

From the heart of the mind of the editor



William D. Taylor, Editor

Pascal: “I believe those witnesses who get their throats cut”.

Initial thoughts and word pictures

This is a difficult and painful journal issue craft, because essentially its contents are laced with challenging, painful and discouraging realities. Writer Harry Hoffman (coordinator of the Mission Commission Global Member Care Network) says it well in his terse article “Too many sad stories”. The missional church faces multiple challenges as we grapple with the multiple reports of Christians encountering extraordinary challenges, conflicts and suffering in mission, perhaps because of their personal discipleship journey or as a result of their specific context and ministry focus.

Some have queried me on the four-fold foci of this issue, “Why are you including the huge categories of suffering and violence? Why not just deal with the persecuted church in mission, with some comments on martyrdom?” So let us affirm at the outset that we purposefully present **Connections** with these four different, and perhaps messy, categories. While they are distinct from each other, they overlap, and many times emerge in a progression. Suffering is a mega-umbrella universe, coming from many sources: some self-caused or other-caused; from stuff we bring when we move into cross-cultural

casting the context for our discussion on mission in contexts of suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom

mission and what happens to us there, on-site. We thank God for the thoughtful ministry of dedicated member care providers—from the local church to field-based teams—that provide healing ministries of the living Spirit of God. Yet we are all-too aware that we all live with brokenness. That is bottom-line reality.

In this issue we consciously inject suffering in the context of the other three dimensions and the realities of the church on mission—violence, persecution, martyrdom. I posed myself the question, and sought the counsel of others: “Is persecution and martyrdom increasing or do we just have more immediate information and reporting?” The answer is, “both”. It is increasing, obviously and subtly, on a global scale. And the vast communications networks that feed cell phones and the Internet broadcast immediate news, and also overwhelm us with information.

Also, we recognize the very different experience that the suffering national church has compared to expat-cross-cultural workers—for most of the latter can rely on their passports to depart rapidly, especially if they come from a country with power. The church stays there and lives out the rest of the story—but will also receive the just reward in heaven.

Since we first conceptualized this issue of **Connections**, deciding early-on to convert it into a “double-issue”, we upped our global radar, relationships and networks to generate real information

that would guide our reports. We commissioned some key writers to address issues from a reporter’s eye, as well as practical, pastoral and missiological perspectives.

We present this issue as an appetizer of a full-length Mission Commission book to be released in 2009, including some of this content but with time and space to address many more issues. Again we present a journal that purposes to live out its commitment to serve as a global writers roundtable, confirmed by the presence of some 40 writers from 27 nations. This is a unique journal and we are thankful to God to offer it as a gift to the global church on mission.

It’s a litany of difficult realities, sad stories and disturbing news

As we sketch the broader landscape of specific recent ongoing stories we well remember.....

- The martyrdom of the three servants in Turkey, one a German expat worker and two Turkish converts to Christ;
- The story of the Korean short-term missionaries kidnapped, and two killed, in Afghanistan, and the subsequent reactions within the Korean media and church as well as the global church in mission. It was global news for weeks. It will permanently change the mission landscape in Korea;
- The murder of the young YWAM missionaries in Colorado, USA, with a shorter news-span;
- The bombings of Christian churches in Pakistan and ongoing systematic persecu-

tion in the Indian state of Orissa;

- The assassination in Iraq of Paulos Faraj Rahho, the Chaldean Catholic archbishop of Mosul, whose body was soon found in a shallow grave;
- The kidnapping of other expatriate Christian relief and development workers in Afghanistan;
- The violence breaking out in Kenya just after the rigged elections, but disturbingly revealing the deeper hostilities and the trumping power of tribalism, apparently stronger than even Christian faith. This tribalism factor lives out its nasty DNA in too many nations around the world—and not only in the Middle East with its millennia-old tribalism leading to vengeance and reprisals. Again we are forced to deal with the question: Just what does it mean to be truly Christian in a tribal society?
- The report from a mission agency leader, a personal friend who told me even as we spoke, that field colleagues were in delicate negotiations to seek the release of a kidnapped missionary in Africa;
- Pope Benedict XVI’s statement on martyrdom within Catholic theology and practice—which we have included in this issue of **Connections**;
- The very recent updating work by many mission agencies of their own policy statements in contexts of violence and persecution
- Some churches who were the sending agency for their missionaries have had to craft

their own guidelines in these contexts, though most confessed that they did not have any policies yet. This is not good news for those church missionaries;

- The clear awareness that these multiple stories, events and case studies reflect the natural outworking of our discipleship to the suffering and crucified savior, who purposefully walked the path of downward mobility, but who knew the Father would resurrect him. This is our path and our hope. Suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom have characterized the entire narrative of the obedient people of God through church history.

