

One Movement Adjusts to the Pandemic

BY KEVIN HIGGINS

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Like all of us, everywhere, the news and information and seriousness of the COVID-19 crisis emerged over time and for some faster than others. And it also emerged region by region and country by country throughout the world. In some places (as I write in April of 2020) there are still governments denying that the virus is an issue in their country.

In my roles as General Director of Frontier Ventures and President of WCIU, my first responses involved how we as organizations needed to care for our people and our partners. But in almost the same breath another dimension of my life also engaged: since 1990 I have lived in South Asia or been involved with leaders of movements to Jesus there. I have almost daily communication with these long-time friends and colleagues from different people groups and countries.

So, in this article, I want to trace the evolving response of one movement and its leaders to the crisis. I will do this through several emails I received, which give windows into the process. I share these chronologically. These represent about a two-week window at the time. Though I am leaving much of the language the way it came to me, I have edited the messages to make them clearer and also more secure.

Message 1

As-salamu Alaikum!

I hope and pray that everything is well with you and your family and WCIU and FV and GT.

We are as family just doing fine. Thank you for praying for us.

Situation in the country is worsening. Many places isolated, lockdown. But some areas contaminated people are running away from isolation. People

becoming crazy of making stock of food and other supplies. Price of essential commodities jump three times more than last week. Police trying to control the situation but there are not enough police to do that. Market is out of control.



In the villages people facing different problems, they cannot sell their agriculture product, fish, vegetables, tomatoes, potatoes, etc. so they have no money to buy things they need.

Every day increasing number of affected people. Death toll also increased.

In this situation, panic everywhere. Our people are also afraid. So far, I didn't have any news of any affected among the movement. But as I talked with several Imams (KH: leaders, believers in the movement) and all of our workers over phone, villages are in chaos, rumors, anxiety and worries.

I have written a letter to all the leaders of our believers gatherings. I wrote about Psalm 91 and Psalm 121, tried to encourage people, reminding them to trust God and keep faith in God.

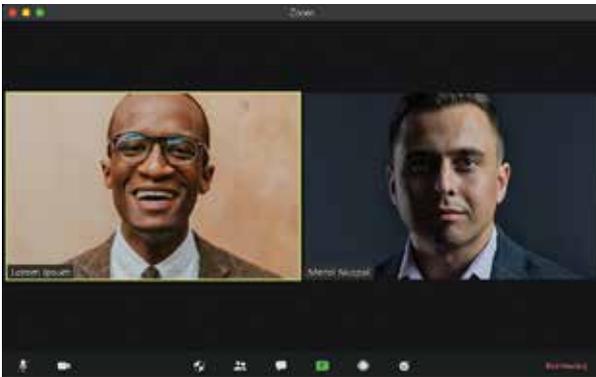
Also, I wrote detail instruct for preventive measures, following health advice from Government and WHO [World Health Organization].

Last three days I was sending the letters by courier services person to person delivery. Including today I have sent 800 letters, I need to send about 6,000 (to get to all the leaders), no matter how long it takes. Courier is a bit expensive, but I have no other way. I must encourage our people and help them wherever I can.

As you can see, in that first communication, there was concern, practical advice and spiritual encouragement. You can also notice that the concern was already shifting: not just the health risks of the virus but the fall out in terms of income, jobs, and food.

Message 2

As-salamu Alaikum!



Yesterday I had a conference call with our main leaders (the elders) about how we should face this crisis. The result:

In order to get a good understanding of the real situation at this moment and what will come in next few weeks, we need to make survey. So, I have asked 25 of our leaders to call all of our Imams (local leaders) through cell phone. They will report back tomorrow (Sunday). We are finding out:

What is present situation there? What kind of needs and crisis are there? Is there any gathering of believers that has already taken any program or

action to the response to the crisis? What kind of participation we can expect from our people? How many local volunteers we can find and use to help locally? Any suggestions from local leaders?

As I understood by talking over phone: Big crisis of shortage workers for harvest in whole north of country. This is potato harvesting season there, potato must harvest before rain come. Onion growing districts are also facing same problem. Lowland areas must harvest rice before rainwater rush to lowland area. These districts can grow one crop in a year, most of the time land remain under water.

I am going to follow brother "A" as he is doing in his country. He gave us a wonderful Idea. Pray that we'll be able.

Note here that brother "A" is a leader of a similar movement in another country; we meet as a group weekly and these brothers share their ideas and pray together, so, "A" had mentioned that in his country the believers were voluntarily going out to do the harvesting for different villages so there would be food for people.

At this stage ideas are forming, they are surveying and trying to get ideas from the ground level.

Message 3

(Note, between Message 2 and 3 this movement decided to do a short food program for 3,100 families, costing about \$8 per family for a week)

As-salamu Alaikum!

A small good news, I want to share with you.

As I was communicating with many people for help, I have some positive responses.



I have promises from a government member, not a believer, and a business owner, not a believer, for 165,000 more. And police officer, a believer, for another 35,000.

All of our own leaders will give 25% of their salaries next three month (April to June), and our translation team also will give 25% of their salaries next three month.

Message 4

As-salamu Alaikum!

As we all know situation not going to change soon, it may last until middle of June as they are talking.

The food distribution plan I have taken (started) and if I even get all that fund, that was only for one week. And as week passes, there will be more people needing help.

So, I was thinking what to do. There some people who use to have work but because lockdown they are out of job. I called this young man and asked him if I help him and he will earn enough for himself and for his family and at the same time, he will be helping people.

I explain to him that I will give him enough money to buy one little "van" (moved by manpower), and then buy fresh vegetables from villages and take them to the town and go house to house. (KH: Total investment was just over \$130 USD). People need vegetables, they will buy, you will make profit. Next day you will do same. (KH: keeping distance).



He immediately agreed. So, this week we bought this van and last two days he was doing as I told

him. He sold and made a 25% profit of about \$15.25 USD from the vegetable sales.

This is one-time help, but this will make him a helper instead of a help seeker. He will become a businessman. He is very happy because he is earning again.

This young man is a believer from nearby district. I know him and his father, know his home. He is staying in my town now with few other people, he will pay a daily rent. He will send money to his family and also help others in his gathering of believers, and those are in need.

Every evening he will come to my home, we are going study Scripture together. I think he has wonderful opportunity to tell people about gospel of the kingdom through his deed and life, through his behavior and through his words.

Hopefully this gives you a little window. Instead of telling a lot of stories, and instead of focusing on something outsider friends might be doing or helping with, I wanted to give you a window into this movement, its leadership and its attempts to respond.

Revealing our Humanity?

I am guessing you have read about the good, the bad and the ugly that the crisis has brought out. I hear about the racist reactions, about Hindus blaming Muslims, Muslims blaming Christians, Americans blaming the Chinese (even those living here in our own country) and more. I hear stories of selfishness and "grabbing."

But, like you I am sure, I also hear stories of selflessness, of social workers and medical workers putting themselves at risk; of people sewing masks for others; of people sharing food (and even toilet paper!).

This story from a movement at the edges of the kingdom among the unreached is one that I find especially encouraging today, revealing as it does the heart of Jesus in these brothers and sisters and the very real transformation He can bring. 