

**Canadian Foodgrains Bank Learning Tour Presentation at Wildwood  
September 9, 2018  
Ethiopia Jan. 27 to Feb 7, 2018**

**GAYLORD - Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to share our experiences on a Canadian Foodgrains Bank learning tour to Ethiopia from Jan 27 to Feb 7 this year. The work of the Foodgrains Bank is something that we are passionate about. As followers of Jesus we feel we are called to consider the plight of the poor and oppressed. Many verses in scripture encourage us to share of our abundance. Hebrews 13:16 – “And do not neglect doing good and sharing.”

People sometimes ask me why I decided to support CFGB with a growing project. It started with a growing awareness of the prevalence of hunger in our world and a realization that we are living lives of privilege and plenty gave us a desire to do more; we want the hungry to share in our good fortune. A Canadian Foodgrains Bank growing project was a good fit for us – we have land and growing crops is what we do. So for the past 8 years we have had a growing project on our farm.

**Canadian Foodgrains Bank background**

The Canadian Foodgrains Bank was formed in 1983 and today is a partnership of 15 church and church-based agencies working together to end global hunger, one of which is MCC. In 2016-2017 over 900,000 people in 35 countries were beneficiaries of this work. There are different ways in which the Foodgrains Bank seeks to address the issue of hunger in our world. One way is by providing emergency food for people who are hungry because of war, drought and unfair international trade policies. A second way is through agriculture and livelihoods programs which focus on helping small-scale farmers provide food for themselves and their families in the longer term by increasing their yields through sustainable agriculture practices, and generating more income from what they grow. A third way is support programs that improve nutrition, especially for children and nursing mothers, and by providing nutrition education and training for families. Canadian Foodgrains Bank also works to end global hunger through education and advocacy, working to influence national and international policies that contribute to ending hunger, and engaging and educating Canadians in efforts to end hunger.

**LOIS - Ethiopia Facts**

Ethiopia is located in the horn of Africa (NE), and is a land-locked country approximately twice the size of Saskatchewan with a population of about 106 million. 80% of Ethiopians earn their livelihood from agriculture and although Ethiopia is rich in natural resources, the average income is \$2/day with 44% of the population living below the poverty line. While a large part of Ethiopia languishes in drought, its main exports are actually agricultural products—coffee, vegetables, oilseeds, plants and cut flowers.

Approximately 80 different languages are spoken in Ethiopia, with Amharic (somewhat similar to Arabic), being the most widely understood. Addis Ababa is the capital city and the hub of Africa with the headquarters of the African Union being located here.

Ethiopia, sometimes referred to as “Land of Origins”, is the oldest independent country in Africa and one of the oldest in the world. What are believed to be the oldest remains of a human ancestor ever found, which have been dated as some 5 million years old, were discovered in the Awash Valley in Ethiopia, beating “Lucy”, who was unearthed in the same area in 1974. (origin of 4 major crops—coffee, sorghum, castor bean and teff)

Ethiopia is mentioned in the Bible 45 times, as the land of “Cush” in more modern translations. The Old Testament records the Queen of Sheba’s visit to Jerusalem where “she proved Solomon with hard questions”. Matters clearly went further than that because legend asserts that King Menelik, the founder of the Ethiopian Empire, was the son of the Queen and Solomon. Missionaries from Egypt and Syria reached Ethiopia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and introduced Christianity and then various historical events isolated Ethiopia until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A bit about food—the grain teff accounts for about one-quarter of total cereal production in Ethiopia. Teff is a very small grain, high in dietary fibre, iron, protein and calcium. It is becoming somewhat of a super food in developed countries, as it is also gluten free. It is used to make injera, a spongy pancake-like bread which is eaten with all kinds of meat, chickpea and lentil “toppings”. Food is eaten without utensils.

As Ethiopia is the place where coffee was first discovered, it is an important drink. Making and serving coffee is a ceremony. The beans are roasted over a charcoal fire while frankincense is tossed onto another small fire, filling the room with fragrance. Once the beans are roasted, they are passed around for everyone to smell. Then the coffee beans are taken away and ground and the coffee is prepared. Usually it is served with popcorn or nuts.

