

Central Ethiopia Report by Claude and Rhoda Houge August 2009



A new area for LCMS World Mission is the Central Ethiopian Synod (CES). (A synod is like a district in LCMS.) A year ago, Claude talked with Rev. Abraham Mengesha, president of the CES. Pastor Abraham shared the need for support for their "Mobile Bible Schools." Instead of needing to buy land or build a structure, Pastor Abraham had begun a program where existing Bible Schools are being used when residential training is not in session. These short term programs train as many as 60 lay leaders and evangelists at a time so that there are more people equipped to do outreach.

Shortly after that trip a year ago, we were contacted by LCMS Mission Developer Gary Thies who said he had a donor looking for a special project. Claude shared the Mobile Bible School strategy, and the donor was excited about the project. After this, other people heard about the concept, and now Jesus Is Lord Mission Society (JILMS) in Texas has made funds available to continue the work and expand it.

We visited the first group of 36 students while they were in session during this latest trip to Ethiopia. They meet at a residential Bible school outside of Addis Ababa when the regular school is not in session and the facilities are available. They expressed their appreciation for the support from LCMS World Mission that had made their training possible, and they asked if somehow we could continue to support the work. Claude was able to tell them that JILMS was offering more support, and they erupted in applause. It was a very exciting and joyful moment for all of us!

The second Mobile Bible School that we visited was about 500 kilometers east of Addis Ababa in a beautiful area of the country. The students also were in session in Dere Dawa, meeting in a local church. We were told they hadn't been able to meet together for 12 years, and now they were happy to begin their training once again. The students came from as far away as 300 kms, and they are meeting twice a year for a month of intensive training.

They were asked about how their training would help them, and some of the responses were: "We learned how the Gospel came to this country with so much suffering, and it inspired

us to spread the Gospel in spite of the hardships."



CES President Abraham Mengesha introduced us to the new class at Dere Dawa.

"We live under uncertainties because of the Islamic population here. We need to take advantage of every opportunity and be willing to sacrifice. This is so good to get teaching. You are stirring up our hearts and encouraging us." A leader who is a convert from Islam said, "I have gotten so many insights into Christianity. To me, the greatest difference is that Mohammed's last words were 'massacre the Jews,' but Jesus' last words were, 'Father, forgive them.'"

They also shared that Muslims have a plan to convert the whole region by 2015 so they can enforce Sharia law in the area, which would drive out all Christianity. They said, "God has used you to intervene." That's a significant statement, and one worthy of our prayers!

Claude shared with the group from 1 Cor. 15:58 that nothing that they are doing would be wasted because of Jesus' Resurrection. He also encouraged them from Eph. 6:10 – Be strong in the Lord! We have power in Christ, so we should arm ourselves for spiritual warfare. Being with these students was an inspiration for us, and we thank God that they are receiving more training to work in difficult areas.

