

# More Than Words: Timberline Church Takes Bold Steps to Foster Unity Through Language Translation



## Challenge

### Uniting Worship Through Language and Connection

For those who don't speak English, fully engaging in worship can be a source of comfort, strength, and belonging in a world that often feels unwelcoming. In today's increasingly polarized society, language can become an invisible barrier, creating separation, where there should be a connection. Timberline Church saw this challenge firsthand and set out to change things.

Established in 1921, Timberline is a multi-campus church. Under the leadership of Senior Pastor Dary Northrop, the congregation has grown substantially over the years and strives to make a positive impact within the congregation and society. They believe that faith is about more than just words, it's about connection, community, and understanding.

Though the surrounding Northern Colorado community is predominantly English-speaking, approximately 16% of the population speaks another language at home, with Spanish being the most common. To ensure that non-English-speaking attendees could fully engage with their sermons, Timberline began using Wordly AI translation in 2024 to provide real-time translation during services. Building on this effort, they sought a way to go beyond translation alone, to find a way to not only bridge the language gap, but also foster empathy, deepen relationships, and create a stronger sense of community with their multilingual neighbors.

"It's one thing to know that language barriers exist, but it's another to sit in church and struggle to understand what's being said," offered Pastor John Mehl. "For many of our non-English-speaking members, this is their weekly reality."

## Solution

### Experiencing Worship Through a Different Language

To deepen understanding and encourage empathy, Timberline hosted a special “reverse translation” service designed to put English-speaking members in the position of those who worship in a language they don’t fully understand. During a sermon focused on embracing and accepting those who are different from us, a portion of the message was delivered in Spanish. English-speaking attendees relied on Wordly AI translation to follow along, highlighting the importance of understanding and connecting across language barriers.

“It’s one thing to acknowledge that language barriers exist, but it’s another to experience what it’s like to step in another person’s shoes,” said Pastor Mehl. “Imagine needing the comfort of scripture, the reassurance of prayer, or the inspiration of a sermon, yet feeling disconnected because the words are unfamiliar. For many of our non-English-speaking members, this is, unfortunately, their daily reality.”



*Timberline Church Pastor John Mehl*



## Results

### A More Caring and Connected Community

For many the experience was eye-opening.

By stepping into the shoes of those who depend on translation, Timberline's congregation didn't just gain awareness, they built empathy and relationships.

"I never realized how much I take for granted being able to hear and understand a sermon without effort," said Timberline Church Member Jeff Bitterman. "For the first few minutes, I felt lost, like I was on the outside looking in."

This exercise opened new conversations, new connections, and a broader sense of community, one where we strive to understand each other's experiences, rather than just observe them from a distance.



