



CONCILIUM

RETURN:

Executive Benchmarks for Faithful
Re-Engagement After Crisis Evacuation

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About the Author

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Known as a visionary leader and strategic thinker, Scott has launched and led several influential initiatives serving the global mission community. He combines foresight, collaboration, and practical wisdom to inspire teams to pursue innovative solutions to complex challenges.

As a trusted change-maker, Scott builds strong partnerships across ministries, government agencies, and international networks, empowering others to pursue bold, long-term Kingdom impact with confidence and clarity.

Scott is married and lives in the Midwest with his wife and three children.





Executive Summary¹

When an international critical incident necessitates the evacuation of personnel, stay-go decisions are inherently complex, often generating significant stress and uncertainty for leaders and field personnel alike. Similarly, decisions regarding return and program resumption can also create stress. Return decisions must carefully balance mission urgency with disciplined, principled risk management. At its core, this document affirms that security management should never be a constraint on mission but a force multiplier that enables faithful, sustainable Gospel engagement.

Effective decision making begins with distinguishing risk tolerance (willingness) from risk capacity (ability to endure consequences). This is what Jesus calls “counting the cost.”² While calling, conviction, and enthusiasm often drive a desire to return, decisions must ultimately be governed by what the organization can responsibly sustain without incurring negligence.

Duty of care serves as a non-negotiable boundary, requiring leaders to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harm, inform personnel of risks, and implement mitigation strategies. In this context, return-to-ministry decisions **mirror stay-go frameworks**: if potential consequences exceed organizational capacity, delaying or modifying the return is prudent.

Benchmarking **theological maturity** involves assessing how well leaders and personnel integrate biblical understanding with disciplined decision-making in complex risk environments. Mature theology reflects a balanced understanding of calling, suffering, and stewardship; one that embraces obedience while rejecting recklessness. However, this must be accompanied by **spiritual maturity**, which is closely tied to emotional maturity and the ability to remain regulated, discerning, and non-reactive under pressure. While theological maturity and spiritual maturity are distinct, both are essential for effective Great Commission security risk and crisis management. Together, they enable leaders to make decisions that are not only biblically sound but also emotionally disciplined and operationally wise.

Leaders must also evaluate the impact on local partners, ensuring that foreign presence does not increase risk to national believers. Theologically, decisions should reflect objective faith—“eyes open” obedience rooted in wisdom—rather than blind faith that disregards risk.

Ultimately, successful re-entry requires clear benchmarks, pre-defined thresholds, and calm, non-anxious leadership, ensuring that risk is carried responsibly in alignment with mission, stewardship, and long-term effectiveness.

¹ Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Luke 14:27-33. The keyword being referenced is "count" psēphizō in Luke 14:28 which can be defined in several ways: 1. To count with pebbles, to compute, calculate, reckon 2. To give one's vote by casting a pebble into the urn. 3. To decide by voting. Definitions 2 and 3 are suggestive of decision-making in a group context. Each is suggestive that "counting the cost" comes with high stakes and is a serious responsibility.



Overview

Mission agency executives today face one of the most complex operating environments in modern ministry history. Many areas of the world present a convergence of volatile security dynamics, ideological conflict, shifting governance structures, intensifying natural events (famines, storms, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.), growing cyber threats, and heightened scrutiny of foreign religious actors.

The question field teams and organization leaders are often trying to answer is “Should we leave?” But once a departure decision is made, the new persistent question becomes:

“Under what conditions, with what posture, and within what limits should we return?”

It is my hope that this document provides ministry leaders with a practical operational framework for answering this question. I intend to emphasize throughout the document that faithful decision-making is neither reckless nor risk-averse, but rather theologically rooted in **objective faith, disciplined risk management, and principled leadership**.

This assessment synthesizes those principles into a structured approach for leaders seeking to:

- Benchmark readiness for re-entry.
- Align decision-making with mission, spiritual calling, and biblical theology.
- Fulfill duty of care obligations.
- Navigate the tension between calling and risk capacity.

Reframing the Objective: Security Risk Management (SRM) as a Force Multiplier for Mission

I am a strong advocate for the view that security risk management (SRM) exists to empower the **mission, not constrain it**.³

This reframing is essential. Over nearly three decades of international ministry, I have seen organizations often fall into one of two traps:

- **Security as restriction** inhibits mission and discourages risk-taking.
- **Mission without structure** exposes workers to preventable harm.

³ *Love, Joy, Fulfillment, and the Mandate of Gospel Security Management*, by Scott Brawner
<https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/01/Love-Joy-Fulfillment-and-the-Mandate-of-Gospel-Security-Management.pdf>.



The correct posture is neither. Instead:

SRM should function as a **force multiplier**, enabling Gospel workers to operate more effectively in high-risk environments.

For leaders, this means benchmarking is more than simply asking: “Is it safe to return?” But:

“Can we return in a way that maintains or increases effectiveness while responsibly managing risk?”

