

Scripture Engagement – Tanzania September 2016

by Alwyn Bull (Chairman of The Word for the World UK)

You may wonder why we are involved in scripture engagement and may even ask the question; well now if they have the scriptures in their own language surely they would use what has been provided? Perhaps so in some instances, however in our modern world so many countries have a common trade language which all people in the country are supposed know and to use fluently. In these countries they have become used to using the scriptures in that language if indeed that language has the scriptures. In Tanzania that is the case as Swahili is the common language and they have had the scriptures in that language for some time.

It was our privilege to visit Tanzania once again this year. Last year we attended the launch of the 10 new Testaments and then went on to provide a conference for the pastors at Ifakara primarily aimed at the Ndamba people group.

This year a small team travelled to Dar es Salaam at the beginning of September. Alwyn a UK board member travelled together with the pastor Tom McGibbon and His wife Judy from Oundle Road Baptist church in Peterborough. Raymond Bigwa the Tanzanian Assistant Director and his wife Elizabeth were there to meet the team and were actively engaged in the logistics and as translators for our time in Morogoro and then in Handeni and Tangeni. The Morogoro and Tangeni conferences were aimed at the Luguru speaking people group while the conference held in Handeni was for the Zigula speaking people group.



Conference venue Morogoro

The first pastors conference was held in Morogoro and some 60 pastors attended with some able to bring their wives. In all there were around 80 people in attendance. This was the first occasion that a special series of meetings was provided specifically for the pastors wives. Judy was the keynote speaker for this women's event ably assisted by Elizabeth. Her series was based on Jesus being their rock.

On the second day both Tom and Judy brought a combined presentation dealing with marriage. This session was introduced by selecting several of the pastors along with their wives who were called to enjoy a little fun playing the game of Mr & Mrs. This brought much joviality to the extent that the pastors asked the bishop and his wife to play the game the following day.

On a more serious note the conference started and ended the day with a time of singing and devotions lead by Raymond. Tom presented a series starting with “Effective leadership”, leading on to two sessions on “Our walk with God” concluding with “Presence, passion & purpose”.



From left to right – Judy, Elizabeth, Alwyn, Raymond and Tom
Photograph taken in the partially built Bible College building



Lunch time meal

Changing the sequence of address each day so that no one was left solely with after lunch addresses. Alwyn offered a series of addresses on a purpose driven church and mission. The addresses looked at “Running the race” Hebrews 12:1-3, “Our commission” Matt 28:16-28, “following the heart of God” concluding with “Our practice” Romans 12.

In addition to the chosen subjects of the conference TWFTW had opportunity to present to the churches an understanding of the translation process and how the churches can participate in the whole development of the new translation. John Mbeyle led these sessions and was well received.

Each session was followed by a question time that turned out to be very productive and often dealt with the same problems that the churches face in the West.

The conference was very well received by both the pastors and their wives and would like the team to return. In Africa there is a great thirst to learn from Gods word and this was voiced at each of the conferences we have delivered.

At the end of the conference the pastors' wives celebrated their appreciation by singing to Judy and presenting her with some gifts.



Pastors' wives celebration
(To view video see <https://youtu.be/H7QSnz7NVW8>)

A day was spent by the team at the new TWFTW offices and those present enjoyed a time of teaching and enjoyed a meal together. It was good for Tom and Judy to see the office in operation and to meet the staff and translators present. Tom led this time together by providing an address of encouragement for TWFTW translators and leaders present.



TWFTW offices Morogoro Tanzania

After a very good conference and visit to the TWFTW offices the following day the group took a break and spent the next day in the Mikumi Game Park about 90mins drive from Morogoro. It certainly was the hottest day we had in Tanzania but also the clearest day. Plenty of sunshine which made for good game viewing.



Sleepy Lions



Left to right Judy, Tom, the driver, Alwyn & Raymond in front of an old Baobab tree

Sunday morning was spent at a service in Morogoro where Tom was asked to preach. The service started with the traditional time of singing and worship followed by an engagement ceremony in which a young couple to be married received a church blessing African style. After the ceremony and another song Tom gave the morning sermon.

Following the service we enjoyed lunch together at the Arc Hotel and then Tom and Judy flew out to return to the UK while Alwyn & Raymond travelled on to Handeni, a four hour drive, where a two day conference was planned.

The time spent in Handeni was precious with the conference opened by the pastor of the church in which we held the conference.



Opening address



Pastors and their wives

Raymond presented the times of devotion at the beginning and end of each day while Alwyn covered the same topics as he did at Morogoro. One of the ladies in the translation group spent some time encouraging the church leaders in their role together in helping with the translation of the Zigula Bible.



Member of the Zigula translation team

After each session we enjoyed a time of question and answer learning that the churches there face, many of these again the same problems that our churches face in the West. It was good to hear of one pastor who was called to minister to a different tribe in another part of the country. This is a relatively new experience for many of the African churches as often the tribal divisions are very strong and often very antagonistic.

While in Handeni we had the privilege of meeting the missionary who in the early 1980's planted the church in which we met. He was visiting with a group of friends who had come out with him from Sweden to see how the work was going. We trust he was encouraged by what he saw.

We left Handeni early the following day and returned to the Arc Hotel in Morogoro. Early in the morning the next day we set out for a one day conference in Tangeni. We were able to meet with a very diverse group of church leaders this time. These churches had never met each other previously and all who attended were excited and motivated to set up further meeting where the churches could meet together with a common goal, serving the Lord God.



Conference venue in Tangeni

During the presentations members of the congregation were asked to read the scripture passages from their New Testaments rather than using the Swahili Bibles in their possession. After the presentations question and answer time a comment was made by one

of the church leaders; “until this we have been in darkness”. This in part answers the question asked at the beginning of this recollection, when people read the Scriptures in their own mother tongue it takes on a whole different meaning. These are no longer scriptures borrowed from another language or culture, this is their heart language. God speaks to the heart in the best possible way. This is the primary reason behind translating the scriptures into the language of the people groups. We are encouraging pastors and church leaders to use these translations in the preaching, teaching and in their churches as they reach out to their congregation and to the lost.



Leaders from Tangeni churches

A second and very important reason for scripture engagement is to provide some helps to the local pastors and church leaders who often have very little education and probably even less theological training. Conferences are something generally way beyond their reach. We are privileged to be able to provide this for them. This is a great encouragement to both the pastors and to their churches.

We are currently planning a further trip to Tanzania next year in September, this time we will start our time there in the South West, near Mtwara and then move on to Songea, and finish off in a town not too far out of Morogoro. If this article has touched a chord in your heart you too can be involved in this ministry through prayer, and financial support of the work.

May God bless you in your endeavours for Him.

Alwyn J Bull

TWFTW website: <http://www.twftw.org.uk>