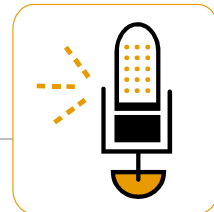


Mission Maceió



July 2008

In the meantime we are also busy preparing ourselves for our upcoming furlough in Canada...we hope and pray that the Lord will protect us in the coming weeks and guide us on our way to Canada.



We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.irbmaceio.com.br

Rev. Abram de Graaf
Mrs. Celia de Graaf
Marba, Jonathon, Miriam

Rua Lourival de Aquiar
Pessoa 23
Serraria, Maceió
57046-390
Brazil

abramecelia@globo.com

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This Mission Maceió newsletter will probably be the last one that I write before I come to Canada to attend the Missionary Conference, to meet with the Boards of Mission and Mission Aid, and to visit the supporting churches.

One of the biggest events in the last few weeks was the publication of our brand new **Book of Praise**. But before I continue, perhaps you need some background on why we have a new Book of Praise. In the year 2000 the churches decided to work together towards a common Book of Praise for all the churches. A committee was appointed, and after a lot of work they came to Synod 2002 with a good proposal containing 260 Hymns. Synod 2002 appointed another committee to evaluate the proposed Hymns, but rather than doing so, that committee only presented a report. This probably came about because in that same year, a brother in Canada donated about 400 "*Hinários Provisórios*" (Provisional Hymnals) to the Reformed Churches in Brazil. It was a spontaneous offer, and so the churches received a provisional Book of Praise that was then used in almost all the churches in the federation. Synod 2004 relieved the committee that had been appointed to evaluate the proposed Hymns from their duties.

In Maceió we used the provisional Book of Praise with a lot of pleasure, but we considered it a pity that nothing was done with the 260 Hymns that were proposed in 2002, and some members wanted to see more Psalms in our Book of Praise. Therefore we appointed our own local committee with the mandate to evaluate the 260 Hymns that were proposed in 2002, and to translate and adapt more Psalms for singing in the worship service. We informed the rest of the churches in the federation about our initiative, but none of the churches seemed to be interested, because they did not respond in any way. Regardless, the two brothers on our committee worked hard evaluating the 260 Hymns, and they also regularly presented us with new Psalms to be used in our worship services.

The work of translating Psalms is not yet done, but they were forced to publish their work as it stands because the old provisional Books of Praise were falling apart. You should realize that we use our Book of Praise very intensively. They are used during the worship services, of course, but also at our praise-evenings, during the catechism lessons, and during bible study with the adolescents and pre-adolescents. The condition of the books deteriorated (covers became ugly, pages were loose, Psalms and Hymns were missing) to the point where it became problematic during the worship services. It also became a shame to offer such a tattered Book of Praise to visitors to our church. That's why we decided to publish a new Book of Praise using the results of the work of our committee. At this point, it is a local Book of Praise, but we will present it to the churches at the next National Synod.

We don't consider this Book of Praise to be finished – it too is a provisional Book of Praise. We will evaluate it in our worship services, examining the tunes and the text of the Psalms and the Hymns. Furthermore, we hope that over the coming years we will have more Psalms adapted for worship, and in all likelihood there will also be more Hymns that we can sing. If we look to the history of our Reformed churches we can see that almost every generation had

its own Book of Praise. We have a lot of things in common with the past generations, and that is good, because we live in a rich Reformed tradition. But there are also new biblical songs that come up. There are new compositions: bible texts that have been put to music so that we can sing them in our worship services. And there are also old Psalms that have received a new melody that fits the Brazilian culture better.

On the 15th of June we had a special worship service in which the new Book of Praise was inaugurated. Our Book of Praise is the size of small book, with a blue cover. It says: *Hinário. Salmos e Hinos. Igreja Reformada do Brasil em Maceió (Hymnal: Psalms and Hymns. Reformed Church of Brazil in Maceió).*

During this worship service, I preached on Ephesians 5:19, “Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with Psalms, Hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord”. This is a very interesting text that shows us that we should not underestimate the role of the Psalms and Hymns in our worship services. In the first place we may note the unity between the Psalms, Hymns and spiritual songs: they all are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and they may all be used in the worship service. The Holy Spirit uses these Psalms, Hymns and spiritual songs to strengthen our faith and to teach us to submit ourselves to the Lord and to one another. It's not only the preaching of the Word that strengthens our faith, but also the singing of the Word that strengthens our faith. The preaching is for the head, the Psalms are for the heart. They touch our soul.

