

Refugees want to forgive

Susan Wingrave, Volunteer Development Officer, was humbled by her trip to Austria to see how the Bible is impacting refugees.

From volunteers helping just three staff members cope with the influx of Bible requests, to the refugees' stories and their desire to forgive, Susan was touched.

'It was cold outside but my heart was warmed by all I saw and heard,' Susan told Volunteer Team News. 'Our colleagues in Austria form a small team but they're having to cope with a surge in demand for Bibles as refugees continue to come to Austria. The Director, Dr Jutta Henner, told me that in 2014 they had 20,000 people seeking asylum but 100,000 people arrived in Austria during 2015.

'They receive requests for Bibles for refugees from all over and it's thanks to the work of the volunteers there that they're able to cope – just about – with the demand. Volunteers like Stephanie. She's so passionate that people have the Bible. She's in her late twenties and used to be employed by Bible Society. She is now working in a church outside Vienna near her home town but continues to do all she can to support the work with refugees.'

Susan went to Austria with a cameraman and producer to film a video for this year's refugee pack, and you can find out more about the people she spoke to in that video, plus more on YouTube.

Humbling

'It wasn't straightforward,' Susan explained, 'When we filmed one man, our producer asked the questions in English, Jutta translated into German, another man then put the words into Aramaic. The questions were answered in Aramaic, translated into German and then finally into English. It wasn't always easy but speaking to these people, who have



*Wife of family who left Syria because the husband was kidnapped
Photo: Whitestone Media Ltd*

fled Syria because of the threat from ISIS, was really humbling. The overwhelming thing they told us was that they wanted to forgive and they wanted a Bible so they can see what Jesus did.

Kidnapped

'We visited one family, whose husband had been kidnapped by ISIS. Fortunately his wife had the money to pay the ransom. When he returned, he fled the country. Now he has asylum and his family have joined him. His wife was a headmistress. She told me how scary it had all been and how the church supported her. She knew it was important to forgive people and not let it affect the rest of her life.

'There were times I needed to check reality. I spent a morning with a refugee who told me how he had to flee his home in fear for his life, and later the same day I was sitting in a nice coffee shop with people carrying on with their normal lives and conversations.

'I wanted to do everything I could for these people, give them jeans or Bibles or even bring the children home with me. How can they give up what they had and still be grateful?

cont on p2

Refugees want to forgive cont...

'Life must have been hideous in their country. It's not that they want an easier life; they just don't want to be killed.'

Prayer pointers

- Vision Visit: 8–14 September, around ten volunteers from our Speaker Team will be visiting Vienna including spending Sunday with Father Aydin (pictured right) to discover first-hand how Bible Society is working with the refugees. Please pray for the trip
- Please pray for Jutta and the team. They're working really hard and the stories they hear are



heart rending. Pray they may be aware that God is with them and will sustain them.

- Pray for peace in Syria and across the Middle East.

Bringing the Bible to life

Over the last few months, we've been reviewing the way we engage with our supporters and have made some refreshing changes.

Our new awareness raising campaign is called 'bringing the Bible to life'. This campaign will provide an exciting opportunity for you to tell our story in a fresh and engaging style as it summarises everything we do and what we're about under one umbrella. Linked to this we've also refreshed our website, our logo, introduced new colours and clarified our key organisational messages, such as:

Our vision (how we want the world to be): A world where everyone has access to the Bible and can recognise its value for them, their families and communities.

Our mission (what we're doing to achieve our vision): We're on a global mission to bring the Bible to life for every man, woman and child.

And why do we do this? Because when people engage with the Bible, their lives can change, for good.

Watch this space for further information on how, together, we're going to be bringing the Bible to life.

News in Brief

What's Your Story?

We'd love to be able to share stories of how the Bible is changing lives, for good. If you, or anyone you know has a testimony of how God, through the Bible, has changed them in some way – perhaps helped reconcile the family, or helped someone gain confidence or even helped change career – please email the editor with a few details so she can follow up. joy.aldred@biblesociety.org.uk

National Volunteers Week

National Volunteers week is 1-7 June 2016 and this is an ideal opportunity to get your church friends to join your Action Group or just generally become more active for Bible Society.

