

Dispatches: Laying a cornerstone in Ethiopia

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Contrasts. That's the only word to describe our experience in the last couple of days.

We've seen people picking through trash heaps in an urban slum in Nairobi, looking for food scraps to eat. And we've dined with the president of Ethiopia at a community feast in his hometown.

Ethiopia's
President
lays the
cornerstone
for a school
at Bantu,
while
Buckner
President
Ken Hall
looks on.
Hall
accepted
the land
title for 10.2
hectares
and pledged
to build the
school using
local labor
as soon as
construction
materials
are
available.
(Photo by
Ken Camp)

We've spent the night at Addis Ababa in what is probably the most luxurious hotel I've ever seen, and we've driven a few blocks where old women and little children stood begging on a street corner. We've seen jungles and savannahs, skyscrapers and thatch-roofed huts. We've learned

to say hello in Swahili and in Amharic~at least, I hope that's what we were saying. We've seen what Buckner and its partners have established in Kenya, and some of the fruit it is bearing. And we've seen the genesis of a new partnership develop with Buckner in Ethiopia, where the ministry is beginning with the blessings of the government. We've seen what is in Kenya; we've caught a glimmer of what can be in Ethiopia.

This morning we traveled by bus from downtown Addis Ababa to Bantu, a rural area where President Wolde-Giorgis has given 10.2 hectares to Buckner to build a school. On the way, we grew to know and love Pastor Getahun Tesema, who has headed the Bright Hope ministry in Ethiopia for six years as a partner with Buckner. Getahun grew up in Ethiopia but fled the country in 1989 at age 22. He spent two and a half years in a refugee camp in Kenya. "I had been brought up in the Christian tradition with all its formality, but that is where I developed a personal relationship with Christ," he told us.



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Eventually, Tesema moved to the United States, where he worked as a taxi driver, attended Dallas Theological Seminary and was part of the Ethiopian Baptist Church in Dallas. But he felt called back to his homeland, and he returned to Ethiopia to found Bright Hope ministry. The ministry ranges from evangelism to economic development—a vital need in a country plagued by unemployment and 70 to 80 percent illiteracy.

Buckner partnered with Bright Hope in its ministry to orphaned and abandoned children. Ethiopia is home to 4 million orphans—about 500,000 of them affected by AIDS. In Addis Ababa alone, 300,000 children live on the streets. Today, we saw the beginning of two ministries to address that need—a school in Bantu and a baby home in Addis Ababa.

We were privileged to participate in the groundbreaking dedication ceremony for the educational center in Bantu. Phase one of the building program will be a school for about 300 pre-Kindergarten to 4th grade children. Phase two would extend the curriculum through the 8th grade. Eventually, Getahun hopes the school also will include a post-primary component, with preparatory school for college-bound students and vocational training for young people who want to enter the work force.

Ken Hall and Getahun joined Ethiopia's president in setting the cornerstone for the building. Both the president and Ken spoke to the assembly, which not only included people from throughout the community, but also national media representatives and the district governor. Ken received title to the land for the school, and he promised construction would begin as soon as the building materials could be secured—a commitment of about \$500,000. He also announced that Bright Hope formally was merging with Buckner to become an Ethiopian-led ministry, and he pledged that the school would exist to serve the people of Bantu. "In accepting the title to this land, we give it back to the children of Bantu," he said.

After the ceremony, we joined the president and other dignitaries under a tent for a lavish feast of traditional spicy Ethiopian dishes. We noted the large quantity of food, and Ken explained that after the president and his guests were served, the entire community would be able to participate in the meal.

Getahun explained about 200,000 Oromo people live in the Bantu district, and they are among Ethiopia's poorest people. He hopes the school will be

a model that can be replicated elsewhere. His dream is to see 20 schools in 20 districts within 10 years, benefiting up to 1 million children and youth. Getahun also intends to start a church that will meet at the school, because there is no evangelical church in the area.

After lunch, we returned to Addis Ababa where Getahun showed us the baby home that is under construction. The three-story building going up in the western part of the sprawling city blends in well with the neighborhood—respectable-looking and built to last, but not opulent or Western in its appearance.

The home will take abandoned and orphaned babies birth to age 3. Buckner will have an adoption office at the baby home, handling both domestic and international adoptions, again with the permission and blessings of Ethiopia's president. A social worker will help place the children in adoptive homes.

Tomorrow, we will learn about Buckner's foster care program in Ethiopia and meet with some foster families to hear their stories.