

A Snap of my trip to
Ethiopia
March 22nd to April 10th 2017

My thirst for visiting Ethiopia began about nine years ago when I decided to come to America in 2008. I was a recent graduate from seminary and took over a leadership role as a director for Mission and Theology Office at the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, Mekane Yesus, East Gambella Bethel Synod. In the summer of 2017, I filled out an internet application not knowing that it would open a door for a visa process to come to America. In the spring of 2008 I got a letter from the US State Department; that I was being chosen among thousands of applicants in Ethiopia; that I should now acquire a visa from the US embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In addition to looking for visa processing money and collecting all required documents for an interview, I was in constant debate with myself. Should leave behind my family, the church, and the people I had known only to come to America? It was the best choice after all!

However, when I finally decided to come to America, I made an oath promising God that I would keep going to Ethiopia to continue what God has placed in my heart for the people of God, if the Lord gives me health and a chance to travel “Home.” God has been gracious in listening to my prayers! This trip was my fifth trip to Ethiopia. The Lord has brought to my life great people and their support has been a blessing in keeping with the promise. I have been going to Ethiopia for short mission trips visiting churches, providing short Biblical courses, proclaiming the good news, strengthening faith, and make Christ alive in the lives of many—*“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.”* said Paul in Romans 1:9-12

This trip was special in nature. I traveled home this time as an ordained pastor/teaching elder of the Presbyterian Church USA. Everyone in the area is familiar with Presbyterian, because Presbyterian is the denomination that has brought the light of the gospel and enlightenment of education in the Gambella land of Ethiopia. This was done primarily through the great missionary, Rev. Dr. Don McClure and others in late 1940s. We are extended family in the Reform faith!

I left Worthington late in the evening, March 22nd and took off from Sioux Falls airport for Washington D.C as my connecting flight will be leaving early morning, March 23rd, for Ethiopia. We took off at 11am ET and arrived in Ethiopia at 7am local time after 13 hours in the air. I was able to venture in the city of Addis Ababa. The first time I was in Addis Ababa was two years ago, in 2014. There are lots of changes now in Addis Ababa—new roads and a city train transportation system etc.; the signatures of the new change in Ethiopia. The next morning, I visited the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus head office to reconnect with the old friends and talk to the newly elected president.



The next day I visited newly released political prisoners. These were individuals who spent three years in federal prison on charges they did not commit. One of the released was my nephew' (my brother's

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son). (He calls me father, because in the Anyuak culture you do not address the brother of your father as “uncle” but only your mother’s brother.) When I visited them, his roommate asked him whether he could remember the dream he had shared the day before they were released. His roommate (Bakwach), had a dream on Wednesday night and in the morning he told us. In his dream, he said, “I saw my father (uncle) coming from America with a letter of our release and we were all released from this prison.” I was amazed when I heard and listened to the dream because Omod and his friends were detained in a location where no one could visit them after their last court appearance.

There is no way he could have heard about my travel to Ethiopia. I assure them that I did not bring with me a letter of release from America that this was driven by God for me to visit you in prison and to secure your release. Yet God brought me today as a witness and to support you with your needs. I was carrying a message of HOPE and Peace to Ethiopia in my body through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Then I gave them money, clothes, shirts and shoes that I was taking home to Gambella. God had planned that I must be in Addis that day when they were released from prison.

For the following four or five days I had a limited internet connection. This happened due to the six months state of emergency declaration, which is now being extended to a 12 months. The Ethiopian government has blocked access to many social media and a narrower access to internet as a whole. For the Ethiopians, they have their own way to get around the restrictions by using different tools and different web browsers, which also made devices vulnerable for hacking. There are always good Samaritans! A friend of mine configured my phone and made it work somehow, so that I was able to share some pictures on Facebook and send emails from Gambella, Ethiopia.

The first Sunday in Gambella was March 26th and I had a chance to share a message of peace and unity and perform a hand washing for about 500 people as a sign of purification and washing off spiritual dirt, [James 4:7-10 and Isaiah 1:14-20.] This church has been in a conflict for the last few years. In many of my trips to Ethiopia, I have been preaching, providing Biblical courses for pastors and giving counseling to the leaders on how to forgive and see God in their midst as they walk with God. After the sermon, I asked everyone interested in washing hands and come as a sign of coming back in unity—with God and one another. It was a blessing!



