

## 10 days, 3 Continents, Meeting with 10 Global Leaders for the Bible Vision

From November 15-24, Loren and Darlene Cunningham together with David Hamilton had a remarkable journey meeting with some very influential Christian leaders in five cities in four countries on three continents.



### What was this trip about?

The purpose of the trip emerged as we are increasingly aware of the remarkable season we are in. We are aware that Bible translation is progressing at a pace never before seen. We expect the last of the 7000 languages spoken on earth to begin translation sometime between 2020 and 2025. And we can expect that the translation and publication process will have progressed so much that by 2033 (two millennium since Christ's death and resurrection!) everyone on earth will have the Scriptures available in their mother tongue! What an amazing milestone! Just think of it. For the first time in history everyone will have access to God's written Word in their own heart language. What an exciting time to be alive! Indeed, God is certainly at work around the globe preparing for a great new wave of kingdom harvest. We believe this coming spiritual awakening will be fed and undergirded by a new level of engagement with God's Word. As Bible poverty is eradicated and the Scriptures spread throughout the earth we can expect God to draw people to himself resulting in the redemption of individuals and the transformation of nations.

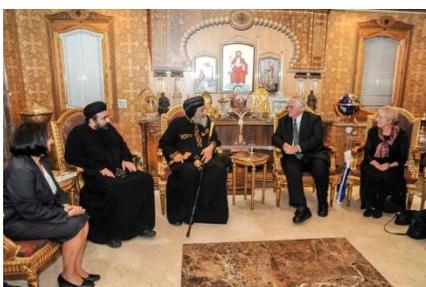
In light of this situation we felt it imperative to visit with key leaders who represent the various streams of the Christian tradition as well as those engaged in filling the world with God's Word. Our purpose was to be cheerleaders, encouraging these leaders to encourage their constituents to engage afresh with God's Word. At the same time we wanted to explore with them means of collaboration and cooperation around the Scriptures: getting them translated, produced, distributed, read, used, understood, and applied. We wanted to hear what these leaders are doing in these areas and learn from them as we also would share with them what we see happening in these categories. Though these leaders represent many different Christian traditions we can all agree that the Bible is God's Word and as such it needs to take a vibrant place in the life of the reader... So where did we go?

### Cairo

Our first stop was Egypt. The time there was made possible by Magdy and Maida and their families in the Middle East. The time in Cairo was very significant as we got to spend most of an hour and a half with the Coptic Pope Tawadros II (Patriarch of Alexandria) and about three hours with Pastor Sameh of Kasr El-Dobara Church in Cairo, the largest Arabic-language evangelical church in the world. Certainly Egypt finds itself in a remarkable moment of its history and the opportunities for the gospel are many.

The time with Tawadros II was very warm. He was eager to know about the diverse ministries of YWAM, but was dynamically engaged with us as we spoke of a new season of Bible engagement. He was thrilled with our desire to see a Bible in every home and extended his blessings over us. He said that he encourages his people to open the Bible but not to close it. “The Bible,” he said, “should always be open, so that we can read it as God leads us.” He was particularly interested in some of the new digital tools being created because he is aware of what an important role social media has played in Egypt’s current history. He was gracious, deeply spiritual with heart-warming humor. His passion for the kingdom and mission expansion was obvious. His love for young people and the Word of God was also very evident.

We were able to give to Tawadros II a beautifully framed copy of the Christian Magna Carta in English and Arabic, as well as a SourceView Bible. He was very appreciative and gave us some beautiful Coptic artwork as a memento of our time together. Our visit finished with laughter as Loren and Tawadros II took a “selfie” photo together.



## Rome

For this part of the trip we were joined by Alejandro Rodriguez of YWAM Argentina and Giacomo Coghi of YWAM Costa Rica. In fact, this trip was possible because of Alejandro’s long-standing relationship with the man we now know as Pope Francis. Years ago YWAM Argentina established a National Prayer Center (NPC) in the famous Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires where the most important government and church buildings stand. They originally rented and then purchased the space for the NPC from the Archbishopric of Buenos Aires. In this same building the former Archbishop and then Cardinal of Buenos Aires also had his offices, so from time-to-time he would come down to the YWAM NPC for prayer. That Cardinal is now the Pope, and as a result of the friendship that Alejandro has faithfully stewarded with him we were able to meet together for some 70 minutes with Pope Francis. We were looking forward to this as only a few weeks earlier, Francis had taken the unprecedented initiative to distribute Gospels of Mark to everyone in Saint Peter’s Square while proclaiming, “[Let there be] a Bible in every family! A Bible in every family! It mustn’t be hidden, not put on a shelf, but [we should] take it in our hand, to read it often, every day, be it individually or together, husband and wife, parents and children, perhaps in the evening, especially on Sunday. Thus, the family grows, walks, with the light and strength of the Word of God!” We knew a fresh breeze of the Spirit was gently blowing...

Francis could not have been more gracious, welcoming us in Santa Marta, where he resides in the Vatican. We had an hour scheduled but – even though he was tired from a busy day – he let our meeting linger on beyond the scheduled time. He was delighted that we had met with Tawadros II and would be meeting with Archbishop Welby. He told us stories of his childhood and of God working in his life. He told us how his grandmother taught him to have an unconventional and loving perspective of people. When he was five years old he was walking down the street with her when they saw a

couple of officers of the Salvation Army. Alarmed to learn that they were *evangélicos*, his grandmother calmed his fears (for Protestants were viewed with suspicion by Catholics in those days), telling him, “These are good people.” He also told us of his love of the Scriptures and how he desires all to have access to the Bible. When he was Archbishop in Buenos Aires, he instructed all the Catholic bookstores under his jurisdiction to sell the Bibles at cost. “We should not profit from the Word of God,” he said.

