

Serving through sending

Wycliffe
Bible
Translators

How the local church
can support mission
partners serving God
in Bible translation
worldwide



'Our sending church has shared the journey and the vision with us. So our work has very much been a ministry of the church.'

'We feel very much part of our home church, very prayed for and cared for. That has been foundational for us. We feel very blessed.'

Timothy* and Anna*, serving with Wycliffe in Southeast Asia

*names changed for security reasons

Cover photo: A Keliko woman holds the Keliko New Testament at the launch in Uganda. The Keliko people are from South Sudan but because of war in their country they have been living in a refugee camps in Uganda for many years. At the launch of the New Testament, Bishop Seme Nigo, a Keliko translator said: 'Thank you, thank you, thank you to God, because this New Testament will now speak to the hearts of the people. Hallelujah!'

A world where everyone can know Jesus through the Bible.

That is the vision of Wycliffe Bible Translators.

1 in 5 people don't yet have the Bible in the language that speaks to them best, which significantly hinders the growth of the worldwide church. But when people have the Bible churches grow, and in some places are established for the first time. And your church, through sending people to serve God in the ministry of Bible translation, plays a key role in creating a world where everyone can know Jesus through the Bible.

Thank you that your church already is, or is considering, playing a role in the worldwide ministry of Bible translation. Wycliffe's desire is to serve your church well. We want to help and resource you as you support and care for the people you are sending to serve in Bible translation ministry.

When my family lived in Kenya, where I served training local church leaders, the support and prayers of our sending church made such a difference to us. This meant that our home church was a crucial part of our ministry in Kenya – and also that our work in Kenya was part of the ministry of our home church.

Also, as someone who has served as a church leader in the UK, I know the many pressures that church leaders are under, and the many demands on your time. So Wycliffe would love to be of help, and this booklet is designed to help you with practical, simple ideas for ways in which your church can support those you are sending to serve God in Bible translation.

The mission of God is primarily achieved through the church, so thank you for all that you are doing and for the role you are playing in the ministry of Bible translation.

May God bless you in your ministry,



James Poole Wycliffe Executive Director



PS There are also a lot of resources for your church at wycliffe.org.uk/churches, and we would also love to talk to you to see if there is anything else that we can do to support you in your important work – we would love to hear from you at: churches@wycliffe.org.uk

Before your mission partners go

There is a lot to think about and a lot to do as an overseas mission partner prepares to leave. It can be a stressful time leaving behind family, friends and familiar surroundings and stepping out into a very new situation.

You can share some of the load by listening, understanding, and praying for them during this time. You can also help with some of the practical details. Think about talking as a church about the following:



Prayer

Form a personal prayer group for your mission partner and publicise it around the church to encourage people to get involved in prayer partnership. Prayer is needed before they go, not just while they're away – it's so much better if prayer partners and mission partners can get to know one another before the mission partners leave.



Pastoral support

Talk with the mission partner about pastoral support. What will that look like while they are overseas? How will the church maintain a pastoral relationship with the mission partner?



Transport

Ask if they need help selling their car. And if they need to borrow a car to use between selling theirs and before they go.



Housing

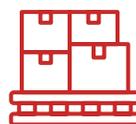
Arrange a place for them to stay once they have moved out of their accommodation and before they leave – it's easier to clear a house when you are not living in it.

Identify someone who could be a home-end contact regarding their house, who might help finding a tenant, and will also keep in touch with the agent.



Bunong Christians in church in Cambodia.

The Bunong New Testament translation is now complete, and the local church is growing. But Bunong church leaders have asked to have all of the Bible in their language, so translation of the Old Testament is beginning.



Storage

Check whether they would welcome somewhere to store some possessions, and find people able to help them move.



Understanding

Take time to listen; find out what your mission partners are excited about and what they may be fearful about. Develop a deeper understanding of what they think they are heading into.



Children

Arrange a playdate for their children to give mum and dad a break, or time for something they will find easier without the kids around!



Online scrapbook

New church members will arrive while the mission partners are away. Prepare an online scrapbook with family photos and background information, so new church members can begin to get to know the mission partners and to learn about their work.



Distributing news

Your mission partners will be sending home regular news in various formats. You could be involved in producing and distributing email or print versions of these updates, as appropriate, or making sure church small groups can all access video updates, and so on.

Serving from home

With the changes in working patterns, and through using online tools like Zoom, many mission partners now serve teams overseas while working from the UK or Ireland. Sometimes mission partners who have served overseas then come back to continue serving while based at home; other times, mission partners serve remotely without ever living overseas. The contribution that these people make to the progress of Bible translation – people who physically work from the UK and Ireland, but the impact of their work is overseas – is vital.