On Friday, March 31st I rented a minivan and travelled and drove to the village to visit my father. It took me almost a week days to get a vehicle to go to the village while my brother and others were waiting for my arrival. Finally I rented a car for \$75 dollars for the morning hours, 37km (22miles) to meet my father, siblings, nieces, and nephews. Even

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though I was late getting to the village, I was able to see my dad before noon. Then we had a great conversation. In our culture an old man talks to his son early in the morning before eating any breakfast. It's being assumed that speech/first words at daybreak have essence of purity and are trustworthy. So to have a son from America, the best time to share some family concerns or to orient him on the course of his life, is early morning when birds are singing songs. I wasn't lucky though. I missed eating two goats my brother had butchered the other day when they were told I would be arriving on Thursday, but did not go because the car owner I talked to cancelled my trip. All that was to welcome me home! Everyone is excited to see me coming back as an ordained pastor.

Everything was going well in Gambella, only with limited internet connection. It's always hot in Gambella in the months of February, March and April until it starts raining. Yet, I love going there when it's hot because I will have access to the villages. It's difficult to get to rural villages when it's raining and the big river overflows to the land and every road leading to the villages will be closed in the winter. In Gambella electric power was going off and on, but life continues as usual. Everyone drink coffee after meal even if it's hot at noon. For Ethiopians, coffee is a desert after every meal.

One of the church leaders called me to discuss a wedding few weeks prior to my departure. He wanted me to do his wedding. Though I resisted not to officiating due the limited time of my trip,



his church insisted. When I arrived in Gambella I invited the couple to come to counseling sessions that I planned to offer them before their wedding. Saturday, April 1st was John Ochang's and Abang Obang BIG DAY! It was the day I perform my first wedding as a teaching elder. I used our book of Worship and was able to perform the wedding using my translated version. Oxen and two goats were our meal for the wedding. On Sunday, I was giving the opportunity to speak and I preached on Genesis

15...."Keeping covenant for the fulfilment of the promise." It was encouraging to speak to people who are desperate and wandering for a helper as they are challenged by the current circumstances of war and the news of abductions.

Itang's church building was looted, choir robes were taken, and a grinding mill was destroyed during the conflict. The attack was a surprise leaving the church empty as many homes were set on fire by the attackers. Member had asked everyone for prayers and support as they are gathering in an open air for worship and are now working hard to build a church hall for Sunday worship before the rain fall season. Pray that the Lord open doors and provide for their great need.



Total cost \$5,647 dollars

On Monday April 3rd, I met two individuals in Virginia, from Mount Olive



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Presbyterian Church. I had a nice conversation with them. They were on a short mission trip. I learned that their congregation has a partnership with the Church in Gambella and the pastor and other members keep going to offer some training for youth and women every year.

In addition to meeting Pastor Robert and Carol, I had the privilege to visit Michel and Rachel Wellers, who are PCUSA mission co-workers in Ethiopia. Also, I was able to visit and pray with the vice president of the Gambella regional state. What a joy to ministry to people in authority!

Before I leave you, I want to share with you the picture of the shrine in our village. Even if it's



now being deserted and no one pays attention to it any longer, the marks can still be seen. I was so excited to take this opportunity and took a picture of this place as it used to be revered when I was a little child. For many of you who had a chance to read my faith journey you'd remember what I was trying to say in my statement—about presenting gifts to the gods in my village.

April 9th was my last Sunday in Ethiopia. Then I had a chance preach my last sermon about **persistence and endurance** before I left that afternoon for Addis Ababa and then to the USA. *Please, see also the power point for more pictures on the slideshow and some short descriptions.*

Thank you everyone for your prayers and continuing support. Thank you to Westminster Presbyterian Church, Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys, and Grace Community Church of Worthington for the unyielding spirit of support for our ministry. Our ministry has been growing because of your friendship, partnership and love for God. Thank you to Peter Mann and Mary for the dedication of their time, making sure that our ministry misses none but keep the flame of the Holy Spirit burning stronger and thriving. God has blessed us with great friends!

“Gambella is a lot safer than South Sudan! You’re all welcome any time!” said Rachel and Michel Wellers, our Mission Co-workers in Gambella, Ethiopia.



Therefore, I invite whoever is interested in making a short mission trip to Gambella next year; your presence will touch lives; bring a lasting impact, encouragement and blessing to many. Also I need many of you to see and learn where I came from and how your support and prayers has been changing lives in Ethiopia.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” Eph. 3:20-21