

HEARING *and* READING THE WORD OF GOD.

Andrea Fleming, Partner Engagement and Communications Manager, uncovers the past, updates us on the present and looks to the future of the life-changing Bible translation project in Papua New Guinea.



Global Interaction’s work began in Papua New Guinea (PNG) nearly seventy years ago. While we acknowledge the very real social challenges the local church is responding to, we celebrate that today more than 90% of people in PNG identify as Christian. The Australian Baptist community has contributed to this remarkable movement and today there are over 80,000 Baptist believers who regularly worship across the nation, mainly in the Western Highlands.

Fifty years ago, in 1968, Vision magazine recorded concerns, noting the ongoing prevalence of witchcraft and the spiritual bondage of the local people. Speaking of the impact on new believers, Global Interaction representative Rev. K M Shakespeare wrote, “... with the limited amount of truth that these Christians have, and the strong pressure brought to bear from the non-Christian members of their tribes, it is very difficult for these Christians to stand firm for Jesus Christ.” He closed his article asking Australian Baptists to pray constantly for the Kyaka Enga people.

Quite likely, the result of our collective prayers sowed the seeds for the team in PNG to grow and for faith-based ministry to flourish. In the following decades, Australian Baptists in partnership with local people, worked to translate the Bible into the heart language of the Kyaka Enga people.

Knowing that the Living Word of God speaks to empower believers, we can only imagine what it meant for the local faith community, to not only be hearing the Good News, but to be reading it for themselves!

In subsequent years, copies of the original translation of the Bible were widely distributed but since then, many have been lost or water damaged. Recognising that there were very few copies left in circulation, with none available to buy, in 2015 Global Interaction partnered with The Baptist Union of PNG and promoted a Bible Translation Project. This project raised \$70,000 and began the updating and revision of the original shorter Bible. The updated translation is now in its final stages of completion.

One member of the Bible revision team is Pauline Longley. Pauline served God in Papua New Guinea from 1972 and then alongside her husband Andrew from 1985- 2001. Pauline and Andrew’s heart for, and understanding of, the Kyaka Enga people contributed to the long legacy of Australian Baptist work in PNG. With Andrew passing in 2015, Pauline has continued their commitment, working with the team to revise the original translation into the contemporary language of the Kyaka Enga people.

The translation team includes; Susan Trapu and Henry Yalu from the Baptist Theological College, Traimya Kambipi a highly respected elder statesman of the Baptist church, former translator Kondopibngi Kupwa, Albert Kukiwa a Baptist Pastor from Mt Hagen and Heather Mapusiya, daughter of one of the original translators, who is a trained teacher and literacy facilitator.

Pauline, together with Sally Burton, former cross-cultural worker and field linguist, has recently returned from a time in PNG working with the team. She reported that 75% of the New Testament has been reviewed and significant progress has now been made on the Old Testament. When Sally and Pauline return in July they aim to work with Traimya, Albert and Heather to finalise the review.

On behalf of the Australian Baptist team members involved with the translation including Sally Burton and Geoff Cramb, Pauline is encouraging Australian Baptists to again dig deep and give generously to support the next phase of the project to raise \$15,000 for the printing and distribution of 2000 copies.

Pauline shares, “What a privilege it has been to work with such a committed and focused team, striving to make God’s Word available to the Kyaka Enga speakers of the Western Highlands. As one member of the team shared when reading God’s Word in their language, ‘... it speaks more clearly.’ ”

The team have commented on how relevant the teaching is today for the Enga church facing similar issues to the early church. God’s Word is definitely relevant for 2018. Interest in the project is growing and as soon as the publication is ready for print and distribution people are expressing their desire to purchase a copy of the Bible, one that they can fully understand!

To hear the Word of God and to read the Word of God in your heart language is a different experience of the Truth. Together let’s give thanks to God. We have seen God’s spirit move in PNG, we have witnessed the development of faith communities, we have journeyed with and mentored local faith leaders and we as Australian Baptists have contributed to the Word of God being available in the heart language of the people.

This is Global Interaction’s vision for all communities in which we work! It takes time, but it does and is happening. Amen.

Top left: Men in Papua New Guinea. Photo taken by Geoff Cramb.
Top right: Kyaka Enga woman with Bible. Photo taken by Geoff Cramb.

For more information and updates on this project, or to give towards the publication and distribution, visit: www.globalinteraction.org.au/PNGPublication



Bottom left: Henry and Susan, Bible translation team members. Photo taken by Geoff Cramb.

Bottom right: The Bible translation team, including Pauline and Sally.

