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Social Media on the Mission Field: Blessing or Curse? *Current Issue of 'Unfinished' Magazine Reveals Pros and Cons of Facebook, Other New Media for Ministry in Regions Unfriendly to Gospel*

NORCROSS, Ga. – Social media that provides missionaries unprecedented connections with home also comes with inherent dangers, according the latest issue of “Unfinished,” the award-winning quarterly magazine of The Mission Society.

Especially in areas of the world where evangelism is outlawed or unwelcome, missionaries and their home supporters are urged to exercise wisdom to maintain safety in using these technological advances. Missionaries, new believers and the communities they serve could suffer life-threatening persecution from governments or others antagonistic to the faith.

“Before posting something on a missionary’s page, assume that their local friends, local police and local thugs all could potentially read it,” said Jim Ramsay, vice president for mission ministries at The Mission Society and author of “Facebook and Missions: What Kind of ‘Friend’ Are You?” in the spring issue of “Unfinished.”

Social media such as Facebook and Skype have completely transformed how missionaries connect with their support partners, families and one another. Only a decade ago, this kind of instantaneous communication was nonexistent to most missionaries ministering far from home.

Today the benefits of various social media make prayer support available immediately for ministry needs half a world away. Supporters and family members have come to expect newsletters and updates every few days.

However, not every missionary can share freely on social media that may be seen by people unfriendly to the gospel. According to Ramsay, “Often the ministries that staff and missionaries are involved in are best left off public forums such as Facebook.”

Friends and supporters must likewise exercise caution in messages and photos they post on missionaries’ Facebook pages and their own as well. Ministries, names and identifications of people in photos can sometimes place missionaries and the people they serve in danger.

One missionary family was recently expelled from a country closed to the gospel because of photos they were “tagged” in on the Facebook pages of friends at home, according to Ramsay.

Supporters should take their cues of dos and don’ts of Facebook from what the missionaries themselves are posting. In addition, the amount of contact with home on media such as Skype and Facebook should be monitored. Too much social contact with home supporters has been shown to delay missionaries’ bonding with the people of their new ministry.

“Caring for the Missionary’s Soul: Fresh Ways to Think about Participating in God’s Mission,” the theme of the spring issue of “Unfinished,” also gives practical and safe ways to support missionaries, from prayer to care packages to the simple act of listening. The Mission Society offers missionaries the services of their member care and development department and coaches.

The Mission Society’s award-winning quarterly magazine “Unfinished” informs and inspires readers about worldwide mission trends and issues. To receive a free subscription, visit <https://www.themissionsociety.org/go/subscribetouf>. Copies of the spring 2013 issue may be ordered in bulk.

Founded in 1984 in the Wesleyan tradition, The Mission Society (www.themissionsociety.org) exists to mobilize and deploy the body of Christ globally to join Jesus in His mission, especially among the least-reached peoples. The Mission Society recruits, trains and sends Christian missionaries to minister around the world. Its church ministry department provides seminars, workshops and mentoring for congregations in the United States and abroad, helping equip churches for outreach in their communities and worldwide. At present, The Mission Society has 214 missionaries serving in 45 countries.

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