

IMPRESSIONS

Vol.4.1

Celebrate
70
YEARS
with Us!

70TH Anniversary Edition
Thank God for the Past and Build the Future.

A publication of Synergie Francophone
Formerly BLF USA



Synergie
FRANCOPHONE

Together... planting, watering, growing fruitfulness

Credit: Awa Thiandoum

Reflecting on 70 Years of Cultivating Fruitfulness in the French-Speaking World

This time we have a special edition of *Impressions* magazine dedicated to celebrating our 70 years of ministry to the francophone world. It all began with missionaries Abe and Mary Kroeker. These Oregon natives took biblical materials and the Gospel throughout the Belgian Congo and western Africa, which was very difficult at the time. They had the same heart as the Gospel writers, recognizing that written materials were vital in the spread of the Gospel. They would agree with John 20:31, "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (ESV). They knew that getting Bibles and printed materials into the hands of key African leaders was critical to the future of the Gospel in Africa.

Abe and Mary quickly realized there were few materials readily available in Africa and so headed to Europe to find out what supplies could be sent to the African continent. Arriving in France, they found that even in French-speaking Europe the lack of printed materials was a challenge. When I lived in France in the 80s and 90s, it was still a challenge: less than half of one percent of the population identified as evangelical Christian, and I only knew of seven Christian bookstores in the entire country. In 1953, Abe and Mary started a small printing company outside of Brussels, Belgium, that would later grow into BLF Éditions.

For our first 65 years, BLF USA worked in support of the print shop, first in Belgium and then in France. The goal was that it would become healthy and able to stand on its own as a print shop. This became a reality

between 2015 and 2019 and challenged BLF USA to ask what was next in our ministry. So the vision of Abe and Mary came full circle.

Before handing over Congo Open Heart to SF, Abe and Mary's son Clement and daughter-in-law Charlotte continued with this same passion, sending Bibles and biblical materials to those most in need. Congo Open Heart's vision, which we share, was a simple one based on 2 Timothy 2:2, "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

This concept of multiplication was at the very core of what Abe and Mary believed to be possible if the right materials were in the hands of faithful leaders in francophone Africa. This is the vision that SF shares to this day.

We believe God is calling us to help get printed materials and Bibles to those who can share them across francophone Africa and the francophone world. The importance of paper in these regions is higher than ever because of the limited power and internet most of us take for granted in the US. Books

are highly valued and have the multiplicative impact of being passed around from one family to another. In this way, numerous people grow together from just one book.

I hope you enjoy this special edition of *Impressions* dedicated to the 70 years of ministry that are still in the making. May God touch your hearts and fan your passion for the 321 million French speakers around the world who have yet to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

Ray Sanford, President of the SF Board



Credit: Ray Sanford

An Impossible Dream Fulfilled: Highlights From the SF Story

By: Elise Tegegne

“Write the vision and make it plain so that the one who reads it will understand... If its realization is delayed, wait for it. It will surely come.”

(paraphrased from the French version of Habakkuk 2:2-3)¹

1935–A VISION

One early morning in 1935, Abe Kroeker had a vision. He was standing on the deck of a stern-wheeler churning through the Kwilu River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He and his ailing wife Mary were traveling from the village where they served as missionaries to the US for medical support. As dawn lit the sky, Abe’s vision unfolded: literature for “all the people in all the villages that floated across the horizon of our landscape. Literature that would speak their language clearly and point to a Savior, who loved them and desired a relationship with them. Literature that would continue to teach after the departure of



One thousand Bibles arrive in Matende with Kroeker boys, 1948. Credit: Clement and Charlotte Kroeker

the missionary. Literature that would help them to distinguish truth from error and inspire them to follow in the footsteps of Christ...What an impossible dream!”²

1953–THE FOUNDING

After serving for nearly twenty years in the DRC and having four children, Abe and Mary Kroeker felt called to serve God in Metz, France. There, Abe was struck with the paucity and poor quality of the biblical literature available.³ The French even found some of it offensive!⁴ He recalled, “All, it seemed, were starved for spiritual food.”⁵

Without a secure income, Abe wondered how printing more materials could be funded, but he and Mary continued taking steps of faith.⁶ One evening, Abe invited young people from the Kroekers’ Bible study group to help translate a leaflet called “The Loveliness of Christ” from the American Tract Society. After receiving enthusiastic permission from ATS, Abe and his team translated the leaflet and chose a fresh illustration of a rose. Two Christian brothers who had a commercial print shop in Brussels printed the materials. Those first packages of literature would be the start of millions of



Exposition of tracts and Sunday school materials printed by ELB. Credit: Clement and Charlotte Kroeker

tracts, books, and Sunday school materials printed for French-speakers across the globe. Christians George Winston, Paul Gauchez, Paul Stautemas, and Abe and Bud Kroeker formed a committee in Belgium and received the legal status as a non-profit organization in 1959. Editeurs de Littérature Biblique (ELB) was born.

1. Joanne Kroeker, *Shiny Shoes on Dusty Paths: The Polishing of Grace*, Vol. 1 (Shippensburg, PA:

Treasure House, 1995), p. 124.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 123-124.

3. Joanne Kroeker, *Shiny Shoes on*

Dusty Paths: The Polishing of Grace, Vol. 2 (Keizer, Oregon: Grow Books International, 1996), p.122.

4. *Ibid.*, p.164.

5. *Ibid.*, p.158.

