

HANTI SIDRA ONE GLOBAL FAMILY

REPORT FROM ERITREA 2009



**Our relationships
are what we value most**

It's all about relationships with people

ANOTHER journey to Eritrea, halfway around the world. After 24 hours of airport waits, cramped seats, stale air, and airplane food through 11 time zones, I was home, with Sister Thomas and Brother Ghebreyesus there to greet me. What a joy to be filled up with their acceptance, love and faith.

On these pages, you'll read about the geography, economy and sociology of Eritrea. However, what is essential, the reason I have made this inconvenient half-world journey for the past 16 years and the reason why I will return is the people. My friends in Eritrea and my relationships with them are what really matter.

Global development cannot succeed unless humans enter into meaningful relationships with each other. We need to care as much about people half a world away as we do about our own family.

Hanti Sidra/One Family is the name of our charitable society. For me it is so much more than a let-

terhead on paper. It is a reminder of the importance of the relationships we have with each other. The same commitment, acceptance, frustration, fun, disappointment, perseverance and unconditional love that I find in my own family is what I find and feel for my close Eritrean friends. They deserve nothing less.

In this booklet, I'll introduce you to, and update you about, some of these incredible friends. These are the people whose work you support with your prayers, thoughts and financial donations. They feel a relationship with you and I know many of you sense that same deep bond. You deserve nothing less. ♦

Stephanie Schroeder

COVER PICTURES: Top, Stephanie with two of our longtime friends, Mihret Kidane (left), one of the One Family group, and Sister Pasqualina, head of the Feledareb clinic. Bottom, our One Family group gathers for a joyful reunion.

We are all One Family

Although our charitable organization officially changed its name in 2008, we didn't really adopt a new name. The Eritrean war orphans we began to support in 1993 called themselves "Hanti Sidra", which means "One Family" in the Tigrinya language. Those of us who supported them have always been included as members of One Family. Today members of our extended One Family and the work we support are in many parts of the world. So all of us, no matter where we happen to be on the planet, are connected; we are all members of One Global Family. ♦

Who we are; what we are trying to do

It all started in 1992, when we, Stephanie and Dennis Schroeder, left our comfortable home and three young daughters in Sidney, BC to visit Eritrea, a land devastated by three decades of war and frequent droughts. Fighting had ended just a few months before we arrived there.

Our initial search was for a small orphanage where we could sponsor all of the children. We found it at St. Joseph's School in Keren. We also found Canadians who shared our interest in developing friendships with Eritreans and assisting them in their struggle to create better lives for themselves and their children.

Our group began as the B.C. branch of the *Eritrean Relief Association in Canada* in 1992. Two years later, after Eritrea had become independent, that organization was dissolved. We reorganized as the *Eritrean Relief and Rehabilitation Association of British Columbia (ERRA-BC)*, a non-



The Arbutus Singers perform at a fundraising concert in Sidney.

profit society incorporated in B.C. and registered with the Canada Revenue Agency as a charitable organization. In 2008, we changed our name to *Hanti Sidra One Global Family*.

During our 17 years of operation, we have spent or committed nearly \$1 million (see back page) to a variety of projects in Eritrea and elsewhere in the Horn of Africa. Some of those projects are described on these pages.

All of the above mentioned funds have been contributed by people who believe in the value of the work being done. None is from governments. And all of it goes directly to those doing the work in Africa--none is used for salaries or administration.

We continue to visit Eritrea each year to strengthen our ties of friendship and to observe the programs and projects we are supporting.

In Canada, we have been blessed to have loyal and committed support from many people. They volunteer their time and talents for fundraisers; they make generous financial contributions; they hold prayer sessions in times of crisis. Thank you; this work would not have been possible without your support. ♦

HANTI SIDRA ONE GLOBAL FAMILY

Board of Directors

Ghebremedhin Abbai
Gary Koett
Lynn Koett
Patricia Gale-MacDonald
Dennis Schroeder
Stephanie Schroeder
Peter Yearwood

Active Volunteers

Dozens

Contributors

Hundreds

Sister Letteberhan

LETTEBERHAN is headmistress at the Santa Anna School in Keren, responsible for 925 children and 14 teachers. She has extended classes to Grade 8 and has a learning program for 45 women as well.