One of the men in our group tried his hand at serving the coffee, although we were told this wasn’t a man’s job!

### **GAYLORD - Learning Tour**

Our group of 15 learning tour participants arrived in Addis Ababa early in the morning on Jan 28. We were from across Canada—2 from BC, 2 from Alberta, the two of us from Saskatchewan, 2 from Manitoba, 3 from Ontario, 1 from Nova Scotia plus 3 from the Foodgrains Bank office in Winnipeg. We were met at the hotel by Sam Vanderende, a Canadian Foodgrains Bank staff person who has lived in Ethiopia for 24 years. He led us in an orientation that morning and was our guide for the learning tour.

In the afternoon we visited the national museum (it was interesting, but most of us were so jet lagged that we can’t remember much!) Later we took a short drive out of the city, up a mountain where we could get a good view of the city. What surprised us was the poor air quality. Exhaust from diesel engines and a city of 6 million people, many using wood, charcoal or dried animal dung for cooking fuel created a haze that could be seen and smelled.

The next day we met with a local organization called Desert Rose who introduced us to Ethiopian culture and perspectives on poverty. It was a good morning of learning how to greet people in a culturally appropriate way and about the importance of relationships in Ethiopian culture.

In the afternoon we boarded a plane to Bahir Dar in north western Ethiopia, on the banks of Lake Tana, where the Blue Nile originates.

For supper we were joined by Etsegenet and 4 students who had benefited from the “Orphaned and Vulnerable Children Project”, a World Renew (Christian Reformed) partner that we would visit the next day. The students shared about their studies, their goals and dreams for the future and thanked us for the support they received through Foodgrains Bank. Interestingly, we found out that we had attended a Foodgrains Bank event here in Saskatchewan a couple of years ago where Etsegenet was the guest speaker.

### **LOIS - Project Visits**

On Jan 30 we drove to our first project visit at Nefas Mewcha where Canadian Foodgrains Bank partner World Renew is continuing to support Food for the Hungry – Ethiopia with a four-year food assistance and agriculture and livelihoods project in the Amhara Region. This project is continuing to build upon two previous three-year projects, with the objective continuing to be the provision of food and care support for the physical and social development of 1500 orphans and vulnerable children affected and infected by HIV/AIDS.

The program focuses on four areas of support for the children: food, education, health and psychosocial. The program also continues to include a focus on livelihood development for the care-giving families through small scale income generating activities.

The most meaningful part of the day: we split into groups and, along with an interpreter, visited the homes of students and their caregivers. As we drove and then walked to the homes, we were surrounded by poverty. Many of the homes were small, windowless structures with a small fenced yard.

**GAYLORD** The group I was in met with a grade 5 girl who lived with her grandmother. She showed us her school work which was very neatly done, and at the end of the visit the grandmother, with tears in her eyes, begged us to take her granddaughter along with us because she wanted a better life for her.

Our second visit was with a girl in grade 7 living with her aunt. Again, despite the poverty, in each home we were offered a gift of hospitality—fresh grass and flower petals spread on the dirt floor and injera made from inexpensive grains.

**LOIS** The group I was in visited Mogus, who lives alone in a tiny room rented from a landlord.

After seeing his room we visited in the landlord's living room.

Mogus's parents died when he was little and he then lived with his grandmother. He is 20 years old now and in Grade 12, having spent 3 years in the OVC program. On weekends he goes home to be with his grandmother. He is very grateful for the assistance he receives, and particularly mentioned the rice, lentils and oil that he received every month.

He is doing very well in school and hopes to graduate with very good marks. The top marks are extremely important as he wants to become a doctor, and come back to work in his home area.

We also met with a group of volunteer teachers who spend two hours each Saturday and Sunday afternoon providing extra tutoring for children in the program. When asked about the challenges facing them as teachers, the answer loud and clear was HUNGER. Hunger is a great problem. Students often are late because they are trying to find something to eat before coming to learn. And when children come to school hungry it's hard to learn.

On Jan 31 we drove to Lalibela. Here is a picture of the vehicles we were driving in...and one of our 4 Ethiopian drivers who got us to all our destinations safely.

