

Report of visit to Ethiopia by Jean Grove Trust Members/representatives

Fr. Aidan Nichols, Jane & Andrew Powell

12th – 23rd February 2009

Overview

The Country.

According to the Bradt Guide (2006) Ethiopia has a population of 70m; 8-10m were at risk of starvation from droughts of 2005. The Italian legacy is very obvious – they have good quality roads linking the main towns, and Italian NGO's are still very much in evidence.

Addis Ababa is expanding rapidly due to migration from the rural areas; there are no reliable estimates of population. There is huge demand for wood in the city – for fuel, for construction, for scaffolding. Most of the mountains around the city have been cleared of native woodland. Attempts have been made to replace this with fast growing and persistent eucalyptus; however this tree is damaging to the soil and contributes to the widespread erosion in rural areas.

Outside Addis the population survives through subsistence agriculture and aid; land is owned by the Government.

Ethiopia is predominantly Christian (Ethiopian Orthodox) but there is a substantial and rising minority Moslem population. According to a recent Government statistic the Moslem population is 35%; the Moslems believe it is 65%, giving them constitutional rights. The reality is thought to be somewhere between the two. Most people we met expressed concern about this; historically relations between the faiths have been very friendly at local level. However there is a lot of Arab money being channelled to build new mosques and new Islamic communities. Unlike the Christian Church, the Moslem Churches only provide aid to practising Moslems. There is evidence of Arab style Moslem dress being increasingly adopted and increasing tension between the communities.

The Government is authoritarian in style; mostly we heard supportive views. Relations between the Catholic and the Orthodox churches have historically been distant, reflecting concerns on the part of the Orthodox Church that the Catholics may be seeking to persuade people away from the Orthodox Church. However it appears that the two Christian Churches are beginning to work more closely together in the face of the threat from Islam. In the words of an Orthodox priest (at Yejoba) as translated by Abune Musie:

'The dogs will keep fighting until the Hyena barks'

And Abune Musie himself:

'The Catholic and Orthodox churches have been fighting for 2000 years because of a misunderstanding of the word 'Two''.

Catholic church in Ethiopia - Although Catholics make up <1% population, the Church is extremely well organised; it does not seek to influence beneficiaries of its programmes to convert to the Catholic Church. So strict is it in this regard that it will not accept a candidate for conversion below the age of 30 without a signed letter from the candidate's parents. This position ensures that the Church can collaborate effectively with the Government in pursuing its development work. Indeed it would appear that the Government is very keen to hand over schools and clinics to the Church recognising its superior ability to attract funding and to organise delivery.

The Catholic Church is divided between those dioceses that use the Latin rite and those that use the Eastern rite.

We have advised the bishops that our ultimate objective is to support one school in each of the Eastern Rite dioceses.

Development activities undertaken – the Church undertakes extensive development activities wherever it is represented. These projects are funded by a range of charities and NGO's, some big and international and some quite small – including Caritas Internationalis, Misereor (Germany), CAFOD (England and Wales), Trochair (Ireland). 'Aid to the Church in Need' provide help with pastoral projects.

It works closely with local communities and hands over any resulting infrastructure to the communities on completion. The suite of activities generally encompasses health activities, water supply, food security, women's promotion, peace and justice.

- Health – drop-in clinics, hospitals.
- Water supply – dams, boreholes, small water catchment reservoirs, pumps, piping etc to provide potable water for human use and for irrigation.
- Food security - demonstration plots, training, provision of simple equipment. Farmers expected to pay back if they do well enough, micro-credit for establishment of units, marketing, water catchment management.
- Peace and justice – bringing communities together to promote understanding and resolve problems through workshops etc.
- Womens' promotion – sewing, weaving, typewriting, day care services to enable women to work.

Education – School grade system – KG, Primary (grades 1-4), Secondary (grades 5-8), Pre-U (grades 9-12). Government schools are poorly run and hugely under-resourced – they run a 2 shift system and there can be as many as 150 in a class. Government would like to move to a one shift system as in the Catholic schools but does not have the resources to do so. Many children walk a long way to school each day with little to eat. State pays for University education - where you go depends on subject – Addis, Bahir Dar, Gonder, Mekele.

In the Catholic schools girls are well represented – most classes we saw were 50/50 and girls generally seem to do better than boys as they progress. There is a one shift system and class sizes are around 50. In some areas the school provides a nourishing midday meal. Montessori system is increasingly in use in the Kindergartens.

