



Mission News

Mission Activities of the Canadian Reformed Churches

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Brazil – Aldergrove Mission Board Activities in 2014

For those involved in any way with the Aldergrove Mission Board, the last year was an important one with many significant activities.

Missionary sabbatical

As the year began, the Board had to wrestle with the reality that Rev. Wieske was not able to function as he had previously been able; burnout had caught up with him and he was in need of an extended break. His temporary departure from the field for most of the year was a huge change, not just for the Wieske family, but also for his colleague's family and for other players on the field. Rev. VanSpronsen found himself busier than ever, juggling an amazing number of responsibilities to ensure that the work continued to progress.

In February, Rev. Wieske went for a brief trip to the Marble Retreat, near Denver, CO. Staffed by trained professionals, this organization seeks "to help bring healing, hope, and restoration to those in vocational Christian ministry," working particularly with those who need an extra measure of encouragement. Though for this first session he could not be accompanied by his wife, thankfully, during the second session late in 2014 both husband and wife were able to attend together. The professional staff there were able to provide our missionary with many tools which he feels enables him to operate at a more sustainable level in Brazil. Besides the professional care received through the Marble experiences, our missionary, together with his family, spent about eight months of the year in Canada. He was able to have a complete break from all his responsibilities in Brazil, and consequently become recharged and renewed. By the time the end of his stay in Canada had arrived, the Mission Board was thankful to see a reinvigorated missionary eager to go back to work.

A recurring question the Mission Board wrestled with was "What can we do differently to minimize the likelihood of one of our missionaries suffering from burnout in the future?" Since there are many factors impacting our missionaries'

lives in Brazil, the Mission Board had to acknowledge that there is no easy answer to that challenging question. Nonetheless, several specific initiatives that saw significant progress during 2014 were impacted by such discussions.

Missionary manse

For numerous years, the Mission Board has been aware that the living arrangements at the Aldeia Training Centre for the Wieske family have been temporary; the family has been living in a building that is also functioning as the home of the theological education program. This building functions as the nub for most activities on the property. While we acknowledge the appropriateness of a missionary being centrally-located, most will also understand that a missionary and his family need to have their "personal space."

Consequently, a fundraising committee was charged early in the year to begin gathering funds that would enable the construction of a new home for the Wieske family, to be located several hundred meters away, on a currently unused portion of the eleven-acre property. Thankfully, numerous donations arrived during the course of the year. By year's end, almost \$200K had been collected, representing eighty percent of the \$250K target. We are hopeful that by the time you are reading this, plans have been finalized and construction has begun! This initiative was a significant one for the Mission Board; the latter is very thankful that the Yarrow Mission Board (which oversees the physical property of the Aldeia Training Centre) is helping out to ensure things progress appropriately. Yes, donations continue to be welcome, as we have about \$50K left to collect! Every effort has been made to find the appropriate balance between providing our missionary with safe and comfortable housing with the need to be careful with donated dollars, as well as demonstrating sensitivity to public perceptions. Housing was one of the pressure points for our missionary, but not the only one.

Additional missionary

Another pressure point was the workload for our missionaries. They have asked repeatedly for more assistance, as the demands for their time and efforts are absolutely relentless. Luke 10:2 states, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." This has been a repeated refrain of our missionaries, and was clearly reinforced by members of the Reformed Churches of Brazil (IRB). This too is quite a challenge, because realistically, nobody can truly believe that an additional missionary (or several hundred or even more) will satisfactorily address the real needs and opportunities which are evident in this massive country with 200 million inhabitants. Nevertheless, during the course of 2014, the Mission Board, after having consulted with our sister churches in Brazil, as well as with supporting churches in western Canada, concluded that the search for an additional missionary should begin. A calling committee has been appointed and has begun the search.

Adding another missionary is a significant step for all involved. Not only does it generate a great deal of work for those involved in Canada, but it also is a very encouraging reality for our missionaries. This is one more tangible way that our current missionaries can feel the support of the sending and supporting churches – which is tremendously encouraging!

It is impossible to know how long it will take for an additional missionary to begin working on the field; that will depend on many factors which are currently not known. The necessary paperwork and language, culture, and other training could easily take more than a full year; full integration will be a lengthy process! We understand that the longer we take to begin, the longer it will take to have another missionary fully engaged in mission activities in Brazil. The decision to move ahead represents a significant one for Aldergrove Council, as it moves forward in close cooperation with the Mission Board.

