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**Ethiopian Church Attracts Those Seeking African Roots - Amanda Dale, Sub-Editor & Writer
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Leader: Archbishop Abuna Thaddaeus Gidey. **Photo supplied*

FRIDAY, APR. 27: The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is growing because people of African descent are trying to reconnect with their roots and identity, according to the Archbishop of the Diocese of the Caribbean and Latin America.

Archbishop Abuna Thaddaeus Gidey is visiting Bermuda this week to deliver services, ordinations and baptisms at the island's church in St George's.

It marks his fifth visit to Bermuda and the Archbishop said he was encouraged by the growth in followers over the years.

Survival

The Bermuda branch of the church was established in 1975 and Archbishop Thaddaeus made his first visit as a priest in 1980.

"Every time I come to Bermuda the membership is growing," he said.

“I am very happy to see the changes. I am also grateful to the Government and the Bermudian people for granting me the ability to come here to conduct my services joyfully and freely, without hindrance.

“The Bermudian people are very hospitable.”

Last Sunday the Archbishop ordained the Holy Orders, a deacon and a priest. This Sunday he will baptize three members of the church.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is a Christian church but has roots in Judaism. Its churches have a replica of the Ark of the Covenant – the Tabot – on which the bread and wine is consecrated during the Eucharist (Mass). It only plays instruments referred to in the Bible alone and worshippers must remove their shoes before entering the church.

The seat of the Diocese of the Caribbean and Latin America is Trinidad and Tobago, which was established in 1952 and has nine parishes. There are also churches in Barbados, Jamaica, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Antigua.

“They are all important for the spiritual future. As the father, all children are important to the father and mother,” said Archbishop Thaddeus.

“We came from Ethiopia, from Africa, and all over the Caribbean are the descendants of slaves.

“It’s about roots, it’s about identity. We need roots, because without them there is no survival.

“That is what people are seeking. Our people have lost identity and culture and so they are looking.

“Ethiopia is also about freedom – we were never colonized. Our faith is from early Judaism and then Christianity.

“We are one of the first churches – we date back to the first century AD. That is what people are looking for – identity.”

The Very Reverend Stuart Lambert said the Archbishop’s visit was inspiring some followers to return to the church.

“We have over 700 baptized members but our congregation currently numbers about 50,” he said.

“We have seen some returning since His Grace’s arrival. This visit is helping to renew the spirit and energy among those who for some reason have stayed away.”

The service this Sunday takes place at 8am at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Old Military Road, St George’s. Call 297-2085 for more information.

- Abuna Thaddaeus Gidey, formerly Abba Wolde Gabriel Wolde Selassie, was born in the province of Wollo, Ethiopia, in 1942.
He attended the traditional church school, and at 14 became a deacon.
- In 1958 he became a monk priest and served for six years at Karetza Mariam Monastery in Tigray Province. He then moved to Shoa province and served at Managesha Amba Mariam Monastery for four years. He studied zema (liturgical music), tiguame metsahift (commentary of the New Testament) and kenye (poetry).
- Abba Wolde Gabriel Wolde Selassie also wanted a modern education and attended Holy Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa for four years.
- In October 1972, he was sent with the late Archmandrite Abba Haddis Gessese to serve the church in Trinidad and Tobago. He served as Priest in Charge of Trinidad and Tobago for 20 years.
- In February 1993, in recognition of his long service and dedication in Trinidad and Tobago, he was consecrated Bishop and assigned to the Diocese of the Caribbean and Latin America.
- Two years later, in February 1995, he was elevated to the office of Archbishop of the Archdiocese.
- Under his spiritual guidance four new churches were built. Three branch churches were also established in Martinique, Guadeloupe and Antigua Barbuda.
- There are currently more than 40 clergymen serving the Archdiocese.
- The church says: "His Grace Abuna Thaddaeus Gidey is a caring, dedicated and loving shepherd who is presently one of the longest-serving Ethiopian priests in the Western Hemisphere.
He has served the people of the Caribbean, especially Trinidad and Tobago, for 38 years. He continues to be that beacon for our churches here in this Archdiocese.
May Almighty God keep him for many years in good health and strength and may he fulfil all that God has given him, to continue to gather and feed the lost sheep and people in general."