

MARILYN ESCHER

by Jim Harrington

Marilyn Escher has spent more than a half century helping to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the people of Senegal.

For much of that time, she's been working to translate the Bible into the Wolof language that is heavily spoken in that African country, where 97 percent of the population is Muslim. Yet, it's been a team effort, as Escher has received the support and prayers of Calvary Church during this entire endeavor.

"Thank you for your partnership for over 50 years," says Escher, who joined Calvary's global staff in 1970 as she was first preparing to go to Senegal. "Because of your support in prayer and finances and equipment and encouragement, the Bible translation is done and the Bible is now being prepared for printing."

What Escher has been able to accomplish in Senegal, in the name of Jesus Christ, has been undoubtedly impressive. Yet, it's just a continuation of what she has pretty much always done – to seek and follow Jesus.

"I decided to follow Jesus Christ at a very young age," she remembers. "I remember in church looking up at the stained glass window of Christ knocking at the door, and asking Him to come into my life."

"I was overwhelmed that He would give His life for me. I knew I could never pay Him back, but out of sheer gratefulness I wanted to live my life for Him. My life verse became 2 Corinthians 5:15: 'And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.'"

While other young school kids were planning to go to college to be a doctor or a lawyer, Escher was getting herself ready to be an overseas missionary. At age 12, she met John Beekman, a Wycliffe Bible translator, and her life was changed.

"That night I entered in my diary, 'Maybe someday I'll be a Bible translator,'" she says.

Many years later, after graduating from college and pursuing language studies to help prep her for translating Bible verses, Escher met some missionaries who were headed off to a country she had never heard of at the time – Senegal. She was invited to come to the country as well and help translate the Bible into Wolof, but she initially rejected the idea – believing instead that she was meant to go to Asia, not Africa.

"Meanwhile I became involved in the college group at International Baptist Church, whose pastor was the son of missionaries in India," she remembers. "When I told Pastor Jim Cook about my dilemma of not knowing where God wanted me to serve Him, he said, 'You are not called first to a place, but to a Person—the Person of Jesus Christ— and to a walk of daily obedience with Him. Keep walking. He may not give you a searchlight, but a flashlight to see the next step. Don't worry over geography. Follow Him.'"

And she did – embarking on a journey to Senegal that has inspired countless others over the decades.

“Marilyn has dedicated her life to giving the Wolof people access to God’s word in their heart language,” says McKenna Giordano, Director of Global Outreach at Calvary. “I cannot begin to imagine how many lives were changed for eternity because of her faithfulness. She states it beautifully, ‘God’s grace sustained me during the past 50 years, making it evident this is His project, not mine, and drawing me into a more intimate walk with him.’ What a life and legacy!”

Nancy Locke, a friend and prayer warrior for Marilyn, calls Escher “a remarkable person who has trusted God with her life and her ministry from an early age.”

“Marilyn is an example of walking by faith and believing that God can do anything,” she says. “She is a blessing to those who know her, and a true asset to World Venture (Escher’s mission sending organization). I feel privileged to know her and hold up her ministry in prayer.

“The Wolof Bible is an amazing culmination of a life’s work for the Lord. The dedication ceremony will be a wonderful and joyous occasion, and this Bible will be the reason many are in Heaven in the future.”

Yet, Escher would be the first to tell you that there is still much Kingdom work to be done in Senegal.

“Only 57 percent of the population can read, so we are planning to record the entire Bible and get it up on the web where we have already posted the Wolof Bible in print,” she says.

She wants to see even more victories in the name of Jesus – further adding to the number of people in the area whose lives have been transformed by Christ.

“They are free from the fear of the evil spirits,” she says of those who have embraced the Good News. “They are bold in the face of rejection from family and friends. Some helped to translate God’s word and now some are taking God’s word in Wolof into places that have never had it before.”