



MENNONITE *Air* MISSIONS

"Oh, Praise the Lord, He Set Me FREE!"

The words of the chorus "This Is the Day" filled the air Sunday, February 19, as more than 100 gathered in anticipation of a special service for the baptism of Carlos and his wife Mirna as well as Ruben Benito.

Ruben's parents, José and Tiburcia Benito, had flown up from San Bartolomé, and many of Mirna's family and other friends and neighbors had come for this special occasion. Ruben's sister, Sandra, led one of Ruben's favorite hymns, "He set me free." Ruben truly was celebrating being set free—free from the life of sin and drinking that had bound him tightly. Free from the desperation and darkness that he had lived in and that had almost taken his life. "Oh, Praise the Lord, He set me Free!"

The singing continued with a song especially fitting to Carlos and Mirna, "And to be like Christ, is what I long for." Carlos gave his heart to the Lord a few years ago but then drifted away for a time. His wife Mirna accepted the Lord at the beginning of 2011 and has steadily grown in her walk with the Lord and in her love for her Saviour and her family. Both of them have shown a longing to be like Christ, and we rejoiced to see them take this step together. "And to be like Him, one day I will be."

Mark Gingerich's message reminded us all of the meaning and steps required for baptism. Ruben's dad, José Benito (the pastor in the book *Under His*

Wings), assisted Mark with the baptisms. We sang from our heart, "Happy day, happy day, when Jesus washed my sins away."

At the close of the service, many made their way to the front to welcome our three newest members and to share a hug, a handshake, and even tears. Then we shared the meal the church ladies had worked so hard to prepare.

We as a body prayed together for the three that were baptized. We cried with them, worked with them, encouraged them, and now rejoiced with them as they joined our family. But the Head of the Body, Christ, is the One who deserves the glory. Without Him we would not be a body, and without Him we would not have anything to rejoice about on this memorable baptismal day. —*Melanie Mummert*



Baptismal class at the front of the Gethsemane church.

Moving In at Lirio

After years of planning and changing of plans, false starts and dedicated efforts, the new chapel in Guatemala City is finished and occupied. In early March, we held our last service in the little chapel inside the mission walls, and on March 11, we entered the new chapel for a day of services and fellowship. It was a day of worshipping, remembering, and looking forward.

After a church meal, we entered a dedicatory
(continued on page 3)



The new Lirio chapel was ready for use in early March.



EDITORIAL

by Brian Yoder

Things I'm Taking Home

In eight short days, I have a rendezvous with a Copa jet that will absorb my family and our twelve suitcases and carry us on the first leg of the journey home. It's been nearly two-and-a-half years since we were in the U.S. as a family. Instead of an ordinary furlough, we are embarking on a twelve- or eighteen- month sabbatical. It's not an easy time.

The house is in a disarray as we clean out corners and make thousands of little decisions about what to sell, give away, or take home. Moving is always a chore. Moving with a twelve-suitcase limit is a pitched battle between nostalgia and practicality.

But the most important things I'm taking home from Guatemala don't require suitcase space. They're stored away in my mind and heart, lessons learned during my fifteen years in Guatemala. I'd like to share a few.

I've learned that you can't out-give God. I came as a stingy teenager who would rather go hungry than spend money on food. When my fellow V.S.ers complained that their monthly support wasn't reaching, I was proud to tell them that I hadn't even cashed my last two paychecks yet. Needless to say, others didn't benefit from my iron wallet, either. But over the years, God has hammered my stingy attitude and taught me a valuable lesson. Generosity is not a road to poverty; it's a door to blessing, and He's proved it in many ways.

I've learned that there is power in the blood. After an American tourist heard our goals from one of our young missionaries, he stated flatly: "What a colossal waste of time!" Feeding the poor and housing the homeless he could understand, but simply *sharing the Gospel*? I would have loved to say, "Have a seat, I have some stories I'd like to tell you . . ." And he would have heard about Chico, who used to come home drunk and terrorize his wife and children, but thanks to Jesus, now lives gently among them. About Cesar, who grew up in a broken home, and now tenderly cares for a wife and four children. About José, Pablo, and Santos. The blood of Jesus is the only power that changes society from the inside out.

