

Ethiopian Churches Expanding Despite Persecution

The famine may be crippling. The Muslim voice may be strong. Fleeing refugees may crowd the borders. But the evangelistic churches in Ethiopia are linked in unity and strength like never before.

Global Advance witnessed this incredible unity at their Frontline Shepherds Conference conducted in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, last month.

With the Frontline Shepherds Conference, pastors were even more equipped with a sense of unity as they were trained in church growth, planting and missions. Pastors were also challenged in their personal walk with the Lord, and many committed to plant a new church within the next 12 months.

David Shibley with Global Advance says, "It's one of the few places in the world where all evangelical churches—almost 100 percent—are cooperating with one another, encouraging one another."

The background of Marxist persecution and ongoing trials today have only strengthened the Ethiopian church. "There was a unity that was forged during those years of Marxism where many of the pastors suffered, many of them were imprisoned, and many of them were tortured for their faith in Christ," states Shibley.

The Ethiopian church is expanding. Since the fall of Marxism in 1974, the number of evangelicals has grown from 5 percent to nearly 20 percent today. Congregations spread, and more and more pastors have a passion for bringing the Gospel to others. Training and resources are in high demand.

"In developing nations like Ethiopia, this may be the only

pastoral training that these men ever receive," says Shibley. "It was wonderful, during the breaks, to see these pastors sitting at their place and not going to take tea, but rather reading through these manuals, because for many of them it's one of the very few—and perhaps the only—book they possess beyond the Bible itself for any kind of ministry training."

Frontline Shepherds Conference only added to the unity by connecting pastors across denominational lines. In this bonded strength among the church, pastors were more enabled by the training conference to reach out to their suffering communities in the famine disaster.

"The church in Ethiopia is responding with the resources they have," ensures Shibley. "In the midst of this, the gospel is going forward. In those [refugee] camps, people are coming to Christ, and God is using this terrible disaster to bring people to faith in Him."

Please pray for continued healing and life, both physically and spiritually, as the church works to encourage a starving and conflict-torn Ethiopia. Pray that the gospel would be proclaimed through all things and that the pastors would spread the light of Christ in the wake of the conference.