



Telling God's Story

by Nancy Vander Meer

How would you reach 3.5 billion people with the story of God's love?

It sounds impossible. But thanks to today's media tools and the support of God's people, Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) shares the gospel with people around the globe—even in small, isolated communities.

Awatar lives in a remote village in the Jammu region of northern India. At one time he might never have learned about the Christian faith. But through a radio program produced by BTGMI's ministry team in India, Awatar heard about Jesus for the first time in his life.

Life is not easy for the people in Awatar's village, located near the Himalayan Mountains in an area marked by political and religious conflict. Ownership of the region is disputed by Pakistan and India. A Hindu stronghold, the area is surrounded by a Muslim majority state. It seems impossible to build a Christian community here. But



through media outreach, people are coming to Christ.

The first time Awatar heard the Back to God Ministries broadcast, "I was glued to the radio set," he told BTGMI's indigenous producers who later visited his

village. “I took in each word as if my life depended on it.”

Awatar continued to listen and discovered that his life did, indeed, depend on Christ as his Savior. He committed his life to the Lord and says, “I now live a happy, Christ-centered life.”

As Awatar’s family and friends observed the transformation in his life, they too began to listen to the radio broadcasts.

The Power of Media

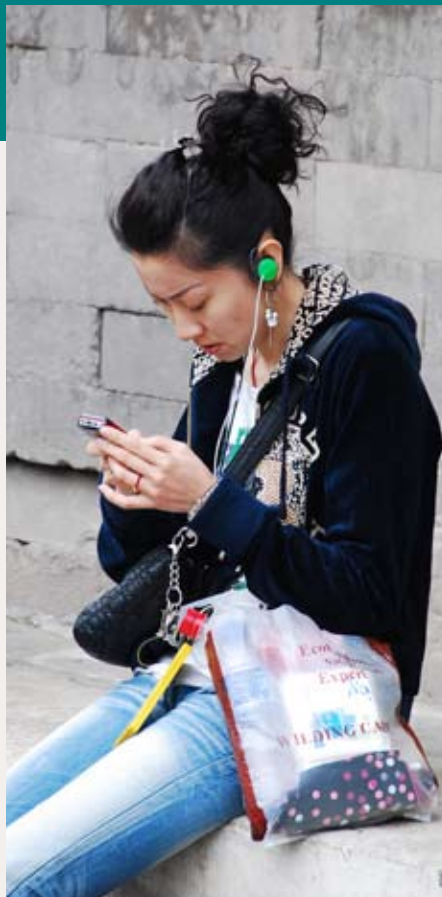
In places where traditional missionaries may be unable to venture, media can penetrate barriers to the gospel. Awatar and the people of his village listen to programs in their own language, produced by Good Books Ministries in India in partnership with BTGMI and Words of Hope, the media ministry of the Reformed Church in America.

BTGMI uses a variety of media to tell of God’s love to people of all ages. In some places, like remote regions of India, Africa, Russia, and Latin America, traditional radio, television, or print media communicate best. But in China, Japan, and the Middle East, the gospel message is powerfully reaching millions through the Internet and cell phones.

Listeners in the Middle East are responding to radio broadcasts, but they do not feel safe making phone calls or sending letters to engage in conversation and ask faith questions. Through text messaging, Arabic staff have personal contact with an average of 700 people each month.

A new believer from Yemen texted, “Already my life is enriched by the beautiful teaching of Issa [Jesus]. This glorious teaching is needed by all people.”

Over the past year social-media ministry made a significant impact in reaching people in China. Thanks to new online and cell-phone social media in China, BTGMI more than quadrupled the number of people who have access to its evangelistic and discipleship program-



Social media outreach is making a significant impact in China.

als to at least 150 others, multiplying the number of people who receive the good news.

The Power of the Gospel

“In our programs, our goal is to help our listeners discover the practical ways the gospel brings joy and direction to family, community, and social life,” said BTGMI Director Bob Heerspink, who passed away Oct. 1 from pancreatic cancer (see p. 10). “Our message is both evangelistic and disciple making in nature.”

Many people in Latin America, the U.S., and Canada, for example, identify themselves as Christian but do not apply the life-changing implications of the Christian faith.

“The ongoing challenge is to teach biblical truth in today’s culture,” said BTGMI Spanish-ministry leader Guillermo Serrano. “We use new methods to proclaim the gospel, but the message is the same: Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.”

That message resonates with radio broadcast listeners. Maria, a listener from Spain, appreciates the focus of BTGMI messages: “I was educated in a religious school and I understand the language of preachers, but listening to your program ‘Understanding Christianity,’ I can now differentiate between theory and practice of the Christian life.” »

“I took in each word as if my life depended on it.”

ming. In addition, churches and individuals are duplicating and distributing Back to God Ministries’ CDs, DVDs, and devotional materials.

Even as BTGMI staff praise God for the large number of people who have access to God’s Word through media, they recognize that the ministry touches one person at a time. Some of these individuals share their faith and BTGMI resources with others.

One blogger in China wrote, “Today’s devotional is about seeking for spiritual wisdom. It serves as a very good reminder to my spiritual walk. I am resending this to my *weibo* [mini-blog] fans.” Another text message subscriber in northeast China resends the BTGMI daily devotion-

Quick facts

- BTGMI shares the gospel through media in 10 languages.
- Each month it makes nearly 1.2 million unique contacts with people from at least 189 countries.
- 40 staff members work from North America.
- 205 indigenous staff work from 28 international ministry centers.
- More than 800 local volunteers work in 82 countries. ■

—Nancy Vander Meer

It's Not What You Think

Back to God Ministries International has been around for more than 70 years. Because it initially became familiar to many as a half-hour English-language radio program, many people still assume that's all there is to the ministry. On the contrary . . .

