

## Journal from Sept. 2018 trip



### Day 1 - Sunday

The five person team of Gary Taggart, Barry Barron, Rachel Rodrigue, Lee and Diane Camp arrived for our first day in Sintaro on Sunday in time to attend parts of three different worship services. The churches were full of enthusiastic worshippers. All had large choirs, one had three choirs, with different choir robes! Lee briefly greeted at one, Gary at the other two, both translated by our accompanying translators.

As we walked to the school from the churches we were swarmed by friendly and curious children who were eager to hold our hands. The older ones who attend Hope school asked "what is your name?" Or pointed out all the trees, animals and other things along the path using the English words. We were impressed with their clear pronunciation and confidence.

The first day of school is tomorrow. Please pray for a good start and smooth operation of the school this week while we are here and for the whole year. We met many of the staff and had lunch together at the administration building. We had a productive meeting with the assistant principal and the nurse, discussing key issues for the new school year and hearing their concerns. We expressed CPC's interest and support for Sintaro, which they treasure. The fact that we have come is a deep reassurance to the school staff and the whole village that we are here for the long term, not like too many of the NGO's that they hear about that leave after a short time.

Lee, Diane and Gary did a home visit to the Camp's sponsored boy, who was tending cattle elsewhere, unfortunately. We were invited in to his home by his mother who was holding a baby. He lives in a small round hut where the cooking fire smoldered, the smoke escaping from the gaps in the thatched roof. Through our translator, we learned that Marcos is doing very well at school and the family is much healthier since they can now get clean water from the well.

Gary led us up the hill to the storage tanks for the water system. The four water stations are all gravity fed, and spaced strategically to serve as many homes as possible. We saw the pump station and the site of the well at a lower elevation, next to a muddy creek where women were washing clothes. What a blessing that these people no longer must drink muddy, polluted water!

A few other observations from our first impressions: the land is very hilly and green. Something is growing in every inch of land! Many different crops in small tended plots, but not the large flat fields we envisioned. There is almost no trash to mar the beauty. The children are "free range"; they seem free to go where they wish and they know where they are going. They are agile on the muddy paths that twist and climb through the village. The grownups are friendly and quick to smile, touch your hand in greeting, and those who know Gary from previous visits give joyful hugs.

We are looking forward to the first day of school tomorrow!

### Sintaro Day 2 – Monday

We arrived with a very full van today. Three big bins, two cooks, four translators, the five of us and the heroic driver who knows how to dodge donkey carts, goat herds, motorcycles, and groups of pedestrians. For those who have been to Sintaro, you will be glad to know that the road as far as Tula is now paved! We picked up deworming medicine at the Red Cross. For only six cents per child, they are protected from infectious parasites for six months.

School was already in session when we arrived. People from Hope arrived with most of the uniforms and shoes. We unpacked the chalkboards, chalk, crayons, books, letters and nametags. Then we began to read the sponsor letters to the children of grades K2, 1, 2, and 3. We had four of us reading and praying with the aid of our wonderful translators. Thanks to those of you who turned in a personal letter; if you didn't your child got a generic letter from a student at the Academy. Special thanks to Ashley's class! Barry played his ukulele and sang for the children waiting to be weighed and measured.

The Camps met their sponsored child, and Rachel fell in love with one of the new K1 girls, and will sponsor her! Diane read one of the easy readers we brought to the second-grade class, "There is a Bird on Your Head." They were attentive, but too polite to laugh! Whenever the children were out for a recess, they swarmed around us to shake hands, say hello, and pose for a photo.

Two important meetings were held with staff from Hope and the local Water Committee and the Elder Board of the village. There was respectful and open dialogue, and they frankly expressed their questions, complaints, and appreciation for what CPC has done for their village. One elder said, "your church is our children's second parents." The biggest concern for the Elders was the acquisition of the adjacent land so we can build the classrooms for grades five through eight. The government has been unwilling to meet the seller's price. They decided that the Elders who would not benefit financially from the purchase would attend the meeting on Thursday with the county government officials along with the representatives from Hope, plus Gary and Lee. Please pray that the officials will understand the urgency of the need and agree to a fair price for the land, so we can begin to build.

