

A Visit to Ethiopia

*Members of the Mill Neck Family Return
from Recent Travel Abroad*

A team from the Mill Neck Family of Organizations, including Deaconess Tiffany Manor, Deaf Missions Facilitator, Pastor Thomas Dunseth, Director of Deaf Missions, Katie Kerzner, Principal of Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf and Dr. Amy Wilson, Director of International Programs at Mill Neck, traveled to Ethiopia in early February. The trip involved meeting with hearing and Deaf people in this east-central African nation who are working together toward a new vision for the Deaf in their country.



Globally, less than 5% of children with disabilities attend school. Parents will hide their child at home from shame because of myths and odd religious beliefs about disability being a curse. Schools will not accept or do not know how to teach a child who is different. This results in less than 3% attaining formal employment later on in life. Many must rely on the kindness of their families to care for them or they find manual labor jobs where they earn meager wages.

Ethiopia is a country of 90 million inhabitants. It is home to approximately 1 million people who are Deaf, where discrimination keeps them from driving cars, attaining a decent job, or being included in their local school. Throughout the country, there are less than ten schools

specifically for youth who are Deaf. Parents are unsure what to do with a child born without hearing.

Among their stops in Ethiopia, the Mill Neck team visited the Hossana School for the Deaf.



Two teachers at the Hossana School wrap an apron made by their students around Deaconess Tiffany Manor, who is impressed with all the students' products.



Deaf graduates earn a salary plus income for the school by cutting lumber.



Seen in the photo to the left, is a Deaf teacher at the Hossana School, where she is using Ethiopian Sign Language to teach math to 20 boys and girls in a classroom where she once sat as a student. The Hossana program was established in 1981 with only ten children. Today it is home to 200 Deaf students. The teacher shared that "...these students know how lucky they are to be in school and are very serious about their

studies." Annually over 100 parents sign up their child to attend Hossana, but due to limited capacity, only ten to fifteen percent of applicants can be accepted. The school is majorly supported by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus – Development and Social Services Commission South Central Synod, support from the Church of Sweden, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, CBM, some funding from the federal government and by self-supporting projects run by graduates and current students of the school. Kerzner said the positive feeling on the Hossana campus was "amazing" and she was pleased to observe the



Principal Katie Kerzner, photographing a licensed cosmetology instructor who is Deaf.

emphasis on teaching language. In addition she stated, "I see some teaching activities at the Hossana School for children to learn how to develop social relationships that I think would work well in our classrooms at Mill Neck, too."

Academic education from preschool to grade ten is given according to the curriculum of ministry of education. Students successfully pass the required Ethiopian national exams for grades 8 and 10. Eighty-five percent graduate and are successfully employed in the public and private

sectors. Students also receive vocational training in computers, hairdressing, home economics, metal work, textile work and woodworking to assure employment upon graduation. Dr. Wilson noted that in most developing countries it is rare to find Deaf adults teaching academics. "The Deaf teachers are able to communicate clearly, are great role models for the students and can

share teaching techniques with hearing teachers who may not have that innate understanding of how to best present the material,” she said.

Hossana also reaches out to the community to work with parents and train teachers in the public schools in Ethiopian Sign Language and to understand the educational needs of Deaf children. Pastor Dunseth was impressed with the holistic manner in which the school approached teaching and with reaching the children educationally and spiritually.

Members of the Mill Neck team also visited the Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development, the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf and with Deaf and hearing professors in the Deaf Culture/Ethiopian Sign Language program in the Linguistics Department of Addis Ababa University. All of the organizations are raising Deaf awareness, working toward including Deaf children in regular public schools, increasing the use of Ethiopian Sign Language in schools and at home and improving Deaf education in general.



Pastor Thomas Dunseth thanks Mr. Belachew Ensermu of DASSC for guiding the Mill Neck team as Deaconess Tadellech Loha, who acted as translator and cultural broker, looks on.

The team also attended a church service where a colleague, Mr. Belachew Ensermu, was inducted as a new elder for his church.



Children are blessed at Mr. Belachew's induction.



Principal Katie Kerzner and Deaconess Tiffany Manor contemplating their 16 hour flight back home to the U.S.

Although many barriers exist, the Mill Neck team left Ethiopia impressed with all of the organizations' accomplishments and continued efforts to enable Deaf people to become contributing members of their society.