

ANGELS In Afghanistan

Two unknown American missionaries were rescued from a Taliban prison late last year. Now, with a new book out about their ideal, Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer are telling the world about Jesus.

When Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer signed up for an exploratory missionary trip to Kabul, Afghanistan, in the summer of 1998, they knew it wouldn't be a vacation. Taliban forces had taken control of the city in 1996 and imposed strict rules on citizens and foreigners alike.

After visiting the country, both women made a long-term commitment to do humanitarian work in Afghanistan. "I came to see that God did not need someone with extraordinary gifts and achievements," writes Mercer, 25, in the women's recently released book, *Prisoners of Hope*, the story of their captivity and subsequent freedom. "God assured me that if I would be committed to loving and serving with a soft heart, then even if my life seemed small in the eyes of the world, before God it would be great."

After earning degrees in social work, and German and physical education, respectively, the Baylor University graduates set out to do relief work. Curry had been in Kabul for more than 1-1/2 years when Mercer arrived in March 2001.

They partnered with Shelter Now Germany (SNG), a Christian relief and development organization committed to helping the poor. Antioch Community Church—a nondenominational church in Waco, Texas, founded in 1999—supported them with spiritual and pastoral oversight.

Curry, who is 30, and Mercer reached out to people of all ages, from poor street kids to elderly widows in need of hope. When they weren't helping someone in need, they would regularly visit their Afghan friends in their homes. It was one of those visits that caught the attention of the Taliban.

The American women were arrested separately on Aug. 3 after showing a film about Jesus on their laptop computer and reading about Jesus from a children's storybook in an Afghan home. They landed in a Taliban prison, along with four German and two Australian SNG workers.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the aid workers were moved to a high-security intelligence prison, also in Kabul. They hoped to finish their court proceedings before the United States started bombing Afghanistan, but the events of Sept. 11 stalled the process.

They received a very poor English translation of their charges from the Afghan Supreme Court in October that stated they had spread the "abolished religion of Christianity" among Afghans. Although their Pakistani attorney was optimistic about their case, Curry and Mercer were concerned about how it all would end—and the bombing didn't help calm their fears.

On Nov. 12, the group was transported to Wardak and learned en route that Kabul had been taken by the Northern Alliance. They had missed their chance for freedom by 30 minutes. After an overnight stop near Wardak, the aid workers journeyed on to Ghazni (about 50 miles from Kabul), where they were taken to a prison.

Concerned that they might be headed to the Taliban stronghold

of Kandahar, the group banded together in prayer. Their prayers were answered that evening in Ghazni when an unknown, beardless man who supported the Northern Alliance burst into their prison carrying a machine gun and rocket launcher and told them they were free. But their battle wasn't over.

Now released, the aid workers went to the home of a local Afghan family. The SNG group leader began making calls to U.S. officials, who explained a top-secret rescue plan.

Their pickup spot was a deserted airfield about the size of four football fields. Curry, Mercer and the six other workers went to the location late at night and waited by the flame of a small oil lamp for the U.S. rescue team. The helicopters passed overhead and missed them the first time around.

Most of the group began to question their safety and considered returning to town, but Mercer remained firm about staying. After finding matches in a co-worker's purse, she set her head scarf on fire. The other women did the same with their head scarves and blankets.

The pilots saw the fire. Within minutes, the jubilant SNG workers were being flown to safety in Islamabad, Pakistan. Their ordeal of 3-1/2 months ended on Nov. 15.

Since then, Curry and Mercer have been traveling throughout the United States, sharing their story in churches, with reporters and at Women of Faith conferences. In the following interview with Charisma, they talk about their desire to reach the poor in Afghanistan, the stresses of being held hostage in a Taliban prison and the growth they and their church experienced as they united in

prayer.

Charisma: Why did you have an interest in going to Afghanistan?

Dayna Curry: I knew a family [who was doing relief and development work] in Afghanistan. We would pray for Afghanistan, and as you start to pray for a country, the Lord puts it on your heart. Over the years God had developed in me a heart for Muslim women. One out of every 4 or 5 women in Afghanistan is a widow. I had been working as a social worker in the school system and was longing to do full-time missions work. I wanted to see if I could handle such a strict Islamic society.

Heather Mercer: I lived overseas as a child and traveled a lot, so I've always had an affinity for other cultures and people. I told God, "If you will send me someplace where no one else wants to go, someplace that is hard, I'll be willing to go." Part of that is my own sense of adventure—I like a challenge. In addition, I was really stirred by Afghanistan, and God was developing within me a heart for the poor.

