



Sagalee Abdii

A Periodic Newsletter of
Our Redeemer Oromo Evangelical Church of Minnesota

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Editors' Note: Sagalee Abdii Is Back

"Those Who Keep Waiting Upon the LORD Will Renew Their Strength"

By Admasu Simeso

This year, we missed at least two issue of Sagalee Abdii, the publication of our church, thus several of our regular readers inquired about it. We sincerely apologize for the missed issues but now we are glad to be back!

For those major events of our church which took place during the missed period, (the last quarter of last year and the first quarter of this year), we will briefly mention the events, where possible with pictures, without going into the details.

The name, Sagalee Abdii, (Voice of Hope)¹ is more than just a name. The Oromo word 'abdii' (hope) means to 'remain in a positive mindset, to be optimistic' looking forward in the midst of difficulties and hard time, whether it is with personal issues, economic difficulties or of national tragedies such as what our people are going through now, etc.

The irony is that usually we do not mention or even think about hope (abdii) when everything is normal and fine. We take our refuge in hope (abdii) only when we face difficult situations. Hope is faith based trust that sustains life in individuals or communities. Where there is no hope (abdii) there is no future. Lafa abdiin hinjirre egeeren hinjiru, jireenyi hinjiru. Namnii tokko yks sabi abdii kutannaan hinraawwateef jechuu dha. We should also keep in mind that the alternative; losing hope, giving up - (abdii kutachuun) does not offer anything at all, rather

it leads to anxiety and worries and finally lead to death literally or metaphorically. "This reminds us the dilemma expressed in Paul Revere & the Raiders' song- on Cherokee People".

Now we look at the sagalee part of Sagalee Abdii, (word, voice). Sagalee (word, voice) is what encourages and sustains abdii (hope) in people or nations in difficult times, not to easily give up but hope for better days and situations. Abdii (hope) involves scarifies, endurance, determination and guts not to easily succumbed to a situation even though it may be costly at the time. That is what the world is witnessing today in our country.

As a church we have various ways of sustaining one another's abdii (hope): through preaching from the pulpit, worshiping together, praying for one another and for our people in Biyya Oromo, calling and encouraging one another in times of difficulties or even in good times. Yeroo rakkinnaa walii birmachuu! Sagalee Abdii, (Voice of Hope) our publication is meant to be one of the ways to convey to our church members and communities, our voice, our standing together, our faith and our witness as members of community of believers. Yes, we are mindful that Sagalee Abdii is not meant to provide news. For that there are experts out there on the spot who keep us informed in real-time. Ours is just to note history for the record and remain steadfast in our faith and hope.

The other meaning of sagalee is word. While in Oromo word and voice mean sagalee, in English they are two different words. One can hear sagalee, (voice) without hearing a word. Word is what gives meaning to voice.

¹ We are thankful to those who came up with such a visionary name in the first place. The display of it

beautifully graces our church website. On behalf of our congregation we say thank you again to the designer of the logo, Chali Yadessa.

In the Gospel of John 1:1 it is written, ‘in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God’. Jalqabatti Sagaleen ture, Sagalichis Waaqa bira ture, Sagaleenis Waaqa ture.

Here John calls the Lord, the Word (Sagalee), from the Greek word, Logos, meaning for Word.

It is with the words of the Word (Sagalee) that our church reach out to her members and our community at large to provide word of hope and encouragement during these uncertain times full of challenges from all corners of the world starting from here where we live. His words are anchored in hope (abdii) that will sustain us to hold up our heads and move forward trusting in Him without wavering no matter. But we need to constantly be in prayers for guidance from the Almighty to be able to discern the right from the wrong and the just from the unjust.

In I Corinthians 13:13 the Apostle Paul says, “Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love”.

We are pleased to say that we are back with Sagalee Abdii; kanaaf Abdiin jira

LIVE AT PEACE WITH EVERYONE

By Pastor Melkamu Negeri



The original purpose of God for men was to live in peace and harmony with each other and also with God. But this was damaged when the first people totally failed to obey God. Direct

communication with God and each other got blurred. As the result, they started blaming and accusing one another. This continued to pass to the next generation and we all are reflecting those signs of our fall that we have inherited from our fore fathers.

Nobody is teaching children to do harm to one another but they fight each other sometimes to the extent of severe revenge. Since fall, hurting peaceful life and fellowship among people became an easy action of daily life. Sometimes, we even do not notice that we are hurting peace and fellowship as we all have our own justifications of our action. Today when anything goes wrong, we always have someone to blame for anything that went wrong while we distance ourselves from what has happened and think we are innocent. Many times, we hear people blaming someone else for anything that did not work out as intended. People feel comfortable to talk about someone who did something wrong be it in a family, in communities or even in government and political organizations. People do not want to be responsible for any damage made but always point to someone else to be in charge. Whenever we make ourselves blameless but pile all the bad things on someone else, we cannot heal the broken world. We should know that we all are degraded as a result of our disobedience that has been inherited from our father Adam and our mother Eve. If we are not blamed in one area, we have numerous areas of failings. Tradition tells that the following sentence was found in the pocket of Martin Luther on his deathbed “*We are all beggars; this is true*”.

If so, we are all individually called to do our best to recognize our own flaws and make peace with fellow Christian and none Christian to live at peace.

