FAMILY MINISTRY (Christian Family Life Education Program, FLEP)

Annual Report 2007

Summary  Background and development - Mekane Yesus Church is a strongly outreach-oriented, young Church. In some cases the already found members have not got the needed support in their Christian life. In the rapidly growing Church many people have family related questions, even acute problems. There is a growing need for church workers who are equipped to serve in Family Ministry to support those members.

Since 2000 the EECMY has had a specific program for Family Ministry. This family related teaching is based on the Bible. The Ministry is part of EECMY Department of Mission and Theology (DMT). The Family Ministry Staff are Rev. Geneti Wayessa (the Co-ordinator), Mrs. Aberash Tolessa with an advising missionary couple. Sr. Anna-Kaarina Palmu and Rev. Matti Palmu are sent by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), which has been financing the program from the very beginning.

The four main sectors of Family Ministry are: 1) Pre-marital teaching; 2) Marriage teaching for couples; 3) Teaching various target groups on marriage and family life, and 4) Marriage and family counseling.

During first years the program arranged a Basic Marriage Course for couples in all EECMY Synods. Since 2000 there has been also Family Ministry teaching in all the Theological Seminaries (4) of the Church, also during 2007, and teaching for various other target groups. - Recently the program has expanded to the field of younger generations. The Pre-Marital teaching is for the time being arranged in four of the Synods in the western Ethiopia by Sr. Helena Räisänen and Mr. Tapio Räisänen. There have been seminars for those responsible for youth work on Synod, parish and congregation levels.

By now 334 people have got the Training of Trainers for Family Ministry course. Through them the Family Ministry activities have expanded to all Church Units. Out of the trained instructors about half (165) have sent the report on their activities of the past year to their Synods, and as a copy to the DMT-FLEP. In order to equip the instructors for this service "Strengthening the Family, A Handbook for Family Ministry" was prepared and published in English. The Amharic and Oromiffa translations of the Handbook are being processed to be printed in 2008. - The FLEP Advisors are preparing A participant's Textbook for Family Ministry, and teaching materials for training of the Marriage & Family Counsellors.

During 2007 there were two Training of Trainers courses (in Awasa and Mizan Teferi, alltogether for 66 persons). For those who had got the Training of Trainers course before 2007 there were seven Training of Trainers Refresher courses with about 130 participants; the 8th of those courses is due in January, 2008.

The plan is to arrange starting from 2008 additional training (TOT-T) for those, who will then conduct Training of Trainers courses on Synod level. In the long run the vision is to have Christian family life education as an essential part of ordinary teaching in all levels of EECMY Church.

The plan to strengthen the Structure for Marriage and Family Counselling activities is also being implemented. The aim is to start training for the Counsellors in co-operation with the Addis Abeba Mekane Yesus Congregation (AAECMY) and the Central Ethiopia Synod (CES).

The Family Ministry staff, the two couples at Central Office and the third couple at Aira, is (in addition to the mentioned main line activities) serving in various other occasions like teaching Christian Family Life in local congregations. The FLEP Coordinator is representing the EECMY in the working group for Family and Marriage issues in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. - To achieve the goal of the ministry there is a great need to secure sufficient resources and support towards the development of this ministry.
1. Introduction

Taking into account the present challenges in family life and marriage situation the EECMY- DMT Family Ministry core objective is to facilitate training programs for the EECMY Units, preparing and providing teaching materials on marriage and family life. Through this ministry we try to improve many aspects of life in our society, including the status of girls and women.

The EECMY Family Ministry activities are divided in four main sectors: 1) Pre-marital teaching for the youth; 2) Marriage teaching for couples; 3) Teaching various target groups on marriage and family life, and 4) Marriage and family counseling.

With the help and mercy of God the EECMY-DMT-FLEP has accomplished most of the planned activities for the year 2007. These include teaching at different EECMY theological institutes, Training of Trainers (TOT), TOT Refresher courses for instructors of Family Ministry, distribution of various marriage and family related books, follow up of the process of Family Ministry Handbook translation into Amharic and Oromo languages and other work related activities.

