

# Planting Seeds a World Away Reaps an Abundant Harvest

by Carly Parker



Students from the 1988 class of St. Matthew's Evangelism Seminar held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Mitiku Zeleke is pictured first row fourth from the left.

In 1988, when Wayne Chaffee and a small team from St. Matthew, Holt went to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to run an evangelism seminar, they were not expecting to bump into any of their students – 20 years later.

In the late eighties, with Ethiopia emerging from a communist regime, the mission team was greatly restricted, making evangelism training more difficult. The team found an opportunity to conduct sessions at a seminary. Among those attending the seminar was Rev. Mitiku Zeleke, who is an Ethiopian Field Missionary.

“It was very hard to reach the younger people,” said Chaffee. “Our seminar trained pastors to teach lay persons how to witness in their own community; we never imagined that we would see any of them after we left Ethiopia.”

But meet again they did ...

With the current population of Ethiopian immigrants growing in the Lansing area, it became



Members of the team to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Russ Noble, Stan Woell, Wayne Chaffee and Mark Hough.

apparent that an Ethiopian church was needed to accommodate the Amharic language and unique worship style. Rev. Zeleke was called to lead the charge.



Rev. Mitiku Zeleke

Not long after he arrived in Lansing, he met Rev. Richard Laeder who invited him to a pastor's circuit meeting. Only when the current pastor of St. Matthew in nearby Holt was introduced at the meeting, did Zeleke realize the connection!

“I asked the pastor if he was from the church that had come to Ethiopia 20 years prior,” said Rev. Zeleke. “When he confirmed it, we were amazed! I had been keeping the certificate from the seminar all of these years. I knew that they were from the U.S. but I didn't expect them to be in Lansing!”

Rev. Zeleke was then invited to visit St. Matthew's where he was reunited with Wayne Chaffee and one other member from the original mission team.

“They shared photographs with me, and I showed them my certificate,” said Rev. Zeleke.

*Continued on page 18*

*PLANTING SEEDS Continued from page 15*

“Everyone was amazed that we met each other again, but we glorified the Lord for what He had done.”

But God’s grace did not stop there. Rev. Zeleke, a father of five, wanted his children to attend Holt Lutheran Schools, but with no financial assistance available it did not seem like a possibility. However, God provided. Thanks to an anonymous donor, a generous scholarship fund was created allowing Rev. Zeleke’s children and other families desiring a Christian Education to attend the school. Three of Rev. Zeleke’s children are studying at Concordia University Ann Arbor.

St. Matthew continues its mission focus. Having sent more than 60 teams on missions around the world, the church is currently sup-

porting a team in India and is active with MOST Ministries.

As for Rev. Zeleke, he leads a small congregation at Rehoboth Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lansing.

“Sometimes when you plant a seed in other places you don’t always know it will grow,” Rev. Zeleke said. “We must trust that when God gives us the seed, He will grow it and harvest it when the time comes.”

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