Financial issues – the global recession is affecting their ability to deliver development in two very direct ways:

1. The exchange rate between the £ and the Birr has fallen from 19+ to c15 Birr in 2008, so our money is only worth 75% of its value 12 months ago.
2. Aid agencies are already beginning to cut back funding – presumably because Governments are cutting back on their aid budgets.

Some indicative costs:

- Teacher salary = 700-1400 Birr (£45-90) per month
- Cost of educating a child for a year = 1100 Birr (£72)
- Training a Montessori teacher (which includes all the equipment they will use in their school) is less than £200.
- One sack of Tef = 950 Birr (£60) will feed 500 children for 6 days.
- School equipment and play equipment = 40000 Birr (£2700).
- Small building = 3-500000 Birr (£20000-33000).

Communication –everyone we met uses email and mobile telephone. Mobiles work all over the country. They are very happy to report progress on all projects.

Meetings with 4 surviving members of the original Ethiopian priests who came to Cambridge in the 1950's.

Abba Kidane Mariam and **Abba Gabriel-Mariam Amante** at the Cathedral in Addis Ababa

Abba Fetiwi Ghebray at the major seminary in Adigrat. Abba Fetiwi is still a parish priest in a remote country area (Biera parish), having to walk two miles to the nearest transport.

Abba Tesfe Hadgu at lunch in the minor seminary with Abune Tesfaselassie. Abba Tesfe is almost blind now, but gave a moving speech recalling the origins of the relationship between the Trust and the Ethiopian Church.

Visit reports

Eparchy of Emdibir

General

This is a very rural area 3 ½ hours drive south west of Addis. Economy is subsistence agriculture, the people live in traditional villages, the staple crop is the false banana. It is thought that around 50% of the population in this area is Moslem.

The Eparchy was only created in 2005 and already has 24 churches, 13 working priests + 3 overseas in training. In addition there are 4 Capuchin friars. There are 40 schools, many water projects, 4 agriculture projects, 2 hospitals, 5 clinics. An agricultural college has been built in Emdibir with Dutch money but they are not yet resourced to run it.

The Eparch, Abune Musie – 59, Eritrean by birth- is a former rector at Gulale (Capuchin Franciscan Institute of Philosophy and Theology, and Holy Saviour in Addis). He is a very energetic man, and the work of the Eparchy seems very well organised, with well qualified development and education co-ordinators reporting to the Secretary General. They receive financial support from Little Way, and especially from Church in Need.

Whilst in Emdibir, we were invited by Abune Musie to join him at a consecration of an Orthodox Church at Yejoba, where he had been invited to assist the Orthodox bishop. This was the first time that the two bishops had spoken, let alone met, and was a critical moment in developing the relations between the two churches. As Abune Musie's guests we were treated as dignitaries, and after the ceremony joined Orthodox Bishop Melchisedec at a private lunch.

Existing Commitments

1. **Demetech Habte** – see separate report on her progress. We met her in Addis along with her sister Fantu and Abraham who interpreted for us. She is in the second year of the two years we have paid for at the blind school in Addis. She is one of 5 children, 4 girls and one boy. Father is dead, Mother frail with sight problems, living with son in Emdibir. The 4 girls are all in Addis though none have proper jobs. Demetech lives with Fantu and her 15 year old daughter in one room- however at the moment because of the roadworks in Addis make the journey to school difficult she lives with her older sister during the week. Travels by taxi (cost 400Birr), rent 300 Birr (I assume these are monthly costs).

Demetech intends to go back to school when she has completed her training, but beyond that has little idea of what she will do. The best opportunities for blind people tend to be as lawyers.

Abune Musie was of the view that the money we have provided is enough; we have said to him that he should let us know if she needs extra support, either to continue her studies or with living expenses.

Opportunities

1. **Zizencho** – Rural village approximately one hour's drive south of Emdibir. Kindergarten and Primary school running now for 2 years. Currently there are 3 KG classes and 4 Primary – a total of 462 children, around 50 in a class. There is huge demand for the school, selection is

by lottery and the preference is to have no more than one child per family. Children here are the first generation to go to school.

Each class had a blackboard, but minimal other equipment. Each child has own exercise book. We distributed pencils which were well received. Notwithstanding this was the best example we saw of creative open-ended work on display.

The school is run by the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ (from Kerala, India). They also run a clinic on site which was taken over from the Government – new clinic building opening in 6 months and new house for sisters is also nearing completion.