One of her major concerns is the children with special needs who are now coming to school. Previously these children would just be kept at home. There are no therapy teams to provide assessment and individual educational plans.

Sister Letteberhan will try to provide one-to-one teaching herself for these youngsters in addition to her duties as principal and teacher of History in the Middle School (Grades 6-8). ♦

Brother Tinsiew

TINSIEW is in charge of development projects at Hagaz Agro-Technical School, where 450 students are in plant science, soil analysis, veterinary, animal husbandry or agro-mechanics programs. The school is administered by the de la Salle Brothers of Eritrea.

This has been a tough year for the school, as there has been no rain. Last year they reaped 560 quintals of grain, this year none. Last year they got 3,400 bales of hay, this year none. So they have been forced to buy grass and grain from other regions to keep their livestock alive. They also had termites eating their grapes which are produced for a cash crop, so they had to replant.



Brother Tinsiew at Hagaz.

The financial support we gave this year was a lifesaver for Brother Tinsiew. He's hoping and praying for rain this year. ♦

Brother Awate

FOR several years, Awate has been headmaster of St. Joseph's School in Keren. The school has 1,300 students from Grade 1-11 and retains its reputation as one of the best schools in Eritrea. Brother Awate, meeting the challenges day by day, certainly deserves credit for maintaining the high standards.

Because of social and economic problems in society, many deserving students cannot afford even the small school fees. There is always a steady stream of students and parents coming to Brother Awate's office asking for help.

We have tried to help by paying school fees for students from poor families, partly by selling our popular gift cards. ♦

Sister Thomas

TOMMY continues to pour her wit, wisdom and energy into the predominantly Muslim community of Afabet in northern Eritrea.

She works tirelessly as one of the five Comboni Sisters--two Eritreans, one Italian, one South American and a wee Scot--in the small community. Each has an area of responsibility: teaching women sewing and literacy; providing Kindergarten for children aged 4-6; and Tommy's first love, the Study Centre, with its library and activity centre.

To help women keep their families alive while husbands are away in the service, Tommy has a new project. She gives them wool to knit squares. A few skilled women put them together to make small afghans. Everyone gets paid a small amount for their work and the afghans are given to the elderly of the town. ♦

Tommy (right) with Sister Claudia, only recently retired and in her 90s. Claudia worked as a nurse for more than 60 years in Eritrea. She volunteered to work at Afabet when others were reluctant to go.



Sister Efret

EFRET is in charge of the Catholic Eparchy Secretariat of Keren (CESK). She is responsible for all schools, clinics, and social programs in the 25 parishes of the diocese.

In Spring of 2008, she requested our help to provide materials for a resource centre at the Faraleba village school, which we have supported for several years. We agreed and the school now has new books, shelves, teaching resources, and sports and art equipment.

In addition, CESK acquired a TV, tape deck, audio and video cassettes and a generator that are part of a mobile kit that can go to any of the schools in the diocese. Funds raised at the Arbutus Singers concert in Sidney in May were used to pay for these valued resources. ♦

Sister Pasqualina

PASQUALINA is director of the Rural Health Centre run by the Capuchin Sisters at Feledareb, just north of Keren. She makes good use of her many talents as nurse, lab technician and administrator. She also has a wonderful garden with fruits, vegetables and even coffee.

The health centre serves Feledareb and 10 surrounding villages. Women in difficult labor, young children, the elderly, those most vulnerable and frail all arrive there because they trust this place. Sister Pasqualina brings not just medical knowledge and cures; she also brings hope and a strong faith. ♦

Planning for a group business project

OUR One Family group of orphans, now adults, have a new idea. For the past several years, funds from a revolving loan program have helped several dozen of them start small businesses.