The Christian Family Life Education Program envisons putting in practice the Biblical teaching in our congregations, homes, marriages, parent-child relationships, and in our communities.

Along with the Mekane Yesus Church motto "The whole Gospel to the whole person" Family Ministry endures to enrich the life of a congregation at all levels: children, youth, singles, couples, parents and elderly people. The Ministry has a prophetic voice for Christian faith, spiritual development, fellowship, understanding of unity, economic development to bring about social transformation.

Our Church has focused more on evangelism by reaching out to new areas. Nurturing its members is also a great challenge in the field of family life and marriage teaching. Thus the Family Ministry has achieved encouraging progress by implementing the planned activities in all Church Units, even with limited budget during 2007, as stated below.

2. Family Ministry teaching at Theological Institutions of EECMY

Marriage and family teaching has been included in the Curriculum of the Theological Seminaries and Bible Schools of the Church. A special course on Basics of Family Ministry was given at the Seminaries in Addis Abeba (MYTS), Hossana (HTS), Nekemte (NCEC), Aira (ONS).

- May 1-4, 2007 at the Nekemte Christian Education College; the participants were 39 Diploma students of 1st and 3rd year; altogether 32 periods in four days. The facilitators were Mrs. Aberash and Kes Geneti. Language: English, Oromiffa and Amharic.

- May 28-29, 2007 at the Hossana Theological Seminary; the participants were 19 Theology diploma students of 3rd year, altogether 16 periods in two days. The facilitators were Sr. Anna-Kaarina and Rev. Matti. Language: Amharic.

- November 7, 9, 14, 16 at the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary (Addis Ababa), the Family Ministry part of the "Pastoral Care in African Christianity" Course, altogether 16 periods (out of the total of 32 periods of the whole course), 4x4 periods in four days. The participants were 18 degree students of the 3rd year. Language: English and Amharic. The facilitators were Sr. Anna-Kaarina and Rev. Matti, present were also Dr. Shiferaw Sadi, the responsible teacher of the whole course, and (partly) Rev. Geneti and Mrs. Aberash.
January-March Special Course on Marriage / Family Ministry at the Onesimos Nesib Seminary (ONS), Aira. Teachers: Sr. Helena Räisänen and Mr. Tapio Räisänen; the participants: All Theology diploma students of 1st, 2nd and 3rd year. The course was given as part of the Seminary's weekly program, altogether 32 periods; Language: English.

As a new opening The Räisänens have also conducted at the Aira Seminary (ONS) a three day Marriage course (June 19-22, 2006) for the students' couples, while at the same time there was a separate Pre-Marital course for the single students.

Some supplementary books (like The Handbook for Family Ministry) have been donated to some Theological Institution and Bible School Libraries.

3. Teaching on marriage and family life at different synods: Training of Trainers (TOT)

3.1. The 12th of Training of Trainers course (76 Course hours) was held from March 19-30, 2007 at Awassa (SCES). The participants were 14 couples and 1 single (29 people). They were key leaders of the South Central Ethiopia Synod: president, executive secretary, treasurer, parish and congregation pastors with their wives.

3.2. The 13th Training of Trainers course (76 Course hours) was given from May 20-31, 2007 at Mizan Teferi (SWBS) for 18 couples and 1 single (37 people). Participants were key leaders, who are serving 16 parishes.

In the 12th and 13th TOT workshops, the participants were all practicing and leading turn by turn various teaching sessions of the Handbook. After each teaching and practicing session the facilitators also led feedback discussions turn by turn. Furthermore each participant was doing an action plan for Family Ministry teaching. They were asked to report to their respected Synods what they have gained from the training. Both courses were opened by synod leaders and closed by taking part in the Holy Communion.

Thanks to God for His wonderful gifts and committed synods leaders. Without their sincere cooperation none or the above mentioned activities would have been accomplished on time.

The following 8 books were distributed to the TOT participants: Questions young people ask (in Amharic), Biblical Marriage (in Amharic), Family and child raising (in Amharic), Understanding your wife (the 5 booklets in Amharic: Her ovarian cycle and fertile days, Her Experience during pregnancy, Her preparations for child birth, Her response in the act of Love and Her Joy in Breast feeding).

