

## Dear Friends,

*"Sing to the Lord a new song" (Psalm 33:3). As someone who's not particularly musically gifted but loves to create and to imagine new possibilities, this verse has become part of my purpose as a regional director for Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT). I get to co-create "new songs" in Tanzania, Southeast Asia, and Papua New Guinea with colleagues and partners. We are creating new rhythms and medleys to produce beautiful "music" in our programs.*

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*I didn't know that some older people who were attending church were not understanding [Swahili] Scripture. When they heard the Bible story told in Kikerewe, they became excited. They understood it! It was so clear!"*

*(Pastor on Ukerewe Island)*

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## Oral Bible Storytelling: A "New Song" in Tanzania

In 2003 Nathan and I arrived in Ghana to work with the Komaba in Bible translation. Along with other missionaries, Nathan worked with the community and team for years, laying a foundation of language development, literacy, translation training, and community engagement. Gaining momentum was a slow and difficult process, involving ongoing training, mentoring, and problem-solving. **But what if there's no well-trained "expert" available to sit with a team for years to do Bible translation?** A new song needs to be written for Bible Translation.



Oral Bible Storytelling (OBS), as a first phase for language program development, is the song we are writing in Tanzania and Southeast Asia to address this reality. Storytellers, selected by the community, craft stories at workshops, using an approach that closely resembles translation. It's a gentle introduction to the Bible translation process, and communities get a taste of Scripture in their language immediately as the stories are shared. No tech or linguistic analysis is needed for this.

Over the past 9 months, since OBS was initiated in Tanzania (with Nathan as the consultant), thousands of people have heard stories in 6 Tanzanian languages through this program. In 2026, we will add new components to 3 languages—selecting and training translation teams, linguistic analysis, and creating goals with the community. Rather than a missionary providing advanced skills, we are training and mentoring others in Tanzania through an incremental approach that slowly builds capacity while also nurturing vision and ownership.

*(Pictures are from OBS workshops in Tanzania—Stories told this way are interactive and engaging, making it fun to hear and remember them!)*



## Merging New Voices Together

Through an agreement between LBT and the Seed Company (SC), Nathan serves within SC to strengthen collaboration with LBT and broader Church bodies. Drawing on his experience as an ordained pastor who partnered with a national Lutheran Church in Bible Translation ministry, Nathan helps bridge communication and understanding among stakeholders.

One perspective that Nathan articulated to Church partners is the idea that *Bible translation can be a form of pastoral care*. This resonated deeply with Church leaders in both Papua New Guinea (ELC-PNG) and Tanzania and is shaping their vision for their involvement in Bible ministry. For instance, rather than focusing solely on translation programs, they are considering integrating translation-related training into pastoral formation, as many leaders face complex multilingual ministry settings where more than one language is needed to meet the needs of diverse people.

As a regional director, I think, “Where am I going to find the people to support this big vision?” Combined people resources from SC, LBT, and our Church partners is the harmonization we need.



*ELC leaders from nine districts in Papua New Guinea identified ministry needs and then used dots to prioritize them at a recent workshop exploring Bible Translation as pastoral care.*

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### LEARN MORE AND GIVE:

[LBT.org/esala](http://LBT.org/esala)



**The Lutheran Church has been instrumental in Papua New Guinea's development (i.e. health, literacy, community development, schools).** This was showcased during my recent trip during festivities to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of PNG. My colleague Michelle Gillard and I enjoyed vibrant cultural performances from across the country. Praise God for this impact—the song of the Church in PNG!

## PRAISE God for...

- ...the Komba Full Bible dedication and distribution in November.
- ...amazing partnerships for me and Nathan.
- ...the solar system installed in PNG through key partnerships. It provides electricity for remote language programs, enabling workshops and the printing of translated Scripture portions.

## PRAY...

- ...for Tanzania and Southeast Asia teams as they initiate the transition from OBS into Bible translation in 2026
- ...the Lord provides for the needs of LBT and our partners as we work together
- ...for the ELC-PNG as they discern next steps towards Bible translation as pastoral care.

Sing with me Mary's song, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices...for the Mighty One has done great things for me." (Luke 1:46 & 49 NIV)

Merry Christmas!  
*Sarah (for Nathan too)*