6. *Ibid.*, p.126.

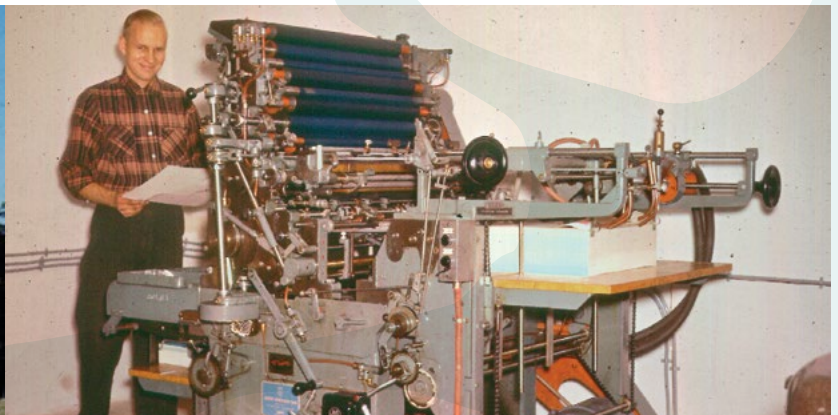
1959–THE CHÂTEAU

After their residence permits for France were denied, the Kroekers moved to Brussels, Belgium. Clement (Bud) Kroeker, who was studying biblical literature at Wheaton College, dreamed of establishing a printing and publishing plant that would provide Christian literature, tracts, books, and New Testaments to all the French-speaking world, especially Africa. An unexpected \$5,500 check precisely covered the cost of the first press.⁷

In searching for a location, they discovered an old chateau in a northern suburb of Brussels. Across the street from the 1958 World's Fair grounds and the Century Palace, the building was large enough for all their needs: the first and second floors would serve as

two apartments, the basement would house the print shop, and the rest would house guests.⁸ Though his lawyer completely disapproved, the proprietor knew the Kroekers were the right renters.

Soon after signing the lease, the Kroekers began refurbishing the chateau. Mary scrubbed the floors and Abe the stove pipes. They stood on armoires to paint the high ceilings and collected heaps of trash from the overgrown garden.⁹ To install the massive press, they had to enlarge a window. Providentially, the machinery was ready in time for the initial shipment of paper. When the first pages passed through the rollers and ink, then emerged printed at the other end, everyone stood and watched. Abe recalled, "What a triumph!"¹⁰



1959–1973 Home of first printing operation. Clement Kroeker with the first off-set printing press, 1959. Credit: Clement and Charlotte Kroeker

1971–MOVING TO WATERLOO-BRAINE-L'ALLEUD

"Like a snowball rolling downhill, the publishing momentum was picking up speed," Abe said of this time.¹¹ ELF staff were working late into the night preparing thousands of handbills and posters to announce a Europe-wide evangelistic campaign with Billy Graham. Other European publishers were offering more and more titles, which ELB distributed. To meet increasing demands for literature, ELB purchased a two-color press, which would be too large for the chateau. A new location was needed.

After weeks of searching, they finally found a property in the picturesque countryside of Waterloo and Braine-l'Alleud. Knowing the real estate prices in the area, they realized that moving

there would take a miracle. Driving to the owner's house on the property, they prayed. And God answered. The owner agreed to sell the property at a special price. "Before, I didn't need to sell. Today, I do," he said.¹² Once he learned their plans to print Bibles, the owner offered them an even better deal (*prix d'amis*)!

Miraculously, the architect's plans for the plant were accepted. (At the time, bribes were often required to procure approval.) Later, a church in California sent a team to dig trenches for the foundation during a cold, rainy autumn. Despite the challenges of moving wheelbarrows of cement through mud and a violent storm that toppled a wall, the new plant was eventually complete.¹³



Countryside around Braine-l'Alleud, 1971

7. Ibid, p.239.
8. Ibid, p. 243.

9. Ibid, p.256-257.
10. Ibid, p.257.

11. Ibid, p.263.
12. Ibid, p.265.

13. Ibid, p.269.

1980s-TRANSITION

Bob Holmstrom, who knew Bud and Charlotte Kroeker at Wheaton College, served on the board, first as a member, then as chairman during a difficult time of transition. In email correspondence with SF, he wrote, "My time on the board was like an interim pastor enduring the challenges of change. We struggled with defining the larger vision of an international mission board. Finances were a challenge. Fulltime personnel were a challenge. Printing technology was a challenge."

In 1989, Abe and Mary Kroeker both died within four months of each other. Abe was buried in a wooded cemetery in Braine-le-Château, a stone's throw from the little farmhouse where they lived their last earthly days.¹⁴ Mary, who returned to the US after Abe's death, was buried in Reedley, California. Holmstrom described this season as the "birth pangs of an effective family endeavor transitioning to a larger corporate status." Despite the hardship, God was at work, redeeming and clarifying ELB's vision.



Abe and Mary Kroeker at their home in Braine le Château, 1988. The ELB Office, 1984. Credit: Clement and Charlotte Kroeker



1990s AND EARLY 2000s-IMPRESSIONS TEAMS

To connect US churches to the ministry in Belgium, ELB was dreaming of hosting teams regularly. The King and Thomas families helped establish that vision. They hosted teams at La Grande Maison, a large home which housed visitors and served as a ministry hub in Braine-le-Château. Along with the Lutzes, ELB missionaries Russ (who served in maintenance and taught teams how to use the printing machinery) and Mary Ann Miller (who mainly served in writing and editing), and others, the Thomases also helped remodel the home so that it could serve 14 or more people for ten-day trips. In a

recent interview with SF, Russ and Mary Ann described helping to put up drywall, rip up carpet, sand oak floors, create windows, build bedrooms and a bathroom in the garage, among other remodeling feats. In an email, Sherri Thomas wrote that the home "would impact hundreds of future team members, their churches, and the production at the shop for many years."

