

The Best Laid Plans

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28 NIV). We know that this is true, but sometimes it doesn’t feel that way.

In western Ethiopia is a region called Gambella. Gambella is home to three Lutheran Synods seeking fellowship with WELS. Together, these three groups may have as many as 40,000 members, perhaps more. Many of them are refugees from South Sudan. These synods do not have many trained pastors or church elders, but they are eager to receive instruction from God’s word. It is a tremendous opportunity to reach out with the gospel!

Missionaries Howard Mohlke, Christopher Pluger, and Mark Panning were set to go. Fourteen delegates from the three synods were going to meet us in Bishoftu, Ethiopia, along with three delegates from our sister-synod, the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia. We were excited about the meeting. We purchased airline tickets for the 14 representatives and booked a conference hall in Bishoftu. Everything was ready.

God had other plans. A few days before the meeting, civil war returned to Ethiopia. Seven rebel groups had banded together against the government. Armed militias had captured several airports, and airline service was suspended. In Gambella, long-standing tribal disputes immediately boiled over. Roads were blocked. Then we learned that a Lutheran youth group was traveling to a meeting when their bus was attacked by rebels. Several of those Lutheran youth were wounded in the attack. One of them was killed – a young Lutheran woman named Martha Nyalam Chuol.

I heard about the fighting at 6:30 a.m. on September 22. By 1:00 p.m. on the same day, the meeting was already canceled. To be honest, I felt very discouraged.

But I did not hear discouragement from our Lutheran friends in Gambella. They understood that the meeting had to be postponed. Yet even as we were canceling

the tickets, I heard some say, “We will pray to God. Maybe things will improve if we wait a few days.” Others said, “This meeting is very important! When can we reschedule?” On the following Sunday, Lutherans in Gambella gathered to comfort and encourage one another with the word of God. They were not discouraged.



Nothing happened the way we thought it would. It didn't feel like a triumphant march toward glory. But that's exactly what it was. In his infinite love and wisdom, God carried out his plans in the way he knew was best. The faith and trust of God's people were tested in fire and purified like gold. The leaders of those Lutheran churches grew in their resolve to serve God and his people. Those who suffered painful trials found peace and comfort from God's word. And a young Christian named Martha received her everlasting crown of glory, and it will never be taken from her.

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.” It often

happens in ways that we do not expect, but God's kingdom marches on.

Missionary Mark Panning lives in Malawi.

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news, and receive updates. Learn more about our mission fields in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in people's hearts at <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>