We Christians are on this earth sent by Jesus the Christ to create a new society and become a heavenly model. Christians proclaim peace among themselves and in society by taking the lead on their own. In another word, a Christian is saying “LOOK AT ME”. We do not say this in words but in our daily actions. Most of the time that is the area where we all fail.

The theme of this message was taken from Romans 12: 9-21. I love the title given to this section. It says “**Marks of the True Christian**”. Paul continues to list what these marks are. On verse 18, he tells Christians what they are expected to do in the midst of animosity of those days. “... *live at peace with everyone*”. Please note the phrase “**With everyone**”. Because they are Christians, they are different from the rest of the people living around them. The quality of life Christ expects from his followers makes them different from the rest of the society they live in. Probably, there was no society that teaches to love “*enemies*”. On the contrary, Paul is suggesting living in peace with all includes enemies. We all know that this teaching is based on the instructions of Christ, “...*I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven*” [Matt. 5:44ff].

To be called *children of heavenly Father* and also to be called “*Christians*” is not sufficient by itself. The character of our Father in heaven is not something undisclosed. Especially, we Christians know very well from the scripture that our heavenly father is a father for all. “... *He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous...*”. Probably, we should pause for a while and think what is going on among Christian churches and Christian families. We are called to the extent of loving our enemies but

why do we find it hard to love even our fellow Christians? Are all our justifications good enough to lose our Christ-given sacrificial love towards our brothers and sisters in Christ? Are we not even called to beyond that? Are we imitating Him as individual Christians and as churches? Are we promoting peace and unity among the children of the heavenly Father? I encourage the reader to respond personally.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

By Samuel Yonas Deressa

In March 2016, the Daily Mail of South Africa reported that the South Africa “self-named-prophet” Alec Ndiwane had fallen into a trance in South Africa's Kruger National Park to prove the “Lord's power over animals.” According to the report, the “prophet” was speaking in tongue and walking in confidence until he was chased and attacked by lions. He was saved by security offices after one of the lioness clamped him down. The “prophet” was latter heard saying, “I don't know what came over me. Were we not given dominion over all creatures of the earth?”i

These days, reading similar stories have become common in our daily encounters If there is anything that continues to confuse and challenge churches in the twenty first century, it is how we understand the Holy Spirit and Its reality in the life of a Christian. As I understand, the confusion emerges from lack of proper teaching on one hand and the infusion of non-Biblical traditions and practices into the church on the other. Among other teachings the teaching about the understanding of the Holy Spirit is one of the most important lessons that needs to be taught in Christian churches today.

Particularly in developing countries, the confusion is deep rooted.ⁱⁱ First, the pre-Christian religious experience shapes the way they understand and live out Christian faith. As studies show, people tend to mix up God's Spirit with other forms of "spirits." In other words, their traditional religious understanding of "spirits" influence their understanding of the Holy Spirit and His works.ⁱⁱⁱ

Second, the so called charismatic movement have massively influenced Christian traditions in negative ways such as misappropriation of spiritual gifts, spread of prosperity gospel, focus on glory than the cross of Jesus Christ (the central message of the Bible), and uplifting some individuals as men of God, *Namaa Waaqaa*, rather than glorifying the head of the church which is Jesus Christ our Lord, and so on. By this, I do not mean to undermine the positive contributions of charismatic movement, even on the mainline churches like evangelical Lutheran churches in Africa. Its positive values include the inspiration of people for reading the Scripture, yearning for spiritual renewal, and revival that resulted in massive evangelism movements.

The intention of this brief article is to note that the Holy Spirit is neither to be confused with other forms of "spirits" or man-made self-uplifting practices observed in some charismatic movements. Worshiping in African immigrant congregations in Minnesota for the last five years, and visiting some other non-African immigrant congregations, I have observed believers struggling with this confusion.

As Lutherans, we have inherited a Biblical based tradition on which we can evaluate these and other non-Biblical traditions that are inculcated into church practices. We are also

witnesses as to how the Holy Spirit builds up, strengthens, and enriches His church when the church opens itself to be taught and embrace the true Biblical teaching. As Paul says, our teachings and experiences are not the result of "words taught us by human wisdom but words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words" (1 Cor. 2:13).

Lutheranism is built on the principle of appealing to the Scripture along, *sola scriptura*, as a means to evaluating church practices. But this does not mean that the Scripture is the only authority in the church. We are provided with creeds and confessional writings. As reformers did, we can also use arguments by early and contemporary theologians. But Scripture remains to be the *chief* authority of our faith. As Luther declared at Worms in 1521: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by clear reason, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscious is captive to the Word of God."^{iv}

What do we learn from the Scripture about how the Spirit works in believer's life and ministry? The book of Acts is a good demonstration for how the Spirit works in the life of the community of saints and Christian church. When Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, illustrate the context within which God's Spirit manifested itself in the life of the believers, he emphasizes the following (see Luke 2:42-46): (1) The Scripture was central to the life and teaching of the apostles and all believing community. It says that the believing community "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." The apostles were teaching from the Scripture and their encounter of Jesus' ministry, which later became part of the Scripture when they put it in writing. (2) The believers were devoted to fellowship which included "the breaking of bread." They were in

fellowship with each other. It says “all the believers were together and had everything in common.” (3) They were committed to prayer.

