

Reach Out - Spring Break 2010



Ethiopia

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Cost: \$1,800-\$2,000 (estimate)

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Language: English

Ethiopia's story is a unique one in Africa: a Christian kingdom since the 4th century, it used its long history of international relations and clout in global trade networks to arm itself and stave off a colonial invasion by the Italians in 1896. Thus, its success in the Battle of Adwa assured Ethiopia would never be colonized despite temporary Italian occupation in the late 1930s. Instead, its 20th century history is dominated by the long rule of the charismatic Emperor Haile Selassie I, perhaps most famous internationally for inspiring Rastafarianism. Yet, Selassie's legacy is complex in Ethiopia: his failure to transition the nation from a feudal society led to his bloody ouster in 1974 at the hands of the communist Derg regime that, upon its own fall in 1991, left Ethiopia one of the poorest nations in the world. It remains so today, plagued by failures in land reform and food insecurity. Regardless, as will become clear in our exchanges with people and organizations in both urban and rural settings, development work here is invigorating, revealing the nation's dynamism and forging human connections in ways often overlooked in our daily lives back home.

First, we will spend a week in Addis Ababa, the country's exploding capital city. Addis suffers from many of the same ill-effects of urban growth seen across the developing world: seen as a haven providing employment and prosperity among the rural poor, many flock to the city only to find unemployment and destitution. Additionally, given the inability to stem the HIV/AIDS epidemic, many children are orphaned and left to fend for themselves on the streets. A decade ago, Yawoinshet

Masresha started a small NGO using her own resources to do what she could for these children. Today, Hope For Children provides group homes for orphaned youths who live together with a "house mother," attending school and frequenting HFC's new Youth Center, where they can work on arts and crafts projects, use the computer lab, read books in the library, and engage in other projects. We will volunteer at the youth center in the afternoons after helping out in HFC's newest program of kindergarten classes for its youngest orphans. While in Addis, we will also shadow Dr. Rick Hodes for a day at the Mother Teresa's Clinic - the care provider for the poorest of the poor. Dr. Hodes began working in Ethiopia decades ago with the purpose of keeping its Jewish population healthy enough to emigrate to Israel. Since then, he has adopted a dozen or so Ethiopian children with serious spinal and other health problems and arranged for their treatment abroad. Finally, we will meet Rick's family for one of his famous Shabbat dinners at his house before leaving Addis.

The second portion of the trip takes us southwest to Yetebon, where for over a decade and a half Marta Gabre-Tsadick and Deme Tekle-Wold have devoted their lives to creating a model sustainable community. The couple were forced to flee with their children when the communist takeover threatened their lives, as Marta had been the first female senator appointed by Emperor Selassie. After a narrow escape to Kenya, they were granted asylum in the US and settled in Fort Wayne, Indiana. After the Derg's fall, Marta and Deme returned to Ethiopia in order and were granted some marginal farm land from the government to establish Project Mercy. Over time, they have been welcomed by the community thanks to their ability to transform the community through their graceful, humble demeanor. Using the of local labor, know-how, and support, Project Mercy now includes a school, drip-irrigation agricultural system, cow hybridization project, orphanage, metal and beadwork production, and fully functional hospital in an otherwise desolate region. Here, we will tutor schoolchildren and work on an undetermined project, yet other highlights will include playing games with and getting to know the orphans as well as listening to Marta and Deme's story and sharing meals with them.

Altogether, our aim is an energizing, productive trip that balances work with a wide range of cultural experiences. Ethiopia is a gripping country, situated in a volatile region and yet populated by an overwhelmingly hospitable people. Though the trip is expensive, we are working to find financial support from a number of institutions to make it more affordable. In any event, it promises to be well worth the cost. If you have any questions or would like to hear more about the trip, feel free to contact either trip leader.