I have learned that God has a very large family. We missionaries tend to have a hero complex that thinks, "I am the missionary, and it's up to me to save the world." We carry the weight of the world and the mantle of missions rather noticeably upon our shoulders. But I am only one of millions, and

sometimes I run into a "Melchisedec": someone who pops up out of nowhere to bless me.

I was feeling pressured and wrung out, and didn't feel like passing out tracts that day, but out I rushed, intent on getting it done. I almost collided with a man rounding the corner of sixth and tenth, handed him a tract, and then paused when he began asking questions. When he was satisfied with my spiritual identity, he began to talk to me. I stood there for almost an hour, with growing wonder and humility. He reminisced joyfully about what God had done for him. He spoke wistfully about himself: "*Jesus said, 'My sheep hear my voice.' I am a very needy man, and I need to hear that voice again today.*" Without me breathing a word about them, he spoke with uncanny discernment about needs in my own soul that I had barely recognized. I had come to reach the world. Instead, God sent another son to reach me, and I returned home, very quiet and very blessed. God's family is large, and no one can say of another: "I have no need of thee."

I have learned that I am very human. I have come face to face with myself, and have at times come away appalled. I have learned my limits, been educated in my shortcomings, and faced my failures. I have become painfully aware that one's greatest weaknesses follow in the shadow of one's greatest strengths. But in learning about my humanity, I have also learned that God loves humans very much.

I have learned that there is no substitute for prayer, although I have often been entirely too devoid of it. History underlines this point. Times of spiritual successes were marked by prayer. Frustrated efforts were marked by days too busy to pray. "*Apart from me, ye can do nothing,*" Jesus said. Yet in the most crucial moments, there's just one more demand, one more phone call, one more person to talk to . . . and the prayerless hours pass. Prayer has no substitute, but we often try to invent one.

And now the path has turned away from these dear people and the well-worn field of education and battle. It's impossible to pack this many years into twelve suitcases, but these reminders and many more will stay with me wherever I go. And for you, dear readers, in this last editorial, I desire that God grant you an abundant and personal knowledge of the Almighty.

Moving In at Lirio . . . continued

service of singing and reminiscing. We recalled the history of the City congregation that began nearly forty years ago. We remembered the story of our new building, and the three Tonys that invested a compiled total of three years to bring it to completion. We recognized others that had been a part of the final push to finish the final details.

Our new chapel is placed in the center of a residential community. We feel a responsibility to be good neighbors in the community, and provide

(continued on page 4)



A view from the balcony during the service.

Pastor of the Month



José & Tiburcia with three of their children, Ruben, Sandra, and Priscilla, at Ruben's baptism.

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" These are some of José Benito's favorite verses. "God has been so faithful to me and to my family through all the years and the difficulties we have encountered," he told me recently. "I know He is near me because I can feel His presence . . ."

José Benito Xotoy, now 59 years old, has lived and worked in San Bartolomé for many years. He was born on a coffee plantation near Escuintla to Catholic parents. After they moved back to their hometown of San Bartolomé, José married Tiburcia Ramirez in the Catholic Church, at the age of 19. They now have 7 children and 16 grandchildren, a source of joy

whose mention always brings a smile to José's face.

When Harold Kauffman entered the dusty streets of San Bartolomé with a vision to share the Gospel, José was a young and prominent leader in the Catholic Church. Although very skeptical at first, José was soon convicted of his need to change his life and accept Christ. His mother and many other family members have come to find abundant new life in an all-sufficient Saviour.

And there have been many difficulties for José and his family along the way. Part of their story is recorded in the book *Under His Wings*. God has been beside him all the time, many times protecting him from death and keeping him strong through discouragement and distress.