Alejandro exceeded our time together masterfully with wisdom and humility. Loren shared some key formative stories related to his passion for the Word of God. He told the story of the woman with the faded red dress in Mexico who longed to have a Bible of her own, and the story of his time with King Harold of Norway (if you are not familiar with these stories you can find both of them in Loren’s book about the powerful impact of the Bible: *The Book That Transforms Nations*). Loren also shared about the seven spheres of society and the Christian Magna Carta (CMC). A dear friend had produced a beautiful artistic rendition of the CMC in both English and Spanish which Darlene presented to Francis.



Then Giacomo from Costa Rica shared about the Bible distribution project that they are doing there (120,000 already distributed with another 100,000 Bibles ready to distribute) and gave Francis a gift of a soccer jersey. Latins love their soccer and are ardent and loyal fans of their favorite club team. But when the national team plays they all put on a common jersey and play for a common cause. Giacomo used this as a parable of how we should all rally around God’s Word. It was very touching and appropriate for the Pope from South America.

David then had an opportunity to share with Francis some of the key new things that are emerging to spur increased Bible engagement around the world. He gave him a copy of the SourceView Bible (SVB) in English and a SVB Sampler of Mark in Spanish. These and other tools can encourage young people into a fresh engagement with God’s Word. With all of this, Francis was very engaged, responsive, listening, and inquisitive. He seemed particularly keen about the new Bible tools being produced. We ended with a rich time of prayer together: he praying blessings over us and we over him. And of course...Loren got a “selfie” with Francis.



## London

Our journey next took us to London, where YWAM leader Lynn Green had labored to put together a rich calendar of engagements. First of all, we got to meet with the head of the Anglican church, Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury together with several of his leadership team. We met at Lambeth Palace, just across the Thames from the British Parliament. Though our personal time with Archbishop Welby was shorter, it was very warm as he has been a long-time friend of Loren and YWAM. One of the joys of this encounter was to participate in a worship service over which Archbishop Welby presided in a chapel that dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century! He heartily endorsed our desire to do everything possible to see an increase in Bible engagement and urged us to come back again so that we could continue to pursue this dialogue. He gratefully received our gifts of the Christian Magna Carta and the SourceView Bible and then blessed us with his prayers. But he did not bid goodbye until he and Loren had posed together for another “selfie”!



It’s interesting to note that these three leaders have all stepped into their current leadership roles in the last two years. Both Tawadros II and Welby have met separately with Francis in history-making events. All have a notable desire for God’s Word and a spirit of collaboration. Between 1/5 and 1/4 of the people on earth identify themselves with one of the Christian expressions led by these men. It does indeed seem like God is up to something through them and others...

Before we left London we also got to meet with some extraordinary allies in the cause of eradicating Bible poverty. Among them were:

- Nicky & Pippa Gumbel of Holy Trinity Brompton and international leaders of Alpha;
- James Featherby who had just been announced as the new Chairman of the Board of the British and Foreign Bible Society together with his wife Charlotte;
- Baroness Barridge of the House of Lords who is working to strengthen Article 18 of the United Nations church which guarantees freedom of religion for all people in all member nations; and
- Michael Perreau, President of the United Bible Societies.

With each of these amazing people we had marvelous times of fellowship and found ourselves greatly encouraged to learn what they are doing for Bible engagement around the world.

## New York

Darlene returned to Hawaii directly from London, but Loren and David, back in the US, had a remarkable five hours with Roy Peterson and his staff and leadership team of the American Bible Society (ABS). Previously Roy gave leadership to Wycliffe USA and then to The Seed Company. He assumed the role of President of ABS this year, and is working tirelessly to see a new wave of Bible translation, distribution, and engagement unfold across America and the nations of the world. According to current polls about 47 million Americans engage with God’s Word on a regular basis. They are committed to see that number increase to 100 million by 2025!

Two key moments stand out from this time. One was as we met with all the ABS staff. We gathered with the New York staff in the same room and with other staff scattered around the nation via video conferencing. At the end of our time together, Loren took them through the Bible, going book by book from Genesis to Revelation pointing to Jesus in every book, the Living Word residing in the Written Word. People were deeply touched. The other key moment occurred when we met with the ABS leadership team. David presented them with a special SVB Sampler of the Gospel of Mark which he had produced in the words of the Good News Bible – the translation owned by ABS! As they read aloud from Mark 8 in the story when the disciples realized that Jesus was the Messiah. Their excitement was palpable. We then spoke of several concrete possibilities of collaboration. Many kingdom opportunities will emerge from this time.

### Oklahoma City

For our final stop on this multi-city blitz we visited Mart Green. The Green family have been avid supporters of everything leading to the translation and distribution of God's Word. The Green family has honored the Word of God through the creation of the Passages Bible Museum and their extensive support of Wycliffe and the YouVersion app. They have been a key catalyst in the Every Tribe Every Nation initiative which has created a tremendous digital platform for Bible translators and distributors to collaborate together so that all may hear. We spent a delightful 90 minutes with Mart, building on past conversations. Hearing his heart for the Word was truly inspirational.

Loren and David wrapped up these ten historic days thanking God for his gracious leading at this time. We have a renewed sense of God's hand at work in our generation and a fresh commitment to do all that we may so that God's Word may be made available to all people. The second point of the Christian Magna Carta states that "Everyone on earth has the right to have a Bible available in their own language." As we approach the Christmas season in which we celebrate "THE COMING OF THE LIVING WORD TO THE WORLD", may we ALL do ALL that we can to facilitate "THE SENDING OF THE WRITTEN WORD TO ALL THE WORLD".

Blessings,  
Loren & Darlene Cunningham and David Hamilton