This shift reframes return-to-ministry decisions from binary (go/no-go) to conditional (how, when, and under what safeguards).

In 2023, I wrote the Forward for Anna Hampton’s fantastic book, *Facing Fear: The Journey to Mature Courage in Risk and Persecution*. In the forward, I said:

“...some of the worst physical and moral injuries suffered by expatriate gospel workers and their children happened in organizations that, while maintaining articulated theology of risk, lacked a standardized duty of care.”⁴

I wholly stand by this statement and want to encourage mission leaders to consider that an articulated theology of risk and suffering is not the end goal. Instead, an organization’s articulated theology of risk and suffering should be the foundation on which a comprehensive duty of care is constructed. That duty should include a practical security risk and crisis management program that helps field workers make wise decisions, enabling them to thrive where the Lord has called them and remain effective where He plants them.

Most of all, this keeps organizations from “predictable tragedies.” Predictable tragedies result from a failure to acknowledge and mitigate known threats and vulnerabilities. Crises resulting from predictable tragedies are often the most heartbreaking for all involved.

⁴ Anna E. Hampton, *Facing Fear: The Journey from Fear to Faith* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2019), foreword, xiv.



Benchmarking Framework: Risk Tolerance vs. Risk Capacity

One of the most critical conceptual tools is the distinction between **risk tolerance** and **risk capacity**.⁵ Essentially:

- **Risk tolerance** = willingness to take risk
- **Risk capacity** = ability to endure consequences

For re-entry decisions, this distinction is critical and should be decisive.

Organizational Benchmarking Questions

Organizational benchmarking questions help leaders evaluate both the willingness and the ability to engage with risk responsibly. By assessing risk tolerance alongside risk capacity, leaders can identify gaps between ambition and capability. This process ensures decisions are grounded in operational reality and aligns mission objectives with the organization's ability to sustain negative consequences.

Risk Tolerance Indicators⁶

Risk tolerance indicators reflect an organization's willingness to accept risk, shaped by theological convictions, leadership posture, and cultural expectations. Risk tolerance indicators influence how aggressively or cautiously the organization pursues mission objectives in uncertain environments. This includes:

- Stated theological convictions about risk, suffering, and mission.
- Leadership appetite for risk engagement.
- Cultural expectations for managing risk within the organization.

Risk Capacity Indicators

Risk capacity indicators measure an organization's ability to absorb the consequences of risk. This includes crisis response capability, financial resilience, legal protections, and personnel readiness to endure and recover from adverse events. Risk capacity indicators include:

- Crisis response capability (evacuation, medical, legal).⁷

⁵ For more on risk tolerance vs risk capacity, read *Risk Tolerance, Risk Capacity, and the Sacred Work of the Kingdom Security Professional*, <https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/01/Risk-Tolerance-Risk-Capacity-and-the-Sacred-Work-of-the-Kingdom-Security-Professional-1.pdf>.

⁷ Bringing cross-sectional teams together for tabletop exercises to test organizational response capabilities is a great way to learn whether an organization's risk tolerance exceeds their risk capacity.



- Financial resilience under crisis conditions.
- Business continuity plans.
- Technology recovery point objective (RPO) and recovery time objective (RTO).
- Insurance coverage and contingency funding.
- Political/legal exposure in host and home countries.
- Psychological and pastoral/member care capacity for workers.

Critical Insight:

Many organizations overestimate their readiness because they measure **tolerance instead of capacity**. “Your ego is writing checks your body can’t cash” is an apt metaphor when a gospel worker’s ambition (or the organization’s ambition) exceeds their operational resilience.

Principally Speaking:

- High tolerance without capacity = **organizational negligence**
- Capacity without willingness = **missed opportunity**

Remember: Benchmarking must prioritize capacity.

Duty of Care as a Non-Negotiable Constraint⁸

Duty of care is a non-negotiable obligation requiring organizations to prioritize team members' safety over operations, ensuring timely evacuation, risk mitigation, and support, even when legal, financial, or strategic pressures conflict.

Duty of care is defined as:

“A legal obligation to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harm.”⁹

For leaders, this is not merely a legal requirement—it is a theological expression of:

- Stewardship

⁸ For more on a Christian organization’s duty of Care responsibilities, read *Duty of Care as Faithful Stewardship: A Biblical Mandate for Mission Agency Executives*, featured in the March 2026 inaugural edition of the *Watchman’s Brief*. <https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/03/The-Watchmans-Brief-First-Edition-Duty-of-Care-as-Faithful-Stewardship.pdf>.

⁹
Please review: *Faithful Calling: Stay-Go Decisions and the Challenge of Duty of Care*, <https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/01/Faithful-Calling-Stay-Go-Decisions-and-the-Challenge-of-Duty-of-Care.pdf>.