Charisma: How did you prepare for the trip?

Curry: I went through our church's one-year staff training to learn specifically more about Afghanistan, and we did some team-building exercises. Also, I went to Colorado and took a few courses in Muslim studies.

Mercer: I also went through the one-year training school, which ended with a two-month outreach in Turkey. That was great because it was the first time I actually lived for an

extended period of time in a Muslim context.

Charisma: What are your best memories of your work in Afghanistan?

Curry: It was a joy to help start a project for street kids and to train them by working with them up close. They felt like they weren't on the street begging [but] were earning something and were so proud of what they were doing.

Mercer: Besides hanging out with the street kids, my favorite thing was to go to the hospital, visit patients and pray for them. When I would see street kids or women in the hospital, it was my great joy to get to love them and sit with them because I was getting to partner with Jesus in what He was doing.

Charisma: What was the hardest part about the missions work?

Mercer: Not having the freedom to really do all I wanted to in Afghanistan with the people. I wanted to live in a house with Afghans and get inside of their culture and become one of them as much as an American can become. It wasn't easy to conform to the strict laws, even though we did not have to do so to its fullest extent.

Charisma: In Kabul, why did you risk visiting Afghan homes?

Curry: Our purpose was to build relationships and share Jesus. We wanted opportunities to share. People would ask us all the time to visit their houses, though they knew the dangers as well. You're not going to experience Afghanistan unless you go

into [Afghans'] homes. However, we didn't go unless they asked us a whole lot.

Charisma: What would you do differently if you could do it all over again?

Mercer: There are probably a few I don't think if we ever changed a thing it would have made any difference. There was this huge sovereign plan of God to change Afghanistan, and we were in the middle of it. During the interrogations, it was so hard to face the issue of how to answer the questions so as not to get any Afghan friends killed.

That was the thing that was the hardest for us. Dayna and I have decided we return to Afghanistan and talk to the people about Jesus, we should say, "If I'm ever questioned, I cannot lie for you." That way we don't find ourselves walking the fine line between truth and lie.

Charisma: Were you surprised the Taliban let you have Bibles and worship together in prison?

Curry: I probably wouldn't have thought they would let us do that to the extent they did.

Mercer: However, it wasn't illegal for us to be Christians. They didn't typically put major restrictions on foreign Christians for practicing their faith.

Charisma: What were your daily worship services like in prison?

Curry: They were usually in our room. We shared different Scriptures and sang praise songs for about an hour. Sometimes there would be spontaneous prayer during the worship, but usually afterward we focused on prayer for Afghanistan, prayer for the Afghans in prison, prayer for America and our families—whatever God laid on our heart. Sometimes we would just have a “love on Jesus” night, where we worshiped and exalted God but did not pray for anything specific.

Charisma: Did certain books or songs minister to you in prison?

Mercer: I did a study in the book of Acts, could see that persecution was actually the catalyst for growth in the church. While reading about Paul’s suffering, I was thinking, How can I get out of this place? Yet Paul was asking, “How can my imprisonment build the church?”

God really brought some revelation to me about persecution. We sang...”There Is a Light in the Darkness”...a song of intercession for the Afghan people peace in the midst of literal darkness. The electricity is out, I’m lying in bed, there are bombs going off everywhere, and I’m singing, “There is a light in the darkness and His name is Jesus.” That was powerful.

We also sang a song called “History Maker.” In realized we had sung that song two days before we got arrested. There’s a line that says, “I want to be a history maker in this land,” and after we got arrested, I was thinking, This isn’t exactly what I had in mind!

Curry: I read the Psalms every day. Also, I had a Reader’s Digest book called They Beat the Odds put things in

perspective and encouraged me to have a more thankful heart.

Charisma: How did you live in such close quarters and deal with tensions?

Mercer: Relationships were particularly hard for me. One time I was hurting over a relational issue. I started writing down Scriptures about forgiveness and all the reasons why Jesus didn't have to forgive me but did. I didn't have any excuse not to do the same thing. Relational issues had to be worked we were constantly living in a pressure cooker.

Charisma: In your book you talk about unsanitary conditions in prison that created some health problems.

Curry: We all got worms.

Mercer: It was highly unsanitary. I had to go through three rounds of medicine to get rid of the worms. I also got head lice.

Charisma: Were you concerned that the U.S. government might not be able to help you out?

Curry: I was surprised that our government did as much as they did. I didn't expect help, because we went to Afghanistan at our own risk.