Some of the challenges of working remotely, and how churches can help, are:

| If your mission partner is based in the UK or Ireland, have a good chat with them about what they are doing and how working from here works, in order to help the wider church membership understand the challenges, and also the impact, of this way of working.

| Sometimes people working like this will sense that others feel they are not a 'proper' mission partner, since they are living in the UK or Ireland. Financial support can sometimes be

cut when mission partners move back to the UK or Ireland, even though they may often be doing the same job. It helps if church members understand that their mission partners are still serving, just from a different location.

| Working remotely with people who are thousands of miles away can be a very lonely experience. If your church has office space, why not offer a desk to your mission partner, so they can have a sense of community with others?



Pastor James Shaine holds up the Lugwere New Testament in his church in Uganda.

Before the New Testament was translated, James said: 'Being a pastor of a church when you don't have a Bible in your language has been very difficult. It was hard to convince people to study the Bible. But when they are using their language it makes a difference.'

Now the Lugwere people are looking forward to having the complete Bible in their language.

Praying effectively

Prayer makes a difference. Prayer flows from our relationship with God and relationships need time and commitment. Instead of a hurried blanket blessing – 'Lord, please bless our mission partners' – it would be good to take time to think about those we pray for and time listening and talking to God. Everyone can pray, and all mission partners need a lot of people praying for them.



▲ Jérémie, who works with Wycliffe in Togo to help churches in using the translated Scriptures, prays at his church in Lomé.

Praying with understanding

The more we understand about someone's situation the easier it is to find the words to pray for them. Mission partners are human. Pray for their health, for their work, for their family, and for their ongoing awareness of God's love and power. Learn as much as you can about the work they are doing, the country where they are working and what they hope, with God's help, to achieve.

Praying as a church

Include a regular mission prayer slot in church services. With online tools like Zoom, mission partners may be able to play a part in church services and prayer events. Inform the church about the work they are partnering in by using some of the Wycliffe videos, posters and magazines. When people understand more about the work of your mission partners, then they are more likely to pray.

Praying as a group

There may be a mission prayer group in the church, or you may be able to start one. You could create a prayer support group for an individual or family, which will maintain good communication with 'their' Wycliffe mission partner, supporting them in a variety of personal, spiritual and practical ways. Or could the mission partner be linked to an established home group in the church as 'their' mission partner to pray for and support?

Praying as an individual

Encourage members of your church to include your mission partner in their regular times of prayer or in prayer and Bible study small groups. Often taking what we have learnt from studying the Bible, and then praying that for others, is a helpful way to encourage prayer. God speaks to us when we read the Bible, and we pray in response to what he has just said.

What are the most helpful things your sending church can do?



▲ Roman and Rebekah Mészároš

'Stay in touch! Send us the church newsletter (if you have one). Send us prayer emails. We want the relationship to go both ways. Connect us, or keep us connected, with a home group so that we're connected with a group that's small enough to know more personally and that we could easily meet with in person whenever we're visiting. If you're able to, stay in closer contact than the newsletters. There are often things that we don't put explicitly in a newsletter that we would appreciate church leaders knowing to support us in! We don't just need financial support, and often the non-financial support is what is most needed and most appreciated.'

Rebekah Mészároš
Serving in Tanzania from Rwanda

'One thing I would appreciate is some kind of photo gallery of who's who in our supporting churches, as a way of putting faces to names and keeping people in prayer, especially as people come and go from the church over the years.'

Matthew Harley
Serving in Nigeria from Liverpool



▲ Matthew teaching linguistics in Nigeria



▲ Katherine O'Donnell

'I feel well cared for by my supporting churches. What really helps is when they take the initiative in reaching out to me with a friendly message – things like not just replying to newsletters or sending official emails, but contacting me with personal "How are you?" kind of messages.'

Katherine O'Donnell
Serving in Tanzania

'One of the most helpful things that my churches have done with me is to set out clearly the expectations from both sides: what the church plans to do in terms of support, whether it be financial, personal or informational, and what I as the mission partner will do – for example, regular reports, newsletters and what types of interactions will be expected when I am back in the UK.'

Jo Clifford
Serving global audio Bible recording, app, website and video teams from Germany



▲ Jo Clifford



'As someone who has recently been through the process of being sent out, I am hugely grateful for the many people praying for me and those who are giving. Some of the other things that would be really helpful are: arranging an official commissioning before leaving, helping with practicalities when I'm returning to the UK, and looking out for ways to help and support me when I'm going through the difficulties of leaving and also re-entering.'

John Miller* Serving in Central Asia

While your mission partners are overseas

Anyone who has spent time away from home knows how good it feels to get a letter, email, or message, or hear a familiar voice on the phone. Imagine how it feels to have left everyone and everything and to be a stranger in a foreign country where new relationships have to be forged in a foreign language. For those back home, keeping in touch is an encouragement; for those overseas it can be a lifeline.



