

# WORDS FOR LIFE

WYCLIFFE BIBLE TRANSLATORS



## the God story through deaf hands

# the UK story

*From Eden To Eternity*, Saltmine's dramatic overview of the Bible, toured 15 churches in England, Scotland and N Ireland in March. Three thousand people were encouraged to treasure the Bible and share it with others, and donations were received to start a project in Nigeria and cover the cost of translating Matthew, Romans, Galatians and Ephesians.

Font developers have been working on two fonts for Asian languages. These will be used in July and November to typeset the New Testament in two languages with 25 million speakers.

Members of a church in Kilmacollm, Scotland, which has been supporting the Ahanta project in Ghana, will join in the celebrations at the launch of the New Testament in September.

People will be able to find out about Bible translation at Imagine (Aberdeen, July), Worldwide (Bangor, August) and Mission 21 (Bath, November).

The typesetting of the Chumburung New Testament for 70,000 people in Ghana was going well until recently, when typesetter Steve Pillinger was incapacitated by serious back trouble.

For 50+ years, thousands of researchers have used and contributed to Ethnologue, the encyclopedia of languages. The 16th edition, typeset at the Wycliffe Centre, lists 6,909 languages, including 163 previously unregistered ones, and will be published in July. [ethnologue.com](http://ethnologue.com)

Some of the 24 buildings at the Wycliffe Centre used by 6 Christian organisations for training, accommodation and international administration need refurbishment. Requirements vary from new boilers and roof repairs to a coat of paint and new furniture.

Last summer, 7 young people from N Ireland went to work with the Oku project in Cameroon. One literacy student thanked them profusely: "We didn't realise we were important; we thought we were in a lost place. But to see you coming from so far away raises our hearts so much. Blessed be the day that I open and read the Oku Bible for myself!" Watch the short video! ([wycliffe.org.uk/oku08](http://wycliffe.org.uk/oku08)) This summer three Engage teams are helping with language projects in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Cambodia. Next summer it could be YOU! [wycliffe.org.uk/engage](http://wycliffe.org.uk/engage)





A church group from Crawley are visiting Cameroon in July, to encourage the Aghem language team, to see them in action, and then to report back to the church and encourage them to keep supporting the project through the InFocus programme. Now 54 UK churches are supporting 27 language projects through InFocus. [wycliffe.org.uk/infocus](http://wycliffe.org.uk/infocus)

The European Training Programme at the Wycliffe Centre is in full swing. People from 34+ countries have taken courses in the last two years and numbers have been very encouraging. Now they are now working in 40+ countries. [wycliffe.org.uk/events](http://wycliffe.org.uk/events)

## love story

I remember when my wife Sue and I first met, we spent hours and hours talking to each other about our families, friends and hopes. We didn't share lists of facts and figures about our lives; we told stories, because that's what people do when they want to get to know one another. When you tell stories, you convey factual information but you also reveal so much more. Stories show our emotions, our commitments and our passions in a way that simple facts never can.

This is why God has given us the Bible in the way that he has. It isn't a theological text book, or a list of rules and regulations, though it contains both theology and rules. It is first and foremost a story: a story of how God loves his creation and how through the cross he is reconciling mankind to himself. The Bible doesn't just tell us that God is love, it shows us the extent of his love in a story which covers thousands of years of heartache and faithfulness in response to human rejection and sin.

Though the definitive revelation of the Bible is complete, the story still goes on. When people read and understand the Scriptures they find their place in the story as they are drawn into a relationship with the God of Abraham, Moses and Jesus. It is our huge privilege in Wycliffe to retell the Bible story in other languages through translation and to see people grasp the reality of the message for themselves. God's message of love, translated into languages and lives.

This edition of Words for Life is about telling the story. We hope that it encourages you as you see how your prayers, gifts and support have all played a part in Bible translation projects around the world. We also hope that, as part of all this, you will have a greater vision of your place in God's eternal story.