2. **Wagapecha** – very rural setting 45 minutes beyond Zizencho. Villagers were pagans but decided to convert to Catholicism and approached Abune Musei to open a church. Plot of land has been secured (the site is currently marked by a cross and some building material provided by the village. Kindergarten will open in September –there is a state school on site although this did not look in good condition. This would be a good option if we want to start small and grow.
3. **Medercho** – half built school in a rural setting associated with the church of St George. As with Wagapecha, this would be an option if we wanted to start small and grow.

We have indicated that we are looking for a school project in the Eparchy to support

Addis Metropolitanate

General

The Archdiocese of Addis Ababa covers a huge area; it is intended to split it into 3 separate Eparchies (Addis itself, Bahir Dar and Kombolcha). There is concern in Addis Ababa that the ethos of the Catholic schools, which is not to discriminate in education – is having the effect of disadvantaging the Catholic community as many are poor and cannot afford to attend the prestige schools. As a result it is said that the proportion of Catholics in high positions in Ethiopia has fallen sharply. In both Addis and Bahir Dar we heard concerns expressed about the increasing appearance of fundamentalist Islam.

At Debre Markos, en route from Addis to Bahir Dar we visited the Missionaries of Charity who run a centre for abandoned and sick children, mostly HIV. They have a school, a workshop for adults, church and farm. Life expectancy of HIV children has increased substantially as a result of new drugs - from 14 to unknown.

Existing Commitments

1. Blessed Ghebre Michael school, Bahir Dar

Bahir Dar is a significant town on the edge of Lake Tana with some industry and a position on the main tourist circuit in Ethiopia. There are very few Catholics in this area as a result of reluctance of Emperor Haile Selassie to allow non-orthodox workers into this region (Amhara). Development activity lags well behind that in the South.

The school is run by the Daughters of Charity – a French Congregation, which runs 2 other schools in Addis. The sisters here are all Ethiopian. Sister Ayelech runs the school, Sister Terfatu runs women's promotion – sewing, weaving, typewriting and they are supported by Sister Alemitu.

Around the corner from the school is a very poor slum housing area. Funded by a Maltese group the sisters are in process of building 55 new houses for the poor families of the area - including 3 orphans who attend the school. 290000 Birr to build a block of 8 houses (~€22000).

The school now has 2 KG classes and grades 1-8 (there are around 50 in each class). Next door a new school, run by Lazarus Fathers, offers grades 9-12, and therefore the chance to stay on site up to University level as an alternative to attending State Secondary. Currently 10 per annum move to the Lazarist school, 10 to State school.

There are some 490 pupils in the school – only 4 are Catholic children and there is a small number of Moslems (most Moslems in this area are rich enough to send their children to private schools where they learn Arabic). The school has 18 teachers, 27 staff in all. The mix is roughly 50/50 boys/girls but if you take the top 3 in each class the girls predominate – girls are also doing best in the Lazarus school. More girls than boys go on to University.

Where financial support is provided the sisters ensure that it continues through to the end of the children's schooling. We pay the fees of 30 children in full, and subsidise up to 145 with various components of costs. Help is also provided from the Maltese group mentioned above. See report dated December 2008.

We donated 5 solar powered calculators.

We also passed on a donation of £250 (US\$350 in Travellers Cheques) from Coleridge school to Sister Ayelech – this will buy 4 sacks of Tef, enough to supply the school for 2 months (Tef 3 days per week). We also invited students in Grade 6 to write letters to Coleridge students; we collected some 40 Letters.

Success stories

- 2 of original JG Trust students have now left University and have returned to the school to teach - Kindeneh Chalie (26) and Tegegne Lemma (22)
- 1 JG Trust girl has completed 12th grade and is returning to teach KG – Tigist Aleign
- Balete Bantayenu – age 15 (?)crippled, brought to school by a man who found him in the fields; no-one wanted to look after him, but the man thought he was very bright and agreed to look after the boy if the school would educate him. School in Addis recommended Blessed G Michael. Knew alphabet already so was started in G 2 where he was immediately top of the class, so they moved him up. The same happened all the way through the Grade 6; he is now top in G9 (we are paying fees at Lazarist school)
- Walenlinoe Turuneh – 18. 7th in G9 Lost an arm through snake bite.

Needs

To maintain the real value of our donation would require it to increase from £6000 to £8000 per annum to compensate for exchange rate movements.

