

# Language

## and the Importance of **BEING UNDERSTOOD**

**Y**ou might be surprised to learn that not everyone from Ethiopia speaks the same language. But why does that matter in Virginia? It matters because approximately 400,000 Ethiopians reside in Metro Washington, DC. This is the largest concentration of Ethiopians anywhere in the world outside of Ethiopia itself. Awareness of this demographic has been the driving force for SBC of Virginia churches planting and supporting Ethiopian churches here. While SBCV includes nine Ethiopian churches, all nine utilize Amharic as their primary worship language. Ethiopians whose heart language is Oromo often don't know Amharic and struggle to integrate into Amharic-speaking churches.

In September 2019, a group of Ethiopians and Eritreans gathered at the SBC of Virginia's Glen Allen Ministry Support Center for evangelism and discipleship training. Much of the training was

conducted in Amharic since most in attendance spoke that language. Present at the training were a few guests who were learning for the first time about partnership with the SBCV. One of those was Pastor Reta Terfa, who pastors an Oromo-speaking church in Washington, DC. Pastor Terfa returned home and shared the training with his entire church. He never forgot the feeling of Gospel partnership within that room.

In the fall of 2021, Terfa reached out to Pastor Fisseha Tesfaye (SBCV Ethiopian cluster leader) and Matt Gregory (SBCV people groups strategist), asking how his church could affiliate with SBCV. Pastor Terfa and his elders carefully read and verified their agreement with the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. They had already witnessed the missional focus within the SBCV family and were excited to join. Only one cultural obstacle remained. While the church was fully in agreement with the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, its name could be misleading to American

churches: Spring of Life *Pentecostal* Oromo Church.

In Ethiopia, the word *pentecostal* is closer to what Americans would consider evangelical and does not necessarily signal a charismatic doctrine. Even so, if an SBCV church were to see this word on an affiliation list, it could cause confusion and potential conflict. After careful consideration of this issue, Terfa and his elders humbly resolved to change the church's name to **Spring of Life Oromo Church**, which better reflects the church's true doctrinal stance and alleviates any concerns the former name could have caused.

Having partnered with the SBC of Virginia, Spring of Life Oromo Church is no longer alone in its mission to spread the Gospel in Washington, DC. SBCV now has a partnering church reaching out to Oromo-speaking Ethiopians! ■