- Love of neighbor
- Organizational integrity

Practical Implications for Re-Entry

Returning field workers to a location previously evacuated due to various threats requires demonstrating:

Foreseeability

- Have risks been properly assessed?
- Are threat patterns understood?

Reasonableness

- Would a third party (court, insurer, donor, partner, etc.) consider the decision responsible?

Mitigation

- Have steps been taken to reduce the **likelihood** of a critical incident by decreasing the field workers' **vulnerability** to current threats, and taking practical steps with contingency and crisis planning to decrease the **impact** of a critical incident on the organization?

Duty of Care Benchmark Checklist

Leaders should ensure:

- Risk assessments are current and location-specific.
- Personnel are informed of realistic consequences (“duty to warn”).
- Crisis management plans are tested and actionable.
- Evacuation thresholds are pre-defined.
- Leadership decisions are documented and defensible.

Key Principle: Duty of care does not eliminate risk—it defines **how risk is responsibly carried**, especially inherent risks associated with the local areas where field personnel serve, especially if an evacuation was triggered by a larger or regional crisis.



Stay–Go Decision Logic for Return-to-Ministry¹⁰

Return decisions are fundamentally **stay–go decisions in reverse**. Decision logic for returning to ministry emphasizes evaluating mission value in light of current threats, vulnerabilities, and organizational capacity. This framework helps leaders make disciplined, defensible decisions that balance calling with duty of care. This ensures that any return process is both operationally viable and responsibly managed. Likewise, when the consequences of an incident exceed organizational risk capacity, departure is prudent.

Decision Model

The decision model provides a structured approach for evaluating return-to-ministry choices. This includes consideration of mission value, threat environment, vulnerability, and organizational capacity. Decisions should not be driven by emotion or urgency, but by disciplined analysis that aligns operational realities with theological conviction, duty of care, and long-term mission effectiveness once return is complete.

Leaders should evaluate:

- **Mission Value.** What is the strategic importance of presence in this location?
- **Threat Environment.** What has changed since departure, and what is the current trajectory (improving, deteriorating, unstable)?
- **Vulnerability.** How exposed are workers based on nationality, visibility, and activity? Also, have practical, tangible steps been taken to reduce personnel vulnerabilities to the key threats in their area of service?
- **Capacity.** Has the organization completed adequate contingency and crisis planning for critical response? Also, can the organization absorb the worst-case scenario?

Outcome Paths¹¹

Outcome paths provide structured decision options for a full return, a conditional return, or a delayed return. Based on risk capacity and conditions, outcome paths enable leaders to align mission engagement with responsible, disciplined risk management.

¹⁰ For more practical considerations for returning field workers to local service areas, review the document, *Thresholds for Departure/Benchmarks for Return*, <https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/01/Thresholds-for-Departure-Benchmarks-for-Return-12-2021.pdf>.

¹¹ *Faithful Calling: Stay-Go Decisions and the Challenge of Duty of Care* has much to say on these issues. <https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/01/Faithful-Calling-Stay-Go-Decisions-and-the-Challenge-of-Duty-of-Care.pdf>.



Outcome paths can be broken into three key areas:

1. **Return** (Full engagement where risk is within capacity and mitigations are in place). A full return to ministry is appropriate when assessed risks fall within the organization's defined risk capacity, and sufficient mitigation measures are in place. This includes validated security protocols, reliable access to medical care, stable communication systems, and clear evacuation contingencies. Leadership should have confidence that personnel can operate effectively without undue vulnerability and that foreseeable risks have been reduced to a manageable level. Full engagement assumes both operational readiness and organizational resilience, allowing ministry activities to resume at pre-crisis levels with appropriate oversight and continuous monitoring.
2. **Conditional Return** (including limited presence, modified operations, and reduced exposure). A conditional return is warranted when risks remain elevated but can be managed through deliberate limitations. This approach emphasizes a reduced footprint, modified operational methods, and intentional lowering of exposure. Personnel may operate in less visible roles, restrict travel, or engage through indirect or local partnerships. Security measures are heightened, and activities are carefully scoped to balance mission effectiveness with safety. This model allows organizations to maintain presence and momentum while preserving flexibility to scale up or withdraw as conditions evolve.
3. **Delayed Return** (when risk exceeds capacity and it is prudent to continue monitoring). A delayed return is necessary when current risks exceed the organization's capacity to manage potential consequences responsibly. In such cases, re-entry would expose personnel and partners to unacceptable levels of harm and may constitute negligence. Leadership should instead prioritize ongoing environmental monitoring and maintain situational awareness through trusted networks and intelligence sources. During this period, organizations can strengthen preparedness, refine contingency plans, and reassess benchmarks for return, ensuring that future decisions are informed, disciplined, and aligned with both mission and duty of care (what I call a "strategic vacation").

