

Security Issues in Communicating with Field Personnel in Sensitive Environments

By Liz Adleta, Ethnê Ephesus Global Support Team, January 2015

“Communications is the glue of relationships,” according to a well-known psychologist, and the world has exploded with means to carry on communications through electronic means of all sorts: e-mail, Skype, Twitter, Facebook, and so many more now make communicating easier and faster than ever before. But with this speed and accessibility come challenges, particularly as we would communicate with field missionaries working in security sensitive environments around the world.

As you engage directly with strategic field workers living in potentially hostile environments, it is of the utmost importance that you apply certain guidelines as you interact with them for their protection and the protection of their work among the least-reached people groups. Your commitment to listen to and learn from security concerns they have raised is extremely important to your ongoing relationship and your ability to partner with and serve them through prayer.

We know that many governments and religious groups are pro-actively seeking information about church and mission activities. Some security problems come from things like: publishing statistics on believers, baptisms, churches, cell groups and insensitive ‘research teams’ going into the countries of focus. This information gathering takes place both in their own country as well as in other countries including the United States. We want to protect both the national believers and their expatriate partners, paying special attention to those living within the country. We may differ in our opinions on security issues but we must have a common standard which is agreed upon in order to relate to one another with trust and confidence.

Using a “secure” email service helps but does not eliminate security concerns in communicating. Services such as Hotmail and Yahoo have not proven to be secure means of communicating in sensitive environments. Gmail is a better option, but there are free email services such as Hushmail that are more secure. Please obtain and use a secure email service in order to communicate with your field partner.

Even when using a “secure” email service, emails can be accessed occasionally by those seeking information. It is best to never use specific names of people or places when referring to our work or the workers. Use initials or nicknames and best not to link specific people to specific locations for security sake. Disguise names of religious groups or Christian activities such as Isl*m (in place of Islam), Ir*q (in place of Iraq), pr-er (in place of prayer), etc.—this avoids emails being caught by systems scanning emails for certain key words. When in doubt, avoid specifics.

When replying to an email, delete the header information so as not to expose additional email names and addresses or avoid including the email to which you are replying. Especially avoid long strings of email correspondence which may include people’s names, emails and information you do not want being shared.

Clarify in advance the security guidelines preferred by your field team. In this way, they can set the guidelines for you and you can operate within a level in which they feel comfortable.

Field-related information, presentations, photos, and information regarding church and mission activities should be considered confidential and should not be openly shared or reported on in written documents, emails, or public meetings and should not be posted on other websites or even bulletin boards in your church or prayer room. Before reusing any correspondence, be sure to obtain the express written permission of the author first. Names of workers, believers, agencies, or churches should not be given to others outside your prayer community without the prior approval of the person or agency. Be sure to convey the security guidelines to any people who will have access to the information to be sure they understand the urgency and importance of keeping the confidentiality.

With the increase of worldwide social networking (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.), please do not mention your partnership in any of your social networking communications, websites, emails, etc. However, advocacy of the people groups which you have adopted and mobilizing resources, workers, and promoting cooperation is encouraged using approved publicity materials which are available. Check with your field team to access this type of information which can be publicly posted and shared readily. This usually will not mention anything about workers or believers in this people group but will be

generic, publicly available information about the people group, their lives and ways to pray specifically for God's work among them without identifying particular efforts underway.

If you have questions, do not hesitate to consult the leaders of the your organization. Thank you for honoring these security guidelines and helping others to understand and adhere to them as well!

I agree to the above security guidelines:

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Signature: _____