

Businessman Helps Speed Up Bible Translation Process

Mart Green, is backing a cooperative effort to digitize Bible content and speed up the translation process

✖ The businessman whose family's \$70 million gift lifted Oral Roberts University (ORU) out of debt is backing a cooperative effort to digitize Bible content and speed the pace at which translations are completed.

Every Tribe Every Nation plans to initially put 160 existing texts into digital format, although Mart Green said the process for converting several thousand will likely take 20 to 25 years.

"This is driven by the sense of urgency in several areas," said Green, who became chairman of ORU's board of trustees three years ago after helping the school pay off \$54 million in debt. "What's front and center for me right now would be mobile. Every hour 1,000 people are downloading the Bible onto their iPhone."

Although no formal announcement of the initiative was planned, in mid-November Green presented the vision to trustees of the American Bible Society (ABS). The other

two major partners are Biblica (formerly the International Bible Society) and Wycliffe Bible Translators (including partners within its affiliates, The Seed Company and SIL International). The trio accounts for 90 percent of completed and developing translations.

Because meetings were planned in recent weeks with major donors, the budget and specific plans were still being finalized at year-end. Green said the estimated cost for the first two years will be \$16.5 million.

Robert Briggs, executive vice president of ABS' Global Scripture Ministries, said the first phase would also stimulate production of additional translations. They will be made available in digital formats for distribution by cell phone and other electronic delivery.

"This is a project that has a scale that can change the pace and direction of our translation work and outreach to these unreached people groups," Briggs said.

Green, chairman of the Oklahoma City-based Mardel Christian and Educational Supply chain of retail bookstores, said the inspiration for Every Tribe Every Nation goes back to 1998.

That year, he attended the annual meeting of the North American Forum of Bible Agencies,

a consortium of about two-dozen ministries, many involved in Bible translation and distribution.

The association eventually led to Green producing *End of the Spear*. The 2006 film dramatized the story of five missionaries who were killed in 1956 during their attempt to evangelize a tribe in the jungles of Ecuador.

It also caused him to envision the day when a project would develop that was so huge it would prompt various ministries to work cooperatively, and donors who could help finance it.

"I assume we're like a lot of donors—we give to this ministry and that ministry," Green said. "But we've never come together with several donors to say, 'This project is too big for me, but all these ministries are working together. As a donor you should like that because you don't want too many ministries doing the same thing.'"

Briggs credits Green's involvement with moving the idea from concept to reality.

"He came to the Bible Society one day and presented us and other Bible agencies with a challenge," Briggs said.

"He said, 'If you people would considerable collaborating more effectively than you have in

the past and work together on this challenge of getting God's Word to every tribe ... on the planet, I would consider working with you and providing the funding to help get this work done."

Green recalled that some representatives of these ministries pointed out that putting translations in digital form would take considerable monetary investments and human resources. However, he argued they owned the rights to those translations.

"I said, 'You should get it done; it's your intellectual property,'" Green said. "'What if we, the donors, helped you do that?'"

The initiative will help boost Vision 2025, a goal adopted by Wycliffe and other agencies in 1999 to start translation work among every language group in the world by the year 2025.

While completing this digital revolution could cost up to \$600 million, Green said the agencies couldn't process that kind of funding immediately, which is why it could take more than two decades.

Part of the initiative's purpose will be to set a list of priorities for people groups needing a translation and completed versions transferred into digital formats,

Green said.

“If you’re
a mobile phone guy, you want German, Spanish [and other] large
languages,” he
said. “Obviously, those would be ones donors would want to get
done. Now we’re
doing lots of new languages. It would be great for us to
digitize the ones we
want.”