**Eddie Arthur**

*Executive Director*



see **Call to Prayer** 14 July

# life story

## the last shall be first

Translating the Bible for the Deaf is a top priority, says Geoffrey Hunt, leader of Wycliffe's sign language team.

Deaf people prefer 'Deaf' (capital 'D') to emphasise their distinct cultural and linguistic identity, based on their sign languages, which communicate the ideas and values of their culture.

"They're the last people to hear about anything, including spiritual realities. I've heard them described as the most unevangelised group in the world."

Sadly, he says, only about 2% of the world's 20 million Deaf have believed the gospel, largely due to the lack of accessible Scriptures.

But why can't they read the Scriptures in the national language?

"For one thing, it's not their language," Geoffrey says. "Secondly, the printed words represent sounds that Deaf people have never heard, so it would be like learning a set of telephone numbers for each concept. Reading is very hard for the Deaf. Deaf children in

American schools, for example, mostly end up with a low reading level."

In Italy in 1880, it was decided that Deaf children

should be taught to lip read and to speak Italian, which they could never hear, in order to integrate them into the hearing world.

"It took them a hundred years to realise that this doesn't work," Geoffrey says. "Integration efforts have helped create the animosity Deaf people often feel towards the dominant hearing society."

Unfortunately, the Deaf are among the last people to benefit from Bible translation. While Wycliffe personnel have worked among hearing people for 70+ years, they only started focussing attention on sign languages in the late 1980s.

Following early research and translation in Mexico, Spain and Colombia, a sign language emphasis was added to the SIL training courses at the University of North Dakota from the mid-1990s. Survey of sign languages has started in the Americas and Asia. Partnerships are developing with DOOR International, the Southern Baptist International Missions Board and United Bible Societies.

Watch this short video showing the impact of Bible translation in sign languages:  
[wycliffe.org.uk/signlanguages](http://wycliffe.org.uk/signlanguages)

## 230 and counting

According to Geoffrey, every nation seems to have about 2 sign languages on average. “We know of about 230, but there could be over 400 altogether.” To clarify the number, more language survey is needed. Six Wycliffe members are surveying in the Americas, Africa and Asia. The first Deaf Wycliffe member is preparing to do survey in the Pacific.

Other Deaf members are applying for various sign language-related roles. It is challenging, however, to make a large, hearing-based organisation like Wycliffe “Deaf-friendly,” Geoffrey says. It may be best to second these people to Deaf-run agencies like DOOR International.

Wycliffe could use 30 more workers fairly soon, including hearing personnel who know a sign language well and have experience of relating to the Deaf community.

“We need people who can empower the Deaf to do the translation, so that the Deaf are the leaders, with hearing people facilitating what the Deaf want to happen.”

This includes administration, funding, translation aids, training and at least 50 translation consultants.

## precious

Ultimately, though, Bible translation in sign language is about helping the Deaf understand how God sees them. Geoffrey cites two Bible passages:

Firstly, God’s challenge to Moses at the burning bush, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute?”

“It is so important for the Deaf to know that God made them, that they aren’t just an accident,” Geoffrey comments.

Secondly, when Jesus healed a Deaf man (Mark 7:31-35), he took him aside by himself, almost the only time he healed someone privately.

“One—Jesus had time for the Deaf person. That’s very important,” Geoffrey points out. “Two—he took him away from the crowd. When Deaf people are among crowds, they are really confused. It is important that they can come away and be separate.

“These two stories give the Deaf a sense of value. They are valued people.”

And if God values the Deaf, he certainly wants to speak to them in their heart language.



*Father, help the Deaf and hearing people who are seeking to overcome linguistic, technical, cultural and spiritual barriers, so that other Deaf people will see your word. Isaiah 29:18*



see **Call to Prayer** | July

## 3D animation

Steve and Dianne Parkhurst are involved in translating Scripture into two sign languages, Spanish and Catalanian. A significant step forward occurred when they met Jose Ignacio Bonacasa (“Nacho”) in Madrid.

