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## VICS: Whose Spring Is It?

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# Whose Spring Is It?

Faye and Bob Webber

*Folks in the Coronation and Browfield communities in the Alberta prairies know how important water is. And they are also extremely generous. So it is no surprise that the community responded with amazing speed and generosity to the request of Willa and Cliff Suintjens for help with a water project in Ethiopia. Cliff is an agricultural specialist and Willa a nursing instructor. Both are V.I.C.S volunteers from Coronation.*

## ETHIOPIA

Experienced development aid workers know that you don't simply go to a community and drill a well or repair a spring and expect that it will still be in good repair in a few years time. They know that the only way to make a project of this kind work for the long haul is to start with the grass roots community and get them to "own" the project from the very beginning.

Fortunately, Cliff and Willa work with some amazing and experienced people when it comes to water development. The hospital administrator Sister Elaine has had a passion for water projects in Africa (along with medical work and a host of other

initiatives) for thirty years. As well, their Outreach development worker, Endele, is a veteran of many successful projects in the four years he has worked with St. Luke's. So well before we arrived, they had selected a community that needed a water project and was also ready to take responsibility for the project.

In this particular community Muslims and Orthodox Christians live closely together, and have been sharing the same spring for as long as anyone can remember. The spring itself is on Muslim land, but for a long time the Christians have considered it holy water because several people had been healed of ailments through its use. They also use the spring

water for their worship at the church. All of this had been accepted as a matter of course, something that became significant as the community grappled with this new development.

### Equal representation

Happily for us, a trip to the community was planned during our stay. So we went to the village with Cliff and Endele, the development worker and a driver for a meeting of the elders. At the previous meeting Endele had wisely asked the community to select seven elders to represent the Muslims and seven for the Christians. He told us that if they could not come to an understanding on the project this time, a new community would have to be chosen. We packed up in the morning and stopped at a bakery in town to buy some bread as a gift from the donor community for the meeting and off we went. The ride itself was an adventure and we certainly know why a 4wheel drive is standard gear for development workers!

The community meeting initiating spring development.