Now they would like to start one business that would be a venture of the whole group. To make it work they would have to pool their efforts because only a few of them are free from other responsibilities. Most of the young men are doing National Service--either working in government offices or teaching or in the military. The young women mostly are not in National Service. Some have jobs or small businesses, some are at home with children and families and some are jobless.

No one is earning a lot, so when there are any additional expenses beyond the most basic food and shelter, members of One Family look to one another for support. There have been weddings, births, funerals, unemployment, separations--all situations where family members would normally help one another.

When Stephanie met with the group in the Fall of 2008, they expressed their desire to start a business that could give work to unemployed members, provide a permanent meeting place for all, including those who live outside Asmara, and create a self-sustaining emergency fund for any member in need. The business should bring members of One Family together while creating



One Family member Samuel and his new bride. A fund could support events such as weddings.

the opportunity to learn new skills.

After considering various alternatives, they decided that a tea house would be most suitable. It wouldn't require a large capital investment but could attract large numbers of customers. In addition to tea, snacks and coffee could be served.

A lot of planning and organization has to be done before it could be started. Now the search is on for the ideal, affordable space to rent for such a business. A central location in the city is most desirable. We have heard of a couple of promising locations but nothing has been decided yet.

As the planning progresses, we will be kept informed. With the intelligence, energy and cohesiveness of One Family, succeeding at starting a tea house should be a "piece of cake". ♦

A fresh look at Eritrea: first impressions

Bunny Kitchen, a retired nursing teacher and supporter of Hanti Sidra One Global Family from Sidney, BC, visited Eritrea for the first time in Fall 2008. Following are some of her impressions.

A RECENT trip to Eritrea with Stephanie Schroeder left me with some very strong impressions. The country is nothing short of amazing when one considers its history.

Presently Eritrea is on war alert so the majority of the young and able bodied are tied up in the National Service. Individuals are not able to pursue their careers and families are left without one or both parents. As the National Service does not pay well, family incomes are generally very low.

Adding to the problems is that drought conditions have existed for the last five years, making food for the population and their animals scarce and expensive. It is a tough time for Eritreans.

The majority of our time was spent in the capital city, Asmara, which at this point is looking a bit tired. Once it must have been a very impressive city. The architecture and some of the peoples' activities show the period of Italian colonization. The main streets of the city are wide and the buildings are very ornate.

People spend a lot of time in cafes drinking tea or coffee and watching other people. There are nine different Eritrean dialects, and conversations end with "ciao"!



Bunny with Brother Awate, headmaster of St. Joseph's School.

The people are the most amazing part, seeming different from others in Africa. They are tall with fine features, straight, slim, hard working, always smiling and faith filled. When one asks them what they need, the answer is "Prayers" ... prayers for peace and rain. Very humbling!

We met with all of the people the Schroeders have talked about for years and each is very impressive. The funds generated by *Hanti Sidra* are being used creatively and effectively by them for various projects in Eritrea, predominantly to do with education and women's development. From what I saw, these dynamic men and women are making the money go a long way.

Possibly a bigger shock was coming back to all that we take for granted, freedom of speech, food, homes, etc. It was a jolt ... I will not forget Eritrea or Eritreans. ♦

The human face of economic distress

EVERYONE you meet in Eritrea these days has a similar story. All, especially outside Asmara, the capital city, are suffering.

The causes are multiple; the solutions are far from simple.

The domestic economy of Eritrea is stagnant and has been so since the war with Ethiopia in 1998-2000.

One factor, all males aged 18-54 who are not students--about a half million men--are doing mandatory National Service. In Asmara and other towns, those who are educated work in various government ministries and earn the equivalent of \$35-100 per month.

The rest--probably about 300,000, are in the military, patrolling the Ethiopian border and other sensitive areas, or building roads and other public structures. Most of them earn about \$35 per month. They must buy their own food from that. What is left can be sent home to their families.

It just might be possible to survive on that, except that the prices of everything, even the basics, have become incredibly expensive.

For example, one litre of cooking oil costs more than \$5; one kilo of tomatoes costs a dollar; one kilo of onions cost about 75 cents but increased by 500% in October 2008.

