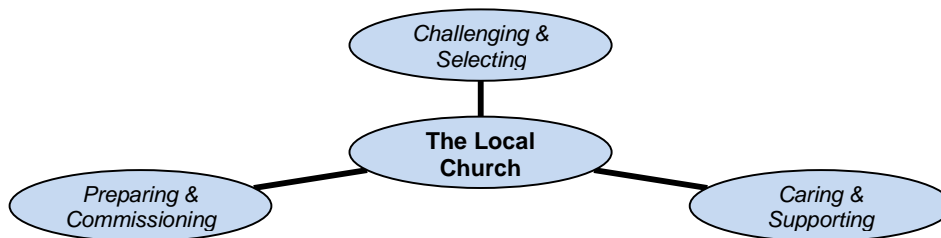


WORLD FOCUS TEAM

Assisting Local Churches and Christians in World Mission



Resource Paper 13

The Role of the Sending Church in Overseas Crisis Situations Impacting Missionaries

Preamble

A crisis situation includes such things as:

- ❖ Abduction / hostage taking
- ❖ Terrorism
- ❖ Civil unrest / war
- ❖ Natural disaster
- ❖ Imprisonment
- ❖ Murder
- ❖ Accidental death
- ❖ Missing persons
- ❖ Serious accident / major health problems

It should be noted at the outset that all the established Mission Agencies can be expected to have established Crisis Management policies, personnel trained to handle crisis situations and to be active when crisis situations arise that affect missionaries serving under their auspices.

A comprehensive treatment of this topic has been developed by Global Connections and their paper “Guidelines for crisis management and prevention including working in high risk areas” can be downloaded from their website at the following web address:

<http://www.globalconnections.co.uk/forums/InternationalHRForum/crisisguidelines>

Information concerning agencies that can give advice is to be found on the OSCAR web address:

<http://www.oscar.org.uk/service/logistics/crisis/index.htm>

Introduction

The handling of serious crisis situations is a very challenging and inherently difficult matter and this paper can only give some general information and pointers. It is by no means a comprehensive treatment of the topic.

In the event of an overseas crisis situation affecting a missionary for whom a church is responsible and:

- where that **missionary is serving under the auspices of a mission agency** it is important that the church appoint a person to liaise closely with the appropriate person in the mission agency concerning the crisis situation.
- where a **missionary is serving independently of a mission agency** then it is important that the church appoint a person, or committee, that has the time and means of rapid communication to oversee the situation on the church's behalf.

In this case, it is recommended that the person, or committee, enquire of Affinity Associate Mission Agencies to ascertain whether or not they are able to provide guidance and actual assistance in handling the situation.

The person, or committee, will also be helped in their response by referring to the Global Connections guidelines mentioned above and by seeking help from one or more of the agencies listed on the OSCAR website referred to above.

In both of the above cases, it can be expected that there will be varying reactions to the situation from a range of people impacted i.e. the missionary, the parents of the missionary, members of the church congregation, the sending agency (if any) and the host agency (if any) in the country concerned.

This will be a stressful time for all concerned and the church representative or committee involved will need to ensure that the situation is bathed in prayer and that they maintain frequent communication with all concerned, within the bounds of needed security.

Outline Procedures

Where the missionary is serving under the auspices of a mission agency:

Clear lines of communication should be established with the agency concerned and, if at all possible with the missionary. In this latter case, reliable and confidential channels should be established and used.

Given the careful preparation undertaken by and the experience of the mission agency it is wise that they take the lead in handling the situation. The agency should indicate a person on their staff who will communicate frequently with the appointed person in the church.

Where a missionary is serving independently of a mission agency:

In the event of an emergency, and as indicated above, assistance should be sought from agencies experienced in this area.

Clear lines of communication should be established to ensure reliable and confidential channels are used.

A chronology of events, during and after the crisis or critical incident, should be maintained and a log of phone calls and notes of all relevant meetings should be kept.

The following general guidelines should prove helpful as the church representative(s) proceed:

Communications with the missionary:

- this will require sensitivity and an understanding of the stressful situation being faced on a day to day basis.
- throughout the communication, the church representative(s) must demonstrate a pastoral concern for the welfare of the missionary and his family in the home country and a concern for the effect of actions taken on the ministry concerned.
- in all communications and in all decisions taken the church representative should hold in balance, the 'insider knowledge' of the missionary, the advice of the Foreign Office, where applicable, and the concerns of the missionary's family and the church family.

Communications with the family of the missionary:

Careful consideration should be given as to:

- how much can be said and why
- guidance given to the family as to whether or not they should travel to the country concerned
- how they should handle the media
- how best to ensure that the family feel that all that can be done is being done
- the need for any action taken by the family to be in conjunction with the church's efforts.

Communications with the church family:

- the focus here is on generating consistent prayer for the missionary and process underway and to assure the church members that all that can be done is being done.

Communication with the media:

- establish a good relationship with the media representative(s) and keep aware of what they are reporting as it may be necessary to use the media at a later date
- Generally, however, try to exclude the media as it may complicate matters
- answer questions with minimal information confined to the facts of the case
- if the story is in the public domain, ask the media to limit what they say

PRAY without ceasing.

On return of the missionary to the home country it is routine that they should receive debriefing and counselling, regardless of their apparent emotional well-being.

Debriefing following an emergency situation should take place within at least 72 hours of the crisis ending. It is common to attempt to shelter children from distress by trying not to mention concerns in front of them, however, it is important to ensure that children are included in appropriate ways in any debriefing.

As they and their families come through the crisis appropriate **counselling** MUST be given. This should not be at the discretion of the missionary.