



The God who sees me

CHRISTMAS
2023

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Editorial from the CEO



The Bible is filled with examples of people who experience the pain of marginalisation. In Genesis 16, we meet Hagar. Forced to bear Abraham's child, then face subsequent resentment and abuse from Sarah, Hagar was well acquainted with feeling small and insignificant. She may have been a poor slave woman yet an encounter with an angel of the Lord reminds her that she is not alone. She refers to the Lord as 'El Roi', meaning 'the God who sees me'.

Many people in the world on the margins of society experience similar feelings of abandonment to Hagar. This is especially true for those suffering from abject poverty, illiteracy, war, homelessness, deafness, blindness or other health conditions. I recently had the opportunity to visit a Multilingual Education (MLE) project in the Democratic Republic of Congo that is being funded by Wycliffe Australia. In the north of the country are the Ngbaka people, most of whom are subsistence farmers, locked into a cycle of illiteracy and poverty because they do not speak French which is the language of education in the country. The MLE project aims to teach six- and seven-year-old children how to read and write in the Ngbaka language before they begin formal schooling in French. The project has been extremely successful because these children are ready to learn literacy skills in French because they already have them in Ngbaka.

Jesus demonstrated the greatest depth of love and compassion for those on the margins of society. The stories in this special Christmas edition of *Wycliffe Today* show how God is reaching out to marginalised people like the Ngbaka through projects that provide dignity and support. I hope you are encouraged as you read about lives being transformed, and reflect on the God who sees you and loves you.

Max Sahl

BETHEL FUNERALS

Bethel Funerals' story began in 1997 as a business that provides Christ-like care to grieving families while also financially supporting Wycliffe Australia. To date, Bethel Funerals has given back over \$4 million to Wycliffe Australia.

When families choose Bethel Funerals, they receive genuine Christian care from our funeral team and contribute to the continued sharing of God's story with marginalised language communities.



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Transformed by the Word

The least of these



by Lyn Wake

'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'
Matthew 25:40 (NLT)

Who are the 'least of these'?

According to this parable in Matthew 25, it includes people who are hungry and thirsty.

The homeless strangers. The naked, sick and imprisoned. You get the idea. In this passage, Jesus revealed God's heart for those who feel forgotten and insignificant. Jesus taught his followers the eternal consequences of how we relate to those who live on the margins of society. How we treat the least of these truly matters.

Wycliffe Australia members have a heart for reaching out to people all over the world who feel the pain of marginalisation. In partnership with Jesus and his family, we address the needs of overlooked people groups and languages. We seek to bring equal opportunities for every person to encounter Jesus through translated Scriptures.

Throughout the Bible, the least of these also includes widows, orphans, refugees, grieving parents, outcasts, those who are misunderstood because they look and feel different. The list goes on. We have all experienced moments of being 'the least of these' in one way or another!

Thankfully, the gospel proclaims Jesus as the righteous king who continues to deliver and transform every person who recognises their poverty of spirit without him. Jesus came for the least of these. He still comes for you and for me, with an all-inclusive invitation that meets us where we are. Thank God that exclusive margins do not exist within his glorious kingdom! The 'least of these' are never forgotten or insignificant but forever loved and important to him.

For reflection: How can you join Jesus in blessing the 'least of these' in this season of your life?

Be transformed by the Word as you engage with: Matthew 25

Prayer: *Father, thank you for meeting me in the areas of my life where I feel misunderstood and overlooked. May your Spirit lead me to places where I can bless those who feel forgotten and alone. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.*

POSITIONS VACANT

Aitape West Translation Advisor, Papua New Guinea

In the Sandaun Province of Papua New Guinea, eleven language communities are receiving God's Word in their own languages for the first time. Mother-tongue translators are receiving training but translators from some languages are without a Translation Advisor, making it very difficult for the translations to continue. We are looking for well-trained people with a clear sense of God's calling who will dedicate their time, skills, and hearts to the task of training others. Are you flexible, spiritually resilient, and do you have the ability to work with a team to accomplish a task? If so, this could be the job for you.