The Amharic translation of the Trainer's Handbook for Family Ministry, "Strengthening the Family", was given as the main teaching material of the course. The course was conducted through two way dialogue as students and teachers were interacting.

4. TOT Refreshes Courses

The plan was to arrange a TOT Refresher Course (for those, who have got the TOT training before the year of 2007) in 8 places during the year. For the shortage of the running budget the last of the eight was transferred to be held in the beginning of 2008.

The facilitators were W/ro Aberash Tolossa and Kes Geneti Wayessa together with Sr. Anna-Kaarina and Kes Matti Palmu; there were 3 Course Days, 25 periods for each course. Altogether there were 132 participants of the 7 Refresher courses. [The total number of trainers invited for these courses was 226.]
1. Date, place: April 11-13, 2007, Dembi Dollo
   - 23 Participants (11 couples and 1 single) 16 from Western Wollega Bethel Synod (WWBS - Dembi Dollo) and 7 from Birbir Dilla Synod (BDS-Aira).
   - [The total number of trainers invited was 27. It is encouraging that almost all of the invited participated!]

2. Date, place: April 17-19, 2007, Begi
   - 37 Participants (18 couples and 1 single) from Begi Gidami Synod (BGS - Begi); [The total number of trainers invited was 42. It is encouraging that almost all of the invited participated!]

3. Date, place: June 6-8, 2007, Arba Minch
   - 10 Participants (4 couples and 2 persons alone) 3 from South West Synod (SWS - Arba Minch) and 7 from South Central Synod (SCS-Hossana).
   - [The total number of trainers invited was 31. Thus majority of the invited did not participate.]

4. Date, place: June 12-14, 2007, Dilla
   - 13 Participants (5 couples and 3 persons alone): 1 from South Ethiopia Synod (SES - Agere Mariam), 3 from South Synod (SS-Dilla), 3 from South Central Ethiopia Synod (SCES-Awasa) and 6 from Wabe Batu Synod (WBS-Dodola); [The total number of trainers invited was 36. Thus majority of the invited did not participate.]

5. Date, place: October 3-5, 2007, Debre Zeit
   - 18 Participants (6 couples and 6 persons alone): 15 from Central Ethiopia Synod (CES - Addis Abeba), 2 from North Central Ethiopia Synod (NCES-Dessie) and 1 from North Area Work (NAW-T - Mekele)
   - [The total number of trainers invited was 34. Thus half of the invited did not participate.]

6. Date, place: October 17-19, 2007, Bodji
   - 18 Participants (9 couples) 8 from Western Synod (WS - Bodji) and 10 from Gimbi Jorgo Synod (GJS-Gimbi).
   - [The total number of trainers invited was 34. Thus half of the invited did not participate.]

7. Date, place: October 23-25, 2007, Ijaji
   - 13 Participants (6 couples and 1 person alone) 8 from Central Gibe Synod (CGS - Ijaji) and 5 from Central Synod (CS-Nekemte).
   - [The total number of trainers invited was 23. Thus half of the invited did not participate.]

The following 6 books were distributed to the TOT Refresher course participants to use as resource materials for their future service: I Loved a Girl (in Amharic), I Loved a Young Man (in Amharic), Cut Flowers (in English or Amharic), True Love Waits Patiently (a pamphlet in Amharic), How to Raise Our Children (in Amharic), The Biblical Marriage (in Amharic).

There are still 42 trainers invited for the January 2008 Refresher course in Mettu. Thus the total number of invited for this round of Refresher courses is 268. The remaining TOT-trained people (66 persons) will be invited for Refresher course later on during 2008.
5. Other duties and activities

Besides ordinary office work, training and teaching of courses, the FLEP Staff has also been involved in other Family Ministry related service:

5.1. Follow up of the Handbook process etc.

During the months of 2007 the staff was concentrating on Family Ministry Handbook translation from English to Amharic and Oromo, editing work, typing, preparation of TOT courses, TOT refresher courses. Reading of teaching materials on Family Ministry is also an important area of our work.

