



## February 2023

Dear friends,

On March 1, I will be getting on a plane in Grand Rapids, MI, for the first leg of a 25-hour journey to Ethiopia. I'm already there in some ways, as I continue to team-teach online/onsite courses at the Mekane Yesus Seminary with my colleague, Dr. Abdi Tadesse. I was doing so at 6:00 a.m. this morning, in fact, (always a bit difficult to work out timings when there's an eight-hour time difference!). But soon I'll be there in person!

I'm going this time not only to do another assessment of the progress we've been making in revitalizing the Christian/Muslim Relations program at the seminary but also to help our students with something that is challenging to them—doing academic research and writing. This is a struggle for them particularly because they're doing so in a second (or sometimes third or fourth or fifth) language, which they don't always grasp very well. English has been the language of instruction at the seminary since its creation in 1960, but it is no longer taught as well as it once was in Ethiopian schools. So many—particularly those from more remote regions—struggle with research and writing. What I hope for this trip is to give them the tools they need to have the satisfaction that comes with doing this as well as possible. Many of these students will be going on from this program to teach in Bible schools or churches to equip Christians for a ministry of reconciliation and witness to and among their Muslim neighbors. Doing well in this program gives them the tools they need to do that effectively.



*Myself and Dr. Masresha with friends of the program; Dr. Masresha, former director of the program, is now an adjunct professor.*

I have been working on several tasks during the past three years to bring revitalization to this program (which was nearly dead in the water before the seminary stepped in to set things right under the guidance of a dynamic

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new president). The first was giving students access to the best resources both in terms of an enhanced library and online resources. Over 200 books are now being added to the library as well as 1,500 online articles and books. Related to this is making donated laptops available to all the students (few students in Ethiopia can afford their own). I'm going on this trip with five that were generously donated by Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, and have 15 more that will be going with a church mission group from Sioux Falls sometime this summer or fall. I praise God for those who stepped up to donate these much-needed tools—friends, churches, and institutions (and if you feel you can afford to do so, more are always welcome!).

The other critical need was for more personnel to teach in the program, particularly with the addition of a new MA program. I praise God, in this case, that the seminary was able to recruit gifted professors who are fulfilling this need as adjuncts alongside Dr. Tadesse.

What I am most excited about is the possibility of a Ph.D. student with significant experience in the field of Muslim/Christian relations considering the possibility of becoming the first director of our proposed Study Center, which will extend the reach of this program beyond seminary walls. He traveled with me in October and was encouraged by what he saw. There are some issues to work out with his family situation, so it's not a given. But it's encouraging to know that this might happen, as the future of the program depends on someone stepping up in this kind of leadership role. If he says no, I trust that God has someone else on the horizon, but am hoping that the answer is yes.



*Mihret, one of the adjuncts and recipient of a donation for heart surgery.*



*Visiting Ph.D. candidate delivering a lecture to the theology students during his October visit.*

What I hope you see here is how encouraged I am by what has transpired so far, which is why I am more than grateful for the support you have provided to help make it possible. I sometimes hear people say that they are "only" giving money to missions as though that's not all that important to the task. But without money, there is no mission, whether local or global. What you are doing with your giving is providing fuel for the fire. Thanks much for helping to keep that fire burning!

Blessings in Christ,

John (and Lynne) Hubers

#### **PRAYER CONCERNS:**

1. Give thanks to God with us for the progress that has been made with the Christian/Muslim relations revitalization project.

*RCA Global Mission does not receive denominational assessments or covenant shares. We depend on the faithful generosity of churches and individuals.*

2. Pray that the Ph.D. candidate and his wife (who is also a Ph.D. candidate in another field) may find God's clear direction in their discernment process.
3. Pray for the students in our BA and MA programs who struggle both financially and academically. Many make great sacrifices to be in this program. Pray that they will find the resources to make it worthwhile.
4. Pray for the nation of Ethiopia—recent moves have brought a devastating conflict (thousands killed and displaced) but praise for what appears to be a peaceful end—or at least moving in that direction.