



 Daasanach Christians prepare to host Christians from an enemy tribe.

## Face to face with “the enemy”

**T**wenty-one years is a long time to wait. But in some ways, that’s how many years it has taken for the work of Dick and Donna Swart to come to fruition. The Swarts have served as RCA missionaries among the Daasanach people in Ethiopia since 1996, and it was only just last year that they saw two enemy tribes come together because of the reconciling work of God.

For many years, the Daasanach and Hamar peoples have considered each other enemies. Even recently, they’ve raided and killed for each other’s cattle. But through a Bible training program (Turmi Bible School, or TBS) in a nearby town, Daasanach Christians have gotten to know Hamar Christians. The Daasanach leaders that the Swarts work with decided to hold a conference, inviting the TBS teachers and some Hamar Christians they have gotten to know.

In the week leading up to the conference, the Daasanach Christians worked hard to prepare for their guests. They built a stick-and-brush shelter adjacent to the church building to accommodate the overflow. They bought sheep and a cow to have enough food to feed everyone. They prepared their presentations and practiced songs and traditional dances.

The village buzzed with conversation about what the Christians were doing. The Swarts heard many people whisper that the Hamar were coming; as enemies, most Daasanach had never

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THIS MONTH'S FOCUS:

# THE DAASANECH IN ETHIOPIA



**A**fter 30 years of faithful ministry, Dick and Donna Swart will retire in June. Over the years, the Swarts have made an eternal impact in both Kenya and Ethiopia. Here is a glimpse into their ministry in Ethiopia:

For the past 21 years, the Swarts have lived among the Daasanech people along the Omo River in Ethiopia. They have focused on three areas: the windmill project, an agricultural project to increase the fertility of the land; healthcare, which Donna offers as a nurse; and evangelistic outreach, which is woven into their daily life and done in partnership with the national Kale Hiwot Church of Ethiopia.

By nature, mission work is of the “long obedience in the same direction” variety, but the Swarts are finally seeing the fruit of their faithfulness.

“Our main vision for the ministry among the Daasanech was to see a viable, self-sustaining, self-reproducing church that has one vision and is equipped to reach their own people,” says Donna. “It truly is a Daasanech church, not one that is foreign or culturally inappropriate.”


Now about 300 people make up the Daasanech church community. The congregation is led by Daasanech leaders and worships in a way that matches the culture.

Dick has devoted his time to transforming the banks of the Omo River into groves of mango, banana, and moringa trees. The windmill project, which includes 80 windmills along the river, is now fully maintained by Erogit and Guradit, Daasanach windmill technicians with whom Dick has worked closely over the years.

When the Swarts first arrived in Ethiopia, they offered the only healthcare in the region. To make medical care more accessible, Donna worked with the Ethiopian government, which provided better supplies locally and helped make it possible for the Daasanach to be referred elsewhere for more major care. Today, most Daasanach children are immunized and hundreds of women receive prenatal care, which means that the lives of many babies and mothers have been saved. For this, the Daasanach people are clearly grateful: “Many of the children that I helped deliver are named after every member of our family,” says Donna.

By God’s grace, the Swarts have made a difference among the Daasanach over the past two decades. Many people have come to know and believe in Jesus, have received medical care, and are able to grow crops because of Dick and Donna’s response to God’s call on their lives. And, also by God’s grace, this firmly planted church will



 **UPPER LEFT** In 2016, 34 new Christians were baptized.  
**ABOVE** Donna studies the Bible with two Daasanach women.

continue its disciple-making movement, engaging in evangelism and outreach, and planting other churches among the Daasanech and its neighboring tribes along the Omo River.

## You can support the Daasanech people

**To donate online** to the ongoing mission among the Daasanech, visit [www.rca.org/daasanechmission](http://www.rca.org/daasanechmission).

**By phone (U.S. only):** Call Terri Boven at 616-541-0835.

**By mail:** Please send your check, made out to “Reformed Church in America” and designated “Mission to Daasanech,” to Reformed Church in America, Attn: Finance Dept., 4500 60th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49512, or, in Canada, to 201 Paradise Rd. N., Hamilton, ON L8S 3T3.

## Lent devotions

Lent is a season of preparation for Christ’s death and resurrection. This year, journey through Lent with a series of devotions written by RCA missionaries. The devotions will be delivered via email throughout Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday, February 14. Visit [www.rca.org/lent-devotions](http://www.rca.org/lent-devotions) to subscribe.



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Students and faculty at Onesimos Nesib Seminary

# VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Come volunteer in Ethiopia. There are opportunities to work at an international mission school in the capital, teach at a rural seminary, or serve in a nursing school.

## **Bingham Academy: Addis Ababa**

Bingham Academy has been serving the missionary and international communities of Ethiopia since the late 1940s. Each year, volunteers are needed to fill a variety of teaching positions and administrative posts.

## **Onesimos Nesib Seminary: Aira**

Onesimos Nesib Seminary, a regional seminary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, is committed to preparing leaders for ministry and church service. There are opportunities to teach intensives or semester-long courses in many subject areas, including Old Testament, New Testament, pastoral care and counseling, theology, worship, and ethics.

## **Aira Midwifery School: Aira**

The Aira Midwifery School is a rural nursing school of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. The school trains midwives for medical service in remote, poverty-stricken, and underserved areas. Volunteers are needed to teach prenatal and maternal care, developmental pediatrics, biology, chemistry, medical English, and other subjects.

*For more information about these opportunities and other ways to volunteer as an individual or group, visit [www.rca.org/volunteer](http://www.rca.org/volunteer).*

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seen a Hamar face to face.

About an hour into the opening service of the conference, the TBS teachers and Hamar Christians arrived.



“I was moved to tears,” wrote Donna in a letter to supporters, “as I saw Daasanach greet them with smiles and welcome them to the gathering. When the service was over, Daasanach gathered around to see these neighbors, these enemies, these brothers in Christ. I can’t fully express what this said to us—a true example of Christ as the answer to ending enmity and bringing peace.”

The next day, Daasanach and Hamar Christians joined together in song and dance. In his presentation, a Hamar man explained that he used to carry a gun. Many years ago, he said, he was in a battle with the Daasanach. He was the only Hamar to survive. It was after that experience that he became a Christian. “God spared me for this day. Our guns divide us but this,” he said, holding up his Bible, “this brings us together.”

At the end of the day, one of the visiting leaders from the Kale Hiwot Church, the Swarts’ national partner church, asked to take a picture of the Daasanach and Hamar Christians and the Swarts. He said, “This was your vision, your desire to see the Daasanach worship in ways meaningful to them, alongside other desert tribes they border. We didn’t always get that vision, but we do now.”

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