



Mission News

Mission Activities of the Canadian Reformed Churches

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Mission Aid Brazil – Cloverdale

Teacher's Conference, July 2011

Sao Jose

The suspension system on the battered car is getting a workout as we lurch through the potholes that mottle the dirt road. Dogs, people of all ages, and the occasional donkey scamper, scurry and saunter out of our way, closer to the grimy plaster and brick walls that line the streets. A boy playing with a tattered ball looks at us through the car windows, which are open to ward off the excessive heat. His eyes shaded with disdain, he spits, "*Alemães!*" Germans.

We aren't Germans, but we are definitely more European in appearance than many of those around us. "Are we safe here?" I wonder aloud.

"Don't worry," says my guide. "This is Sao Jose, not Recife." We look for the next break in the walls to our left. Our destination is half-way down the next alley.

We turn onto a road that is even narrower than the last one. A few houses down, we see a rusted iron gate protecting a sort of carport that shelters an ancient white VW van. Well, whitish, anyway. We stop. Is this our destination?

Two young girls are playing with a toddler in the dirt of the garage floor. My guide calls out to one. "*E a casa de Idalcir?*"

"*Sing, por aqui,*" is the answer. The girl smiles and motions. I grab my violin, half expecting someone to conk me over the head and make a grab for it. But no one seems very interested in us. "*Ir para o fundo e va para a direita,*" instructs the girl. To the back and then to the right.

Nervously, I enter the dark interior of the garage. The ceiling is low, and the space is much deeper than I thought. The debris in the corners fades into unrecognizable shapes as we move to the darkness in the back. But in the right rear corner is a narrow shaft of sunlight through another gate of iron bars.

As we move towards the light, I glance to the right and see a remarkable contrast. A door opens to a kitchen. But

instead of the grimy plaster walls and dirt floor that I had expected, white tile gleams in the sunlight coming through the small windows near the ceiling. Instead of crude wooden benches, the chairs are vinyl and steel around an immaculate table. Instead of a smoky wood fire, a small gas range graces the far wall beside an electric refrigerator.

But I only have time for a brief glimpse before passing through the gate into a narrow space between two buildings.

The tiles on the eaves above us are so close that spiders have woven webs between the two. A narrow stripe of sunlight forces its way between the overhangs and splashes onto the ground.

We turn again, this time to a small door on our left, which is surrounded by a brick wall that is not even plastered. Rivulets of mortar stream in frozen paths along the cracks between the clay squares. The door is open a crack, and my guide hesitates a minute before pushing it open. A second later, it's confirmed: we are at the right place.

Two steps later, I am in another world. A much cooler one, thanks to the whirring air conditioner beside the door. The room is tiny: smaller than my bathroom back home. The walls and ceiling are covered with charcoal grey sound-absorbent foam. The place of

honour in the centre of the room is taken up with a modern synthesizer keyboard on a stylish stand. Behind that is a line of cool blue light – the outer panel of a computer. Other equipment takes over a small desk, a microphone is suspended close to the door, and everything is connected with a web of cables.

A young man stands up and extends his hand over his instrument. "*Ola!*" he smiles. "*Estou Idalcir, e este e meu estudio.*" And this studio will suit our needs more than adequately. I look around for a place to unpack my violin. It's time to get to work.



Annual Teachers' Conference

Over the years, many of us have read numerous accounts of mission work in far-off lands. Fewer have had the opportunity to experience it first-hand.

This past July, I had such an opportunity. I was invited by Mission Aid to be the guest speaker at the annual teachers' conference that this organization sponsors. The conference is open to teachers at the four Reformed schools in Brazil, and more than thirty were able to attend.

This was the third such conference, which meant that I had to follow in the able footsteps of Ron DeHaan and Otto Bouwman, who were the guest speakers at the previous gatherings.

When preparing for the conference, it was important to me to connect to the work done previously. In addition, the material had to be accessible to the participants. The principals in Brazil requested that the topic have a clear practical application so that the teachers would see it as useful. After much consideration and consultation with others, I chose to speak on classroom management or discipline.

Structure and Consistency

After over twenty hours in three airplanes and three hours in the car, we arrived in Sao Jose, where for the first time I was able to see the Escola Biblica Crista – the largest of the Reformed schools in Brazil. The conference sessions took place in the newest wing of the school, which were well equipped with air conditioners and presentation equipment. With the able assistance of Chris Boersema, who translated, the sessions got off to a good start with the introduction of my family, church, school, and country using a selection of pictures. After reviewing the speeches of brs. DeHaan and Bouwman, the rest of the first day was spent reviewing the foundations of what Christian education is all about. After a series of excellent discussions, I introduced my twin themes of structure and consistency, and we spent most of the

next two days unpacking the meaning of these words and how to apply them in the classroom. We also had time for a session in which I taught a sample lesson using "Flame of the Word" which is available in Portuguese.

Fellowship

As always at such conferences, the time in between sessions was valuable as well. We ate extremely well, thanks to a dedicated team of parent cooks. (They were the ones who laughed the loudest at my valiant attempts at Portuguese.) There was lots of time for conversation, relaxation, and singing. In between power outages, we were

also able to record a few songs meant for inclusion on a CD that Mission Aid hopes to distribute in Canada. This, of course, was the reason for my trip to Idalcir's studio, described above.

A visit such as this confirms some stereotypes and shatters others. Although there were areas of squalor like the one described above, many people that I met were relatively well off. Brazil's booming economy is begetting a burgeoning middle class, and though you can still see the desperately poor, the overall standard of living is definitely improving.

