

# Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Fiftieth Anniversary

Colleagues,

Something jubilant after last week's somber posting. In the second year of our decade-plus serving as "Global Mission Volunteers" in the ELCA (1995), Marie and I were in Addis Ababa at the seminary of the EECMY, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. Here "Evangelical" = Lutheran, and "Mekane Yesus" = Dwelling Place of Jesus. Our initial caretakers and mentors upon entry there were Loren and Edith Bliese, pioneer missionaries from the American Lutheran Church, a predecessor body of the ELCA. They arrived in 1960, just one year after EECMY was constituted—and stayed for 48 years. They have been major shapers in what the EECMY has now become. Just one facet of that is this: When constituted fifty years ago EECMY membership was 20,000. Today it's over 5 million. EECMY today has the second largest church membership in world Lutheranism. They know something about missions and evangelism that we mainliners don't. One is their mantra (which I've mentioned before): If you're baptized, you're a missionary.

Two weekends ago the EECMY celebrated its 50th birthday. Also the 110th year since the start of Evangelical missions in Ethiopia. Marie and I wish we could have been there. This ThTh post is the best we can do to join the celebration along with our friends and former students in the EECMY. One such student is the festival peacher mentioned below, Dr. Gemechis Desta Buba, now also an ELCA staffer. We also want to celebrate along with the Blieses, for Loren received an honorary doctorate

during the festivities. The grounds for that honorary degree are appended below. But first we start with Loren's own report to us of the public celebration.

If you want to see pictures GO to <<http://tinyurl.com/bxmhlh>>  
For general info about EECMY it's <<http://www.eecmy.org/>>

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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From Loren Bliese: EECMY Jubilee and Commemoration of 110 Years of Mission

All praise and honor to God for the wonders of his work through national and expatriate missionaries in Ethiopia for the past 110 years, and for the 50 years of growth since the organization of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

The celebration began Saturday, Jan. 17, 2009 with a gathering of guests from Ethiopia and abroad in the Ethiopian Conference Hall in Addis Ababa. Rev. Iteffa Gobena, the President of EECMY, welcomed everyone, and summarized the spiritual and developmental growth of the church, which has come about through the grace of Jesus. Bishop Jim Arends of the La Crosse Synod of ELCA led opening prayers along with representatives of other churches from Europe and Africa. Mr. Degefe Bula, the spokesperson of the Ethiopian House of Federation, delivered a speech. Messages were brought from various local and international churches.

Dr. Gemechis Desta, a Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary graduate now serving in the ELCA Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission Unit, proclaimed the word on the basis of the Jubilee fifty year celebration of freedom in Leviticus 25. He noted the past times of persecution, and how by the blood of Jesus the

church now has been freed. It has a new opportunity to proclaim freedom in Christ to the whole world.

Rev. Rafael Malpica, the Executive Director of ELCA Global Mission Unit, brought greetings, noting the blessings the immigrant sons and daughters of EECMY have brought to the ELCA. Greetings were given by representatives of many partners. Getachew Bellete traced the historical origins of Christian witness in Ethiopia. Dr. Tesfaye brought greetings from Word of Life Church, noting that both denominations trace lines back to Presbyterian missionary Dr. Thomas Lambe.

Medals of honor were awarded to many Gospel pioneers, and a list of places to be named in memory of many departed leaders was read. Included in these was the designation of the men's dormitory in Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in memory of Dr. Herbert G. Schaefer. He was the founder of the American Lutheran Mission, and by God's guidance served as a catalyst to bring the Lutheran work of various European and American missions together in the founding of EECMY in 1959.

Lunch was served to the guests, after which a panel presented "Christian Social Responsibility and the Role of the Church in Society." The wholistic ministry of EECMY was traced from its beginning with both Gospel proclamation, and medical and educational services. A challenge was given for the haves and have-nots to work together in the love of Christ to help people regain dignity and to bring out the best in everyone.