“Can we translate the Bible?” he wondered. “Is it do-able? Can you help us?”

Nacho lost his hearing at age two and spent most of his youth at residential Deaf schools. One of them provided Saturday Bible classes that instilled some important truths in young Nacho.

After leaving school, Nacho worked for an architect for 30 years. Then he was asked

about working with Steve on Bible translation in Spanish Sign Language.

“I thought, ‘I’m not very

clever; how can I do this? Plus, working with a Protestant...!’” he jokes. “But we liked each other, so we started working together. I didn’t know what to do, but I said, ‘God, it’s your work,’ and kept going.”

Nacho gave time to the project in the afternoons after his regular job.

They started with the Christmas story. Many of the signs they needed had fallen out of regular use, so first of all they needed to build a vocabulary. By discussing with older Deaf people and doing other research they gathered key terms in sign—such as “star town” for Bethlehem.

“I put tons and tons of time into it; I got tired and frustrated,” says Nacho.

The Christmas story was published by the Spanish Bible Society as a 46-minute DVD. The SBS wants translations to be acceptable to both Catholics and Protestants.

Therefore, since using a signer from either of these groups would limit its use in the other group, the Christmas DVD was produced as a 3D animation.

Steve videoed himself signing the translation, and then created an

avatar of Luke the apostle, who narrates the story. It was incredibly meticulous work. With delicate precision, hands and arms were adjusted. Transitions were smoothed. Timing was perfected. Movements of eyebrows, glances and mouth shapes—all were nudged appropriately into position. Steve worked for seven months to animate 152 verses.

“It took about eight hours to do one or two verses,” he says.

The work paid off. The DVD, which also includes an introduction to the Bible, maps, a dictionary of names and key terms, was very well received.

“Over many years of working



with Deaf people I have done everything I possibly could to make Scripture understandable by explaining things in sign language,” said one hearing priest. “But I have never been able to make a successful jump beyond the printed Spanish Scriptures. Now they have the Scriptures in their own language and that barrier has finally been broken.”

Said another, “The important thing was how much interest and discussion it generated.”

Nacho’s Deaf friends say, “Give us more! Where’s the rest? All we’ve got is the Christmas story. Hurry up!”

And Nacho adds, “The Deaf need to be saved. They are hungry and don’t know Jesus yet. It doesn’t matter where you are, the Bible’s got to be in sign language.”

Animation is now seen as the way to publish sign language Scriptures in Spain and other countries. In politically or religiously sensitive situations, for example, people may not want to be pictured for fear of persecution.

Producing the DVD also showed the need for specialised software that any Deaf community can use to do high quality, 3D-animated sign language Bible translation with less time and struggle.



## worldwide

South Asia has a high incidence of deafness. Deaf people are often shunned by their families, discriminated-against in society and denied employment. Only about 2% of Deaf children have an opportunity to attend school. In 2008, Wycliffe India assigned an Indian couple to work with Deaf people to translate the New Testament into a sign language in India.

More surveyors are needed to identify sign language translation needs in India and elsewhere. One Wycliffe member has surveyed languages in nine Asian countries and translation has started in one of them. Another Wycliffe member, who is Deaf herself, is preparing to survey sign languages in Papua New Guinea.

*Pray for the efforts of a team at JAARS, Wycliffe’s technical arm in N Carolina, to create such software, with input from Steve and others with experience.*



see **Call to Prayer** / July



**Papua New Guinea:** During a teacher training course he was leading, Wionare visited the sick and prayed for them. Twice the sickness was due to sorcery, and the sorcerer came to laugh when prayer failed. However, the victims recovered! The third time this happened, he was convinced, trusted in Christ and destroyed his fetishes publicly. This fierce-looking man, a feared killer for 10 years, is now visibly changed and an enthusiastic member of the church and the community. Pray that God will protect and deliver all those who confront the kingdom of darkness.

