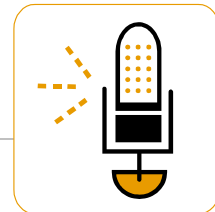


Mission Maceió



November 2009

The pastoral work should be in our hearts and heads...my biggest concern is the lack of good pastoral care in our Brazilian churches. We have to invest a lot of energy and patience to train the elders and the young ministers to become good shepherds.



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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It's now a couple of months since we came back from our furlough in the Netherlands. As always, if you come back from a long trip, you arrive in the middle of the reality that continued while you were away. Somebody told me "we can see that you are back again and it seems that you hit the ground running." I think that that was a good observation. I'm fully aware of the fact that a lot of water still will run through Niagara Falls before we will get to the institution of the church in Maceio.

That doesn't mean that nothing has happened in the last months. In my last article in the Mission News I have explained the situation of the school being under the supervision of the church and the problems that are related with that situation. There were several things that had to be investigated and that's what we have done. We have heard several experts, who all told us that it would be very unwise to disconnect the school from the church. We even had a contact with a tax inspector who also did not recommend such a move. If it will have to be done, it should be done very carefully, because otherwise it might be considered a suspicious move that might lead to an investigation of the church. This might sound strange, but that is our reality at the moment. In August they arrested the president of the biggest Pentecostal Church of Brasil (Igreja do Reino de Deus) because he wanted to buy a television station and they started to investigate where he got his money from. We know that they are becoming more and more rigorous with the churches, because there are churches that exist just on paper so they can be used to laundry illegal money. That's why they are scrutinizing the official documents of the church.

In any case we are making progress and it seems that it will be unwise to disconnect the school from the church. That doesn't mean that everything will be clear now. Our investigation showed us that the road that leads to disconnection is very complicated and that the school will not benefit from it, nor the church. The other road that we now have to follow is the organization of the church/school structure in such a way that it will not hinder the work of the office bearers in the church. We got to know that there is a church of the IPB in Recife that has also the supervision over a school. We have made contact with them, and we will soon visit that school to see how they have organized their relationship with the church.

Looking forward to the institution of the office bearers I have also started a new course with the members of the training group. We started to study a book that was written by **John Sittema**, a minister of the PCA. He wrote a book with the title With a Shepherd's Heart. The book explains the pastoral responsibility of the elders and ministers in the congregation. It's a very good book and I can notice that it makes the participants aware of their future responsibility as an elder or deacon. It will be an excellent preparation in the coming months, while we are so busy with the organization of our church. Sittema makes it very clear that administrative things have to be organized, but that this kind of work is not the heart of the ministry. And he is right! I have chosen this book on purpose to put things in the right perspective. We should know what will have to be the priorities in our ministry. The pastoral work should be in our hearts and heads. I have said in on another occasion, but I will repeat it here: my biggest concern is the lack of good pastoral care in our Brazilian churches. We have to invest a lot of energy and patience to train the elders and the young ministers to become good shepherds.

The next year will also demand a process of defining our future mission work. When we institute the church in Maceio, we will come to the point that we have ask ourselves: and what now? I know that the Board of Mission is convinced that **Mission work is a commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ and the churches should continue**

with it till the final day. That is a clear position. The next question will be: okay, but how will we continue with our mission work? There are several opinions on this topic, so I will give some examples.

The church leaders in Maceió are willing to institute, but they are preoccupied with the pastoral aspect of the work after the institution of the church. That's why **they have proposed that the missionary would stay for several years in Maceio as their minister**, until the moment that they are able to call their own Brazilian minister. That's one option. The Board of Mission is aware of the preoccupation of the congregation in Maceió, but states that they want to continue with their mission work. Therefore **they are thinking in the direction that the missionary would become a counselor for two or three years and in the meantime he will continue with his mission work** at another location or preaching point. That is the classical view of mission work. The third option will come from the federation of Brazilian churches, because they have discussed the situation in Brazil and **according to the majority of churches the missionaries should become teachers in a theological seminary that will train Brazilian men to become elders, evangelists and ministers of the word.** These Brazilian men should work on the frontline and the missionaries should work in the training centre. That is the third option and I can imagine that the supporting churches might have some questions about that option, asking themselves if this kind of work still belongs to the mission work. The fourth option may be: help an existing congregation to become an instituted church. That's the work that I have been doing (more or less) for the past few years. **John Kroeze** was a church planter, I came after him and started to organize the life of the church, so it might become an instituted church. So, there are several options: the sower and planter; the organizer and trainer; the foreign minister and pastor; the teacher.

It will be a challenge for the Board of Mission to find their way on this cross road. They have to ask themselves what the focus of the mission work will be in the coming years. If they want to send a classic missionary to Brazil, they may hear from the churches there that they don't need such a man, but they need a teacher that will train Brazilian ministers and evangelists. That will be much more effective for the mission work, then a foreign missionary preaching the gospel in a big city. They will also have to discuss the view of the congregation of Maceió and come to a solution that will take away the preoccupation of the members in Maceió. And they will also have to discuss their idea of mission with the supporting churches, because if they want to continue with the classical way of mission work (spreading the gospel in non-Christian areas) they have also to reconsider their strategies and the financial consequences. The observation made by Brazilians that it will be more effective if you use Brazilian evangelists or preachers should not be easily ignored. I think that they are right, but to get these men, you should train them. And they will also need help to organize their church life: the pastoral part of it, but also the administrative part of it.

Another aspect that also will ask our attention in the future is the role of the IPB (The Presbyterian Church of Brazil). This year the IPB celebrates its 150th birthday and I have visited the special celebration here in Maceio. I went with several members of the training group and we all enjoyed the evening of praise and worship in which the president of the IPB, **Roberto Brasileiro**, unfolded the plans of the IPB with the state of Alagoas. The IPB is not satisfied with its presence in Alagoas. There was one presbytery of 8 churches and the idea is to grow and to have three presbyteries in the near future. The special day of the celebration was used to announce the creation of a second presbytery and there will be a huge investment in the evangelism work for the coming years. That means that if nothing will be done by our own IRB confederation, we will lose a lot of possibilities to strengthen our own federation in the future. I know that that is not the focus of our mission work. We should be glad that there are other reformed churches that want to spread the gospel in the State of Alagoas. Observing these plans, I think that it becomes more and more time that the Canadian Churches will investigate the IPB via their CCCA, especially now our Dutch sister churches and also the OPC have offered a sister church relationship to the IPB. It might be that the result of such an investigation will also have an enormous effect on our view of mission work in Brazil.

There is a lot more to write about. For example about the National Synod of the Reformed Churches that will be held at the end of this month here in Maceió. We ask your prayers for the preparations and for the delegates who will come. May the Lord grant us wisdom and peace to deal with all the topics. **Put it on your fridge: The Congregation in Maceio, The National Synod, The Board of Mission and Fam. De Graaf, because we need your prayer every day!**

Rev. Abram De Graaf