

Date: 2 March 2009

Dear Friends and family,

Report: Three weeks travelling in Colombia - February 2009

Last week I (Philip) returned happy and exhausted from a 3 week pastoral visit to Colombia. The objective was to help with some Bible teaching and seek to be an encouragement to brothers and sisters there.

National Brothers Retreat: This two day annual event took place in Armenia. About 40 brothers, representing some 20 assemblies came together to encourage each other, to study the Word together, to discuss legal matters of mutual concern and to coordinate some of the work such as camps, conferences and retreats. I was pleasantly surprised to sense the calm and thoughtful atmosphere in which the theme of “divorce and remarriage” was discussed.

When most brothers come from a Catholic background where divorce is simply not allowed, it is emotive to discuss the clause “except for cause of fornication” given by our Lord Jesus in



Matthew 5 and 19, and the “letter of divorce” and possibility of remarriage given under Moses. God hates divorce and yet He regulates it. Our fear is to weaken the life-long commitment in marriage, and yet, a Biblical solution is required for so many new believers who come to Christ with complicated marriage arrangements. We are all exposed to the danger of being too liberal on the one hand or being stricter than what is clearly stated in Scripture. Both are errors. But there is another danger, that of seeking binding agreements between assemblies!

Temporal agreements may be useful, perhaps even necessary, for harmonious living within an assembly. But between assemblies, doctrinal and procedural agreements provide a short term “fix” but at a high price: they usually lead to long term to bondage. Every assembly, with the help of the Holy Spirit should learn to function guided with the Word of God, and not the Word of God PLUS a set of inter-assembly agreements. We come together not to seek agreements, but to seek more light on Scripture. As the Lord provides further light, we can help and encourage one another to walk in revealed truth.



Assembly visits: We travelled about 2000 kms visiting homes and assemblies. In all we visited 11



assemblies. I usually like to form one or two travelling teams. It is safer, it is enjoyable to serve the Lord as a team, and the hours spent chatting together in the jeep are also very useful. During the 5 day trip south to La Paila, Cali, Cabuyal, Florida and Popayan, we had a 4 man team: Brother Julio V. and I shared the Bible teaching in the different assemblies we visited, and brother Mario Z. and his son, served the Lord and the saints with their lovely musical talents.

7th Workers Retreat: This is a bi-yearly 2 day event. A number of full-time and part-time Christian workers come together to pray, study the Word, share vision and encourage each other to serve the Lord more effectively. It also provides a platform for some cooperation and mutual accountability. This time, 20 brothers met together in Pereira. We were all encouraged to experience how the Lord broke down some barriers to effective cooperation as we spent a prolonged time in earnest prayer. Sometimes talking and Biblical counselling must stop and give way to serious prayer. There are strongholds that only the Spirit of God can break. We must humbly and urgently ask God to act. And He does.



We also were stimulated by a report prepared by brothers Roland K. and Gregorio T. on their visit to Honduras. Honduras is a relatively small Central American country (8m), where there are currently about 265 assemblies, and they continue to grow. These assemblies are very similar to those in Colombia and such initial contacts inspire and encourage.



Christian Network School: This is a non-centralized school, a network of 12 teachers who seek to teach Bible lessons in secular schools. I had the privilege to participate in one of their bi-yearly retreats. These events are arranged to encourage the teachers to remain focused: to bring children to the Lord Jesus. These retreats provide a forum for such teachers to exchange materials and experiences, learn new songs, introduce potential new teachers, and coordinate this evangelistic work. During the travels, I had the opportunity to visit 4 of the schools where the programme operates. The school heads were all very positive and grateful for the contribution these teachers make to their schools. For this we praise the Lord!



My sincere thanks to those of you who supported this trip with your gifts and prayers. My felt thanks also for those who expressed their care for Anneke and our 4 children while I was away from home. Your loving partnership makes these visits possible.

With warm Christian greetings, *Philp.*