*Timberline Church: Connecting Through Warmth and Fellowship*

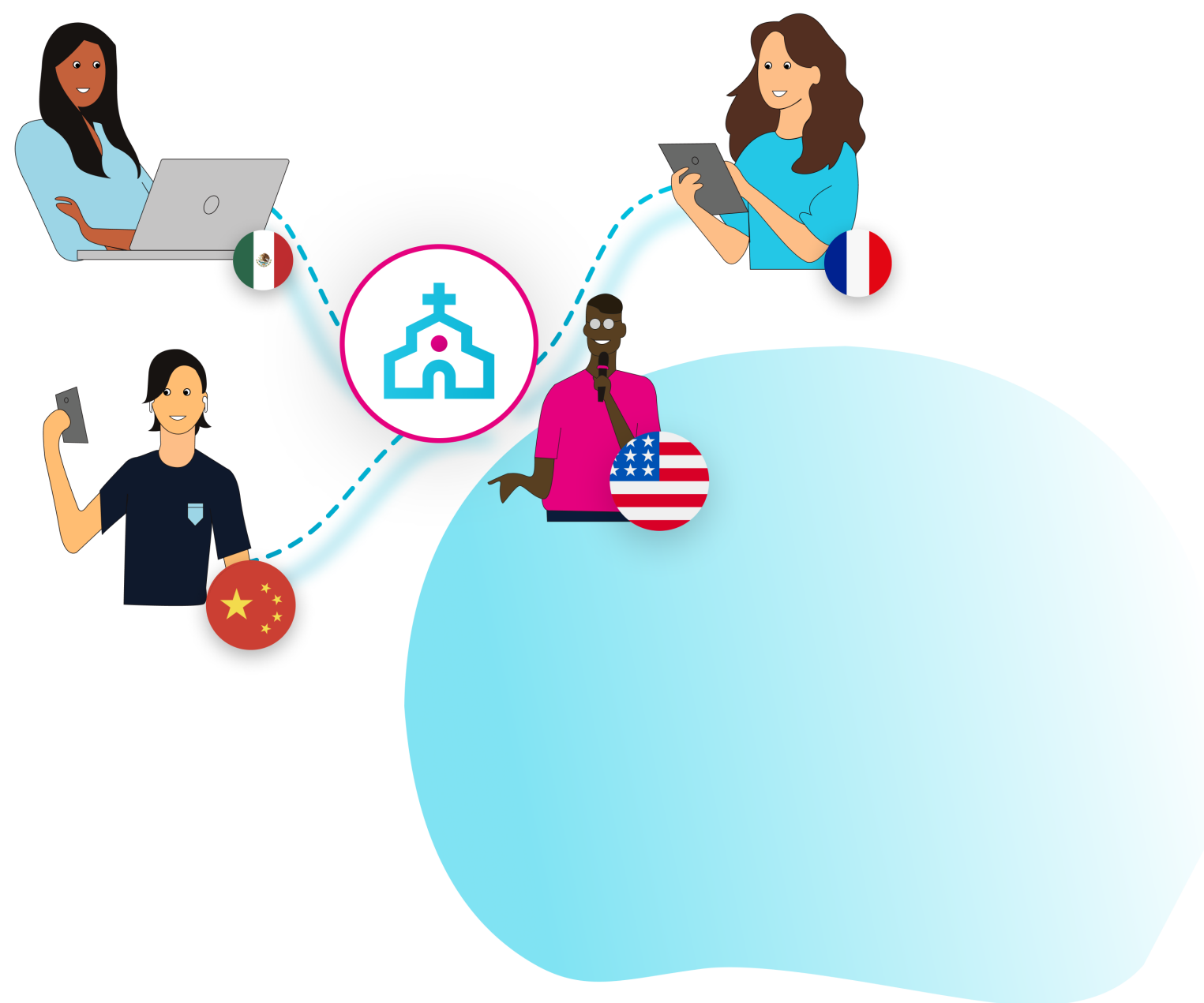
## The Future

### Continuing the Mission of Inclusion

“We believe strongly that faith should have no barriers,” continued Pastor Mehl. “This experience reinforced that ensuring everyone has access to worship, in a language they understand, is more than a service; it’s a necessity.”

Timberline Church’s commitment to breaking down language barriers doesn’t stop here. They continue to expand their use of Wordly, ensuring that worship remains a place of belonging for all by making services accessible to all members each week. By providing live translation in 60+ languages, non-English speakers can now fully participate in services alongside their English-speaking neighbors.

#### Make Church Services More Engaging and Inclusive



By scanning a QR code with their smartphone, congregants can instantly listen to or read the sermon in their preferred language. This seamless integration means that non-English speakers no longer have to miss out on the message.

“By continuing to use Wordly’s real-time AI translation, we are actively breaking down language barriers, making sure that every person who walks through our doors can fully participate in worship, build relationships, and experience the power of faith together.”



## About Wordly

Wordly provides live AI translation and captions in 60+ languages, making meetings and events more inclusive, accessible, and engaging. The Wordly platform does not require human interpreters or special equipment – making it easy and affordable to communicate across multiple languages.

Over 4 million users at 2,000 organizations worldwide use Wordly for in-person and virtual sessions across various industries, including corporate, non-profit, government, education, and religious organizations.

For more information on Wordly, visit [www.wordly.ai](https://www.wordly.ai).

