



# RCA Missionary Update

## from the Fords

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus seeks to train specialized evangelists who will help their congregations reach out in Christian love to their Muslim neighbors. As part of this goal, Peter Ford directs the program in Christian-Muslim Relations at Mekane Yesus Seminary. Through his teaching at the seminary and in various workshops, Peter enables Christian leaders to better understand the faith and practice of Muslims in the Ethiopian context, and how they can share the message of the gospel in an honest yet respectful manner.

### *Ethiopia facts:*

- Population: 65 million
- Size: 704,000 square miles (about twice the size of Texas)
- Major religions: Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, 48%; Islam, 35-40%; Evangelical Christianity, 12%



#### MINISTRY

Theological Education

#### LOCATION

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

#### PARTNER

Ethiopian Evangelical Church  
Mekane Yesus

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Christmas Greetings from the Ford Family

December 2007

Dear Friends,

As we celebrate our sixth Christmas in Ethiopia, it would at first seem that not much has changed in the past year. We live in the same house on the campus of Mekane Yesus Seminary; Peter continues to teach in and coordinate the Program in Christian-Muslim Relations; we are still very much involved with our local congregation, the International Lutheran Church of Addis Ababa; Andrew remains a student at Bingham Academy; and David is again with us here for his Christmas break. But when we sat down to list the various family accomplishments of 2007, we realized that indeed a lot has transpired. So our letter provides another opportunity to reflect on how God's grace has again carried us through and leads us forward.

Undoubtedly the greatest achievement of the past year lies with David, who in May graduated from Houghton College, magna cum laude. Situated in the rural hills of southwestern New York state, Houghton has been a super fit for him these past four years—academically, socially and spiritually. His major in Inter-Cultural Studies (with minors in Linguistics and Islamic Studies) has been a great first step in preparing him to return overseas at some point in the future. He has sensed God's call to get

involved in the analysis of unwritten languages among ethnic groups which desire to have God's Word translated into their mother tongue. David has now moved on to the next step: studies at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics in Dallas, Texas, where he continues to thrive academically. If all goes well, he'll receive his MA degree in 2009; meanwhile, his application to join Wycliffe Bible Translators is in process.

Andrew's big achievement has been physical—now a teenager, he has surpassed Patty in height! He works hard in eighth grade, although academics sometimes give way to other interests, especially art. He has developed his own cartoon strip which occasionally appears in his school newsletter, the *Bingham Bulletin*. Other activities include piano lessons and operating the sound system both at church and for school plays.

Patty continues to divide her time between two areas of volunteer work. At the Sisters of Charity orphanage, which serves HIV-positive children, she helps to promote physical and social development among the infants and toddlers. Her involvement with our church includes directing Sunday school, leading the pre-teen youth group, and organizing an occasional Saturday morning women's get-together. At least someone else has taken

over the preparation and printing of the weekly bulletin. Recently, her meal preparation at home was stretched when we welcomed two visiting college students who lived on campus for eleven weeks while helping out at the orphanage, church and Bingham Academy.

At the seminary, Peter completed a major project as part of the school's re-accreditation process. He had been chosen to coordinate the required institutional self-evaluation. This involved organizing several review committees, collating their reports, and preparing an extensive Self-Evaluation Report which (including dozens of appendices such as financial reports and sample syllabi) ran to 300 pages. The visiting team finally came in November and all seemed to go well; we'll find out for sure in a couple months when their final report arrives. Meanwhile, the Program in Christian-Muslim Relations continues to fill an important need in providing the Mekane Yesus church with evangelists and teachers who can assist the church in its outreach among the many Muslims of Ethiopia. Ten CMR students graduated in June and ten new ones joined the program in August. It is a special joy for Peter to see his two Ethiopian colleagues develop their teaching abilities; one of them took over the Introduction to Arabic course, although Peter will continue to handle the subsequent electives in Arabic grammar.

A couple of years ago Peter was invited to contribute a book chapter dealing with the subject of his doctoral dissertation (which he had completed back in 1998). The book finally came out this year, entitled *Jesus in Twentieth Century Literature, Art, and Movies*, edited by Paul C. Burns (published by Continuum and available on Amazon.com). His chapter is "'Abbās Mahmūd al-'Aqqād's—*The Genius of Christ: An Innovative Muslim Approach to Jesus.*" It's a good summary of this unusual Arabic treatise which presents the life of Jesus in a very positive manner while still remaining within a Muslim framework. More recently Peter has prepared an article dealing with Christian-Muslim relations in Ethiopia; this is due to be published in 2008 both as a journal article and as a chapter for a Festschrift (a book honoring one of his former teachers).

The year 2007 marked another milestone: 25 years serving the mission program of the Reformed Church in

America. Part of Peter's job, of course, is to periodically spend time in the States on "Home Assignment"—visiting the individual congregations that contribute to our support. So Peter flew to Richmond in March and stayed with his mom while flying to churches in the east. He was able to visit David in his Houghton dormitory and was invited to speak in David's class on Islamic Contextualization. Patty and Andrew stayed home in Addis Ababa to allow Andrew to continue at Bingham Academy, but in early May they joined Peter in Richmond in time to drive to Houghton for David's graduation. From there we all traveled to Holland, Michigan and (as we usually do) stayed in an RCA mission house, from which Peter continued to travel and speak. He also attended RCA's General Synod as a voting delegate.

In July we drove to Dallas with David and his belongings to help him get settled into the dormitory there. By the time the rest of us flew back to Addis Ababa in mid-August, we had driven 10,000 miles and Peter had visited 22 of our 28 RCA supporting churches. In addition to preaching, he was frequently invited to present his seminar on "Why the Gulf between Islam and the West?" which stimulated considerable interest and discussion. There continues to be a great deal of misunderstanding and apprehension among Christians in the U.S. concerning Islam; the best way to begin dealing with that is to try to appreciate the complex nature of contemporary Islamic belief and practice while also taking the initiative to befriend our Muslim neighbors. The church in Ethiopia has determined to pursue this course of action; our hope is that people in the U.S. will overcome the tendency to react with suspicion and retaliation, and instead to build bridges of communication across the divide.

It seems, then, that 2007 was quite an eventful year after all for the Ford family! Yet we know that all of this has been possible only by God's gracious provision of continued health, guidance, and support from congregations in the States and colleagues here in Ethiopia. Our prayer is that you will ascertain and apprehend that same grace in your lives—all to the glory of our King!

In our Lord who never fails,

Peter and Patty Ford