More greetings were brought from partners, the Lutheran World Federation, and All Africa Council of Churches. Historically, together with Ethiopian Gospel pioneers, the Swedish Evangelical Mission, American Presbyterian Mission, and German Hermannsburg Mission work encouraged the growth of many strong synods in Western Ethiopia. The Norwegian Lutheran Mission has sent 600

missionaries to Ethiopia since beginning work in 1948. This has brought fruit with active growing churches in many ethnic groups in the south. The ELCA work began under the American Lutheran Church in the north. There are now thirteen congregations and 36 outreach places in the North Central Ethiopia Synod, and three congregations in other northern regions. Other European missions worked in more locations together with Ethiopians who have planted the Gospel throughout Ethiopia. Everyone praised God that the church has grown from 29,000 in 1959 to five million in 2009.

Sunday morning a mass worship gathering was held in Millenium Hall, which was built for the celebration of the 2000th year of Christ. (According to the Ethiopian calendar the third millennium began 9/11/2007.) A choir from various EECMY churches led the singing. The President and Vice President of the Church led the worship along with participation of an archbishop from Norway and the pastors of the EECMY. Recognition was given in a Marriage Jubilee for a very large group of EECMY couples who have been married for over fifty years. Dr. Gemechis brought a message based on Genesis 26:19-22, tracing the troubles and opposition of the past, but the joy of God's blessing. This hope was based on the words, "Now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." A song composed with this theme was sung by the choir, with a chorus for the congregation.

After more greetings from partner churches, special prayers were made for mercy and reconciliation. A presentation was made of the EECMY vision for the next fifty years. Then flags of the regions where the EECMY works were brought forward by present adult members. Children representing these regions then received the flags in a ceremony. This ended with vows of dedication for all in the congregation to go forward with this renewed vision of service to Christ in unity and love.

In the afternoon a ceremony inaugurating the Mekane Yesus University was held at the seminary. The university will incorporate the various theological and educational colleges of the church. Displays from the EECMY synods and national programs showed the activities of the church with pictures and crafts.

Sunday evening an honors program was given at the Sheraton Hotel. Many leaders were honored for their service to the church. Four honorary doctorates were awarded by Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary. The recipients were 96-year old President Emeritus Emmanuel Abraham for his long leadership to EECMY, and three for language development: Rev. Tesgara Hirpo for work on Oromo, Rev. Neils Reimer from Presbyterian Church USA for his work on Anuak, and Rev. Dr. Loren Bliese of ELCA for his work on Afar and 20 other languages while serving as Translation Consultant for the Bible Society of Ethiopia. Rev. Reimer has been serving for over 50 years, and Rev. Bliese for over 48 years in Ethiopia. The honorary degrees were presented by His Excellency Girma Wolde-Giyorgis, the President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. In the accompanying speech he voiced his pleasure in awarding degrees to those who have served so many years contributing to the development of the languages and cultures of the Ethiopian nationalities, and finally congratulated EECMY on its 50th year Jubilee.

Praise be to God for his faithfulness, guidance and saving power through the years!

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HONORARY DEGREE FOR LOREN BLIESE: (Most of the following profile was read at the presentation of an honorary Doctor of Language Development by Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary, Addis Ababa, January 18, 2009)

PROFILE AND LIST OF PUBLICATIONS SENT TO EECMY FOR 50TH

ANNIVERSARY JANUARY, 2009

Rev. Loren Bliese came to Ethiopia in 1960 with the American Lutheran Mission, and served for 44 years as a missionary under the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. After retirement he has continued serving under EECMY about half time as a missionary volunteer of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Rev. Bliese served for eleven years as an evangelistic missionary in Wallo. During these years he helped to organize EECMY congregations in Waldia, Worgesa, Wuchale and surrounding areas. He started the EECMY outreach to the Afar ethnic group in 1963, conducting a mobile clinic service in the nomadic area, and building a literacy school. He also initiated literacy work in the Wuchale area, and by 1976 was administering 70 literacy centers of EECMY. In the 1973-1975 Wallo famine he helped his wife Edith organize famine relief feeding programs connected to many of the literacy centers.