It's interesting to note that Paul says “Speak to one another”. We may use the Psalms and Hymns to communicate with each other. For instance, we may sing Psalm 23 to strengthen each other; we may sing Psalm 32 to console; we may sing Psalm 51 to edify each other. We may sing the Psalms of praise to exhort each other to worship the Lord. “Speak to one another” – there is also an individual aspect to that statement. In the Psalms we can see that sometimes an individual sings in the midst of the people; an individual “speaks to the others”.



It is also good to note how these Psalms, Hymns and spiritual songs function in the congregation. We should sing them with our heart, and at the same time, we should keep the words in our mind. The Holy Spirit wants to use these Psalms and Hymns to instruct us. There is no better way to learn than by using a poem or a song. Older people never forget the Psalms they learned as a child – the Psalms are carved into their memories! When I was a minister in Holland I noticed that even our older brothers and sisters who suffered from Alzheimer's still remembered the old tunes and the old text of the Psalms they had learned as a child. Unforgettable! That's the wisdom of our Lord who gave us these Psalms, Hymns and spiritual songs.

At the moment we are also busy preparing **new regulations** and a **new local church order**. We already had some regulations from the time that John Kroeze was missionary in Maceió (2000), and we are one of the few churches in the federation that is correctly legally registered. We exist as a missionary congregation (officially registered as the “Igreja Reformada do Brasil em Maceió”) with one office bearer (the missionary), and therefore our congregation is a legal entity under Brazilian law.

Because we are legally registered, we were appointed to receive money from C3 destined for

several projects in our federation. But once this money started coming into our bank accounts, the bank was obligated to investigate these funds. You can imagine that sometimes people do things like this to launder drug money! Therefore we had to present our regulations and other documents. Well, when we presented our documents, we received a “yellow card” as a warning, telling us that we had to revise our regulations to bring them in line with legislative changes that were made in 2003.

Additionally, before we can become an instituted church with our own office bearers, we need those official regulations and a local church order. Currently, a committee looks after all the administrative and legal aspects of the church, and the missionary is the sole office bearer. However, once the congregation selects its own office bearers, those office bearers will become responsible for everything. They have to take care of the flock, and they will also represent the church in legal matters, if necessary. That's why Brazilian law (and the banks) demands that there be official regulations and a local church order, so there can be a legal way to hand over responsibility for the church.

As a result, we began a project to revise our regulations. First we had to make new regulations that would meet the new legal requirements. That was done, and those new regulations were approved by the Committee of Administration. Now those regulations have to be presented to our office bearer training group, and after that to the entire church association.

I don't know what the legal requirements are for a church in Canada, but they are very strict here. One of the reasons might be that there are so called “churches” that are simply a front for laundering money. They call themselves churches, but in reality, they are big companies that deal with a lot of money (the “*Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*” is one of them). That's why the law was revised, and that's why the government demands that churches register themselves correctly and renew their registration regularly.

In the meantime we are also busy preparing ourselves for our **upcoming furlough** in Canada. We are collecting material for a new PowerPoint presentation. This time I will present the work in the church and my wife will present the work in the school. We must also make the necessary preparations so that everything will continue during the time that we are in Canada. My wife Célia, Andreia (our cousin), and of course the children are looking forward to visiting Canada again. In fact, the children are very curious about where we will stay this time, and they have been talking about all the places that we have been in the past. But it will be a surprise for them!

We hope and pray that the Lord will protect us in the coming weeks and guide us on our way to Canada. We are confident that we will have a good time there, based upon our experiences in the past years. May the Lord bless you all!

Rev. A. de Graaf



Henrique leading the congregation in song at the Salvador Lira preaching point