

# Trustees' Report

The Trustees present their report and the audited accounts for the year ended 31 December 2013.

The Society is established for charitable purposes and is recorded under the deemed list of local charities held by the Charities Commission Northern Ireland. The Commission began a lengthy process to formally register all local charities in December 2013.

BSNI's stated object is to promote the widest possible effective distribution and use of the Holy Scriptures. During the year the Board refined the Society's Vision which now states:

The Bible Society in Northern Ireland seeks to reach everyone with God's Word in a language and medium they can access and afford, so that each person might experience God's purpose for their life.

In fulfilling that task, the Society has continued to focus on a number of key objectives that were identified in a new Business Plan for the period 2013–15:

## Key Objectives

### 1) Promoting the Bible within our culture through:

- a. Producing 11,000 Bible reading guides which were provided as a free resource and were quickly taken up by some 75 churches.
- b. Creating opportunities to engage with clergy groupings to highlight the need for greater Bible engagement within churches. A useful discussion was held with parish clergy in Lisburn and more meetings are planned for other areas.
- c. Participation in or organisation of public events in churches and the wider community. In November the Society was granted the use of the City Hall in Belfast for a significant event to highlight the Bible Societies' Digital Bible Library. This mobile App, known as YouVersion, allows people all over the world to download the Bible on to a range of digital portable devices for free. It is a remarkable service offering over 700 Bible versions in over 450 languages and the number of available versions continues to grow rapidly. By the end of the year there had been over 120 million downloads worldwide and this service is meeting a need in countries where overt Bible distribution would be unwelcome or even dangerous.

The occasion in the City Hall marked the addition to the Library of two full Bible texts and also a New Testament in Irish, plus a Gospel of Luke in Ulster Scots. Several Bible readings were enthusiastically received by a large audience drawn from all over Ireland, as well as from the local community.

- d. Continuing to support the Amazing Journey Bible Storytelling in Primary schools project by supplying a further 8,800 copies of a Gospel and the book of Acts. These accompany the Pack given to each child. The reach of this project is remarkable – in one week alone, 700 children were engaged in schools in Derry/Londonderry.
- e. Welcoming people to Bible House to browse, seek support for their ministry or to obtain Scripture resources in English and also up to 70 non-English Scripture editions. Sales in 2014 however declined in line with national sales of Scripture in all Christian bookshops as people increasingly access unseen products on the Internet and use local bookshops for window shopping. It remains to be seen if an investment of more time in our website would result in a better and more relevant service, and therefore more sales. It is clear that most customers are only interested in low cost editions and even stocking full Bibles priced as low as £4.99 is no guarantee of a sale.
- f. Unfortunately, the Society went through another year without a tenant for the Ground floor Retail unit and, in response, the Board began a process with property consultants to look at the longer term options for utilising this space and the wider building. The Board sought a fresh evaluation of the building in the wider context of Belfast's retail sector.



## 2) Enhancing our relationships with and support for the Churches:

- a. Staff continued to build up a picture of those churches with active Mission Committees and / or digital projection equipment. Over 100 churches now receive our Resources disks which include picture, video and other material for use in Sunday worship or other aspects of Church activity. Our traditional preparation of comprehensive material for a Bible Sunday celebration continued and it is thought that over 300 churches now make some use of this service which seeks to encourage people to value our rich access to Scripture in our own language.
- b. BSNI works alongside some 45 other Agencies as the Mission Agencies Partnership to create Mission opportunities for both individuals and churches; the General Secretary completed a five-year term on the MAP Executive Committee.
- c. BSNI joins with 15 members of the Association of Mission Societies (linked with the Church of Ireland) to discuss how the crucial work of Mission in the Church could be further enhanced; the General Secretary became Chair of AMS in November for a two-year period.
- d. The General Secretary completed a nine-year term as one of the AMS representatives on the Church of Ireland Council for Mission.
- e. A lunchtime reception for Presbyterian clergy at the General Assembly in June was organised along with the other Specialist Service Agencies that are recognised by the Presbyterian Board of Overseas Mission (Feba Radio, Sat-7 and Wycliffe Bible Translators).
- f. BSNI participated in the organisation of specific events: the public reading of the full Bible text in St Mark's Parish church Newtownards and the building of a 'Christmas tree' using 390 Bible editions as part of a Christmas Tree Festival in First Dunboe Presbyterian Church, Articlave. The latter event attracted over 4,000 visitors and raised £4,000 for spiritual support to survivors of the typhoon in the Philippines in November.



