

A LESSON FROM AFRICA

In 1997 I was the manager of a missionary aviation program in Africa, with aircraft also based in a neighboring country where a rebellion was taking place. (Welcome to Africa!)



Our missionaries and aircraft were at risk. The rebels were advancing toward our mission base and airstrip, so our people decided to evacuate when they reached a certain city a safe distance away. So far, so good!

However, when rebels got to that point, our people still felt safe and moved the red line, maybe twice. They had much vested in their base and their way of life there and didn't want to lose it. I could see what was happening and how it could influence aviation safety, and asked our aircraft base manager for a plan on when, and how, they would evacuate.

He responded that they would take the seats out of the aircraft and sit people on the floor - - "without seat belts because we don't expect to crash." I was dumbfounded. (I think I still have the note!) It was an absolutely reckless plan that certainly arose out of their denial of the situation and their reluctance to leave.

I had been into that airstrip and knew it was marginal in several ways, and instructed him to begin the evacuation early enough that they could do it with passengers in seats with belts.

Here's the point. When possible, we need a good plan well in advance of an anticipated crisis because that's by far the best time to make good decisions. Maybe the only time.

And so it is today. Church leaders, do you have a well thought out plan for caring for those who will depend on you in the troubled days ahead? Even if it means that, in order to serve them you need to abandon the building and programs you are deeply vested in? Could you do that? Why wouldn't you? And when should such plans be laid?

Ken Stoltzfus, Kidron, OH
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