

'A miniature Christian bookstore' in the palm of your hand

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(RNS) God may hold the whole world in his hand, but persecuted Christians can now hold an entire seminary library on a fingertip.

Bible League International is working with the Digital Bible Society to carry the thumbnail-sized chips to Christians in countries, such as China or Saudi Arabia, where possessing unapproved religious materials can result in prosecution or even death.

"It's like a miniature Christian bookstore," said Robert Frank, Global CEO of Bible League International, an Illinois-based non-profit evangelical ministry dedicated to training church leaders using the Bible.

The digital ministry continues the historic work of the Bible League, which went international after World War II when Gen. Douglas MacArthur asked U.S. Christian groups to send Bible to Japan.

The Bible League's 2011 merger with the Texas-based World Bible Translation Center expanded its abilities to get materials to Christians around the world in their own languages.

The Digital Bible compresses data for maximum storage, then copies the material to cell phone cards, thumb drives, CDs and DVDs, depending upon the country where

they will be used. The advantage of the format is that a person can use them, but leave no trace on a computer of their use, unlike the trails left by accessing websites.

Publishers who made their work available for the chip have also agreed to allow the copying of the cards without a fee, Frank said. The works have been translated into Arabic, Farsi, Mandarin and other languages of areas where Christians are persecuted.

"And the content has been donated," said Synetta Armstrong, senior director of global communications for the Bible League, who demonstrated the chip at last fall's Religion Newswriters Association conference. "We want to spread the word of God."

In addition to several versions of the Bible, each of the Digital Bible libraries include worship music, movies, Bible commentaries, a study library, a copy of Rick Warren's "The Purpose Driven Life" and other landmark books about discipleship, ministry and history, as well as more than 1,200 images which can be used for a pastor's study and for teaching others.

"Pastors in these countries want to be trained, but they have no seminaries," said Melany Ethridge, a spokeswoman for the Bible League.