

Matzke Messenger

March 2017

Tim & Martha Matzke
serving in the
Solomon Islands with

Wycliffe 

God's Timing for Savo?

Savosavo, a dormant volcanic island, dominates the horizon five nautical miles off the coast of Guadalcanal. Except on days when clouds descend and envelope the island, we can see Savo every day from our home or office.

The inhabitants of the island speak the Savosavo language – a complex language not related to any other of the 60+ languages spoken around the country. Linguists are unsure why the language spoken there is so very different than its closest neighbors.

A number of years ago, our good friend and prayer partner, Andrea Townsend, came to visit us in the Solomon Islands. When she learned that the Savo people didn't have any translated Scriptures, Andrea took up the challenge of praying daily for Savo through Wycliffe's Bibleless People Prayer Project. On her second visit to the Solomons, Andrea visited Savo with Martha and another friend.

In 2010, Andrea suffered a stroke and currently resides in a nursing home in Kentucky. Although Andrea can no longer speak, her mind is sharp and we are sure she has continued to pray for Savo. But as far as we knew, there was little interest in Bible translation among the Savo people.



Andrea on her way to Savo



About a month ago, we received a phone call from a Catholic nun, Sister Cecelia. She was eager to come visit our office and the next day, she came and shared her story. Sister Cecelia is from Savo Island. For the past 20 years, she has been serving as a missionary in South America and this past Christmas came back to the Solomons for the first time in five years.

Most recently, Sister Cecelia has been attending a Bible school in Bogotá, Colombia, where she has been studying Greek and Hebrew, in Spanish. As she grappled with her studies, she found herself walking out of class and translating what she was studying back into Savo to help her better understand.

The instructors at the school started asking Cecelia about Savo and whether there was a Bible in her own language. She wasn't sure, so they suggested that when she returned to the Solomons, she should try to find out. Once she arrived, she talked to the Catholic Archbishop who gave her our phone numbers, which is how she arrived at our office.

Sister Cecelia told us that on the island, the Catholic churches use Ghari – a language of Guadalcanal in their services and the Anglicans use Gela – a language spoken in a nearby island chain. "But these are not our languages and we don't understand them – it is all rote and meaningless!", she said. "As Christians, the Bible should be the center of our lives. If the



Sister Cecelia outside her home church on Savo



Andrea in a recent photo

Bible was translated into Savo, it would transform lives and the entire island.” Sister Cecelia shared with passion. “There are no social problems on the island that could not be addressed by the Word of God.”

We had to tell Sister Cecelia, that while Savo was high on the needs list for Bible translation, no translation work had been done. We began to wonder if perhaps God was beginning to answer the prayers of Andrea and others for the Savo people.

We shared with Cecelia how Andrea and others have been praying for the Savo people for years. Perhaps, God was going to call Cecelia back to the Solomons to serve her own people. With her knowledge of English and having studied Greek and Hebrew, she has some useful/unique skills for Bible translation. The thought of getting involved in Bible translation herself was a new and frightening idea, but she promised to pray about it.

A plan began to formulate. Sister Cecelia would soon be traveling over to Savo, and she would begin talking to the Catholic Churches about Bible translation and gauge interest there. The next step would be to involve the Anglican Churches, as well. Cecelia was a bit uncertain about taking the lead in this, but we encouraged her and she promised to see what she could do.

Last week, we received an update. The Catholic Churches held a Bible translation awareness meeting and over 100 people met for several hours to discuss the idea. There was a positive response and a plan was made to invite the Anglican Churches to meet together with the Catholic Churches. We were invited to come along and help lead the discussion on what the church/community would need to do if they wanted the Bible translated into Savo.

On Sunday morning, a boat picked us up and transported us to Savo Island. In the afternoon, more than 50 people from both Catholic and Anglican Churches came together to learn more about Bible translation. By the end of the meeting there was consensus that each local church should appoint members to a Savo Bible translation committee to oversee the ministry.

And Sister Cecelia? She is scheduled to return to South America next week, but is open to what God has for her. Please pray for her as she seeks God’s will for her involvement in the Savo translation ministry and that God will call others to be involved in the various roles needed.



Savosavo men participating in the discussion about Savo Bible translation

It’s been a delight to see God answer the prayers of Andrea and others. Please pray with us that the momentum that has begun will keep growing until there are translated Scriptures for Savo.

Until all have God’s Word in their own language,

Tim and Martha Matzke

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