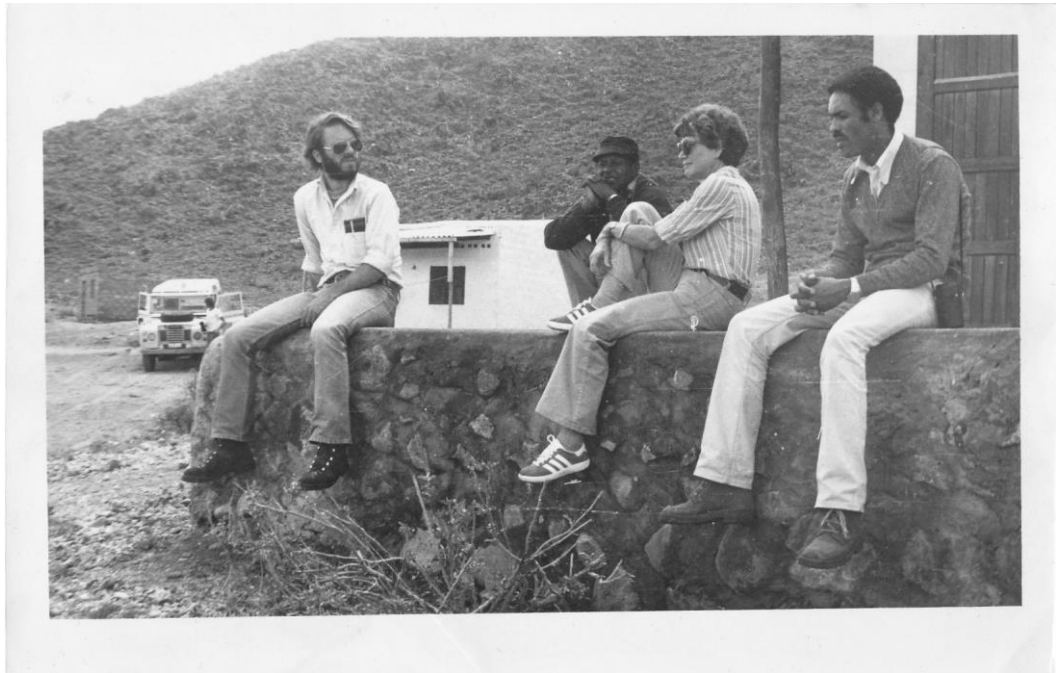




WOMEN IN
CHURCH AND
SOCIETY
THE LUTHERAN
WORLD FEDERATION

From the LWF Institutional Memory

Women on the move – Her story:



Ingjer Ofstad on her first field trip to Wollo, Ethiopia with Phillip and Negussie

Name: Ingjer Ofstad
Country of origin: Norway
Date of birth: 15 April 1920
Church: Church of Norway
Period of mandate: 01.01.1977 – 31.05.1979, participated in the LWF Assembly in Dar Es Salaam, 1977
Short biography: A letter from her LWF DWS director Brian Neldner:

“Yes I remember Ingjer Ofstad well, our first women country representative outside of Europe!

Ingjer joined us in the first days of 1977 just a couple of weeks before Mengistu took power in a coup in early February. This set the stage for the turbulent two years during which Ingjer was with us from January 1977 to January 1979, affecting not only the people and the country but also our member churches EECMY and ECE. The request in the cable of the President of EECMY, Ato Emmanuel Abraham, to the Director LWF World Service, on 23rd April, 1973 for urgent drought assistance to the people of Wollo and Tigre was the genesis of LWS Ethiopia. I remember that well as I was in Bangladesh on my first field trip after being appointed to LWS Geneva from Tanzania where I was

director of the LWS operated Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service. I was instructed to proceed directly to Ethiopia to join an assessment mission organized by Christian Relief Committee (forerunner of CRDA) of the drought situation in Wollo and Tigre which became the basis of the opening of our office in the summer of 1973.

Ingjer came to us from the Norwegian Mission Society where she had just led a drought response in Southern Ethiopia for Norwegian Church Aid. Upon joining LWS, her immediate priorities were to make proposals for aid to the people of Kambatta, Konso and Wollega. No sooner had she made proposals, given her knowledge and experience in Ethiopia, when a seismic event affecting the work of the LWF as a whole in Ethiopia occurred – government troops moved in and seized control of the LWF Radio Station RVOG on the morning of 11th March. This happened the very day after the LWS Emergency Working Group had approved support for the drought response and local resettlement programs proposed by Ingjer, at a meeting in Frankfurt, Germany, on 10th March 1977. This raised questions as to whether and how LWS and other programs of the LWF could continue their work in Ethiopia. An early visit by the General Secretary of the LWF, Dr. Carl Mau, and his subsequent public statement of 23rd March formed the basis for LWS to be able to continue its work in Ethiopia with the endorsement of our member church EECMY. We had to anticipate considerable changes in our program priorities and feasibility of implementation. Ingjer Ofstad had to deal with a continuous process of change in the program content and priorities. Looking back some forty years the only constant in her two years as our Representative was continuous change in the program – whether it would be a major bridge or road works – a transport unit operated by LWS or support for one run by the UN – if, how and where LWS would be involved in resettlement schemes - and so on.

Great changes took place also in our member church especially in the Kambatta Synod with a new leadership emerging and their concern for their people who were moved to more fertile ground during this period the people in the villages – in Bote Tole – especially in the buying of cattle to get agriculture going again. In the closing weeks of her work with LWF, Ingjer was able to celebrate her sixtieth birthday with her daughters, who had come to Ethiopia especially for the occasion. Despite her full engagement in our work Ingjer kept close contact with her children and always spoke enthusiastically about them when we met. Ingjer was available after she completed her assignment with LWF World Service to consult with the Evaluation Team in February./March. The report records the team's appreciation to Ingjer for her input and insights. As the person in Geneva who had most contact with her I want to again express my appreciation for her service and our confidence in her handling of the program in a particularly difficult period."

Ingjer was born in Madagascar 15.April 1920. Her parents and grandparents were missionaries for the Norwegian Missionary Society. She came to Norway at 5 years old and was left to live with her aunts in Stavanger when her parents went back to Madagascar for 8 years. She then was herself married to a Chinese-born missionary. After their wedding, they worked in South Africa for 14 years and he became one of the pioneer to build up Radio Voice of the Gospel but died in Ethiopia in 1974, in his 50s. She remained on and worked as LWF Resident Representative as described above, then continued to be the leader of Norwegian church relief in Ethiopia after her assignment with LWF and left Ethiopia in 1981, after having spent 14 years in Ethiopia. After that she became a pensioner and still lives in Stavanger, Norway, aged 95.