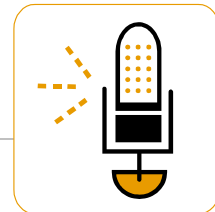


Mission Maceió



March 2009

The regular pastoral work of the deacons, the elders and the minister within the congregation is of great importance for the well being of the congregation.

Pastoral visits should be on the priority list of each office bearer.



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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let me first start with a short story with a strong message. There once was a farmer who wanted to increase the production of his farm. Therefore he visited a wise man and asked him, "What should I do?" The wise man wrote something down on a piece of paper and put it in a little box, closed it, and handed it over to the farmer, saying "Take this little box with you to every place of your property, three times a day, for an entire year."

The farmer went home and acted according to the words of the wise man. In the morning, while going to the fields with the little box in his hands, he met one of his workers sleeping under a tree when he should have been working. In the afternoon, when he went to the stables, he washed the dirty animals and gave food to the horses. And in the evening, when he went to the kitchen with the little box in his hands, he noticed that the cook was wasting a lot of food that could have been used the next day. From that day on he went every day over his property with his magic box and always found things that had to be repaired or resolved.

At the end of the year, he met the wise man and said to him "Please, let me have this magic box for one more year, because the production of my farm has gone up dramatically since the day I received this magic box." The wise man started to laugh, and he took the little box out of the farmer's hand and opened it. He took out the piece of paper, gave it to the farmer, and said "You may keep the box for the rest of your life". On the paper the following words were written: If you want to improve things, take care of them every day!

This was a wise lesson for the farmer, but it is also a wise lesson for every office bearer in the church of Christ. If you want to improve things in the church, take care of them every day. The regular pastoral work of the deacons, the elders and the minister within the congregation is of great importance for the well being of the congregation. Pastoral visits should be on the priority list of each office bearer.

You may ask me now why I have told you this short story, so I will tell you. In January I had to visit the congregation of Colombo in Paraná (the south of Brazil). There I encountered a situation in which a congregation was suffering because of a lack of pastoral attention. It's not my intention to accuse the council of Unaí, who were appointed as the responsible council for that congregation, for I understand their situation. Unaí is about three thousand kilometers away from Colombo, and Unaí is an agricultural congregation without a lot of resources with which to take care of their sister congregation in Paraná. As a matter of fact, Unaí already mentioned these issues very clearly at the last few National Synods.

That's why the Synod in Unaí (May 2008) decided that all the churches had to combine their resources. Each month, one of the ministers had to visit the congregation in Colombo to help the evangelist Marcos Borba with his pastoral work, especially visiting those (young) members who were drifting away from the church. Such visits have an aspect of discipline, and it is not easy for one person to visit such members. There is some wisdom in it that such visits have to be made by two office-bearers. Two hear more than one; two office bearers together have more patience than one. And if the two agree on a case, then there is little doubt for the rest of the council to proceed in a process of discipline. And of course, there is the word of God that tells us that on the testimony of two witnesses a case will be established.

A case of discipline is always a sad case, and it is a lot better if we can avoid such a situation. And I believe that a lot of cases can be avoided if there is a good pastoral presence in the congregation. It's important when a minister visits the members and speaks to them in a pastoral way, edifying, consoling and stimulating them to walk in

the right direction. A lot of people need that: they are like sheep. If they don't get enough attention they become spiritually unhealthy. They start doing things that are not good for their spiritual health. A sheep is an animal that needs a shepherd. The shepherd takes care of the sheep and looks after the sheep. He protects them against wild animals, but also against little animals like ticks. The shepherd looks after the sheep, because they sometimes have bad habits. The shepherd has to look for good food and has to take care of the flock in such a way that it will stay close to him.

In practice that means regular pastoral visits and good preaching. There must be fresh sermons which get to the point in such a way that the congregation sees that this is the Word of God for them at this moment, not an old sermon made by a missionary five years ago. I know that there are enough old sermons that are very good, and you can read them in many congregations. There is nothing new under the sun, so an old sermon may land perfectly in a new situation. Still, I would say that these situations are rare. Looking at my own sermons I notice that it is difficult for elders to read them in another congregation, because there are a lot of elements that are linked directly to the situation in Maceió. Therefore I can imagine that the congregation in Colombo is suffering, because of a lack of pastoral preaching and pastoral visits.

Each month a minister was supposed to visit the congregation, but it did not work. In the month of August, Rev. Ken Wiese went to Colombo, but the other ministers did not visit the congregation. I don't know all of the reasons, but it might be that they are also very busy, trying to be a good pastor in their own congregations. The pastoral need is high and the Brazilian ministers and elders are all young and inexperienced.

The situation in Colombo became even worse in 2008 when the Evangelist Marcos Borba decided to accept the call to the IPB congregation in Jardim Monza, which is close to Colombo. The October 2008 Synod of our churches recognized that this was an emergency situation and asked the church in Maragogi if they could lend their minister Thyago Lins to Colombo for a year. The council in Maragogi considered this situation and their own situation, and came to the conclusion that their minister could go, but only for six months. So Reverend Thyago will go to Colombo in February and help the congregation for six months. A definite solution will have to be presented to the next synod in April 2009.

Observing the small congregation in Colombo (there are now 15 members, while there were over 120 members in the year 2001) made me reflect about the situation in Maceió. Looking to the pastoral aspect of the work, I remain preoccupied. The majority of the men who are involved in the training group are very, very busy and don't have much time left to do their visits. I have exhorted them to do their home visits in this holiday season, because I have already noticed that they don't have time during the year.

I thank God that we have a healthy congregation at the moment, but looking at Colombo I ask myself how it will be if the missionary leaves. What will happen if the men don't function as pastors, if they don't take their "little box" with them all over the property of the Lord? That might be a reason to worry, but it might also be a reason to say that we should institute the offices, because then the men will have to be responsible and show their responsibility. At such a moment we will see if they really believe that there is a Lord in heaven who watches His flock on earth. Our Lord is the supreme pastor, who will show his servants how they should act and take care of the congregation, just as Jesus himself did: He went all over the country, visiting all places, speaking the word of God.

May our Good Shepherd look after us and take care of us! May He bless us in the year 2009. May He bless us not only in Maceió, but also in our sister churches in Brazil, as well as the churches in Ontario and Niagara that support us. And may He bless you personally and be your pastor when you need Him!

Pastor Abram de Graaf



Members of the pre-council training group at work (left to right: Henrique, Elias, Pastor Flavio)