



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 often say that "Life is full of ups and downs," but usually we think of this in regard to our personal lives. As individuals and families, we all have our share of joys and sorrows, peaks of bliss and valleys of grief. Christians know that such life experiences remind us of the many dimensions of God's grace. At times we rejoice at the goodness which God lavishes upon us, and at other times we must learn to bear our burdens patiently as we try to understand what God is teaching us.

Institutions also have their "ups and downs," events that affect the entire community for better or for worse.

Christian institutions such as Mekane Yesus Seminary try to ascertain God's hand at work both in times of celebration and times of calamity. Thus I write these words on a day which the seminary administration has set aside as a special time for praise and prayer, for reflecting on recent events while seeking God's guidance for the future. Two events in particular are on all of our minds as we fast and pray in the presence of our Lord.

On June 21, the seminary hosted its annual commencement services, celebrating the achievement of 65 students who successfully completed their programs. They represented the three major departments of the seminary which focus respectively on theology, leadership and music. Among the 27 theology graduates were four who had specialized in the program in Christian-Muslim Relations, the program which I direct and in which I teach. These four join the previous 19 CMR graduates who are currently directing outreach efforts in Muslim areas of Ethiopia and teaching congregations what it means to truly love their Muslim neighbors.



Peter with Rev. Istifanus on graduation day.

One of the new CMR graduates is Rev. Istifanus, a pastor from the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria. For two years he applied himself diligently to his studies, while his wife and children managed back home without him. Istifanus has a strong vision to help his church better understand the variety of Muslim expressions within his country and to live out the gospel among them in word and

deed. Nigeria, like Ethiopia, has a population which is roughly half Muslim and half Christian. This presents tremendous challenges in the social and political dimensions of life there, much as it does here in Ethiopia. Istifanus learned from both his textbooks and his interaction with fellow Ethiopian classmates, not only gaining insight about Islam, but also developing genuine respect and compassion for those who hold to somewhat different religious beliefs and customs. He is now back in Nigeria beginning to put his studies into practice.

Exactly four weeks after graduation, on July 19, much of the seminary compound was inundated when the nearby Akaki River overflowed its dikes. We are grateful that our house, which sits on relatively high ground, was spared, along with all the academic buildings. However, muddy water quickly flowed into several low-lying residences and other buildings, reaching a depth of up to four feet in only a matter of minutes. This took place on a sunny Saturday afternoon, but the river had risen due to significant rain upstream earlier in the day and for several days previously. Thankfully, no one was injured (as might have been the case if the flood came at night); but there was much damage to property, and several families lost virtually all of their household possessions.

In my last Missionary Update, I wrote about the lack of rain earlier this year, and how thousands of Ethiopians have been suffering from insufficient food as a result. The main rainy season is now definitely with us, but its distribution and timing is not ideal. While some regions, especially to the north, continue to face relative drought, the Addis Ababa area has received a more-than-adequate supply. In all cases, local infrastructures cannot cope well with wide variations to the norm. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), with whom we are partnering, is trying to do their part, both with food relief and with compensation for the seminary and its personnel who were adversely affected by the flooding. Please continue to pray that resources will be found and distributed well so as to reach those who need it most.



Seminary personnel recover articles from the flooded dining hall (above) and staff residences (below).



Meanwhile, the Program in Christian-Muslim Relations continues to fulfill another important role in God's kingdom here. We are glad to be able to reach beyond the borders of Ethiopia to train a few students from countries like Nigeria. I and my colleagues are also thankful for your ongoing prayer and support for our ministry in teaching these students who will bear the message of God's grace in Christ, and who will in turn train others to do so as well.

May the God of peace guide you and your congregation through your own "ups and downs" of life!

Peter, Patty and Andrew Ford