

Dispatches: A bright hope for foster children

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Getahun
Tesema of
Bright Home
ministries
interpets for
Carol
McEntyre as
she brings a
word of
encouragement
to women in a
sewing class.
The vocational
training is
designed to
help women
learn a trade
and escape
poverty— and
in some cases,
a life of
prostitution.
(Photos by Ken
Camp)

Dispatches: A bright hope for foster children

By Ken Camp

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Saturday, Feb. 24, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

After seeing some of Getahun's ministries this morning and visiting with him, I've decided "Bright Hope" is aptly named.

At the ministry's office, Getahun presented copies of his annual report for 2006, showing how more than 400,000 people benefited from the varied social ministries. With an annual budget of \$500,000, the ministry includes foster care, programs for street children, basic skills development training, care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS, food services and educational ministries.



Getahun Tesema's Bright Home ministry offers sewing classes for destitute women in Addis Ababa.

Bright Hope not only places children in foster homes, but also helps foster families become self-sufficient by offering micro-loans to help them start small businesses. Similarly, they help farmers by providing them high-yield seeds, and the farmers repay them by giving back seed from their next harvest.

Getahun told us the greatest challenge he has faced has been fundraising, and his greatest frustration has been spending time raising money when he could be spending that time in ministry. The merger with Buckner will lift much of that burden and allow him to devote his energy to supervising the people involved in direct, hands-on ministry to children in need.



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On the way to a ministry site, I had the chance to visit with Getahun and learn more about him. He grew up in Shashamane, a small city in southern Ethiopia. When civil war broke out in Ethiopia and the communist government conscripted young men for the front lines—essentially using them as cannon fodder—he escaped to Kenya. He spent the next two and one-half years in a refugee camp outside Nairobi.

An American missionary-evangelist witnessed to him while he was in the refugee camp, and that is when he committed his life to Christ. Since Kenya did not allow all the refugees to resettle in their country permanently, Getahun applied to the United States and was accepted there. Working his way through school as a taxi driver in Dallas, he first attended Christ for the Nations Institute and then earned a degree in Christian management from Dallas Baptist University.

He later earned degrees in theology and Christian counseling from a university based in California (not Dallas Theological Seminary, as I had been told earlier). He also served as a minister at the Ethiopian Baptist Church in Dallas.

When he returned to Ethiopia with his wife to tend to some family affairs, he saw the need in his home country. "I saw a child in a dumpster, eating what he could find. I couldn't stop crying," he said. "The Lord moved me and used that to call me to Ethiopia. I determined that if it cost me my life to save one child, I still would come back."



Bright Hope Buckner teaches poor women in Addis Ababa the shoemaking trade.

He and his wife, Tegist, started their ministry with 20 children they rescued from the streets. They rented a house, a sewing machine and shoe-making equipment. Then they began training the youngsters in as seamstresses, tailors and cobblers.

Getahun holds dual citizenship in the United States and Ethiopia, and he undoubtedly could live a more comfortable life in America. But he and his wife have chosen to invest their lives in caring for the needy of their country. Three years ago, they adopted three abandoned girls, each from a different family of origin. Their adopted daughters now are 4, 8 and 12.

"I think God is happy with us because we keep our attention on the needs of the poor," he said.

We saw an example of the shoe-making and sewing classes that Bright

Hope/Buckner offers in Addis Adaba. Many of the women in the classes are mothers who had turned to prostitution to support their children.



Buckner President Ken Hall presents a gift to Ethiopian President Wolde-Giorgis.

We also met a group of foster children and their caregivers. They welcomed us warmly, eager to shake our hands and have their photos taken. They welcomed us in limited English, and they seemed genuinely appreciative of the gospel song we sang for them.

After lunch, we had to change hotels, since the Sheraton was overbooked for the weekend. Then we spent a little time shopping for souvenirs for family and friends back home, and we visited a wonderful little coffee shop.

Believe it or not, we spent the evening at the presidential palace at a state dinner. Ethiopia's president insisted on entertaining us royally with a five-course dinner. He seems deeply moved by Buckner's desire to help meet the needs of children in his country.

Yesterday, when we were in Bantu, a little girl seemed startled when she saw Jay Abernathy. Her mother explained through an interpreter, "She saw you in a dream." Someone later explained that we probably were the first white people the little girl had ever seen, and many of the rural people

believe white people are angels—particularly a blonde-haired, blue-eyed guy like Jay.

If being an angel means being a messenger of God, maybe they are right. We have a message to share, and a God-given responsibility to share it.

Tomorrow, we return home. But we don't have the luxury of going home as the same people we were a little more than a week ago.



The Buckner Africa mission vision team arrives at the Ethiopian presidential palace.

We cannot claim ignorance of the needs children face in this part of Africa. We must tell the story of orphaned and abandoned children, and we must support the ministries that are reaching out to them. We cannot turn our backs on Dickson, Getahun and those other people who are meeting the needs of poor children in Jesus, name.

We cannot forget the faces of smiling children at the Baptist Children's Center, the hugs we received from toddlers at the New Life Home or the empty stares of the hopeless children in the streets of Korogocho. We cannot forget the young mothers in Addis Adaba who are learning an honest trade so they no longer feel trapped into selling themselves to save their children, nor can we forget the foster families who are becoming self-sufficient at the same time they are rescuing children from the streets.

To whom much is given, much will be required. In God's name and for the sake of God's children, we cannot fail to act.

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