The follow up of Family Ministry teaching and Marriage counseling ministry at Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus congregation is an ongoing program in cooperation with FLEP Advisors. EECMY Family Ministry staff team has its own time of evaluation and discussion concerning the FLEP program and activities every Wednesday afternoon.

5.2. Participation, meetings, courses, etc.

5.2.1. Kes Geneti Wayessa has been representing the Mekane Yesus Church in the working group for Family and Marriage issues in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. He also got an opportunity to participate in the celebration of International Family Day May 15, 2007, and in the "Guidelines on Marriage and Family" two day Workshop in Addis Ababa (April 23-24, 2007) arranged by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

5.2.2. Mrs. Aberash Tolessa has participated in two days counseling course, and another course called ‘Deborah wise and courageous” (women as ministers and leaders), both arranged by the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia.

5.2.3. The FLEP coordinators have got two days training on the Marriage for Life organized by the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia on December 7-8, 2007 in Addis Ababa.

5.3. The Advisors in Finland July-August

5.3.1. July 11-16, 2007 in Kalajoki Basic Marriage course ("Marriage Camp"): 21 couples/families plus 7 leader-couples (the participant missionary couples coming from Albania, Ethiopia, Mongolia, Papua-New-Guinea, Taiwan and Tanzania; the Palmus were lecturing and leading.

5.3.2. August 6-10, 2007 in Järvenpää Training of Trainers (TOT) for Family Ministry for Missionaries coming from various working countries; 19 missionary-participants, coming from 8 countries: Bangladesh, Botswana, Ethiopia, Israel, Japan, Russia, Senegal and Taiwan. The Palmus were lecturing and acted as facilitators during the course. - The foreign visitors were the Bishop Kuukauppi (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia), his wife and the Diakonia Secretary Stepanova of the mentioned Church.

5.3.3. The Palmus have been members in the Family Ministry Working Group of the FELM not only while in Finland, but also during their working period in Ethiopia.
6. Other activities in Synods, Congregations etc.

The FLEP Staff has participated in Church and Family related service such as wedding program, teaching, preaching on family life. The Staff has also been giving Marriage and Family Counselling in various occasions during the year;

- **February 5-10, 19-28, 2007** due to the reconciliation work the conflict between the Berber Dilla Synod and Congregations has been solved. On April 1, 2007 family life teaching was given for the leaders of three parishes in Gelana Abaya during the Sunday service. Teaching on marriage and family life was given by FLEP coordinators on July 29, 2007 at Furi Congregation of CES for more than 250 people during the Sunday service. The similar program was done for Ourael Congregation of CES on August 12, 2007.
- **September 21-24, 2007** the FLEP coordinators were at Nekemte Derge Congregation teaching at the annual seminar on marriage and family life. The participants were altogether 285, couples and singles. Such kind of seminar is vital to reach the Congregation families with timely teaching of marriage and family life.
- **March 25 - June 3, 2007** teaching at AAECMY Congregation Marriage Course (for six half-days i.e. three full course days) for 28 couples, total 56 persons.
- **Since September 2007** the Advisors have been helping the AAECMY Congregation in starting a new opening, a system of "Continuous Marriage Teaching for Couples". There is Marriage teaching for one afternoon each month throughout the year; there are four couples serving as facilitators for this program.
- Strengthening the Marriage & Family Counselling activities of AAECMY Congregation in Addis Abeba is under process.

7. Teaching Materials for Family Ministry

We are very happy to introduce that "**Strengthening the Family - A Trainer's Handbook for Family Ministry**" written by Sr. Anna-Kaarina and Rev. Matti Palmu has been translated from English to Amharic and Oromiffa. The editing part has been finalized, while the proof reading and printing process is also underway. A **participant's Textbook for Family Ministry** is being prepared by the FLEP Advisors. We would like to thank Sr. and Rev. Palmu for their great concern and that they have handed over the Trainer's Handbook for the Family Ministry to the EECMY Church. Preparing and collecting **teaching materials for the training of the Marriage & Family Counsellors** has been started.

