

Translating the Word Together

Businessman Mart Green will lead a multiministry initiative to digitize Scripture and accelerate Bible translation.

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 of completing translations.

Every Tribe Every Nation plans to initially put 160 existing texts into digital format, although Mart Green says converting several thousand may take 20 to 25 years. "This is driven by the sense of urgency in several areas," says 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 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.

Green says the estimated cost for the first two years will be \$16.5 million, although the budget and specific plans were still being finalized at year-end. Robert Briggs, executive vice president of ABS's Global Scripture Ministries, says the first phase will also stimulate production of additional translations, which 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 says.

The inspiration for Every Tribe Every Nation goes back to 1998. That year Green, founder and CEO of the Oklahoma City-based Mardel chain of retail bookstores, attended a meeting of the Forum of Bible Agencies, North America, 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*, a 2006 film that dramatized the story of five missionaries killed in 1956 while attempting to evangelize a jungle tribe in 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.

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 says. He said, “If you people would consider 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.

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 2025. Completing this could cost up to \$600 million, which is why funding it would 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, as well as completed versions that need to be transferred into digital formats.

“If you’re a mobile phone guy, you want German, Spanish [and other] large languages,” Green says. “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.”