



**The smiles on their faces show how happy these Bunong Christians are to receive the Bible in their heart language.**

PHOTO CREDIT: ©QUAN PHAN

# VIETNAM'S BUNONG PEOPLE RECEIVE BIBLE

.....  
Vietnam is a country of 104.8 million people. The country has fifty-four ethnic minorities, who make up 15 percent of the population, including the Bunong, who live in the country's Central Highlands. It is among ethnic minorities like the Bunong that Christianity has been taking off.

In the 1970s, members of the Bunong ethnic group fled from Cambodia into Vietnam to escape the war. They were placed into refugee camps where missionaries converted some of the traditionally animist Bunong to Christianity. Upon returning to Cambodia, they took

their new faith with them, evangelising to others. But some stayed behind in Vietnam and today 75 per cent of Bunong people living in Vietnam identify as Christian.

In the 1960s, missionaries had started translating the Scriptures into Bunong, but the work was disrupted by the war and the manuscripts lost. This meant that for a long time Bunong Christians could only access the Word of God in Vietnamese or Rade.

Today, all of that has changed. In 2016, the Bunong people received the New Testament. Over the next seven years a team of translators worked on translating the Old Testament. Local communities played an active role, being involved in checking, and editing the text, with the work completed by March 2023.

On 19<sup>th</sup> August 2023, a celebration was held at Bu Dak church in the Central Highlands, where the Bunong people received the full Bible in their heart language for the first time. The result is a Bible which uses the Bunong language in a natural way employing clear and simple words which will be cherished by the community for years to come.



Dear Friends of Bible mission,

Welcome to the Spring issue of the Word at Work. Since we last spoke, I have had the opportunity to attend the United Bible Societies (UBS) World Assembly in Egmond an Zee, the Netherlands. The United Bible Societies was formed out of a meeting of Bible Societies in 1946 in post-war Europe. Today, these World Assemblies remain crucial to the life of the UBS Fellowship, bringing together Bible Society leaders from all over the world to plan for the future.

The last World Assembly was held in 2016 and since that time a lot has changed in the world, including a global pandemic, economic crises, natural disasters, and war and conflict. The theme of the assembly was "God's Word: Reconciliation for the World". The Fellowship reaffirmed its commitment to the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18 – 20), with a focus on carrying out Bible translation, distribution, Bible engagement, creation care and serving diaspora communities.

Bible Society New Zealand supports the Bible Translation Roadmap which aims to complete 1,200 Bible translations by 2038. In this issue of Word at Work, you can read Bible translation stories which highlight the challenges and ultimately the joy that a new Bible translation brings to communities.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a big impact on the mission financially, forcing us to review the way we carry out the mission going forward. Despite that your loyal support has enabled us to continue helping to make the Bible accessible to everyone and encouraging interaction with it. But we do pray that you will commit to the mission financially enabling it to move forward both domestically and globally.

Thank you once again for everything that you do to support the mission and God bless you!



A blue ink handwritten signature of Neels Janse van Rensburg.

Neels Janse van Rensburg  
CEO



**An young  
Bunong christian man  
with his Bible.**

PHOTO CREDIT: ©QUAN PHAN



# SPANISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES CELEBRATE BIBLE MONTH

---

In August and September 2023, Bible Societies from throughout the Spanish-speaking world celebrated Bible Month with various activities, including conferences and webinars.

## THE BEAR BIBLE

These Bible Societies value having access to the Word of God in their own language, something which they attribute to a rich heritage of Bible translation, which began when the first Spanish Bible was published in 1569. This Bible had been translated by Casiodoro de Reina, while he was living in exile during the Protestant Reformation. His Bible translation was placed on the Index of

**Young people from a Costa Rican Christian school reading the Scriptures during Bible Month.**

PHOTO CREDIT: ©NICHOLAS LAMMÉ

Prohibited books by the Spanish Inquisition's authorities where it remained for four hundred years.

But despite this setback his translation survived. It became known as the "Biblia del Oso" or the "Bear Bible" because of the front page, which showed a bear grasping for honey in the trunk of a tree. In 1602, the "Biblia del Oso" was revised by his student, Cipriano de Valera, with another fifteen revisions being undertaken by Bible Societies between 1708 and 1995. Today, the Reina Valera translation is the most widely circulated Bible in the Spanish-speaking world.

## LATIN AMERICA

In Latin American countries, the Bible is held in such high regard that some countries, such as Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras, hold an official commemoration day.

"As a self-proclaimed Christian country, we

rejoice in having a National Bible Day by legislative decree," says Jorges Gomez, Head of the Bible Society of Honduras.

The Peruvian Bible Society has been participating in Bible Month since 2020. "We originally planned to hold webinars on biblical topics every Friday in September, but the response has been so positive we have continued holding them weekly, with audiences of up to 1,000 people," says Bible Society Head, Pablo Gutierrez.

"Bible Month reminds us of the importance of reading the Bible every day," says Julio Splinker, Head of the Bible Society of Mexico. For Mr Splinker, Bible Month brings many opportunities to evangelise, but also to encourage people to value, mediate on, and to share the Word of God.

