



# Mission News

*Mission Activities of the Canadian Reformed Churches*

**Volume 9 – July 4, 2014**

## Mission Aid Brazil

### Visit

In February of 2014, I had the opportunity to travel to Brazil, to experience firsthand the mission work that goes on there and to contribute my time to help out at the Aldeia Training Center (ATC) in Recife.

My decision to go to Brazil had been impulsive, to say the least, and I landed in Recife without having much background knowledge of the mission field. I had heard of the “reading room” and was fairly familiar with the missionaries, as they had both been in the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church months earlier, to be installed in their offices there, but I had yet to fully appreciate the scope and magnitude of the mission work.

Needless to say, from the moment I stepped off the plane, to the farewell hugs and well wishes of my last evening in Brazil, I was immersed in the unique beauty of the Brazilian culture, and was enriched, inspired, and challenged through the various activities that the Aldergrove team participated in.

As our team drove to the ATC for the first time, we quickly realized how very different this country was from Canada. Dozens of scrawny mutts ran free through the streets, shirtless men with large bellies sat idly around, chatting together in the heat of the day, and eager street vendors sold cooked chicken, coconuts, and mangos at every corner. Many of the buildings that we passed were brightly painted and dilapidated, or else, like the ATC, surrounded by very thick walls to keep out intruders.

### ATC property

To say that the ATC property is beautiful would be an understatement. Upon arrival, we eagerly set off to explore the grounds. We quickly discovered fruit trees of multiple varieties and familiarized ourselves with the pet turtles and chickens. Mission worker Chris Boersema showed us some projects that needed attention. This work included whitewashing walls, painting fences and buildings, sanding

and repairing doors, pressure washing, and other upkeep and repair projects – the majority of which our team was able to complete during our stay.

While we worked, we were often joined by family members of the seminary students, who taught us hymns in Portuguese, laughed at our mispronunciations, and asked us questions about Canada. We were well supplied with fresh watermelon and juice by the cheerful ladies in the kitchen, and almost all of us experienced our first Brazilian sunburn. It was very enjoyable to work under waving palm trees and to the sounds of children playing in the field, calling to each other in fluent Portuguese.

However, our team had to get adjusted to the difference of lifestyles in Brazil. Occasionally we were frustrated by the lack of necessary supplies, or the less than efficient way in which a particular task was carried out by a store employee. We quickly realized that, in general, Brazilians live at a much slower pace of life than the typical Canadian does, and we were challenged to be patient and understanding of this.

### Sunday

Our first Sunday in Brazil was also a wonderful experience, as we were able to see Pastor Julius Van Spronsen preach in two different congregations. Although we could not understand the sermon, which was somewhat discouraging, the friendliness of the fellow Christians there furthered the gratefulness that I have for the gift of the communion of saints. How inspiring it was to see the Lord's Day kept, and the preaching of the Word proclaimed in a country so far from home. The Genevan tunes, so familiar to us, were sung loudly in Portuguese, and we quickly picked up a few phrases, excitedly singing along when we could. The church services connected our team to the Christians living in Brazil, and the joy that we shared on that Sunday surpassed the language and cultural barriers and energized us for the week that lay ahead.



*(L to r): Maria Geertsema, Harvey Pelleboer, Michelle Haar, Kristy Schouten, Marcelle Togerez, Kevin Vandelden, Kandy Vandelden*

## Maragogi

In the middle of the trip, we took a break from our work at the ATC and made the two hour trip to Maragogi, south of Recife. Chris Boersema was our enthusiastic tour guide, and we quickly grew to appreciate him and his love for the country. He was patient and helpful, translating restaurant menus, transporting us to and fro, showing us everything from the rolling hills of the sugar cane fields to the crystal blue waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Chris explained certain aspects of the mission field that we were unfamiliar with, and told us stories of the history of the churches in Maragogi and the surrounding regions. On the second Sunday of our trip, we again attended two different churches, both of which were significantly larger than the ones that we had seen in Recife. We had the wonderful opportunity to share in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper with the Christians there, and the power of God's grace and love was very evident during our stay.

Other activities in Maragogi included walking out to the reefs early Monday morning (carefully evading large sea urchins), meeting Shaun and Brenda Raap, and enjoying fellowship with the church members over cooked capybara on the spacious Boersema porch, swapping stories and laughing together. We made the trip back to Recife on a very rainy Monday evening to continue our work there.

## Recife

Our last few days in Brazil were busy ones. We toured Recife, stopping at different historical buildings throughout the city. We saw the beginnings of preparations for Mardi Gras, or Carnival, the Brazilian holiday of self-indulgence and wild partying. We shopped at the colourful and crowded markets for souvenirs to bring home, visited the remarkable Reading Room – finding familiar books and realizing the potential the Reading Room has to bring people to Christ, enjoyed a peaceful Thursday evening Bible study at the ATC, during which prayer requests were made and a passage of Scripture was explained, and visited with both the Wieske and Van Spronsen families in their homes.

## Beauty

In other articles, you may read about the violent society of Brazil, or about the clash of the lower and upper classes. You may see photos of shacks on the shoreline, and extravagant skyscrapers directly behind that. You may hear stories about the often unfortunate infrastructure, or about the slums or about any of the other problems that the country faces. We surely need to keep these issues in our prayers, as we remember the work in Brazil. However, Brazil is easy to fall in love with, and there is an incredible beauty in the country – not only because of the lovely beaches or the vibrant flowers, but because of the thirst for the Word of God that is so evident there. The desire for the Truth is very prevalent, and the work of the missionaries continues to grow, as the Reformed faith touches the hearts of more and more Brazilians.