From 1970-1972 Rev. Bliese served as principal of Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary. During this time the Theological Education by Extension program and the BTh program were initiated. During furlough in the US the next year, Rev. Bliese completed course work for a PhD in Linguistics. He returned to Ethiopia, and along with missionary work, used the next five years to write a dissertation on Afar grammar. Besides his dissertation he has published numerous articles on Afar linguistics, music and culture, two on Amharic, one on Konso, and many on Old Testament studies analyzing Hebrew literary structures, and on Bible translation. A study of Song of Songs was published by Yemissrach Dimts as Yefiqr Qine. He also published "History of the North Ethiopia Area Work: Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus-1957-1972" in Mission to Ethiopia: An American Lutheran Memoir 1957-2003. From 1985-2004 Dr. Bliese taught Old

Testament courses every semester at Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary, and occasionally at the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology. For many years Dr. Bliese served as the English recording secretary for EECMY General Assemblies.

In 1976 EECMY seconded Dr. Bliese to the Bible Society of Ethiopia to be coordinator for the Afar Bible translation project. Three books of the New Testament were published along with New Reader Bible stories. From 1979-2006 he served as United Bible Societies' Translation Consultant for Ethiopia and Djibouti. During this time he helped in the training of translators, checking for quality control, and administration of projects related to the Bible Society of Ethiopia. He has worked on the following:

Bibles: Western Oromo, New Amharic, Revised Tigrinya, Wolaitta

New Testaments (most continuing toward a full Bible): Aari, Afar, Anuak, Arsi Oromo, Bench, Borana, Burji, Eastern Oromo, Gedeo (training), Guji Oromo, Gumuz, Gurage, Hadiyya, Kafa, Kambaata, Konso, Kunama, Koorete, Maale, Me'en, Sidaama, Silti.

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List of Publications by Loren F. Bliese:

1966, 1970 and 1976. (Reports on Evangelistic Outreach Program in Wallo, Ethiopia). CHURCH GROWTH BULLETIN.

1970. "The Lexicon—A Key to Culture; with Illustrations from Afar Word Lists". JOURNAL OF ETHIOPIAN STUDIES 8.2, 1-19.

1973. "Notes on the Reconstruction of Glottal Stop in the Aussa Dialect of Afar". ANTHROPOLOGICAL LINGUISTICS 15.8, 373-382.

1975. "Afar Vowel Dissimilation: A Problem in Rule Ordering". ANTHROPOLOGICAL LINGUISTICS 17.3, 102-106.

1975. "Amharic Language Interference in Learning Greek". PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST UNITED STATES CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN STUDIES. Ed., H. Marcus, Michigan State University: East Lansing, pp. 303-318.
1976. "Proportional Relations and Synchronic Developments in Afar Morphology". FOLIO ORIENTALIA 17, 41-50.
1976. "Afar". THE NON-SEMITIC LANGUAGES OF ETHIOPIA. Ed., M.L. Bender, Michigan State University: East Lansing, pp. 133-165.
- 1978-79. "The Tragedies of Three Afar Girls". ETHIOPIANIST NOTES 2.3, 49-59.
1979. "Constraints on Clitics in Amharic". FOLIA ORIENTALIA 20, 133-142.
1980. "Bible Translation from SV0 to SOV Languages in Ethiopia". FOLIA ORIENTALIA 21, 163-169.
1980. "Amharic Interference in Afar Translation". BULLETIN OF THE SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, 43.2, 345-356.
1980. "Translating Ancient Literature" (in Amharic). SEMINAR ON TRANSLATION. Addis Ababa University. pp. 182-190.
1981. A GENERATIVE GRAMMAR OF AFAR. Summer Institute of Linguistics Publications in Linguistics Number 65: University of Texas at Arlington.
- 1982-83. "Afar Songs". NORTHEAST AFRICAN STUDIES, 4.3, 51-76.
- 1986 (Coauthor with Sokka Gignarta). "Konso Exceptions to SOV Typology". JOURNAL OF ETHIOPIAN STUDIES 19, 1-40.
1986. Review of E.M. Parker and R.J. Hayward: AN AFAR-ENGLISH-FRENCH DICTIONARY (WITH GRAMMATICAL NOTES IN ENGLISH). BULLETIN



OF THE SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.

1988. "A Discourse Analysis of Amharic Narrative". PROCEEDINGS OF THE EIGHTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN STUDIES. Ed., Taddese Beyene, Institute of Ethiopian Studies: Addis Ababa and Frobenius: Frankfurt, pp. 613-621.

