

When Trouble Comes....

Laura Mae Gardner

Trouble of many kinds comes to most missionaries. Usually it falls into one of five categories: health, relationships (including relationship with God), success in one's assignment, family, or finances. However, trouble also comes from civil unrest, war, violence, the break-down of law and order in a country, hostile ideologies, etc.. In view of these matters, **Wycliffe and SIL, who partner together in the care of shared workers**, think in terms of the following:

Training and Preparedness

Short-term teams are almost always led by an experienced worker. This person prepares his team to face field realities, one of which is that members of this team are obliged to abide by the guidance of leaders on that field. Usually, a team of short-term workers will not be encouraged to go to places of high danger or potential unrest.

Long-term workers or career people have minimal crisis training pre-field, but are made

aware of the security challenges of the field to which they are assigned. Once on-site, they are given some crisis training and informed about crisis policies for that field or area.

Field administrators are assisted by the International Coordinator for Crisis Management to develop crisis policies and practices to predict, prepare for, and weather crisis situations. These policies include the following:

- Risk Assessments. What are the risks most likely to happen in our area or country, and what is the probable impact of those events?
- Triggers. Which events will elicit a corresponding response from our group, informing us of the need to move to a higher or lower level of alertness?
- Contingency Plans. These must be developed for both the group and the individuals in that group.
- Staffing for Crisis Preparedness. A field crisis management committee is formed, to develop and oversee implementation

of these policies, and monitor the triggers when crisis threatens.

- Communication Networks. Strong communication links must be in place for each field administrative office, with the home offices of each field member, with sending churches, with the organization's international communication office, and with crisis specialists.

Appropriate principles behind these policies are:

- Preparedness is wisdom;
- The field is the best situated to gather accurate information about the pending crisis;
- Decisions are best made by those who are impacted by them.
- Policies should be established well ahead of the time of need. They are more easily developed when reason is not contaminated by high emotion or high fear. Establishing policies about ransom of kidnap victims cannot be done after a member is kidnapped—it must be done well before this event.

After the Crisis

- SIL's policies include the need for a debriefing after a major crisis, debriefing for groups in the event of an evacuation or similar occurrence that impacts the entire group, or for those individuals most impacted. We have found that healing and stability occur more quickly when a debriefing takes place.
- Practical care for the impacted individuals and entities. Organizational funded evacuations and debriefings evidence care and impact morale more than any words can do. "We've heard you say you care, but now we see that you really do" were words heard at an evacuated group's debriefing.
- SIL has become more aware of the reality



Glorious Church- Mannar

of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS) and is in the process of developing biblically integrated helpful materials to address this level of distress.

- Post-crisis evaluation of the policies and practices of a group—what did we do well? What did we fail to do? What remains to be done to bring wholeness and stability to this group?

Principles

- A mismanaged crisis can result in a secondary crisis that exceeds the original one. Therefore, it is important that a crisis is handled well, thus the need for good policies, good risk assessments, good contingency plans, and an excellent communication network.
- Preserving organizational assets takes second place to care of the people. An organization can rebuild its field assets, but never recover lives unnecessarily lost while trying to save or protect buildings or materials.
- No amount of training, no array of excellent policies can guarantee safety to individual workers or established field centers. Nothing will replace a reliance on God for His care and direction.
- Individuals must be faced with the fact that serving God as a missionary does not preempt them from suffering, hardship, persecution, and possible death. A theology of suffering, established ahead of time, is essential. (A sample theology is attached.)

Examples

In 1973, at an International Conference, the position was taken that SIL will not pay ransom in the event of a kidnapping of an adult member or of a member's child. However, at the same time it was made clear that every possible effort would be extended to obtain the release of that kidnapped person. Since that time there have been several kidnappings, including that of an adult male who had been held for 810 days. All except one have been returned unharmed. SIL has

Larrie Mae Gardner is member of WEA-MC's Global Member Care Network

benefited greatly by the services of Crisis Consulting International (CCI) under the guidance of Mr. Bob Klamser.

In the early 1990's a position was created for an International Crisis Coordinator. This person, Stuart Shepherd, was tireless in developing policies, in informing field entities of appropriate guidelines, and developing training which included maintaining current risk assessments, and contingency plans.

This International Crisis Coordinator, Stuart Shepherd, also developed a manual for field administrators. This manual, titled *Manual for Managing Individual Crises*, listed the most likely challenges involving an individual member to face a field leader and gave him or her guidelines for responding by offering six questions and a reasonable rationale for following recommended procedures. Those six questions were:

- a) Who should manage this crisis?
- b) What level of confidentiality applies in this case?
- c) Who should be informed?
- d) What immediate actions should be taken?
- e) What policies apply?
- f) Are there legal considerations?

This field manual has been distributed to all SIL fields and has proven to be a significant resource for field leaders and administrators.

A Suggested Theology of Suffering

The foundational principles, the truths that will sustain us as we face suffering for ourselves and for those for whom we carry responsibility are at least these six:

1. Suffering is inevitable; it will happen. It will probably happen to us, and to others. (John 16:33; Phil 1:29, I Peter 5:9; Heb. 10:34.) This does not mean we don't need God's comfort, or that we should fail to support and comfort one another when suffering comes. It does not mean we should court danger or take unnecessary risks.
2. God has promised His presence and sustaining power. (Psa 23:4; Isa. 43:1-3; Matt. 28:19-20.) These are most needed in times of uncertainty, suffering and loss.
3. The perspective of a bright, eternal



future. "Better and lasting possessions" (Heb. 10:34b; "eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (II Cor. 4:18; 'our heavenly dwelling' II Cor. 5:4), etc.. The present is not all there is to life. And long life is not God's sweetest gift.

4. The example of biblical heroes who suffered—we are not exempt. (Heb. 11.) Some were gloriously delivered (vss 32-35a) and some were not (vss. 35b-38). Whether we will be exempt from suffering, delivered from it, or have to endure it is not our choice. However, we are not alone in our suffering (I Peter 5:9).
5. The example of Christ Himself. (Heb. 12.) His suffering was in accordance with God's will. And he was perfected by his suffering (Heb 2:10, 18).
6. The refining, growth-producing power of suffering (Heb. 12; I Peter 1:6-7; 5:10).

Scripture does not glorify unwise sacrifice (sacrificing children to Moloch (Lev 18:21; 20:2,3,4), the sacrificing of Jephthah's daughter as the result of an unwise vow (Judges 11:29-31, 34-39). Scripture helps us understand that we are part of a Body (I Cor. 12), and what hurts one, hurts all. So putting oneself in danger intentionally, knowing the consequences may fall on others, may be a selfish, short-sighted ignoble act. What are appropriate risks? How will these risks forward the gospel? Who will have to endure the fall-out? How can we as leaders of a mission organization, protect our own members? How can we ignore the danger that the people being served will face—those folk cannot leave! Where does faith end and presumption begin? These are questions that each responsible person must answer for himself and for the group he leads. However, each individual should also think soberly about faith and risk, risk and consequences, suffering and growth. <<