Deep friendships were built during tours, communal meals, gathering, trimming, and shipping books in the shop, and times of prayer over the pallets of materials soon to be transported across continents. In an email, former board member and Impressions team member Thom Shutt fondly recalled touring Corrie Ten Boom's hiding place and Anne Frank's house, among other sites. Tonia King shared in an email how working in the print shop opened her eyes to how massive the French-speaking world is and taught her two children confidence and servanthood. Given the opportunity to serve again, Tonia says, "I'd do it in a heartbeat." Sherri adds, "These outings deeply impacted each person as they realized the part we each play in the tapestry of God's design across the centuries. They gave purpose to the entire Belgian mission experience printing God's good news in Belgium for the French speaking world."



Sending off team members. Credit: Sherri Thomas

14. Ibid, p.283.

2001—THE FOUNDING OF BLF CANADA

In 2001, BLF Canada was officially incorporated with the Canadian government in Winnipeg. The executive director of BLF USA, Canadian Harry Enns, who had gathered the founding team, served as the interim director. The organization was founded to meet the needs for Christian literature in French-speaking Canada as well as gather resources for ministry in francophone countries. Though less than \$5,000 was donated in the first year, the ministry grew.

In 2006, Toe-Blake Roy, who was teaching at a seminary and planting a church at the time, became the first director. Founded with the same mission, BLF Canada and SF have worked together since 2001 to reach the French-speaking world for Christ.



Toe-Blake and his family, 2003. Credit: Toe-Blake and Linda Roy.

2006—AES MERGER

While Alain Stamp was chairman of the board, ELB became BLF (Bibles and Literature in French) when it merged with the Association Évangélique Slave (AES), an organization that originally printed tracts in slavic languages but was working more and more in French. As the site of their new operations, BLF bought an old bus depot in Marpent, France. Russ and Mary Ann Miller remember the labor of transforming the depot into a publishing house: filling the bays' pits with concrete, renting jack hammers and Bobcats, trimming trees. They also helped create lodging for volunteer teams and staff. It was "dusty, hard work," Russ recalls. But "we had a wonderful time really."



BLF in Marpent, 2009. Credit: Clement and Charlotte Kroeker

2021—BLF BECOMES SF

In 2020, BLF Éditions became completely independent. A first step in the dream of BLF USA had been accomplished. As the BLF board contemplated God's vision for the future, a renewed focus emerged: placing printed resources into the hands of those who need them most for the advance of the Gospel. BLF needed to communicate their new vision.

To accomplish this task, BLF welcomed Angela Brandle as the new executive director. Staff and board members gave input as to key concepts in our new brand. There were market tests, particularly among young people who would serve as the next generation of BLF partners. A new logo and name, Synergie

Francophone, emerged from this process. In an email, Ray Sanford, who served as vice president and is now president of the board, wrote of that time in BLF/SF's history. "It was an exciting time to be part of the board." Now, thanks to a renewed name and image, a new generation is beginning to understand SF's vision and join us in the work.

In Bob Holmstrom's words, "In God's timing, SF is accomplishing what we only saw in our 'glass darkly.' Bud and Char can be so grateful for what God is accomplishing on the foundation laid by Abe and the whole Kroeker family."

Four Generations of Synergie

By: Jordan Lockwood



Dr. Marshall and Marilyn Matthews with daughter Lynn (Matthews) Lockwood, her husband Jason, and their sons Jordan, Kevin, and David in Kenya, 2006. Credit: Lynn Lockwood



Glenn and Sara Matthews, parents of Dr. Marshall Matthews. Credit: Lynn Lockwood

My family's connection to SF began through the Kroeker family. My grandparents, "Nana" Marilyn and "Papa" Marshall, met Charlotte (Char) in their Wheaton College band. They later met Bud, who married Char soon after she graduated in 1958. This connection led to Bud's parents Abe and Mary, the founders of BLF, getting to know my great-grandparents, Glenn and Sara Matthews, and Margaret Swanson.

Through the years, the relationship between our families deepened. My mom Lynn recalls her grandparents, Glenn and Sara, having "bulletin boards going down the hallway with info about different missionaries, including the Kroekers, whom they supported financially for a long time." Her mother, my Nana, was the first woman board member of BLF, using her financial acumen to serve as treasurer and tax specialist. She replaced my Papa, who wasn't overly fond of meetings.

That relationship between the Matthews and the Kroekers was the seed from which my family's love for BLF/SF grew. As my mom puts it, "Nana and Papa

cared as much about the Kroekers, and about the ministry of BLF, as they did about their own family." Indeed, it seems like they didn't really draw a line between the two. When I gave him a call to ask about his memories of BLF, my Uncle Robert Matthews recounted a childhood memory of an early visit to the Kroekers when the whole Kroeker family, all very musical, performed an impromptu violin and trumpet concert, which Papa, a consummate musician, couldn't help but join. In the years to come, Papa would sometimes give the Kroeker children monetary gifts, so they could afford their own instruments to continue their musical education.

