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10-2014

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Recommended Citation

St. Clair, Becky, "Education Is Gladness" (2014). *Lake Union Herald*. 143.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/143>

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Education Is Gladness

BY BECKY ST. CLAIR

“I was born into an Adventist family,” begins Samuel*. “My father was baptized in the 1960s and worked as a school teacher in the capital city until the government took the school. Although he changed his job, my father’s faithful service to the Church continued until his death in 1986. His example grew in my heart and raised my eagerness to work in the Adventist Church.”

In 1997, Eritrean citizen Samuel was among a group of four Adventist students accepted into Ethiopia Adventist College. Following his studies there, Church administration decided to send Samuel to receive further education in Uganda.

“We are severely lacking Adventist ministers in Eritrea,” explains Hudson Kibuuka, then education director for the Eastern Africa Division. “Samuel was one of our most promising young people, and he wanted to be a pastor. So, we decided to assist him with his education.”

The population of Eritrea is approximately 6.2 million. Less than 530 are members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church there. Within the Church in Eritrea, there are no young pastors, and the current president of the conference is in his early 80s. All other ministers are over 60. Samuel’s interest in serving his community as a pastor was exciting to many.

“The current president is beginning to pass the baton to a younger generation,” says Hudson, now associate education director at the General Conference. “Right now, Samuel is the younger generation.”

Samuel made his way to the Uganda border, intending to continue his studies at Bugema University. Immigration officials decided his papers were not in order. With mounting tension between Eritrea and Ethiopia, Samuel



was deported to Ethiopia where he was jailed immediately. Miraculously, he was released to return home to Eritrea within a week.

“Although I was accepted to Adventist universities in other African countries, I was unable to attend due to the government preventing youth from leaving the country,” explains Samuel.

Still interested in helping Samuel gain an education that would prepare him for ministry, the Eritrean Mission Field president negotiated with the Eastern Africa Division officers for Samuel to study through Griggs University, part of the Andrews University School of Distance Education.

Being enrolled, however, did not promise smooth sailing for Samuel. There was still the matter of getting

study materials to him, which meant sneaking items into the country by hand, since Adventist literature discovered in postal mail is often confiscated. Since the Eritrean government banned the Adventist Church in 2001, nothing religious is allowed in unless it is Orthodox, Muslim or Catholic.

Sometimes, books and study materials mailed to Samuel were never received. Hudson assisted in getting replacement materials and carried them with him to the Eastern Africa Division in Nairobi, Kenya, where he transferred them to someone who took them into Eritrea to

deliver them directly to Samuel. Then there was the issue of technology.

“The village where I live and teach is very remote,” he explains. “There is no electricity, let alone Internet connection, and it is an hour walk to the main road that leads to the capital city where they have Internet.”

Even in Asmara, the capital city, electricity and Internet connection is not a guarantee. Both frequently go out unexpectedly, sometimes making the trip into the city a fruitless effort.

“Getting to the city is hard, and the Internet is difficult and expensive to access,” explains Hudson.

Despite attempts to enroll Samuel in Griggs in 2002, governmental and resource setbacks prevented him from becoming an official student again until 2004.

“He is someone of great persistence and faith to carry on through these significant challenges,” says Glynis Bradfield, director of student services for the School of Distance Education. “Working on assignments only to have the power go out and lose all of his work, then waiting for days before it came back on so he could retype was difficult; fulfilling requirements for this program of study was no small feat.”

Class by class, Samuel progressed through the program. Communication with the outside world at a minimum, Samuel worked hard to meet deadlines, ask questions, and participate in course-required activities. This, in itself, was a major challenge, since he was required to take four classes in Greek and had no one to talk with.

“We had to develop a unique senior project just for him,” says Glynis. “Though he was concerned about how it would



all come together, especially since he could not minister openly like others in the same program would do, he really did well.”

In 2013, 16 years after beginning ministry studies and 12 years of classes, Samuel completed all requirements for a Bachelor of Arts in theological studies from Griggs University. His diploma is being hand-delivered to ensure it arrives in its rightful place in Samuel’s hands.

“Education is gladness,” he says with a smile. “It means finding your place within the progress of your era and successfully serving for the good of not just yourself, but everyone around you. Mark 10:45 says that *even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister*. I want to act in that same way, by his grace.”

Becky St. Clair is the media communications manager in the Division of Integrated Marketing & Communication at Andrews University.

Note: Samuel’s last name is withheld intentionally for his and his family’s security.

Why Pursue Education?

“It is important to continue learning every day of our lives, and getting a degree is just a concrete measurement of that learning.” —Mary, California

“Because I am unable to fit on-campus college classes into my current schedule, the distance education program allows me to study the courses needed to complete my degree at my own pace within my own time

frame. I may be doing it slowly but, because of distance education, I am getting closer and closer to my goal.” —Sandra, Idaho

“The fact that I am studying at Andrews now is totally a result of God’s saving grace opening doors. I value this education because I feel it is a result of God calling me to ministry and me following that calling.” —Isaac, Kenya