

risk reporter

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION BY CHURCH MUTUAL INSURANCE

A journey of faith

Mission work in today's world

The experience of a foreign missionary today is one of faith, unimagined reward and — all too frequently — risk.

Consider the highly publicized and tragic story of Association of Baptists for World Evangelism Missionary Veronica "Roni" Bowers, 35, and her 6-month-old daughter, Charity. They were killed on April 20, 2001, when their single-engine Cessna was fired upon by a Peruvian military plane, in a cooperative action with the CIA, who mistook the small plane for that of drug traffickers. Bowers' husband, Jim, 38, the couple's 6-year-old son, Cory, and the pilot, Kevin Donaldson, 42, survived the attack.

"There's always a risk for missionaries because they tend to go to places that aren't safe," said Stuart Patt, spokesperson for the Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State.

He recommends that missionaries and their sponsors be aware of the risks posed in different areas when selecting missions.

"Colombia is the kidnapping capital of the world," Patt said. "There's been kidnapping in Colombia for a long time, but now it's an everyday occurrence."

Patt and a foreign service officer with the State Department who requested



anonymity strongly recommended that missionaries considering foreign posts should visit the State Department, Bureau of Consular Affairs Web site at www.travel.state.gov and review the Consular Information Sheets. They also advised readers to access the main Department of State Web site, www.state.gov, for the Country Reports on Human Rights on each country and review the sections on Freedom of Religion which provide information about the attitudes and restrictions on religious outreach.

On that site, the State Department also lists the following types of warnings and announcements:

Travel Warnings

Indicate countries that are considered dangerous and travel to these areas is not recommended. Currently, Travel Warnings have been issued for 27 countries.

Public Announcements

Issued for short-term or transnational conditions including terrorist acts or bomb threats that pose risk to American travelers. Public Announcements have been issued for the Middle East, North Africa and 14 additional countries. Also, the State Department has issued a Public Announcement for Worldwide Caution to remind U.S. citizens that they "may be targets of terrorist attacks."

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Reduce your worship center's risk during tornado season.



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Tornado Season – Prepare For Safety

In May 2003, 516 tornadoes exploded across the skies of the United States, the most tornadoes in a single month since tornado data was first recorded in 1950. Tragically, 39 people died in these storms. On May 4 alone, five worship centers were damaged or

destroyed in Missouri. On the same night, a tornado tore into Jackson, Tenn., severely damaging or destroying at least four houses of worship, including the historic Mother Liberty CME Church, built by former slaves in 1872.

Many natives of tornado-prone areas assume a cavalier attitude about the weather phenomenon, standing outside, hoping to catch a glimpse of a twister as black clouds threaten and the skies turn ugly green, but tornadoes should not be taken lightly. Each year, 1,200 tornadoes strike, killing 80 people and injuring more than 1,500.

Mike Foster, meteorologist in charge of the National Weather Service Norman Forecast Office in Norman, Okla. — in the eye of “Tornado Alley” — and storm chaser for nearly 30 years, is passionate about tornadoes and tornado safety.



Tornadoes

“With a tornado, you can go from a sky that’s empty to a storm that’s twice as tall as the tallest mountains on earth, and it all will be gone in a half hour,” Foster said. “Worship centers can be especially vulnerable to tornadoes because so many have large-span or vaulted roofs, and they host activities such as choir practice and potluck suppers between 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. — peak hours for a tornado to strike.”

Furthermore, Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday fall within the prime tornado months of March through June.

“On Palm Sunday, March 27, 1994, a powerful tornado hit the Goshen United Methodist Church in Goshen, Ala.,” Foster said. “Of the small congregation, 20 people were killed and 92 were injured. It was a house of worship’s worst nightmare.”

Foster recommends that worship centers consider the following steps to reduce risk to their congregation should a tornado occur:

- Acknowledge the potential of a tornado and come up with a set of plans for different circumstances such as choir practice or evening services.
- Consider postponing activities when weather threatens.
- Find a place in the building that’s satisfactory as a protective structure and know how you’re going to move people into that shelter.
- If there is no suitable shelter, follow the weather closely and move people to a safe place well ahead of a storm — at least 30 minutes.