Disagreement Scenarios

Field personnel may feel "called" to return even when leadership chooses a delayed return. In these cases, there are essentially three executive responses:

1. **Enforce Compliance.** Require field personnel alignment with the organizational decision to wait. This ensures unity of action, preserves organizational integrity, and maintains adherence to established risk thresholds and duty of care obligations. Clear



communication of expectations, rationale, and consequences is essential to reinforce trust, accountability, and disciplined decision-making across the team.

2. **Re-negotiate Duty of Care.** Define reduced organizational responsibility if individuals proceed independently. This may include clearly outlining limitations in evacuation support, financial assistance, crisis response, and legal coverage. Expectations should be documented through formal agreements (e.g., waivers or indemnification). This process ensures transparency, preserves organizational integrity, and allows individuals to act on personal conviction without imposing undue liability on the organization.
3. **Resignation/Termination.** While an organization should never require a field worker to violate their conscience or sense of calling, it is not obligated to assume the risks associated with that individual's decision to return. Accordingly, a worker may choose to resign and return on their own initiative, or the organization may exercise its responsibility to release (terminate) the individual, thereby allowing them to pursue their perceived calling outside the organization's duty of care framework.

These steps are particularly relevant in contexts where personal calling and risk perception vary.

Cognitive Bias¹²

Leaders should know how to identify cognitive bias. Our brains are predictable. If we don't know how to identify these patterns in ourselves and others, we are more likely to make decisions that put people at undue risk.

Cognitive bias plays a significant role in stay-go decisions as well as return decisions. **Cognitive bias distorts how individuals perceive risk, urgency, and opportunity.** In high-stress environments, confirmation bias can lead both team members and decision-makers to favor information that supports a desired outcome (such as returning quickly) while discounting indicators of continued instability.

Optimism bias may cause leaders to underestimate the likelihood or impact of adverse events, particularly when prior experience in a country or location has been positive. Conversely, fear-based bias can drive overly conservative decisions that unnecessarily delay re-engagement and miss ministry opportunities.

¹² For more on Cognitive bias, check out: Sameera Thilakasiri, *Cognitive Bias and UX — 101*, Medium, <https://sameerast.medium.com/cognitive-bias-and-ux-101-399c4268da14>.



Recency bias is especially dangerous, as a short period of calm may be misinterpreted as stabilization, ignoring broader conflict dynamics. Groupthink can further compound these risks by suppressing dissenting perspectives within leadership teams.

Effective leaders must recognize these tendencies and deliberately counter them through structured frameworks, diverse input, and disciplined analysis. Objective, benchmark-driven decision-making helps mitigate bias by anchoring decisions in measurable conditions rather than perception or emotion.

The Role of Theology: Objective Faith vs. Subjective Faith and Blind Faith¹³

It is important to understand that, when it comes to Great Commission work, the Bible issues a strong warning against **blind faith**—taking risks God neither requires nor honors. This is why Jesus makes a clear distinction between “believing without seeing” (John 20:29) and “walking blindly” (Matthew 15:14).¹⁴

Likewise, the Lord warns us throughout the Old and New Testaments against **subjective faith** (biblical subjectivism). This kind of faith often promotes “practice over pattern,” allowing the individual to “bend scripture” or manipulate the biblical author’s intent to justify personal actions. This is NOT biblical theology of risk. This is: **“I can do all things through a verse taken out of context...”**

When it comes to Great Commission work, God neither asks for blind faith nor honors subjective faith. Blind and subjective faith leaves Christians risking in ways the Lord never commanded and expecting protection in ways the Lord never promised. The consequences of which can lead to tragedy and disillusionment.

Objective Faith Defined

Objective faith is the disciplined practice of pursuing Gospel obedience with an “eyes open” posture that integrates conviction with reality. It is a form of faith that actively counts the cost, assesses risk, and aligns decisions with both God’s calling and the practical constraints of risk capacity and duty of care. Objective faith treats security as an act of godly stewardship by seeking to reduce vulnerability through wise preparation, informed decision-making, and

¹³ For more on objective faith vs blind faith, reference *Risk Tolerance, Risk Capacity, and the Sacred Work of the Kingdom Security Professional*, <https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/01/Risk-Tolerance-Risk-Capacity-and-the-Sacred-Work-of-the-Kingdom-Security-Professional-1.pdf>.

