

“I Dream of Africa”

Ever dream of going to the continent of Africa? In 2019 Western Wollega Bethel Synod (WWBS) plans a big celebration of the 100th year after Dr. Thomas Lambie, brought Christianity to Western Ethiopia. Dorothy Thomas, Elder from Christ Community Church in Cortlandville, was part of the contingent of seven people Susquehanna Valley Presbytery sent in Feb. 2014 to visit our partners in Dembi Dollo, and she will be reading an entry from her journal as the verbal part of our Presbytery Report. The application process for the Feb. 2019 visit will be developed next year, but those who wish to represent our presbytery should plan on being gone about 2 weeks in February, 2019, having their passport and all vaccinations ready to travel, and raise some of their own travel expenses, plus be endorsed by their church Session. The Ethiopian Partnership Team will help cover some, but not all, of the expenses (last time, round trip airfare was about \$1,500 per person).

Ethiopian Orthodox Christians trace their roots back to the Ethiopian Eunuch baptized by Paul as told in Acts. Part of Coptic Christianity for millennia, in 1959 the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahedo Church got their own patriarch. That same year, the major Protestant denomination in Ethiopia, Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus (EECMY) formed. But there were already “Bethel Synods” in western and southern Ethiopia that were the result of the efforts of Presbyterian missionaries to bring Christianity to wandering tribes that had been animist in their religious beliefs. WWBS and the other Bethel Synods joined EECMY in 1994. After first coming to Ethiopia in 1919 from Sudan, American Medical Missionary Tom Lambie received permission in 1921 to found a medical center and school in Dembi Dollo as well as a church, and was eventually given the land that the WWBS compound still stands on. WWBS still seeks to provide quality education as well as training of church elders and ministers. Amanuel Tesfaye, the Director of Bethel Evangelical Secondary School (BESS) has proudly reported that all the 2017 graduating high school students had again passed the national exams and been accepted into university – a remarkable achievement. Just \$750 USD covers tuition, room & board for 1 student – thanks to Nineveh & Christ Community Churches for providing scholarships!

For 2016 and 2017, Susquehanna Valley Presbytery operating budget has included \$15,000 mission funding for the programmatic work of our Ethiopian Partnership (plus another \$1,000 to cover operating expenses). How do we spend that mission support money?

- Our WWBS partners operate four schools: Birhane Yesus Elementary School (BYES), Bethel Evangelical Secondary School (BESS), Gidada Theological College, and the Ethiopian Rural Education Project (EREP). We have contributed \$2,000 annually to each school program, or \$8,000 total.
- General support for the WWBS work is also \$2,000. This can cover whatever programs the WWBS leadership team prioritizes, including “Elder Training” in January (we used to send \$4,000 separately).
- Women’s Ministry has been sent \$1,000 to help with health care and economic challenges to women.
- Mission Worker Support \$500 each year. More funding used to be sent when there were American mission-workers based out of Dembi Dollo, like Mike & Janelle McCarty about 10 years ago, and recently Steve & Brenda Stelle (2014-2016) - who returned to the US due to aging parents and health issues. John & Gwen Haspels, who visited SVP last March, served in central Ethiopia for decades. Currently, the only PCUSA Mission Workers in Ethiopia are Michael & Rachel Weller.
- EthMisNet support - \$500 annually to help plan and host a PCUSA national mission conference.
- EthMisNet attendance - \$1,500 budgeted annually to cover registration, lodging, meals and travel for representatives from SVP. The last couple years we have sent two delegates each time.
- Travel between Ethiopia and SVP - \$1,500 budgeted each year. Some years we have used this category to help underwrite Ethiopian visitors from WWBS or EECMY. Right now we are trying to save some funds towards the cost of sending delegates to the Feb. 2019 Centennial Celebration.



\$500 is being sent to Louisville (PCUSA headquarters) in support of Michael and Rachel Weller, who have served in Ethiopia since 1994. After coordinating mission work in the Horn of Africa, Michael returned in 2017 to the work he loves: training future church leaders. He teaches in Gambella, Ethiopia (south of Dembi Dollo) as a teacher at the Don McClure Bible School and the Manpiny Theological College. The schools are ministries of the East Gambella and the West Gambella Bethel Synods. Rachel facilitates the work of Community Health Evangelism (CHE) in both synods. CHE is a program that gathers people together to identify and use available resources to improve their health situation and to learn truths from the Bible leading to the life abundant that Jesus Christ promised. The program also teaches and encourages individuals and families to reach out in discipleship to neighbors and friends.

Cheryll Berg of the Owego Presbyterian Church, is still collecting books for the Western Gambella Bethel Synod's Jordan Bible School. Ed Pollock of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Maryland is coordinating the project to send books to increase their theological and pastoral library.

Ethiopia is a large country on the eastern "Horn of Africa," never colonized by European nations. Western Wollega is the area on the western pointy tip of Ethiopia, bordering South Sudan. Oromo tribespeople, who were traditionally subsistence farmers and wandering tribesmen, live in the western and southern areas of Ethiopia. At about 21 million in population, Oromos are the largest ethnic group, even though they are the most discriminated against (the Amhara are in positions of power). Drought and famine have made Ethiopia's poverty worse. Since our presbytery partnership began in 1996, the value of their monetary unit, called a "birr" – has shrunk from about 6 birr =1 USD to 24 birr = 1 USD. Their GDP is only \$505, and they rank 174 out of 187 nations in the world on the Human Development index.

Caroline Kurtz (pictured with sister Jane), who was raised in Ethiopia by missionary parents, is promoting a new project to bring solar power to the remote Maji area of Ethiopia (the highlands west of Dembi). She is looking for \$250 contributions to cover the cost of each solar unit, with a goal of bringing units to 300 families. The Ethiopian Partnership Team has decided that we should provide one \$250 contribution from undesignated gifts received this year, and encourage churches and individuals to also support this effort.



- Students can do homework after dark.
- Women have light to care for children at night.
- Less fuelwood is burned after dark, helping to preserve the dwindling forestland.
- Women and children are healthier, with fewer smoke-caused eye and bronchial afflictions.
- People are empowered when they see that the global community hasn't abandoned them after all.

Junieta Brooks (Elder, Northminster Church) has served on the Ethiopian Partnership Mission Team since the beginning in 1996. The Team seeks more members, especially from churches who have made financial donations to the Ethiopian Partnership, so that there is more participation and churches who have a stake in this vital mission are appropriately represented.

The Ethiopian Partnership Mission Team: Juni Brooks, Dorothy Thomas, Peg Corwin, Lynn Reeves, Cheryll Berg, Diane Vredenburg, Janet Adair Hansen