MORE

For more information, go to wycliffe.org.au/positions/aitape-west-translation-advisor-png

Linguist Translator PNG

Are you ready for your next adventure? If you have a love for languages and a heart to serve God, this could be the opportunity for you! We need young, well-trained people with a clear sense of God's calling to dedicate their time, skills and hearts to work alongside language communities in Papua New Guinea.

MORE

For more information, go to wycliffe.org.au/positions/linguist-translator-png

Platinum Jubilee: Wycliffe Australia is turning 70!

Did you know that the year 2024 marks 70 years since Wycliffe Bible Translators was formed in Australia? On 5 May 1954, Wycliffe Australia sent its first field workers to join Bible translation projects in the Philippines.

Join us in celebration of this platinum jubilee as we look back over the past 70 years of world-changing Bible translation. Stay tuned for more information about an event in your state.



Working together

to nourish minority language communities

Dr Michel Kenmogne has been the Executive Director of SIL International since 2016. He is from Cameroon and is the first non-Western person to fill the role.

Michel's experience as someone from a minority language group has given him insights into how we can support and equip translation projects. On his way home from the SIL Connect -Pacific meetings in Papua New Guinea, Michel travelled via Kangaroo Ground in Melbourne to speak with Wycliffe Australia and SIL Australia. Michel shared with great emotion about the impact that having the Bible and other literature available in his own language has made in his own life:

I myself am a speaker of a minority language. I know what it means to have one's language acknowledged, put on the map and translated into Scripture. It enables people to feel as if they are sharing in equal dignity with other peoples around the world.

Michel encouraged everyone that working together as close organisational partners is continuing to be a blessing to the 1635 language projects with SIL involvement currently underway throughout the world. While Michel says that trained expatriate translation facilitators and advisors will still be required to support the work of minority language projects, local mother-tongue translators are increasingly the primary implementers.

He also said that a focus on greater localisation is creating pathways for engaging with churches and establishing more projects for languages still without any translated Scripture:

Our language engagement is growing as a result of projects becoming more localised in many contexts. Local staff are receiving greater training opportunities to help programs become more self-sustaining.



PHOTOS BY KRISTEN HOGLUND

SIL's initiative to become 'locally rooted' is not just about participating in a country as a foreign intervention but really seeking to be connected to the local church, to embrace the local culture, governance and whatever enables us to be seen as a natural expression of the locale in that context. We need to recognise that, theologically, it doesn't make sense for organisations involved in the mission of God to not have an effective relationship with the Church.

MORE

For more information,
visit www.sil.org.

No longer outsiders

The
FLOURISHING
COMMUNITIES
Project

By Sharna Steinert

Did you know that approximately 30% of the population in Victoria was born in another country¹?

The term used to describe these people living outside of their homeland is 'diaspora'. While some diaspora communities in Australia have literature and resources, most diaspora communities have few or no resources available to them in their own language.

In 2021, SIL Australia (SILA), Wycliffe Australia's partner in language and culture training, conducted a research project to identify diaspora communities in the greater Melbourne area. The aim was to find communities that might be interested in partnering to develop resources in their languages.



SILA's Principal Executive Officer, Graham Scott, and Operations Manager, Jack Hibbard, met with a community leader in the Dandenong area from the Hazaragi² diaspora language group. This leader questioned them about their intentions, asking, 'What do you get out of this?' Graham and Jack explained the purpose of the project and their motivation for getting to know and come alongside the community if they were interested in developing their language. The man became less suspicious and more interested, inviting them to attend 'Nowruz', the Persian New Year celebration in Dandenong.

In March 2022, the Flourishing Communities team was able to hold a stall at Nowruz. They printed and distributed books in Hazaragi and two neighbouring languages, along with some New Testaments in another related language. The books were incredibly popular, with people of all ages requesting copies then sending their friends to get copies of their own! The team listened to stories and answered many questions about why they, as outsiders, were so interested in their languages.



PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY SHARNA STEINERT

In addition to the resources shared at the festival, members from the Hazara community, along with leaders from several other language groups SILA has been building relationships with, also received language development training. SILA and SIL Pacific held the first phase of the 'Language and Identity Journey' workshop in September 2022. It led participants through a series of activities to evaluate a language community's current situation and consider actions to help preserve and grow their language resources in Australia.

SILA continues to develop a relationship with the Hazara community, again attending Nowruz in 2023. The Hazara community are now keen to progress to Phase 2 of the Language and Identity Journey course. We look forward to the continued partnership with the Hazara and encouraging other diaspora communities in the area in their language development goals. It is a joy to see these communities learning how to flourish in the languages that they value the most and start feeling more connected in the place they now call home.

MORE

Read more about Flourishing Communities at sila.org.au/flourishing

¹ www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/australias-population-country-birth/2021

² Hazaragi is the language name and the people group is referred to as the Hazara

GOD'S HEART for the grieving

By Tracey Ware, Bethel Funerals

If I asked you to name groups you see as 'marginalised' in today's world, who would make it onto your list?

Refugees fleeing a war-torn country? People living in a drought-ravaged country? Children unable to attain basic education?

I wonder how many of us would have written down those experiencing grief and loss. Yet for our team at Bethel Funerals, we know it to be true that grieving people at times feel marginalised. Grief and loss are something we all experience at different times but that does not reduce death's sting. When the death of a loved one occurs, families often experience feelings of isolation, fear and hopelessness. They are thrown into an unknown world, faced with many decisions and often feel on the 'margins'.

Bethel Funerals was established in 1997 by Wycliffe Australia's Word Investments to make money for missions and minister to grieving people. Bethel Funerals continues to live out this goal, offering Christlike care to grieving families. We seek to communicate to the grieving that they are not alone, that God sees them and cares about them. Yet I would like to suggest that we ALL have a role to play in helping those experiencing grief and loss feel less isolated.



THE BETHEL BOARD, CIRCA 1997

How? Here are a few practical suggestions:

SAY SOMETHING. It's okay to say 'I don't know what to say but I am here and I care about you.' We don't have to have all the answers!

ACKNOWLEDGE their loss. You can say things such as, 'Sorry for your loss. I am thinking of you, I am here if you want to talk.'

PRAY with them or for them, if appropriate.

SIT in silence with them. Being with someone is a powerful antidote to feeling isolated and on the periphery.

DON'T MINIMISE the pain or loss with statements such as, 'they lived a good life', 'they've gone to a better place' or 'they are at peace now.' These things may all be true but they do not help.

NAME the person who has died. Those grieving love to hear others speak the name of their loved one, as it acknowledges that they aren't forgotten.



THE CURRENT BETHEL TEAM IN MITCHAM, VICTORIA

The next time you know someone who has lost a loved one, remember that you can play a role in expressing God's heart for them in the midst of their grief. Tracey Ware works with Bethel Funerals in the area of Community Engagement. Bethel Funerals is a not-for-profit Christian funeral company which to date has given away \$5.71m. Wycliffe Australia is a key beneficiary of these funds.

MORE

For more information about Bethel,
go to bethelfunerals.com.au

Programming a more accessible world

PHOTO BY MARC EWELL

By Deb Fox

John and Sharon Thomson are passionate about seeing God's Word available to people in the languages they value most.

After completing a PhD in Computer Science, John discovered that he could use his unique skills and expertise for God's kingdom. He joined Wycliffe in 1985 and began writing code for SIL computer tools that support Bible translation. This included tools such as Bloom, HearThis, and WeSay that enable minority language speakers with any level of education to engage with language tools for themselves.

John has been one of the main developers for Bloom Editor – a free and open-source software program available to minority language communities to create new books in their language and translate existing ones. It also enables them to record an audio reading of the book and then publish the books in various print and digital forms.



The library already hosts 16,500 books in written format. John and Sharon are especially excited by hearing about how the Deaf community are using Bloom and finding it helpful. There are functions that enable the books to include audio narration for 'Talking Books,' which is helpful for vision impaired readers. More recently, Bloom has made books accessible to Deaf audiences with the option to add sign language videos to create animated books.