¹⁴ The word translated “blind” (τυφλός) appears fifty times in the Greek New Testament. While often describing a literal loss of sight, the word also functions as a metaphor for spiritual and mental incapacity (Matthew 23:16; 2 Peter 1:9, etc.).



responsible stewardship of time, resources, and lives. It holds in tension trust in God's sovereignty with the obligation to act prudently, ensuring that obedience is not expressed through reckless exposure to danger, but through thoughtful, accountable, and mission-aligned engagement. Thus, objective faith is:

- “Eyes open” obedience
- Grounded in wisdom and prudence
- Aligned with counting the cost (Luke 14)

Leaders must guard against:

- **Romanticized risk-taking.** The tendency to elevate danger as inherently noble or spiritually superior can distort sound decision-making. **Risk may be unavoidable, but it is not virtuous in itself.** Leaders must ensure that exposure to danger is justified by mission necessity and governed by capacity, not driven by emotional appeal, identity, or a desire to prove faithfulness through hardship.
- **Misapplied theology of suffering.** Suffering has a clear place in Christian theology, but it must not be used to justify **preventable harm** or poor risk decisions. Leaders should guard against interpretations that equate unnecessary exposure to danger with spiritual maturity. Instead, suffering should be understood within the framework of obedience, wisdom, and stewardship—not as something to pursue through avoidable risk.
- **Pressure narratives (“faithfulness = staying”).** Cultural or organizational narratives that equate staying in high-risk environments with greater faithfulness can create undue pressure on personnel. These narratives may silence legitimate concerns or discourage prudent decisions to withdraw. Leaders must actively reinforce that faithfulness is measured by obedience and wisdom, not by physical presence in dangerous contexts at all costs.

Benchmarking Theological Maturity

Benchmarking **theological maturity** involves assessing how well leaders and personnel integrate biblical understanding with disciplined decision-making in complex risk environments. Mature theology reflects a balanced understanding of calling, suffering, and stewardship; one that embraces obedience while rejecting recklessness. However, this must be accompanied by **spiritual maturity**, which is closely tied to emotional maturity and the ability to remain regulated, discerning, and non-reactive under pressure. While theological maturity and spiritual maturity are distinct, both are essential for effective Great Commission



security risk and crisis management. Together, they enable leaders to make decisions that are not only biblically sound but also emotionally disciplined and operationally wise.

Christian Organizations Should Assess:

- Do leaders articulate a clear theology of risk that answers the question, “What’s worth risking and why?”
- Is suffering understood as possible and meaningful, but not something to manufacture through negligence

Key Principle: Faithfulness is not proven by exposure to risk, but by obedience guided by wisdom.

External Impact: Decisions Affect More Than Your Personnel¹⁵

Return and stay-go decisions must account for impacts beyond the organization’s own personnel. This includes impact on local partners, national believers, and the broader expat community. In many contexts, the presence of expatriate workers can expose local believers to increased scrutiny, elevated suspicion, harassment, or worse. Leaders must therefore evaluate not only organizational risk, but also second- and third-order effects of their presence. Faithful decision-making requires asking whether returning personnel will strengthen or endanger local networks. Responsible stewardship demands that organizations avoid unintentionally transferring risk onto those with less protection and greater vulnerability.

Leaders must evaluate:

- Will our return increase unwanted attention or surveillance on local partners?
- Could association lead to arrest, interrogation, or harm for local partners?
- Does foreign presence create ideological or political complications?

Ethical Benchmark

Ethical benchmarking requires leaders to weigh immediate ministry gains against the long-term safety of local believers. While short-term impact may favor returning, decisions must not expose national partners to sustained risk, scrutiny, or harm. Faithful stewardship prioritizes the enduring protection and viability of local communities over temporary operational advantage. Leaders must always weigh short-term ministry impact with the long-term safety of local believers.

¹⁵ For greater guidance on how decisions to return (or stay) impact local partners and believers, read *CHOOSING TO STAY: Processing how our desire to risk can endanger others*, <https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/01/Choosing-To-Stay-01-2022.pdf>.



Key Question: “Does our presence help or endanger those we serve?”

Organizational Alignment: The Importance of Pre-Decision Frameworks¹⁶

A recurring theme for me in security risk and crisis management is the importance of **pre-processing decisions before a crisis**. Policies should guide decisions **before** they are needed in order to build margin into decision-making for both field workers and organizational leaders.

Benchmarking Organizational Readiness

Benchmarking organizational readiness involves evaluating whether an agency has the capacity, structures, and alignment necessary to re-engage after an evacuation. This includes clear policies, defined action thresholds, crisis response capabilities, leadership alignment, and contingency planning. My concern in any return scenario is for an organization to be able to provide a mechanism that enables timely and responsible decision-making under complex and evolving conditions.

Leaders should establish clear thresholds for both departure and return¹⁷ that include:

- Defined authority structures for decision-making.
- Alignment between leadership, field personnel, and organizational mission.
- Articulated theologies of risk and suffering that support reason and rationale for risk-taking.

Benefits

Pre-decision frameworks (proactive contingency planning) provide critical structure for organizations operating in complex and high-risk environments by establishing clear expectations and decision criteria before a crisis occurs. These frameworks:

- Reduce conflict by aligning stakeholders around shared principles.
- Increase clarity by defining thresholds and responsibilities.
- Accelerate decision-making when time is limited.

¹⁶ For more on how policies should guide decisions before they are needed, refer to *Faithful Calling: Stay-Go Decisions and the Challenge of Duty of Care*. <https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/01/Faithful-Calling-Stay-Go-Decisions-and-the-Challenge-of-Duty-of-Care.pdf>.

