

## **People of the Cross**

Dr. Hugh Smith, Rev. & Mrs. Verne Ward, district & retired missionaries, district NMI leadership team, pastors, delegates and friends of this 66th NMI Convention of the Washington Pacific District - it is with a sense of awe and gratitude that I bring you this report of what God is doing through you.

*Psm 68:31 says:*

*Great ones shall come out of Egypt;*

*Ethiopia shall quickly stretch out her hands to God.*

It was Sunday morning; I awoke to the sound of the nearby mosque calling people to prayer. It was kind of a haunting sound that filled the air. We heard it often as we traveled around Ethiopia for the Muslims have an ambitious plan to build a mosque every three miles. As I lay on my thin mattress on the floor of an abandon building, listening to the prayer call I reflected on all that I saw and heard and experienced in my short trip through Horn of Africa.

We heard last year from Howie Shute about the incredible movement of God that is breaking out in that area of the world. I was there, with 75 other district presidents for a prayer & vision tour—a fancy name that meant we drove around the countryside and didn't do any work. We were there to hear first hand the stories of the Ethiopian Christians who have stretched out their hands to God.

We listened to the small, humble Ethiopian pastor who spent 38 weeks in jail this past year. Since it is only legal to imprison someone for preaching Christianity for 24 hours at a time, he arranges his daily preaching in the market square so that he is out of jail by Sunday morning in order that he can be in the pulpit preaching to his congregation. Monday morning finds him back at the market place, preaching until he is once again beaten and sent to jail for 24 hours. It is a daily pattern that has played out over and over again this past year.

One afternoon we sat among 2000 Ethiopians, many who had walked for days to get to this auditorium for a holiness conference sponsored by the Church of the Nazarene. The conference had to be relocated several times for securities Reasons—yet people came. Two people often sat in a single chair, people sat in the aisle, people lined up along the walls, people sat in the window sills and stood in the doorway and there were many who could not get in but stood outside to listen. Wherever there was space, it was filled.

I sat on my metal chair and listened—this time the sound that filled the air was not the mosque calling people to prayer but a deep moaning that literally rose up from the floor. The Ethiopians were crying out for God. They were hungry for more—more of God—more of His presence—more of Him. Amidst the moaning a voice would cry out “Allelusha” and soon the auditorium was breaking out in praise to God. “Allelusha”, “Allilusha”, “Allilusha”

We look to Ethiopia to see God moving and here they were—the ones that we look to- were crying out for more of Him.

The floodgate of the Holy Spirit opened before us—people were saved, people were delivered from demons, people were healed.

Stories are being told all around the world of what God is doing in Ethiopia. But you know—what God is doing there He is capable, and willing and wanting to do in every nation.

The theme—and my prayer - for this coming year is that we are people of the cross. What does that mean? I know what it means in Ethiopia, a country that is 75-80% Muslim – it means that you can not graze your cattle on government land, you can not send your children to public schools

and it means that you can not even bury your dead. I know what it means in India, North Korean, the Middle East and many other places around the world where you are persecuted, beaten and jailed for your faith. We know what it means to be a people of the cross in other nations.

But what does it mean to be a people of the Cross here on the Washington Pacific District?

The answer I think is found in Psalms 68. A people of the cross are people who quickly stretch out their hands to God—wanting more of Him.

William Carey, pioneer missionary to India. Said

"To know the will of God,

we need an open Bible and an open map."

God is calling us to take our Bible and our map and preach the gospel to every land, every tribe and every tongue.

He is calling us to be a people who are stretching out their hands for Him.

The map that we are holding is a community map:

We have

- Supported and prayed for Benji & Abbi Rodes as they minister to the lost and hurting in Capital Hill.
- We supported and prayed for our new church plants and stood in the gap with our ethnic pastors.
- We've helped those who were affected by the snow melted rivers of Snoqualmie, Lewis and Gray counties.
- We fed people who were hungry in Forks, in Centralia, in Vancouver, in Kirkland, and every part of the district.
- We've given a cup of "Seattle Water" - a cup of coffee - to those who thirst.
- We clothed those who were naked and
- we were a people of the cross to our neighbors, and to our communities.

The map you hold in your hand is also a global map:

- The Church of the Nazarene just entered 4 new countries bringing our total to 155 world areas. In a time when other denominations are downsizing their mission work because of the economy. We are standing firm in our commitment to make Christ-like disciples of all nations.
- You have worked hard and sacrificed in order to raise over 1.1 million dollars for World Evangelism Fund.
- You gave over \$30,000 through Alabaster and \$97,000 through W&W to put churches, schools and parsonage on the map.
- The 1536 minutes of airtime you provided will bring the message of hope to places where we can not build a church.
- You gave over \$46,000 to support our missionaries through LINKS, Christmas Fund, Health Care and deputation.
- There are 14,655 new believers in the world today because of the support you gave to the Jesus Film (\$43,965).
- Whatever the needs, where ever it was you gave compassionately and sacrificially (\$159,968)
- Even our children gave over \$4,400 to help other children half way around the world in Madagascar.

Six of our families from the Washington Pacific District are serving on the mission field.

- Andy & Judy Bennett
- Robert & Connie Dunn
- Hugh & Evelyn Friberg
- Kent & Kathy Pelton
- Benji & Abbey Rodes
- Jon & Margaret Scott

What a privilege it is to have Hugh & Evelyn with us today and later this afternoon we will hear from them but I hope you take the time to extend to them a warm welcome from their home district.

We do need to take our map in hand but we can't take the journey by ourselves—we need traveling partners. This district is blessed by an incredible team of pastors and local presidents. Behind every dollar amounts I just shared with you stands countless hours of prayers, work, energy and creativity on the part of our pastors and presidents.

If you are a local president or pastor would you stand?

Thank you for being people of the cross.

I have asked the district NMI leadership team to stand behind me while I read this report. I am deeply grateful for these people for their endless source of inspiration, unwavering friendship and incredible encouragement. I could not have asked for a better group of traveling partners.

Thank you to: Marilyn

Darci

David

Darlene

Deanna

Rene

Kathie

Verle

Ivan

Tom

Carol

Julian

Matthew

Dale

Benji

Marian

Dennis

Ray

Cindy

Shelley

Tim

Louisa

Washington Pacific District you are a people of the cross!

You are a people with your arms stretched out to God.

Rick Warren tells a story about a Catholic Bishop Fulton Sheen who once visited a leprosy colony. He came across a man sitting on the ground who had a number of serious skin diseases. The man's body was oozing with puss, putrid sores and as the Bishop leaned over to talk with him, the crucifix he was wearing broke off the chain and fell into the open sores on the man's leg. The Bishop's first reaction was to jump back revolted by what had happened. But, he said, all the of the sudden he was the overwhelmed with compassion for this person. So he reached into sore and took up the cross.

I think this is the finest definition of what it means to be a people of the Cross. Reaching into the sores of life - where people are broken, dying, poor, hopeless and taking up the cross.

Washington Pacific District you are a people of the cross!  
You are a people who are reaching into the sores of life with one hand and with other - reaching out for more of God.

The Bible is clear—there is only one mission for the church—to bring glory to God by proclaiming the message of the cross in every land, in every village, in every place on the map. So that one day all of us will stand before the throne praising God—

Allelusha', allelusha' allelusha'

I would like to end my report by giving praise to the God who  
has redeemed the world. But I want you to join me.

We are going to do it the Ethiopian way:

The word is Allelusha'

Allelusha' Allelusha' Allelusha'

Respectfully submitted,  
Debra Voelker  
Washington Pacific District  
NMI President