Commitment

It was very encouraging to see the level of commitment and knowledge among the Brazilian teachers. During one presentation, I asked the participants for the first word that popped into their head when I said the word "discipline." I was looking for words like "punishment," "detention," "scolding." Instead, the first responses I heard were, "love," "the Bible," and "God." Especially among the school leadership, I sensed a rich understanding of not only the Bible, but also how it applies to life in their cultural context and to education. Although continued help and support is undoubtedly needed, the future of Reformed education in Brazil appears to be in good hands.

Kent Dykstra





Missionary Vision in Middle Egypt

By Lisa Atallah



Top to bottom: Cairo on the Nile River; street in Minya; Prayer meetings led to the Minya project.

Prayer Power

A small group of pastors, evangelists, elders, and other lay leaders began to pray together weekly for a spiritual revival in their province. As they prayed, they were burdened to call on churches in the province to seek a renewed vision for Gospel proclamation. The vision caught on and several other prayer groups were started. Then a committee was formed under the leadership of Pastor Mahrous Habib, a former member of MERF's Board of Directors. As political and economic

Riding three and a half hours by train south from Cairo upstream along the Nile River and its canals, the train pulls into a major city station in central Egypt—Minya. It is capital of a large province with the same name. Minya's capital city, five major towns, and hundreds of villages are home to about 5.5 million Egyptians. About 50 percent are of Coptic Orthodox Christian heritage. Agriculture and its related industries dominate the economy, such as cotton, sugarcane, grain, fruit, vegetables, and livestock. A large state university is located in Minya city.

Missionary Beginning

Evangelical witness in Minya began in the mid-nineteenth century along

with the first distribution of the Arabic Bible. It bore much fruit among nominal Coptic Christians. A few Muslims were converted. Due to threats to their lives, they had to relocate to other parts of the country. (Even today this is often the case for Muslim converts.) Currently there are about 160,000 Evangelical/Reformed Christians in the province, organized in about seventy congrega-

tions. They range in size from several hundred to a small handful of members. Some churches have declined significantly. At least eighteen small churches have not had pastors or trained elders for many years. A few have closed completely. This situation, along with many villages without churches, has weighed heavily on the hearts and minds of a number of Minyawi Christian leaders.



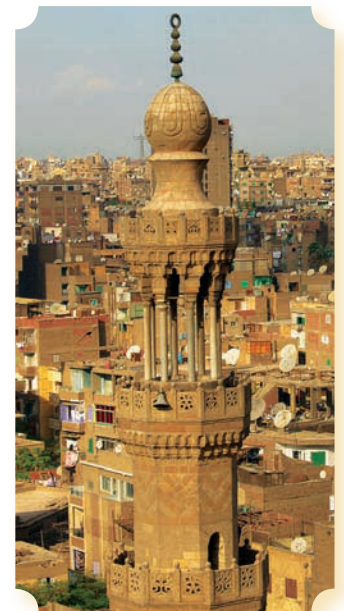


Egyptian provinces catch the same vision.

URGENT PRAYER

The intensifying drought in the Horn of Africa is impacting the lives of millions in Somalia, eastern Ethiopia, and northern Kenya. Please pray for MERF staff and local Christians who seek to honor Christ in response to the urgent needs.

Clockwise: The Minya vision includes children's activities; tower of mosque rises over Egypt.



turmoil engulfed Egypt and the Arab world, concern that these events were distracting God's people from Kingdom priorities brought a new sense of urgency. An action plan was drawn up to focus on training and organizing young people of both city and village churches for outreach.

A total of fourteen specific communities spread over four geographical areas of the province were targeted for this missionary endeavor. Even though they have significant numbers of nominal Christians, these communities have not had any organized gospel work for many years. The goal is to plant a church in each community in four to six years and move on to repeat

the endeavor in other communities.

Called Out

Two experienced pastors sensed a calling and asked to be released from their charges to focus on the effort. With the help of Pastor Mahrous' committee, they screened and selected eight laymen. These have already joined the two pastors in beginning outreach. The eight laymen continue to also receive training in evangelism and discipling of those who respond to the Gospel message. Home Bible study groups have already begun in all fourteen locations. Sunday evening worship services have begun in two of them. Most are attended by youth and young families.

To draw other Christians into the vision, the committee began to rotate the meeting place of their weekly prayer meeting between various churches located near the fourteen strategic communities. Forty-one Minyaw congregations committed to pray for and become involved

in the outreach. Volunteers from these churches are to be trained to join the pastors and lay workers in house calling and one-to-one evangelism.

Missionary Partners

MERF gladly agreed to partner in supporting the Minya outreach project. The Fellowship has committed to financial support of the work as well as training events, Arabic Bibles, Sunday School curriculum, and other literature. MERF's local committee in Egypt is organizing a conference for spiritual leaders from churches in other Egyptian provinces to consider adopting similar projects. This also links in with MERF's training of Egyptian Christian volunteers to disciple Muslim-background seekers who make contact through MERF's Arabic gospel broadcasts and internet ministries.

Praise God for the multiplication of His witness in Minya; pray for this vital Gospel work, that new congregations take root, and that churches in other

*"Then the Lord will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering; yes, they will make a vow to the Lord and perform it."
—Isaiah 19:21*

MERF-Canada

Thank you from the heart for your faithful support. Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Yours in Christ's service,
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