

Ancient Country, New Faith



Ethiopia is one of Africa's historic countries with rich long-standing influence of Judaism and Christianity. It is widely accepted that the Queen of Sheba mentioned in the Bible had brought Judaism back with her to Ethiopia. Furthermore, it is believed the Ethiopian Eunuch who met Philip (Acts 8) brought the true Gospel to the Ethiopia of those days, and that Jewish merchants who were also followers of Christ later strengthened the Christian movement in Ethiopia. Coptic Christianity became the state religion in 330 AD and was later named the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC)

Since Coptic Christianity became the state religion of Ethiopia, government leaders have bestowed favored status to the church. For example, the government granted one-third of the land in Ethiopia to the EOTC. The EOTC has in return supported government leaders by anointing kings and approving their coronation. Similar to what happened in the Roman Catholic Church, Ethiopian government leaders wanted to exert influence over the church, especially King Zar'a Yacob who introduced many teachings and practices contrary to what the Bible teaches. Over time the truth of Christian faith was compromised and the preaching of the Gospel was forgotten.



How do you spell Coca Cola in Ethiopia?

Prior to the time of Dr. Martin Luther there

were individuals who attempted to reform the EOTC from within. In the 15th century the monk Abba Estifanos advocated the teaching of salvation by grace alone through faith and condemned the veneration of saints. In the 17th century the theologian and philosopher Zer'a Yacob (not to be confused with the aforementioned king), who rejected church tradition in favor of Scriptural authority. This proves that God wanted the reform of His Church and raised men for this purpose. The EOTC however resisted their efforts and persecuted them, often to the point of death.



In the late 19th century, Lutheran missionaries from Northern Europe and America first arrived in Ethiopia. When the EOTC resisted their efforts to reform the church and persecuted the EOTC priests who were the first converts to Lutheranism, the Swedish, German and American Lutherans agreed to establish a new church. Its name is the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). “Mekane Yesus” means “Dwelling Place of Jesus.” In 1959, the EECMY became a legally registered national church.



Rev. Dr. Kebede Getachew Yigezu became a

Christian in the EECMY at the age of 15 in 1987 and had been serving as a youth leader, choir member, solo singer, lay preacher and later as theologian for a total of 25 years. After being involved in various voluntary services for 18 years in the EECMY, Kebede studied theology at Mekane Yesus Seminary and continued serving in the EECMY. In 2007, Kebede joined Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri, and received advanced theological training. While there, his were eyes opened to confessional Lutheran theology and Kebede ascertained that the WELS understanding and practice of the doctrine of fellowship is more in line with the Bible's teaching than the EECMY's understanding of fellowship.

Kebede left the EECMY for doctrinal reasons to remain faithful to confessional evangelical Lutheran theology of the Law and Gospel and the truth of the Scriptures. In compliance with the Ethiopian government's requirements Kebede and 56 founding members registered The Lutheran Church of Ethiopia (LCE) as a confessional Lutheran church body in 2013. The LCE also founded Maor Lutheran Theological Seminary (MLTS) as a Christ-centered, Bible-based and Reformation-driven confessional Lutheran theological seminary, which is authorized to offer bachelors and masters degrees and also doctorate programs. More background information about the church and seminary are found at <https://lcemtc.weebly.com/college.html>



Soon after the establishment of the church and seminary in 2013, Kebede was ordained in the LCE and reached out to WELS with the purpose of establishing fellowship. In 2014 and 2015 the LCE was visited by

Professor Edward Allen Sorum and Professor Kenneth Cherney of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Rev. Peter Bur-Chairman of the Global South Sudanese Outreach, Rev. Paul Nitz-delegate of the WELS Board of World Mission, and Rev. Davison Mutentami-CELC Africa Region President.

After several years of talks with WELS representatives, the LCE and WELS declared fellowship in 2017. WELS has been collaborating with the LCE on the work of training church workers by sending professors for short-term intensive teaching trips, and by providing funding to purchase property and to complete the construction of a five floor multi-purpose building where the LCE operates her Gospel ministry and theological education programs.



Nuer refugee women singing and greeting us on arrival

The LCE is a small church body bringing the Gospel truth to light amongst more than the one hundred million people of Ethiopia. Like Luther, Kebede and the members of the LCE are standing against many opponents of the Gospel truth. It is not an easy path to follow but by the grace of God the latest statistics show:

- Baptized national members = 421
 - Organized congregations = one very active congregation in Bishoftu and four active preaching centers (Adama, Addis Ababa, Wukro and Dukem)

- National pastors = one
- National evangelists = four (volunteers and active witnesses in life and ministry)



One of the greatest blessings that have come from the declaration of fellowship between LCE and WELS is **our partnership in the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which is based on our unity of faith, love and purpose.** In view of this, we rejoice at the many opportunities God is giving us to make this unity visible. The LCE and MLTS enjoy the wonderful blessing of fellowship with like-minded brothers and sisters in the WELS and CELC member churches, who share their beliefs and gladly pray on their behalf to our heavenly Father. The Lord is blessing the humble beginnings of the LCE. We praise God for giving the members of the LCE the endurance to run their race in Him and to pass the baton of the Gospel truth to the next generation of Christians.

