

A letter from Rachel Weller in Ethiopia

October 2013

Gambella, Ethiopia



Rev. Akwai presents the Bible to the next generation

How does one adequately describe a once in a lifetime event?

On the same weekend that my friends and relatives in the US were celebrating the birth of our nation, the Anywaa people were gathering in Gambella to celebrate the dedication of the Bible – the whole Bible – in their own language. They recognized it as a sort of birth, allowing them clearer exposure to the mysteries of God. Michael and I, along with several former missionaries and offspring of missionaries – including a grandchild and a great grandchild – were honored to participate in the joy and experience the excitement of the community to hold in their hands the Word of God that needs no more translation for them to understand.

There were two days of speeches, singing, remembering old times when the missionaries first came to the region, and reviewing the process that followed, bringing this great work to completion. Presbyterian missionaries were the instigators and the constants in the process. Marie (Breezy) Lusted and Niles Reimer – both retired now – had worked since the mid-1970s to bring the Old Testament to the Anywaa (formerly called Anuak) language. The history is fascinating, but there isn't room for the whole of it here. Both Breezy and Niles had other assignments, but both had an interest in translating and the ability to do so. Obstacles seemed to repeatedly attempt to halt the work – language helpers moving on in life and even death, a country revolution, a revolt against the revolution. Added to these were technical difficulties such as learning the newest thing in communication: how to work a computer – in a time when chips, disks, and mice were most likely to be dipped, slipped, and trapped! But the two missionaries were persistent, and God blessed the work, allowing both of them to enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done.

Niles, known among the Anywaa as Okwomchor, and his wife, Ann (called Nyodier in Anywaa) came for the celebration. Breezy (known as Nyajak), unable to travel for health reasons, joined us by Skype, giving greetings in Anywaa to the great delight of the crowd. The translation work was started working in notebooks with pencils, progressed to personal computers when few desktops had room for one, and was finally completed by Skype with the four translators working from two time zones in the United States and two locations in Ethiopia! All the celebrators understood the marvel of the accomplishment and so the rejoicing was exactly what it should have been – overwhelming!



One of the very early exercises teaches kids to recognize shapes, learn letters, and understand that those letters together make a word which they recognize by the picture.

Now that the whole Bible is available, people need to learn to read it. The church in Gambella understands that basic literacy is an important goal, not only for adults, but also for children. With that in mind, a group of teachers, parents and administrators of four church-run pre-schools went to visit an innovative school being operated by sister synod, Western Wollega Bethel Synod, in the mountains to the west of Gambella. What we saw on our visit was inspiring.

Children sat at tables, busily placing rubber letters on matching spaces on cards, and then identified the word they had spelled by looking at the picture. The innovative program allows children to work at their own pace, moving up a ladder of success to complete up to grade four literacy and numeracy. In addition, the children learn science and English in the same manner. The leaders of the four pre-schools are in the process of considering adopting this program or a similar one, in order to provide, not just education, but a good education to their children. Tools such as these help children to process information and use it, rather than simply memorize and reproduce information without really understanding how that information might be relevant to their own situations. Using the Bible for reading practice, they will also learn to understand how the ancient Words of God speak directly to them today, guiding them in the way they live and showing them a path of excellence for the future.

Use the links below to see pictures from the Bible dedication ceremony in Gambella and from the pre-school in Western Wollega Bethel Synod.

Anywaa Bible Dedication:

<https://plus.google.com/photos/112636359413151385290/albums/5932738777647199057?authkey=CI7BrZnH6ObPOw>

Kids learning to read:

[/https://plus.google.com/photos/112636359413151385290/albums/5932756023816237745?authkey=CPKklc-hrbPH7gE](https://plus.google.com/photos/112636359413151385290/albums/5932756023816237745?authkey=CPKklc-hrbPH7gE)

For strength, we rely on your prayers; for companionship, we rely on your letters, emails, and Facebook greetings; for daily bread, we rely on your financial support.

Rachel Weller – along with Michael