



# 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

#### CONTACT

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Dear Friends,

March 2009

Hello again from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia! Many of you have been wondering why you did not hear from us at Christmas time, and we hope that this belated greeting will help to explain the delay. We will soon embark on an important and exciting transition to a new assignment as RCA missionaries. The process began in early December but has taken three months to become finalized, and we felt it was best to wait until we could provide you with some definite news.

First, we should mention that for a year or so we have been prayerfully considering whether it was time to wrap up our service in Ethiopia and move on to some other location where our gifts and experience could be used. Peter's involvement in the Program in Christian-Muslim Relations (CMR) here at Mekane Yesus Seminary has progressed to the point where he is able to leave it in the very capable hands of his two Ethiopian colleagues. There comes a time, sooner or later, when missionaries should work themselves out of a job and allow the national church to carry the work forward in the way they know best. Nevertheless, since we were not aware of any place that was looking for a similar kind of program, we were prepared to continue here for the time being.

We now see that God was at work in ways that were not apparent at the time. In December, some e-mail commu-

nication took place between our RCA supervisor and St. Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya. St. Paul's is a Christian institution which offers several theology and development programs designed to train students from all over Africa to serve the church in many different capacities. In 2004 they began a Masters-level program in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations with the assistance of a capable British scholar. When he left in 2006, St. Paul's approached the RCA about whether Peter could come and help. At that time we felt that a move from Mekane Yesus Seminary would be premature, and having chosen not to pursue this inquiry, we assumed that St. Paul's found some other means to continue their program adequately. When they again contacted the RCA in December, we learned that the program has been struggling for three years with only part-time teachers, and again they were very interested in having Peter come. This time we responded favorably. Correspondence continued in January; Peter visited St. Paul's in early February; and in early March the new assignment was finalized.

Throughout this process we have felt affirmed in God's call to this new opportunity. The Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations Programme (yes, it's officially spelled the British way!) at St. Paul's draws students from various countries in Africa where Muslims form a significant part

of the population. After completing their Masters degree, they return to their home countries to teach in their Bachelor-level church schools, helping local African pastors and evangelists to better understand Islam in their context and to reach out to Muslim neighbors with God's message of grace in Christ. Some of them may even establish a CMR program in their country similar to the one here at Mekane Yesus Seminary. Thus, Peter's involvement here at the Bachelor level, as well as teaching CMR courses at the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, provides him with the experience required to enable Masters-level students to multiply this kind of training around the African continent.

So now we are getting ready to move, and to bring appropriate closure to our service in Ethiopia. For example, we recently coordinated our last church campout at Lake Langano, with 22 pre-teen campers. We are very glad that the new pastor of our local English-speaking congregation has just arrived, so that our involvement in worship coordination can be concluded graciously. Plans are that we will leave Addis Ababa the end of May in order to attend the graduation of our son David (see below). We will then spend June and July in the U.S. visiting family; but note that this will not be a Home Assignment, due to financial restraints in the RCA Global Mission program. We are scheduled to fly to Kenya arriving on August 3. Again, we are very glad that another RCA missionary couple, Rowland and Jane Van Es, has been living and teaching at St. Paul's for several years, and they are helping us to look at options regarding housing, etc. For example, they linked us up with Rosslyn Academy, a fine Christian school on the outskirts of Nairobi, about a 20-minute drive from St. Paul's. We have already learned of Andrew's acceptance there as he heads into 10th grade!

The administration of St. Paul's is also quite interested in what Patty might offer in the area of Christian education. She has her Masters degree in this field and had taught courses at Nile Theological College during our stay in Khartoum, Sudan. The need was not so great here at Mekane Yesus Seminary, so she got involved with other ministries. After we arrive in Kenya, she will explore various possibilities at St. Paul's.

Meanwhile, David is gearing up for his own major transition. He is now a missionary of both Wycliffe Bible Translators and the RCA, assigned to become a Linguistics Specialist in Khartoum with SIL (Wycliffe's sister organization overseas). There he will assist the process of Bible translation by analyzing some of the dozens of languages in that country that still have never been put into writing. He is due to graduate on June 4 from the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics (in Dallas, Texas), with his Masters in Applied Linguistics. We'll first drive to Dallas for that special event, then spend the summer together as he prepares to launch out on his own. His departure for Khartoum (where he spent most of his childhood) should also take place in early August. However, the timing will

depend on whether his full support has been pledged; currently he is at 50%. Although we praise God for the commitment of churches and individuals during this time of financial difficulty, we want to encourage any of you who would like to consider becoming part of his prayer and support team to contact Roger DeYoung, [rdeyoung@rca.org](mailto:rdeyoung@rca.org), at the RCA office in Grand Rapids. We might also mention that the recent uncertainty due to the indictment of President al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court for war crimes has so far not affected SIL's work in Sudan.

Here is an updated picture of our family, which was taken over the Christmas break when we were again privileged to have David with us; and yes, Andrew is now the second tallest in the family! The second picture is of the library at St. Paul's University, where undoubtedly Peter will spend a good deal of time.



Our e-mail address will stay the same: [pford@softhome.net](mailto:pford@softhome.net). But please note that starting Aug. 3, our new mailing address will be:

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KENYA

We thank you for your patience in waiting to hear from us. We hope that this update will encourage you to see God's hand at work in your lives, too; and that you will pray for us as we move through many changes and challenges in the months ahead.

In our God through whom all things are possible,

Peter and Patty

*P.S. We want to thank you all again for your ongoing financial support during these difficult times. The RCA budget for us is very tight, and they would welcome an increase in or any additional one-time contributions towards our relocation expenses or an increase in Partner-In-Mission (PIM) shares if possible (go to [www.rca.org/pford](http://www.rca.org/pford) to make a donation).*