Currently, the library has 517 sign language books and 3019 talking books. John says that the technology Bloom provides for communities means that, with motivated teachers and eager learners, 'people can hopefully begin moving from learning to read to reading to learn'.

John and Sharon were recently in Melbourne to reconnect with supporting churches. John also visited Papua New Guinea to consult with SIL's 'Education for Life' team that has started a project in the East Sepik region to provide education for school children in digital formats they can easily understand, including Bloom's Talking Books. John was exploring ways to enhance Bloom to make it easier for users to create interactive books where children can play language games on electronic pages.



IMAGES SUPPLIED BY JOHN THOMSON

Please pray for John and Sharon as they prepare to head back to their home in the United States.

NEWS

To stay in touch with the Thomsons, sign up to their newsletter at wycliffe.org.au/member/john-sharon

MORE

To experience a Talking Book, go to bloomlibrary.org/talking-books or visit bloomlibrary.org/sign-language to see how the sign language books are set up

INFO

For more information about the Bloom Library, go to bloomlibrary.org

SILENCE is not always golden

The Four Seasons gave us the song 'Silence is golden'. But have you ever wondered what it would be like to lose one of your senses?

Helen Keller lost both her sight and her hearing after an illness in her infancy. Despite the incredible hurdles and daily struggles she faced, she was able to attend Harvard University and become the very first deaf-blind person in America to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree. Yet Helen was acutely aware of her unique position, saying in her autobiography, 'I owed my success partly to the advantages of my birth and environment. I have learned that the power to rise is not within the reach of everyone'.

Sadly, the majority of Deaf and blind communities still face challenges in their daily lives most of us never encounter, including the ability to access and understand Scripture. At a Wycliffe Australia 'Mission Possible' event in Melbourne, Saul and Rebecca Thurrowgood shared about their heart to reach Deaf people with the Bible in a language that speaks to their hearts. Their talk was titled 'Faith comes by hearing ... but what if you're Deaf?' and included live sign language interpretations throughout the night. They also shared about the motion capture technology Saul has been creating called Chameleon that is helping to advance the work of Bible translation for Deaf communities.

Rebecca's parents are both Deaf so she has grown up witnessing firsthand the difficulties they endure. She says that, despite the privileges many in our society have access to, there are still many challenges the Deaf face in Australia and on an international scale:

Attitudes have changed over the years but there is still a stigma attached to deafness. Deaf people aren't necessarily any more included in services and planning. It takes more intentionality and preparation to truly include Deaf people and provide them with the resources they need. Many Deaf people have other disabilities and deafness has come as a secondary issue. They tend to be abused more because they are more vulnerable.

A 2018 study in America found that the stigma Deaf people face is often a result of the different ways they need to communicate. It determined that 'the hearing world tends to view being Deaf as a disability ... rather than as an identity that also brings opportunity for personal growth and community' (Mousley & Chaudoir, 2018).



The same attitudes are prevalent among the Deaf in Australia. Rebecca shares:

We often get asked, 'Well if Deaf people can see, they can read the Bible, right? Why do they need a translation of their own?' When you don't have that phonetic input, reading is quite difficult. And it's not just the words, it's

the way words are put together. **But sign language is more than a series of words. It's a language that expresses culture, identity and belonging. That's the way I believe God speaks to us. He's not just a hearing God - he's also the God of the Deaf. He understands sign language too!**

PRAY:

- for the Auslan Scripture translations Saul and Rebecca are planning to start in coming months
- that a team of Auslan signers can be formed and trained to help with the motion capture being used for Chameleon.

MORE

To see videos created for Deaf children in Auslan, go to: [wycliffe.org.au/children](https://www.wycliffe.org.au/children)

Watch the Who, What, Why and How of the Christmas story in Auslan! Go to [youtube.com/wycliffeaustralia](https://www.youtube.com/wycliffeaustralia)



Ministry Resourcing

CHRISTMAS 2023 / ISSN 2202-9818

Wycliffe
Bible Translators



What is Wycliffe Ministry Resourcing?

