

## **Extend God's love to those needy children**

A story about EECMY Center for Mentally Retarded Children

By: Itessa Gobena/Rev.

It was in 1982; winter that one afternoon thirteen mentally retarded and disturbed men were brought to Jimma prison and pushed into a room of four by four meters in the prison building. All the inmates were observing and the men were not the kind of people who often brought to the prison. Some of us, were able to approach the policemen and asked who they were and told that they were beggars, picked up from the street of Jimma (as part of the cleaning of the city) for a planned visit of a high official of the then East German Republic. Unfortunately the visit did not happen. But the persons were held in the prison in a very bad condition, for about three months until one night they were taken out and killed. The inmates were left with a question why? and why? but no answer. Some of us knew that the Communist's value of human being (our government was Marxist rule at the time) is based only on the productivity of a person reducing the human being to a production tool. So our conclusion was if a "tool" can not perform what it was meant for it has to be disposed, and in the same way those unfortunate men were handled.

About the same time I was released from the prison serving two years and eight months, falsely accused of performing subversive act against the Revolution as a CIA agent for the imperialists.

Returning back to the Church work I was assigned to the office of Christian Education in the Central Office of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. This gave me a chance to ones again think on the philosophy of the ministries and social services of the Church reflecting on the sad experience I faced when those persons were killed being unwanted in the society.

We Christians believe that all human being are created after the likeness and image of God and through our Lord Jesus Christ saved to participate in the divine nature of God (2 Pet. 1 :4). The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus believes that all human being are created equally in the image of God and are agent of changes. Having this conviction her ministries are focussed to serve the "Whole person", giving chances and opportunities for all persons. She serve to cultivate their God given potentials (physical and spiritual) to benefit themselves and their society at large. If this is so, what about those people, the handicapped, the mentally retarded and disturbed. Shouldn't they deserve to be served and cared for? Yes, the Church has been inclusive in her services, but in most cases only those who are able to present themselves, the healthy one, got all the opportunities to the services of the Church. Then these and some other exposures I had made me to continue to think on the Church's ministries to the disabled for some years until in 1986, when finally I wrote a letter to a missionary friend Rittva Olkkola that we start to pray and challenge our Church, the EECMY to give attentions and find ways to minister God's love to the mental retarded and disturbed persons in the Ethiopian Society.

In many ways God moves us to prayer when he plans to do some important work among us so that we come along to participate in it joyfully. So it was not long when I heard that the EECMY started a center for mentally retarded children in 1986 while I was in abroad on study leave.

The God who loves and cares for those neglected ones made it possible for His Church to take up her responsibilities to extend God's love to those needy children who may otherwise do not have any hope.

I rejoice for God changed my sad experience at Jimma prison to such a joyful one by giving me the opportunity to witness that God cares for such neglected persons he created in His image.