Charisma: What was your reaction to the English translation of the charges you received Oct. 4?

Mercer: The day they read them in court, they read them only in Dari. Our lawyer didn't speak Dari. When we finally got them in was sobering, and it was also comical. The goal was not a fair trial. They knew what they wanted to do—and in my mind, it was to execute some of us.

Charisma: What was it like being so close to the bombing?

Curry: One of the Taliban us that our government knew where we were, and that gave me some reassurance. But some of the bombs came really close. Every time you heard the bombs, your stomach tensed up. I think it did more to our nerves than we realized.

Charisma: When you were taken from Kabul to Wardak and learned that you barely missed an opportunity for freedom, what was going on in your mind?

Mercer: Because everything was unraveling so fast with the Taliban, I thought, Either we're going to get killed in Kandahar, or something's going to break. It was a real bummer to think we were taken 30 minutes before everything fell apart in Kabul, and we might have been rescued. On the flip side, I didn't want to be in a gun fight with the Northern Alliance trying to kill the Taliban so they could come and get us. The way it happened was actually the safest way.

Charisma: In Ghazni, what were your immediate thoughts when you learned you were free?

Mercer: At that moment, things were moving so fast we really didn't have time to think about anything.

Charisma: Did you think it was a good idea to risk walking to an open field in Ghazni to be rescued?

Curry: For sure I wanted to go out there. But after it had been two hours and the helicopter had not spotted us, I thought the Afghans might try to shoot us.

Mercer: The U.S. military was spending millions of dollars to perform a top-secret, high-security rescue operation. It was a dangerous situation. We had several options: Stay there and potentially get killed, try to get out or possibly die if we went back. I felt that waiting for the helicopter was for freedom.

Charisma: Describe your mental or emotional state right after being freed.

Mercer: A lot of people said, "I saw you at the press conference, and you guys looked so great and happy." After coming out of 105 days in a Taliban prison, all we could feel was sheer joy. We were finally free, and I was so thankful.

Curry: I think I've gone through some culture shock, mainly because people put us in such nice places, and I still don't feel totally comfortable with that after having seen such poverty in Afghanistan.

Charisma: In what ways has your experience changed you?

Curry: I trust God more than before. He's sovereign and in control, and it was amazing to see the timing of everything. God had a perfect plan in all of it.

Mercer: I feel like I am so much more free to be who God has made me to be than I ever was before prison. I am more free to run with [my] dreams. I've also learned more about the grace of God. I don't have anything except Jesus—everything is filthy rags.

Charisma: Would you do it all over again?

Curry: Yes—we realize it was an incredible be part of this huge move of God.

Mercer: Without question I would do it all again. Prison was the greatest privilege of my life—God's blessing to me. We had the privilege of being a part of God's changing history in Afghanistan. I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Charisma: How did your imprisonment influence Antioch Community Church?

Curry: So many different individuals have come up to me and said, "I've been changed through praying for you guys [and] for the nations." I think the level of prayer has gone way up. Also, I sense that we have more of a focus for things that are eternal and that really matter.

Mercer: I think it's made people more bold. One woman from church told me, "When you were in prison, it made me want to more boldly proclaim the name of Jesus." It is so scriptural. When Paul was in prison, he talked about how he was thankful for his imprisonment because it empowered and strengthened the church to be the church.

Charisma: What have been some of the highlights since you've returned?

Curry: There have been so many. We got to take part in a Bible study at the White House. Heather did an awesome talk on the poor, and I brought my guitar and handed out worship sheets, and we had worship. We had a spontaneous prayer time, and the prayers the staff prayed were so heartfelt. The room was packed out, and it was encouraging to know there are people in the White House who love Jesus.

Mercer: In general, seeing how our testimony has impacted young kids has been amazing. A 9-year-old girl came to hear us speak in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Afterward, her aunt asked Dayna and I, "Would you please pray for my niece?" The young girl thought God was calling her to go overseas. We laid hands on her and prayed for her, and she just started sobbing. It was so precious to see a young heart break for the things that break God's heart.

Charisma: What do you think the future holds?

Curry: I'm more committed than ever about spending my life reaching the unreached. I don't feel that I was finished serving in Afghanistan, and Lord willing, I'll be able to return.

Mercer: I believe it's taking a different shape than I expected. I can say for myself that I don't think the Afghanistan chapter is over yet.

Two unknown American missionaries were rescued from a Taliban prison late last year. Now, with a new book out about their

ordeal, Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer are telling the world about Jesus..

