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## Caring for Cross-Cultural Workers in Red Zones

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# DIALOGUE

## BRUCE MOYER AND ERICH BAUMGARTNER CARING FOR CROSS-CULTURAL WORKERS IN RED ZONES

### ***Tribute to Dr. Bruce Campbell Moyer***

*Dr. Bruce Campbell Moyer was a significant part of the mission of the North American Division (NAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In his early years, Dr. Moyer pastored Seventh-day Adventist churches in the Pacific Northwest, taught at both Auburn and Columbia Adventist Academies, lectured in pastoral theology at Solusi University in Zimbabwe, and was associate professor of Theology at Columbia Union College (now called Washington Adventist University), near Washington, DC. He also served as senior advisor on HIV-AIDS for ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), as well as spending eight years pastoring urban and inner-city churches in Portland, OR, and Takoma Park, MD.*

*As his career continued, Dr. Moyer became professor of World Mission and an advisor to Ph.D. candidates at Andrews University and was heavily involved in the training of cross-cultural workers and the development of cross-cultural training curriculum. He also was the co-founder/director of the Center for Global Urban Mission, a research and training center that developed urban training programs, urban strategic planning, and urban mission models.*

*Even in his retirement, Dr. Moyer was heavily involved with a ministry called "Gospel Outreach." His work with this ministry involved outreach to Muslims on three continents.*

*Dr. Moyer passed away on May 11, 2019, at the age of 82. Shortly before his death, he wrote: "No tears please. My life has been a great adventure with Jesus. I have few regrets, and only a couple of bucket list items undone. I have loved my wife, family and 'work.' God has treated me far better than I have deserved and none of you owe me anything. I have now gone, like Reepicheep, in Voyage of the Dawn Treader, to my 'last great adventure,' when with more questions than certainties I am face to face with Jesus and all His saints."*

*For 10 years, Bruce and I were colleagues, focusing on the preparation of cross-cultural workers around the world. Like an older brother, Bruce was the one to introduce me to cultural foods like masala dosa in Omam or red lentil dal in India. He also taught me to embrace cultural differences not as a threat but as an opportunity to learn something about God's beautiful mosaic of the people who make up humanity. On occasion, Bruce's instincts for keeping people safe preserved me from getting myself in trouble, which is also reflected in the following article summarizing sound practices Christian organizations follow to care for cross-cultural workers operating in difficult places.*

*The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership is written for Christian leaders in organizations worldwide, and as such, we recognize the need to disseminate*

*helpful information that enables leaders to think about how to work with those workers working in the red zones. JACL is honored to have received this manuscript from Dr. Moyer shortly before his death, and we are pleased to share his writings with you in this issue.*

—Erich Baumgartner, Senior Editor of JACL

## Introduction

During the last few years, we have received sad reports of Christian cross-cultural workers being hurt or killed as they seek to share the love of Jesus throughout the world. For example:

- On January 15, 2016, 28 civilians were killed in Burkina Faso by terrorists; this group of militants opened fire at a cafe and then a hotel across the street. Among those killed was a 45-year-old US missionary, Mike Riddering.<sup>1</sup> Jihadist violence has flared in Burkina Faso since this event.
- John All Chau, a 26-year-old American missionary, was killed on a remote island off the coast of India on November 17, 2018. Chau understood the danger of attempting to share the gospel with the most isolated tribe in the world, but stood unafraid for the glory of “declar[ing] Jesus to these people.”<sup>2</sup>
- On May 12, 2019, terrorists interrupted a mass service in Dablo, Burkina Faso, killing the priest and five worshipers. The attackers then burned down the church.<sup>3</sup>
- At the beginning of 2019, *Christianity Today* published a list of the top 10 most dangerous countries to be a follower of Jesus. These countries, in order, are:
  1. North Korea
  2. Afghanistan
  3. Somalia
  4. Libya
  5. Pakistan
  6. Sudan
  7. Eritrea
  8. Yemen
  9. Iran
  10. India<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Baer, M. (2019). As violence escalates in Burkina Faso, family of slain missionary keeps serving. *Christianity Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/may/terrorism-burkina-faso-christian-missionary-family-attack.html>

<sup>2</sup>Shellnutt, K. (2018). US missionary killed by “world’s most isolated” tribe. *Christianity Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/november/missionary-killed-north-sentinel-isolated-island-tribe-chau.html>

<sup>3</sup>Burkina Faso church attack: Priest among six killed. (2019). *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48246715>

These areas would all be considered cross-cultural worker red zones. But what are red zones? Red zones are areas of the world where there is regularly intense stress and real or perceived threats to one's safety. These negative conditions may be due to politics, where revolution, insurgency, or other armed conflict puts people in harm's way. They may be due to location, for example, an area in which destructive battles are being fought between religious groups. Or they may be due to extreme health hazards present, such as disease or famine. Even frequent natural disasters can cause an area to be considered a red zone.