¹⁷ *Thresholds for Departure/Benchmarks for Return*, <https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/01/Thresholds-for-Departure-Benchmarks-for-Return-12-2021.pdf>.



Just as importantly, pre-decision frameworks protect leaders and teams from emotional or reactive choices driven by fear, pressure, or incomplete information. By pre-processing decisions, organizations are better equipped to act consistently, responsibly, and in alignment with both their mission and duty of care under rapidly changing conditions.

Leadership Requirement: Non-Anxious Presence

In volatile environments, fear can spread faster than the threat itself! Remember: the same hands that go up in enthusiasm and say, “Here am I, Lord, send me¹⁸” can just as quickly go up in a time of crisis, shaking their fists at God, crying, “Why have you abandoned me?”

I have personally observed in faith-based organizations how fear and anxiety can spread faster than the threat itself in high-threat and crisis environments. This is true not only for those directly facing a threat, but also for those managing a crisis response. To note, a person’s response to threat and crisis is often rooted in their management of hyperarousal, be that condition activated (or aggravated) by acute or chronic stressors.¹⁹

The Risk of Poor Leadership Posture

Poor leadership posture in high-stress environments degrades organizational effectiveness and increases risk. Panic in leadership leads to operational breakdown. As communication falters, teams lose cohesion. This results in erratic decision-making. At the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I consulted with several Christian organizations whose overreaction, driven by fear, resulted in unnecessary restrictions that not only hindered mission effectiveness but also eroded trust between field workers and organizational leadership. Conversely, I have also observed how avoidance or denial of risk leads to a lack of preparation, leaving personnel exposed when crises emerge. From the military to the private sector, I have observed how vulnerability undermines confidence and compromises mission outcomes. It cannot be stressed enough how critical the importance of calm, disciplined, and well-regulated leadership is, which takes into consideration the following realities:

- **Panic leads to operational breakdown.** Panic in leadership disrupts clarity, communication, and coordination across the organization. As anxiety spreads, teams may freeze, fragment, or act impulsively, leading to cascading failures in execution. Decision-making becomes reactive rather than strategic, increasing the likelihood of errors and compounding risk in already unstable environments.
- **Overreaction creates unnecessary restriction.** Overreaction driven by fear can lead leaders to impose excessive controls or restrictions that unnecessarily limit

¹⁸ Isaiah 6:8

¹⁹ Scott Brawner, *Applying the Principles of Non-Anxious Presence to Security and Crisis Management*, 3.



operational effectiveness. While intended to reduce risk, these measures can stifle initiative, erode trust, and hinder mission progress. Over time, this creates frustration among personnel and reduces organizational agility in dynamic environments.

- **Avoidance permits lack of preparation.** Avoidance or denial of risk results in insufficient planning and preparedness for foreseeable threats. Leaders who minimize or ignore emerging risks often fail to implement necessary safeguards, including training and contingency planning. When a crisis occurs, this lack of preparation leaves personnel exposed, forcing reactive, erratic responses that could have been avoided with proactive leadership.

Application to Return Decisions

With non-anxious presence and its application to return decisions, leaders must:

- **Resist pressure to act prematurely.** Leaders must resist internal and external pressures to make premature return decisions driven by urgency, emotion, or even field OR stakeholder expectations. Acting too quickly can overlook critical risk indicators and compromise duty of care. Instead, allow space for proper assessment, ensuring decisions are grounded in validated information rather than anxiety.
- **Avoid paralysis from uncertainty.** While caution is essential, leaders must also guard against inaction caused by uncertainty or fear of making the wrong decision (“analysis paralysis”). Leaders CAN move forward with clarity, even with incomplete information. This is why established frameworks and benchmarks help leaders make timely, responsible decisions without becoming immobilized by ambiguity.
- **Communicate decisions transparently.** Transparent communication between headquarters and the field is essential for maintaining trust and alignment. Leaders should clearly articulate the rationale, risks, and expectations behind return decisions. I would add that it is important that all stakeholders affected by return decisions understand both the “why” behind them and their implications. This is how leaders foster consistent messaging, reduce confusion, prevent speculation, and strengthen organizational cohesion during complex transitions.

Integrated Benchmarking Model for Return to Ministry

An integrated benchmarking model provides mission leaders with a principled approach to evaluating when and how to return after evacuation. Rather than relying on instinct or isolated data points, this model synthesizes mission priorities, risk capacity, duty of care, and external impact into a decision-making framework. Aligning theological conviction with operational



discipline enables leaders to assess readiness by applying consistent standards to the return process. This helps leaders make return decisions that are both faithful and responsible in rapidly changing conditions. Below are principles that can be fashioned into an actionable framework:

Phase 1: Strategic Assessment

- **Mission priority of location.** Evaluate the strategic importance of the individual location (vs. the entire region) to the mission objectives of the returning team. This includes considering access to unreached populations, providing strategic support to local partners, and aligning with the organizational vision and long-term priorities.
- **Current threat environment.** Assess present security conditions, including political stability, conflict dynamics, crime levels, and hostility toward foreign or Christian presence, to determine the immediacy and severity of risks.
- **Historical incident patterns.** Analyze past incidents such as violence, arrests, or disruptions to identify trends, recurring threats, and escalation patterns that inform risk forecasting and decision-making.

