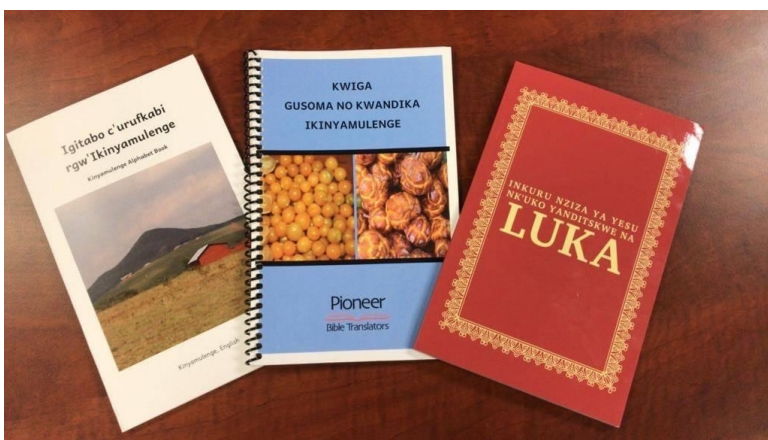


New language translation of Luke celebrated

March 13, 2024

AMARILLO—February 25 marked a historic day for four Amarillo churches. For the first time ever, three congregations of Banyamulenge refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo received translations of the Gospel of Luke in their heart language, Kinyamulenge. First Baptist Church Amarillo helped host the celebration.

“It’s a big deal for us because we didn’t have our own Bible,” Antoine Nkurunziza, pastor of the Good News Preaching Church, said.



Kinyamulenge grammar books and the Gospel of Luke. (Courtesy photo)

The Banyamulenge people have had to read the Bible in other close languages like Swahili, Kinyarwandan and, sometimes, French or English, the pastor explained.

“But now we’re going to have *our own*. That’s going to be exciting for us. That’s going to be good,” Nkurunziza said.

The Banyamulenge are [a small group of ethnic Tutsis](#) from the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Seen as outsiders, they have experienced persecution as far back as the 18th and 19th centuries, according to [Human Rights Watch](#).

Persecution of the Banyamulenge increased in the 1980s. But it came to a head in 1998 when 20,000 Banyamulenge were forced to flee the former Democratic Republic of the Congo province of Katanga amid heinous attacks for being “foreigners,” as reported by *The Conversation*.

The Banyamulenge have continued to face attacks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo until the present. Some who fled have settled in Amarillo.

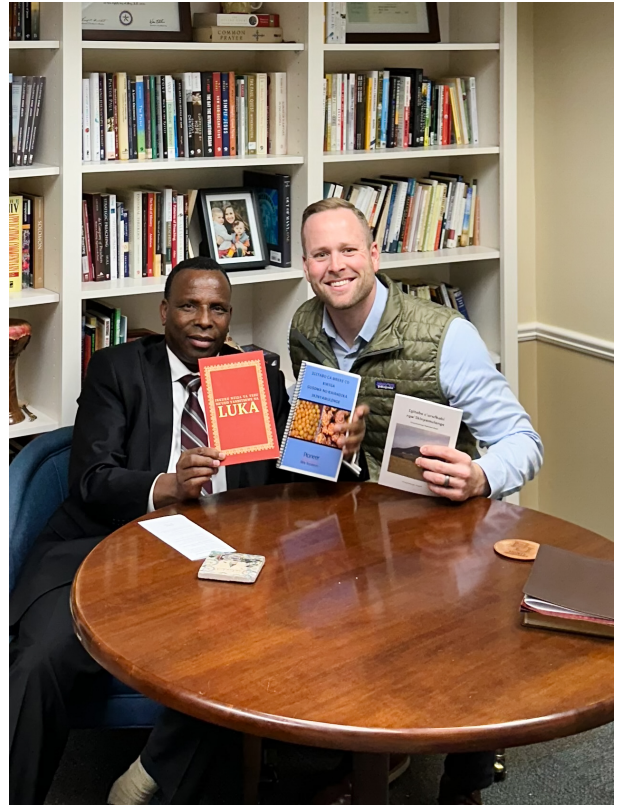
Amarillo home to Congolese refugees

With a lower cost of living and accessible jobs, Amarillo has received a significant number of the tens of thousands of refugees from around the world who resettled in the United States in recent decades, Trevor Brown, associate pastor of First Baptist Church in Amarillo, explained.

First Baptist has “a long tradition of serving and sharing with our international neighbors,” he continued.

Each week, the church hosts services in seven languages, he said, and has a robust English-as-a-Second-Language ministry serving dozens of people groups, with hundreds enrolled every year.

“Often times, we’re introduced to these groups because Christian refugees arrive in our city with a desire to worship but no resources to host services in their own language,” Brown explained.



Good News Preaching Church pastor Antoine Nkurunziza with Trevor Brown. (Courtesy photo)

In 2018, First Baptist began working with a Banyamulenge pastor and his congregation who needed space for weekly worship services.

First Baptist never had hosted a service in the Kinyamulenge language before. But they made a plan to provide space for the Banyamulenge congregation to meet in their chapel.

Now meeting in a larger facility owned by First Baptist to help host their [five international ministries](#), Nkurunziza and the 75 to 100 members of the Good News Preaching Church have remained closely connected to First Baptist Amarillo.

While the Banyamulenge congregation maintains some of its own identity,

their “partnerships often blur the lines,” Brown said, a fact they celebrate.

Banyamulenge children attend First Baptist’s classes, camps and events, with many growing up in First Baptist’s youth group, Brown said. Adults have served as deacons at First Baptist and as partners on mission trips to Africa, he added.

There are at least two other Banyamulenge churches in Amarillo, in addition to other ethnic-background-and-language-congregations from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Brown noted.

Translation work began

There also are large groups of Kinyamulenge-speaking refugees in Ohio and Louisville, Ky., where [Pioneer Bible Translators](#) sent one of their linguists to begin work on the Kinyamulenge translation.

The groups in Kentucky and Amarillo are connected. So, word spread quickly among the network of Banyamulenge pastors once work began. First Baptist Amarillo learned of the translation work in 2021, Brown said.

Neither First Baptist nor the Banyamulenge groups in Amarillo played a direct role in translation, Nkurunziza and Brown concurred, though both took keen interest in the process.

Kinyamulenge is an oral language, Brown explained. This Gospel of Luke is the first book printed in the language. So, the first work of translators was to develop an alphabet and a grammar.

Once they had those, Pioneer worked with Banyamulenge pastors in Kentucky to make sure the translation was faithful and made sense, Brown said.



Amarillo Banyamulenge Congregations' conference for Luke. (Courtesy photo)

In January, they were ready to print the first 3,000 copies. Nkurunziza flew to Kentucky for the conference. Any time Banyamulenge congregations come together for shared fellowship or important events, the meeting is referred to as a conference, Brown said.

The three Kinyamulenge congregations in Amarillo regularly meet together for conferences at holidays and for celebrations. And the new translation of Luke merited a conference.

First Baptist Amarillo purchased 500 copies for Nkurunziza to bring back and distribute to the congregations in Amarillo, Brown said. First Baptist also provided grammar and reading supports to help recipients read in the newly written language of their hearts.

Work already is underway on the next book to be translated—Acts.