

Partnership Energizes ETHIOPIAN CHURCH

When Abera Tessema came to the U.S. from Ethiopia in the 1980s, he was an atheist and a communist. Like the Apostle Paul, he encountered Jesus and was radically transformed by the Gospel, despite describing himself as the “worst person.” This formerly “worst person” grew in his faith and eventually became a pastor, founding **Amanuel Ethiopian Evangelical Church (AEEC)** in Alexandria, VA, in 1993.

AEEC has been a thriving church for many years, growing to over 400 members and owning a building on a prominent property in Alexandria. However, Pastor Abera acknowledges

that while the church had great passion, it was not fully pursuing its God-given vision. For years, the church failed to share the Gospel outside its ethnic community. Though AEEC had dreamed of planting another church since 2009, no steps had been taken until a turning point in 2023.

In the summer of 2023, Pastor Abera and Youth Pastor Amanuel (Mannie) attended a training session at the SBC of Virginia Ministry Support Center for Ethiopian and Eritrean pastors. Over the course of two days, as Fisseha Tesfaye, Church Planting Associate, led the training on discipleship, church planting, and SBCV partnership, God began stirring something deep within their hearts. On the drive home, Mannie couldn't shake the words of the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts 8:36: “What would keep me from being baptized?” But this time, God changed the question in his heart: “What's keeping me from church planting?”

Less than six months later, AEEC decided to apply for partnership with the SBCV. Mannie Bekele attended a church planting assessment retreat and was endorsed as a Send Network Virginia church planter to begin planting

Remnant Church, a church focused on reaching second-generation people from various nations.

In less than a year after the SBCV training, AEEC sent another church planter, Berhanu Abebe, for assessment. He, too, was approved by Send Network Virginia to plant a church in Dumfries, Virginia. The new **Dumfries Ethiopian Church** will partner with Pillar Church in Dumfries, sharing facilities and resources.

Pastor Abera reflects, “For 30 years, we only focused on one church, so now we have to get busy planting many churches.” While planting two churches in under two years might seem like enough work for most churches, AEEC is already praying and preparing for two more church plants in the near future.

Recently, Remnant Church celebrated its first baptisms of non-Ethiopian candidates, marking a significant milestone in the church's outreach efforts.

The Power of Partnership

Pastors Abera, Amanuel, and Berhanu all credit the SBCV partnership for giving them new energy, direction, resources, and training to help them fulfill their church's vision. Left alone, they fear these ideas for church planting would have remained just dreams, never becoming reality. But that didn't happen because **they are not alone!** ■