## 3) Developing the support of the thousands of individuals and churches on the Society's database

- a. Some progress has been made on the electronic front with more people choosing to make gifts to the Society by credit card through the JustGiving website, often as a response to one of our mailed fundraising campaigns.
- b. A particular effort was made to match specific Church organisations with the wide range of Bible Society translation and distribution projects across the world. Through our Projects Manager, a post that was upgraded to full-time status from 1 January, offers of grants have been obtained from the International Women's World Day of Prayer for the (Philippines), the Methodist Missionary Society (Ireland) for Ghana, the Presbyterian Church Junior Boy's Brigade Committee (Brazil), and the Presbyterian Church Youth and Children's Project (India). The Society was also recognised by the Royal Black Preceptory, along with Mission Aviation Fellowship, as their (joint) adopted charity for 2014, through which Bible distribution will be supported in South Sudan. The funds being raised by each of the above organisations will flow to BSNI during 2014/5, so expanding the current Income streams.
- c. In order to ensure that our communications with supporters continue to be of good quality and modern in style, a review of the content and presentation of the Word at Work magazine is ongoing. A good many words of appreciation are received about the quality of the magazine and the encouragement that it provides to donors.



## 4) Developing our fundraising potential

- a. The number of supporters availing of our Direct Debit scheme continues to grow, but while we continue to attract people to our Facebook page, this does not appear to have the potential to be a significant income generator. Rather, fast moving Social media appear to offer topical issues for personal reflection.

- b. The Society continues to invest much staff time in presenting its work to a wide range of audiences during Sunday Services and Midweek meetings.
- c. During the year, recognising the reluctance of many people to engage in a regular pattern of financial giving, the Society produced a Bible Change box so that small amounts of cash could be accumulated and eventually forwarded to Bible House.

#### **5) Achieve growth in the Society's International Scripture Programme:**

BSNI continues to be one of the significant providers of funds to other Bible Societies which are unable to generate sufficient funds for their programmes. During 2013 the Society provided over £360,000 in support to specific Bible projects being implemented in 45 countries. A list of those projects appears below.

#### **6) Enhance the Society's profile within the local Christian community and the United Bible Societies:**

Through design of promotional material (business cards which advertised the free YouVersion Bible download service were very popular), contributing articles to local newspapers and Christian magazines, the Society does everything possible to ensure that our work is as visible locally as possible and that our active participation in the Fellowship is maintained. The General Secretary chaired the group which organised the Europe-Middle east conference for around 50 General Secretaries.



#### **7) Complying with best practice in the day-to-day management of the Society:**

The Society seeks to be an effective steward of its finances and premises, and Board members were kept regularly informed of current developments, both through formal meetings and by email. Close contact was also maintained between the General Secretary, Chair and Treasurer.

During the year everyone connected with the Society was shocked to learn of the sudden death in June of Mr David Taylor who had been a member of the Board for over 12 years and who is still fondly remembered. In December the Board welcomed a new member, Captain Colin Taylor, who has had a long association with Church Army. It was decided to appoint two additional members to the Board in early 2014, and membership of the Board is now a matter of annual review.

No new requirements were placed on the Society by the Charity Commission in Northern Ireland, but the Society is confident that, in all respects the Society will be seen to comply with any new responsibilities as they arise.

### **Governance and Management**

The Board of Trustees and Executive Committee held a total of seven meetings during the year to receive reports and proposals and to monitor the Society's day-to-day activities and finances.

Some adjustments were made to the Society's staff arrangements with the post of Projects manager being upgraded from part-time to full-time status. Some other posts were re-graded from February. The staff team remains settled.

#### **Trustees' Induction and Training**

The Society's Board is currently made up of eleven trustees who together offer a wide range of professional skills, and are drawn from a number of different Church backgrounds.

In addition to planned meetings, BSNI staff provide Members with information, reports and updates on a regular basis.

Reverend Stephen Lowry completed his three-year term as Chair on 31 December and was succeeded by Reverend Richard Kerr. As Vice Chair, Reverend Lowry remains on the Executive Committee.

## Risk Management

The Board, Executive Committee and staff plan the most effective response to the challenges which inevitably arise but the excellent relationships helped to ensure a relatively uneventful year. The Board is re-evaluating Bible House as an important capital asset in the centre of Belfast. It was a source of some disappointment that two expressions of interest in leasing the vacant Ground floor retail unit eventually came to nothing. The Second floor of Bible House continues to be occupied under a leasing arrangement.

In view of declining income streams due to the difficult economic environment, attention was given to creating new fundraising resources and opportunities for partnership with other Christian organisations. There was continuing scrutiny of all costs in order to maximise the value created by the generosity of donors.

## Internal Financial Control Policy

Online access to the Society's current account ensures that all financial transactions are closely monitored. There is close liaison between the staff, Treasurer and the wider Executive Committee and there are arrangements in place for approval of any exceptional items of expenditure, such as during 2013, in respect of substantial roof repairs.