# your story

**India.** Bible translation is in progress in 136 languages. The Bible has been translated into 69 languages and the New Testament into 62 languages. Translation is needed in up to 98 languages, and 66 languages still need to be surveyed to identify translation needs. Wycliffe India needs to grow about 300% in order to meet this huge challenge.

In May, colleagues in **Senegal** celebrated 25 years of language work in Senegal, Gambia and Guinea Bissau. Thirteen language groups now have a new sense of dignity. One person says, “No longer must we walk with the torch of another.” The NT has been completed in three languages and translation is under way in 20 out of 40 languages. Pray that the cordial relationships with the government and other partners will continue.

John Wycliffe finished translating the first English Bible in 1382. The 70,000 Deaf people in the **UK** have waited much longer. Work on the British Sign Language Bible started in 2007. Mark 1 – 8 has been translated and the whole Gospel should be available in 2011 in DVD format, website clips, PDA etc. Praise God for some funding via Spring Harvest 2009, and pray for the funds to keep the work going beyond this year. [bslbible.org.uk](http://bslbible.org.uk)

**Niger:** The Jesus Film in the Kanuri language was screened on national TV on Easter Sunday! “People are phoning me all the time.

‘C’est formidable!’ one member of the cast reported. Pray for many opportunities to show people the wonder of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection on their behalf.

**Colombia.** The Yuruti people live in 10 villages, with a slightly different dialect spoken in each one, but not different enough to require 10 Bible translations. The challenge is how to produce one version acceptable to all. Earlier this year, people from three villages checked a translation of Acts and agreed on the wording. Pray for continuing agreement as they press on, and that God’s word will speak to people’s hearts, bringing churches and communities together.

**Mexico** “Three years ago, I joined the Totonac translators,” says Jorge. “This opened a whole new world to me. I was like everyone else, just walking around in unbelief, blind, not knowing God’s word. Now I believe. I really like this stuff. You must apply what the Bible says, not just hear it.” Pray for the work and witness of Jorge and his friend Tobi, who has now joined the team and is doing well.

*see Call to Prayer (enclosed), our daily prayer guide. One of many people who receives it says: “Call to Prayer is so exciting! Surely it will not be long before every tribe and tongue has heard the good news!” To order it regularly, go to [www.org.uk/pray](http://www.org.uk/pray) or tick the box on the response form enclosed.*

## machetes for romans

Four translation teams in Uganda were struggling over Romans, so a consultant went to give them some training. He helped them to understand the meaning of the text and then re-phrase it in their languages. But one of them asked, "Can you show us how to follow the same principles you use? Give us machetes for cutting this jungle!" So they practised using the study resources they had to study Romans 1 – 5 in depth, and by the end of the workshop they felt confident that they could use their machetes to finish Romans on their own!

Continued on [wycliffe.org.uk/romans](http://wycliffe.org.uk/romans)



## words for life direct

From now on you can choose to receive Words for Life either in its current printed form or as an electronic version sent directly to your in-box.

Words for Life is an extremely successful publication, with around 18,000 copies of each issue being distributed. We try to cram in as much as possible about Wycliffe's work around the world as well as sharing some stories from closer to home. It is a big job and we hope that you like the result.

Now we are making Words for Life available as both a printed and an electronic publication. From now on, subscribers can choose to receive Words for Life as an e-mail.

We appreciate that e-mail is not a perfect solution for everyone. Many

people give Words for Life to friends and family or circulate copies around their church, for which a paper version is essential. But people who opt for the e-mail version will release resources that can be used by other Wycliffe projects.

We hope that you continue to enjoy reading Words for Life and that the stories give you a glimpse of what is going on in the world of Wycliffe.