Discount

We're delighted to announce that until 31 December 2016 all volunteers will be able to get 10% off any product in our online shop, except: Open the Book handbooks, which are already discounted and The Lion Storyteller Bible.

When you order via our online shop just type in VOL16 in the promo tab when you check out/confirm basket stage.

Action Group Reports

The Barnet and District Action Group usually raise £1,000 each year through a mix of the usual – and the different.

There are ten people in the group, representing most of the churches in Chipping Barnet, with about 50 people regularly supporting the group by attending events.

Secretary Jenny Remfry explained, 'About £500 is raised from our four coffee and bring-and-buy mornings, and donations. We also raise various amounts at a summer tea party and each year we have a special event. Last year it was a garden party at my house in May; this year it was a Beetle Drive, which was successful. There were 40 people there and we raised almost £200.'

Another £150 comes from a puzzle page the group sells for £1 each November. This scheme may raise even more money as some local churches give money direct to Bible Society.

Jenny added, 'The founder of our group was a Salvation Army officer, and his son is now our vicechairman. We've always succeeded in finding a local clergyman to act as Chairman of the Group and Master of Ceremonies of our games. We make sure that the post is not too onerous and it works for us. Every rector, vicar and minister in our part of Barnet has done at least one two-year stint over the years and I think this helps to give us gravitas.

'My personal interest arises from my experiences abroad, in particular in Czechoslovakia and Russia, where I was aware of the excitement when Bibles became available again after the fall of communism.'



March Market

New Church Relationship Manager Kristin Stevenson reported on the Croydon Action Group March Market (pictured below).



'The volunteers did a wonderful job making the hall very inviting and they had some lovely cakes and tea for those who would like to sit and catch up with old or new friends. Those who were looking for mother's day gifts were also spoilt for choice with a number of lovely toiletries, books, sweets and jams on offer.

'They also gave the Easter Poem books to the children who attended. With over 50 people attending the group raised more than £300 and are now busy planning for their next fundraising event which is their annual walk in September.'

The Servant Queen

The Queen, who is patron of Bible Society, celebrates her 90th birthday on 21 April. To celebrate this occasion, we – together with HOPE and the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity – have published a new book.

The Servant Queen looks at the Queen's Christian faith. We're offering all supporters a copy of this book free of charge.

To request one please contact 01793 418222.

Meeting the Refugees

A Farewell... from Heather Clements

Yes, I really am retiring from my role in mid-April – after 11 years working for Bible Society!

Having reached the teacher's pensionable age last summer, I have prayerfully taken stock of where I should be and what I should be doing and have concluded that it is now time to move on to the next stage of life (whilst continuing to speak for Bible Society as a volunteer).

There are many contributory factors which have influenced this decision e.g. my husband has already been retired for over five years, my daughter has just had her second child and I feel that God is calling me to be much more involved in my local church here in Fleet.



*Heather with the elder's wife in a Miao village, Yunnan Province.
Nov 2014*



*Giving gifts to the children of a Bunong village in Cambodia.
Feb 2013*

Privilege

I'll never forget the excitement of the crowd in Ethiopia as we took part in the celebrations for the launch of the complete Bible in the Gurage Region or of the new believers among the Bunong tribal people of Cambodia.

Witnessing the amazing work of the Bible Society of Lebanon was another highlight and, of course, I will always remember the joy of those Chinese believers to whom I have given their first Bible.

Every blessing

I'm really pleased to say that my successor, Kristen Stevenson, has been appointed and started working for Bible Society in February.

One of my real concerns was that I should be able to work alongside my successor for a couple of months to effect a good handover. This prayer has been answered!

I have really appreciated your friendship and fellowship over the years and wish you every blessing for the future.

Church Relationship Manager News

And a welcome to Hannah and Kristin

Kristin Stevenson is taking over from Heather. Originally from the United States you might not immediately hear her southern accent when you meet her as she's been living in England for over 15 years. She tells us...

