

My Journey from Asmara to Arlington

by Saron Woldehaimanot



My name is Saron Yohannes Woldehaimanot. I was born and grew up in Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea, a country in the Horn of Africa. About five million people live in Eritrea's 45,406 square miles.

The second oldest child in my family, I currently live in Arlington, Virginia. My mother, father, and four of my siblings, however, still live in Asmara, and my youngest sister lives in Sweden. My father and my mother graduated from Beleza Lutheran Evangelical Theology School, served as missionaries and teachers in different areas of Eritrea, and instilled in me a love of learning from an early age.

At the age of twelve, I started teaching Sunday School. I began my formal ministry as a teacher in a Lutheran school in 1987, while also working part time in the Evangelical Lutheran Voice of Beserat Gospel Broadcasting service.

In 1995, I moved to the United States and enrolled at the Apostolic Bible Institute in Minnesota. I completed my studies in 1998, graduating with an Associate Degree in Theology. While there, I taught home Bible study for older women. A Bible study group that I began at a home for young adults is now the Eritrean Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul, Minnesota.

I moved to Rochester, New York, in 1998, where I led worship and Bible study, visited the homebound, and shared the Gospel through the Ethiopian Evangelical Broadcasting Service. After relocating to Virginia a year later, I attended an Eritrean nondenominational church. In 2004, I joined Our Savior Lutheran Church in Arlington, Virginia, and began serving the Eritrean ministry there.

Called to Deaconess Service

Encouraged by Dr. Reverend Yohannes Mengsteab, the founder of the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), and with the sponsorship of Our Savior Lutheran Church and the Southeastern LCMS District, I enrolled in the EIIT program at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in November 2006.

On October 20, 2011, I became the first female graduate from the pastoral and deaconess program and was consecrated a deaconess at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Arlington, Virginia, on January 28, 2012.

During the 2005–2007 biennium, LWML awarded the \$100,000 grant, "Ethnic Institute of Theology – Deaconess Training," to the EIIT Program at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. My scholarship to EIIT was funded by this grant, enabling me and others to be trained to spread Jesus' love to immigrant communities in the United States.

Pastor Wayne Fredericksen, "my spiritual father," has been my preceptor and mentor for the last five years. I am now serving in the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) at various levels. I serve on the Heart to Heart Sisters (H2H) Committee and am a district leader for the Heart to Heart Sisters program. I am also a board member of the women's association of the Eritrean Evangelical Mission Society (W.A.E.E.M.S.) in North America and contribute Bible study articles to their quarterly newsletter, *Kal Tsega* (Word of Grace).

When I was a Heart to Heart Sister at the LWML Convention in Portland, I met Norma Polk, a Heart to Heart Sister from Indonesia, living in Saline, Michigan. A former Muslim, she and her family have been



Lutherans for 14 years. I told her about the EIIT program. When our paths crossed again as Heart to Heart District Leader trainees at the LWML Convention in Peoria, I



learned she is completing her third year in that program and is part of a Gospel outreach program to Muslims in Saline.

The way the women of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) serve in humbleness throughout the world to "people without borders" has moved my heart to join LWML and be part of their blessings. These wonderful women truly have made a big difference in my life. [Q](#)

Current Mission Grants Highlighted This Issue

Project JOEL — Outreach to Youth in Central/South America — \$75,000

Through Project JOEL, developed by Lutheran Hour Ministries, hundreds of thousands of children and young people receive practical information, based on biblical principles, about drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and promiscuity. Expanding this important outreach ministry in Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Guatemala, Panama, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela enables Project JOEL to reach many more youth with the message of salvation and equip them to face life's daily challenges.

Pregnancy Center Newborn Protection in Malaysia, Southeast Asia — \$54,500

A growing problem among pregnant women in Malaysia is that they often deliver their babies, without medical assistance, and stuff them into trash receptacles or are culturally pressured to abort them. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia, together with LCMS World Relief and Human Care, established the Women's Care and Counseling Center to counsel and offer support and medical care to these women. Relocating and renovating the center will enable more pregnant women to be cared for and taught the Gospel of Jesus so that they will keep and nurture their babies.

Cancer Care Package Ministry — \$100,000

The mission field is everywhere we look. Phil's Friends is an organization dedicated to assembling and delivering care packages filled with hope and comfort rooted in the Gospel to persons with cancer throughout the United States. Delivering these care packages is the work of dedicated Christian volunteers who are educated and prepared to share God's Word with patients, families, and friends. Assistance will enable Phil's Friends to assemble and deliver more care packages to people afflicted with this disease and bring Christ-centered support and hope to them.