

A Milestone: The First Major Scripture Use Conference in Papua New Guinea

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[This conference was arranged and organised by Carol Jean Gallagher and Kathryn Christensen who oversee the Scripture Use office at Ukarumpa, the SIL centre in Papua New Guinea. The main presenter was Margaret Hill the SIL Scripture Use Coordinator for Africa Area. This article is a compilation of their two reports on the conference.]

The Papua New Guinea branch of SIL held its first major Scripture Use (SU) conference from 31 July – 14 August, 2001. The workshop was held at the SIL Training Centre at Ukarumpa in the Eastern Highlands. The conference was designed with a two-fold purpose: to train leaders in Scripture Use and to give practical experience to teams in developing materials which encourage the use of Scripture in vernacular languages. The main presenter was Margaret Hill. Some of the topics were presented by local SIL members also.

The conference was attended by 78 people though only 69 were officially registered. A total of 27 language groups were represented by 43 Papua New Guineans (including 11 members of PNGBTA, the national Bible Translation Association). Many of the 26 SIL and PBT (Pioneer Bible Translation) members who also attended were accompanying their church leaders or co-translators from the languages with whom they work. Registration had to be limited due to space limitations and the practical logistics of advising so many language groups. There was a much greater interest in the conference than anticipated and several teams had to be turned away. It was exciting to see so many teams interested in this type of conference.

The manual *Using Your Bible: A Manual for Scripture in Use* (and the supplement) was the primary source of topics for this conference. Topics included:

- God and Language
- Scripture memorisation
- SGM (Scripture Gift Mission) [publishing of SU materials]
- Bible Study (on passages; on topics)
- SU and Sunday School, church, youth work
- Sunday School materials
- SU and schools
- Scripture games, songs, drama
- Production and distribution of SU materials

SU and adult literacy
Outlining sermons
Scripture and health
SU and problem solving

Basically the pattern was a lecture with some interaction from the participants, followed by an exercise done in language groups. At the end of the time all the groups had handouts ready to use back in their areas for local seminars. Four assignments (from each language group, not each individual) were an obligatory part of receiving a certificate at the end of the course. All the participants were given a copy of the SU manual and also the supplement lessons. Only about half the manual was covered and one-third of the supplement lessons.

In addition to the items on the program, every team, if they chose, was paired with a person who could help them discuss and plan SU activities. Most people managed three consultant sessions during the conference. One participant remarked, "The consultant sessions really helped us to plan more SU into our program."

The majority of the topics were very practical, with assignments completed during the conference. Each language team produced two Bible studies, one Sunday School lesson, a sermon outline, a Scripture song, a Scripture poster, a writing guide and a general plan for what they will do next with SU in their language.

The last day was spent in making plans for the future. Most of the language groups are planning local workshops for church leaders or other leaders in the next year. The teams also met in regions and discussed holding regional workshops. We also discussed the possibility of an advanced course in two to three years for those who have put into practise what was learned at this conference. There was discussion about the New Testaments (NT) that are not in use in the country and this seemed to stir up the concern of some of the Papua New Guinean participants. The regional groups are looking for ways to invite church leaders to workshops to start correcting this situation. One participant wrote, "This course made me think a lot about the surrounding languages that have NTs, but no one is using them."

The participants were very appreciative of the conference. There was much time for interaction and gleaning ideas from each other. Many commented that the lessons on applying Scripture to real-life situations/problems were very helpful. Several teams made specific plans to conduct local SU courses in their languages. There is interest in holding another conference in the trade language, Tok Pisin, and also interest in a follow-up conference for those who attended this conference.

An evaluation sheet was given out at the end of the conference to help determine some of the needs of the PNG people in regards to SU and how we could improve the next conference.

Many participants found the Bible studies the most helpful. In having to design questions for content, deduction and application, the participants began to understand how to get meaning from the vernacular Scriptures they have been reading. They now see the Scriptures as something that applies to everyday life.

Many appreciated having assignments to do. In this way they were able to practise what was discussed in the lectures. Most indicated they wanted to return home and teach Bible studies to their literacy committees, adults, youth, and even children. Others plan to use Sunday School materials in training teachers in their schools. Many recognised the need for teaching vernacular literacy in order for the people to read and understand the Scriptures.

A few of the participants were motivated by the stories of SU from other countries in Africa. They were keenly interested in what is being done in other parts of the world.

There were only two things consistently mentioned in a negative light. One was the difficult level of English, mainly in the manual. The other, was the length of the conference, it was too short!

In response to these concerns the SU office is now working on simplifying and writing the manual in Tok Pisin. Another conference is also being tentatively planned within another year or two.

This conference was definitely popular and something many people have wanted for a long time. The best way to communicate this to others is to let the participants speak for themselves.

“The seminar was very good. I have been doing things without being trained, but now I have some training and have sharpened my skills. I will go back and put into practise what I have learned and teach others to do what I do.”

Jerry Robert
(Kaugel Language)

“This has been a very helpful seminar. It has helped me to go back home and teach the people.”

Tandai Amsel
(Mbula Language)

“In this seminar I have learned many new methods that I can use to help the church leaders and congregation and children in both primary and community school. I also know more about God’s character.”

Dan Tumaka
(Borong Language)

Thank you so much for the seminar! It was extremely beneficial and I believe it will give our program some badly needed assistance in this area. I'm so glad we came at this early point in our program. I can't imagine implementing these ideas and having them take root if we had waited until we were almost finished translating."

Ron Olson
(translator in Agarabi Language)

"This seminar was great because it helped me a lot and showed me how to use Scripture in my mother tongue. I will do my best to teach my people in our own language."

Saberty Sirorai
(Rapoisi Language)

"I really liked the practical nature of the sessions and the way that subjects were boiled down to some do-able steps that we can use back in the village. It was great to be exposed to lots of ideas that are possible for us to do."

Robyn Davies
(translator in Ramoaaina Language)



Drama: A New Testament Story of fishermen casting their net into the sea to catch fish.



Song: Singing Scripture verses put to traditional tunes. (This was controversial because of the cultural and spiritual connotations of some of these tunes.)



SS Materials: A banner depicting stories from Old Testament and New Testament in chronological order.