This is very much in line with Lutheran teaching of how the Holy Spirit manifests itself in the lives of believers. In Lutheran teaching, the Spirit works through the Word and Sacraments, which we call the means of grace. God gives spiritual gifts through these means of grace in which the church is built, strengthened, and edified. The word of God is central (which in Acts is describes as one of the main areas of the apostles’ commitment) to the Spirit’s work in our lives. It is the word of God mediated by the Spirit that opens the way for us to share the life of the Triune God by virtue of which we are also enabled to commune with each other.

Sacraments are also central to the Spirit’s work in our life. Sacraments are administered in communal gatherings where people are committed to prayer and worship. Just as Luke indicates how the apostles and other believer were committed to fellowship and prayer, sacraments are all about saints coming together as one community to worship, pray, and share Christ’s life with each other. According to Luther, “the significance or effect of sacrament is fellowship of all the saints.”^v To take part in Holy Communion is to have fellowship with Christ and all the saints. As Luther writes, “the Holy Spirit works through the followings: the community of saints or Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.”^{vi}

In the *Large Catechism*, third article, Martin Luther discusses about the work of the Holy Spirit in baptism. For Luther, the Spirit sanctifies humanity through daily baptism. The first

baptism is of water and the Word. But what Luther refers to as daily baptism is a daily dying to sin and raising in Christ. In baptism, we are given the “grace, Spirit, and power to suppress the old man so that the new may come forth and grow strong.”^{vii}

Luther writes,

Baptism is nothing else than the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new creature, both of which must continue in us our whole life long. Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after. For we must keep at it without ceasing, always purging whatever pertains to the old Adam, so that whatever belongs to the new creature may come forth. What is the old creature? It is what is born in us from Adam, irascible, spiteful, envious, unchaste, greedy, lazy, proud—yes—and unbelieving; it is beset with all vices and by nature has nothing good in it. Now, when we enter Christ’s kingdom, this corruption must daily decrease so that the longer we live the gentler, patient, and meek we become, and the more we break away from greed, hatred, envy, and pride.^{2viii}

¹ Read more on Daily Mail.com; accessed 06/11/2016.

¹ However, by no means do I mean that such confusion does not exist in developed countries.

¹ Byang H. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, (Kisumu: Evangel Publishing House 1975) 169; John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970) 1.

¹ Luther’s Work, 32:112

¹ Martin Luther, *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ, and the Brotherhoods*, ed. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut Lehmann, vol. 35 (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 50.

¹ Ibid, 435:37

¹ LC, IV, 76.

¹ LC, 465:65-67

BEARING FRUITS:

By Admasu Simeso

The theme of our church for last year, 2015 was taken from 2nd Peter 3:18, which says, “*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus*”. Our theme for the current year, 2016 is from John 15:16. “*Go and bear fruits*”. It was one of the last spiritual guidance that the Lord gave to His disciples as His time on this earth in human form was coming to close.

If we look at the two themes, the one of last year and this year, the sequence in which they come is very interesting, that bearing fruits follows growth.

We might have not met the expectation of our theme of last year and accomplished as much we would have liked in growing. Some of us might feel we’ve grown very much and others would say not as much as expected of us. Nevertheless, *here again we are more than 3/4 through the current year with our new theme to bear fruit.*

Most of us, the first generation of Oromos to this country and around the world come from the land where our parents tilled the land, planted crops and garden the old Biblical time ways by sowing (scattering) seeds, ploughing the land with wooden ploughs drawn by oxen and sowing (scattering) the seeds. They knew from centuries of experience what it would take to plant crops or fruit trees. The land has to be carefully prepared and treated with fertilizer, *xaa’oo* from animal manure, not with the present day toxic chemical fertilizers, (unfortunately

being introduced now days as sign of development).

The crops where the land is prepared well and given *xaa’oo*, *with timely rainfall from above*, the planted seeds grow healthy and bear fruits many folds when the time comes. The plants and crops planted on not well prepared soil and not having *xaa’oo*, even if they get sufficient rain do not grow well right from the beginning and do not bear fruits. The description for such crops are, *hinmujuje, gadi-marge (stunted)*.

In our case there are few positive indicators of growth. A clear case is that our number, the church attendance has grown well, so also the number of small children, teenagers and young adults a sign of a Living Church. The various Ministries of our church are active and always busy around our church, especially the Women Ministry. *Waaqayyo Gooftaan ammayyuu isaan ha’eebbisu!* Hopefully the others will follow suit soon.

Thus the focus of frequent teachings in our church, since the beginning of the year have been on our theme of the year. Our Pastors and preachers have been focusing in their teachings on the theme, on Sundays and on other occasions and continue to emphasize our theme, *to bear fruits, and bear abundantly.*

While we try to concentrate on our theme and seek guidance from the Lord, how to make it practical, at the same time our focus has been drawn to the extremely volatile and disturbing situation of our people back home in Oromia (*Biyya Oromo*). *Now almost a year* and it has been a real challenge and concern, and continue to be.

Beside the prayers, our church is involved with other Oromo churches around the world to bring

the plight of our people to the attention of all peace loving governments, humanitarian and human rights organizations to be aware of what is going on and make humanitarian intervention to help stop the killings, abuses and mass imprisonments. We hope that this also will bear fruit to see justice and peace for our people and all people in that troubled region.