**GAYLORD** In Lalibela we met Abdu, who works with Lutheran World Federation, another Foodgrains Bank partner, who gave us insight into the two projects we would be visiting the next day. This area has a high number of female farmers as men are often away seeking other employment.

The following day we visited two water diversion/irrigation projects. The first project at Shumsheha covers approximately 60 hectares of land. The water channel is 2.5 km long with the first 700 meters made of concrete (by hand, as a cash or food for work project) and the rest earthen canal. It was impressive to see the oasis of beautiful irrigated green vegetables such as cabbages, onions and tomatoes growing next to land that was cracked and dry. When completed, 108 families will benefit from this project.

At this location there was also a beekeeping project. With increased vegetation they are now able to produce and sell honey to supplement their incomes.

In the afternoon we visited a project at Medaghe.

This project covered 21 hectares. We met with members of the water users association, chaired by Kassa. He explained how the concrete channels have reduced seepage and have led to more efficient use of water. This community was sharing water with another project upstream. On the day we visited, the upstream project was using water so there was actually no flow coming down the river. Ninety-eight households benefit from this project. Irrigation has allowed them to diversify crops, resulting in better nutrition and health for their children.

The water cooperative hopes to purchase a used truck to take their produce to market with the money in their bank account. Farmers are fined if they don't help clean out the canal or they don't show up for meetings.

We met with farmer Kibretu Ayalew who showed us his fine field of cabbages.

**LOIS** Besides visiting the Foodgrains Bank project sites, we also had a day tour of the Lalibela rock-hewn churches.

There are 11 churches at this site, each carved out of a single rock, and now declared a UNESCO heritage site. Depending on which information you believe, they were either carved in 23 years with the help of angels working the night shift or they took 150 years to build using human labor, probably started during the time of King Lalibela in the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century. The churches are still in use today by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as places of worship, pilgrimage and devotion.

King Lalibela had the churches built as a "New Jerusalem" because Muslim invasions had halted pilgrimages to the holy land. Even today pilgrims walk many kilometers barefoot to worship. As we were entering the first church, our guide pointed out a man who had walked 200 kms barefoot to come to worship—his feet were a sight to behold!

Our guide, Hailu, was the grandson of the last high priest and grew up within the compound of the churches, so he was very knowledgeable and told us many interesting things about what we were seeing.

**Worship Service** -We were able to attend an Orthodox Christian worship service at the World Savior Church in Mekelle on Sunday morning. The service begins at 6 am and can last up to 9 hours, with worshipers standing the entire time. Worship is much like it was in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, conducted in Ge'ez, an ancient liturgical language. We attended for about an hour and a half, and even though we couldn't

understand the chants, it was a moving experience. Worship in close proximity to so many people bowing, kneeling with faces touching the ground was an experience I won't soon forget.

In Mekelle we visited an MCC project, Anna's House. Linda, the Hutterite woman on our tour, is the niece of Anna Hofer, for whom the project is named. Anna lived in Winnipeg, and her homemaker worker was an Ethiopian woman named Behren Mesret. After Anna's death and just before Behren returned to Ethiopia Behren dreamed that Anna came to her saying "we must do something for the children of Ethiopia" and so Anna's House was born. Today around 40 orphans and vulnerable children are placed in foster homes through the project.

Kibron and his co-worker, Letay, took us to visit one of the guardians, Mitslal, whose house is on the edge of Mikelle. Her home looked very impressive with small fields of vegetables and maize around her, fruit trees and rosemary among other things, and four cows in the barn near her house.

Mitslal "owns" the land she farms, but not in the way that we consider ownership. All land belongs to the government, so she can farm the land as her own but could not sell it. Mitslal is a widow who has two of her own children living with her and 4 children being fostered through the Anna's House project, including a mentally challenged young girl. She gets a monthly stipend for all 6 children, and also some help with projects to improve her family situation. Mitslal started with the program 11 years ago and her living situation had become more stable. It was interesting to hear that of the 515 birr given monthly per child (about \$19), 70 birr goes into a bank account in the name of the child to become a fund for secondary education. Social workers visit the family and also the schools the children attend 4 times a year to monitor their progress and assist as necessary.