The Water Committee expressed concern for needed repairs on broken faucets at the water distribution sites, and the need for fences to prevent damage. Hope will share in the cost of repairs and maintenance, but Gary explained that the fences will be built in conjunction with the construction of the new buildings; it would be too expensive otherwise. There is also a need for concrete around the well head to prevent damage from the creek nearby when it floods.

Praise God for the first day of school, uniforms delivered, for most of the letters read, and two productive meetings!



### Sintaro Day 3 – Tuesday

We saw monkeys playing leapfrog on the power lines this morning before we left the hotel! On the ride to Sintaro we passed people on the way to the market day carrying vegetables, donkey carts loaded with crates of tomatoes and other vegetables, cattle and goats that would be sold.

When we got to Hope School all the children lined up in straight lines to sing and listen to a talk from Pastor Matthew from Hope, who is visiting this week. We met with the staff, then continued reading the letters from sponsors and gave the deworming medication to every child. The children value getting the letters from sponsors, especially the older ones who feel an increasing connection to their sponsors over the years.

Gary and Diane met with three representatives of the PTA to hear their views of how the school is performing for the children, and to hear their suggestions. They are happy with the education the children are getting. The government representative who attended said that Hope School is far superior to what the government schools provide. They confirmed that the students are sharing what they learn with family members, even the parents. This committee also sees the acquisition of the land and building of more classrooms as a priority. They will do what they can to press the county government to complete the purchase soon. They requested training from Hope or the government to be more effective in their role to support the school. The one complaint was that the 5th graders need more food for lunch than kindergarteners, but everyone receives the same amount. The Hope representatives said they would look into a solution.

Gary and Lee had a very encouraging private meeting with the new principal. His number one priority is training the teachers to enhance the education the children are receiving. He also plans to put in place student evaluations and to introduce remedial training for those in need of it. He has good credentials and experience, and we are optimistic that he will make Hope School even better.

The K1 and K2 children put on their new uniforms, red and white check pants and skirts, white shirts and new shoes, and came running across the field to the hand washing station and then to lunch. What a colorful and joyous sight! Soon the other classes were outside for lunch and free time. Again we were the center of attention, especially Rachel with her long blond braid and her radiant love for them all. We had lunch in one of the classrooms with the staff, the translators, and the PTA committee.

We finished reading the letters. Barry played his ukulele and Rachel drilled the first graders on the ABC's, then each read an Elephant and Piggie book to the class, with the help of an expressive interpreter, to the delight of the children.

We returned to Awasa, then walked along the lake to a lovely lakeside resort where we had an appreciation dinner, for Mehretu, who has been our key manager of all the details for the week and his wife, Yodit and baby. Mehretu has been our part-time project manager for Sintaro for the last 2 years.

It was a very full, fun and productive day.

### Sintaro Day 4 - Wednesday

Our priority today was to take the photographs to give to the sponsors. It is gratifying to see how much your child has grown and changed since the last visit, so we took the assignment very seriously. The uniforms are here, but they have not yet been issued to each child. We pulled out some shirts that they would put on over their clothes while in line for the photo, then take off again. The teachers, Hope staff and translators helped to get the nametags and collars straight and we took turns taking the pictures and checking off each child as they were photographed. Gary noticed that the children smiled more readily for the camera than in past years and were unflustered by the assembly line atmosphere. These children are happy to be in school!

Another important goal for the day was to have each child write or draw a page for his sponsor. The translators helped the children write meaningful answers to the questions on the sheet. We hope you will enjoy reading them, and when you write again you can comment on what your child has written or drawn.

