



Bethel Evangelical Secondary School helps Ethiopian girls complete high school, overcome poverty

Dembi Dollo, Ethiopia

One day, outside the gate of the Bethel Evangelical Secondary School (BESS) campus, people were digging and constructing a new concrete ditch for the road. Many of the workers were young women, between the ages of 15 to 19 years old. Amanuel Tesfaye, principal at BESS, said these girls either did not pass the 10th grade national exams and were not allowed to finish high school or they had dropped out of school because of personal problems. They worked for 40 birr a day (approximately \$2 USD). These young girls are proof that only 35% of Ethiopian women complete their high school education. This places Ethiopia in the bottom 10% in the world in terms of girls’ education. Sadly, these women are almost assured a life of poverty. There is little hope they will return to school. Most will never rise above their present meager standard of living.



The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s partner, the Western Wolega Bethel Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is working hard to educate Ethiopia’s young women and men at BESS. Not only is BESS’ percentage of girl students, currently at 44%, higher than the national average, but, more importantly, all 60 of the 10th grade girls passed their national exams last year. They will complete their high school education and attend university. Amanuel Tesfaye says: “It was the [PC(USA)] who built BESS in the early 1970s because they believed Education was the only way for the oppressed to escape poverty.”

PC(USA) continues to support BESS through mission co-worker Brenda Stelle’s work. Brenda teaches English to the students at BESS to prepare them for their national exams. Since all the high school instruction and testing are done in English, it is crucial for students to understand the language. Brenda’s 25 years of experience at both the high school and college levels make her well qualified to prepare BESS students for their university education. Last year 100% of the BESS graduating class went to university (including 50 young women). This is a remarkable accomplishment since less than 6% of all Ethiopians age 18-22 attend university.

Supporting BESS to help girls complete their high school education and encouraging all students to attend university is one way Presbyterian World Mission is working with its global partners to alleviate poverty by providing [quality education for one million children by the year 2020](#). To help support Brenda and Steve Stelle’s ministry, please make a gift to [E200507](#). Congregations can also designate gifts through their Directed Mission Support account D507574. To support Bethel Evangelical Secondary School (BESS), please make a gift to [E862104](#).