

School for refugee children begins anew in Uganda

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After civil war forced a school for refugee children in Sudan to close, the Texas Baptist Eritrean church that founded it has launched another similar school in Uganda.

In 2012, Gospel Light Eritrean Baptist Church in Dallas founded Tesfa Eritrea—Hope of Eritrea—in Sudan to serve children in a refugee camp.

“There were a lot of refugees from Eritrea. It was a big mission field there,” said Ahferom Akilas, a missions leader at Gospel Light Eritrean Baptist Church.

Due to the pervasive influence of the Orthodox Church in the area, starting an evangelical church in the region was difficult, Akilas said.

However, parents of all backgrounds were eager to send their children to school—even an explicitly Christian school, he noted.

The school opened with 450 students and 17 teachers, Akilas said. The next year, student enrollment doubled, and the school employed 30 teachers.

As the school grew, not only did many of the students come to faith in Christ, but many of their family members also made personal faith commitments to Jesus, Akilas noted.

At its peak, the school had an enrollment of 2,500 students, from pre-kindergarten through high school.

“We didn’t have enough space, and we actually had to turn some students away,” Akilas said.

Funds from the [Texas Baptist Hunger Offering](#) enabled the school to offer nutritious meals to the students, as well as provide books and other basic supplies.

Civil war in Sudan created crisis

Everything changed in mid-April 2023, when conflict between rival factions of the military government in Sudan escalated to civil war.

Many schools and hospitals closed. A [humanitarian crisis](#) ensued, with about 25 million people needing aid, including 14 million children.

The civil war internally displaced more than 6.7 million people in Sudan, and more than 2 million fled the country as [refugees](#).

A core group of the Tesfa Eritrea teachers and some students relocated to Uganda.



With help from Gospel Light Eritrean Baptist Church, a school for refugee children that previously operated in Sudan relaunched in

Kampala, Uganda, with a modest enrollment of 30 students.
(Courtesy Photo)

With help from Gospel Light Eritrean Baptist Church, the school relaunched in Kampala with a modest enrollment of 30 students.

Because schools—including Christian schools—are more common in Uganda than in Sudan, Akilas acknowledged the school in Uganda is unlikely to grow to the same size as the Sudanese school before the civil war.

However, he sees a school specifically for refugee children—with their shared backgrounds and unique needs—as filling a niche and serving an important need in Uganda.

In addition to Eritrean refugee children, the school has the potential to provide an education for refugee children from Ethiopia, Somalia and other African nations, he noted.

And the evangelistic vision that motivated Gospel Light Eritrean Baptist Church to start a school in Sudan also guides the school in Uganda.

“We want to see people saved,” Akilas said. “We want students and their families to come to know Christ.”