

Bibles in Braille

by Michelle Swartz , last modified March 30, 2010 11:17AM



Evening News photo by KIM BRENT

Julia Copi (left) fills more metal plates with paper as she and other volunteers continue printing and piecing together Psalms books in Braille, which will be sent to the blind and visually impaired in India and Kenya. Every Saturday, members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Monroe work together assembling the volumes in the church basement, which they have been doing for nearly 11 years.

Seated around tables that formed a big circle, volunteers at Trinity Lutheran Church have created their own version of an assembly line.

Working at a moderately fast pace, the volunteers are on a mission to print Bibles in Braille. The group is part of the Lutheran Braille Workers Inc., an international organization that provides Braille Bibles for the blind in Third World countries.

The local church is one of about 200 work centers in the United States and Canada.

Each Saturday in fall, winter and spring, about 15 volunteers meet for about three hours at the church to print the Bibles. They produce Braille Bibles in the Malayalam language for the blind in India and Kenya.

“We produce three volumes of the book of Psalms. Volume one is 48 pages, volume two is 65 pages and volume three is 71 pages,” said Kevin Weinau of Monroe, leader of the group. “We work on one volume a week. The order we must complete each month is 15 total sets of books.”

Ten volunteers arrived Saturday morning to work on the Bibles. Each had a specific job that was done in a precise and timely fashion. The process begins by hole-punching blank papers to be bound later. Then, the pages are numbered by hand and placed between zinc plates. Each paper inserted into the plated jacket is pushed through a press, similar to a wringer washer, which presses the dots onto both sides of the page.

Each page then is put in its correct order and placed into a binder. The finished product is boxed and ready for shipping.

"Everyone has their own job, but each is an important step in the entire process," Mr. Weilnau said. "We have volunteers who are young and older. Any age is welcome to join us. You don't have to know how to read Braille to help. You only have to know how to count from 1 to 71, which is the number of pages in our biggest volume."

Luther Bengelsdorf of Monroe, 77, has been volunteering for about eight years. While some volunteers change their duties on occasion, Mr. Bengelsdorf always keeps the same job: Using a machine, he punches the holes in each blank page.

"The key is putting the pages all the way to the back and to the left (of the machine). I pull the lever down with my right hand and use my other hand to give them to the next person (in the assembly line). I enjoy it. It's good exercise for my arms," he said, laughing, while continuing his workload.

John Case of Monroe began volunteering about a month ago. He enjoys the work but also appreciates the purpose of the group.

"It's religious. We stop for a while for devotions and prayer. We just really enjoy ourselves and at the same time, we are helping others," he said.

The group has made a lot of progress since forming 11 years ago. Marcia Rudzinski of Monroe has been a member of the group since it began. On Saturday, she reviewed the final copies before they were shipped out.

"Since we started, we have shipped 750,000 pages," she said. "We have to keep producing so many copies because the pages can only be used about 25 times before the dots smooth out. They don't last a long time."

In order to keep the work center in operation, volunteers need to raise about \$1,500 annually in supplies, such as paper and other materials.

"We get church donations and hold fundraisers to help us out," Mr. Weilnau said. "A volunteer from the church built the stand for the press, shelves for our paper and cupboards for storage so that really helped us out, too."

Mr. Weilnau says the work is meticulous, but rewarding.

"It's a blessing that we're able to help others in need," he said.

To volunteer with the group, call Kevin Weilnau at 384-7094. For more information about Lutheran Braille Workers Inc., visit www.lbwinc.org.