

TRIP TO ETHIOPIA IN THE SOUTH SUDAN – by Jeff Ritchie



David Paduil & the
Rev. Nhial – Photo #1

Commissioned Ruling Elder David Paduil, of the Sudanese Presbyterian Church in Gallatin, and the Rev. Jeff Ritchie, Associate Director of The Outreach Foundation, made a two-week trip to Ethiopia to learn the needs of refugees from the civil war in South Sudan who are in refugee camps in the Gambella Regional State of Ethiopia. After arrival in Addis Ababa they boxed 520 Nuer-language hymnals to take to Gambella in Western Ethiopia near the South Sudan border (see photo #1, “David Paduil and the Rev. Nhial loading hymnals”). They also petitioned the government office in Addis Ababa that administers refugee affairs for permission to enter the camps.

They then spent the next week in Gambella. First, they met for three days with church leaders from four of the refugee camps where they listened to the needs of the refugees, traumatized by the 15 month-old civil war. A phrase they heard over and over again was, “We left our country, but we have not left our God.” So their great cry was for Bibles and hymnals to be able to maintain their connection to God, their hope.

After the conference they took packets of hymnals (see photo #2, “church leaders...taking hymnals back to their members”), and we promised them we would find a way to get the 600 Bibles we had purchased in South Sudan through a South Sudanese church leader into Ethiopia and down to the camps as soon as possible.



Photo #2



Older Youth singing

The last two days of our mission in Gambella we visited the refugee camps in person. This was thanks to the tireless efforts of PCUSA mission co-worker Michael Weller, who had hand-carried our letter of petition to the partner church in Ethiopia and then had carried the official request from the church to the office of Administration of Refugees that we be allowed into the camps.

We did hear about great needs in the camps, but we also saw great faith as we arrived in one camp the day that a youth/young adult Christian conference was to begin. We were welcomed with the song: “Welcome in peace in the name of Jesus.” The young people sang loudly and fervently in praise of God.

At another camp that same day the young people there sang movingly about their sufferings and longings to return to South Sudan: “We are walking in a hard place, shedding our blood. Vultures surround us. Let it stop. We want to go back to the land flowing with milk and honey.”

We thank all the churches of the Presbytery who have supported this mission, along with the Outreach Mission Committee of the Presbytery. The desperate cry is for peace so they can return. We look forward to sharing more about our experiences with you in your churches and at Presbytery.

Faithfully,

Jeff Ritchie



Chalk Drawing by
Younger Youth

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