Papa's military assignments in France, Germany, and Belgium from 1963-1974 made many visits possible between our families. While the Matthews were stationed about an hour from the BLF publishing ministry housed in the Kroekers' home in Belgium, the Kroekers got to know people at the base chapel. Papa and Nana introduced the Christians on the base to

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Lynn (Matthews) Lockwood and Charlotte Kroeker.
Credit: Lynn Lockwood

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BLF resources, and Marilyn and her mother Margaret Swanson, and many of their friends from the base chapel volunteered at the print shop or bookstore. The Matthews also hosted volunteers who came from the US to build a new printing facility in the early 1970s.

In 1978, when Nana, my mom, and Uncle Rob returned to Belgium to visit, Uncle Rob and my mom, 11 and 14 years old respectively, helped at the printing press for a month after Nana returned to the US. My mom recalls that "the Kroekers felt like cousins." Uncle Rob distinctly remembers the smell of the publishing house: "I remember that building, with huge pieces of equipment everywhere, from the ones that cut the paper, to feeding it through, with the smell of ink in the air and books and books and books everywhere." He was in awe of the huge, complicated printing process. "I felt good to be a part of it." Years later, when all six Kroekers went on furlough to the US, all six Matthews tagged along for part of the time, bringing the families together for a road trip adventure across the country.



Lynn and Rob Matthews at Brussels airport in 1978 with Charlotte and Esther Kroeker. Credit: Lynn Lockwood



Jordan Lockwood.
Credit: Lynn Lockwood

Impressions Team members David and Jordan Lockwood (left to right) at the BLF print shop, 2013, Credit: Lynn Lockwood

Today, my brothers and I look back fondly on days spent at the print shop, putting stickers on the covers of The Manga Bible, both in English and in French. What a big part of our growing up SF was! As I sit at my desk typing up this article, I remember all the other pieces I've written for SF and look forward to seeing what role the ministry will play in my family's life, and my own, in the years to come.

Miracles of Abundant Provision

Highlights from a Talk by Director of BLF Canada Toe-Blake Roy

By: Angela Brandle

A FURNISHED HOME FOR THE ROYS

Called to a church-planting ministry in Quebec, the Roy family first visited Lachute early in 1994. After living in a two-bedroom duplex for a year, the family of six moved to a larger home, purchased from a Christian family. Mrs. Kingsbury could not move all her possessions to her new home, so she left the furniture, appliances, and even the lawn mower as part of the purchase, God's unexpected provision for the Roys!

A CHURCH FOR A DOLLAR

The Roys' church plant began with meetings in French at a church that held services in English. The Kingsbury family, to whom God had already linked the Roys, owned a church building in Lachute that they were selling for \$10,000.

Toe-Blake decided to devote a few days to consulting the town annals. Going back generation by generation to the year 1872 when the church was constructed, he found a revelatory piece of history: "A brother in Detroit gave a sum of money so that the brothers in Lachute could purchase land and erect a building for worship." So, the church had been provided by a gift. Toe-Blake contacted the Kingsburys, sharing this information with them. He explained that they had received the church free of charge and asked why they were now selling it for \$10,000. "Why not rather sell it for one dollar?" he asked. A few weeks later, they called agreeing to sell the church for just that amount! God had done a miracle!

Teams came to restore the building. God provided funds for the work through a grant of \$75,000 from the Quebec government, and through brothers and sisters in Ontario, Western Canada, and the US, who raised about \$200,000 to add an extension. Work gloves hang from a clothesline at the back of the church. Each one represents a team that came to work on the building. The other hand of each pair was kept by each team that came. Miracle after miracle, God always provided the funds for the work, ensuring that the church was completely paid for.

SELLING THE LAWN

The church had no parking lot, just a lawn. A church member who was building a house needed turf to make



Credit: Angela Brandle

his lawn but did not have sufficient funds. "No problem," said Toe-Blake. They rented a machine to cut the church lawn into strips of turf one foot wide, rolled up the sections, put them on a trailer, took them to his house, and unrolled them like a carpet. Having received his lawn, the homeowner asked how much he owed. "One dollar," replied Toe-Blake, "the price of the church." He considered it important to reimburse the price of the church by the sale of its lawn! And now the church had a parking lot! "God did this," Toe-Blake hastened to add.

TEAMS SPREAD THROUGH QUEBEC

As team after team came to Quebec, God established a new ministry. Churches across the province asked for teams to improve their buildings. In Laval-Est, a team helped rebuild Sunday school rooms and floors. In Charlesbourg, teams converted a former restaurant into a church. At St-Hubert, an old bar-turned-church was renovated. A team from Ontario assembled a prefabricated house for the pastor and his wife. Much construction was done in downtown Montreal for the Vachons, missionaries working with homeless and marginalized people. In Bury, teams helped convert a former Bank of Montreal building into a church. The old bank vault became a children's Sunday school room. Teachers joked that if the children misbehaved, they would leave them and close the door!

FIFTEEN-MINUTE FUNDRAISING

Successive teams of young people from the US went to Sawyerville. A participant in one of the teams became an assistant pastor in a US church. For eight years his

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church sent teams to work with the Sawyerville church. Just as the teams built and cemented physical walls during their visits, relationships were built and cemented between hosts and teams. Joining in local evangelistic efforts exposed the team to the great spiritual needs of the town and cultivated hearts for taking the Good News to local families. Blessings flowed along a two-way street.