Caught in the Crossfire

German missionary Georg Taubmann says he and his team were taken hostage in Afghanistan as 9/11 bargaining power.

After years of running humanitarian-aid projects in Afghanistan with the approval of the Taliban regime, Georg Taubmann, director of Shelter Now—a Christian nongovernmental organization based in Germany—and seven of his international co-workers were suddenly arrested in Kabul in August 2001.

The charges were false, or unsubstantiated, and for a month Taubmann had no answer for why the Taliban had suddenly turned against the Shelter Now workers. Not until Sept. 11, when news of the terrorist attacks in New York reached the Kabul jail.

“The understanding dawned upon me that the leading Taliban had known long in advance what would happen in Manhattan and needed us as hostages and human shields against the expected U.S. retaliation,” Taubmann told Charisma.

The group’s defense lawyer, a Muslim trained in Islamic shariah law, concluded the same. “You have not committed a criminal offense,” he told Taubmann. “I realize you are here as hostages.”

Taubmann claims the hostage status was later confirmed to him by befriended senior Taliban officials, who told him the order

to arrest Shelter Now staffers came from Taliban leader Mullah Omar, Osama bin Laden's father-in-law.

In November, upon losing control of Kabul, the Taliban attempted to move the Christians south to Kandahar, but en route they were liberated by local Afghans and, after much drama and tremendous trauma, airlifted to freedom by the U.S. military.

"The pressure in the last hours, when it seemed the helicopter pilot could not spot us and would leave again without us, was the worst part of the 105 days of imprisonment," Taubmann recalls. "We are deeply grateful to the U.S. government for sending some of their best men to our rescue."

Taubmann and his wife, Marianne, moved from Germany to Pakistan in 1984 to work among Afghan refugees, then from Pakistan to Afghanistan two years ago. Their work over two decades has been dedicated to the numerous victims of the 1979-1989 Soviet-Afghan war and the fluctuating civil wars. German President Johannes Rau honored Georg Taubmann this year for his long service in Afghanistan.

Shelter Now Germany, the organization Taubmann leads and former American hostages Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer worked with, is a separate entity from Shelter Now International. The German group is the largest relief organization operating among Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Its charge includes the complete food distribution for the U.N. relief agencies UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and WFP (World Food Programme).

The organization's work in Afghanistan since 1988 has included

operating factories that manufacture construction materials, drilling wells, feeding street children and erecting houses. It was registered with the Pakistani government in 1983, the Afghan government in 1993 and the Taliban regime in 1998. In general, its presence has been well-received and respected.

"Many Muslims respect Christians who are truly committed to the One God and the Holy Book—as they put it—and to godly morals," Taubmann says.

But fundamentalist Muslims repeatedly accused Shelter Now of engaging in forbidden "religious proselytism" and, in particular, buying converts with charity. The Shelter Now staffers arrested in Kabul in August 2001 were charged with proselytism.

"Two team members had been asked repeatedly by a Kabul family to show the Jesus movie in their home, and eventually did—off-duty and using a private laptop," Taubmann explains. "It turned out to be a trap. Eight of us were rounded up and threatened with the death penalty."

All internationals on the Shelter Now team are believers, but Taubmann denies the staff was involved with what the Taliban called proselytism and that they ever paid people to convert to Christianity.

"The vast majority of our workers are local Muslims, and when the Taliban claimed that we had offered them money and pressured them in other ways to convert, not one of them agreed to testify against us—simply because the accusations were groundless," he says.

“Our policy under the given circumstances is to give personal answers to personal questions, which is not against the law. Even so, there are very many opportunities to speak about Christ and the Bible, and to share the gospel, because in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan people are deeply religious. They talk about religion the way Germans talk about sports and politics, and ask questions without [being prompted].”

In the Kabul prison the eight believers kept a strict routine of daily worship, proclamation and intercession.

“On the one hand it was a matter of staying sane and not panicking,” says Margrit Stebner, another German team member and former Kabul hostage. “We actually prayed more for Afghanistan than for ourselves because we sensed that that was the meaning of it all.”

Taubmann adds that news of the captivity of his team triggered an “incredible and long overdue wave of prayer” for Afghanistan and that in the end 2001 brought about a real change in Afghanistan after 23 years of war and oppression.

He emphasizes that a majority of the Afghans greeted the American intervention with joy. “I witnessed the cruelty of the Taliban against their compatriots,” he says. “There were many Afghans in the prisons praying to Allah five times a day that the Americans would overthrow the Taliban!”