Wycliffe Australia's Ministry Resourcing department seeks to support the work of our members and organisational partners on the field. We are committed to building strong relationships, with an emphasis on mutual respect, trust, collaboration and prayer. Our three main objectives are to:

- work closely with national Bible translation organisations under the Next Step Development initiative
- support strategic partnerships with SIL International
- support Australian members on the field with their project needs.

PHOTO BY HEATHER PUBOLS

'No one left behind'

Recently, Max Sahl and I were privileged to travel to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to visit with the local Wycliffe Global Alliance organisation there, ACOTBA-SUBO. We sponsor the costs of training and materials for a multilingual education (MLE) program in DRC that ACOTBA-SUBO runs. The program means that local children are able to learn in their own language for the first few years of their schooling, instead of struggling with the national language they do not yet understand. The result is much lower dropout rates. With education such a strong catalyst of change in people's lives, this is a great way of 'making a difference'. We were able to observe a 3-day training session for around 70 teachers involved in year 2 classes, and visit a number of schools using the program.

The teachers receiving the training were acting more like I would expect their students to behave, all so engaged, enthusiastic, and grateful for the extra training and materials. In the schools, we saw examples of up to 150-180 students squeezed into small classrooms because their parents want their children to attend schools with the MLE program. Some of the classrooms had concrete floors and solid roofs. Others had dirt floors and sections of the roof were missing. But the energy and enthusiasm were in evidence everywhere. It was a great blessing to us to see God's love in action in this way.

by Greg Conwell, Wycliffe Relief and Development Foundation CEO

Yolngu Matha Cluster Support Project 8538



PHOTOS BY GARY MCMASTER



Yolngu Matha is a group of over 40 related languages and dialects spoken in North-East Arnhem Land. Some languages are linguistically similar, but have very distinct identities. Others differ significantly and would not be mutually intelligible, except that multilingualism is common. One dialect in the Yolngu cluster has the New Testament available, but many other language groups have a desire to have Scripture available in their own language.

The aim of this project is to support new and established local translators and Scripture Engagement workers in the various Yolngu Matha languages. This may be done through ongoing remote support with people wanting to work on translation, by sending translation consultants to North-East Arnhem Land, or by bringing translators to Darwin for workshops. Funds may be applied to equipment, wages, administration, travel, accommodation and other workshop-related expenses.

Target: A\$42,000



For more information:
[wycliffe.org.au/projects/yolngu-matha-cluster](https://www.wycliffe.org.au/projects/yolngu-matha-cluster)

Next Step Development Projects

The mission of Next Step Development is to hear and understand what God has put on the hearts of our national colleagues, and through prayer to come alongside and support their vision and strategies for Bible translation. Next Step is currently working in close relationship with Wycliffe Global Alliance partners from PNG, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Indonesia, Philippines and two countries in South Asia.

To see more Next Step projects, go to [wycliffe.org.au/projects/](https://www.wycliffe.org.au/projects/)

Wycliffe Relief and Development Foundation Projects

Wycliffe Relief and Development Foundation is a separate company owned by Wycliffe Australia, which works through local partners to improve the practical aspects of life in marginalised communities. We aim to demonstrate Christian compassion and provide practical assistance in literacy and education, disaster relief, medical and basic health support. Donations to the Foundation are tax-deductible.

For WRDF projects, visit the WRDF website [wycliffefoundation.org.au](https://www.wycliffefoundation.org.au)

Wycliffe Field Support Projects

Wycliffe Australia is committed to helping our field teams and the organisations they work with to thrive and serve effectively in their communities. Ministry Resourcing can help with providing funding for computers, village housing, travel costs, delivery of training, consultants and other services.

