

Minister Translates Bible Into Remote Languages

Syvelle Phillips has spent the last 30 years working to make the Scriptures available in every language

In an effort to make the gospel accessible to the more than 500 million people who don't have a Bible in their mother tongue, a former Assemblies of God pastor has taken up the task of translating the Scriptures into little-known languages spoken in remote regions around the world.

During the early 1970s, while he was pastoring an Assemblies of God church in

Southern California, Syvelle Phillips says he felt God calling him to translate the

Bible. Through relationships with church members who worked for Wycliffe Bible

Translators, Phillips learned the importance of their unique ministry.

"I had never been aware of the need for Bible translation," Phillips said. "I thought the entire world had the King James Bible, and it was good enough for everyone."

After much prayer and research, Phillips founded Evangel Bible Translators, which is based in Rockwall, Texas. Since 1976, he and his team have devoted millions

of hours to studying and recording the nearly 7,000 languages spoken worldwide. "When I said goodbye to my church, I had no missionaries and no money," Phillips said, "but I attacked the project with great zeal, and there was tremendous response."

More than 30 translators and their families, located primarily in Africa and India, currently direct Evangel projects. Most work in their native countries. They receive both biblical and linguistic training before journeying to the mission field, and they are equipped with laptop computers to aid in their translation work.

“One of our first translators was a Quechua Indian who took up a project Wycliffe had abandoned and returned to his native people,” Phillips said. “After we trained him, he completed an entire Bible before he was killed by guerillas in Peru.”

Evangel also encourages missionaries to plant local churches and lead the congregations in worship and Bible study. “I’m highly committed to the church,” he said. “I tell our people when Sunday comes to get their guitars, go sing and tell someone about Jesus. It will be therapy for your souls.”

Evangel trained 15 translators last year and expects another 30 to complete their preparation this year. Although the ministry is grateful for the increased interest, the growing demand also requires more financial resources. To fund these needs, the 76-year-old Phillips preaches more than 200 times annually in local churches and at conferences.

“God called me from the start to challenge the charismatic, Full Gospel churches into involvement with Bible translation,” he said. “He began

us at a point we
could comprehend and moved us into an area we had never known.
We've seen
God raise up our mother-tongue speakers and connect us with
them."

JOHN HILLMAN IN ROCKWALL, TEXAS