## Achievements and Performance

### Financial Results

After the deficit experienced in 2012, the Board agreed to use £30,000 of its legacy reserves to help fund its International programme of support to Bible projects. The result at the end of the year was very satisfactory with the Society close to achieving a balanced budget. Notification was received in December that the Society should expect to receive a substantial bequest during 2014 and this will enable the Society to commit to some long-term Bible translation projects.

BSNI continues to receive support through a wide range of channels – by post, through personal visitors, a growing number of Direct Debit donors and also gifts sent by text or through the JustGiving website. It is clear, however, that the rates of response and the value of resulting gifts for Direct Mail campaigns remain challenging. The prospect of special project funding, to be received in 2014, from a number of Church organisations is therefore very welcome as it represents a diversification of the Society's fundraising efforts.

The Society's activities are reviewed under the following headings:

- ◆ **International Programme** - Activities to support Bible Mission abroad
- ◆ **Home Programme** - Activities and events within Northern Ireland
- ◆ **Future Strategy** – Development and review of the Business Plan for 2013-15

## International Programme

During the year the Society continued to be an active participant within the United Bible Societies, the global network that links Northern Ireland and the other 145 national Bible Societies and offices. The General Secretary convened the group which organised the annual conference for General Secretaries from throughout the Europe-Middle East area. As well as BSNI's traditional support for a range of Bible translation, printing, publishing and distribution projects, generous gifts from donors enabled the Society to provide significant support to China (for Bible printing), to Romania (for the provision of Bibles to newly-weds) and to Egypt to repair two Bible shops which were burned in disturbances in August 2013.



Two bookshops in Egypt were fully restored after being burnt.



The following is a list of national Bible Society projects to which BSNI designated agreed sums of money during the year:

### Translation

Translating Scripture in 32 languages in India and some of the 900 languages in Papua New Guinea

Translation of Study Bibles: Kirundi in Burundi\*, Siswati in Swaziland\* and Creole in Haiti

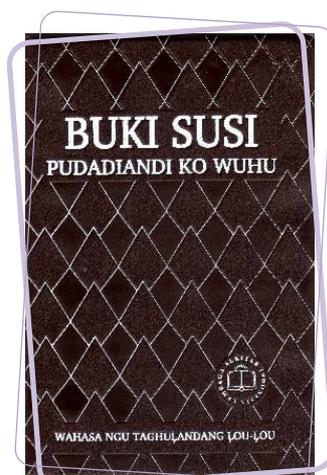
Translation of a first Gun Bible in Benin\* and a first Tagulandang New Testament in Indonesia\* (see photo to right)

Completion of Old Testaments (Albania\* & Poland\*), and also a Kurdish Old Testament in Turkey

Translation work on the Dida New Testament in Côte d'Ivoire\*

Translation of the Elhomwe Bible in Malawi\* and the Pulaar Bible in Senegal

Adapting the text to complete a Tigrignan Bible for the people of Tigray, Ethiopia\*



Tagulandang New Testament, Indonesia

### Children and Young People

Supplying schools in Ghana with Braille Bibles for those who are blind\*

Giving teenage gang members in Guatemala a second chance

'Bread of Life' – giving kids a daily breakfast, Scripture and Bible teaching in Peru\*

Providing 25,000 Children's Bibles in Malawi and Outreach to Youth in Zambia

Scriptures to engage with children at risk in Suriname and Bolivia



Braille Bibles for Schools in Ghana

### Distribution

Sharing Scripture materials among shepherds in Lesotho

Bringing God's Word to islands in the South Pacific on the Dayspring Yacht

Providing printing paper for the printing and distribution of heavily subsidised Bibles in China\*

Taking the Gospel to the border villages of Armenia and to villages in Bolivia

Provision of Bibles to couples to be married in Romania

Spreading of the Gospel to Muslims in Krgyzstan

### Churches

Resourcing churches in Lebanon and Laos with Scripture

Introducing the New Testament in four languages to be used in worship Services in Belarus

### Bible Ministry Support

Supporting the costs of maintaining Bible ministry teams in Albania\*, Latvia, and Uruguay

Developing the capacity of both Board and staff members in Malta and Togo

### Special audiences

MegaVoice digital Scripture players for use by people in the Philippines\* who are blind  
Provision of Scripture to Muslim neighbours in a partnership of four West Balkan countries