See more projects at [wycliffe.org.au/projects/](https://www.wycliffe.org.au/projects/)

West Arnhem Cluster Support Project 8537



In association with the Uniting Church, Wycliffe's partner organisation, Australia Timor-Leste Group (ATG), has a presence in Maningrida, West Arnhem Land, to support the local church in the work of Bible translation. There are at least four very strong languages in this part of the Northern Territory without a full Bible in their language (Bininj Kunwok, Ndjebbana, Burarra, Maung). There are also at least four more languages (Nakara, Rembarrnga, Gurrgoni, Djining) with very small populations and minimal Scripture portions translated. These groups are greatly encouraged by being seen and valued, knowing that their languages matter to us and to God.

Speakers of these languages come together to worship God as one multilingual congregation in Maningrida. Since 2020, ATG has been involved to varying degrees in engaging with Kuninjku, Ndjebbana, Nakara, Rembarrnga and Burarra translators. One of the best ways for aspiring translators to make progress and to gain skills in exegesis and translation theory is by studying in blocks of time away from the demands of community life. This is expensive in terms of travel and accommodation costs.

In addition, Bininj Kunwok speakers from multiple varieties (Kuninjku, Mayali) have made significant progress in translation work within the community. These language varieties are very similar and coordination in a cluster project style would be ideal for expediency and consistency. This requires travel between remote communities, Maningrida, Manmoyi, Jabiru and homelands – at least by a translation advisor, or aspirationally by local translators also.

In the first two years of ATG's most recent presence in Maningrida, the above expenses have been met by the Uniting Church Australia and/or Bible Society Australia. As this project transitions to becoming a long-term commitment, we are seeking direct donations to this project, in order to expand our capacity and as an expression of our partnership with the Uniting Church.

Target: A\$28,000



For more information:

[wycliffe.org.au/projects/west-arnhem-cluster/](https://www.wycliffe.org.au/projects/west-arnhem-cluster/)

References:

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. "Advocacy kit for promoting multilingual education: including the excluded." <https://www.sil.org/literacy-and-education/>, UNESCO Bangkok, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000152198>. Accessed 8 August 2023.



Congo Multilingual Education (MLE)

Project 8879



Imagine trying to learn about complex scientific formulas in a foreign language. The concepts and terminology are difficult enough in your own mother tongue but learning in a language other than one you understand well can seem difficult, if not impossible. Many children throughout the world are only offered an education in a language other than what they speak at home. Multilingual education (MLE) is helping minority language speakers learn in their national or trade language in addition to their mother tongues.

Studies throughout Asia have shown that bilingual and MLE programs are 'helping to prepare linguistic minority learners for literacy in both mother tongue and national languages ... increasing enrolment, retention and achievement in the formal school system'. (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2007).

Teachers for the MLE Support program in the DRC, Africa, have reported that the parents of the children enrolled in classes are 'pleased to send them to school to receive an education in their mother tongue'. Ngbaka language communities are proud of their language and comprise 1.5 million speakers. The children are now starting their education in the language they use at home. Once these children understand that learning is achievable, they are then learning French, the national language, and progressing through their classes with more success.

MLE better equips young children for lifelong learning and increases their ability to engage successfully in activities that contribute to the wellbeing of their families and community. This program sits alongside the government school program and utilises government-paid teachers. However, the government is not able to provide books for the schools nor the teacher training needed. This project provides those, as well as classroom supplies in the 114 schools in the program. As more teachers are trained, neighbouring schools are also able to adopt the MLE approach.

Being able to learn reading, writing and maths in the language they understand best is making a difference in their ability to learn. One of the teachers shares with joy:

This has given each of these parents the motivation to seek to enrol their child, no matter how great the distance, in our Ngbaka Programme schools. That can easily be verified by the great number of students in a classroom. This proves that the project has a great impact on the local communities also by the abundant requests for joining the project.

Target: A\$55,000

MORE

wycliffefoundation.org.au/africa/mle-dr-congo/

For more information about the importance of providing MLE, download the advocacy kit at: www.sil.org/literacy-and-education/advocacy-kit-promoting-multilingual-education



PHOTO SUPPLIED BY GREG CONWELL



If you would like to discuss any of the Ministry Resourcing projects, please contact:

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Greg Conwell: ceo@wycliffefoundation.org.au

Or call (03) 9712 2777