1988. "Metrical Sequences and Climax in the Poetry of Joel". OCCASIONAL PAPERS IN TRANSLATION AND TEXTLINGUISTICS 2.4, 52-84.

1988. "Chiastic Structures, Peaks and Cohesion in Nehemiah 9.6-37". THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR 39.2, 208-215.

1989. "Does the Verb Come Last in Your Language?" THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR 40.2, 219-227.

1990. "Figurative Language in the Psalms: some working notes from a translation team". THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR 41.2, 445.

1990. "Structurally Marked Peak in Psalms 1-24". OCCASIONAL PAPERS IN TRANSLATION AND TEXTLINGUISTICS 4.4, 265-321.

1991. (Coauthor with Yvonne Genat). "A Discourse Analysis of Afar Narrative". JOURNAL OF AFROASIATIC LANGUAGES 3, 297-317.

1993. "Chiastic and Homogeneous Metrical Structures Enhanced by Word Patterns in Obadiah". JOURNAL OF TRANSLATION AND TEXTLINGUISTICS 6.3, 210-227.

1994. "The Afar Drum Song Karambo". PROCEEDINGS OF THE ELEVENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ETHIOPIAN STUDIES, Vol. I. Edited by Bahru Zewde, Richard Pankhurst & Taddese Beyene, 583-594.

1994. "Symmetry and Prominence in Hebrew Poetry: With Examples from Hosea." DISCOURSE PERSPECTIVES ON HEBREW POETRY IN THE SCRIPTURES, UBS MONOGRAPH SERIES, No. 7, Ernst R. Wendland,

Editor, 67-94

1995. "A Cryptic Chiastic Acrostic: Finding Meaning from Structure in the Poetry of Nahum." JOURNAL OF TRANSLATION AND TEXTLINGUISTICS 7.3, 48-81.

1998. "Ethiopia Launches Aari New Testament". WORLD REPORT (United Bible Societies: Reading) #333 (September, 1998), 14.

1999. "The Poetics of Habakkuk." JOURNAL OF TRANSLATION AND TEXTLINGUISTICS 12, 47-75.

2000. "Translating Psalm 23 in Traditional Afar Poetry." in HEBREW POETRY IN THE BIBLE: A GUIDE FOR UNDERSTANDING AND FOR TRANSLATING. Lynell Zogbo and Ernst R. Wendland. United Bible Societies: New York, 185-194.

2001. "Bible inspires woman to serve people with AIDS", "'Born evangelist' led to Bible Society work", and "How a blind man gained clear vision: a true story". WORLD REPORT (United Bible Societies: Reading) #363 (October, 2001), 24-27.

2002. "YEFIQR QINE" ("A Love Poem", analysis of the Biblical "Song of Songs" in Amharic). Yemisrach Dimts: Addis Ababa.

2002. Review of "Poetry in the Hebrew Bible: Selected Studies from Vetus Testamentum," Ed., David E. Orton, in REVIEW OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE, SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE online at [www.bookreviews.org](http://www.bookreviews.org).

2003. "The Key Word 'Name' and Patterns with 26 in the Structure of Amos." THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR 54.1, 121-135.

2003. "Lexical and Numerical Patterns in the Structure of Micah." JOURNAL OF TRANSLATION AND TEXTLINGUISTICS 16, 119-143.

2004. "Metrical and Lexical Patterning in the Structure of

Zephaniah." JOURNAL OF TRANSLATION AND TEXTLINGUISTICS 17, 36-68.

2004. "Bible Translation in Ethiopia: Culture and Ethnicity." BIBLE TRANSLATION AND AFRICAN LANGUAGES. Ed. by Gosnell L.O.R. Yorke and Peter M. Renju. Acton: Nairobi, 105-122.

2004. "History of the North Ethiopia Area Work: Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus – 1957-1972". MISSION TO ETHIOPIA: AN AMERICAN LUTHERAN MEMOIR 1957-2003. Eds. Leonard Flachmann and Merlyn Seitz. Kirk: Minneapolis, 42-63.

Forthcoming. A THEOLOGICAL CODE FOR SONG OF SONGS: SYMBOLIC NUMBERS, LITERARY STRUCTURE AND THEOLOGY IN THE SONG OF SONGS. Bibal: North Richard Hills.