

From the Whites' House

Winter 2017



Doug & Wendy White Your Partner in Bible Translation

On the Wycliffe Front

I'm highlighting an article written by Wycliffe USA's president Bob Creson regarding the Ixil people of Guatemala and the ministry of Paul Townsend.

Back in 1989, when I ministered as a teacher at the Christian Academy of Guatemala, I had the privilege to teach Paul's two children along with Dwight Jewett's children. Later, I worked with the Nebaj and Chajul Ixil language projects as the project funding coordinator in the Americas.

Running the Race

Last month I wrote some thoughts on starting 2017, including a reference to the 11th chapter of Hebrews and the long list of named and unnamed people who lived by faith in the days before Christ came.

The writer refers to these people of faith again in Chapter 12, " ... Since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith ... let us run with endurance the race God has set before us ... keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2, NLT).

I thought of these verses when I heard the story of Bible translation for the Ixil people of Guatemala.

In 1950, a missionary from another organization invited SIL to translate God's Word for the Ixil people. As you know, Uncle Cam worked in Guatemala in the 1920s, but it was primarily this invitation that led to the beginning of SIL's work in the country.

A survey showed there were three dialects of Ixil — Nebaj, Cotzal and Chajul. As translations began for each group, SIL members and local Ixil people joined the race to complete the Scriptures. The relay race continued over the next 63 years, with many passing the baton to others as they moved on to join the cloud of witnesses cheering the new runners on.

The Cotzal Ixil translation was the first one completed. In 2001, after persevering through civil war and persecution, a team of Cotzal translators aided by SIL and Wycliffe advisor Paul Townsend published the Cotzal New Testament.

Until the year 2000, the Nebaj Ixil translation was facilitated by Ray and Helen Elliot, who then passed the baton to Dwight Jewett. Dwight provided direction for that project, as well as the Chajul project, until dying of a heart attack six years later. Then David Henne picked up the baton and worked with the team until they finished the New Testament in 2007.

And now we celebrate the completion of the Chajul Ixil translation! Dwight started the Chajul

translation project in 1977. When he died, experienced Chajul translators like Maria Perez and Perfecto Santiago worked alongside Paul Townsend, and together the team brought the project to completion in 2016! More than 25 congregations are already making plans to encourage their members to read the New Testament through in a year.

Significantly the last Ixil translation is also the last SIL-assisted New Testament in Guatemala. It's come full circle for SIL — from beginning its work in Guatemala by addressing Ixil translation needs, to ending the New Testament stage with the last of three Ixil translations. Translation in the country continues as many Old Testament projects are underway, most of them led by mother tongue translators.

This story illustrates perfectly the changes taking place in our organizations. I think Uncle Cam would be proud of us. We continue to finish and move on completing the task of Bible translation. And we rejoice as more and more people are drawn into the race with us, becoming involved in this great movement of God to preserve his eternal Word for the peoples of the earth.



Photo: Paul Townsend with Chajul Ixil translators Maria Perez and An B'op

But as some of our strategies and methods change, let me affirm what you already know: Some things cannot change. We are committed to clear, accurate and natural translation. We are committed to overcoming the injustice of people not having access to the Good News in a language and form they relate to best. And we are committed to "zero" Bible translation needs. These are commitments that cannot, and by God's grace, will not change.

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