We are in the most trying time in the history of our nation. It is not enough only to appeal to the rest of the world to come to our aid; instead while we keep up the awareness building front, at the same time we need to come to our senses to be able to discern our priorities, as much as possible avoiding toxic ideas from without and within that keep us divided. We need to behave mature cultivating and growing our unity which is our strength. We have to bring forth the determination and strong sense of commitments of our fore fathers/mothers grounded in one-word expression, '**didhaa**'.

At the end we need to mention two important events that have taken place that we are thankful to God for His guidance. The first was the seminar that was held in our church from 15-17 July 2016 on 'Christian Identity and Social Responsibility' conducted by two Oromo theologians and church fathers, Rev Dr. Tezgera Hirpo and Rev. Dr. Debela Birri. The seminar turned out to be eye opening for many of our members providing them with spiritual guidance as what it means to be a Christian and at the same time one's role and responsibility in the world we live in, in general and our Oromo society in particular within our cultural context. Actually the seminar was planned for last year as part of our theme of the year, "Grow *in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus*".

The second important event that we join our sisters and brothers of United Oromo Evangelical Churches, UOEC and thank God together is about the 20th UOEC Council Annual Meeting, (07/20-21/2016) and the 21st general UOEC conference, (07/22-24/2016) held at Oromo Evangelical Church in Washington DC.

As we know UOEC unity, as a strong and viable voice of Oromo Evangelical Churches has been in great doubt and bogged down on trivial matters during the last few years, as a result of inconsequential issues which have never been our issues. At this conference the looming breakup and the uncertainty of the future of the UOEC was averted with the intervention of our God the Almighty in His own way.

Thus, most of the UOEC member churches seem to have understood that we have much more in common that unite us and chose to remain united. By understanding the meaning and importance of unity UOEC can be a strong Oromo Evangelical Christian institution that could be a positive example and play a major role in building democratic culture and just society in our country.

We consider the survival of UOEC as **fruit** of prayers, resilience, steadfastness and undeviating constancy in our trust in the Lord. We simply say, '**galata Isaa irraa hafne!**'

Waaqayyo Gooftaan keenya saba keenya dammaqsse, didhaa abboota keenyaas nu keessatti haarsesse! Hin shakkinu ammas nu'wajjin jira!

News from OROECM

Various Ministries:

Several Major Events that Have Taken Place at Our Church since the Beginning of the Year and During the Period of the Coverage of This Issue:³

Below we'll briefly mention some of the major events that took place during the first half of this year; mainly to note them for the record.

- 1. New Year Celebration:** The 2016 New Year was colorfully welcomed on December 31, the last day of 2015. Each member got a verse of the New Year from the Bible. Some had the opportunity to read them aloud to share their personal message of hope from the word of God with others.
- 2. New Year Conference:** The New Year Conference of this year was from 8-10 January 2016. Aaddee Kelebet Asfaw was the main speaker and she conducted her teaching around our theme of the year of "bearing fruits".
- 3. Annual Congregational Meeting:** Our Annual Congregational Meeting covering last year's activities and financial reports was held on 01/17/2016 in Aster Gannoo's Hall in our church. The last Council President, Dr. Robera Battal gave the report followed by discussions on the reports.

4. Installation of New Church Elders:

On 24 January 2016 four newly elected Church Elders, (*Maangudoota Waldaa*) were installed to serve the Church for the next two years. Accordingly, Obbo Ephraim Olani, President; Obbo Hambissa Homa, Treasurer; Obbo Admasu Simeso, Secretary and Aadde Aregash Kumbi member. The installation was presided over by our Senior Pastor, Pastor Melkamu Negeri.



5. OROECM Mission and Vision Task Force.

A seven persons Task Force was set up to work on our church Mission & Vision, known also as Strategic Plan to be implemented over the next 5 years. The members of the Task Force are: 1) Obbo Yadessa Birri, 2) Obbo Dawit Baisa, 3) Aadde Leensa Iddosa, 4) Obbo Mesfin Ayele, 5) Dr. Dinqisa Bato, 6) Obbo Samuel Deressa and 7) Obbo Bayessa Jabessaa. It is reported that the team is active working the assignments by having every two weeks.

³ We apologize to our readers for missing one issue that was supposed to cover the last quarter of last year and published Page 9 of 22

during the month of January 2016. However, we'll still few important events of the period.

6. The founding of the Oromo Christian Women of Minnesota:

Oromo women from the Oromo churches in the Twin Cities area came together and discussed to organize Oromo Christian Women to build awareness among Oromo Christian women and plan towards viable Oromo Christian Women organization to work on how to cooperate and be preemptive in the social and political life of our people.

7. The Orientation of new members:

On March 19, 2016 new members who joined our church some of them coming newly from back home and others from here joined our church as members after extensive orientation sessions by Pastor Melkamu.

8. Baptism of Children:



On Sunday, 20th March 2016 eight children, whose names are given below were baptized in our church by our Pastor, Pastor Melkamu Negeri: 1) Natati Gugsa Jetu, 2) Ayantu Israel, 3) Birole Dinka Betel, 4) Kemarin Wondimu Legesse, 5) Kooket Lamessa, 6) Meti Feyera, 7) Jahaiel Feyera and 8) Kenna Gemechu. One family had two children baptized.

