

IMB: Use caution, stay committed

RICHMOND, VA. (Special and local reports) – Senior leaders at Southern Baptists' International Mission Board (IMB) in Richmond, Va., are urging overseas mission trip planners to use extreme caution for the remainder of 2020.

Because many countries continue to require quarantines or have not yet opened their borders, travelers could face unexpected circumstances, IMB warns, including quarantines upon re-entering the U.S.

The future threat and spread of COVID-19 also remains an unknown factor.



Chitwood

IMB personnel on the field are continually monitoring their local situations and government's restrictions, IMB said. Many missionaries will not be able to host groups for the foreseeable future due to government-imposed travel bans and other factors related to the pandemic. Churches with long-standing partnerships and plans to travel soon should remain in close contact with their IMB field contact for guidance and continue to check travel restrictions and U.S. re-entry guidelines, which could change day to day.

"The work of Southern Baptists' missionaries has and will continue. Not a day has passed in the midst of this pandemic, or over the course of the past 175 years, that Southern Baptists have been without a witness among the nations," said IMB President Paul Chitwood.

"In making decisions about hosting volunteer teams during this unusual season, however, we must consider the well-being of

locals in the host countries, our field workers, and our faithful volunteers.”



Ray

Missions Mobilization

Mike Ray, director of missions mobilization for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), said, “As we see this news from IMB, we recognize they are in contact with personnel literally all over the world, and we do well to listen to the word they are sharing with us about the complications in the near future when traveling.

“In the meantime, while we wait patiently – or not –for opportunities that allow us to be more active in going, we can utilize this time to:

- Recognize there is a definite spiritual battle and we should strive to see what the Father is showing us and how He is leading us in missions.
- Pray, asking the Father to help us prioritize our involvement with a view to impacting lostness
- Strengthen our strategy of doing missions so that it is in a healthy way
- Sharpen our skills in cross cultural work
- Deepen our understanding of the people we are working with and how to better share the gospel with them
- Deepen our relationship with the missionary partners we work with on the field
- Use available tools to incorporate mission connections and awareness into our online as well as our ‘live’ worship formats.”

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New Opportunities

IMB said Southern Baptist missionaries, while deeply affected by COVID-19 and government regulations covering their field of service, have had new Gospel opportunities – and Southern Baptist relief work related to the coronavirus has been significant.

Send Relief, a joint effort of IMB and Southern Baptists' North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga. (sendrelief.org), reported more than 300 projects in progress or completed in 78 countries.

These efforts are projected to help more than 900,000 people worldwide and have provided food packages, personal protection equipment (PPE), handwashing stations, sanitation supplies, and education materials.

Staying engaged

IMB staff and missionaries are encouraging churches to support relief work and to seek other ways to stay engaged in missions even when travel is not advised:

- Some affinities like South Asia are offering virtual mission trips for participants to connect with missionaries, learn about people groups, and join in prayer (tinyurl.com/virtualmissions).
- The IMB student team has also announced online opportunities through the Stateside Summer Initiative (tinyurl.com/summerinitiative123).
- Missionaries rely daily on the prayers of supporters. Churches can find daily prayer requests at imb.org/pray and can still join the 175 Days of Prayer for the nations (imb.org/175/pray).

- Consider connecting churches or small groups with missionaries on temporary assignments in the U.S. and exploring partnership opportunities (imb.org/contact-us/).
- Stay in close contact with field personnel. Spend time encouraging them and worshiping with them, whether they are currently overseas or in the U.S.
- Ask missionary partners how to find and minister to representatives of their people groups in the U.S., including via Internet. These doors to sharing the Gospel remain open, IMB pointed out.
- IMB cannot continue its work without the support of prayers and gifts. Consider a mid-year financial gift to the Cooperative Program or the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® (imb.org/give).

Praying, giving

Chitwood said he remains thankful and conveys the thanks of missionaries for the support they have received (tinyurl.com/haunfamily). As Southern Baptists pray for IMB missionaries, those missionaries continue to pray for Southern Baptists and for SBC churches across the U.S, he added.

“Thank you for continuing to give, even as you are navigating these unexpected challenges. Your commitment is making a difference,” Chitwood said.