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Relief Fund established to help Lutherans in Ethiopia

A relief fund has been established to help Christians in western and southwestern Ethiopia who have recently experienced persecution by Islamic radicals. The Ethiopian Church Relief Fund is a joint effort by Lutheran CORE, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), and the North American Lutheran Church (NALC).

The Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum Idossa, President of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (the Lutheran church in Ethiopia), has reported that 57 churches and 45 individual homes have been destroyed. More than 3,600 people have been displaced from their homes and some have been badly beaten and killed.

The Rev. Dr. Gemechis D. Buba, Missions Director for the North American Lutheran Church and a native of Ethiopia, reported that these brutal acts are not the first of their kind. Three years ago Muslim fundamentalists burned down several churches, killed evangelists, pastors and lay leaders. They are now repeating the same attacks. Today thousands have lost their homes, churches, family members and their rights to safely worship and conduct their ministries.

Persecution is not new to Lutherans in Ethiopia. “However, every time it happens it opens up old wounds and breaks the hearts of many. In the middle of all this our brothers and sisters are walking into this holy Lenten season not with ashes on their forehead but carrying the cross of Christ and confessing their faith in the words of Psalm 23:1, ‘The Lord is my shepherd!’” Dr. Buba said.

“The violence and destruction against churches of the Mekane Yesus Church and individual Christians have largely subsided. However, the task for rebuilding and relief is beginning,” said NALC Bishop Paull Spring. “The Mekane Yesus Church is providing emergency assistance — food, blankets, and other necessities — for those who have experienced loss. Still ahead is the reconstruction of churches that have been destroyed.

“The North American Lutheran Church has developed a close relationship with the Mekane Yesus Church,” Bishop Spring said. “Individuals and congregations of the NALC are urged to gather funds to assist our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia.”

“Our sisters and brothers in Christ in Ethiopia witnessed to our Lord at great cost for many years under the former Communist government, and now experience suffering from radical Muslims. Their bold witness to our Lord no matter the cost should inspire us in the West to be bolder in our witness. The very least we can do is to help the Ethiopians rebuild their churches and homes,” said Pastor Mark Chavez, director of Lutheran CORE.

“After having just been in Ethiopia with these brothers and sisters, seeing their faith, their courage and their obvious passion for the Gospel, it is overwhelming to consider what they have now had to experience in this persecution. But even in this, they see the Lord at work,” said Pastor Mark Vander Tuig, LCMC Service Coordinator.

“A seminary professor from Addis Ababa said the blood of the martyrs is the seed of evangelism. I pray that we too might someday have that kind of faith. I am hopeful that we can show our support for these believers by helping them to rebuild their churches and their homes,” Vander Tuig said.

Please send gifts to Ethiopian Church Relief Fund; 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220; New Brighton, MN 55112. Please make checks payable to Ethiopia Relief Fund. All funds received will be forwarded to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. You may also give online by clicking on the links at the Lutheran CORE, LCMC, or NALC websites.

“We are reminded by the apostle that it has been granted to us on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since we are going through the same struggle we see (Philippians 1:29-30). I would like to thank God for God’s protection and the grace and courage that God is giving his chosen people to suffer for the sake of Christ! There is hope for them and for all of us. Christ is alive and will always remain Emmanuel for us in times of our joys and difficulties,” EECMY President Idossa said.

“We highly appreciate your concerns and prayers in such a difficult situation. It is our sincere hope that you will continue to pray and accompany us. May the almighty God bless you all!” he concluded.

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