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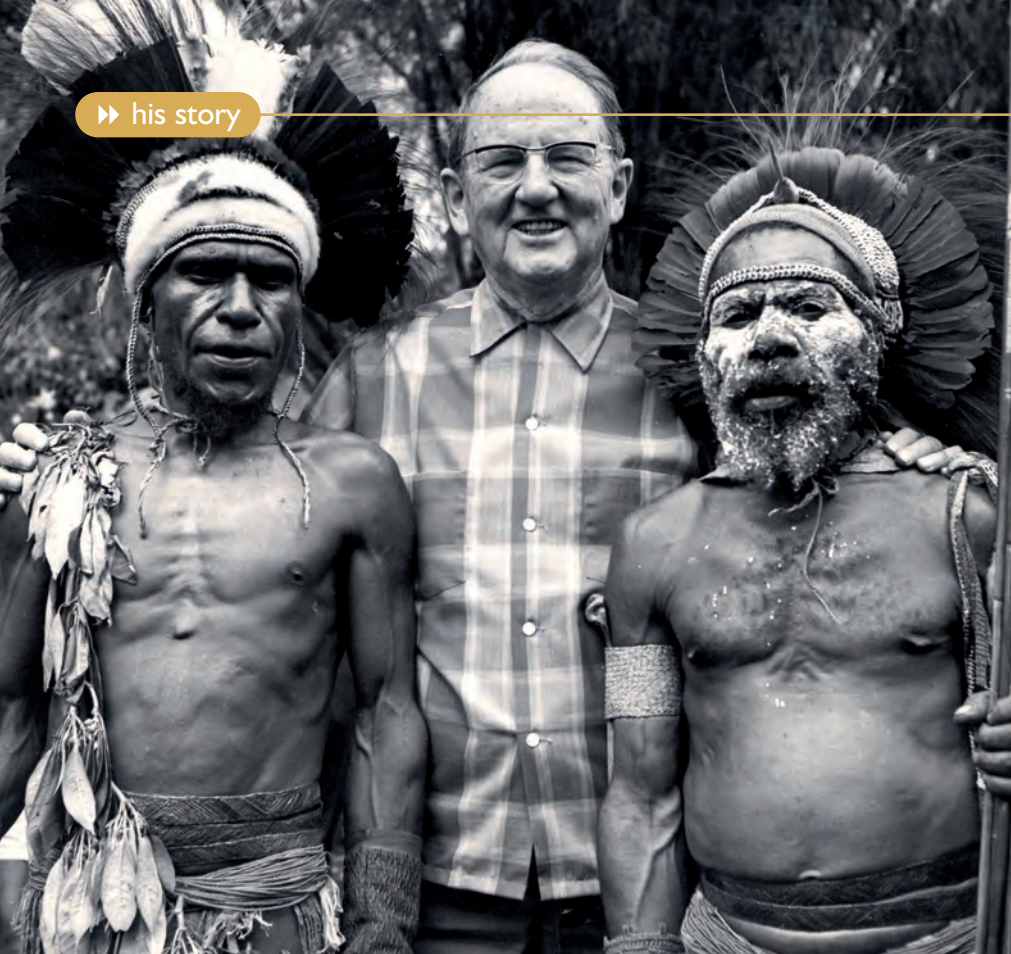
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If you have any comments, or would like to get in touch with Words for Life, please contact us at [askus@wycliffe.org](mailto:askus@wycliffe.org)

## lost languages

Wycliffe's language work brings many benefits to communities. Aside from Bible translation, our work also improves literacy levels, strengthens cultural identity and enables the communication of vital information such as AIDS prevention. Dave Pearson speaks about this and more in a recent interview, which can be listened to on the Wycliffe website. [wycliffe.org.uk/lost](http://wycliffe.org.uk/lost)





Cameron Townsend with two Papua New Guinean chiefs

John Wycliffe, translator of the first English Bible in 1382.

The first linguistics course in the UK was held in 1953 and the first trained workers from the UK set off for South America. Numbers grew and in 1964 Wycliffe UK was incorporated. Other national organisations followed in Canada, Australia, Germany, Korea... Today there are over 100 organisations linked with Wycliffe.

