DEAR FRIENDS,

2021 saw us join together to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the United Bible Societies. For many of us, it was a chance to pause and reflect on how God has been at work in each of our Bible Societies and across the Fellowship.

The handful of Bible Societies that gathered together in 1946 faced a world in upheaval. However, with a spirit of collaboration, they set in motion the formation of a truly global fellowship of Bible Societies. 75 years later, as we reflected on our shared history of Bible ministry, we did so in the face of significant contemporary global challenges.

Yet the spirit of unity and partnership, evident in 1946 at our founding, remains evident across our Fellowship today, as shown in the pages of this report.

You will read how members of our Fellowship have adapted models of ministry to respond to the ‘new normal’, and how digital innovation has been harnessed in the midst of a pandemic. And you will see how, despite myriad obstacles in our path and our inability to meet in-person, we remained connected to one another, building on our legacy of serving together.

I pray that you are encouraged as you read these stories. It is also my prayer that, amidst a constantly evolving landscape, we find the opportunities to be bold and courageous to meet the need for God’s precious message of hope – an unchanging need, as it was in 1946 and remains today – wherever we serve.

In humble service,

Michael Perreau
Director General
United Bible Societies

I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me.

JOHN 17:21
Across rugged terrain, covered by rainforests, rivers, and mountains, in areas difficult to reach, live nine indigenous ethnic groups, the descendants of the first inhabitants of South America. Whilst English – the official language of Guyana – is taught in schools, daily life takes place in the heart-language of each group. However, of these indigenous languages, only Wai-Wai has the complete Bible. Although the New Testament has been available in the other languages for a number of years, work is underway to bring the joy of the full Bible to the Akawaio, Patamuna, and Wapishana peoples.

HEART-LANGUAGE SCRIPTURE

Small teams of four translators for each language group are progressing these translations as part of a cluster project, with the goal of completing the Old Testament in all three languages by 2024. The work is part of a commitment by the Suriname Bible Society, which oversees Bible work in Guyana. Under the leadership of Erny van Axel, the whole team at the Suriname Bible Society is committed to ensuring that everyone in their constituency has access to heart-language Scripture.

These translations are highly valued by native speakers in Guyana, who live in a context of having English as an official language and a growing influence of other major languages. The work to provide them with access to the complete Bible is helping to strengthen their sense of identity, revitalising their languages and deepening their understanding of Scripture. The impact of mother tongue Scripture on communities is often profound.

Supporting this crucial translation work is Dr Marlon Winedt, a Global Translation Advisor from the UBS Global Mission Team. Marlon hails from the island nation of Curaçao in the Caribbean and it is across that region and the Americas where he helps support an array of Bible Society translation projects. In this role, he brings a wealth of experience and expertise in linguistics, exegetical studies, language research, and translation theory.

A few times every year, Marlon would meet with the translation team in Georgetown, the capital of Guyana. That is, until COVID-19 rendered these important in-person meetings impossible. The team members could still make...
As for the translators, they often have to travel for several days by foot or by bicycle from their rural setting in order to upload draft text. The challenges faced by the translators over recent years have been myriad. On top of limited internet connectivity, the translation team have had to cope with COVID-19 and, more recently, flooding. The pandemic saw lockdowns, local food shortages, and health challenges. Some of the translators are not yet fully recovered. Despite all these difficulties – thanks to the devoted work of the translation team, supported by Marlon and harnessing digital technology – the vital work of translating Scripture in Guyana continues.

One of the key technological components to this is Paratext, the software used by Bible translation teams across the world. As well as ensuring consistent and accurate translation, Paratext features collaboration tools, allowing users to work as a team from dispersed locations. The ability to synchronise work between team members is always of vital importance, but even more so during a global pandemic.

The translation team has been supported in the use of Paratext by Brian Renes from the UBS Global Mission Team who delivered in-person training before the pandemic and remote guidance when travel was no longer possible. In his role as CAP Facilitator, Brian works to support the use of technology across translation and publishing.

Paratext has been an essential piece of the translation work in Guyana. However, the effective use of the software requires internet access, and that can be an issue in remote areas. If a translator cannot upload draft text, no other team members can comment, leading to delays.

In 2021, a key service delivered to Bible Societies was in developing and empowering translation staff through capacity building.

Bible Societies engaged in intensive training from the UBS Global Bible Translation team in 2021, involving both in-person and online capacity building.

Bible Society translators and staff participated in Bible translation training workshops on topics such as linguistics, translation theory, and technology.

The translation team has been affected by Covid and it has had its consequences but we continue to forge ahead. The New Testament is used very intensely across the villages and work on the Old Testament is advancing.

Juram Browne
Coordinator of the Wapishana team

LETTING THE LIGHT:
HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY

This valuable work, now being conducted entirely online, includes the sharing of expertise, best-practice guidance, and assisting in meticulous checks of the translation work completed so far.

It was during one of these checks that Marlon encountered a challenge which is indicative of the complexities of the translation process. “God divided the light from night,” was the draft text a translator had suggested for Genesis 1:4. Marlon pointed out that the biblical word was darkness, which differs from night. The translator explained that the language had no distinction, with the same word meaning both night and darkness.

