



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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Dear friends,

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We are nearing the end of our “home assignment”—the period of time when we are in the U.S. (and actually away from our home in Ethiopia) visiting our supporting churches. By the time we fly back into Addis Ababa on August 15, I will have visited and spoken in 22 congregations from New Jersey to Wisconsin in the space of five months. I have enjoyed sharing about my work as the coordinator for the program in Christian-Muslim relations at Mekane Yesus Seminary, and I’ve especially appreciated the stimulating discussions we’ve had about how we might respond to the complex world of Islam. I hope that you will all continue to reflect on how we as Christians—in Ethiopia or in the U.S.—can better understand our Muslim neighbors and seek to build bridges of understanding and compassion among them. I would mention again the excellent resource that is now available on the RCA website (www.rca.org, just click “Mission” and then “Christian-Muslim Relations” to open up a vast array of helpful information).



A group of “fainting goats” at the farm we visited.

On one of our journeys, we had the opportunity to stay overnight with an RCA family who has contributed regularly to our ministry for many years. They are farmers and one of their many activities is raising goats. They have a particular breed called “fainting goats”—so named because when these critters are startled they actually fall right over onto their sides! They have an unusual genetic disorder

such that when they are suddenly frightened, a chemical is released causing their leg muscles to stiffen. They recover after only a few seconds and soon bounce away, but the sight of several goats simply keeling over just because we banged a bucket was simply hilarious! What is not so funny is the realization that we as Christians likewise often “freeze up” when we have an opportunity to share something about our Christian faith with an inquirer. Instead, as Peter wrote, we should “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). That takes careful study and reflection ahead

of time, especially for our interaction with Muslim neighbors. The misunderstanding and mistrust that often exists should not frighten us into silence, but should push us to make the effort at engaging those whom we meet with love and respect, seeking to discern their particular need at that time.

Our farmer friends also told us an interesting anecdote about the fainting goats. It is said that long ago, shepherds used to incorporate a few of these animals along with their much more numerous sheep. When a wild animal attacked the herd, the goats which fell over would be easily caught and killed while the sheep ran to safety. These animals served as sacrificial goats so that the more valuable sheep would be spared. Here is yet another lesson, this time about the great wisdom and love of God our Shepherd, who was willing to sacrifice his own Son. And Jesus, unlike fainting goats, was far more valuable and dear to



Our sons, Andrew and David, look on as several goats fall over after being frightened by a loud sound.

the Father than his many wayward sheep. We might also consider what we, as God's undershepherds, might sacrifice in order to preserve those whom God loves from the attacks of the evil one. Usually what God asks us to give up for the sake of his kingdom—a good job, material possessions, the comforts of our particular "box"—is of far less value than the people among whom we might minister.

May we all continue to find encouragement to do God's will more faithfully as we observe the sometimes amazing features of God's magnificent universe.

Your fellow kingdom-worker,

Peter, Patty, David & Andrew

Peter Ford