ETBU partners in Ethiopian ministry

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ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia—A small team from East Texas Baptist University served seven days at Bright Hope Theological College in Ethiopia recently as part of a partnership involving several Baptist churches in East Texas and Buckner International.

Susie Oliver enjoys a visit with children in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. East Texas Baptist University partnered with the East Texas Ethiopia Missions for a mission trip during Spring Break. (PHOTO: ETBU/Elijah Brown)

The partnership grew out of an initial contact Ken Hall, chief executive officer of Buckner International, made to ETBU President Dub Oliver in 2009. Hall introduced Oliver to Lee and Susan Bush from First Baptist Church in Athens and Eddie Hilburn, pastor of First Baptist Church in Kilgore.

The churches in Athens and Kilgore are part of the E-TEAM—East Texas Ethiopian Aid Mission—a partnership of churches throughout the area committed to volunteer ministry in Ethiopia.

Other participating churches include Central Baptist in Jacksonville and First Baptist churches in Corsicana, Longview, Lufkin, Marshall, Palestine and The Woodlands, as Crossroads Baptist in Marshall.

David Rice, pastor of Crossroads Baptist, joined Oliver and several other representatives of the E-TEAM last year on an initial trip to Ethiopia.

“The purpose of the trip was to allow us to see the scope of ministry that Buckner was already involved in and prayerfully look for a direction on how to join in to what the church of Ethiopia is doing,” said Rice, who graduated from ETBU in 1993. In Ethiopia, he saw firsthand how Buckner works with Bright Hope Ministries in a variety of ministries.

Getahun Tesema (2nd from right), director of Bright Hope ministry in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, visits with (left to right) Elijah Brown, East Texas Baptist University assistant professor of missions; Pastor David Rice from Crossroad Baptist Church in Marshall; and Dub Oliver, ETBU president. (PHOTO: ETBU/Susie Oliver)

“Buckner and Bright Hope have ministries from orphanages to baby homes, from primary schools to theological education, to rescuing woman off the street, food programs for children and HIV-AIDS care,” he said.

While they were there last year, the Texas team led a workshop at Bright Hope Theological College. That experience sparked a prayer concern for Oliver.

“Coming back from the trip in 2010, my prayer to the Lord was, ‘What do you want ETBU to be engaged in?’ The real clear sense that I had from the Lord was that we should help develop pastors for the evangelical church in Ethiopia. This made sense to me, because that is what ETBU is good at and known for,” Oliver said.

Oliver and his wife, Susie, joined Rice and Elijah Brown, ETBU assistant professor of missions, for a journey to Addis Ababa over spring break to

preach and teach.

“It was an honor to participate in the unique opportunity to partner together with Bright Hope Theological College in the further equipping of their students to engage in ministry,” Brown said. “Throughout the week, we were able to challenge and encourage students to ‘live a life worthy of the calling you have received’ as we focused on the book of Ephesians.”

David Rice, pastor of Crossroad Baptist Church in Marshall, teaches through an interpreter at Bright Hope Theological College of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. (PHOTO: ETBU/Elijah Brown)

The verse-by-verse study of the New Testament book drew about 80 participants each morning and another 60 in the afternoon sessions. Some sat two to a desk built for one, while others stood the whole time taking notes because there were not enough chairs for all who wanted to attend classes.

“It was a real encouragement to spend time with local pastors and students committed to their studies and engaged in ministry that will reach throughout Ethiopia,” Brown said. “Evangelical Christianity continues to grow at a fairly rapid pace throughout Ethiopia, although there are still 21 different people groups in Ethiopia where less than 2 percent of anyone from that people group is currently a Christ-follower.”

The first session lasted four hours, Rice recalled. “Nobody moved—not even a stand up and stretch break. They were eager to know more about the Scriptures and were not in a hurry to leave,” he said.

Elijah Brown, assistant professor of missions at East Texas Baptist University, reads from the Bible at in a home in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Brown is reading in English after the homeowner, an Orthodox church leader, read to him in Amharic. (PHOTO: ETBU/Susie Oliver)

“They were so hungry for knowledge,” Oliver added. “The thing that is amazing is that they just soaked it up. They so much wanted to know more about God’s word, because they wanted to teach their people God’s word.”

Rice remembered how key professors at ETBU instilled in him a love for the Bible, and he wanted to pass that along.

“The church around the world that has so little deserves something from those of us who have received the gift of such an abundance of resource and training, they deserve for us to re-gift to them from that which we have received,” he said.

Oliver anticipates future projects at the Bright Hope Theological College involving the ETBU School of Christian Studies.

“I can also see the School of Nursing engaged with the medical components of the missions. Our School of Education could be involved with curriculum development and teacher training in the schools,” Oliver said. The next trip planned is in July.