Reformed Education Worker

A third initiative which saw progress was one which required extensive dialogue between the Mission Board and the Mission Aid Society. Already for years, our missionaries have been advocating assistance in the area of Christian education. For example, in a 2009 document in which the missionaries articulated the need for a Mission Aid worker, they wrote: "The whole area of Reformed schools and Reformed education is vital to the progress of the mission work and the continuing health of the churches in Brazil. This area of work could reasonably be said to require a separate worker." The "Brazil Education Report," published a few years later, also recommended that a Reformed Education Worker be identified and hired. As 2014 drew to a close, the mission boards came to a consensus that a Reformed Education Worker should indeed be hired. Ads are circulating in both North America as well as in Brazil, and all involved are very curious how

this will unfold in the coming months and years. Though such a worker is evidently not involved in the proclamation of the Word or the administration of the sacraments, yet there is no doubt that such a worker would be intimately involved in the development of the churches and the life of Christian families.

Mission Administrator

During 2014, Otto Bouwman began working in a full-time capacity as Mission Administrator for the Aldergrove Mission Board. Historically, the work of oversight and administration for the work in Brazil had been done by volunteer board members. Because of the continued turnover of board members, the existence and involvement of different boards in the mission field, and because of the substantial growth in the scope and complexity of the work, it was becoming increasingly a challenge for the Mission Board to oversee all the operations. The administrator was hired to help the Mission Board set systems in place for the continued management of the work in Brazil. Some of the tasks included developing written policies for the Mission Board and for the Mission Aid Board, increase alignment between all the players involved in the mission, produce board handbooks, and promote the work of mission in Brazil among the Canadian and American Reformed churches.

Though it proved to be a busy year for the boards and the administrator, near the end of 2014 the boards determined that the administrator ought to continue his role into 2015.

Conclusion

The Aldergrove Mission Board has by now had several years of involvement in the mission work in Brazil. Members understand the tremendous opportunities our project has, and consequently have supported initiatives which will quite significantly expand the scope of the entire undertaking. Because of construction of a new manse, the theological education program will have room to grow. With the addition of another missionary, more work can be done in a responsible manner. With the addition of another member on the mission team, dedicated to helping families and schools in the generational transfer of the faith, the work can receive another big boost. The hope and intention of the Mission Board is to support and encourage our missionaries as they fulfill their callings in Brazil.

Simultaneously, Mission Board is aware of those who note that we are increasing the involvement of foreigners in the Brazilian churches. Some also articulate the concern that perhaps such initiatives might be beyond the capacity of the Brazilian churches to sustain; we need to be in continued alignment with the IRB. As we transitioned from the one year to the next, Mission Board has been keenly aware of the need to address such thoughts as best as possible. That topic will be the subject of the next instalment.

Otto Bouwman

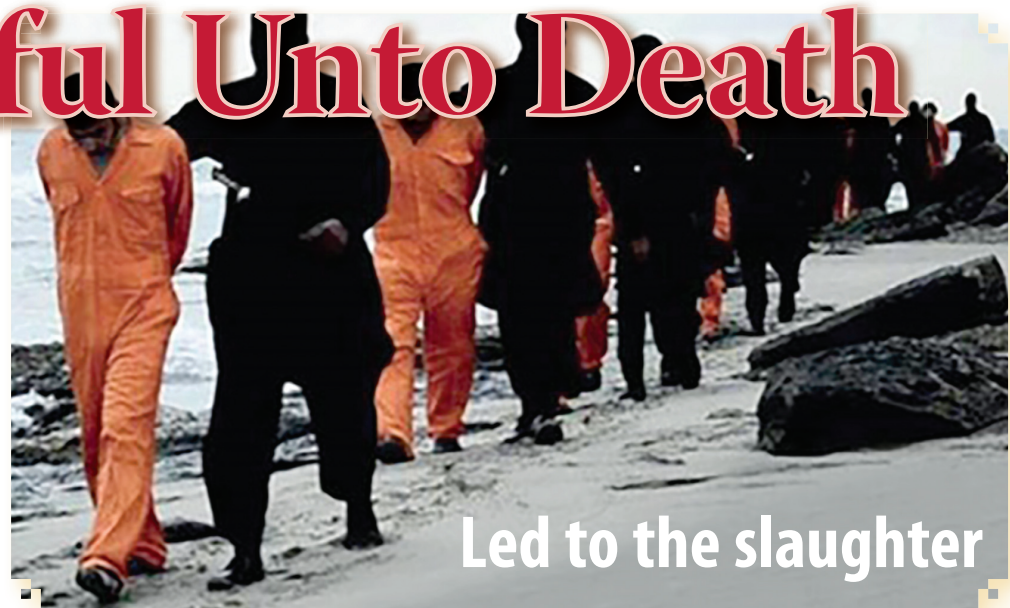


Faithful Unto Death

The first Christian martyr, Stephen, died saying: "Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit...Lord, do not charge them with this sin..." (Acts 7:59-60). His last words resembled those of our Lord Himself facing death on the cross (Luke 23:34, 46). Saul of Tarsus heard and saw it all while approvingly guarding the clothes of those stoning Stephen to death. Still full of hatred for Jesus, he went on harassing God's people until, as he headed north to Damascus, Christ intervened and his life took an about-face. Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit used Stephen's powerful testimony of faith and forgiveness towards Paul's conversion.