9. Easter Celebration:

On Easter Sunday the Women Ministry of our church organized an early morning Easter worship and celebration for a second time. Quite a number of early risers gathered at the church to sing "Ka'eeraa" in the footsteps of the women in the Gospel, like Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of Jesus who rose up early and went to the place where the Lord's body was put 3 days earlier to get a mixed surprise, (scared and bewildered). After the early morning service, the regular Easter service continued at the regular time.



10. Quarterly Congregational Meeting:

The first quarter of 2016 meeting took place on Saturday 23 April 2016 at our church from 09:00 AM to 12:00 Noon. Pastor Melkamu Negeri, our Senior pastor opened the meeting with devotion based on the disciples reporting back to the Lord after they had been out in the field on assignment as given in Mark 6:30-33. The President Obbo Ephraim Olani chaired the meeting. After giving an overall summary of activity reports of various ministries and the latest financial update by the Treasurer Obbo Hambissa Homa members were invited to ask questions give comments. There were

genuine constructive comments and ideas how to improve the work of our church, especially ways to focus on our outreach. Fifteen people gave positive and constructive comments which the Council has taken note. The President underlined that the Congregation should not expect the Council to do everything but the council facilitates the participation of the whole congregation according to each and everyone's gifts and skills. We are all in it together!

11. Mothers' Day Celebration:

OROECM 2016 Mothers' Day was colorfully celebrated on Sunday, 05/08/2016. Two women guest speaker and singer, Aadde Kelebet Asfaw and Aadde Taliilee Fiqiru added to the celebration. Aaadde Kelebet preached about women's life and their special gift in life from Biblical perspective and Taliilee sang her two special Oromo spiritual songs: *Jireenyi kiyya; harka Waaqaa keessa fi Alli nagaa, manni nagaa, ollaan nagaa-----*.



Aadde Irkaabnesh was named OROECM Mother of the Year and Aadde Birtukan Ayana OROECM Women of the Year. A group of men prepared a special lunch for the occasion and served the women first and rest after.



Mothers', Mothers' Day Choir

12. Darabee Youth and Young Adults Spiritual Conference (DYYASC)

By Pastor Wondimu Legesse Sonessa

OROECM also hosted the *Darabee* Youth and Young Adults 1st Spiritual Conference from June 17-19, 2016. *Darabee* Youth and Young Adults Spiritual conference is intended to provide the youth and young adults with opportunity to hear the Word of God, worship together, and maintain the spirit of Christian fellowship among themselves and with the youth of other congregations.



Group Session, Girls

The main objective and goal of the conference is to encourage the Christian youth seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and study the Word of God on daily basis so that they may exhibit appropriate growth in their faith and a dependable Christian life to whom the work of the Kingdom of God is entrusted. The guest

singers and a keynote speaker helped us to achieve the goal desired. Workshops, presentations, and music were also part of the conference.



One of the presentations

13. Fathers' Day Celebration:

This year Fathers' Day was on June 19, 2016 in which the women group organized the occasion with special luncheon at the church after the service. Sagalee Abdii, on behalf of the already fathers and the future fathers, would like to say *thank you!*



Group representing fathers cutting 'cumbo'

14. Annual Church Picnic and Enjoying God's Creation:

Sunday, 10 July 2016 was the annual church picnic at the Minnehaha Park. First we had a short service at the church and headed to the park. A group organized by Men's Group

went early to the place and prepared the place and the food ready to be cooked for lunch time. There were various games and competitions besides enjoying the weather and the nature.



President of the Church Obbo Ephraim Olani & Chairman of the Men Over Forty Obbo Asrat Tesfa at the picnic.



Partial view at the picnic field





Annual Church Picnic chefs busy at preparation of meals & and others cooking

15. Confirmation:

Twelve youngsters were confirmed on 31 July 2016 and became full members of our church on ---- The class was taught by Pastor Wondimu Sonesa and presented the class to our Senior Pastor and the congregation for confirmation.



The confirmands with the pastors, parents and friends, Sunday, 31 July 2016 facing the congregation after their confirmation.

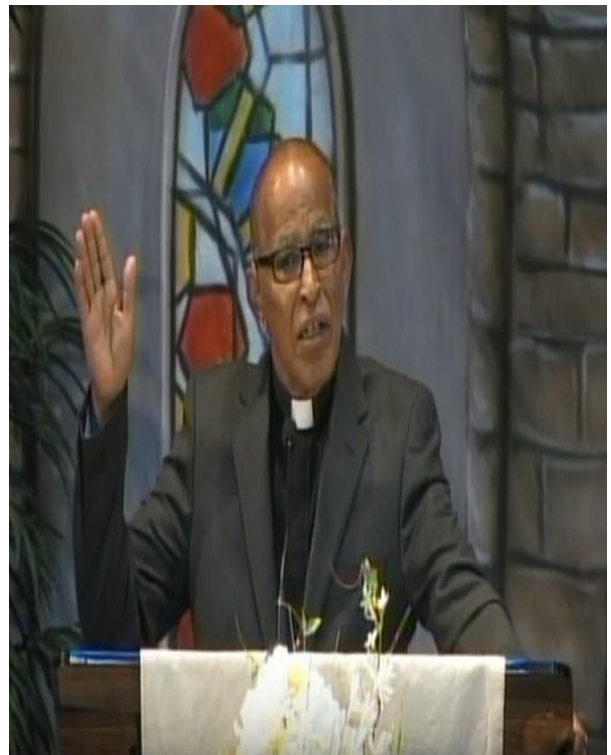
16. Seminar on Christian Identity and Social Responsibility:

A three-day seminar, 15-17 July 2016 was held at our church from in which many people form our church and from other churches attended.