Barry showed video greetings from three CPC women who have been to Sintaro multiple times to the older children and teachers. They especially liked seeing Ashley's new baby. Barry and Rachel were on their way to a home visit in the rain when the van got stuck in the mud. A crowd of about 75 interested spectators soon gathered, and many helped collect rocks to put under the wheels. Rachel and Barry walked the final mile and a half to his sponsored child's home, along with the usual cluster of children.

Gary had a good meeting with the nurse and the Hope staff about the WASH program (Water, Sanitation and Health). More support and supplies from Hope should be coming soon so the program can be expanded further into the community. There was another meeting to check the records of urgent expenses paid from the small use fund and the decision was made to provide a cash infusion for forthcoming needs.

We saw the customers lined up at a water station as it opened at 4:00. Two little girls together were hauling a full jerry can back to their home. Women carried the same size tied to their backs.

We had a wonderful dinner with the Hope staff, including the new General Secretary, to thank them for being with us this week and to build relationships with them.



### Sintaro Day 5 - Thursday

On our final day we got to Sintaro in time to observe the opening ceremonies. The children were in straight lines by class. They heard scripture read and sang a joyous song before starting the school day. Gary and Lee left for an important meeting about the land purchase with the government in Wujjirra. An answer to prayer! The government officials intend to act on buying the land within two weeks!

Barry and Diane finished taking pictures of the new, unsponsored little kids. We have 50 adorable students to choose from, come on Sunday and find the one for you to sponsor!

We all toured the medical facility in Wujjirra. It is mainly a maternity and health education center, plus treatment for simple disorders. They are building a traditional round hut so the mothers and babies can stay in a familiar setting after delivery.

We returned to Hope School and after lunch we made a video of the children saying "Thank you CPC" and singing for you which you will see this weekend. We made two more home visits. Diane attended a spirit-filled worship service at a nearby church. One of the teachers played keyboard, and one of our translators was the guest preacher!

We honored and thanked the teachers, translators and Hope staff with a traditional Ethiopian feast. We had purchased a live goat earlier in the day, and after he enjoyed grazing in the schoolyard all morning, he was taken away and reappeared as dinner at 4:00! Some of us had a bite. We formally thanked them all for what they do for the children, presented them with bookbags Barry's wife Mija had made, and then they all non-traditionally pulled out their smartphones and took lots of photos!

As we left, we saw a great crowd with jerry cans waiting to purchase water. It is wonderful to know that so many people can now drink and cook with safe water, thanks to CPC's investment.

We finished the day interviewing two candidates for the position of full-time project manager.

We will see you on Sunday at church! Please come to the Experience Sintaro area after the services!

### Sintaro Day 6 - Friday

Departure day! One more power failure and rainstorm as we packed up to leave the hotel, then off to the airport. One day there will be an elegant new airport terminal but not yet! A wonderful road has been graded and graveled part of the way, but for much of the trip you literally can't tell where the road is. We had a highly skilled driver, praise God. Along the road we saw a cart heavily laden with corn stalks that had tipped, raising the mule completely off his feet! Our driver quickly stopped and ran over to help, followed by the other men in our van and the men in a truck who saw the emergency. There is a culture in Ethiopia of helping where you can, not waiting for "AAA"!

When we arrived at Addis Ababa we went directly to the building site of the new headquarters of the Evangelical Theological College (ETC). It was thrilling to see the progress as the floors are being constructed. When it is completed it will accommodate 1000 students plus commercial rental property. See the photos. Next we visited the current campus which is in rental space next to a church. They can only teach 400 students here. This is where Gary and Laura teach. CPC library has been sending theological books here for several years, so Diane was eager to see the library and meet the librarian.

We visited AZ coffee, the Taggart's favorite. The owner gave us a tour and we all bought coffee beans to take home. Our final stop was Salem's Designs where we saw scarves being woven by the young men Salem trains, plus basket weaving and jewelry making. We all found beautiful things to take home.

We all agreed that we had a wonderful experience and we have a deeper appreciation and empathy for the culture of Ethiopia. The children of Sintaro have touched our hearts. It is our prayer that they have felt our love and commitment and were encouraged by our presence there.