These small checks are a vital part of the process to ensure an accurate and understandable translation of Scripture. And whilst it may be easier to have these discussions in person, technology can offer an effective solution nonetheless.

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Building connection in the midst of physical separation

**Called Together**

Together called separation of physical in the midst connection Building wide conflict, trauma, and upheaval, a handful Fellowship's identity. In 1946, following world-challenges is woven into the very heart of our Bible for everyone.

AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COLLABORATION

Many of these connections at online gatherings and offers of support in times of crisis are possible because of ongoing opportunities to share and collaborate as a community throughout the year. That’s why in 2021, the UBS Global Mission Team launched a new look for the UBS Community to better facilitate the exchange of ideas and opportunities for connection and fellowship. Through this online space Bible Societies can share prayer requests or updates, learn about resources and ideas, and navigate to the grant management system and other tools.

Whether through online gatherings, offers of financial support, or spaces to facilitate sharing ideas and discussion, Bible Societies in the United Bible Societies Fellowship persisted in connection during a year of separation. It was a living out a commitment to the calling of serving together in order to fulfill the mission of the Bible for everyone.

A LEGACY OF SERVING TOGETHER

The calling to serve together in the face of challenges is woven into the very heart of our Fellowship’s identity. In 1946, following worldwide conflict, trauma, and upheaval, a handful of representatives from Bible Societies and churches gathered together to set in motion the formation of a truly global Bible fellowship. After years of global turmoil and separation, these founders knew it was more important than ever to work together to share Scripture with the world. United Bible Societies was formed to fulfill that collaborative mission.

Meeting attendee Rev. Dr. John. R. Temple, General Secretary of British and Foreign Bible Society, explained “This Conference has been called for the purpose of... pooling our knowledge, of thinking and taking counsel together, believing that in union is strength.”

Therefore, it was particularly significant when Bible Societies gathered virtually on May 11, 2021, in the midst of another worldwide crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic – to celebrate 75 years of serving together toward a common mission as a global Fellowship of United Bible Societies.

More than 600 Bible Society staff and members of the UBS Global Mission Team from six continents joined an online commemoration service hosted by the UBS Director General Michael Perreau, Global Council Chair Elaine Duncan, and Church Relations Director Dr. Rosalee Velloso Ewell to remember and give thanks for how God has led the UBS Fellowship over 75 years, and pray together for guidance for the future. Bible Societies from around the world contributed prayers and music, even when their own teams could not gather together in person.

The following day, nearly 200 leaders from across the UBS Fellowship joined online conversations on topics at the heart of Bible ministry today – including Bible engagement, serving diaspora communities, digital transformation, and a focus on audiences.

**COLLECTIVE MINISTRY IN ACTION**

But Bible Society collaboration within the UBS Fellowship wasn’t limited to online gatherings; the Solidarity Fund, set up by the UBS Global Mission Team, enabled Bible Societies to provide cash or Scripture grants to sister Bible Societies facing severe disruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It demonstrated Bible Societies’ commitment to supporting each other in mission during times of trial.

By the end of 2021, 22 Bible Societies had contributed $4.3M in cash and $500,000 in Scripture donations, and 38 Bible Societies directly benefited from the fund through grants, loans, and Scripture donations.

Solidarity Fund grants enabled Suriname Bible Society to continue with the planned launch of the very first full Braille Bible in Sranan Tongo and to distribute mother tongue Scriptures to remote communities in Suriname.

The Bible Society of Cameroon was able to keep its doors open and continue Bible ministry – including its two locally-funded translation projects – amidst many challenges.

“For us, the Solidarity Fund is an expression of belonging to a real family, a united family, even during difficult times. Now in possession of these funds, we will be able to recover from the after-effects of COVID-19 and stand firm in the face of the difficulties our country is going through,” Bible Society of Cameroon Director Luc Gnowa explained.

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ENCOURAGING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Project Engage is part of a multi-pronged effort facilitated by the Global Mission Team to help Bible Societies engage with people digitally. The process starts with Digital Transformation, equipping Bible Societies to understand and embrace digital strategies. This means learning about the possibilities of technology – including websites, email communications, and smartphone apps – but also knowing the people you’re reaching.

Those strategies and technical tools need to come together in practical ways, forming an ecosystem that makes a Bible Society effective in the digital space.

“Project Engage offers a very direct connection with the audience,” says Anders Orsander, Digital Audience Engagement Facilitator for UBS. “Submitting a form on the website, or downloading a Bible translation on YouVersion can trigger an email. Marketing Automation allows a Bible Society to communicate in a personalised way with a large audience.”

CONNECTING WITH OUR AUDIENCES

During 2021, Project Engage helped 49 Bible Societies to connect with their online audiences, promoting Scripture engagement and mission sustainability, through sales and fundraising. These 49 Bible Societies sent 88.4 million emails to over 6 million contacts in their digital communities.

For instance, the Bible Society of Malawi was one of 25 Bible Societies involved in the publication of the African Women Devotional Bible. In a normal year, the occasion might have called for in-person celebrations, but the pandemic forced a more digital approach, using Facebook Live and Zoom.