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Catholic Church reports on missionaries killed

December 2003 — Roman Catholic Church officials report that as many as 29 Catholic Church workers were killed on mission in 2003. Most victims perished during robberies or in politically motivated incidents. The most recent victim was Irish Archbishop Michael A. Courtney, the Vatican ambassador to Burundi, who was shot by Hutu rebels while riding in his car near the town of Minago.

Source: *Catholic News Service*

Tornado strikes after study group departs

November 2003 — The Friendswood United Methodist Church, Friendswood, Texas, was heavily damaged when two tornadoes struck the town on an unseasonably muggy evening. There were no injuries at the church; a Bible study group disbanded just minutes prior to the twister. The church’s landmark bell tower, roof and sanctuary were destroyed. In the same storm, 13 tornadoes menaced the greater Houston area.

Source: *Cross Connection*

Congregations aid California fire victims

November 2003 — As wildfires wreaked devastation across Southern California late last year, area worship centers stepped forward to aid victims providing shelter, food, cleanup assistance and counsel. Congregations from as far away as Pennsylvania offered support to the thousands of residents who suddenly found themselves without homes. By the end of 2003, fires had claimed 19 lives, destroyed more than 3,600 homes and 1,300 structures and burned more than 738,000 acres in Southern California.

Source: *Christianity Today and Western City*

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A PERSPECTIVE

Stuart Patt, spokesperson for the Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, provides sound advice for people heading off to missions in foreign lands and their sponsors.

Risk Reporter: Do missionaries face more risk than the average traveler from the U.S.?

Stuart Patt: Missionaries, more than other types of travelers, are going to remote places that aren't safe. It's the nature of their work. They're exposed to additional risk, because they're often cut off from their support network, and they're in more remote parts of countries where people are very poor. Frequently, missionaries in these areas stand out as Westerners or Americans and are viewed as rich, which can make them a target.

RR: What are some things missionaries can do to reduce risk?

SP: First, they need to be prepared and do research on where they're going. It's important to know the culture because it will help them fit in. When they stand out, they are exposed to greater risk.

When the travelers arrive in their assigned country, they need to register with the embassy or consulate, provide information on how they can be contacted out in the field—such as a local phone number or e-mail address—and check in with the agency regularly. Also, travelers should always have some means of contact such as a cell phone or computer.

RR: What's important for those on mission to bear in mind when they're in the field?

SP: They should not dress or behave in a manner that draws attention to them. They must fit in as much as possible—blend in with the community so they're not obvious targets. Also, when in more populous areas, they should be very careful to avoid large crowds, demonstrations and any place Americans and Westerners are congregating. That's what happened at the nightclub in Bali and in the housing complex in Saudi Arabia—Westerners and Americans were known to frequent these places.

Note: On October 12, 2002, more than 200 people were killed and 209 injured when bombs exploded at a packed nightclub. Islamic terrorists were convicted of the crime.

A housing complex in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, inhabited by a large number of foreigners, was attacked by a suicide bomber on May 12, 2003. Casualties included 91 dead including eight Americans. A large number of Americans also were injured.

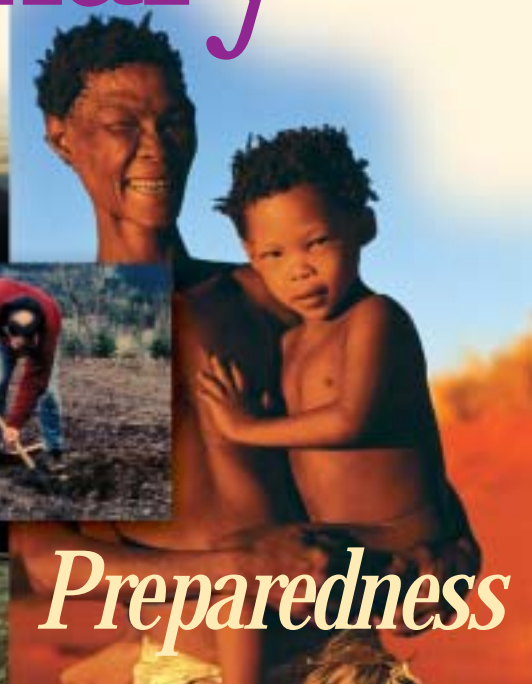
RR: Have the types of crimes committed against Americans and other Westerners changed in recent years?