When the church in the US heard that a major renovation of the church in Sawyerville was needed, it raised the money to cover the work in just 15 minutes! It seemed natural to help brothers and sisters who had been welcoming them and sharing their lives over time. The Sawyerville congregation and its ministry already had a special place in the hearts of team members who had been going there each year. Indeed, it had become part of their own church's ministry.

BAT EVICTION

Bats had invaded the attic of the Dalesville parsonage, making the house uninhabitable and forcing the pastor and his family to leave. Bat excrement even flowed down the kitchen walls!

A building was needed to house trainee pastors, so Toe-Blake approached the elders of the church and asked if he could bring a team to rid the attic of bats and disinfect the vacant house. "But how?" they asked. "Bats are protected, and you cannot kill them!" Toe-Blake said he would not kill them but would provide a building that trainees could live in free of charge.

It was early spring, snow still on the ground. Toe-Blake and his team set up a series of flood lights in the bats' attic dormitory. With a flip of the switch, the bats scurried to all the holes to flee the light and left in a flutter! After the bats had vacated their longtime residence, the team started the sanitization process.

Wearing complete PPE, the team took 145 extra-large garbage bags of dirt and old insulation out of the attic, cleaned, and disinfected. They put in new insulation and invited the leaders of the church to come and see.

A pastoral couple lived there rent-free for two years. When they moved out, Toe-Blake asked if the church would support French ministry in Quebec by



Credit: Toe-Blake Roy



Credit: Toe-Blake Roy

allowing Virgil Jones and his family to live in the house. They had been paying \$800/month for a leaky house the landlord refused to fix. The church agreed. With their six children, the Jones have ministered from the Dalesville parsonage for the last 15 years and are still there today.

QUEBEC BLESSES ALBERTA

Interchurch ministry in the area was strengthened by these miracles, but God intended for Quebec to bless ministry in Alberta too! Toe-Blake noticed that the English Associated Gospel Church (AGC) and its parsonage in Lachute were for sale. He approached the AGC in Toronto, asking if they would sell the parcel for one dollar. They could not sell it for a dollar, they said, because they wanted the proceeds to be invested in church planting. Toe-Blake thanked them and prayed for God's direction.

Cliff Reimer, a member of BLF Canada board, invited Toe-Blake to speak at the Church of the Open Door (COD) in Ponoka, Alberta. The pastor came to meet Toe-Blake, effusing joy that a real church planter was with them. "Woah," said Toe-Blake, "I only planted one church!"

"Yes," replied the pastor, "but that is more than we have done, and we want to plant a church in Blackfalds, 30 minutes down the road."

Toe-Blake was taken to meet the church leaders and give a short course on everything he knew about planting a church. He was glad to hear they carried out everything he had said, including sending their senior pastor to lead the church plant. When Toe-Blake returned to COD in 2008, the church plant had financial needs. "Have you asked the AGC?" enquired Toe-Blake.

"Yes, in Alberta."

"You need to go further," Toe-Blake said. "Talk to

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Praise Sprouting: A Meditation on the Biblical Idea of Jubilee

By: Elise Teegne

“IF YOU’RE READING THIS I HAVE PASSED AWAY.”

These words were part of a post published on social media after Casey McIntyre died of ovarian cancer last year, leaving behind her husband and 18-month-old daughter. Before her death, she had arranged for the post to be published, asking readers to help pay off other people’s medical debt as a way of celebrating her life. As of November 2023, McIntyre and her family raised \$170,000. A non-profit that pays off a dollar of medical debt for every donated penny, multiplied the donations to cancel \$17 million dollars’ worth of unpaid medical bills. To honor McIntyre’s life and mission to forgive medical debt, her family plans to have a memorial service and “debt jubilee” in a New York City park.¹



The McIntyre family. Credit: BBC.com

THE MEANING OF JUBILEE

The idea of jubilee originates in the book of Leviticus. Here, God ordains a full year of Sabbath rest every fifty years: “That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap...It shall be holy to you,” (Lev. 25:11a and 12b). Everyone—including the land and grape vines and domesticated animals—enjoyed a release from labor. It would be like having 365 days of straight Sundays!

But biblical jubilees were about much more than Sunday afternoon naps. It was also a season of national homecoming. People would return to their original property and clan (Lev. 25:10). Those who had sold their property due to financial hardship would receive it again, free and clear (Lev. 25:28). And slaves, those who had sold themselves in desperation, would gain freedom (Lev. 25:47-54). Like Casey McIntyre’s mission to help eradicate medical debt, jubilees were a time of liberation from bondage.

A SPIRITUAL RETURN

Just as Israelites would journey home physically, they

would also journey home spiritually. The Hebrew word for “return” can also mean “repent.”² Jubilees began with a blast from a ram’s horn on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 25:9). On this annual holy day, the high priest would slaughter a young bull, a ram, and a goat to atone for the sins of himself, his household, and the whole community of Israel. He would dip his finger in the animals’ blood and sprinkle it in specific places throughout the temple in a symbolic cleansing of sin. Jews still observe this day (now called Yom Kippur), deeming it the holiest day of the year.

Through the bloody mess of animal sacrifice, Israelites received divine forgiveness. And out of the overflow of divine mercy they oriented their hearts towards obedience. “Therefore you shall do my statutes and keep my rules and perform them, and then you will dwell in the land securely,” (Lev. 25:18). “Do,” “keep,” and “perform” are vigorous verbs. Instead of physically working during jubilee years, it seems like God was calling people to engage in the spiritual work of cultivating an obedient heart.