▲ Ifè pastor Kodya Odah learnt to read through literacy classes run by the Ifè translation team and through reading the Ifè New Testament. Kodya is now the pastor of a church in a village called Efofami in Togo. But something is missing in his ministry: 'I'm facing a big challenge in my ministry,' Kodya says. 'Since I can't speak or read French, I can't use the Old Testament. I am praying that God helps the translation team complete the Old Testament translation, so that we can have the whole Bible. It will really help me to be able to go through the Old Testament in my teaching.'

- | **Keep in touch** – ask for regular updates, including video clips or holding meetings by Zoom.
- | **Advocate for them in the church** – make sure the news they are sending gets out; 'introduce' them to new church staff and members.
- | **Look after the 'at home' concerns** – house rentals, preparation ahead of a home assignment (for example, finding and furnishing a house, information about schools), as what your mission partner can and can't do from where they are based will vary.
- | **Help elderly parents** – individual situations will vary widely. Sensitivity is the key and offers of help may be only gradually accepted. Letters or phone calls may be more appropriate than visits in some cases. Parents of mission partners may be missing the family; they may be glad of an opportunity to sometimes be in touch with people who are connected to the mission family and who care about them.
- | **Encourage children back home** – older children may be studying

at college or university in the home country. Being a substitute family for your mission partner's children may be an immense relief for the parents as well as a help to their children. Consistency is important, so plan a realistic level of sustained involvement.

- | **Don't forget children living overseas** – mission partners really appreciate it when you think of their children. You could provide educational materials, books, comics or DVDs not available where they are. Write to the whole family. Write to the children directly. Send news of their friends and their interests. Remember their birthdays. Ask your children to connect via an online game to the mission partner's children.
- | **Listen** – sometimes it's good for the mission worker to have a safe place to vent their frustrations. If this is you, or a small group in your church, maintain confidentiality and offer the kind of prayer and support that's appropriate coming from someone outside the situation.
- | **Encourage church members to send post if possible** – as old fashioned as 'real post' is, overseas it's like a gem. Encourage church members to tell those overseas about themselves, their families, work, church life, the nation, the weather, the economy, the football scores, anything that might be of interest. Send cartoons, jokes and quotations. Whatever you write, it says someone cares.

| **Produce reminders** – such as fridge magnets or postcards, to keep the face of the mission partner in people's view.

| **Recordings and videos** – send short greetings via video recordings, or newsy chats, to enable the overseas worker to see how your family is changing and how your children or grandchildren are growing.

| **Visiting** – first-hand experience of the work overseas is invaluable. A holiday with a difference? An extension to a business trip? Perhaps a group of you could get together and encourage one person to make the trip on behalf of all. Suggest the church puts money aside to send someone to visit.

| **If a member of the church is an accountant, their advice can be invaluable for people who are newly self-employed and also living overseas** – there are so many new things to learn for completing their tax returns. Would someone be willing to help them with this as part of their giving?

Zoom, Facetime, WhatsApp, whatever! Many overseas workers have reasonable internet or phone access. Try a live call in a church service. Or you might be able to record the conversation for your church or prayer group. Plan a few questions and keep an eye on the clock.

Security issues

As more of the work of Bible translation is now happening in places that are hostile to the gospel, there may be security issues about sharing information about your people overseas, especially online.

Please follow the security guidance from your mission partners overseas to protect them and those they are working with. Always check with them before sharing anything publicly, and especially online.



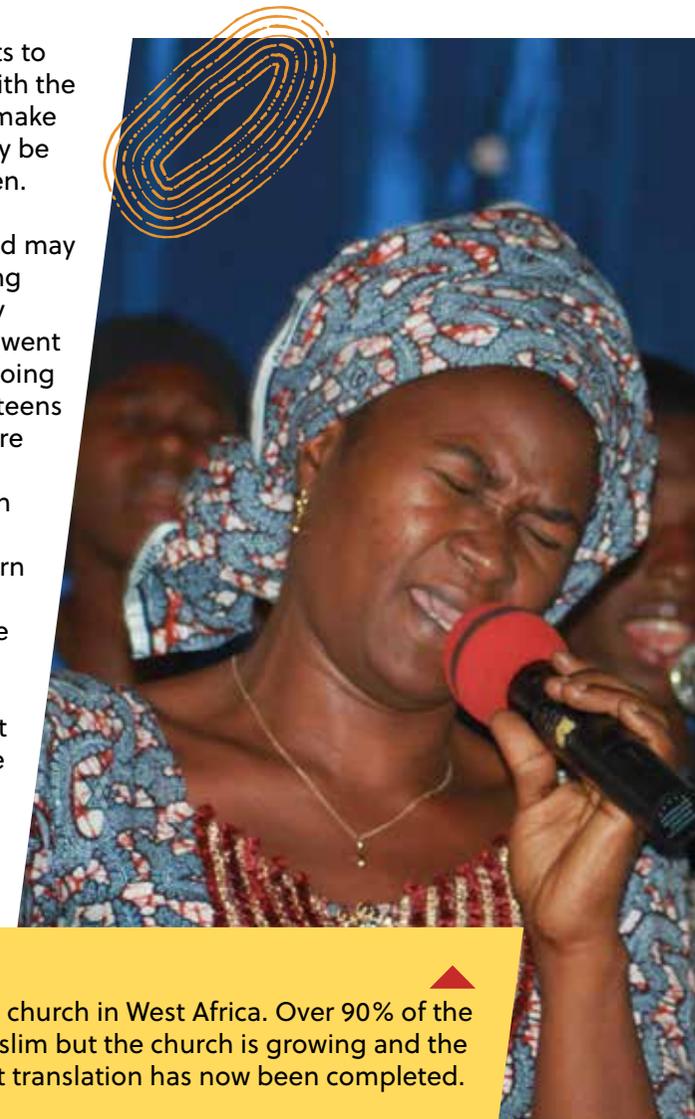
▲ Different generations in a Dobeel-speaking church in Indonesia read the book of Ruth together.