An email campaign let people know about the launch, and those who responded received an automated follow up email. On the first day of the campaign, even before stock had been received, people began to pre-order the Bible.
This campaign also created relationships with many new people who were now interested in the Bible Society of Malawi. More follow-up emails promoted membership, and within two weeks of the initial email send there were almost 50 new membership pledges.

“The use of digital communication during this project was quite eye opening,” says Herbert Chagunda, Distribution and Marketing Manager of the Bible Society of Malawi. “It has given us tools by which we can communicate with our audience and have measurable results, which has been quite a challenge with other communication channels in Malawi.”

Herbert also notes that digital methods are forging new connections in “the middle-income market,” a group that is essential to the growth of the Bible Society’s ministry in Malawi. “At a time when we could not meet physically, the digital tools facilitated smooth communication with our audience with quite tremendous results. We hope to utilise these tools more in our future projects implementation.”

Similar results have occurred in other countries. Learning tactics such as segmentation, A/B testing, and removing old contacts, the Indonesian Bible Society streamlined its email newsletter outreach, sending 40% fewer emails, but seeing an 80% increase in those engaging with their emails. The Advent and Christmas Campaign of 2021 used a segmentation strategy to get more than a thousand people opting in to receive future emails. Over the five-week campaign, only six people dropped out. Though their normal newsletter open rate had been 5-10%, this year-end outreach boasted open rates well over 50%.

Project Engage is about cultivating relationships with an audience that is increasingly composed of digital natives.”

Nelson Saba
Digital Strategy Coordinator

FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS

According to Nelson Saba, Digital Strategy Coordinator for the UBS Global Mission Team, Project Engage does far more than just bump responses. It’s about cultivating relationships with an audience that is increasingly composed of digital natives. “That’s the underlying goal of Project Engage: to establish a digital community for Bible Societies, which means a portion of your audience knows you, has a relationship with you, and finds that relevant to them. That extends your reach, your visibility, your voice.”

As younger generations continue to develop relationships both online and in-person, Bible Societies that wish to expand their audiences must not only enter the digital world, but also seek to build relationships there. “Digital is not just another option,” says Nelson. “It is the fundamental channel Bible Societies need to master in order to be relevant today and in the future.”

We will look back on 2021 as a year of extraordinary challenges. But we may also remember how COVID-19 changed our approach to digital development. The pandemic may have forced us to adopt strategies that move us into the future more effectively than ever.
2021 UBS Global Mission Team Income

The largest portion of income of the UBS Global Mission Team comes from the Global Stewardship Fund (GSF). In 2020, in response to the changing environment brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, UBSA waived the GSF contribution for part of the year. 2021 saw a reduction in this discount resulting in a small increase in the GSF.

The UBS Global Mission Team also received income – designated here as “Other Income” – from sources such as investments, sales, and royalties of copyrighted materials, reimbursement for seconded staff, and other minor activities. The income from ISP grants is restricted and primarily designated for Scripture translation projects that provide value and service to the Fellowship at scale.

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2021 UBS Global Mission Team Expenditure

In many parts of the world, 2021 saw some easing of the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19 in the previous year. However, given the ongoing reduction in income, the UBS Global Mission Team has continued to limit costs associated with travel. Otherwise, the goal has remained to deliver services to support the UBS Fellowship as a whole, the Bible Societies within it, and the ministry carried out around the world.

Total expenditure: $11,559,000

- Shared services to the fellowship: $7,781,000
- Implementation of ISP projects: $3,535,000
- Pension deficit payments: $243,000

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2020 UBS Global Mission Team income: $13,977,000

- Global Stewardship Fund: $7,572,000
- ISP grants (primarily from ETEN to GMT for translation work): $3,370,000
- Other income: $3,035,000*

2021 UBS Global Mission Team income: $13,942,000

- Global Stewardship Fund: $7,762,000
- ISP grants (primarily from ETEN to GMT for translation work): $3,649,000
- Other income: $2,531,000*

*Other income is primarily from investments, donations and legacies, copyright income, and government grants, specifically furlough schemes.

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Average Annual UBS Economy

The UBS Fellowship economy is made up of three components: Local Bible Societies’ economies, grants given from Bible Societies to each other through the International Support Programme (ISP), and the Global Stewardship Fund (GSF), which supports the work of UBS and the Global Mission Team. This shows the average amount of each part of the economy from 2018-2020.

Average Annual UBS Economy (2018-2020):

- Local Bible Societies’ economies: $309,021,000
- ISP grants: $38,009,000
- GSF Contributions: $8,737,000

1Expenditure was reduced by approximately $1.5m in 2021 due to the release of a prior year provision.
The Bible for everyone

unitedbiblesocieties.org
Tel +44(0)1793 236 200
Email comms@biblesocieties.org

Scripture quotes are from the Good News Translation and Contemporary English Version.

The Fellowship is incorporated as United Bible Societies, a corporation registered in the state of Delaware, USA, in 1946. The affairs of the Fellowship are administered on its behalf by the United Bible Societies Association (UBSA) from its registered office at UBS UK Hub, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon SN5 7PJ, England. UBSA is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales no. 2264875. Registered charity no. 800058.