

Addis Ababa Church Planting:
a new flowering of the church with and among the urban poor

"New Flower." That is what Addis Ababa, the name of Ethiopia's capital city, means in Amharic. Those words also express the deepest need of this city and its 3 million people. Addis Ababa desperately **needs a new flowering of the gospel** of Jesus Christ.

Since 1996, the Ethiopian and U.S. staff of the **AIDS Care and Treatment Project** has been caring for the profound physical, spiritual, and social needs of **those suffering with HIV/AIDS and urban poverty in the heart of the city**. Nearly 550 families in three of the poorest neighborhoods of Addis currently receive assistance with food, shelter, medical care, counseling, school fees, orphan care, and Bible study and discipleship opportunities. The Spirit of God is at work restoring women, men, and children to health and hope out of the direst situations. Many are **coming to profess faith in Christ** through this ministry, but the **local church is largely absent** in these poor communities. Where is the church, the Body of Christ, for these new believers? How can they be equipped to reach the thousands around them for Christ?

Addis needs a **new flowering of the gospel** through **Ethiopian-led church planting**, and the strategic time is now. The Ethiopian ACT Project leadership is in place and excited about this vision, but they **need the relationships and resources of God's people** to move forward.

Personal Core Values for an Addis Ababa Church Planting Movement:

Any significant church planting movement in Addis Ababa **must be contextualized** for and **led by Ethiopians**, and therefore vision and logistics for these church plants must be worked out over time through **team collaboration and prayer**. In the future we anticipate sharing more specific church vision that has been developed and corporately owned by our Ethiopian teammates, but for now I can only share those values which drive Liz and me personally, and which we hope to see permeate our lives and ministry as we move to Ethiopia.

1. Christ-centered

*The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16-17). In a religious and cultural context dominated by nominalism and moralism, we seek to be a redemptive and counter-cultural **community of gospel grace in the heart of Addis Ababa**. We long to be joyful **people of worship, word, sacrament, and kingdom justice**, all which overflow from the free and abundant grace we have received through the person and work of Jesus Christ.*

2. Kingdom Mission

*We are people of the King, our Messiah Jesus Christ, and as such we are a people called to his Kingdom Mission. Isaiah 35 provides a powerful image of what God's Kingdom looks like as it breaks into our world. Flowering deserts, healed bodies, deliverance from danger and oppression, and God's redeemed people walking in the way of holiness and unity as they lift their voices in joyful worship. This is the kind of ministry we long to have. Our mission has numerous facets, but three main emphases will be a sacrificial **compassion***

for the poor and marginalized, intentional reconciliation between ethnic and social groups, and bold proclamation of the good news of the gospel through an organic interweaving of the words and actions of Jesus Christ.

3. Spirit-empowered

*The **Spirit of God is at work in Ethiopia**, and our life and ministry is utterly dependent upon his power. The salvation of men and women, the reconciliation of social and ethnic groups, the restoration of hope and health in the midst of urban poverty and AIDS-these are **works of the Spirit, not human self-effort**. We will seek the "daily bread" of God's Spirit through persistent and desperate prayer, trusting that we serve a good and gracious Father who delights in giving the Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11).*

4. Love for the City

*God is calling us to dwell **in** the heart of Addis Ababa, while battling in love **for** the heart of Addis Ababa. The unique urban center of Addis is home to over 3 million people, and is known as the "capital of Africa" because of its historical, diplomatic, and political significance. Addis has a vibrant, independent, and beautiful culture, and yet also suffers with chronic underdevelopment, deep urban poverty, and staggering rates of HIV/AIDS. Addis Ababa is a city of great promise and deep struggle, and it is **our joyful calling to love this city in all of its beauty and brokenness** by the power and grace of the gospel.*

5. Ethiopian-led Team Ministry

*Our commitment is that church planting move forward only in the context of Ethiopian-led team ministry. The Ethiopian leadership of the ACT Project has been the impetus behind a growing vision for church planting among the urban poor of Addis Ababa, and this current planting effort comes at their request. Our team, comprised of Ethiopians and expatriates, will work together in **different, yet mutually supportive roles**, to initiate a church planting movement and **eventually call Ethiopian pastors and elders** to oversee this ministry. We seek to embody the humility of Jesus in our mutual life and ministry, rejecting opportunities for "personal kingdom building" and instead **helping unleash each others' God-given gifts** for the building of God's Kingdom.*

6. Reformed and covenantal, yet connected to the Church universal

*We desire to see churches planted throughout Addis that are vibrant in their faith and rooted in the beauties of a **Reformed and covenantal** understanding and practice of the Scriptures, and yet churches that are also **in relationship to all branches of the Church universal** that profess the historic creeds of our faith. As such, we will seek to engage the local expressions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and other Ethiopian Protestant and Catholic churches when possible-always taking care to **affirm where Christ is at work and graciously challenging where Christ is being obscured**.*

7. Reality of Redemptive Suffering

*While we firmly believe that God's Kingdom is already breaking forth in healing, salvation, and restoration, we also recognize the "not yet" dimension of the Kingdom. True, transformative, and miraculous change of individuals, churches, and societies is possible through the gospel, and yet we know that any change will always be partial and messy until Christ's return. This guards us from the vain over-optimism that pain and suffering will be eliminated, and also from discouragement and pessimism when gospel change seems slow or elusive. Trials and suffering are often **the very means God uses to mature our faith** (James 1:2-4),*

and by persevering in trials we follow our Savior who learned obedience and was made perfect through suffering (Hebrews 2:10, 5:8).

8. Mutual Love and Care

*Our personal relationship with God is intimately connected to our mutual love and care for one another (1 John 3:16-20). God's intention for us is a **healthy inter-dependence as the body of Christ**; we need one another in order to grow in our understanding and experience of God, and to fulfill the calling He has placed upon our lives. As a team, we walk through the ups and downs of life together, and like the church in Acts 2, we share a fundamental commitment that everyone's basic needs for life-food, shelter, clothing, and Christian nurture will be met through the body of believers.*