When mission partners return

Going to another country as a mission partner can be a difficult experience, but so can coming home. Having become accustomed to living in a new environment, there is 'reverse culture shock'; the returning overseas worker has to adjust back to life in an affluent consumer culture that has likely changed a lot, even in just a couple of years. This can be a real emotional roller coaster.

There are a lot of adjustments to make, and friends helping with the practical arrangements can make the transition easier. This may be especially true for the children.

Returning to the UK or Ireland may not actually feel like 'returning home' for the children if they were young when the family went overseas. For them it is like going overseas. Help children and teens understand the 'home' culture they will be coming back to. Talk about the latest trends in music, fashion, thinking, TV, politics, consumerism, western culture, relationships and entertainment. Don't assume children and young people know how life in the UK or Ireland works. Ask them what they know and then fill in the gaps to help them feel safe. Be sensitive, have empathy, understanding and curiosity.



▲ Worshipping in a Flame* church in West Africa. Over 90% of the Flame people are Muslim but the church is growing and the Flame New Testament translation has now been completed.

*name changed for security reasons

Some other ways your church could be of help are:

- ▮ Above all, listen to them! Ask meaningful questions about their work and experiences, and listen to what they say. This often gets passed over and missed with all the practicalities of 're-entering'.
- ▮ Provide accommodation.
- ▮ Donate or loan a vehicle.
- ▮ Provide clothing for them, as the temperature here may be very different to where they have come from.
- ▮ Help with schooling, holidays, meetings.
- ▮ Meals on arrival might be appreciated, but consult the mission partner about what they would find helpful. Too many invitations to eat out can be hard on children unsettled by a move. But a full fridge and cupboard will be very welcome!
- ▮ Again, if your mission partner thinks their children will be OK with it, offer to do something with the kids in order for the parents to get essential jobs done.
- ▮ Welcome them home with a party – again, if (and when) the mission partner would enjoy it!
- ▮ School is a huge part of a child's life, so if the children will be going to school locally, other children or people who are at that school can be put in touch with the family to welcome them, and to make the transition easier for the children.



▲ A woman worships at a church in West Africa.

Sharing the vision

Your overseas worker needs your support, your love, and your prayers. They are no different in their needs from anyone else. They just differ in some of their problems. Mission partners want to know that people understand them – and they want everyone to know why God has led them to serve in the ministry of Bible translation.

Resources

To find out more about the people your mission partner is serving, take advantage of our free quarterly magazine *Words for Life*, which includes the *Prayers for Life* prayer diary. Having church members receive this can increase their understanding of the significance of your mission partner's work. Sign up at wycliffe.org.uk/wordsforlife

Invite speakers

A good way to find out about Wycliffe's work is to invite a Wycliffe speaker. Contact our church relations team at churches@wycliffe.org.uk to arrange a speaker to come to a service or special event.



◀ A Flame* pastor preaches from the newly translated Flame New Testament in a church in West Africa. The Flame people hope to have the complete Bible translated into their language in the coming years.

*name changed for security reasons



◀ **'I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that you do to advance the ministry of Bible translation.'**

'The church is growing and people are coming to receive Jesus as their saviour. If this is the impact with just the New Testament in our language, once the complete Bible is translated we hope to see our entire people group impacted with God's word.'

'Thank you very much – if we don't have the chance to meet on earth it is sure that we will meet in heaven.'

Pastor Paul*

Leader of a growing church and director of the Flame* Bible translation project in West Africa

*names changed for security reasons