



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Ruth Heeg of the Canadian Bible Society, and Meg Billingsley, of Wycliffe Bible Translators of Canada, stand with those who are working on a new translation of the Bible into Plains Cree: Gayle Weenie, Ethel Ahenekew, Rev. Stan Cuthand, and Dolores Sand (l-r). An initial publication of the Gospel of Mark was launched May 19 at Queen's House in Saskatoon. The publication includes an audio CD of Mark's gospel read in Cree by Dolores Sand of Muskeg Lake.

Photo submitted by Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish

New translation of Gospel of Mark published in Plains Cree

BY KIPLY LUKAN YAWORSKI

SASKATOON – A new translation of Mark's gospel in the Plains Cree language was launched in Saskatoon May 19, 2010 sponsored by the Canadian Bible Society and Wycliffe Bible Translators of Canada.

The new publication of the Gospel of Mark is part of a larger Western Cree Bible Translation Project to publish the entire New Testament and about 40 per cent of the Old Testament into the Plains Cree "Y" dialect, explained project coordinator Ruth Heeg of Kitchener, Ontario, who works with the Canadian Bible Society's translations department.

The translation itself has already been completed by Anglican priest Rev. Stan Cuthand of Saskatoon, with scripture readers fluent in Cree continuing the long, ongoing process of reviewing the translation, she said.

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“We thought it would be good to put out a publication of a portion of the work, and the decision was made to produce the Gospel of Mark,” said Heeg at Queen’s House of Retreat and Renewal, where the launch was celebrated.

Publication of Mark’s entire gospel follows an publication of the Old Testament book of Ruth and a booklet featuring the Easter story from the Gospel of Luke produced in Cree in 2004 as part of the ongoing project, she noted.

Over the past 150 years there have been other translations of scripture into Cree, including work by Rev. Gerard Beaudet, OMI, who recently died in Saskatoon. However, in any language, ongoing and updated translations are needed to ensure the Bible will continue to be accessible and understood, Heeg said.

The new Western Cree publication of Mark’s gospel includes both syllabics (a style of writing composed of symbols) and Roman orthography (using the same letters as the English alphabet) – with the two forms appearing on facing pages. It also comes with an audio CD of the gospel read by Dolores Sand of Muskeg Lake, who is one of those working on the grassroots review of the Cuthand translation.

One of the first graduates of the Aboriginal Catholic Lay Formation program in Saskatoon, Sand is a teacher and elected leader who has also created an audio CD of the rosary in Cree.

Sand described how her aunt, Ethel Ahenekew, encouraged her to get involved in the translation project. A member of the Anglican Church active in native ministry, Ahenekew is

also involved in the ongoing process of reviewing the Plains Cree translation.

“Because I am a teacher of Cree and familiar with the Bible, she encouraged me and kept encouraging me to come too – and that was eight years ago,” said Sand, who served as master of ceremonies for the launch of the new book.

“I think it brings the Bible to us, however you want to read Cree,” said Sand of the new translation, noting the benefits of having both forms of writing on facing pages. “And the audio is there too.”

Working on the project has enhanced her own knowledge and understanding of the Bible and of her Cree language, Sand said, quoting one of the speakers at the launch who described the feeling of being “poor instruments” working to make God’s word known.

“I am getting to know the Bible much more deeply. I have found this spiritually fulfilling,” said Gayle Weenie of our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Parish in Saskatoon, who has been involved in the review process for the past two and a half years.

“It has opened up a new way of reading the Bible. Before, the Bible was something the priest read on Sundays,” she said. “It opens up a new way of reading the Bible, having it in our own language.”

The differences between Cree and English – and the original Greek of the scripture — means that the committee must often wrestle with words and concepts, she described, adding

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that differences in Cree dialect have also posed challenges and necessitated some compromises in the translation. “It takes time, and a lot of thinking.”

The review committee is now working on the Gospel of Luke and the book of Psalms, said Weenie. “It’s a long process.”

Weenie said she would like to eventually see the new translation used in her parish, which serves First Nations, Métis and others in downtown Saskatoon. “Maybe we could select a reading once a month, and just start slowly.”

The entire process of working on the Plains Cree translation has also had a healing dimension for Weenie, whose parents attended residential schools, where they were forbidden to speak their native language.

“When I met these people from Toronto, they were so welcoming, and they were so happy that we could speak Cree and so happy we could work on the project,” Weenie related. “I thought of my parents who went to residential schools and were punished for speaking their language.”

In spite of that, her father persevered, and taught his family to speak Cree, she said. “It was hard for my father that his language was not accepted. And now it is being accepted, and we are being welcomed and encouraged. It is kind of coming full circle.”



Ruth Heeg (right) expresses appreciation to Gayle Weenie of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish for her work on the translation project.

- Photo submitted by Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish

Weenie also observed that it is the Christian church that is working to bring this Cree translation about. “No one else has invited me to work in this kind of a role,” said Weenie. “It’s an interesting process how things have worked out. And I think of all these people who are not around anymore, and how they would have welcomed being able to read the Bible in their own language.”

She also thinks of the children and grandchildren who will have this new translation. “It is something to pass on.