Though we play a role in our own spiritual growth, becoming like God is impossible without divine grace. Jubilees reminded the Israelites to fear God, to stand in awe of God. It is God alone who is YWH, the Self-Existent One. It is God alone who brought the Israelites

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1. Madeline Halpert, “US cancer patient’s dying wish erases \$16m in people’s medical debt,” BBC.com, 17 Nov. 2023/27 Dec. 2023

2. “7725. Shub,” Biblehub.com, 27 Dec. 2023, Strong’s Hebrew: 7725. שׁוּב (shub) – to turn back, return (biblehub.com).

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out of slavery in Egypt. It is God alone who owns the land (and the practice of returning purchased land to its original owners made this reality tangible). The people of God are mere servants, tenants briefly stewarding what God has given them in the first place.

Jubilees reminded the people that God is the One who provides. In the ancient world (and in much of the world today), the concept of Sabbath rest was strange and even foolish. It was a countercultural act of faith to give up work for an entire year, but God anticipated this concern: "And if you say, 'What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?' I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years" (Lev. 25:20-21). God promises a tripled harvest that would allow not only the Israelites, but local sojourners, hired workers, and domesticated animals to eat their fill. In divine abundance, all would be fully satisfied.

AN OUTPOURING TO OTHERS

After looking inwardly to the care of their own souls, the Israelites were called to look outward to others. During jubilee years, people focused on justice. God commands the Israelites to take special care of the poor. Financially stable families invited poorer relatives to live with them. God forbids lending these relatives money at interest or giving them food for profit (Lev. 25:37).

God reminds the people that they themselves are sojourners and strangers, in constant need of divine support (Lev. 25:23). After reminding His people of this humbling truth, God tells them not to rule over their Israelite brothers and sisters who out of financial hardship must eke out a living as servants (Lev. 25:46). Jubilees reminded the people that each person is ultimately God's servant, and that each person is made for freedom (Lev. 25:55).

JESUS: THE FULFILLMENT OF JUBILEE

Hundreds of years after God ordained the year of jubilee, a new rabbi entered a Galilean synagogue on the Sabbath to read the Scriptures. He unrolled the scroll of Isaiah, and found what is today known as chapter 61:1-2a:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.



Credit: summertrain on Unsplash

The man rolled up the scroll, returned it, and sat down. Everyone stared at him in shock. Hearts pounded. Stomachs unsettled. Mouths opened in wonder. And then the man said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," (Luke 4:21).

Here in muscle and bone stood the Messiah.

In coming to earth, Jesus declares an eternal jubilee: no longer will human beings need to slaughter animals to receive forgiveness. Jesus became the perfect sacrifice once and for all (Heb. 9:13-14). No longer will human beings be enslaved to sin and death. Just as God brought the Israelites from Egypt, Jesus liberated all of humanity from bondage to evil through His death and resurrection.

Just as the jubilee was a time of abundant provision, Jesus gave Himself as the bread of life, as living water (John 6:35, John 4: 10-14). Just as the jubilee brought the return of mortgaged land, God gives us unmerited favor, unearned lavishness, through Jesus (Eph. 2:8-9). Just as the jubilee offered rest, Christ offers spiritual rest (Heb. 4:3). Freed from the burden of justifying ourselves, the burden of caring for ourselves, we are enabled to live by faith, trusting God's perfect provision and care (Rom. 1:17).³

And just as Jesus lived a life of service to the poor, a life of perfect justice, we are called to the same. Contemplating Leviticus 25, Matthew Henry writes, "It becomes those that have received mercy to show mercy."⁴

This year we celebrate our own jubilee at SF: 70 years of cultivating fruitfulness in the French-speaking world. Through the years, we have sought to embody Jesus' life of mercy: offering the life-giving Word of God to those who are oppressed, those who suffer in

Continued on p.13

Continued from p.12

imprisoning need. Like the Israelites celebrating the miraculously abundant harvest of God, in 2024 we celebrate God's faithfulness. We have planted and will continue to plant the Gospel message, and now rejoice in the harvest. With the prophet Isaiah, we sing,

For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations. (61:11)

As we look to the future, we pray that God would continue to raise up oaks of righteousness all over the world, planted by His hands and grown for His glory (Is. 61:3b).

Continued from p.10**QUEBEC BLESSES ALBERTA**

the leader in Toronto." They had just sold the church and parsonage in Lachute for \$325,000. The AGC gave the COD church plant \$10,000 a year for five years—money from Lachute, Quebec! God closed one door to open another in a different place, and God allowed Toe-Blake to be the link between them.

"It is God who gives the ideas and connections," said Toe-Blake: "Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see, (Heb 11:1)." Please ask God to continue doing miracles of abundant provision for evangelism, church planting, and local Christian radio stations in Quebec and across Canada.

