



# 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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Friends,

June 2008

OK, here's a quiz to see how well you know your RCA missionaries. The following family names belong to some current and former missionaries who have served for many years: De Jong; Estell; Kapenga; Scudder; Swart; Thoms; Van Es; Vogelaar. Can you think of anything special about all these names? Well, yes, most of them are Dutch, but I actually had something more important in mind. It happens that these families have produced second- (and sometimes third- or more) generation RCA missionaries. Kids who grew up overseas while their folks served in the RCA mission program decided that God was calling *them* overseas as well. Often returning to the same region and to a similar vocation as that of their parents, these RCA missionaries have utilized their unique intercultural experiences to serve in dynamic new ministries among RCA's partner churches. It's one of those things that makes the RCA family kind of special.

So we are proud to announce that the "Ford" name has recently been added to this

esteemed list! Our oldest son David has recently been accepted as an RCA missionary. He will serve in partnership with Wycliffe Bible Translators, thanks to a special agreement between the two organizations. And (if all goes according to plan) he'll return to Sudan, where we served for ten years and where David spent most of his childhood through high school. His specific job title will be "Linguistic Technician"—meaning he will analyze various unwritten languages (Sudan still has about a hundred of these), determining the proper alphabet symbols and describing what can be rather complex grammatical relationships. This will provide the foundation for others (mostly trained nationals these days) to translate the Bible into such languages. Now if Linguistics does not sound like your cup of tea, you can be glad that David thoroughly enjoys it, because there is a great need for such specialists to enable the work of Bible translation to move forward.

It will be at least a year before David actually gets onto the field and begins his work.



David Ford—new RCA missionary

First, he'll finish his MA in Applied Linguistics at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, a Wycliffe institution in Dallas, Texas. He has just completed his first year there, and is set to graduate in June 2009. This summer he'll be attending various conferences and orientation sessions, both with Wycliffe and with RCA. These will enable him to officially begin developing his prayer and financial support base, and starting this fall he'll be visiting some RCA churches as part of that. Hopefully the end of 2009 will find him back in Sudan, getting into his new work, and beginning to form working relationships that will be part of his new life as a missionary for many years to come. As you might imagine, we are thrilled to see how God has worked in our son's life, preparing him step by step both spiritually and practically for this wonderful vocation.

Back at home here in Addis Ababa, life goes on pretty much as usual. In addition to her orphanage ministry, Patty continues to be very involved in our local congregation, the International Lutheran Church. Her major task this year has been her first stint as Sunday school director, and the frequent shortage of teachers has provided a number of challenges. Andrew recently turned 14, is completing 8th grade, still loves art—and continues to shoot up. Now there is no question who is the shortest in the family, just considerable speculation who might eventually be the tallest!



Andrew and Patty in our front yard

At Mekane Yesus Seminary, another academic year will soon draw to a close. On June 21, four students will graduate from the Program in Christian-Muslim Relations (more about that in my next letter). Among the many activities I pursue in addition to teaching, I participated in a unique consultation in Egypt in early May. My two teaching colleagues in the CMR Program, Rev. Abdi Tadesse and Rev. Masresha Mengiste, joined me for this unique event. A Presbyterian mission organization brought us there, along with a teacher from a seminary in Pakistan, to join some faculty at a seminary in Cairo. We discussed ways in which each institution can develop its curriculum so that we can help our students better understand Islam and engage in respectful outreach among Muslims. We considered how each of our contexts is different with respect to Christian-Muslim relations, and how each school might adapt this common concern to its own local situation. Although the context in Ethiopia is more open than in either Egypt or Pakistan, my colleagues and I were able to offer some suggestions from

our own CMR Program that could benefit our new associates. We forged some good friendships which will hopefully lead to ongoing consultation and faculty exchange visits.



Masresha, Abdi and Peter present the situation in Ethiopia

Before I close this letter, I should mention briefly two points. The first is to ask you to pray concerning the food crisis here in Ethiopia. Although the current problem is affecting most of the developing world, it is especially severe in Ethiopia due to the lack of rain in most areas during the first months of this year. Farmers (who make up 80% of the population) needed those early rains to plant their first crop, but that was not possible. The main rainy season should begin by the end of June; pray that it will be sufficiently abundant for a good harvest. In the meantime, however, the UN has warned that over 100,000 Ethiopian children have only one month to live, while over six million are at risk of starvation. Our local congregation has joined many churches in Addis Ababa to take up special offerings to help alleviate the crisis; we would encourage your congregation to do the same.

The second point is to mention that it is now possible for you to receive our regular missionary letter by e-mail directly from the RCA. If you opt for this method, you can help save printing and postage costs for our church. If you (either congregation or individual) would like to make this change or simply to add your name to the email list, just send us a message by e-mail (our address is at the top front of this letter); I'll collect the names and pass them on to the appropriate person. I will need to have: (1) your name; (2) your mailing address (necessary for RCA's database system); and (3) your email address.

Serving Christ together,

Peter and Patty Ford

If you are interested in supporting the new ministry of **David Ford as a "Linguistic Technician" in Sudan**, please send your contributions to:

Reformed Church in America, P.O. Box 19381, Newark, NJ 07195-1938

If you have questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact Derrick Jones, (djones@rca.org), Supervisor of RCA Missions in Africa, or his assistant, Sharon Schramel, (sschramel@rca.org), or call 800-228-3813.