The seminar was conducted by two prominent Oromo theologians, Rev. Dr. Tezgera Hirpo and Rev. Dr. Debela Birri. It helped to clarify what would the role and responsibility of a Christian in a society within the context of his/her culture?



Luba Dr. Tezgera speaking at the seminar at OROECM



Luba Dr. Debela Birri speaking at the Seminar



From L to R Rev. Dr. Debela Birri, Rev. Dr. Tezgera Hirpo and OROECM President Obbo Ephraim Olani.



Children playing in the OROEC parking space

17. DAY BIBLE CAMP

By Pastor Wondimu Legesse Sonessa

Day Bible Camp is intended to nurture our children with age appropriate spiritual experience during their summer vacation. Children from Pre-K to 4th grade attended Day Bible Camp at the OROEC from July 25-29, 2016. The participation of our youth and parents who volunteered made this Bible camp successful. Their daily schedule comprised worship, hearing Bible story, small group time, indoor activities, and field trip. All children visited Science Museum and Como Pool on different days. It was a blessing experience for our kids to learn, share, worship, play together, and discharge responsibilities in the church during their time together. It also contributes a lot to strengthening a sense of belonging together and Christian fellowship at this early age in their life. They had barbeque and certificate award for the closing ceremony.



Children with their participation certificate

18-WAPO BIBLE CAMP:(By Masresha Gemechu)

Since 2008 sending our children to WAPO Bible camp is becoming a tradition here at OROEC. From year to year it is getting more popular among our Sunday school children and youth. As I heard from most parents the kids start planning as soon as they roll in to fourth grade. They talk about it the whole year round. It is them who are nagging their parents to send them to WAPO Bible camp. God bless them.

This year I had special privilege of going to WAPO Bible camp with our kids. If you were not in any camp before, Bible camp is an entirely different experience than any other church programs. It is like you would not trade the experience for all the luxury things in the world (for the love of Jesus). Every child should have to experience IT at least once.

The WAPO Bible camp setting itself makes our kids to expose themselves to nature and God. Surrounded by trees, beautiful cabins, which most of the cabins have Bible names; Like Nazareth, Antioch, Bethany, Salem and ... Hebron. The councils are loving and very caring. They have stayed with our kids 24/7. Everything is so well orchestrated and coordinated for result.

The morning worship, devotion time with cabin bodies, group Bible studies, the field games, the gaga game during their free times, different prayer station setting around the camp and at field, songs and skits during camp fire all these make the camp WAPO a place of spiritual feast.

At WAPO, they teach faith through fun. For example, there are different prayer stations. A station which they can pray without a word; there is a board which divided in to three

columns. Each column titled Thanksgiving, Ask and Repent. When the kids go to this station they put paint on their thumb and put their finger print in each colleen under each title. The other station is where they pray for solders and sick children. The next station is where they exchange prayer; it is a station where there is a prayer request hanged on different colored string (red, blue and white) by other campers. When they get there they just take a random prayer request and pray according to the request and leave their own prayer request. It is clear to imagine what they can learn from this experience.

From my personal observation at this Bible camp our Kids have learned not only spirituality and social life but also responsibility and independence too. Every day the whole week they rise early in the morning, take shower, brush their teeth, and make their bed and get ready on time without their mom reminding them. Camp is where they are fed well both spiritually and physically.

Finally, sending our kids to WAPO Bible camp is the perfect opportunity to step into their own relationship with God. For a few days they are not distracted by home life, sibling quarrel, TV or any kind of media. It's just them and God. I strongly encourage parents to plan to send your kids to Bible camp. It is a perfect spiritual investment.



OROECM children and youth at WAPO bible camp; praising God of all creation with children from other churches.

19- OROECM Spiritual Music Concert: By Dawit Baisa

For second year in a row, the OROEC Worship Team organized an Oromo Gospel music concert at Concordia University. It was held on August 4th, 2016 during the annual Oromo Week in Minnesota where also annual Oromo Soccer Tournament was held. About 175 people came to the concert and enjoyed the worship with OROEC Worship Team and Oromo spiritual singers - Tesfa Bonja (Pennsylvania), Tesfa Temesgen (California), Ibsitu Dhufera (Minnesota), Fedhasa Michael (Canada), Ababo Negassa (Oromia) and Meti Degefa (Minnesota), and musicians from Wogegta Band and OROEC. God's presence was truly felt through the songs and the short teaching that was presented by Pastor Dr. Dinkisa Bato. We hope this annual Gospel Music Concert will continue next year as well, but we have to make a decision yet whether to hold it where the annual Oromo Soccer Tournament will take place next year, Washington DC in summer of 2017.



This important event, one of the ways of outreach for our church would not have been possible, and will not continue, without the prayer and financial support of the congregation members and local business. We are grateful to all of them!