Most cross-cultural work entails some risk—even work done in one's own country; cross-cultural workers face stressors such as learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, understanding new verbal and nonverbal cues, and adapting to a new setting. However, red zones may include added risk; this topic has been discussed by Raymond Hicks (2002), whose chapter on member care in red zones has informed this article. Some of these risks include:

- Potential threats of robbery, rape, or abduction;
- Death threats;
- Active attempts to repress Christianity by governments and/or militant religious leadership;
- Terrorism;
- Intense anti-Western sentiment;
- Random acts of violence, shootings, civilian attacks;
- High unemployment rates, low wages, and/or large-scale hunger/acute physical needs, accompanied by violence and/or political upheaval (Hicks, 2002).

Additionally, normal ministry situations can become red zones with amazing rapidity. Weather changes, political upheavals, or “spillovers” from the conflict in neighboring countries can quickly make a radical impact on a ministry project.

Many “sending” ministries have little experience in caring for workers who operate in such areas that are beyond the “edges of the typical missionary envelope.” Thus, when threats are identified, workers are simply extracted from the situation. However, at other times, the situation becomes volatile too quickly, and workers cannot be extracted in time. Rwanda was such a case. When the political firestorm hit in 1994, governments struggled to evacuate their citizens, even as they were trying to comprehend the situation. In almost every case, there are warning signs if only both leaders and workers are tuned

<sup>4</sup>Shellnut, K. (2019). Asia rising: The top 50 countries where it's hardest to follow Jesus. *Christianity Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/january/50-worst-christian-persecution-open-doors-world-watch-list.html>

into the news or in touch with the local “grapevine.”

Since the beginning of the 21st century (and specifically since the events of September 11, 2001), red zones are becoming more prevalent and often unpredictable. For this reason, it is vital that cross-cultural workers and their sending organizations alike be prepared and proactive when it comes to the care and treatment of workers in red zones.

## Proper Care

On September 11, 2001, the world entered a new era of global terrorism. The world was shocked by the events of that day, as they revealed that no country—no matter how “safe”—is free from the threat of terrorism. When and where terrorism will hit is not often predictable. As I write these lines, three bombs have hit a major religious city in the country that I am visiting; the entire country has been placed on high alert. I was not anticipating this when I left home only days ago.

If the church is to be faithful to its commission (Matt. 28:18-20), it must reach out to all peoples everywhere, safe and less-than-safe. I frequently talk with sincere church members who tell me that they would love to do mission work, but only where they are assured of personal safety. After reflection, I often counsel them to “remain in bed.” While I say this somewhat tongue-in-cheek, I am not sure where, even in their neighborhoods, they can be assured of personal safety.

In the broader world today and in the areas yet to be reached, safety is a luxury, not an assurance. Jesus *did not* say, “Go into all the safe areas of the world . . . .” However, He *did* state, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it” (Luke 9:23, 24, NIV). In Matthew’s gospel, these words appear in the context of Jesus commissioning His disciples, “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword . . . . Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (Matt.10:34, 39, NIV).

Proper care for workers to be placed in these red zones requires a comprehensive approach that begins with the selection process. This approach should incorporate such matters as psychological testing, pre- and reverse pre-departure training, regular in-field contact, and mini-furloughs. It must also include deliberate post-return critical incident debriefing (CDI) and possibly extended counseling.

### *Psychological Testing*

Psychological testing is particularly important for those preparing for ministry service. The stress factors of red zone missions require a meticulous selection of candidates and their families. As the risk factors intensify, some individuals and families are more likely to operate well under such stress than others. While psychological testing will not solve all problems, it will lower certain risk factors by ensuring that candidates have the mental countenance to withstand the trials they will likely face.

