explain how they were working with financial matters and dealing with various issues, such as bringing youth into the center of the church, their relationship with the diaspora, Christian-Muslim relations, the charismatic issue, etc.

Then Dr. Urgessa Biru, of PFF and Light of Hope Ministries, spoke about Religion and Culture. He spoke about the history of Ethiopia – the growth of first the Orthodox church and much later, the evangelical church. Unfortunately the missionaries brought their

divisions with them, which makes it harder for Muslims to accept Christianity. But the charismatic revivals and communist persecution brought some unification. Then he made some applications to the Arrsi Oromo, one of six clans of the Oromo people.

In the afternoon Debbie Braaksma talk with us about Amendment 10A and the likelihood that it would pass. She talked about how this might affect our relationship with overseas mission partners. Girma's reaction was not very encouraging.

Then Debbie told us about the Suri Project, which is an Integrated Rural Development Project. It includes clinics, schools, agricultural improvement, road building, etc. It has won two major awards from the Ethiopia government. John and Gwen Haspels will be phasing out of the large program in the next few years and concentrating on a new, smaller work among the Baale people.

Later we broke into concurrent sessions on community development issues with Tom LePage, working with Muslims with Dr. Urgessa, and more on being missional with Rob Weingartner. Tom LePage gave this advice about starting a project: Know where you are and where you want to be in 3 years; don't start any structure that you don't know how to get out of; and know how you will judge whether it is successful.

Rob Weingartner suggested that we look to see what God is doing and then ask what they think God is doing. Then we can ask how we can work together in what God is doing. How can we help build each other's capacity to respond to God's activity? What gifts can we give and what gifts do we need to receive.

After dinner Endalkachew Kidanewold share about his Ethiopian roots.

Then we were pleased to receive the report from the Bethel Synods Coordination Office and Michael Weller brought us up to date.

We closed with worship and communion led by Michael Weller.