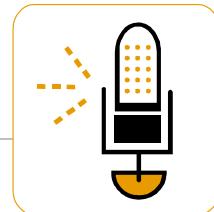


Mission Maceió



June 2008

We followed the Word of God that was preached to us at the opening of the Synod: *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace"* (Colossians 3:15)



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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It has taken me a while to write another Mission Maceió, but I will try to explain the reasons for that. I was not able to write the last Mission Maceió newsletter because at the end of April I had to go to the hospital for a gall bladder operation.

In February this year, while making an ecclesiastical visit to the congregation in Colombo in the south of Brazil, I discovered that I had problems with my gall bladder. The last morning before I was to leave for Maceió, I woke up with a terrible pain in my upper belly and I had to cancel my trip home and instead go to a first aid post. There they examined me and gave me medicine for the pain, and also advised me to see a doctor in Maceió. Once back in Maceió I went for several examinations, with the result that they discovered that my gall bladder was full of tiny little stones. It seems that you can live with this condition, but the best way is to remove them, otherwise they might cause a bigger problem: pancreatitis. Considering that somebody can easily live without his gall bladder, I decided to go for an operation and thereby be released from the gall bladder and the stones. In the meantime my gall bladder problem had already flared up two more times, so the decision was not difficult to make. Everybody who has had problems with his gall bladder knows how terrible the pain is after you have eaten something wrong and the gall bladder gets upset. Some women told me that it is worse than the contractions with giving a birth...well, I can't compare it to that, but I can imagine that it might be so.

We scheduled the operation for the end of April. I will spare you the majority of the bureaucratic details between the hospital and the health insurance, but suffice it to say that the first was willing to do the operation **after** having received payment; and the second was willing to pay **after** the operation was finished. Finally I provided the hospital with a cheque as a guarantee, and from that moment on the door was open. On the day that the Queen of the Netherlands celebrated her anniversary I received my operation. It was a short operation and everything went very well, so after one day I was released from the hospital and could go home.

Being at home I had to rest for one week and my dear wife (together with Andreia) took care of that. Here in the northeast of Brazil they are very careful with somebody who has just had an operation. There are a lot of rules you have to observe to avoid infection of the wound. You are not allowed to eat pork, nor may you eat shrimp or any other type of seafood that lives on the bottom of the ocean. As a matter of fact, all animals that are impure in the Old Testament were forbidden for me to eat. I knew about this beforehand and even asked my doctor about it. He didn't agree with these customs, but still acknowledged that it might be better to avoid eating anything "heavy", and so I did. What I did not know is the rule that you are not allowed to walk on bare feet. The second day I got out of bed, because I had to walk around the house a little bit for the blood circulation (always good after an operation). So I went to the living room and there they stared at my bare feet, raised their hands in the air and also their voices: "**Pastor!!!! Não pode!**" (= you are not allowed to do it!). I was very surprised and told them to clean the floor regularly and then nothing would happen. They did not believe me, and several times they looked at me that week very critically, which made me think that I'm a very rebellious patient.

Now, after everything is done, I must admit that I discovered that going for an operation is one thing, and recovering from it is another. You may have had a good operation, but if the wound becomes infected, then you have a bigger problem. Nevertheless everything went well and one week after the operation the stitches came out and I was released to travel to Unai where the National Synod was to take place.

Pastor Flavio and I travelled to Unai and there we had a good week together with the delegates from the other churches. A lot of decisions were made unanimously, although that does not mean there were no opposing ideas. There were very opposite ideas about the question of what our relationship with the IPB (the Presbyterian Church of Brazil) should be. Some think that the IPB is a false church that doesn't administrate discipline, while others (Maceió for example) defend the IPB, explaining that they are administrating discipline although in a different way than is outlined in the regulations of our church order. In Maceió, we don't believe the IPB to be a false church, and therefore we defended the idea that our federation should continue to have official contact with the IPB. However, others were completely against that, so we had to come to a conclusion. We followed the Word of God that was preached to us at the opening of the Synod: *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace"* (Colossians 3¹⁵). These words ruled our hearts and we came to a unanimous decision to discontinue our official contact with the IPB federation until 2010. The main motive for this decision was the peace of our churches – we knew that the strongly opposing opinions could easily lead to a split up of our federation. In the meantime, Synod did open the possibility of making contacts with local IPB churches so that we might get to know each other better. It is important to note that the Synod did not declare that the IPB was a false church – that would have been unacceptable for the church in Maceió (9th commandment!). We in Maceió are very pleased that Synod did not make such a declaration, particularly since we understand that our sister churches in the Netherlands just offered ecclesiastical fellowship to the IPB church.

There were a lot more decisions that were made, but perhaps they can be published in another way. Once the week was over, Pastor Flavio and I came back to Maceió where there was more than enough to do. During the first week back I had several meetings to evaluate how the work was going and to stimulate the members to continue with their jobs. One of the bigger jobs was editing our new book of Praise. Elias and Henrique did a lot of work on that, and we hope that we will see a new Book of Praise in our worship service next Sunday!

Another big thing was the profession of faith of our sister **Graciana Pinto Bandeira**. Four years ago she came in contact with our church. She had a Roman Catholic background, but her first real contact with the Bible was via the Seventh day Adventists. There she was re-baptized when she became a member. But some years after that she came in contact with members of our church, and for almost three years now she has been a 'congregada'.



Graciana Pinto Bandeira and family

Graciana has a good knowledge of the Bible and understands the reformed doctrine. Unfortunately, her husband is not a believer. Graciana is very sad about that, and in the beginning she even thought that she had to leave him for that reason. We told her that she should stay with him as long as he respects her and is a good husband and father for the children. If he agrees with the fact that she goes to church and follows Jesus Christ, he will be sanctified by his wife who is a believer (1 Corinthians 7¹⁴). She had a very difficult time with it, but she has learned how to deal with it in a Christian way.

Last Sunday Graciana did her profession of faith and her four children (**Matheus, Luan, Luana** and **Milene**) were baptized. Her husband was present at the service and he made it very clear that he consented with the fact that she would do her profession of faith and that the children would be baptized. The text for the sermon was 1 Corinthians 7¹⁴ and using that text it was easy to explain why the children had to be baptized (because they are holy!) We baptized all of the children, although the oldest is already 15 years old and will still have to continue with his catechism lessons. Nevertheless, he is holy like the others and therefore we decided that they all should be baptized. It was also an excellent text to explain the position of the husband who was present. He could not respond to the questions related to the baptism, but his presence made it clear already that he consented in the baptism of his children.



Matheus, Luan, Luana and Milene (from left to right) being baptized.

It was a very special service with a lot of singing before the service started, but also during the service. It was touching to see the four children baptized. These services really have a special effect on the congregation. It stimulates the brothers and sisters, but also the other 'congregados' who are preparing for their profession of faith. Right now, there is one family that will hopefully do their profession of faith before I come to Canada this fall; there is another group of four women who are still studying; there is a group of 5 young people in the pre-confession class; and there is another family studying together for their profession of faith.

In the meantime we continue with our evangelism work in Village Campestre and Salvador Lira. We also have contacts in another neighborhood (Medeiros Neto), but it is too early to start a new preaching point there. We will have to consider that very carefully, but we are grateful that the Lord opens door and brings people to our church.

We are also busy with a lot of administrative details that must be resolved before we can get to the institution of office bearers. We are working on revising and adopting the statutes, regulations, and internal church order that regulate the elections and define the ecclesiastical and juridical position of the office bearers.

May the Lord bless us through His Holy Spirit, who established order in creation and who will also establish peace and order in our congregation by His supreme gift!

Rev. A. de Graaf