- BTGMI produces 46 audio programs in 10 languages, delivered on more than 2,200 radio stations and accessible through the Internet.
- BTGMI is not just a radio ministry. We have 36 websites and 30 blog sites that offer devotional, Bible study, and discipleship resources. You can find links to all of them at *BackToGod.net*.
- BTGMI produces 12 video programs aired on 235 TV stations in 5 languages. It also distributes these programs through DVD, Facebook, YouTube, and other Internet outlets.
- BTGMI prints and distributes more than 3.7 million devotional booklets in 7 languages, plus tens of thousands of people receive BTGMI's daily devotional messages through email subscriptions, cell phone downloads, Facebook, Twitter, and iPhone, Android, and Kindle apps and their international equivalents.
- BTGMI outreach ministries are not just translations from English. Ten gifted indigenous ministry leaders and their media teams produce evangelism and discipleship materials in the "heart language" and cultural context of the people groups BTGMI reaches.
- BTGMI is not just a media ministry. Follow-up and discipleship are just as important as broadcasting. By God's grace, through listener communities, Bible study resources, text-message conversations, Internet downloads, and committed prayer teams, BTGMI is turning listeners into seekers, seekers into believers, and believers into ambassadors of Christ who share God's good news with others in their communities. ■



Rev. Sergei Sosedkin meets with people in rural Russia.

—Nancy Vander Meer

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Senator Lusa Bahati's faith motivated her to offer greater service to her country.

Bahati, who lives on the outskirts of Kinshasa, often listened to "Perspectives Réformées," a French-language radio program produced by BTGMI. Through this she learned about a Bible study correspondence course. At a graduation ceremony for 800 people in Congo who completed the course, Bahati testified to the gospel's power in changing her worldview, especially the way she conducts her political activities.

"This study gave me a new perspective on my work as a senator," she said. "My life has been transformed. My faith is now firmly established in Christ, and my Christian witness has been strengthened."

A colleague at the state senate in Kinshasa asked Bahati to serve as the senate chaplain. Now she plans to campaign for the national senate and bring her message of grace and hope through Christ to the whole nation.

"This story is just one illustration of the power of the gospel and the power of media to reach unexpected audiences," said Heerspink. "Through the integration of the Reformed world-and-life view, Bahati is able to



Senator Bahati seeks to serve the people of Congo.

make a political impact on her nation."

"All of our international media ministry teams share an unstoppable gospel that is empowered by the invincible Spirit of the Lord," Heerspink said. "Through the tools of modern media, the gospel breaks through every barrier to bring the message of God's love and his kingdom to a fragmented, broken world."

The Power of Sharing God's Love

Poverty, illiteracy, and cultural religion affect people living in remote regions of Indonesia's vast island nation. Sixty-six-year-old Mr. Dendra

Mr. Dendra became a believer through a listener community in Bali.





Villagers in remote regions of northern India have access to God's Word through media.

is illiterate but came to Christ through a BTGMI listener community in Bali.

"I used to be a Hindu," he testified. "But I was exiled by my community because my wife and our son were paralyzed. The community accused me of being a person who was cursed by God. I was so sad and did not know what I should do."

Then Dendra met Pastor Nengah, the listener community coordinator in Bali. "Pastor Nengah became a friend. He has a small and simple house in the middle



of a rice field, and he allowed me and my family to stay with him," Dendra said.

Nengah introduced Dendra and his family to Jesus. Although the home has no electricity, Nengah and his guests listen to the Indonesian program on a battery-powered radio provided by BTGMI Indonesian media missions.

"I am very happy that I learned about the Christian faith," said Dendra. He and his wife and son were baptized, and their faith continues to grow. Dendra testifies

to the wonderful things God has done in his family. "Through the power of prayer, my wife and son are getting better day by day," he said. "I thank God for his wonderful work, especially through Jesus Christ, who saved me and my family."

The Power of Partnerships

Back to God Ministries International does not carry out evangelism and discipleship on its own. Whenever possible, it partners with local ministries that provide a vast network of discipleship opportunities for people who respond to the programs. Many of these partners also provide financial resources.

BTGMI collaborates with more than 50 ministry partners, including Christian Reformed Church agencies and indigenous churches and ministries. It also works with more than 800 international volunteers worldwide.

The partnership with the RCA ministry Words of Hope is one example of effective collaboration. Together, the ministries produce "Spotlight," a simplified English-language audio program that discusses a variety of topics from a Christian perspective.

And, through international partners, BTGMI has helped to establish 49 Spotlight English Clubs in 21 countries, providing opportunities to build relationships



BTGMI is privileged to work with gifted ministry leaders for outreach in 10 Languages.

with people who want to know more about the Christian faith. It also partners with Words of Hope in Arabic-, Hindi-, and additional English-language media outreach and is exploring opportunities in Indonesia.

Other crucial partnerships include the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF), the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (Portuguese outreach), the Indonesian Christian Church, the Reformed Church of Japan, Christians in China and Hong Kong, Evangelical Churches in Russia, India, and French Africa, HCJB radio, and many more.

Without these partnerships—and faithful support from churches and individuals in North America through ministry shares, gifts, and offerings—BTGMI would not have the resources to reach out to and disciple people who are seeking God's good news for their lives. But with your support, people are becoming followers of Jesus ■



Nancy Vander Meer is a staff writer for Back to God Ministries International.