## Thankfulness

Since arriving back home in Canada, my thankfulness for my experiences in Brazil has only increased. When the mission work is mentioned in prayer in church, I have vivid pictures in my mind of the church congregations there. I see the Boersema children playing in their front yard, beneath a large mango tree. I picture Pastor Julius asking the young children their catechism questions after the Sunday morning service. I hear the acapella singing of the psalms in the fascinating Portuguese language. I envision the steadily growing collection of books in the library at the ATC, and the enthusiastic seminary students pacing the paths of the ATC, memorizing parts of Scripture. Mission reports have come to life for me in a dynamic way, and the trip to Brazil has motivated me and inspired me to be more active in mission work not only in Brazil, but also here in Canada.

The works of service and sacrifice by the missionaries, the mission workers, and the church congregations have opened my eyes to the greater things of the Kingdom of God. I repeatedly saw God's name glorified in unique ways during my visit. I witnessed young congregations striving to serve God in their daily lives, and excitedly conversing with the missionaries after evening services. I also noticed the struggles and challenges that the churches are experiencing, thus seeing the need for prayer for God's continued protection – not only for these churches, but for our churches in Canada as well.

I felt particularly reassured of God's great providence in gathering his church to himself, and I was inspired to re-devote my life to his service and glory, in the hope that one day, we all will reach glory in Christ. Finally, then, we will be united forever, not only to him, but also to our brothers and sisters who now live in countries far away.

*Kristy Schouten*





## Somalia & Syria Updates

### Somali Witness

For many centuries, the vast majority of Somalis have professed Islam. Like other East African Muslims, most have little knowledge of the Arabic language and therefore little understanding of their religion. They tend to follow different forms of folk Islam that include elements of ancestral pagan religions.

In the Horn of Africa the cause of Christian missions among Somali peoples was not helped by the presence of colonial powers (Italian, French and British). Also, in the second half of the twentieth century, with generous financing by oil wealth, a modern Islamic missionary movement prospered. It was led by Egyptian and Saudi Muslims who succeeded in bringing about a Somali Islamic revival. In recent years this gave birth to radical Muslim Brotherhood groups linked to Al-Qaeda. Most promi-



nent among these is the aggressive, well-armed "Harkat Al-Shabab" (Youth Movement), whose adherents have committed acts of terror also in neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia.

Attempts by Al-Shabab and other fanatical groups to impose extremist religious customs and practices have antagonized the Somali population, especially in urban areas. However, modern education, the publication of the Somali Bible, gospel radio broadcasts, and, more recently, the spread of cellular

Somali believers worship together openly. In most Somali communities, converts must worship secretly in homes, as it is much too dangerous to express their faith publicly.



phones and the Internet have exposed Somalis to the Christian faith. The small, but growing number of Somali converts still face severe persecution and some have been martyred. Only immigrants to Western countries and in parts of Ethiopia can

### Nurturing Somali Faith

Hajji Nour, MERF's Somali ministry leader, makes periodic visits to house churches in relatively safe areas of Somalia, Somaliland, and Ogaden (Somali-speaking region of south-east Ethiopia). The visits have a threefold objective: to encourage believers, to

*Left: Somali children in a fellowship meal  
Bottom: Somali ladies fellowship*



train spiritual leaders, and to connect new converts to local fellowships. Visits are supported by gospel broadcasts, literature, SMS text messaging, and email. Needy believers also receive diaconal aid, such as food, medicine, clothing, farm seeds, or animal feed.

Not long ago, a small group of converts traveled from central Somalia to a secret location in Somaliland and spent a few weeks together enjoying fellowship with other believers and solid biblical instruction. Upon their return they sent this message: “... *In God’s mercy we arrived safely to our homes praising God for the rest and spiritual nourishment we received...We have experienced truly loving Christian hospitality and fellowship. We are also thankful for the much needed medical care some of us received....*”

A group of converts in another Somali community recently wrote: “*The radio signal is clear these days. We ask all Christians to pray for us and for all Somali believers. We are surrounded by human wolves, but our Jesus is the strong lion who daily protects us....*”



### ***New Attack on Syrian Christians***

At the end of March, thousands of well-armed and organized Islamists suddenly crossed the borders from neighboring Turkey to attack the predominantly

Armenian Christian region of Kessab in northwest Syria. Most of the population descend from survivors of the early twentieth-century Turkish genocide of Armenian Christians. The Syrian army was only able to defend the community against the armed invaders for some hours, but it gave enough time for most families to run away to the south and take refuge in the government controlled areas of Latakia. Kessab, the main town attacked, has one of the largest evangelical congregations in Syria. The town was completely abandoned by its population, as the Islamists (most identified as fighters from Chechnya) occupied several northern neighborhoods. More than 70 church families hastily left their hometown “with only the clothes they could carry with them.” A pastor native of Kessab active in MERF’s diaconal and evangelistic ministries in northern Syria sent this urgent message: “Please pray for our people. May the Lord avert another Turkish-sponsored Islamic genocide against Armenians and other Syrian Christians!”

### **MERF–Canada**

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### ***Additional Prayer Items:***

- ✧ Give thanks for fruitful Gospel ministries by radio and Internet in the Farsi language impacting Iranians, Azeris, and Afghans. Pray for the preparation of solid biblical literature to disciple young converts.
- ✧ Pray for the continuing development of the new Arabic language online radio ministry.
- ✧ Continue to pray for restoration of peace between warring factions in South Sudan. Professing evangelical Christians are among the leaders on both sides of the conflict. Both groups need to promote Christ’s clear teachings on self-giving love and forgiveness. Thousands lost their lives in the recent fighting, including several pastors, evangelists, and other spiritual leaders.

**Top:** Somali believers in a fellowship meal. **Bottom:** Kessab in northwest Syria.

*“But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”*  
—Matt. 10:19–20