20-UOEC Pastors and partners visit to Washington DC.

Pastors from several United Oromo Evangelical Churches, UOEC went to Washington DC, from 14-15 January 2016 on advocacy mission to draw attention to the severe human rights violation against our people, Oromo people and to appeal for humanitarian interventions.



UOEC Pastors and Partners

Led by UOEC president Rev. Dr. Gemechu Olana UOEC Pastors and Partners visited the

US Department of State and US House of representatives to express their concern and appeal for humanitarian intervention with regard to the widespread persecutions, indiscriminate killings and imprisonment directed against Oromo protesters only expressing their concerns. They met with officials from the US Department of State, the US Congress Lutheran Advocacy Office in Washington DC and the Ethiopian Ambassador to the United States underlining the volatile situation if not resolved immediately

21-UOEC Annual Conference and Council Meeting:

The UOEC 21st Annual Conference and its council 20th meeting took place in Washington DC from 20th- 24th July 2016 at the Oromo Evangelical Church in Washington DC.

Among the major decision made by the Council was to put on hold the contentious issue of relations with other churches and institutions which became a divisive factor of the union over the last several years.

It was agreed that a team led by two prominent Oromo theologians and church fathers, Rev. Dr. Tezgera Hirpo and Rev. Dr. Debela Birri make a thorough review of the issue; including the basis of membership and what may lead to termination of membership and its process and get back to the Council with their recommendations. In the meantime, the member churches were urged to pray for one another, to work together on the so many *national* challenges that face our people and also challenges to our union- *tokkummaa with holistic approach*. **The resolution was decided by a vote of 17 for, 4 against and 1 abstention.**

The Council also elected and installed new Council members:

1. Pastor Alemu Sombo, from Oromo Evangelical Church of Melbourne, Australia President. It is Pastor Alemu's 2nd year as UOEC board member.
2. Aadde Yeshi Olqabaa, from United Oromo Christian Fellowship of Winnipeg, Canada, Vice President, 2nd year in the Board.
3. Obbo Ephraim Olani, Our Redeemer Oromo Evangelical church of Minnesota, (OROECM) Secretary, his first year in the Board. *(Note: Obbo Ephraim was elected at the last minute after those who were nominated by the Nomination Committee declined and said that they would not be able to serve on the Board and after an effort nominate 3 others from the floor.)*
4. Obbo Fikru Lemu, from Oromo Evangelical Church of Columbus, Ohio, Treasurer, his first year in the Board.
5. Obbo Admasu Simeso, OROECM, member and his 2nd year in the Board.



Installation of new UOEC board members

The Council also endorsed the idea of setting up an advocacy office headed by the outgoing President Dr. Gemechu and accountable to the UOEC Board, primarily to focus on building awareness and advocacy with regard to the situation of our people in Oromia. Dr. Gemechu is to submit names of the Advocacy Team to the Board with draft terms of reference.

Application for membership in UOEC by Oromo Evangelical Church of Washington DC was unanimously approved and the church became

a new member at the 20th Annual council meeting.

Finally, the application by Oromo Evangelical Churches of Columbus Ohio to host the 2017 UOEC 22nd Conference was discussed and provisionally approved on condition that the two Columbus, Ohio Oromo Churches; the Oromo Evangelical Church and the Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church go back and work on how to host the Conference together and inform the Board within 4 months (by mid-November 2016) if they have come to agreement. If not in agreement to host the conference together, the chance we will be given to another church at the board's decision.



On that day, at the end of the service, as it is a customary with guests he greeted the congregation and praised God to be alive and stand in the House of the Lord with his sisters and brothers in Christ, and as an Oromo who is being persecuted for his God given identity. He also thanked the congregation for their prayers during those uncertain and difficult years for him, his family and in general those who were unjustly imprisoned. We remember that he urged the church to continue to pray for those who are still languishing in prisons across Ethiopia so that soon they find justice.

The unique thing that impressed and surprised many of us about Obbo Bekele was that, even though a politician he did not shy away to thank God standing in the church, in front of the congregation and witnessed that as a Christian he resolved to struggle for justice without favor or fear; and he has proven that. He affirmed the same thing in his interview with NPR on 27 August 2015¹.

*"I am honored to learn that my non-violent struggles and humble sacrifices for the democratic and human rights of the Oromo people, to whom I was born without a wish on my part but due to the will of the Almighty, have been considered a crime and to be unjustly convicted." **Nevertheless, still proved to be a proud Oromo and nationalist!***



Online Prayer Group Choir singing at the UOEC Conference.

22- Prayer Request for Obbo Bekele Gerba and for All Those in Similar Situation:

By Admasu Simeso

Obbo Bekele Gerba, who was a political prisoner in Ethiopia for 4 years was among the guests who attended Sunday service at our church on Sunday, August 30, 2015, almost a year ago.

“He describes himself as a Christian who believes in non-violence and says he spent his four years in prison pouring over the sermons and speeches of Martin Luther King and translating them into the Oromo language for a book that he hopes to see published. The title: “I Had a Dream.”