Phase 2: Capacity Evaluation

- **Crisis response capability.** Determine the organization's ability to respond effectively to emergencies, including evacuation plans, medical access, communication systems, and coordination with external support resources such as medical and crisis evacuation providers.
- **Financial resilience.** Assess whether the organization can absorb financial shocks arising from crisis response, evacuation, legal issues, or operational disruptions without compromising the broader sustainability of its mission.
- **Legal exposure.** Evaluate potential legal liabilities in both host and home countries, including compliance requirements, duty of care implications, and risks of litigation or government action.
- **Personnel readiness.** Examine whether field personnel (and their families) are spiritually, emotionally, and practically prepared to live and serve in high-risk environments, including training, resilience, and alignment with organizational expectations.



Phase 3: Ethical Impact Analysis

- **Impact on local partners.** Assess how returning expatriate personnel may affect local believers, including increased scrutiny, risk of persecution, or added burdens. Ensure that return decisions do not transfer unnecessary risk onto more vulnerable partners.²⁰
- **Long-term sustainability.** Evaluate whether the proposed return can be maintained over time without repeated disruption, ensuring that ministry presence creates long-term impact rather than short-term engagement.
- **Reputational consideration.** Consider how decisions may affect the organization's credibility with stakeholders, field worker families, donors, ministry partners, and authorities, including perceptions of responsibility, wisdom, and integrity in high-risk environments.

Phase 4: Decision Thresholds (Define)

- **Conditions for return.** Define specific, measurable indicators (such as improved stability or restored services) that must be met before personnel can safely and responsibly return to the field.
- **Conditions for withdrawal.** Establish clear triggers for **fresh departure**, including escalating violence, infrastructure collapse, or targeted threats, to ensure timely and decisive action when risk exceeds acceptable levels.
- **Acceptable risk levels.** Document and articulate the level of risk the organization is willing and able to bear, aligned with its risk capacity, mission priorities, and duty of care responsibilities.

²⁰ Failure to account for predictable consequences does not constitute an honest mistake, nor absolve leadership for watchman's accountability (Ezekiel 33:1-6). When those vulnerable (mikros - μικρός) members under our charge stumble (skandalizō - σκανδαλίζω) due to the lack of due diligence from leadership, the Lord warns that the blood of those harmed will be required of the watchman (Ezekiel 33:6). I have personally seen legitimate moral injury grip leadership and field personnel when they are not able to rescue their national staff from what preventable harm befell them while partnering with an expatriate church planter. Both leadership and staff have to live with the consequences of their actions and inactions (or dereliction) in these cases. Indeed, it may be better to fall into the ocean with a millstone around our necks (Luke 17:2) than suffer the Lord's wrath in some of the worst cases. Choosing to send expats back in-country, knowing it may harm national staff and local partners, is unconscionable. Yet if we are habitually thinking about our own individual "calling" rather than the greater picture with second and third order of consequence, we may very well make catastrophic mistakes (see "Cognitive Bias" on page 10). This merits focused missiological reflection and is deeper than just a "security" issue.



Phase 5: Implementation Strategy

- **Phased re-entry.** Plan a gradual return of personnel and operations, allowing the organization to test conditions, validate assumptions, and adjust strategy before committing to full engagement.
- **Reduced visibility models.** Consider operational approaches that lower exposure, such as discreet presence, remote engagement, or reliance on local partners, to minimize risk while maintaining ministry effectiveness.
- **Enhanced training and preparation.** Provide targeted training in security awareness, crisis response, and cultural dynamics, ensuring personnel are equipped to operate safely and effectively in complex environments. Help field personnel become masters of self-rescue.

Phase 6: Continuous Monitoring²¹

- **Real-time intelligence updates.** Maintain up-to-date awareness of changing conditions through reliable information sources, enabling timely adjustments to operations and risk posture.
- **Feedback loops from field personnel.** Establish regular communication channels for field teams to report conditions, concerns, and insights. Ensure that leadership decisions are informed by ground-level realities.
- **Adaptive decision-making.** Continuously reassess strategies and decisions as conditions evolve, allowing the organization to respond dynamically rather than relying on static plans.

Conclusion: Faithful, Responsible, and Effective Return

Faithful return to ministry requires more than just conviction; it demands a disciplined alignment between mission, risk capacity, and duty of care. Leaders must ensure decisions are grounded in wisdom, not urgency or emotion.