School needs CD's (English Language and Science), Books for the Library (especially science books).

Also urgent need to repair the external wall (Sr Ayelech can let us have a quote).

Opportunities

Nazareth school

This is one of only two schools in Addis that is exclusively for girls (the other being the Nativity School). It has had a fine reputation in the past and has educated many of the most successful women in the country (e.g. most of the women lawyers). It caters for the local community – 1500 pupils, fees are 1400 Birr per annum for KG to G4 (c.f. international school where the fees are 1400 per month) which cover running costs. The school got into difficulties both financial and disciplinary under Daughters of the Heart of Mary. As a result the diocese has brought in the Dominican Sisters to manage the school although the DoHM sisters still own it and are involved in the teaching and pastoral care. Since becoming involved in 2006, the Dominican Sisters have set about weeding out the teachers and pupils who are a bad influence and rebuilding the morale and ethos of the school. Lots of court cases pending. Their urgent need is for 1.8m Birr (~£120000) to upgrade the laboratory facilities – they have plans and permissions but no funding.

We stressed that this is not a suitable proposition for the JG Trust, but that we would enquire to see if a separate benefactor could be interested.

Laity Catholic school

The Catholic laity in Addis is concerned that because of the lottery system in operation, Catholic schools are inadvertently discriminating against Catholic children. Currently the laity is offering scholarships to 40 poor Catholic children at the best schools. However in the longer term they would like to start a school, overseen by the laity council which would give priority to poor Catholic children. They are in the process of negotiating land and seeking formal involvement from the Church.

No immediate plans and costing exist. We indicated that this was a project in which we could be interested, in due course.

Educational co-ordination

There are increasing issues with management of schools across this huge diocese – Catholic influence is diminishing; often the Head is the only Catholic. The Diocese wishes to exercise much closer direction from the centre – they have undertaken a review and established a 5 year plan. They need funding to appoint one or two new education co-ordinators. Cost to fund one post in the first year is likely to be £4-5000.

We said that we preferred to fund education projects directly, rather than administration.

Student in Rome

The diocese is paying for a 26 year old female student named Salamawit, to study philosophy in Rome but English needs to improve. The diocese is hoping that she will come back and teach in one of the schools or the seminary. She would like to come to England between June and October 2009 to undertake a suitable English course and live with an English family.

Jane has said that she would make enquiries as to suitable courses. If she decides to go ahead we could see if someone from the congregation at Blackfriars or OLEM is willing to provide accommodation.

Eparchy of Adigrat

General

This is an extremely large Eparchy, covering an area 3 ½ times the size of Switzerland, including almost the entire border with Eritrea from Sudan to Afar. The region is extremely dry – the rains failed last year and as a result there are food shortages, and Government food distribution centres are in operation. In addition the region has a large transient population as there is a steady influx of refugees crossing the border from Eritrea – this creates additional challenges delivering education and basic services and has also resulted in a sharp growth in HIV infection.

The Eparchy has 32 parishes, 61 priests active in the diocese (plus 7 working elsewhere, 7 studying abroad), and 10 religious congregations. There are 49 Catholic schools of which 25 are under Diocesan control, and 24 under the religious congregations. Catholic preference not seen as an issue here, nor did Islam appear to be a particular concern.

The Catholic schools offer extra curriculum over state schools, including life skills. In contrast to the stance taken in Emdibir they tend to encourage siblings of existing pupils believing that the younger ones benefit from the support of the older ones. Nearly all students pay fees, though these are set at about 100 Birr per annum plus registration fee which is 10-50 Birr dependent upon grade. The costs are probably 12 times that amount. It is not the practice to feed the children at school. For emergency cases they provide biscuits.

In the course of our visit we were invited to present the prizes at the Tsinseta Marian High School in Adigrat. This is the premier school, in the region.

For more information about the Eparchy and the Education programme see the following websites:

www.adigratcatholicchurch.org

www.educateethiopia.com

Abune Tesfaselassie's preference is for us to deal direct with the Filippini sisters for Zalambessa, and for Dawhan to send money to the Diocesan account in Ethiopia, not the account in Germany.

Existing Commitments

Zalambessa is some 35km from Adigrat, situated on the border with Eritrea in a military zone; whilst we were visiting the school there was a small border incident with some shooting which we could hear clearly. The town population is around 6000, the region is 90-100000 - pupils may have to walk up to 2 hours to reach school. Since the town became involved in the war, those that could migrate have moved elsewhere – the people who have come back to the town are the poor.