Marched to the Slaughter

A few weeks ago, twenty Egyptian Christians and a brother in the Lord from Chad were kidnapped,



paraded, and ruthlessly beheaded by hateful men of the Islamic State (IS) in Libya. They were murdered simply for being Christian. Dressed in the orange one-piece IS execution suits, reminiscent of Guantanamo Bay prison uniforms, they were marched handcuffed and leg chained. Each was accompanied by an armed executioner, cowardly hooded, with the sharp

throat-cutting knife in his hand. The men knew that they were to be slaughtered. The request of some to have last words over the phone with loved ones in Egypt had been denied. The official Islamic judgment (fatwa) was that infidels are not entitled to any privileges! ***One by one, they were urged repeatedly to recant their faith in Christ. Not one did.***

In Jesus' Hands

None stumbled in his walk. Some were clearly whispering prayers. In the first YouTube recording, one is heard saying in Arabic, "Jesus, my life is in your hands," as he felt the knife on his neck. The man beside said, "Amen." Not an exact quote of Stephen at his martyrdom, but close enough.

The Gospel knowledge of each of the twenty Egyptians is not clear. At least three were known to have made public professions of faith and several of the others regularly participated in Bible study and prayer meetings. They all came from poor village families; some were illiterate. They went to Libya to work as construction laborers. The Chadian brother was detained because of his public witness to Christ.



Left: Muslim women join Christians in Egypt mourning the beheading.



A Narrow Escape

One of a smaller group of Coptic Christians living in the next building reported that their names were also on the list wanted by the “beastly, heavily-armed men who came in three large pickup trucks.” The armed men, however, were satisfied to leave with the thirteen Coptic men and six Chadian nationals. They had already kidnapped seven more Egyptian Christians. Screams of some of the younger men were heard as they were beaten and kicked all over their bodies and forced into the vehicles.

Infidels

Some of the captors were not Libyan, but clearly Egyptian Muslim fanatics. Speaking in Egyptian Arabic, they shouted at their victims, “Infidels! Infidels!” (Kofar) as they dragged them away. Other Egyptian Muslim laborers in the com-



pound were also terrorized by what they heard and saw. None dared to challenge the “human beasts.” They too are leaving Libya in growing numbers because they are being coerced to join the murderous Jihadist gangs.

Five of the Chadians denied being Christian, made an Islamic vow and were released. The sixth refused to deny Christ, saying, “My God is the same as these Egyptian Christians; if you kill them, you kill me too.”

Faithful unto Death

One thing is certain—none of the twenty-one was willing to spare his own life by denying Christ and accepting to convert to Islam! It seems they were all kept in one place over the weeks of captivity and encouraged one another to remain loyal to Christ.

Another of the men initially sought after managed to hide with the aid of a Muslim co-laborer. He later escaped the area and returned to Egypt. He confirmed that the captors



were openly amazed and outraged by the resolve of the men not to convert to Islam, even when repeatedly threatened by death.

Martyrdom Fruit

The mother of one of the young men was interviewed on TV a few days later. She was asked what she wanted done to the murderers. Sobbing, she said: “We forgive them and pray for the Lord’s mercy for them and for their families.” The interviewer, a secularist Muslim, afterwards commented: “Now I understand how Christians take to heart the glorious words of Jesus about loving ones’ enemies and forgiving those who persecute them.”

A woman with a distinctly



Muslim name later blogged: “Our murderous terrorists and suicide bombers are considered martyrs when they die in action. But they are not. These brave Christians are, just in the footsteps of Jesus, the noblest man that ever walked on earth.”

One of the first TV commentators, a Muslim, viewing the video of these gruesome beheadings, reported: “Yes, I heard with my own ears and saw with my own eyes their lips in prayer... I heard the one calling on Jesus to receive his life...what courage, what faith...this must be what God wants humans to be like!”

Hani, a Coptic young man, blogged: “Lord Jesus, thank you for these brothers. They taught me two things—one, it is for real that we must be ready to die for your sake. You died for me; two, I am not ready to do so unless you enable me...”

Top: Nine of the martyrs; Tribute to the unity of faith of the Chadian brother; **Below:** Egyptians running away from Libya

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“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall ... persecution ... or sword? As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” —Romans 8:31–36