

## Reflections on the nearly-complete Carolinian New Testament translation

Cameron Fruit, January 2015

By the end of January, the Carolinian Bible translation team expects to complete the translation of the New Testament. It is interesting to reflect on the past ten years, to remember the joys and challenges of the work as we approach this milestone.

The Carolinian people are a unique community of people. They have lived in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands for around 250 years, having emigrated from islands throughout the Carolinian chain, now mostly part of the Federated States of Micronesia. The people of the different Carolinian islands all spoke related but distinct languages. In Saipan, the contact between people from different islands resulted in a new language. However, it still bears evidence of the distinctions of speech held over from their original islands. Individual speakers and families may use different vocabulary or pronunciations of words as a result of their historic background. Sometimes we enjoyed stimulating discussions about what spelling or what term to use in our translation.

There has never been a uniform system of writing Carolinian. About half the Carolinians use the “n” sound in many words which the other half would pronounce with an “l”. Early on in our translation, we had to make a choice: Would we use “l” or “n” in the Scripture? It was beautiful to see the “n” group on our team humbly and graciously accept the “l” spelling. This was not easy to do, as their language is so important to them as people—our language really is part of who we are.

A Bible translation project requires the ability to learn new ways of working and to adapt to different needs as they occur. When we initially started the Carolinian project, we worked with extreme care, trying to get everything perfect in the first draft, even perfecting the spelling and punctuation as we went. We knew that working on God’s Word is probably the most important work a translator can attempt, and we wanted to get it right. However, there were two things we learned. First, at the rate we were going we would have taken 45 years to complete the New Testament, which was much too slow. Second, we learned that our translation process included many, many checks and double-checks by ourselves, others in the Carolinian community, members of the clergy, linguists and professional Bible translation consultants. We didn’t need to get everything perfect in the first pass. Now, after only ten years, we are thankful that we made the decision to focus only on the meaning of the original New Testament text in our preliminary stages of translation.

Many people don’t realize that a Bible translation team also changes a lot over the course of doing a whole New Testament. Our Carolinian team started with about 25 members. Most of those original people are no longer working directly on the project today—some have moved away, some have other responsibilities that limited their involvement, some have even passed away. Others have joined the translation work sometime in the middle of the process. Today there are only two of the original translators who will be present to add the last “jot and tittle” of the book of Revelation.

The list of people to thank for their help is too long to put here. I will mention the tremendous contribution of our five consultants: Annie del Corro, Nico and Pam Daams, Msgr. Anthony Abela, and Neville Southwell. Thank you very much for your encouragement, motivation and expert advice.

And of course, all the glory for the accomplishment goes to our wonderful Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. May he use this translation in a wonderful way among the Carolinian people.