8. Pre-marital teaching

The Pre-marital teaching has from the very beginning been one of the main needs in Family Ministry, but the FLEP Staff has not had enough resources to start much teaching on this field. We are very glad to share here some information on Pre-marital teaching part of the EECMY Family Ministry. This activity was started specifically in 2005, when Sr. Helena Räisänen and Mr. Tapio Räisänen started their service based in Aira, working for the Synods in Western Ethiopia.

On the Church level they were teaching in the EECMY Youth worker’s workshop for one day in March 2007. On the Synod level they have had the True Love Waits Patently (TLWP) workshops in Birbir Dilla Synod (BDS), Gimbi Jorgo Synod (GJS), Western Synod (WS) and Begi Gidami Synod (BGS). In each synod the parish leaders, parish women’s secretary and the youth secretary were called as well as some synod workers and some teachers from the near by schools.

The **True Love Waits Patiently** teaching has been given in 11 different workshops arranged by the youth, women, Sunday school or HIV/AIDS sections of the BDS, WS and GJS. In the area of these three synods there has been 4 Parish level teaching weekends and 7 congregation visits. - In the Aira Hostel there has been
a series of 6 occasions for the students living in the hostel. At Lalo Aira Secondary School (LASS) there has been a TLWP-club for the 11th and 12th graders during the 1st semester of the school year 2006-2007. Schools were visited in Challia area (4 schools, grades 5-10.), LASS once the whole school, grades 9-12, Biiftu high school in Aira once, grades 9-10 and Walgo elementary school in Aira, grades 5-8. The last two schools are both governmental schools. The teaching has been given also in the Aira Nursing School.

The goal of the workshops has been to teach those who are responsible for teaching the youngsters. At least one person from each parish of the four synods has got the basic teaching, in most of the parishes 2 or 3 persons. The Pre-marital teaching has proved to be very much needed. But because the topic is sensitive and difficult to talk about openly, much more teaching is needed. Also we need to find from each synod persons who are devoted to this topic. They need more training and encouragement to start teaching in their synods.

The main aim of the Pre-marital teaching is to give Biblical education concerning our sexual behaviour. This simply means abstinence before marriage and faithfulness in the marriage.

We hope that Pre-marital teaching would not only be the work of the four synods in the West, but that it could be expanded to all EECMY Synods. This will be more fruitful when done in cooperation with the Youth Ministry and the Women's Ministry of the EECMY.

9. Progress of the Family Ministry in EECMY Units

We have been encouraged by receiving activity reports and feedback from many TOT trained instructors in different Synods. Out of the 334 trained instructors about half, that is 165, have sent the report on their activities of the past year. The instructors are sending their reports to their Synods, and as a copy to the DMT-FLEP. Still there are quite many, who have not reported about their possible activities, even though they have been reminded about it six months ago in June 2007.

We would like to express our appreciation to the synods, as we have received reports from each and every Synod and Work Area. It is encouraging to see that Family Ministry work is expanding and finding its due place in the Church, according to the original plan and goal of the Family Ministry!

Some testimonies of Family Ministry courses' participants: "After the course …"
- "There is a big change in our understanding of marriage."
- "I used to be the boss of the family, but now I have asked for forgiveness from my wife."
- "We have now understood that equality of husband and wife is a blessing for our marriage and family."
- "We want now to have meals the family together, even if we have guests."
- "We have learned to discuss equally how to use our resources economically."
- "I am trying to help her as much as I can."
- "I was mistreating my children. But now I have changed - and the children have recognized the change!"
- "Before we had very different expectations of marriage. But now we have started to discuss."
- "I used to think that marriage is just a burden. Now I see it can be a blessing."
- "Our neighbors started to ask us: "What has happened? You have somehow changed!"
- "We understood bad and good customs of our area. Which ones we want to pass on to our children?"
- "Our couple relationship has improved. I am not any more afraid of my husband."
- "Our intimacy has become an example in our congregation, and further on in our neighbourhood."
- "Our way of thinking has been changed. Not any more always 'I', but 'we', in all areas of everyday life."
- "Now I have realized that it is useful to get education. I want to go on with my school!"
EECMY Family Ministry Instructors' Activity Reports of 2007

The TOT trained instructors sent us such heart warming news that they were able to train 15,596 couples, 58,950 others, altogether 90,142 people on marriage and family life teaching.

