



David Ford – Ethiopia

2023 was a significant year for my ministry organization, SIL Ethiopia. (“SIL” *used* to stand for the Summer Institute of Linguistics. That full name is no longer used, and the acronym doesn’t actually stand for anything. (I think the acronym could and should be repurposed—we’ve already got the L for Language!) SIL can most simply be thought of as the field/work organization where missionaries from Wycliffe Bible Translators are sent for service.) This was especially apparent in March when we celebrated our 50-year Anniversary. That’s right, SIL has been working in Ethiopia since 1973! This month of celebrations included several special events:

- An SIL “Fair” at the beginning of March, where over 80 outside attendees (mostly Ethiopians) came to learn about the diverse work SIL is involved with in Ethiopia. Just to give you some context, SIL Ethiopia has approximately 120 staff from a dozen different countries, though the majority of our staff are Ethiopian. Our programmatic departments include Bible Translation, Literacy & Multilingual Education, Linguistics, Scripture Engagement, Vernacular Media, LanguaCulture Center, and Training; these departments are supported by Admin, Human Resources, IT, Finance, and Library/Archives which is part of my role.
- A day of celebrations with both our church (Bible translation) and government (language development) partners, and a special celebratory dinner event at the Sheraton. These events garnered lots of positive local media promotion for SIL Ethiopia.
- An “SIL family” celebration lunch for current and former staff.
- The first Ethiopian “Run for the Bibleless”—already a well-known event in other countries like Kenya, I believe our administration hopes to make this an annual event that we hope will grow to similar prominence in this country.



SIL Fair and the Partners dinner celebration

This year was also significant because we announced that on the year SIL Ethiopia turned 50, Ethiopia would see the achievement of Vision 2025—the goal Wycliffe Bible Translators adopted in 1999 to have a translation program in process in every language still needing one by the year 2025. Although there is some discrepancy in how this is measured, a project has indeed been set up in the last of Ethiopia's 87 languages. Logistics are still being organized and I invite you to pray for these projects to be able to start the practical work of language development and scripture translation within these next two years to see the “full” completion of Vision 2025 by all measures.



Run for the Bibleless

The special media coverage of the 50-year Anniversary gave me access to a wealth of diverse and professionally recorded footage of staff interviews and reflections. With the help of our Global Mission Marketing and Communications Coordinator, I was able to craft this footage into an excellent [six-and-a-half minute video](#) featuring 14 different staff and partners, all sharing their own experience and expertise within SIL Ethiopia. This video, which I shared in my October newsletter, is a unique opportunity for you to hear about our work from the various staff themselves, and well worth watching!



SIL Ethiopia Family

My role as Special Projects Implementer, as usual, contained an eclectic variety of jobs in many different departments as I served with my skills in detailed data entry, organization, and management. In addition to my routine roles as librarian, archivist, editor, and other jobs, two major projects this year were:

- The proofreading of a 300-page grammar draft of the Berta language written by my colleague Susanne Neudorf. My work focused on keeping the hundreds of interlinear examples consistent through the use of Styles as well as fully automating the manually entered bibliographic references throughout the text.
- Working with a team of specialists in the U.S. on a pilot project to document and analyze how intellectual property is handled at the entity/countrywide level in SIL. We need to manage the copyright and licensing of our intellectual property well to reliably and legally allow language communities to use the work we produce. It is hoped that this pilot project—done in Ethiopia due to our entity's robust publishing history and my dedicated archiving work—will serve as a template for SIL International to be able to guide entities worldwide into better management practices and stewardship of their own intellectual property.

Looking forward to next year, I expect a major new role to come in the form of being trained to do Scripture Typesetting—formatting a translated New Testament or Bible for printing. I expect there will be much more on this topic in my newsletters next spring!

On the personal side, 2023 has been a significant year, especially due to a major change: my parents retired from 40 years of overseas service as RCA missionaries (most recently in Beirut, Lebanon, from December 2012-August 2022) and settling down in their sort-of-new, sort-of-old home in the Richmond, VA, area. They have found a local church home and become actively involved in it; connected with their neighbors and HOA (Dad is

now on the community board); and gotten involved with several senior sports (pickleball for Dad and sometimes Mom; swimming for Mom; senior softball for Dad).

This change has a significant impact on my own routines. For example, I would usually spend most of December in Beirut on Christmas vacation with my parents; now that they are farther away in the U.S., it is more challenging (in travel and jetlag recovery time as well as airfare), and thus I am staying in Addis Ababa for this Christmas. My parents' retirement will also have some substantial effect on my Home Assignment time, since up to now I have always piggybacked my Home Assignments on that of my parents since we share most of the same contacts and they provide vital assistance with the large amount of interstate driving required. (For the near future, they may still voluntarily travel with me, out to Holland, MI, anyway.)

My parents' retirement and resettlement in Richmond also comes with the ability for me to establish a bit more of a permanent home base. Rather than my parents staying temporarily during Home Assignments in what was effectively the home of my grandmother (who passed away in 2020), they can now carry out renovations in the condo that fits their needs. Along with that comes a bit of deliberate partitioning of space for me—this fall they enclosed an alcove of our upstairs loft area into a small but dark and quiet bedroom for myself—no more having to sleep in the walk-in closet off of the upstairs bathroom! This room should better enable me to build a stock of supplies that I keep in the U.S. so that I don't have to relegate so many pounds of valuable luggage space to transporting personal objects back and forth across the ocean.

Speaking of "across the ocean," I did get to enjoy quality time with my immediate family this year, even though I will not be with them during this Christmas season. My parents, Andrew, and Anita were able to come join me in July for two weeks of vacation in Kenya. Now, this is nothing unusual; we've done family vacations at our favorite Turtle Bay resort many times. But this trip was significant as it was Anita's first time. This was her first trip overseas and, in addition to Turtle Bay, we spent three nights near Nairobi, where Andrew could introduce Anita to the St. Paul's University compound where we lived and my parents worked from 2009-2012, Rosslyn Academy where he went to school and graduated, and Village Market where we did most of our shopping. This was an important trip for introducing Anita to an important part of our Ford family heritage in Africa.



Ford family in Turtle Bay and five-player Cribbage in Turtle Bay

2023 has thus been an unusually special year for me, and I thank God for being able to participate in both professional and personal endeavors that will pave the way for a very good future.

David Ford