

# Revival in Ethiopia Rooted in Unique National Missionary Movement

**Ethiopians are being trained to evangelize their own country amid a belief that they stand in the way of an Islamic takeover**

Revival is sweeping Ethiopia as missionaries carry the gospel to a people devastated by drought, famine and war. Evangelical church leaders in Ethiopia report that the gospel has been preached to at least 1.2 million people in the last six years, resulting in 50,000 conversions to Christianity and 500 new churches.

This move is primarily the work of national missionaries who have been trained and sent out through a partnership of the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE)—which represents 97 percent of Protestant churches in the country—and Accelerating International Mission Strategies (AIMS), a Virginia-based organization.

“It’s been encouraging to see the Ethiopian leaders mobilizing their churches and owning the missionary task,” said Howard Foltz, founder and president of AIMS.

ECFE, which was forged in 1974 when Ethiopia first came under communist rule, represents 17 denominations. The churches have remained together with a commitment to reach Ethiopians with the gospel.

“It’s the greatest unity I’ve seen anywhere in the world,” Foltz told Charisma. “There’s a price to pay for that unity,

but they are paying it.”

The foundation for the Ethiopian partnership was laid in 1989, when Calvary Temple in Denver opened its doors to a congregation of Ethiopian believers that had come to the United States to escape persecution by the communist regime in their homeland.

When the socialist government of the country fell in 1991, Calvary Temple pastor Charles Blair was invited to Ethiopia to help local church leaders make the transition from underground cell groups to thriving, visible congregations.

Foltz accompanied Blair in 1996, helping to train Ethiopian church leaders, pastors and missionaries. Today, the ongoing partnership continues to yield a harvest of new believers and churches.

According to Pamela Foster, AIMS director of operations, the evangelical church in Ethiopia faces many challenges. In addition to persecution from Muslims, Ethiopia’s Orthodox church leaders have joined forces with the Islamic movement to persecute evangelical Christians.

“Leaders from the evangelical church in Ethiopia believe they alone stand between their government and a total Islamic takeover,” Foster reported.

In spite of these obstacles, more than 8,000 Muslims in one region alone have come to Christ during an 11-month period.

“A Muslim man who converts to Christianity will have his wife

taken from him and given to another Muslim man. In addition, he may be disinherited and even stoned.”

National woes present yet another crisis for the Ethiopian church. Ethiopia has the third largest HIV-positive population in the world. There are 1.2 million AIDS orphans in the country.

During a recent AIMS training conference in Awasa, in southern Ethiopia, Christian leaders repented for the Ethiopian church’s silence on this issue and vowed to take action.

“The AIDS pandemic gives us an opportunity for a redemptive turnaround,” Foltz insisted. “The compassion ministry [of the church] can be a way of reaching families and communities with the gospel.”

Foster reported that in 2001 the alliance trained more than 100 top Ethiopian leaders, giving them tools to further mobilize Ethiopian churches.

The alliance expects its work to have an impact on some 8,400 congregations—70 percent of Ethiopia’s churches—through this training program. It also expects to dispatch and support 6,000 new missionaries over the next two years.

“Our motto has always been, ‘Don’t just give a fish; don’t just teach how to fish; but train teachers of fisherman,’” Foltz said.

**Sandra K. Chambers**