Any return to a previously evacuated area should be marked by clear benchmarks, theological clarity, operational readiness, and prayer and agreement. When these elements are aligned,

²¹Concilium offers a suite of services for Great Commission organizations to support their analysis and risk management needs. Check out Concilium's 2026 Ministry Guide for more information on Concilium's resources. <https://concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/03/Concilium-Ministry-Guide-2026-2.pdf>.



organizations can be confident in their return as they protect their expat staff and local partners and preserve mission integrity.

With this in mind, leaders seeking to return to ministry well after a forced departure should pursue:

- **Clarity of mission.** Leaders must define why they are (re)engaging in a given context and ensure that decisions are anchored in a strategic purpose aligned with the organization's mission and vision, rather than emotion, opportunity, or external pressure.
- **Discipline in risk management.** Effective decision-making requires consistent application of risk assessment, mitigation, and capacity evaluation. This ensures that risks are understood and responsibly managed rather than ignored or overstated. In this way, we obey Jesus's guidance to be "shrewd as serpents yet innocent as doves" as leaders, "count the cost of obedience."²²
- **Integrity in leadership.** Leaders must act transparently and consistently. They need to align their decisions with stated values, duty of care, and organizational commitments. That way, leaders build trust and demonstrate accountability under pressure.

I believe it is critical to emphasize that both the purpose and the intent of this document are not to eliminate risk but **to align risk-taking with mission, capacity, and the faithful stewardship** of the time, resources, and lives we, as mission leaders, are called to shepherd before the Lord.

Final Executive Principles

These final executive principles are intended to help mission leaders process complex decisions by building margin into decision-making. This requires congruency between mission, risk, and responsibility. I hope these principles help leaders avoid emotional bias and empower their organizations to maintain consistent decision-making. This way, field workers are empowered to steward their return well as they pursue effectiveness in ministry. Remember:

While mission drives decisions, mission does NOT override responsibility. Mission provides direction and urgency, but it must be pursued within responsible limits. Mission leaders must ensure that zeal for impact does not compromise stewardship, safety, or ethical obligations toward those they lead and serve.

²² Matthew 10:16; Luke 14:28-33.



Understanding Risk capacity helps leaders FAITHFULLY govern operational boundaries. Operational decisions must be constrained by what the organization can realistically sustain. Exceeding risk capacity exposes field personnel (and local partners) to consequences that can quickly become catastrophic. At a minimum, exceeding risk capacity will undermine mission effectiveness and long-term viability. Bottom line, this isn't faithfulness; it's poor stewardship.

Duty of care is both a legal and a theological obligation. Duty of care reflects not only compliance with legal standards but also a biblical mandate of stewardship and love. Leaders are accountable to protect those entrusted to them through prudent, informed, and defensible decision-making.

Objective faith requires wisdom, not recklessness. Faithful obedience is not demonstrated through unnecessary exposure to danger. Objective faith integrates trust in God with disciplined judgment, ensuring that decisions reflect both conviction and careful consideration of real-world risks.

Leadership posture determines organizational stability. The emotional and decision-making posture of leaders shapes the entire organization. Calm, disciplined leadership fosters clarity and cohesion, while reactive or anxious leadership can destabilize teams and compromise effective crisis response.

Return decisions must consider impact on others, not just organizational personnel. Decisions must account for second- and third-order effects, particularly on local partners and vulnerable communities, not to mention other expat gospel workers who may suffer as a result of poor decision-making. Responsible leadership avoids transferring risk to others unnecessarily and prioritizes the long-term safety and sustainability of those impacted by the organization's presence.

Closing Thought

Completing the Great Commission will ALWAYS require risk for Gospel engagement. The question is not whether risk exists, but whether that risk is:

- **Understood**
- **Measured**
- **Aligned with capacity**
- **Carried faithfully**

Organizations that can answer those questions well will not only return, but they will also **endure, adapt, and bear lasting fruit.**



Resources

PERSONAL AND CORPORATE SECURITY TRAINING
<https://concilium.us/services/training-and-equippping>



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STRATEGIC ANALYSIS AND GUIDANCE
<https://concilium.us/services/threat-analysis>

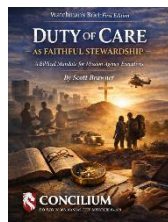


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CRISIS MANAGEMENT, CONSULTING, & RESPONSE
<https://concilium.us/services/security-and-crisis-management>



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[Duty of Care as Faithful Stewardship](#)



[Thresholds for Departure/Benchmarks for Return](#)



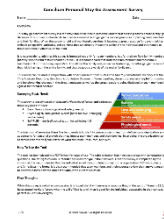
[Choosing to Stay: Processing how our desire to risk can endanger others](#)



[Faithful Calling: Stay-Go Decisions and the Challenge of Duty of Care](#)



[Gaining Buy-In for Security: A Short Essay](#)



[Concilium Personal Stay-Go Assessment](#)

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