Now, 40 years later, Harold Kauffman and José are working side by side among the people of San Bartolomé, strengthening those that remain, encouraging the weak, redeeming the backslidden, and as always, reaching out with the glorious message of the Gospel. José keeps trusting God for continued harvest, even though he has experienced deeply discouraging times. Quite recently, some church members and even some of his own children, in whom he had invested much mentoring and prayer, have turned away from God and blamed him for their problems.

About a year ago, due to some sharp criticism regarding his way of handling his wayward son, disgruntled members demanded that José either step down from his bishop responsibilities of 18 years, or go to a different mission station to lead and

work. José decided to stay, face the problem and work through the misunderstandings, temporarily stepping back from his leadership position in the church.

Last Sunday the Mennonite church in San Bartolomé "Monte de Olivos" celebrated Communion with 26 active members. Although many have fallen away or moved to other places for work or service, there are definite signs of growth and maturing. José's two youngest children, Ruben and Priscilla, each back home with their parents after a time in El Chal, are now faithful to the Lord and active in the various church programs. Sandra has been a key element in the clinic and church in El Chal for more than five years, and Maria, the eldest, has been true to God through very difficult circumstances.

San Bartolomé is very different today than it was when José was a young pastor 28 years ago. Motorcycles zoom the streets past internet cafes, and cell phones are everywhere. José's message is the same. God is so faithful. He has not promised an easy road, but He gave his life for us and offered us salvation from sin and eternal death. We must be careful to enter ". . . in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

José asks that you would pray for the brotherhood in San Bartolomé, his children, the church and the backslidden. —Stephan Gingerich

Personnel News

Kendra Horst from Virginia is serving in Santa Rosita with the Diefenbacher family from February until the end of May. She comes as a schoolteacher and household support worker for the Diefenbachers, and also will be working to support children's and youth programs there. "We have already been blessed by her vivacious spirit, her ideas, and her energy to implement them."



Kendra Horst

Sharon Nolt left in March after a year and eight months of serving in domestics in Guatemala City. Thank you, Sharon, for all the meals you prepared and the responsibility you carried through the coming and going of several sets of houseparents!

Vernon & Jean Helmuth and family returned to Bonners Ferry, ID, in March after serving as houseparents in Guatemala City for the past nine months. Their daughter, Jody, is planning to stay down till May to finish out the school year teaching the Yoder and Beachy children. Thank you, Vernons, for filling the demanding position of houseparents, guest coordinators, and much more!

Moving In at Lirio . . . continued

a welcoming atmosphere to those around us. We pray that Christ would make us light and salt in this community of needy people.
—Brian Yoder



The first fellowship meal in the new chapel.

Project Spotlight

As valued readers and supporters, we would like to keep you informed about our current projects, and if the Lord leads, allow you to make a difference by supporting these needs.

The main current project is the renovation of a partially finished house in El Naranjo for the female staff who are involved in the clinic and mission work there. We are currently renovating a partially finished house for their use. The project is nearing completion, but is lacking a bathroom, septic system, kitchen cabinets, and electrical hookup totaling around \$3500.

Another ongoing project is the San Cristobal Church (pictured in the previous newsletter). They have raised approximately \$4550 for the construction of their new building, and are awaiting the remaining \$2600 from the mission to match the funds that they have raised.

Leighton Zook and family from Parry Sound, ON, left mid-March, after serving in Novillero for nine weeks. They experienced frosty mornings as they lived in the mission house and did some repairs to it.



Leighton Zook Family

Personnel needs: A nurse is needed for the El Chal clinic by July 1st. An R.N. degree, and/or hospital experience would be very helpful as the position will include prescribing meds and performing minor procedures.

Please make donations payable to "Mennonite Air Missions" and send to: Mennonite Air Missions, c/o Amos Hurst, 140 Rothsville Station Rd., Lititz, PA 17543.

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