



Transforming Lives. Strengthening Communities.

## Overview of Sports Friends Ministry in Ethiopia

**Introduction:** God is doing a mighty work in Ethiopia through the simple, yet powerful, platform of sports ministry. New churches are being planted; Muslims are turning to Christ; existing churches are engaging their communities; men are serving passionately in the church; and youth are being disciplined. We invite you and your church to consider partnering with us and our Ethiopian brothers and sisters in Christ in this exciting work of the Holy Spirit. Below is a brief summary of the Sports Friends ministry and how God is using sports ministry in Ethiopia for His glory.

**Ministry Description:** Sports ministry is the utilization of the platform of sports for intentional evangelism and discipleship purposes. It is not primarily focused on sports – sports is just the common ground for relationship building and ministry. Instead, sports ministry is an excellent tool for the church to use in planting new churches, evangelizing the lost, discipling believers into maturity, and advancing God’s Kingdom.

Children, youth and young adults are typically the age groups most open to new relationships and new ideas. Over 60% of Ethiopia’s population is under 25 years old. Sports is a powerful tool to reach these young people, and through the youth, to reach their families and communities with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sports is a magnet – a common language! Throughout Ethiopia, in both urban and rural communities, you can find young people playing soccer, volleyball, basketball and other sports. Many of these young people will never attend an evangelical church service or even have an opportunity to be exposed to a Christian witness. Sports creates the opportunity for Ethiopian Christians to build relationships with these young people and share the love of Christ.

Not only is sports ministry an excellent church planting and evangelism tool, it is also a powerful discipleship tool for the church. On the sports field, a person’s character is quickly revealed. Sports provides an excellent, real-world classroom to teach young people about Godly character traits – selflessness, sacrifice, perseverance, commitment, unity, respect for authority, etc.

**Ethiopia Experience:** Sports Friends (“SF”) began working in Ethiopia in 2002. SF’s vision in Ethiopia has been to empower a nationwide movement of churches and church planters to use sports ministry to impact their nation for the glory of God. Prior to SF’s involvement, there was no church-centered sports ministry of any significance in Ethiopia, nor any efforts to use sports as a church planting tool. We praise God that over these last five years many denominations have started using the sports ministry strategy and God is producing great fruit through their efforts. SF is a servant resource to these



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denominations and church planting networks, providing the vision, training, leadership development, consultation and certain ministry resources to support this ministry movement.

Over the last five years since the ministry was initiated in Ethiopia, much has been accomplished:

- Over 4,500 Ethiopian sports ministry leaders have been trained in our Level II course (a 3 to 5 day course providing the training necessary for leaders to establish sports ministry in their local churches).
- 55 Ethiopians have been trained to become national sports ministry coordinators (through our 5-week Level IV leadership training) for their denomination or church planting network. SF then partners with these leaders to provide training and leadership for the development of sports ministry within each denomination or church planting network.
- Over 1,200 churches in Ethiopia have started sports evangelism programs in the last 5 years (most of these in the last 2-3 years). These churches have over 30,000 youth participating in their programs.
- We are working with 20 different denominations and church planting movements and seek to foster interdenominational coordination and unity. SF has written partnership agreements with 14 of the largest and most influential denominations.
- Thousands of youth and members of their families have placed their faith in Christ as a result of the sports ministries of these churches. Over 100 new churches have been planted through sports evangelism. Most of these churches have been planted in all Muslim villages.
- In the Arsi region of Ethiopia, we are working with one church planting network that has planted over 80 new churches in all Muslim communities and seen over 15,000 Muslim converts to Christ. Their primary church planting and evangelism tool is sports.

Despite these exciting results, we still believe we are in the early stages of the development of a church-centered sports ministry movement and of what God is going to do in Ethiopia.

**Camping Ministry:** In addition to developing sports ministry programs at the local church level, SF is also in the process of developing a camping ministry at Lake Langanu (named Camp Langanu). This will be the first Christian residential youth camp for a country with over 75 million people! The camping ministry will be an integral part of the ongoing sports ministry programs of the local churches. Youth will come to camp with their sports ministry leaders and will return home after camp with their leaders, providing a continuum of effective relational ministry. The camp is being developed on a beautiful 95 acre property on Lake Langanu which has been owned by SIM and the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church for over 30 years. Pilot camping sessions are currently being conducted,



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and plans call for the construction of additional facilities to accommodate over 150 youth by the summer of 2009. SF believes Camp Langano will be an awesome ministry and a strategic location for North American Church Partners to meet and minister with their supported Ethiopian leader(s).

**Summary:** Sports ministry is one of the most powerful church planting, evangelism and discipleship tools available to churches and church planters to connect with young people and their families for the cause of Christ. SF has helped to unleash a powerful movement of churches involved in sports ministry in Ethiopia. We believe God is going to continue to use this ministry in a powerful way throughout Ethiopia. Our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia are eager for additional North American church partners to join them in this work of the Holy Spirit – through a strategic investment of prayer, financial resources and personal involvement/going. We believe this strategic partnership will not only be a blessing to the Ethiopian church, but will also be a tool that God uses to bring renewal, blessing and joy to the North American church.