Developing a web presence under the theme 'ZeBible' for young people in France

Developing a Bible Exhibition gallery at the Bible House in Ukraine

Scriptures for Women's ministry in Malaysia



'ZeBible' for young people in France

## Home Programme

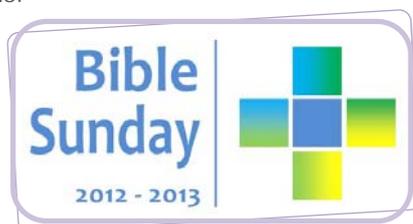
Staff were involved in 73 speaking engagements in church Sunday Services or with church groups. The Society continues to see this undertaking, despite the substantial commitment of time and resources, as the most effective way of presenting the Society's ministry to a wide and relevant audience. Three engagements involved the General Secretary accompanying the Church of Ireland Primate on a roadshow within his Armagh diocese. A further three engagements involved Ramez Atallah, General Secretary of the Bible Society of Egypt, and his wife Rebecca, who together gave a graphic account to audiences in Bangor, Belfast and Dublin of the current unrest in Egypt and its impact on their ministry there. Julie and Leah were involved in a very different kind of special event: the creation of a Christmas tree made up entirely of 390 Bible editions. This was one of the exhibits in a Christmas tree festival in Articlave, Coleraine which was very successful.



Ramez Atallah, from the Bible Society in Egypt and his wife, Rebecca.

Staff continued to provide supporters with a range of resources:

- Around 12,000 copies of our 16-page Word at Work magazine are circulated by post three times per year. The prayer information contained in a centre-fold is supplemented by a fortnightly e-zine which is sent to some 780 people and a monthly News briefing is sent to around 1,400 email addresses.
- Three Prayer/Gift Letters were sent by Direct mail as well as the annual alternative Christmas Gift catalogue which proved more popular than in 2012.
- The Bible a Month Prayer Partnership calendar continued to provide 12 projects for prayer and support, enabling supporters to place at least one Bible in a country each month.
- Two Resources disks were created and sent to churches to provide short video clips and other visual material for use in church worship. Over 100 churches now receive this.
- The website continues to contain a great deal of information about the Society's mission and enables people to read material on-line at a time of their choosing.
- A particular effort is made to provide churches with lots of on-line resources to support a Bible Sunday Service in their church.
- The Society continues to promote its presence on its Facebook but, to date, the Society has not joined the Twitter generation.
- Since the event in November to promote the YouVersion App, close to 10,000 cards have been distributed to make this service more widely known and to encourage individual Christians to engage users of mobile devices in conversation about their faith.
- The Society repeated the publication of a Daily Bible Reading Guide for 2014. 11,000 copies were quickly taken up by churches.



The Society continues to stock a wide range of Scripture editions in some 70 languages, but the trend to use bookshops for browsing only, prior to Internet purchase, continued to impact sales.

A total of 8,800 Gospels and Portions were supplied to the Association of Baptist Churches' Amazing Journey project. This Bible Storytelling initiative serves a vital purpose in introducing thousands of Primary age children to the stories and themes of the Bible as part of the curriculum in Primary Schools, and support for this Home project remains a high priority for the Society.

In addition, we seek to facilitate people travelling abroad to have contact with services provided by our sister Bible Societies so that Scripture can be made available; local distributions were arranged for them through the Bible Society staff in Cambodia, Cuba, Ghana and Kenya.



Amazing Journey volunteers look the part in Comber.

## Other special events / partnerships

BSNI continues to liaise closely with the National Bible Society of Ireland in the sharing and publication of literature which is relevant to supporters in both parts of the island. By increasing print runs, it is possible for BSNI to help make literature and fundraising available to individuals and churches throughout Ireland without incurring any significant design costs.

## Future Strategy – Business Plan for 2013-15

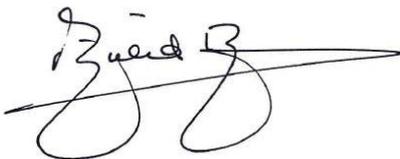
The current Business Plan was reviewed at the September Board meeting and it was noted that the Society had engaged in a number of unanticipated but valuable additional activities during 2013. A number of further activities were approved for action during the ensuing year in an effort to maintain the freshness of the Society's mission to benefit people here at home as well as addressing the crushing Bible poverty within our world.

The Board began to give consideration to the idea of establishing a small Advisory Group to guide the Society in broadening its visibility among those Church denominations and emerging churches where BSNI's profile may be low. It was hoped that this might bring the Society's mission to the attention of new audiences.

## Conclusion

In all the Society's efforts during the year, both the Board and staff were conscious of how richly the Society is being blessed. We trust that, as we look forward to a constantly evolving future, the Society will continue to enjoy His favour and the inspiration that is needed to fulfil the Society's Vision statement:

"The Bible Society in Northern Ireland seeks to reach everyone with God's Word in a language and medium they can access and afford, so that each person might experience God's purpose for their life."



Reverend Richard Kerr  
(Chair of the Trustees)  
Date: 14 October 2014