

Executive Director Address to the Wycliffe Global Alliance

Global connect 2020

1. Introduction

Dear friends and colleagues in the Bible translation movement,

It is with a sense of honour and gratitude, that I have the privilege to serve the Wycliffe Global Alliance as Executive Director. I am humbled by the opportunity to lead the Alliance during this time and grateful to everyone that has offered words of encouragement as I have stepped into this role.

I am grateful to my wife Lezelle, and our two children, Natasha and Ivan, who stand with me and support me in this ministry. This year Lezelle and I celebrate 30 years together in ministry, 25 of which has been in Wycliffe Bible Translators. Since January 2019 when I accepted the nomination to serve as Executive Director, our resolve has been tested in the deepest way possible. As expressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 5, the sufferings we experienced produced perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. It is in this hope, and in total dependence on God that I am approaching this role.

In the process of accepting the position as Executive Director, and moving towards a leadership transition, no one could foresee the turmoil humanity would face due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic. Each Alliance Organisation, your countries, and each one of you personally, has been impacted by this crisis in unique ways. In the book of Isaiah, we see a record of Israel and Judah facing a calamity. What stands out in the midst of their trouble is the constant reminder of the presence of God with them. In the same way, in our crisis we are comforted by Immanuel, God with us.

I am especially encouraged by the ingenuity of our Alliance Organisation Boards and Leadership teams in the ways that they have responded to this recent crisis. We have not fallen into despair, but responded well to the challenges before us.

The Coronavirus pandemic, or any other crisis we might face in the future, is not our destiny. Our destiny is still before us, and will only be complete when, as we are reminded in the book of Revelation, “... a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, [will stand] before the throne and before the Lamb”.

As our Alliance journey is still unfolding before us, I now want to share a few thoughts that will help us as we make our way together. As we step out on this journey, I will refer to things that will act as guides for our future, as well as reference a few focal points on our way.

2. Guides for the future of the Alliance

2.1 The importance of our foundational statements

We will remain true to our Alliance foundational statements, which include our purpose, mission, vision, core values and doctrinal statements. Over the years we have recognised and embraced numerous values that have become part of our Alliance way of life. These values will continue to guide us and enrich our relationships and ethos as an Alliance.

Today, I will only highlight six of these, though there are others that I could mention as well.

- We value **community** and the multitude of voices that it represents. We have come to know this as the **polyphonic nature** of the Alliance.
- We value our **diversity** and therefore take conscious steps to maintain our **unity**.
- We value the **Church**, our **partners**, and the **language communities with whom** we serve.
- We value **missiology** as our foundation for evaluating the theory and practice of what we do and how we do it.
- We value the practice of **reflection and discernment amongst our** community.
- We value a movement that is **generous**, and aspire to be **accountable stewards** in managing the resources that God has given to us.

2.2 We will remain rooted and forward thinking.

To remain relevant as an Alliance we need to be forward thinking. Of course, the only way in which we can appropriately be forward thinking, is if we remain rooted in what has gone before.

- We need to remain rooted in the mission of God. God's mission belongs to him and God commissioned his Church for his mission. So in response to being called by God, we have the joyful privilege of participating with him in this. In order to discern and align ourselves with God's mission, we will continue to conduct missiological discussions, as these serve our community well.
- We need to remain rooted in our history that provides us with clear markers as we anticipate our future. We have a rich history. Traced from the days of Cameron Townsend, this year we celebrate 40 years since the foundation of an international organisation under the leadership of George Cowan. Today we humbly recognise all those who have gone before us, those who responded to God's call in their own contexts and times. There is much we can learn from them as we move forward.
- We need to also remain rooted in our foundational statements that point to our future and to the vision of the world we long to see and the characteristics we long to show as an organisation of people who put their faith and trust in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

But while we need to be rooted in what has gone before, the world is rapidly changing, and we must be equipped to adapt to this complexity and challenge of a fast-changing world.

For example, to help us discern the way forward as an Alliance community, we have launched a global discussion on what the Bible translation movement could look like in a post-pandemic world. We trust that it will be possible for each Alliance Organisation to participate in this discussion.

2.3 We wish to see robust Alliance Organisations

We recognize that God has gifted each Alliance Organisation differently in order to make their unique contribution to the Bible translation movement. We desire to see each

organisation reach their fullest potential and participate joyfully in the life of the Alliance community. We long to see the community engage in meaningful relationships and make contributions that will strengthen and enrich one another, while knowing that each organisation is valued in the Alliance community.

2.4 We wish to effectively serve the Bible translation movement

Even though the Alliance, inclusive of all Alliance organisations, is a significant player in Bible translation, we acknowledge that we are only one of many participants in this movement. This movement includes the worldwide Church and many partner organisations, such as SIL and others with whom the Alliance has a close relationship.

We are also indebted to many others who are enthused by the value of Bible translation. They contribute through prayer, through their financial gifts, and also inspire others to do the same. We acknowledge the contribution all of these are making in the cause of Bible translation. Together we remain committed to generously serve the Bible translation movement and wisely steward the gifts that God has provided to us.

