

Helping The Homeless Elderly In Ethiopia

by Deacon Michael Savko

On receiving our Diocese's 2005 Stewards of the West Appeal, I was very pleased to read that in addition to four worthwhile outreach activities in our Diocese, our two bishops and the Diocesan Council have added a fifth activity, one that provides for assistance to the homeless elderly in Ethiopia.

Specifically, 100% of the funding will be sent to the Gobeze-Goshu Home for the Elderly in Adwa, Ethiopia, a facility recently completed that is the vision of one Ethiopian native, Tsige-Roman Gobezie, a member of our Annunciation Church in Santa Maria, California.

Tsige-Roman Gobezie is a native of Adwa, a town of around 40,000 people in northern Ethiopia, who left Adwa when she was 8 years old after her father died. She eventually became an American citizen and worked until her recent retirement as a pharmacist for Santa Barbara County. On her first trip back to Ethiopia in 2000, Tsige-Roman was devastated by the poverty she witnessed, especially in Adwa where many elderly were living in the streets without food, shelter, or hope. On inquiry, she discovered that church, government and international aid agencies have limited programs in place to assist Ethiopian children and the handicapped, but no programs existed for the homeless elderly. You should be aware that Ethiopia is one of the poorest of the third world nations that has experienced recent severe droughts, food shortages that have resulted in thousands of deaths, and major health threats due to water-related diseases. This country of 65 million people embraced Orthodoxy (Monophysite) in the 4th Century, and is still a majority Orthodox, with the remainder mostly Muslim and a few Protestants.

On her return to the United States, Tsige-Roman made a firm resolve to help. In her own words:

"I cannot help all these people, but I will pick one of these groups and do at least a little. I am retired, and all I have is a home here, so whatever I get from the sale of my house and my possessions and my retirement that is invested I will use to build a residence there."

A few months after relocating to Port Hueneme, California, I met Tsige-Roman last year at the monthly gathering of the Friends of St. Barbara Monastery in Goleta, California as she

was about to leave for Ethiopia to start her good work there.



She described to us her vision of housing sixty people of her village who would be over 65 with no home, no family and no income. They will be provided with beds, clean clothes and regular meals. In January, 2005, Tsige-Roman returned from Ethiopia for a minor operation and spoke with some of us at the Monastery gathering about her progress.

A few years ago, the Ethiopian government donated some land in Adwa with a small river running through it. On this property Tsige-Roman has built her home, a caretaker's house, an office, and the facility for the elderly. Plans are for crops to be raised by the river as a source of income and food for the facility along with a bakery. The residence plans to rely on solar power for cooking to reduce expensive electrical expenses, along with a fuel-powered pump to pump water from the river to irrigate the fields. Tsige-Roman foresees a time when the facility will be self-sufficient, but until that time when the crops are established in five or six years, she must rely on financial assistance.

The pictures of the facility on this page are from a slide presentation that Mr. Brian Diederich made at the April 11, 2005 Monastery gathering upon his 23-day Ethiopian visit. Brian informed us that the 60 elderly will be selected by the local churches and government officials in Adwa, with two elderly from each of the ten nearest churches. God willing, by Pascha, the first twenty elderly (10 men and 10 women) will arrive and the facility becomes operational, increasing the number of elderly helped as time progresses.

Official dedication is planned for November of 2005 with the Prime Minister and the Patriarch of Ethiopia in attendance to lend their support. Tsige-Roman must report to two governmental boards in Ethiopia in addition to coordinating with another support board in Italy and our own Board of Trustees of which Brian is finan-



cial coordinator.

Brian informed us that Tsige-Roman is very happy in Ethiopia, but misses her church in Santa Maria and her friends here. She does have some family nearby in Adwa and in near-by Axum



who have pledged to keep this facility in perpetuity as a family-controlled project. Mother Victoria, on behalf of all of the Friends of St. Barbara Monastery at the meeting, asked Brian what Tsige-Roman needs most in the form of aid. I must confess I expected to hear him request us to send money and more



money. After all, according to the brochure, \$10 will help support one needy elderly person for two weeks. What Tsige-Roman prays for most are able-bodied volunteers – preferably skilled in the care of the elderly – to assist her on-site for three months, six months or a year or more. She can provide the room and board and will be most happy to do so. She realizes that the rub for most of us is the time commitment and the cost to get to Ethiopia, but she prays that this will happen.

Perhaps in one of our parishes or missions we have someone fresh out of high school or college who would like to do such a good work before embarking on college or a career. If airfare is

a deterrent, perhaps contributions from the local parish would help. Just a thought...

Those who would like to contribute to this Diocese of the West outreach project can send their donations to:



The Gobezie-Goshu Home for the Elderly
 P.O. Box 5624
 Santa Maria, CA 93456



Or send them directly to the treasurer:
 The Gobezie-Goshu Home for the Elderly
 c/o Brian Diederich, Treasurer
 834 Bougainvillea Street
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Unlike most charities, 100% of your tax-deductible contribution will go directly to benefit the elderly residents, as everyone involved with the project freely volunteers their time, talents, and resources for the benefit of helping the destitute elderly. E-Mail inquiries may be sent to GobezieHome@sbcglobal.net.