### *Pre-Departure Training*

Pre-departure training must be upgraded from the three-week program that is now being offered in my denomination. For instance, additional time needs to be spent on language acquisition (more than at merely a “survival level”), studying the local religion, the geopolitical history and current realities, and instruction in secure communication. Special attention should also be given to interpersonal communication (strategies for healthy families and healthy teamwork) and “tent-making” strategies (in areas requiring creative strategy).

### *Regular In-field Contact and Mini-Furloughs*

Regular in-field contact must be maintained with cross-cultural workers through personal visits and secure communications. This should be augmented by frequent breaks (mini-furloughs) outside of the red zone. Unless workers have regular breaks from the stress they face, they tend to become as dysfunctional as the surrounding context. Many organizations mandate such mini-furloughs and provide financial support at times to assist personnel in a getaway. A helpful amount of time might be two to four weeks every six months. This should be outside of the zone or in “safe houses” outside of the immediate area.

### *Reverse Pre-departure Training*

As workers prepare to return to their home contexts, reverse pre-departure training is also essential. This should begin about six months before the cross-cultural worker returns and include a re-entry group activity, such as is conducted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church Institute of World Mission.

### *Post-return Debriefing and Counseling*

Post-return debriefing, counseling, and continuing contact is also essential. Special recognition should be given to all returned workers, and especially to

the “elite” group that returns from red zones, many of who may experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Since temperaments differ and some stress/traumatic incidents are not apparent or reported, critical stress-incident debriefing should be mandated for all returning cross-cultural workers either on furlough or on extended or permanent return. This requirement would remove any possible burden or feelings of suspicion. Such debriefing also uncovers hidden stress and trauma situations.

It is important to remember that the care of former cross-cultural workers is the work of many: the workers themselves, local field offices, the sending organization, and agencies such as the Institute of World Mission. Without this coordinated care and attention given to workers’ wellbeing—be it physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual health—workers can quickly experience burnout.

## Debriefing

In the book *Doing Member Care Well*, Debbie Lovell Hawker (2002) contributes a chapter entitled “Guidelines for Crisis and Routine Debriefing,” from which the material for this section is taken. Hawker maintains that while there are different types of debriefing, all returning workers should be debriefed as a routine matter. Debriefing should occur within 24-72 hours after a traumatic event. Otherwise, it should happen within the first three weeks after “re-entry,” allowing for jet-lag recovery. In all cases, routine debriefing may reveal the need for critical incident debriefing (CID).

### *Types of Debriefing*

The simplest form of debriefing is *operational debriefing*. This type of debriefing involves gathering information about the work performed and about what was achieved. This type of debriefing aims to gain information about a specific project.

The next form of debriefing is *personal debriefing*. This level of debriefing discovers how the individual experienced their work and how these experiences have come together to impact the person him/herself. “The aims are to offer any support that might be needed and help the individual with re-adjustment processes” (Hawker, 2002, p. 458). For many returning workers, this type of debriefing is all that is needed; it lets the worker know that he or she is appreciated, valued, relivant, and affirms what the person accomplished. It may also suggest how and where the individual should move next in life. Additionally, this personal debriefing may also uncover more profound diffi-

culties of stress or trauma that leads to the third level.

The third level of debriefing is *Critical Incident Debriefing (CID)*. This is a highly structured form of personal debriefing, following a traumatic experience. This type of debriefing aims to help accelerate recovery and prevent post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from developing.

### *Who Needs Debriefing?*

All returning expatriate workers should be debriefed on the first two levels. This is important for several reasons. To begin with, if it is a standard procedure, it can be viewed without trepidation and does not suggest any failure, weakness, or suspicion. Secondly, through operational and personal debriefing, the need for CID may be revealed.

Persons experiencing severe trauma, relational loss, or any intense form of stress need debriefing. It is important to remember, however, that debriefing is not therapy.

### *Who Should Conduct Debriefing?*

Debriefers should be experienced people with credibility. They should have a knowledge of and sensitivity for host cultures, possess excellent listening skills, and be non-judgmental. They must be affirming individuals and be able to empathize. However, debriefers must be aware of their limitations; due to the complexity/severity of worker experiences, it may be necessary for debriefers to refer those being debriefed to another professional. As stated above, debriefing is not therapy; it may, however, lead to a referral for treatment by a professional.