**Members of the Bible Society and Te Wānanga Ihorangi's teams at the special launch event held on September 11, 2023, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Auckland. The event featured a special reading of Luke's Gospel, accompanied by taonga puoro, waiata, and haka, creating an immersive experience that embodies Māori culture and its deep-rooted connection to the Word of God.**

PHOTO CREDIT: ©BIBLE SOCIETY NEW ZEALAND

# MĀORI AUDIO BIBLE LAUNCH

On 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023, a new partnership was launched between Bible Society New Zealand and Te Wānanga Ihorangi, a faith-based Māori language school, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Auckland. The aim of the partnership is to produce the first complete Māori Audio Bible, which will give Māori people better access to the Bible in their heart language. It is seen as an opportunity to not only increase the availability of Scripture to Māori, but to encourage engagement with it. It will also help to drive the ongoing revitalisation of the Māori language and the reach of Te Paipera Tapu (The Holy Bible).

The project encompasses all 66 books of the Bible. As the books are finished, they will be released to communities giving them an opportunity to provide feedback and allowing milestones to be celebrated collectively. The end of the project in three years time will be marked with a big celebration for all those involved.





**Harvey Satewas Gabriel, centre, with the Mohawk Bible, with Rt. Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, moderator of the United Church of Canada, left, and Rev. Dr. Rupen Das, right, president of the Canadian Bible Society, which helped Harvey with translation and linguistic support and funding.**

PHOTO CREDIT: ©HENRY VANDERSPEK

## **THE MOHAWK BIBLE - ONE MAN'S LEGACY**

On September 9th, 2023, members of the Mohawk community, who reside in Canada and the U.S., celebrated an important milestone when they received the full Bible in their heart language, at the Kanesatake United Church, in Caledonia, Ontario. For principal translator, Harvey Satewas Gabriel, who has worked on the translation for decades, the new Bible represents a lifelong journey of passion for the revitalisation of the Mohawk language, family, and faith.

In 1715, the first portions of the Bible were published in Mohawk. In 1880, Harvey's great-grandfather, Sosé Onasakenrat, also known as Rev. Joseph Swan, completed the translation of the Gospels into Mohawk. These matters remained until the 1950s, when 17-year-old Harvey went to church with his mother and heard the Scriptures read in English.

Harvey went home and asked his mother, Gladys Jacobs, why there was no Bible in Mohawk. That conversation sparked a

decades-long passion that culminated in the publication of the Mohawk Bible.

Both Harvey and his mother, Gladys, have fought to retain the Mohawk language. For Gladys, it began as a child when she was placed into a residential school where she was forbidden to speak Mohawk. These were boarding schools which were designed to isolate indigenous children from their language and culture and assimilate them into the dominant Canadian culture.

But Gladys and her sister and other children refused to give up their language, and they spoke it among themselves. "If they got caught, they would be put in a dark room for a very long time. They never got caught," says Harvey. Gladys passed on her passion for the Mohawk language to Harvey and his siblings, who are fluent speakers.

In the 1980s, Harvey started translating Bible passages into Mohawk when he was asked to do readings at his church. In the 1990s, he was invited to join a translation team. Together, they translated 2 Corinthians, Esther, Ruth, and Proverbs into Mohawk, before disbanding. Harvey continued, working evenings and weekends before his retirement.

When asked what motivated him, Harvey's reply is simple: "language." Harvey, who has also written a Mohawk dictionary, believes that translating the Word of God into his language means that it can never be lost. Already, young people who are learning Mohawk have told him that they are eager to use the Bible as a resource.

Now 83-years-old, it was a special moment for Harvey when he unveiled the long-awaited Mohawk Bible at Kanestatke Church. But when he was recognised for his work, he was quick to humble himself. "It is not my word. It is not about me, it is about Him," he says. The event was attended by Mohawk community members, church leaders, Six Nations officials, and Bible Society leaders.



To watch a video of Harvey speaking about the Mohawk translation, please scan this QR code.

## IN MEMORIAM

Bible Society has learned of the passing of the following friends. Gifts towards the work of Bible Society's mission have been made in their memory. Their work of love goes on.

Lesieli Niuvaio  
Iris Naudè  
Charles and Melva Summers  
Lyn Harrison  
Leonard Smith  
Doug and Losa (Rosie) Corrin  
Estate of Mrs Amy Helen Anne Bates  
Valerie C Johnston  
Te R Puketapu  
Maria L Chua  
Mable F Goonetilleke

## A GIFT IN YOUR WILL

To find out more visit:  
[www.biblesociety.org.nz/bequest](http://www.biblesociety.org.nz/bequest)

# BIBLES DISTRIBUTED IN UKRAINE

With the onset of the war in Ukraine last year, the distribution of Bibles began to surge. In 2022, over half a million Scriptures were distributed to people within Ukraine, including 109,965 Bibles and 133,088 New Testaments. Furthermore, around 20 Bible Societies distributed 220,000 Scriptures to Ukrainian refugees scattered throughout Europe.

"The war is still going on and may last longer," said a Bible Society of Ukraine representative. "There are so many people who still need to hear His voice through the Bible. They need to receive comfort and healing, to remain sane and humane and, ultimately, to receive salvation. It is our prayer that he continues to empower His Church here, and His servants, and that He gives us the resources, strength, and protection, so that His Word is spread among as many people as possible in the months to come," he said.

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Would you prayerfully consider making a gift to help support the Bible Translation Roadmap and bring the Bible to people in their heart language?



FACEBOOK



INSTAGRAM



YOUTUBE



WEBSITE

[www.biblesociety.org.nz](http://www.biblesociety.org.nz)

## THE LAST WORD

*Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. 1 Corinthians 14:10 (NIV)*

0800 424 253 ▪ [www.biblesociety.org.nz](http://www.biblesociety.org.nz)  
[bibles@biblesociety.org.nz](mailto:bibles@biblesociety.org.nz) ▪ November 2023  
Charities registration number: CC22121