

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” ~ Matthew 5:9

On November 5, I left for Ethiopia for a Presbyterian Peacemaking Travel Study Seminar. The experience was wonderful, eye opening, educational, spirit filled, uplifting, and at times difficult and exhausting.

Our group consisted of eight Presbyterians from throughout the country. We ranged in experiences, backgrounds, professions, and ages. Somewhat surprisingly, for not having met before (with few exceptions - only two people went to the same church, and the trip leaders had worked together before), we meshed very well. Starting off as brothers and sisters in Christ, we soon became friends, confidants, and hopefully, deeper Christians together. All glory to God and thankfulness to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit!

Fortunately, the excitement of being in Ethiopia outweighed the long trip consisting of multiple flights spanning DC, Detroit, Amsterdam, refueling in Khartoum, and finally Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

We kicked off the first few days of the trip by visiting the worship services of the Grand Mosque in Markato, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). After the services and at an afternoon seminar, we met with representatives of the faiths and in particular those working on peace building and reconciliation efforts. Many of the people there, Ethiopians and missionaries, are truly witnessing in action as well as in word. Hearing of the bridges they're building between faiths, as well as within their own, and the outreach they are doing alone and together was inspiring.

On a lighter note, during a seminar break, I learned that coffee is really tasty with a ratio of 4 to 1, milk to coffee. I'm glad I found a way to enjoy it. It would've felt very wrong to be in coffee's birthplace and not partake at least a little. Also during the break, I was pleased to meet Masresha Chufa, a Mekane Yesus Seminary professor who received his training at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. What a small world! I travel around the world and end up chatting about Minnesota.

While this was a fun meeting, it also illustrates something about the EECMY. In planning for their seminary, they truly wanted Ethiopians teaching in leadership positions rather than just missionary professors. With foresight, they selected two of their best and brightest students and sent them abroad to get training, return, and become leaders. Chufa is an example of this foresight and investment in their own people. Now, even more students

can be trained within Ethiopia and continue to reach out across their country.



Even though my trip to Ethiopia was only eleven days, I feel a connection and am thankful for those who have invested in me and in this incredible experience. I am thankful to Calvary and to all of you for your encouragement, prayers, and support. The trip was truly eye opening and spirit filled. The people I met (Ethiopians, missionaries, fellow trip participants, and more) are inspiring people, truly witnessing in action as well as in word.

I have so much more to tell. I've only covered the first three days, and even there barely scratched the surface. Other meaningful moments included:

- meeting a homeless, orphaned child and learning about love in action from a new missionary friend,
- struggling through a language barrier on the women's side of a mosque porch (separated from our male guides/translators, who were on another side) and yet forging connections with a simple attempt to say "thank you" in Amharic "amesege'nallo" by us and a welcoming smile and gesture by a few Muslim ladies,
- learning from the leaders of the Jimma Presbytery's university preaching point about their outreach and care for the whole person, followed by a joint prayer in English, Amharic, and Oromo (I think), kicked off by the song "We Are One in the Spirit,"
- receiving a greeting card and meeting the student who made it in a Compassion International Program, run at the Jimma Presbytery's base,
- hearing the joyful, vibrant choir at the EECMY Kotobe Congregation, and much, much more.

I'll post pictures soon, write up more reflections, and hopefully share more of my experiences in a presentation early in the new year. Also, I welcome individual questions and conversations in the meantime.

Amesege'nallo' – thank you,

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