Debriefing must be viewed in context. It is part of a more extensive system, including the care of workers that begins with careful selection, adequate training, and continuous support while on assignment. It should also include preparation for returning “home” with debriefing one to three weeks after return, as well as follow-up or continuing care/referral for further help, if required.

For those who question the need for this extensive package of care for cross-cultural workers, it is essential to balance these costs with that of deserting “wounded warriors,” as well as the comparative costs of appropriate member care versus managing the anger and disillusionment that deserted “wounded warriors” can cause in their churches.

## **Guidelines for Administrators and Leaders**

During deployment, as well as after their return, workers in red zones

require extra measures of care. Hicks (2002) offers the following administrator and leader guidelines, suggesting five things to avoid when working with cross-cultural workers—specifically those in red zones.

### *Five Don'ts*

- 1. Avoid overstatements.** Even if an administrator or leader has had experiences similar to what the cross-cultural worker is going through, s/he cannot completely understand the worker's current situation. Additionally, workers in red zones are extremely sensitive. Statements such as, "I know exactly what you are going through," are rarely well-received, especially when made from the safety and comfort of an office.
- 2. Avoid downplaying danger and stress.** Do not trivialize the "redness" of a worker's zone or minimize his or her pain/hurt. Show care and compassion for workers' experiences by doing more listening than talking.
- 3. Avoid conflict.** Those working in red zones have sufficient conflict already. There is a time for dealing with difficult issues, but that time is usually not in emails and phone calls. Save confrontations for face-to-face interactions outside of the red zone.
- 4. Avoid increasing personnel workloads.** Those working in red zones may be barely keeping their heads above water as it is. Additional responsibilities/work will only create more stress, frustration, and worry for them.
- 5. Avoid making decisions without personnel input.** Make decisions with workers, not for (and never against) them.

### *Ten Dos*

Hicks (2002) also offers ten suggestions for ways to tangibly support cross-cultural workers.

- 1. Provide a range of support.** Crisis response workshops, spiritual life seminars/retreats, marriage enrichment, supporting family life, etc., are all great ways to support cross-cultural workers. These are not only beneficial to workers themselves, but are tangible evidence that they are actively cared for.
- 2. Keep in regular phone contact.** The personal aspect of phone calls can be hugely encouraging to workers in red zones. Calls should be made at least monthly, but ideally, weekly. Please note that calls may require the use of "code language," as many red zone countries monitor phone calls.
- 3. Listen.** Listen for what is said and what goes unsaid. Listen for warning signs and unspoken cries for help. It is possible that cross-cultural workers may not know how "in need" they are.

- 4. Be an encourager.** Just as a family relies on each other for encouragement, so workers should rely on each other and their sending team for encouragement. Likely workers in red zones are more in need of encouragement than those working in a less tenuous setting.
- 5. Provide opportunities for mini-furloughs.** Giving cross-cultural workers a mini-furlough of two weeks every six months is not unreasonable. This is not a full home leave, but should be outside the conflict area and may include some (mild) debriefing.
- 6. Visit.** A stay of several days by sending ministry administration and leaders can provide helpful information, allowing ministry personnel to walk alongside workers, ministering to them, and better understanding their day-to-day life, as well as their daily concerns.
- 7. Provide debriefing opportunities.** Whenever possible, conduct a debriefing with workers. For some, a regular CID might be in order. For others, just listening to them and helping them clarify their thoughts and/or feelings will be sufficient.
- 8. Take directive leadership.** “If one of your families is slowly falling apart and heading for a breakdown, be ready to act on their behalf” (Hicks, 2002, p. 204). Have a plan in place for families working in difficult situations can be critical to their safety and wellbeing.
- 9. Monitor.** Monitor cross-cultural workers both during and after their red zone service. As stated above, a great way to do that is by checking in with them by email, telephone, and personal visits. However, when they leave the red zone, see to it that they have the opportunity to be involved in CID. This can help them process their experience and possibly keep them from having stress-related difficulties later on.
- 10. Develop a Red Zone protocol and strategy.** The sending ministry/agency must develop a protocol to appropriately respond to red zone instability and real (or even potential) crises.

As stated before, it is important to remember that all cross-cultural care is the work of many people; providing comprehensive, consistent care for those working in red zones is key to creating a successful experience for them. The rest must be left to God.

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