As numbers kept growing, the work diversified into related areas like language survey, literacy, education, non-print media, non-roman scripts and sign languages. Wycliffe Associates and, later, JAARS were set up to help with computing, building, transport, aviation and radio communications.

The first Wycliffe personnel in Asia arrived in the Philippines in 1953, then in Papua New Guinea (1956), Africa (1962) with John Bendor-Samuel as director, and eventually in the former Soviet Union in the 1990s.

In 1999 Wycliffe committed itself to the bold vision of seeing Bible translation started in every language that needs it by 2025. This requires greater partnership, more prayer, more funds, and more training of local people to take ownership of translation where they are.

Wycliffe members have helped to translate the NT or Bible into 721+ languages. Work is under way in about 2,000 languages and needs to start in some 2,000 others.

[wycliffe.org.uk/history](http://wycliffe.org.uk/history)

# the story so far

In 1917 Cameron Townsend, a 19 year-old American, travelled to Guatemala to sell Spanish Bibles. Few of the Cakchiquel Indians he met could speak Spanish, let alone read it, and one man asked, "If your God is so great, why can't he speak my language?"

So he started learning Cakchiquel, and after ten years' work the Indians were delighted to have the New Testament in their own language!

Leaving an emerging church in the hands of trained local leaders, he faced the challenge of other languages without the Scriptures. More workers would be needed, so in 1934 he set up a training programme, where new workers could acquire the knowledge and skills needed to translate the Scriptures.

As numbers grew, an organisational framework was needed, so in 1942 Wycliffe Bible Translators was formed, named after

*We'll praise him for all that is past  
And trust him for all that's to come!*

# till the whole world knows

It is always dangerous to make predictions, so it is hard to say exactly what Wycliffe will look like in the years to come, but we can identify some of the trends that will shape our organisation and our work.

## home trends

The most obvious change which will affect us at home is the increasingly secular nature of our society. This touches us in two ways. As the percentage of committed Christians in Europe declines, there are fewer people who are likely to support the work of Bible translation by praying, giving or going. At the same time, there is a growing hostility to the Christian message and to those who profess it. This could make life very difficult for organisations like Wycliffe which are dedicated to sharing God's message of love.

There are regulatory changes which have an impact on us too. Increasing scrutiny of charities and post 9/11 money-laundering laws

mean that we are faced by more and more red tape. Now these are good things and we pride ourselves on our professionalism and integrity in handling money, but staying on the right side of the regulations is an increasing drain on both our finances and time.

## world trends

The situation in many parts of the world is the opposite of Europe; churches are growing and people are coming to faith in huge numbers. Our challenge, then, is to know how to help these growing churches so that they can have access to the Scriptures themselves as well as reaching out to others. One fascinating effect of the changes in the world church is that African and Asian churches in the UK are bucking the national trend and growing rapidly, raising the possibility of us recruiting from the diaspora.

Whatever else happens, we can be sure that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be honoured (1 Thess 3:1). Whatever pressure the world and society throw at us, Christ will build his church around the world and people from every tongue, tribe and nation will come to worship him. As Christians we have the amazing privilege of working with him, to the glory of his name.

## I'm no good at languages!

Bible translation does call for linguists, but many other skills are needed too.

**Do you enjoy working with computers?** Help meet the IT needs of language projects worldwide.

**Can you teach?** Mission schools everywhere need people like YOU!

**Are you well organised?** Name almost any country and you could help in admin or management.

**Do numbers make you tick?** You could use your skills to channel funds where they are needed.

**Do you love adventure and meeting people?** You could help language communities explore their need for Bible translation.

[wycliffe.org.uk/vacancies](http://wycliffe.org.uk/vacancies)





# The Wycliffe CENTRE

**“a great haven of refreshment and encouragement!”**

This was the verdict of one church group after holding their retreat at the Wycliffe Centre.

Located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty between London and Oxford, the Centre can accommodate up to 160 guests and attracts 80–90 groups in a year.

**By holding an event at the Wycliffe Centre you will be supporting Bible translation around the world**

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