
How to use a dedication event to improve Scripture engagement and use¹

Margaret Hill
© FOBAI 2009

There are a number of different ways in which dedication events can and should be used to help people engage with the Scriptures. Most of those suggested here apply to any dedication of a Scripture Book, but they are particularly relevant in the case of the dedication of a New Testament or a Bible.

Selling the book

It often works very well to arrange pre-sales of the book. Small slips of paper or card are made with a distinctive pattern on them. The churches collect money for the book, and issue the cards. The price beforehand should be less than the price of the book at the dedication. At the dedication, the people come with their cards to receive their books. This makes for a lot of enthusiasm and encourages others to buy. It would be possible to have a competition between churches or villages to see which one sells the most books before the dedication. That church should receive a prize at the dedication, such as a lamp or a musical instrument.

Events before the dedication

Competitions

It is good to have a choir competition before the dedication. Possibly this could be held the day before. The church choirs need to start preparing for this some months ahead. They could be sent passages of Scripture from the new book on sheets of paper and told to compose new songs based on these passages. The Psalms are very suitable for this. In the New Testament, some passages from Luke 1 and 2 would also be suitable. They should be told to use a traditional music style and to bring suitable instruments to the competition, and of course they should sing in the local language – this may need stating clearly! Alternatively, they could be asked to sing a song on a particular theme, for example, “God’s Word”, “Having courage in suffering”, etc.

At the time of the competition, judges are needed. Most should be speakers of the language, and the words of the songs should be judged as well as the music and the general presentation. If possible, all those taking part in the competition should receive a small prize such as a badge. The best choirs will then receive some other sort of prize and also be chosen to sing during the

¹ This article is a revision of: Hill, Margaret. 2009. ‘How to use a dedication event to improve Scripture engagement and use.’ *Scripture in Use Today* 17:9-10.

dedication ceremony. The next group of choirs who sing well can sing as the visitors arrive for the dedication, and another group can sing as people leave the dedication and during the meal – if that is the cultural pattern.

Other sorts of competitions are possible, such as reciting memory verses or Bible knowledge competitions. Another possibility would be dramatized Scripture stories, or dance that portrays a Scriptural truth. These should be held in the months before the dedication, then the winners declared and prizes awarded at the dedication ceremony. The best drama group could perform during the dedication. This is usually easiest to organize through the churches.

During the dedication

Readings

The readings during the dedication of Scripture portions are important. They should be well done, which means preparation and rehearsal beforehand. It will encourage the less educated members of the congregation if at least one of the readers learned to read as an adult through literacy classes. It is also a good occasion to announce the start of a new literacy class.

Bible reading guides

When selling the NT or a Bible it helps to give with it something to encourage people to read portions each day. This might be a reading card for a year published by the Scripture Union (they have a special NT only one), or it could be a series of reading suggested by the local churches. Another popular possibility is a sheet of references dealing with specific problems, rather like the list found in a Gideon's Bible. Examples would be "When you are sick, read ... When you are worried, read... When you want to divorce your wife..." etc.

Audio and audio-visual promotion

It is also important, however, to think of the large number of people in the congregation who cannot read and maybe will never learn to read. The dedication of a book is a good time to dedicate or at least advertize oral ways of listening to the Scriptures. This might be the launch of a Faith Comes by Hearing Program, with specific invitations to join listening groups, or it might be the dedication of the Jesus film in the local language. Megavoice players could be sold at the dedication with Scripture passages on them ready to be played.

After the dedication

Scripture Use seminars

This is a prime time to have Scripture Use seminars for church leaders. The Dedication should have generated interest in the new book that can then be channeled into training in various areas of Scripture engagement. The period of 6 months following the dedication a NT or Bible is probably the most important time to empower church leaders to use the new translation in all aspects of church and private life.

Integrating the Scriptures into real life situations is vital. The team running the Scripture Use seminars needs to know the real needs of the churches and the leaders, and meet them through appropriate studies and resources. For example, in some areas, trauma healing may be what the church leaders need to learn about. In others, information about AIDS or community development should be part of the seminars.

How many dedications?

Logically, a Bible or NT can only be dedicated once, but after that it is very possible to hold additional celebrations. If the area in which the language is spoken is large, this may be the only way of letting people celebrate the arrival of the book. It also helps considerably with distribution and sales. There may also be a need for a celebration in the capital city, or in other areas where there is a strong Diaspora of the language group.

For more ideas, it may help to watch videos of how other groups have celebrated the dedication of Scripture.