One quintal (about 50 kilos) of grain is enough for a family of seven for one month. It is used to make bread, injera (a sourdough pancake that is a staple of the local diet) and porridge. It costs about \$225.



Daily life in a poor residential area of Asmara

It is obvious that the most basic food costs for one month cannot be met by anyone on a national service stipend. And that does not include other family expenses such as rent, transportation, clothing, health care (there is no Canadian-style medicare or pharmacare), school fees for children or anything else.

Also, since farmers are the majority of those doing military service, Eritrea is growing less food. In many villages one sees only women, children and elderly people. All food aid has been cut off and food imported from other countries increases the cost of living.

Another factor is drought. In the past year, there was no rain at all and no food at all was produced in many farming areas.

Eritreans of all faiths pray for two things--peace and rain. We

The promise of biosand water filters

A MAJOR cause of debilitating illness and death in Africa, especially among children, is gastro-intestinal diseases. In many cases the diseases are a result of drinking or bathing in contaminated water.

An important part of the solution is education—teaching people about proper hygiene and sanitation practices in and around their homes and villages.

Beyond that, people need the means to purify water taken from rivers, lakes or wells that have been contaminated. One simple, inexpensive purifier is the biosand water filter. Invented by David Manz, a former engineering professor at the

William (right) and another participant examine a filter we built at the Calgary workshop.



University of Calgary, there are now more than 200,000 of these filters in homes throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Made from concrete, the filter also has some plastic tubing, a wood or metal lid, and a plastic or metal diffuser plate. The filtering medium is sand and gravel, ranging from fine at the top to coarse at the bottom. Sediment and microorganisms trapped by the top layer of sand add to the effectiveness of the filter.

Tests have shown these filters remove virtually all parasites and microorganisms, more than 97% of all bacteria and up to 90% of viruses from water. They also eliminate turbidity (cloudiness), colour and odour from water. A filter costs about \$20 and lasts for many years.

In October, William Kolong Pioth of the South Sudanese Association of B.C. and I participated in a training workshop run by the Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology in Calgary, where we built a filter.

Early in 2009, we went to South Sudan where water is plentiful but much of it is contaminated, particularly by human and animal wastes. While there we spread the word about the value of hygiene and sanitation education and water filters, and made arrangements for a biosand filter training workshop.

The next step is to begin a project for the production and distribution of filters in South Sudan. ♦

By Dennis Schroeder

Sister Haregu

HAREGU is a Santa Anna Sister and long-time friend. After years in the cities of Keren and Asmara, she now lives in the small village of Acrur. From there she is responsible for all the Kindergartens in the surrounding villages of Hebol, Mai Ella, Adi Kwanzi, Adi Fini, Degra, Maraba, Haddish Adi, Adi Abur and the two classes of Kindergarten in Acrur, with 130 children.

Sister Haregu also provides training workshops for the 66 other Santa Anna kindergarten teachers in Eritrea every summer. She is acutely aware of the importance of education and the role that Kindergarten for ages 4-6 years provides. ♦

Sister Lettemariam

AFTER many years as an exceptionally excellent teacher, our good friend Sister Lettemariam is a student. She is in Asmara taking courses in Education, Psychology and English by correspondence from a university in Kenya.

But of course that is no reason for her to stop her other activities. On weekends she returns to her home community of Daughters of Charity in Dekemhare, 45 km south of Asmara. There she is still actively involved in the community, their remarkable elementary school, kindergarten, clinic and social services.

She is also preparing for a series of workshops for Daughters of Charity and lay Kindergarten teachers from around Eritrea. ♦

Brother Ghebreyesus

THE de la Salle Brothers of Eritrea are responsible for the Institute of Religious Studies, which is in reality a small private college. In addition to the religious studies, the IRS offers post-secondary business, arts and social science courses.

Brother Ghebreyesus Habte, head of the Eritrean Brothers, is the founder and director of the Institute.

This year, the Study Centre, which we have supported for several years, has been given a facelift. There are new tables, chairs, books, wall charts and additional supervision so it can be open day and evening.