We were encouraged to see a project such as Anna's House, helping not only children who are orphaned but families who are at risk. Programs such as this seem particularly important at this time, because Ethiopia has closed the door to foreign adoptions earlier this year.

**GAYLORD** On Feb 5 we drove from Wukro to visit a Support for Sustainable Development project on the Demale River, another Lutheran World Federation partner project.

To get to this project we drove for an hour or so along a dry river bed. Along the way we saw boys panning for gold. This area in the NE of Ethiopia, in the Afar Region, near the Eritrean border seemed particularly dry, desolate and remote.

This project was very intriguing and had many in our group somewhat skeptical. When the rainy season comes, dry river beds become rushing torrents of earth-laden water, eroding the surrounding hills. The 4.5 km canal on this project will divert this soil-laden water onto the rock-bordered plots where the soil will settle out, much as it does when a delta is formed at the end of a river's journey to the sea. In one to two years these rocky areas will become fields of nutrient rich soil that can be planted. Thousands of hours have already gone into this work for food project. 85% of the canal has been dug by hand and the rocks placed one by one in rows bordering the fields.

We found this project's outcome hard to imagine until we saw the results of a previous smaller project in a nearby area.

**LOIS** Because we've lived on a farm for the last 40 years, where one is always aware of water or lack thereof, I was keenly aware of the challenges faced by so many small-holder farmers in Ethiopia. Rains are sporadic in the area of Ethiopia that we visited, especially during the early rainy season in March/April. One of the images I remember clearly is something I saw as we were driving. It was

raining just a little, the only rain we saw the whole time, enough so that the driver occasionally turned on the windshield wiper. Near the road was a house where a woman with a small child on her hip stood in front of the door, holding what looked like a small tin can up to the edge of the roof to catch the little bit of water running down. When I think about our experiences in Ethiopia, this image sums up the importance that water plays in our lives.

**(GAYLORD)** The last project we visited and described to you left a lasting impression on me. As we drove up the dry Demale riverbed, the valley became increasingly barren. It felt like we were touring another planet where life didn't exist. When I think of the images along this valley, another valley always comes to mind. It's not a valley that actually existed in any place or time, but one that the prophet Ezekial saw in a vision.

In his vision, Ezekial is standing in the middle of this valley and he is surrounded by bones—dry bones. They have been there for a significant period of time. And God enters into the vision and asks Ezekial “Can these bones live?” I marvel at the wisdom of Ezekial's response “God you alone know.” And God tells Ezekial to prophesy to these bones and they will live. So Ezekial prophesies and he hears a rattling noise throughout the valley as the bones come together. And then sinew and flesh and skin appear on the bones. But the bodies have no life in them, so God tells Ezekial to prophesy again, which he does and the winds blow and breath enters the bodies, they stand up and a vast army fills the valley. What an amazing transformation Ezekial witnesses. Dry bones coming to life. Of course it didn't actually happen, right? It's a vision. But God tells Ezekial that he is going to work an equally amazing transformation among this people.

Back to the Demale River valley. I can imagine a rattling noise, hundreds of hours of rattling as stones are piled on stones to form the retaining walls of this CFGB project. I can imagine more rattling and clanging as picks and shovels work to dig several kilometers of canal. And when the infrastructure for this project is complete, the simple but powerful forces of nature and gravity will bring soil to cover the rocky fields, putting on sinew, flesh and skin, as it were. And when the local people plant their seeds a vast army of vegetables and fruits will rise up, filling the valley, providing food security for approximately 4000 people. And an absolutely amazing transformation will have taken place!

The goal of Canadian Foodgrains Bank is to end global hunger. A lofty goal, I sometimes think, given the conflicts in our world that continue to cause hundreds of thousands to flee their homes and land, robbing them of the ability to provide food for themselves and for their families. A lofty goal, given the challenges faced by small-holder farmers amid a changing climate.

Will our world, I wonder, ever know a day when there is no hunger? Our friend Ezekial would respond, “God, you alone know. You alone...know. Amen