



# Chris and Suzy Wilson

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**Location:** Ethiopia



**What we do:** Working in reconciliation and peacebuilding with local Christian leaders.

Dear friends and supporters,

Greetings from Gambella. We're back here for a few weeks delivering training to a group of young leaders from the Anglican Church. We are all enjoying being reunited with friends and colleagues here, and our kids are enjoying being back in the place where they spent their early years.

These few weeks of training provide us with an opportunity to hand over the baton to Rev Sammy Atsali. Sammy is a Kenyan missionary priest and is the new acting principal at St Frumentius' college. While working here, we often prayed for God to send new teachers from other parts of Africa. Though this didn't happen at the time, it's been encouraging to see God bring in a Kenyan instructor and a much more sustainable model. Everything we have seen over the last few weeks makes us confident that both Sammy and the new training model will be a big blessing to the Church here in the years to come.

Over the last few months, we have been developing our capacity to work with churches in many different parts of Ethiopia. The single biggest element of this has been learning Amharic. It is a difficult language and it's been a struggle at times to combine it with existing ministry and PhD commitments, but we continue to make progress. Pray that God would bless and help us as we work on this.

In addition to language learning, we've also been orienting ourselves to the church situation in different parts of the country. In March, I (Chris) travelled with our boss Serawit to a city called Hosaena in southwestern Ethiopia to attend a large conference organised by the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church. This is a region and a church with a remarkable history. In 1928, a US Presbyterian doctor, Thomas Lambie, set up a mission in southwestern Ethiopia. This project was cut short in the mid-1930s when the Italians invaded Ethiopia and expelled all Protestant missionaries. The missionaries who were expelled left behind a small community of less than 50 baptised Protestants with little more than the Gospel of Mark in their own language. The missionaries' diaries express the expectation that they would have to start from scratch whenever they could return. But when they did return – five years later – they found around 100 separate churches with about 10,000 believers.

Despite having relatively little political power and enduring several periods of intense persecution over the last century, this set of churches has grown into a denomination with around 10 million members.



*Visiting a church in Jimma*

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**With Jesus  
With each other  
To the edges**



During their conference, a drama group re-enacted the persecution that the first believers had endured from their own community for departing from their traditional religion, and the subsequent state persecution of believers during the communist era. This was a surreal experience. This church is – in many respects – bigger than anything that exists in the UK. And yet, one can still sit down and talk to elderly people who endured intense persecution for being among the first to convert to Christianity.

In April, I travelled with a missionary couple who have spent decades in Ethiopia training leaders for rural churches and who had huge amounts of wisdom to share. We visited a Bible college in a mountain range

a few hours southwest of Gambella, which is locally led and locally funded. They shared that they have been involved in planting 50 new churches in the last decade. While it is difficult to compare a conflict-affected context like Gambella with one that has generally enjoyed peace and stability, I came away from this college visit in awe of what they are doing and also with unresolved questions about the when flows of finance and personnel from the outside are helpful and when they may stifle the growth and development of the local church.

In addition to all of this, I have continued to research some of the distinctive challenges that churches face in situations of inter-communal conflict. In June, I made a brief visit to the UK to attend a postgraduate research conference. It was really encouraging to be able to present my proposals for responding to these challenges to established scholars and other PhD students and to receive their input. It was also a great opportunity to catch up with family members, and to photocopy and scan lots of library resources that will be needed over the next year.

Looking ahead, we have some further trips in the pipeline. As a result of continued conflict in the country, the leaders of the Anglican Church have deemed it unsafe for a group of refugee students to travel to Gambella for training. Instead, we have agreed that I will make a few visits to their refugee camp and deliver some training there. I am particularly excited about this opportunity to support and train refugee church leaders who have endured much hardship. Please pray that we'd be able to get all the permissions that we need to make these trips happen, and that God would help us to understand the situation of these churches and give us wisdom to know whether there are ways we can continue to support them over the years to come.

Chris and Suzy



*Photos from top to bottom: Conference in Hosaena; in Gambella, playing games with the students between classes; introducing a visiting friend to some Ethiopian cuisine*



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**Africa Conference: Friday 7–Sunday 9 October** – A weekend residential with opportunity to connect online. This year's theme is Out of Africa: Learning together about mission. Book your place now at [churchmissionsociety.org/ac2022](https://churchmissionsociety.org/ac2022)

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