Another freestanding classroom has been added to the campus. Brother Ghebres talks of plans for more classrooms, more students, and an outside study area. ♦

Brother Ghebreyesus in the library section of the Study Centre.



ABOUT ERITREA

MODERN Eritrea was born in the 1890s as an Italian colony. The Italians attempted to invade Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) from there in 1896, but were defeated. However, the Italian dictator Mussolini got revenge in 1935, invading Ethiopia and forcing Emperor Haile Selassie to flee. In 1941, Italy was defeated by the Allies. Haile Selassie was restored to power in Ethiopia and Eritrea became a United Nations mandate administered by Britain.

In 1952, the UN federated Eritrea with Ethiopia, a move that was very unpopular with most Eritreans. In 1962, Haile Selassie annexed Eritrea, ending the federation. Meanwhile the Eritreans had launched an armed liberation struggle that lasted for the next 30 years.

Eritrea won its freedom in 1991 and, after a UN supervised referendum, declared independence on May 24, 1993.

For several years after independence, conditions improved in

Eritrea. Schools, hospitals, clinics, roads and homes were built, and agricultural and industrial production increased. The economy grew by an average of 6-7% per year.

But by 1997, relations with Ethiopia were deteriorating for a variety of reasons. A vicious border war broke out in May 1998 and lasted for two years. Up to 100,000 people died and more than a million were displaced. Since December 2000 UN peacekeepers have patrolled a 25-km wide buffer zone between the countries. But none of the issues that caused the war have been resolved and the level of tension remains high.

The Eritrean economy has been in decline since the border war. Most young people are still in the armed forces or doing compulsory national service. Drought and diseases constantly stalk people still not recovered from the war. ♦



ERITREA AT A GLANCE

Location: Northeastern Africa.

Boundaries: Red Sea to the east, Sudan to the northwest, Ethiopia to the south, Djibouti to the southeast.

Total land area: 124,320 sq. km., about the size of England.

Coastline: 1,094 km. along Red Sea.

Climate: Hot and dry, especially in lowland areas. Frequent droughts.

Population: About 3.2 million, 75% in rural areas. Many others abroad.

Religions: Most Orthodox Christian or Muslim. Some Catholics, Protestants, animists.

Languages: Tigrinya and Tigre (80%), and 7 other minorities.

How your contributions were used

ACCUMULATED REVENUES, EXPENDITURES & RESERVES SINCE OUR ESTABLISHMENT IN 1992 (\$C)

	2008	1992-2008
REVENUE		
Fundraisers	3,873.00	70,803.65
Charitable donations	41,914.88	539,399.84
Charitable bequests	19,372.47	207,512.18
Gifts from organizations	2,997.69	106,769.85
Interest/other	10,884.70	62,192.68
TOTAL	79,042.74	986,678.20
EXPENDITURES		
One Family orphans	7,713.00	208,991.83
St. Joseph's/Shinara Schools	4,000.00	48,839.19
Hagaz Agro-Tech School	4,000.00	34,419.60
Faraleba School	4,752.00	43,777.75
Water development	-----	27,392.46
Afabet Comboni Community	8,000.00	55,388.30
Kindergartens	2,600.00	33,861.03
Poor families/refugees/women	3,400.00	58,103.35
Clinics	5,600.00	24,100.00
Study centres/Students	15,600.00	46,916.35
Public orphanages/schools/war vets	-----	14,161.08
South Sudan	22,214.51	22,214.51
Container shipments	-----	18,323.50
Promotions/Administration	497.30	8,723.43
TOTAL	78,376.81	645,212.38
RESERVES FOR FUTURE PROJECTS	665.93	341,465.82

JOIN THE FAMILY!

*If you would like to support the good work being done in Eritrea,
send a cheque for any amount to:*

HANTI SIDRA ONE GLOBAL FAMILY
PO Box 20004
Sidney, BC V8L 5C9

*Please make your cheque out to **HANTI SIDRA FUND**. An official tax
receipt will be issued for any donation of \$20.00 or more.*