Light and hope triumphed in the mist of our editorial work and it came again through the counsel from the persecuted church. One Vietnamese pastor wrote: "We have learned that suffering is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Disobedience to God is the worst thing." In addition, the New Testament is so clear from Jesus through the apostolic testimony that suffering, persecution and even martyrdom are not strangers to discipleship; rather, they are to be expected and even welcomed. It has struck me again and again that the New Testament was written by persecuted believers to persecuted believers. By the time the last epistles and Revelation are penned, probably every First Century believer knew of somebody who had suffered extreme persecution or was martyred. And we have no time to revisit church history, laced with countless of reports of these realities.

As we designed and constructed this issue, we sought the counsel of many both within and outside the World Evangelical Alliance and its Mission Commission arenas. Readers will recognize the

voice of many colleagues throughout the journal.

We are glad to announce that during this editorial process the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) was confirmed, whose "...purpose...is to encourage and nurture partnering and collaboration among Christian organizations focused on religious liberty. The RLP will more intentionally work together in addressing advocacy and in raising the awareness of religious persecution globally." We are grateful for these resources now reflected in a unique strategic alliance.

Global Connections in the UK represents one of the more forward-thinking national mission networks that has created solid policies and guidelines for its members. They offer a template for national mission movements, agencies and churches around the world. Thank you, Martin Lee, for graciously giving away these documents. They provide robust policies and guidelines to be studied, adopted and adapted by churches, sending agencies and other national mission movements around the world.

We are grateful to the mission agencies that sent us copies of their official policies on ministry in these contexts, though they rightly asked to remain anonymous. They work, along with other key documents must imperatively be worked into the mission training curricula of our schools and centres around the world. Mobilization leaders around the world must be more truthful in the reality of ministry in a dangerous world

We thank Crisis Consulting International for its seminal work. Based in the USA, it is creating high-value material to be studied and adapted around the world. CCI's mission is to assist the global Christian community in fulfilling the Great Commission by providing secu-

rity and crisis management services. Established in 1983, its purpose is as follows:

- Providing security-related training, site surveys and risk assessments, and consultation services.
- Assisting Christian organizations with specific needs such as event security, protection of personnel and investigation of hostile acts.
- Serving as consultants and hostage negotiators for Christian organizations during crises such as kidnappings.

Offering a final review of issue

Open your issue to the table of contents and notice the structure of this extended issue of **Connections**.

- Bertil and I set the stage with our initial editorial comments;
- Then you encounter the rich substance, starting with anchoring missiological reflections by Tonica van der Meer, Rose Dowsett and Glenn Penner;
- Thoughtful writers comment in light of some of the contemporary trigger events and subsequent statements and articles from around the world;
- A singular global correspondence conversation addressing questions of agency pre-field preparation of missionaries, contingency plans, policies on kidnapping and ransom, post-trauma care, missionary training and general member care. We listen to the voices of agency leaders from both Global South and North, and those of national mission leaders. A pastor writes candidly.
- A series of other global reports and reflections on the topic, opening the writers table for other of our Mission Commission network leaders;

- Samples of Best Practice Commitments;
- Other related news and developments;
- A table laying out some strategic resources and reviews;

Final thoughts from the heart and mind of this editor.

As we look into the future for **Connections**, we are grateful for Anton Smeele, our Holland-based publisher, and the recent arrival of Willem Griffioen, now based in the USA and guiding the production process for our journal. Thank you, Anton, and welcome Willem! We affirm your vision for the future of our writers roundtable.

The next issue of **Connections** will feature new reflections and reports on contextualization, and the one after that will focus on the singular and delicate themes of mission and spirituality. These three issues will guide three working teams at the Mission Commission's global consultation in Thailand, to be held just after the World Evangelical Alliance General Assembly. The teams will then produce the MC's Commission's three next books, for release during 2009-2010.

If you wish additional copies of this current issue, or a bulk order for your leaders to read and study, write William Griffioen directly at wgriffioen@mercazz.com.

Good reader, may God stimulate, encourage, challenge and stir you as you work through this rich feast! <<

William Taylor is Ambassador at large of the WEA and editor of *Connections*. Born in Latin America, he and his wife, Yvonne, served for 17 years before a move to the USA. He is the father of three adult GenXers born in Guatemala.