'I've done a number of roles with different charities and volunteered for several years while my children were younger, so I understand the time and effort you give. My girls are 11 and 13 so over the last three years I've devoted more time to full time work. I've spent two years working with the National Citizen Service and engaging with 16 and 17 year olds, showing them the importance of social action and

Hannah Dobbins is excited about her new role as Church Manager for the North West. She tells Volunteer Team News about herself... 'I'm 25 and grew up in a Christian family.

For many years I took the Bible for granted but never really understood its value until I was about 16. I was having trouble at school and was in my bedroom crying when I picked up my Bible and opened it at the Psalms.

When I read that Psalm, it was as if it was written for me and to me. As I read it, I wept, and spoke out the words over and over again and that's when I got it! I knew then that the Bible is the word of life and is a rock; it's the one thing steady when everything else seems so unsure. As Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink"(John 7.37). The Bible is where I come to drink. That's why everyone should have access to it, so they too can find a place to drink and feel refreshed – no matter what they're going through.

'The Bible has been my lifeline. It's the one place where I can find encouragement, direction, wisdom and peace. But most of all it's one of the places where I hear God's voice.

how volunteering not only will change their lives but those around them. I live on the Kent and East Sussex border and worship at St. Mary's Church, Ticehurst. I'm excited that with my new role I will be able to not only share my passion for the Bible and what it's meant in my life but also enable others to engage with the Bible.'

Contact Kristin.Stevenson@biblesociety.org.uk



'I'm excited about this role because I can talk about my faith, have that inner sense of making a difference, and work towards something I passionately believe in. I'm looking forward to sharing stories and inspiring and encouraging churches in the north of England.

'But the biggest honour is having the opportunity to meet so many amazing individuals who believe passionately in the Bible and its power to change lives and communities for good – and hearing their stories of how the Bible has impacted them. It really is a privilege to be able to meet so many incredible people and be a wider part of so many church families; to feel encouraged and hopefully to be an encouragement.'

If your church or group is in the North west and you would like Hannah to come and speak at an event or service, or meet your church leader or Action Group, please email her on **Hannah.Dobbins@biblesociety.org.uk**



The Bible is changing lives, for good

So grateful

A programme to reach marginalised communities in Kenya – including the Maasai, Pokot, Turkana and Teso – is transforming lives.

The Bible Society of Kenya began the literacy programme five years ago and more than 200 people have attended classes to equip them with literacy skills for daily life and, ultimately, to read the Bible.

Esther and Simon are just two people who have seen their lives changed, for good. Esther Teekah, from Ewuaso, said, 'I thank the Bible Society for bringing this education to us. Now I can write my name, do sums and help my children with their homework.'

Simon Olekaru, from Bissil, is also thankful. 'Before, I couldn't communicate with friends and family as I didn't know how to use a mobile phone, but now I'm so grateful because I can read, write and use my phone to do business and communicate.'

Joy Odhiambo, of the Bible Society of Kenya, said, 'It's clear from what we hear that local people are really benefiting from this initiative. It's also pleasing to see how our work is contributing to the government's development goals for improving our country's education levels.'

'It was like a light had been turned on inside me' A show which aims to bring healing to a country still traumatised by the past has had a huge impact. The Bible Society of Cambodia produced *Spean Metrey*



Scene from *Spean Metrey*



Literacy class in Kenya

(Bridge of peace and reconciliation) to help teach that God's peace and forgiveness is available to everyone. It's an emotional topic for Cambodians, still coming to terms with its harrowing past.

The first show was timed to commemorate 40 years since the Khmer Rouge marched into the capital Phnom Penh, beginning their four-year reign of terror. Millions died and Cambodians are still living with the painful legacy of that time, and of the wars that preceded and followed it.

Many who attended the show were non-Christians or new believers who know very little about the Bible. Srey Peu made a big effort to see the show – despite being pregnant she travelled over 60 miles from her village to attend it, perched with her six-year-old daughter, Rebecca, on the back of her husband's old motorbike. Her husband was going to be an usher there.