Taubmann and his family returned to Kabul in June.

“Our family lost everything to the Taliban a year ago, and Shelter Now lost most of its Afghani resources,” Taubmann

says. "But Afghanistan is where God wants us to be."

Tomas Dixon in Germany

EVANGELISM IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Rebuilding a Broken Nation

Behind the headlines, God is doing something profound in Afghanistan.

The call to prayer began at 5:45 a.m. All over the city people already were stirring, starting their day and, through this prayer, showing their allegiance to Allah and his prophet Muhammad. It would be the first of five prayers repeated every day. Since the days of the Ghaznavid Dynasty (A.D. 962- circa 1149) the people of Afghanistan have committed themselves to Islam.

From my kerosene-heated room in a Kabul guesthouse I committed my day, Feb. 16 of this year, to the risen Lord. The roosters began to crow, and the sun eventually brought to light the beautiful snow-capped mountains surrounding a city being reborn from the ashes of destruction, terror and war.

For the last 23 years, Kabul—once described as the European center of Central Asia—has been systematically destroyed by war. First the Russians, then various mujahadeen factions, then the Taliban and most recently the U.S. military have taken their turn at leveling historical sites, water-purification plants, universities, theaters and homes.

Having been to other war-torn nations—Israel, Vietnam, the Soviet Central Asian Republics and the killing fields of Cambodia—I mistakenly thought I would be prepared for what confronted me. I was wrong.

By the end of day one in Kabul the impact of the devastation pushed me toward the edge of emotional shock. Each subsequent day compounded the impression, and I found myself saying under my breath, “How do these people find the courage to even get up in the morning?”

I still find it difficult to accurately describe in words the images permanently affixed in my mind. The damage done in nearly every sector of life comes close to the word annihilation.

Yet, I found the people of Kabul to be joyful in the midst of despair, hoping for a brighter future and a restored city. The life on the faces of young boys and girls, teenagers, mothers, soldiers and elderly men spoke of a courageous and indomitable spirit that transcended their current circumstances.

Later in the day I was driven down a dirt road where thousands upon thousands of makeshift graves with small unmarked and uncut stones covered the hillside. The human toll from war was so vast there wasn't even an entrance to this cemetery.

Out of respect, I carefully walked between each stone and made my way up the hillside to what seemed to be an abandoned village. Bombs had left nothing but ruins.

Then I saw them. The little children came out from the walls,

laughing and talking. Their joy was unstoppable as they ran through the graveyard.

I took a moment to look across the rubble to the rolling hills of the dead. In my spirit something said, "Can these bones live again?" [See Ezekiel 37]. I saw children refusing to give up hope and women carrying water to their homes among the ruins.

After a few minutes, a Mr. Karim came up to me and began a conversation in nearly perfect English. He had a blanket-style shawl wrapped around him for warmth. With a big smile and great pride he said, "Thank you for coming to our country."

We chatted for a few minutes. His father had died in the mujahadeen conflicts in 1992, and he and his mother survived with no means to earn a living.

We said our goodbyes, and I stood on the hillside among the haphazardly placed stone monuments. The buoyant heart of Mr. Karim had answered my question—yes, these bones can live. I whispered a prayer on the way back into town, "God, I pray today that you would raise up a generation of people, from every walk of life, to do their part and breathe life back into this nation."

Why is Afghanistan a strategic nation in God's eyes? For centuries Afghanistan and its people have been in the middle of what historians refer to as the "great game," a struggle for political power among Russia, China, Great Britain and the United States.

Strategically located along the ancient Silk Road, the country

promises more than natural gas, precious gems and a hard-working people. It is the passageway from East to West. Since the days of Christ, the world's great economies and religions have passed through Afghanistan to span the continents and influence civilization.

However, the real "great game" may not be political but spiritual. Perhaps Afghanistan is part of a larger plan God is orchestrating.

From China, down the Pacific Rim to Indonesia, thousands of believers are praying every day for the fulfillment of a prophecy given in China more than 50 years ago. The words were simple yet powerful—God would raise up a spiritual army to walk the Silk Road, traveling from Asia west (through Afghanistan) and across the Muslim world en route to Jerusalem, bringing people to Jesus.

God loves the peoples of Afghanistan. He longs for them to know Him, and He wants to heal their land and restore it in righteousness.

Eric Watt in Kabul, Afghanistan

REMEMBERING SEPTEMBER 11

Sorting Through Disaster

One year later, New York churches are still busy caring for the victims of the World Trade Center tragedy.