He returned home, expected to go back to his job at the Foreign Languages Department, at Addis Ababa University.” While well aware of what was waiting for him, still Obbo Bekele decided to go back to Ethiopia and face whatever they would throw at him. He knew that he would not be safe nor left alone in Ethiopia and had all the reasons to remain outside and seek political asylum

He was put back in prison in late December 2015 soon after the Oromo protest broke out all over Oromia, and has been in prison since then. The protest has intensified, now almost for a year and Obbo Bekele and tens of thousands of Oromos languish in prison like him.

The latest news coming out of Ethiopia is that he was charged with terrorism. Of all people Obbo Bekele, who describes himself as a *Christian who believes in non-violence, charged with terrorism? Really?*

By his resolve and determination to be with and among his people to lead non-violent democratic struggle Obbo Bekele has proven without doubt to be in the camp of the icon of justice, people like Rev. Gudina Tumsa, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and last but not least his hero Rev. Martin Luther King.

Oromia in particular, Ethiopia and that part of the world in general, need hundreds of Bekele Garbas, who are brave and determined to pay whatever price it takes for justice, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

When he stood in our church on Sunday, 30th August 2015 and thank God that the prayers of our congregation and other churches were heard and he was alive to stand in the House of

the Lord, he also asked for further prayers for those who were still behind bars. But now he is back in prison with those he asked our prayers for.

Sagalee Abdii would like to call upon all of us, members of OROECM and all Untied Oromo Evangelical Churches and other churches to remember Obbo Bekele’s request for prayer and continue to pray for them without ceasing so that justice prevails soon for all those who are unjustly incarcerated.

On Sunday, August 28, 2016 our congregation took a one-minute silent prayer for Obbo Bekele and all the tens of thousands who are languishing in prisons, those whose whereabouts unknown (unknown to their friends but only known by those who took them away), those who lost their lives unjustly and those who mourn the loss of their loved ones; young children, parents, those in Oromia and the rest of the country.

23- The Worship Team led the congregation in singing:

***Obsii! Obsii! Obsii, Mootiin harka ulfaataa
sii dhufaa,
Barri boo’icha kees hindarbaa, obsi!***

***(Waaqayyo, Waaqi dhugaa sii dhufaa, sii
birmataa),
Barri boo’icha kees hindarbaa, obsi!***

***(Note: Obsi, obsa is resilience under difficult
situation without succumbing under the
situation whatsoever).***

Sunday, 04 September 2016 was the monthly prayer for our people in **Oromia**, who have been are under attack for the last ten months: indiscriminate killings, beating, mass imprisonment and disappearance with no trace of their whereabouts, known only to those who take them away from their homes, from the

streets, schools and work places etc. What makes this day, Sunday, 09/04/2016 a special prayer day is the killings of prisoners who were trying to escape into the compound of the prison from their **burning cells**, a 3 sections buildings of the **Qilinxoo**, maximum security prison. Here, it is said that thousands of prisoners are held, an estimated 90% of them **Oromos**, where someone, a non-**Oromo** once wrote, "*the Prison speaks **Oromiffaa**" (Oromo).*



Sunday, 09/04/2016 candlelight vigil for our people in Oromia at OROECM

The candlelight vigil and prayer was held: the burning candles, which burn and melt but give light to the people in the room and the surroundings. As symbols of the candles the **Oromo** young people, the old the women and children, those who are tortured in prison and killed shed their blood and sacrifice their lives but give hope for their people for better future. Their sacrifices will not be in vain and we hope that God will hear and answer the cry of His people.

Our church while earnestly besieging the Lord for our people who under constant attack also prayed for all people of Ethiopia in similar situation, struggling for justice. We pray for justice and peace in that land!



On Sunday, 21 August 2016, at Rio Olympics in Brazil, OromoMarathon runner **Fayyisaa Leellisaa** crosses the finish line for silver medal in a time of **2 hrs. 9 min:58 sec**. Immediately, his gesture and sign of "cross" captured the world attention, spread beyond anyone's imagination, as a symbol of struggle and support for justice. Certainly, it caught others by surprise.

The plight and struggle of our people have been going on for a long time in general; but much more severe specifically now in time, only for speaking against injustice and for their God given rights. Numerous demonstrations and protests have been held within the country and around the world, appealed to international organizations and governments without significance result.

But God in His own mysterious way and at His own time, heard the cry of His people and moved. Through one man's courageous act, in a matter of few seconds gave the hitherto unheeded to Oromo struggle for justice, placed it on higher level of visibility on international stage.

Fayyisaa Leellisaa's picture crossing the finishing line is bound to be among the icon pictures of the century, and it speaks more than a thousand words! We are certain that he did not have any idea nor meant that his small but decisive move would have such unprecedented impact for his people. Here, we witnessed God working wonders by using one humble man to impact the march of history!

One week later Fayyisaa's silent but effective message was repeated by another Oromo runner, Ebisa Ejigu who won gold at the Québec City Olympic.



Ebisa Ejigu

Oromo athletes have more than half a century dominance in long distance running starting with the legendary Lt Abbebe Biqalaa who won consecutively the Rome marathon in 1960 and repeated again in Tokyo in 1964, the first one in Rome he ran bare foot, taking off his shoes after half way.



Lt Abbebe Biqilaa

Long distance running such as Olympics requires endurance, determination, resolve, resilience and steadfast from which a nation can learn in struggle for its place among the nations of the world for freedom and justice.



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Thank you and God bless you all!

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Sagalee Abdii