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The Family Ministry instructors are involved in many different activities. Some examples of those:

- Starting the Marriage and Family education from their own families!
- Pre-marital teaching for young people; teaching youth together with their parents;
- Teaching at confirmation classes;
- Engaged people;
- Marriage courses for couples;
- Women's courses and meetings;
- Teaching Congregational leaders;
- Teaching youth at HIV/aids programs;

- Instructing and counseling troubled couples;
- Marriage teaching, preaching at wedding ceremony;
- Ongoing Marriage teaching in congregation;
- Teaching at Bible Schools and Theological Seminaries;
- Teaching at a University and College;
- Etc.
10. Challenges of the work

10.1. Limited resources
10.2. Unclear administrative and financial structure of the Central Office
10.3. No help from IT office
10.4. Only one telephone line for the whole DMT
10.5. Mobile phones and cards necessary for work, but not provided
10.6. Limited cooperation between various ministries/programs of Central Office

11. Future prospects of Family Ministry

There are 334 trained instructors to give basic Family life education in Church Units. The EECMY has more than 6000 established congregations and close to 3000 preaching places (statistics of 2006). To have one instructor couple for every 10 congregations (or each parish) we need more than 800 couples to be trained during the coming years.

11.1. Training of Trainers of Trainers (TOT-T)

The plan is to arrange starting from 2008 additional training (TOT-T) for those, who will then conduct Training of Trainers courses on Synod level. It is our strategy to fulfill the tremendous challenge in strengthening the Family Ministry. Furthermore there is a need for Training of Trainers (TOT) for the Synods' Women and Youth Leaders. In the long run the vision is to have Christian family life education as an essential part of ordinary teaching in all levels of EECMY Church.

11.2. Encouraging the TOT trained instructors of Family Ministry

There is a need for follow up of the ministry. The trained ones, as well as the trainers, need ongoing Refresher Courses, access to Family Ministry Library, encouragement and further training for their service.

There is also a need for additional teaching materials for Family Life Education for various target groups like Seminaries, Bible Schools and other schools.

11.3. Pre-marital teaching

Biblical Pre-marital teaching needs to be expanded to all EECMY Synods. It will be good to work in cooperation with the Youth Ministry and the Women's Ministry. This is especially necessary in our times of transition, when the old family values are largely being ignored. Pre-marital teaching materials need to be developed. The goal is to build up a healthy congregation and community growing from a healthy family.

11.4. Marriage and Family Counselling

Strengthening the Structure for Marriage and Family Counselling activities and providing training for Marriage and Family Counselling is a great task for EECMY Family Ministry.

11.5. The recognition of Family Ministry in EECMY structures

For the sustainability of Family Ministry in EECMY the recognition of this ministry is highly needed in all levels of the Church. It needs to be included as one of regular ministries in the congregational structure.
12. Appreciation

Positive feedback of Family Ministry teaching from various directions is encouraging to us. We believe many are considering Family Ministry as one of the core EECMY priorities. The happier their marriages are, the better input the church servants can give in their respective duties. As the HIV/AIDS pandemic is expanding the teaching of Christian family life and faithful partnership has no alternative. The need of Family Ministry has even grown even bigger in the last few years.

First of all we thank God for His grace and mercy. We are convinced about His presence in our work. He wants us to become better servants in His kingdom. These massive achievements would not have been possible without the whole support of the FELM and EECMY Units. Again we are grateful to God for such a community as that of EECMY. Thus we sincerely thank FELM and EECMY-CO staff and leaders. Thank you all.

Respectfully submitted, in December 14, 2007

EECMY-DMT Family Ministry Staff,

Rev. Geneti Wayessa (the Co-ordinator),
Mrs. Aberash Tolessa,
Sr. Anna-Kaarina Palmu,
Rev. Matti Palmu

Above left: The Couple Discussion during TOT Course; Above right: Discussion during TOT Refresher Course.
Below left: The instructors teaching turn by turn; Below right: The Group Photo at Begi course.
(The photos taken by: Above left Rev. Geneti Wayessa; other photos Rev. Matti Palmu)