



Groundbreaking Days

FOR CHURCH PLANTING

"...you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation."

Revelation 5:9

On May 11 and May 17, the beautiful sounds of five languages (English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin Chinese, and Amharic) were used to assess church planter candidates.

In the past, church planter applicants, even those who would be planting a church using a language other than English, had to navigate a church planting application and assessment process that relied on English and was steeped in American culture.

The assessment process is necessarily rigorous so that Cooperative Program dollars are stewarded well—going only to church planters who are biblically and theologically qualified. But a way to make the process work better was needed for people of other languages and cultures.

Thanks to the pioneering work of IMB stateside missionaries and bilingual veteran church planters and pastors, some changes were made.

One aspect of the assessment requires the candidate to preach a Gospel message then be questioned by a panel of pastors. Previously, candidates whose heart

language was not English struggled in this portion. Some candidates were likely evaluated too harshly due to their lack of ability to express the Gospel in English, and some could have been approved too easily with the assumption that they probably had good doctrine even though they were not communicating well in English.

At the May 2021 assessments, each candidate was able to preach in his heart language (Spanish, Vietnamese, Amharic, Mandarin) before a panel of leaders who were also fluent in that language. *What a blessing!*

One of our Ethiopian church planting assessing team members is veteran SBCV church planter, Fisseha Tesfaye. After Pastor Tesfaye heard the candidate preach in Amharic, he remembered his own struggles a few years earlier when he had to preach in English. "I am jealous. It was so hard to prepare to preach in English. It was not natural for me."

We are grateful that our recent planter assessments eliminated that element of stress and the struggle to communicate. As God continues to call out church planters to reach the nations who reside in Virginia and DC, this improved assessment process is vital. We are continuing to learn and grow as we work together to reach the nations! ■