MORE MISSIONARY SURGEONS RECEIVE BOOK SETS

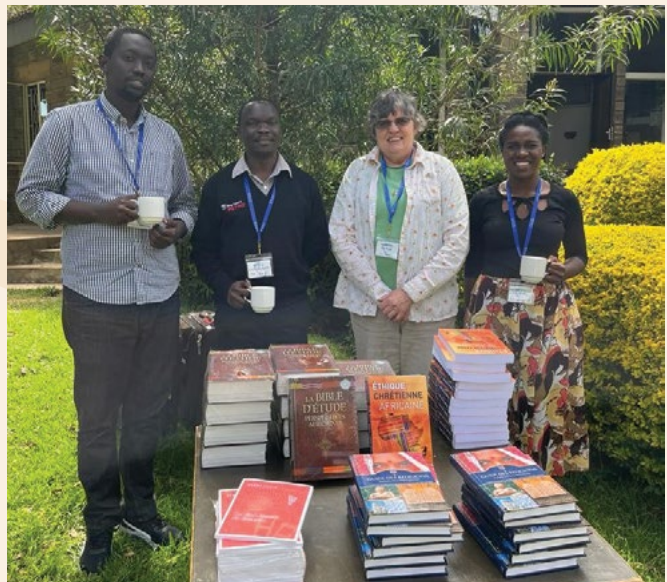
At the Pan-African Academy of Christian Surgeons' (PAACS) annual training conference in Kenya another cohort of francophone surgical residents received the book sets purchased by you, our donors. The Africa Study Bible, reference books, and an SD card containing 130 Christian titles augment the surgical and spiritual training they receive for their role as compassionate healers and spiritual leaders in the remote hospitals where they will serve as missionaries.

Dr. Étienne Mastaki is an anesthesia resident from Bunia, DRC, studying at Kijabe Hospital, Kenya. His anesthesia class is taught by Dr. Christelle Lemfuka, a PAACS graduate serving as an SIM missionary with her husband Dr. Dieudonné and their three children. Dr. Mastaki wrote to express his appreciation for the new books he received:

"These are very important documents not only for our spiritual growth, but also for our survival as a disciple of Christ in this topsy-turvy world."

Several other residents have also reached out to share their gratitude. Dr. Dickson Gusugusu wrote, "I was particularly interested [in] the book *Ethique Chrétienne Africaine* that discuss[es] actual African problems...I am convinced that they will help me grow in my spiritual, social, and professional life. I would like to hereby express my sincere gratitude to you and your organization." Dr. Gildas Konde also wrote, "The [Africa Study Bible] is a true blessing to us. Thank you from the

bottom of my heart for helping us to better understand the Word of God and to grow spiritually." Dr. Christian Neema Mutunzi adds, "Thank you for our books in French which are helping us to understand well the Word of God whenever we don't understand well the message in English." More testimonies, gathered by Dr. Debbie Eisenhut, feature in our "More Than Surgery" project brochure on our website.



Dr. Étienne Mastaki, Dr. Dieudonné, Dr. Debbie Eisenhut (trainer of surgeons), and Dr. Christelle Lemfuka. Credit: Ed Searce

3. Matthew Henry, "Matthew Henry's Commentary," Biblehub.com, 27 Dec. 2023

4. Ibid.

SYNERGIE FRANCOPHONE'S 70TH ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATION:
THANK GOD FOR THE PAST AND BUILD THE FUTURE

SAVE *the* DATE

SATURDAY, AUGUST 24TH (ST. JOHNS, FLORIDA) **OR** SUNDAY,
AUGUST 25TH, 2024 (MINNEOLA, FLORIDA)

PLEASE RSVP BY MAY 20TH, 2024, FOR **ONE** OF THE ABOVE EVENTS.
971-274-6867 | ANGELA.BRANDLE@SYNERGIEFR.ORG

MEDIA CENTER LAUNCHED

Five years of prayer, discussion, work, and fund-raising have resulted in the launch of a media center in Kinshasa. The center includes Africa Study Bibles for sale (launched November 2023), a weekly television program called *Oasis in the Desert* (launched June 2020), and the Oasis Print-on-Demand (POD) service (launched in March 2024). The POD prints "books one



POD trainees. Credit: Brad Graber, Hope4Congo

page at a time" to provide Christian literature to the Church in the DRC and make literature accessible and affordable to all.

Hope4Congo, African Enterprise, SF, and Publish4All came together on March 5, 2024, to set up the print equipment and begin training staff (including two potential backup hires) for the print operation. The following week, the media center hosted an open house. Leonard Kiswangi, director of African Enterprise in the DRC, will manage the operation, and Franci Mavinga will be the technician.

God continues to graciously supply all our needs for this project. We thank Him and many donors for the \$60,000 raised for equipment, supplies, and setup and for an additional \$22,000 to help with startup. We continue to raise funds to support the printing operation until it becomes sustainable through sales.

Please pray for the promotion of this service and good sales, starting in Kinshasa. The plan is to extend the center's reach to all twenty-six provinces of the DRC. Please pray for future plans and for the board, leaders, and workers to keep in step with God's Spirit.

BOOKS GROWING LEADERS IN SENEGAL

SF Board member Lynn Lockwood and a team from Mountain View Presbyterian Church in Marysville, Washington, visited Senegal in January. After their return, Pastor Adama Sène wrote, "I wanted to reach out to you about the excellent books you brought to me. I thank you and the team:

1. *Les Larmes d'une mère (A Mother's Tears)*, where Johanna's experience is a huge source of inspiration to us and to share with others during training sessions.
2. *Le Mariage centré sur L'Évangile*



Children's ministry partner in Senegal. Credit: Lynn Lockwood

(*Gospel Centered Marriage*), which offers very good ideas for pastoral ministry in the church.

3. *Les Seigneurs de la terre (Lords of the Earth)* describes a tribal experience that sheds light on our African cultures."