3. Focal points as we move forward

Now, in order for us as an Alliance to continue to make a relevant contribution to Bible translation, there are a number of areas on which we need to focus.

3.1 Focus on Bible translation

We recognize that each of our Alliance organisations are gifted differently, and have unique capacities in which they excel. We have, for example, seven participation streams through which Alliance Organisations contribute to Bible translation and associated ministries. Yet, to remain true to our purpose that “As a community of participants in God’s mission, the Wycliffe Global Alliance offers leadership, influence and service within Bible translation movements”, we need to ensure that we maintain our focus on Bible translation.

We appreciate the leadership and management that a number of Alliance organisations are providing in Bible translation programmes. The Alliance celebrates these contributions and will continue to seek appropriate ways to collaborate on the development of Bible

translation training curriculum and in the offering of training to meet the current and future needs of Bible translation.

We will continue to assist in establishing pathways for training and the accreditation of translation consultants.

We will continue to encourage local agency and participation in Bible translation. And, as the Bible translation movement celebrates the completed translation of the 700th full Bible, we will continue to encourage full Scripture translation.

And, we desire that translations will be done and produced in formats that will ensure the best accessibility to Scripture.

3.2 Focus on internal and external influences

We want to pay attention to numerous internal and external influences impacting the Alliance and the Bible translation movement. These originate from multiple centers of influence and include numerous organizations — local, regional and global. It is not our role to manage these influences, but we want to understand, interact and respond to them.

3.3 Focus on collaboration

Globalization and technology continue to impact the Bible translation movement as well. Today there are speakers of specific languages dispersed across the world. Growing global relationships among individuals, churches and organisations, enhanced by virtual platforms that enable direct interaction with each other, are diminishing the traditional boundaries that previously constrained us. In addition, to our value on community and relationships, as well as the logical benefits of collaboration, these factors call on us all to make the effort to collaborate well.

While we seek to work well together, we also need to recognise and encourage local participants in Bible translation to be agents of their own future. Working well together may sometimes require us to take a step back.

4. Funding the Bible translation movement

I want to take a moment to address a particular current topic of discussion. At a global level we continue to adjust and make changes as we attempt to serve this diverse community.

One of these areas has to do with funding the Wycliffe Global Alliance. We will continue to work with Alliance organisations to help strengthen our funding models as we address funding realities. Recently the Wycliffe Global Alliance Board agreed to change the funding model of belonging to the Alliance and we have moved to a tier funding system. There are other aspects of our funding model that still need attention, and we will continue to discuss and address these.

5. Organisational response to these values and foci

As we continue to move forward on our journey as an Alliance, we constantly need to ask the question, *Are our strategies serving us well?* Given these values and focal points, and in light of the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world that we are living in, the Wycliffe Global Alliance Leadership Team will continue to assess and discuss if and how we should respond to constant shifts and challenges, and to discern with the Alliance community if our strategies are serving us well. We will continue to be in discussion with Alliance organisations as together we seek the best way to navigate our collective journey in the ministry of Bible translation.

It is my honour to introduce the Leadership Team that will help me lead the Alliance forward.

- Martijn De Vries – Director for Operations
- Nydia Garcia-Schmidt – Americas Area Director
- Bryan Harmelink – Director for Collaboration
- Wairimu Irungu (Pauline) – Africa Area Director
- Jo Johnson – Consultant for Prayer Advocacy
- Paul Kimbi – Consultant for Bible Translation Programmes
- Phil Prior - Director for Communication
- Valerie Soo – Logistics and Event Coordinator and Singapore Office Manager
- Hannu Summanen – Chief Financial Officer
- Susan Van Wynen – Consultant for Strategies
- Simon Wan – Asia-Pacific Area Director

- Hannes Wiesmann – Europe Area Director

4. Conclusion

As expressed in our Alliance vision statement, we want to see “Individuals, communities and nations transformed through God’s love and Word expressed in their languages and cultures.”

God has made himself known to the world, and as an Alliance we have the privilege to participate in the ministry of Bible translation through which God can be known in the languages and cultures of individuals and communities. We will move forward together on this journey in complete dependence on our triune God.

As an Alliance, we will be guided by remaining rooted and true to our shared values. We wish to see robust organisations that will reach their fullest potential according to how God has gifted them. We desire to serve the Bible translation movement, and will therefore remain committed to the Church and our partner organisations.

Going forward, in order to give expression to these values, we will focus on Bible translation, collaboration, the understanding of and response to multiple influences, and also give attention to the issues regarding the funding of the Wycliffe Global Alliance. At the heart of focusing on these areas, we will remain committed to strengthening our sense of community and continuing to grow and develop through the ongoing missiological reflection.

In conclusion, Agnes and the Alliance Board, thank you for your unselfish service as you provide governance and hold us accountable. To our Alliance family, thank you for being part of this journey. Thank you that I can be part of this journey with you. I look forward to the days ahead as we venture forward under God’s guidance.

We are reminded of God’s guidance in Psalm 25:

Show me your ways, Lord,
teach me your paths.

⁵ Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,

and my hope is in you all day long.

⁶Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love,
for they are from of old.

⁷Do not remember the sins of my youth
and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me,
for you, Lord, are good.