Like aftershocks from a killer earthquake, the pangs of the 9/11 World Trade Center disaster linger. In New York, police, fire, emergency medical services, recovery personnel and victims' families are still dealing with the enormity of the event.

Many of the city's churches and pastors are stepping up to the plate, evangelizing and meeting spiritual and emotional needs.

"I have a renewed sense of urgency of wanting to share Christ with others," says Paul Schooling, pastor of singles, evangelism and small groups at Gateway Cathedral on Staten Island. A volunteer chaplain at Ground Zero, he ministered at the Staten Island recovery operation that took place at the Fresh Kills landfill from last September until its official end in mid-July.

Designated a crime scene, the landfill contained 105,000 truckloads of debris from Ground Zero. Teams of New York City police officers and agents with the FBI, Secret Service and FEMA sifted through the rubble searching for body parts—fingers, hands, ears, teeth.

Mountains of charred steel beams, wall sections, window frames and pieces of office equipment were fed through conveyor belts and sifting stations. Schooling and other chaplains roamed the entire site making themselves available to recovery personnel.

"We let them share what [was] going on in their lives," he says. On one of Schooling's visits, an FBI agent requested prayer for his troubled marriage upon hearing Schooling ask if he could pray for anything.

Some of the recovery people called the landfill a death zone. Under a canopy in the final search area, they crawled on all fours to scour dirt and rubble. They cataloged earrings, tie tacks, wallets—any personal effects that could be linked to victims.

On another of Schooling's tours a crane operator maneuvering a steel beam screamed upon discovering a severed leg on the beam. The operator cried hysterically and was rushed away by EMS personnel.

Chaplains distributed Bibles and other gospel literature freely, a service that was prohibited at Ground Zero. One worker who had recently become a Christian told Schooling: "I can see now how God can use bad help other people. I felt so secure... that I didn't want to know anything about God." He now attends a local evangelical church.

Staten Island has paid a heavy toll from the WTC disaster. Of the 183 residents who lost their lives, 72 were firefighters.

"The magnitude of this disaster makes it so you can't process the deaths of that many guys," says Warren Haring, recently retired NYFD fire marshal. "I am also in denial when I think of the people I knew who have died."

Haring, a born-again Christian, and two local pastors recently launched Bridge of Hope (BOH), an outreach to families traumatically affected by 9/11. Programs include a mental health newsletter, counseling center, conferences, summer camps for victims' children and a network to coordinate events among churches. In April BOH volunteers delivered pizzas and 1,800 CDs about a free marriage-encounter weekend to every

police and fire station on Staten Island.

Chaplains continue to make a difference. Dan Schafer, a police chaplain and pastor of Calvary Assembly of God, Hightstown, New Jersey, worked a 12-hour weekly shift counseling New York Port Authority police through May. He still conducts memorials.

"Police, fire and recovery people are still hoping against hope that they will find the remains of their loved ones and brother officers," he says. Resistance to the gospel has softened, he adds. "Everybody realizes that they are just living for today. There is no assurance for tomorrow."

Uniformed personnel need special help, according to John Carlo, pastor of Christian Pentecostal Church in Staten Island and a retired New York City police captain. Police officers and firefighters are reluctant to seek counseling from their departments. "Once you ask for counseling, you are marked," he notes. His church offers confidential counseling to get around this roadblock.

Victims' families still suffer pain, as is evident with William Vazquez, whose brother Arcangel worked on the 97th floor of the WTC's South Tower and died in the second attack of 9/11. "Sometimes I freak out," he admits. "I can't watch news programs of the planes crashing. I have to trust God in times of trouble."

Because the pain will continue, efforts at deeper, more long-term ministry work have just begun.

On March 28, Glad Tidings Tabernacle (Assemblies of God) in

Manhattan coordinated a concert called Night of Encouragement for 2,800 police officers, firefighters and their families at Carnegie Hall. Each person received a bag containing Christian literature and a Jesus video. Glad Tidings just opened a counseling center two blocks from Ground Zero to help New Yorkers cope with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Northeast Clergy Group, formed from the Ground Zero Task Force, is organizing an infrastructure for the long-term healing of the city, reports Ricky Del Rio, pastor of Abounding Grace Ministries in Manhattan. The interdenominational group of 250 pastors will train clergy in counseling and offer practical aid to victims' families who will feel the repercussions of 9/11 for many years.

Says Del Rio: "They need to know somebody loves them."

Peter K. Johnson in New York