Senegal's former President Abdoulaye Wade said that knowledge is found in books, inciting his people to read. Pastor Adama's wish is to have a bookshop in Thiès to enable better distribution and availability of Gospel books, opening up the intellectual riches they contain.

MINISTRY COMES FULL CIRCLE

Clement (Bud) and Charlotte Kroeker have been part of SF/BLF's work since the beginning. With training as a printer, Bud operated the original printing press for the publishing and literature distribution ministry set up by his parents Abe and Mary Kroeker. Later, he oversaw the construction of a new, bigger building for the growing operations and, after his retirement, moved ELB's material to Marpent, over the border in France, following the merger with AES to become BLF Éditions.

Bud and Charlotte spent ten years of their retirement distributing Bibles in the DRC while rebuilding crumbling mission stations with teams of volunteers through Congo Open Heart, the non-profit organization they created. As they grew older, they "realize[d] that it is time to pass on the torch to the younger generation" and began talks with SF. In November 2023, Angela Brandle visited the Kroekers in their home in Belgium. What a joy it was to discover that the vision to which the Kroekers have held fast over the years is the same as the one God has renewed in SF! At its December 2023 meeting, the SF board voted unanimously to accept the Kroekers' proposal and continue the task of coordinating Bible distribution in the DRC.

"We could not be more pleased that God has brought you and us back to each other!" President of the Board Ray Sanford wrote to the Kroekers. "We are honored and humbled to build on the foundations you have put in place."

The Kroekers have written to their donors, asking



Bibles being transferred from riverboat onto motorcycle. Credit: Clement Kroeker

them to transfer their gifts to SF for Bible distribution ministry. SF is deeply thankful for the many people who have financed the printing and distribution of thousands of Bibles over the years. Please pray for fresh and fruitful synergy as SF works with these donors and with partners in the DRC.

WAYS TO SERVE GOD WITH SYNERGIE FRANCOPHONE:

Opportunities in France: **Graphic designer; Offset printing operator/apprentice; Printshop production worker/stock manager; French-speaking administrator/bookkeeper; Computer-assisted publishing.** Some roles could be done remotely from the US or Canada.

Ambassadors in the US to advocate for those without God's Word. Full or part time.

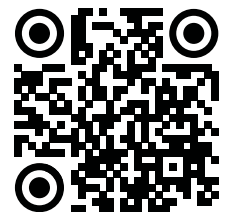
To explore these opportunities, contact Angela.Brandle@synergiefr.org.

JOIN A PROJECT | CHANGE A LIFE | GROW FRUITFULNESS

A Bible That Makes Sense. Give leaders and teachers study Bibles in French with articles and applications written by African theologians. <i>Thank you for meeting our first goal of 80 Bibles. New goal: \$2,000</i>	\$	Ministry's Essential Ingredient. Make our ministry of the Word possible by helping cover our costs of part-time staff, services, postage, and supplies. <i>Thank you for starting a growth curve for ministry. Goal: \$20,000</i>	\$
Adopt a Country. Bring God's Word to people in various walks of life in one of the world's poorest countries, Burkina Faso. Goal: \$15,000	\$	More than Surgery. Give African missionary surgeons the spiritual "sword" to go with their scalpel by donating to biblical resource packs. <i>Thank you for equipping 60 new African surgical missionaries with books. Goal: \$2,000</i>	\$
Adopt a High School. \$900 will purchase and ship a library of 100 books for a high school in the DRC, which a chaplain will use to share the Gospel and disciple students. Smaller gifts welcome. Goal: \$22,500 for phase 1.	\$	Read Right Now. Help to install a print-on-demand center in Kinshasa, DRC, to print books for less without shipping expenses, a great way for new authors to get their books printed. <i>Thank you for funding Phase 1. Equipment/supplies purchased for set up. Thank you for helping raise \$22,000 towards \$60,000 needed for Phase 2.</i>	\$
Bible Distribution in the DRC. Provide Bibles in French for churches and individuals without the Word of God. Goal: \$18,000.	\$	Train the Teacher. Allow new generations of children to learn God's ways with the reprinting of SF's Sunday School Curriculum. Goal: \$10,000	\$
Beautiful Feet. Empower Bible teachers with books in Africa, Haiti, and other countries to mentor and train leaders. <i>Thank you for funding shipments of hundreds of books for trainings in Benin and Togo. Goal: \$40,000</i>	\$	Where Most Needed. We will direct your gift to where it will help the most.	\$
Fill Their Shelves. Supply books for libraries at Christian universities and Bible colleges overseas to help students understand, apply, and teach God's Word to others. <i>Thank you for funding mini libraries for 16 institutions. Goal: \$10,000</i>	\$	Write Truth Right. Help to train Christian journalists to influence readers for Christ through our partner Magazine Training International. <i>Thank you for meeting our first goal that enabled training. New goal: \$5,000</i>	\$
Gospel Waves. Help to share the Gospel in the Province of Quebec, Canada, by funding 100 Christian radio stations and the distribution of Christian literature. Goal: \$6,000 for equipment, license, installation, and programming for one new station for one year.	\$	Give 70	\$
		Missionary Support: Angela Brandle	\$
		Missionary Support: Russ and Mary Ann Miller	\$
		Missionary Support: Nathan and Annie Phillips	\$

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 Or give online at <https://synergiefrancophone.org/give>. Our projects are listed on our website.



Together.... planting, watering, growing fruitfulness



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