As she sat watched Cambodian performers singing, dancing and acting to tell the story of God's love and forgiveness for humanity, she was excited. 'I understood in a new way that God loves Cambodia and that He really is the God of us, the Khmer people, too. Jesus came to save everyone, regardless of ethnicity. The whole message of forgiveness and reconciliation sank deeply into my heart. We can't wait to go back to our village and share what we've experienced. All Cambodians need to hear and understand that God loves them, and that we can be reconciled with our past and live in peace through him.'

The Bible is changing lives, for good

One woman was so moved she had to leave the show for a while and was found by an usher weeping in the bathroom. San Riem's reaction was more joyful: she beamed as she told Bible Society staff how thrilled she was. 'God really loves Cambodia and its people. It made me feel so loved and valued. It was like a light had been turned on inside me. God became more real and personal to me. It became a sacred moment of basking in his love.'

'This message is so crucial to Cambodia, after all the things that have happened here. I believe that Jesus can bring peace and reconciliation to our people. I needed to hear this message, and other people need to hear it, too.'

Secret police search translators' homes

Marijke, a Global Translation Advisor with the United Bible Societies, visits Kyrgyzstan to meet the Tukur team (a code name for one of her confidential projects).

'I meet the translators twice a year,' Marijke said. To meet with them on Skype is impossible and email exchanges are limited. It's also impossible to meet in the country itself, and therefore the team meetings are organised in Bishkek, the capital of neighbouring Kyrgyzstan. Stalinism is still very much alive in Central Asia, and religion is firmly controlled by the government.

Religious freedom does not exist. Although the future looked brighter after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Christianity seemed to flourish, the situation changed rapidly from 2000 onwards. Churches were closed, and Christians were harassed: a real Uzbek, Turkmen, Kazakh or Karakalpak should be Muslim, not Christian.

But despite persecution by the government, churches still exist. A tiny part of the Tukur people are Christian. The pastors of these churches asked for a translation. And despite the difficulties, two translators have committed themselves to translating the Old Testament.

Each works from home. They hardly communicate with each other for reasons of security. Sometimes they meet in a public place to exchange files. In



Pictured: San Riem. Photo: Bible Society

2014 their homes were searched twice by the secret police.

They work with ParaText, a computer program used by almost all Bible translators. It's on a hidden drive in their laptops.

This program allows them to type in their translation and compare it with a variety of translations in neighbouring languages, but, other than that, they have no access to resources.

They are not allowed to have more than one religious book at home, there are no Christian books in the libraries, and Christian internet sites are closed – and, anyway, the internet is not safe because it is watched by the secret police. Hebrew and Greek courses do not exist in their country, and so they mainly work from translations.

'The little material that's available for them in Russian, we scan and store on the hidden drive of their laptops. That is the most we can do,' Marijke explained.

'Even if this translation ends up with only a minority of the Tukur people, it's more than worthwhile. We know it comforts the tiny and vulnerable communities and encourages them in difficult situations.'

Refugee round up

- There are 14 million refugees living in what United Nations calls 'protracted situations' – lives on hold for five years or more as they wait to be granted asylum.
- The global displaced population is now at 60 million.
- The world's largest refugee camp is in Dadaab, northeastern Kenya.
- Designed for 90,000 people, 330,000 Somalis are sheltering there.
- The migrant death toll on the Mediterranean this year is expected to top 3,000.
- 250,000 Syrian school age children do not go to school in Lebanon.
- 70% of newborns are not registered at birth.

As the refugee crisis continues to grow, we invite you to join us in following God's command to:

'consider all people the same'

(Numbers 15.16)

and 'show love for those foreigners'

(Deuteronomy 10.19)

Events diary

2016

- 26 Mar: Mary Jones World re-opens
- 2–6 Apr: Spring Harvest Minehead
- 6–10 Apr: Spring Harvest Minehead
- 17–20 May: CRE International, London
- 27–30 May: Big Church Day Out
- 1–7 June: Volunteer Week
- 17–19 Jun: Vision Refresh Weekend
- 15–17 Jul: Mary Jones Challenge
- 16 Jul–5 Aug: Keswick Convention
- 23 Jul–6 Aug: New Wine, Somerset
- 8–14 Sept: Vision Visit to Austria
- 1 Nov: Mary Jones World winter closing
- 1 Dec: Start the Advent Challenge