SP: We used to see people being inadvertently caught in the middle of local problems, civil unrest and tribal infractions. Now it's more about transnational terrorism. That's why we recommend that travelers avoid going to places where Americans and Westerners are known to congregate. This trend is reflected in the nature of warnings issued by the State Department today. ■

Missionary Work



Safety
Concerns



Preparedness

Consular Information

Available for every country to provide contacts for the embassy or consulate and essential information about laws, health conditions, crime and security.

A Word on the Hot Middle East

In the Middle East, a pressure cooker of religious and political conflict, many countries ban missionaries who represent religions other than the factions condoned by the government.

"In general, throughout the Islamic world, proselytization for religions other than Islam is illegal," said a foreign service officer with the State Department based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. "If one is born a Moslem (one's father is Moslem), you are forbidden from converting to another religion."

In some of the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, including United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, non-Moslems can practice Christianity, Hinduism and other religions openly, and there are public places of worship. However, no proselytization to convert others is tolerated.

General Precautions

When on mission in any foreign country, you can take a number of precautionary steps. Some, such as always being alert to what's happening around you, may seem simplistic. Others, such as don't get into an unmarked taxi, may seem overly cautious, but these measures are critical for one's safety:

- Make two photocopies of your passport, airline tickets, driver's license and credit cards you will carry on your trip as well as your detailed itinerary with contact information. Leave one set with a family member or trusted individual

and carry a spare set with you keeping it separate from the real items you are carrying. Store originals in a hotel safe.

- Know how to make an emergency call from a phone booth and carry the correct change for the call. It also can be useful to know how to make a collect call. Calling cards may be used in some countries.
- Know how to ask for help and where official assistance can be found.
- Dress inconspicuously and be sensitive to cultural or religious customs of attire.
- Avoid wearing jewelry or other items that can make you look well-off.
- Carry only the money you need, under your clothing, on a belt or inside pocket.
- When carrying a bag or purse, use models with long straps that can be worn across your chest.
- Avoid large crowds or demonstrations that can harbor pickpockets or where violence can escalate.
- Avoid places where Americans and other Westerners are known to congregate because of the increase in terrorist acts targeting these groups.
- Avoid going out at night; if you do, don't go alone and steer clear of dark alleys or streets.
- Be wary of people who approach you with offers of assistance.
- Beware of pickpockets including small children who often work in teams; one person may try to distract you while another picks your pocket or bag.
- If you are threatened, don't fight. Hand over your valuables. 




- When constructing a new facility or adding on, consider building a safe room with steel-reinforced concrete walls and no windows.

"In tornado safety, my personal credo is 'get below ground at all cost,'" Foster said. "Flying debris, not wind, causes injuries and kills so seek shelter in an area that provides the most protection from wind-driven debris. Find a part of the building that has smaller ceiling spans, an interior room with the greatest number of walls between the room and the exterior of the structure, and away from windows. Better still, if you can, get below ground in a basement. Once there, position people under sturdy objects like workbenches or pews for protection if the structure were to collapse."

Foster debunks three common tornado-related myths:

- Don't open windows in an effort to relieve pressure; the danger is greater that debris will fly through windows causing injury or damage.
- It isn't necessarily safer to crouch in the west or southwest corner of a basement, because debris-filled gusts can come from any direction during the atmospheric chaos of a twister.
- A long list of cities that have been struck by tornadoes is testament that tornadoes do not "avoid" cities.

The National Weather Service operates 122 offices in the United States. Each office has a warning coordination meteorologist who is available to help develop tornado and storm contingency plans. The National Weather Service Office nearest your worship center can be contacted via the Internet at www.nws.noaa.gov/organization.html or the local federal agency listings in your phone book.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers publications on storm response and constructing tornado shelters. FEMA can be contacted via the Internet at www.fema.gov or by phone at (202) 566-1600. To order free FEMA publications, call (800) 480-2520. 



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