St Peter and Paul school has approx 380 pupils (1 Moslem), from kindergarten to 8th grade. It is run by Sister Kahsa + one other sister and has 12 teachers. The school costs 4-500000Birr per annum to run and has received a lot of support from Caritas Belgium. No lunchtime meal is offered to students –biscuits are given to children suffering from lack of food if the cost is not too high (cost of a case of biscuit gone up from 67 Birr to 195 Birr in 12 months).

We noted that there is a well equipped laboratory – they have received help from Caritas in the shape of new education aids for human biology, a telescope etc. The challenge is now to train teachers to use them. Library appeared quite well stocked. We also saw the desks and bicycles that have been purchased with our support.

Our dealings with Zalemessa should be through the Sister Superior of the Religious Teachers Filippini, based in Addis. She is Sister Letteselassie Alemayohu - see her separate report.

Needs:

- 1. 4 girls bicycles (bicycles cost 1500 Birr each). Families would pay the annual tax (21 Birr)**
- 2. Montessori training and equipment for 2 teachers**
- 3. Playground equipment**
- 4. Money for library- Tigrayan books, not English**

Dawhan

The village of Dawhan is being developed as a new regional centre. It is a centre for Government food distribution and also the site of a new dam which will supply water to villages at least 8km down the valley. This is one of the Eparchy's projects – the dam cost £1m Birr.

The Kindergarten is now in its second year operation. 80% of development was financed by an aid agency, the remainder by loans raised by the Eparch. Our money has been used to provide school fittings and equipment (incl. wall decoration), train teachers and pay the teachers' salaries from September 2008 to January 2009. There is still 30K Birr in reserve.

Construction involved the levelling of a site on the top of a hill. The buildings are new and good – 3 of the 4 classrooms were occupied when we visited. The Montessori method is being used. There is no water yet on site – to be provided as part of the water project.

See separate report.

Main needs:

- 1. Exterior safety measures**
- 2. Playground equipment.**

Opportunities

Abune Tesfaselassie considers Diocesan schools more urgent than Congregation schools (who have more contacts) and food/education more important than bicycles.

Abba Thomas is interested in having young volunteers (gap year ideal) from UK to work on projects, teach etc. Preferred timing is February to June/July to fit with 2nd semester in the year (June to September attachments don't work very well from that point of view). **Potential to develop contacts through Blackfriars/ OLEM – would need proper preparation.**

Appendix (1): Itinerary

February 2009	Schedule	Organisation
Thursday 12 th	D: Heathrow 22.05 Terminal 3 Flight ET 701	
Friday 13 th	A: Addis 08.35 o/night Addis	Eparch of Emdibir Abuna Musie Ghebreghiorghis
Saturday 14 th	Car to Emdibir o/night Emdibir	
Sunday 15 th	Visits at Emdibir o/night Emdibir	
Monday 16 th	Visits at Embidir Car to Addis o/night Addis	
Tuesday 17 th	Car to Bahir Dar o/night Bahir Dar	Addis Metropolitanate Abba Kidane-Mariam Ghebray/ Abba Lisane-Christos Matheos
Wednesday 18 th	Visit Blessed G Michael school o/night Bahir Dar	
Thursday 19 th	Fly to Axum D: 08.30 A 10.40 (note 1) Car to Adigrat o/night Adigrat	Eparch of Adigrat Abune Tesfaseslassie Medhin
Friday 20 th	Visits– Zalanbessa/ Dawhan o/night Adigrat	
Saturday 21 st	Visits in Adigrat o/night Mekele	
Sunday 22 nd	Fly Addis D: 08.15 A: 09.15 Meeting Demetech Habte Meeting Sr Daisy Fornan o/night Addis	Addis Metropolitanate Abba Lisane-Christos Matheos
Monday 23 rd	D: Addis 10.45 A Heathrow 17.40 Terminal 3 Flight ET 700	

Note: Ethiopia is 3 hours ahead of UK time

Appendix (2): Expenses

All travelling expenses have been met from individual contributions without any impact on Trust funds. Due to the generosity of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia minimal expenses were incurred in Ethiopia.

Prior to departure the Trustees agreed to reimburse the representatives up to a maximum of £100 for the cost of small items purchased to donate to the schools.

5 solar powered calculators were purchased at a cost of £71.95. This cost was after a 10% discount given by Rymans in recognition of the charitable nature of the purchase.