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Editorial

Three Beggars

[In our last laymen's meeting, a young married Brazilian brother got up and told an experience. He was having lunch in a restaurant when a beggar boy came to his table and asked for some money to buy a sandwich. A small voice seemed to tell him, "Invite him to have lunch with you." Since this is hardly a conventional thing to do, he decided to give the boy some money to buy a sandwich. The brother relates that when he left the restaurant some time later, the young boy was standing outside the door, radiantly holding up the sandwich he purchased with the money received.]

After the service I spoke to the brother about his experience. He told me how he regrets not having followed the inner impulse to invite the boy to sit at his table.

With the passing of time, my orthodox view of beggars has given way to a more benign—possibly naïve—approach. No longer do I feel the responsibility of informing them that if they would find a job, they wouldn't have to beg. It takes no special talent or tenderness to set a beggar straight. We don't know how the priest or the Levite would have reacted if a beggar would have come to their table. We have reason to believe that they would have sanctimoniously applied the "Don't give them a fish; teach them to fish" philosophy, ignoring the fact that there is possibly nothing in this world that will turn a beggar into a fisherman faster than inviting him to one's table and sharing our fish with him.

As I listened to the brother speak, and then spoke with him after the service, my imagination took wings. May yours also.]

Beggars don't usually come from Christian homes. Mendigo—that's the name we'll give our beggar (it means beggar in Portuguese)—is no exception. And as often happens with beggars, he doesn't know who his dad is. (Read on and you will understand why.)

Mendigo is approximately 11 years old. Because of malnutrition, he is somewhat small for his age. He looks like he might be nine, at the most. He is never clean, at

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least not by our standards. A bath usually means going swimming in a polluted stream. Without soap or washrag.

Mendigo's wardrobe consists of two ragged tee-shirts and pair of shorts. He has no shoes, only two thongs of two different sizes, which can hardly be called a pair.

Mendigo has three personalities. The first, in which life is actually enjoyable, is when he and his friends are free to do as they please. They go swimming, they play games in empty lots, they run and shout like ordinary children.

His second personality is his "work uniform:" a rueful, downtrodden countenance; a plaintive, funereal voice that conveys utter dejection and helplessness; often a limp or gestures that suggest a physical impairment (which may be real).

His third personality is the least known and the one that breaks our heart. Our pulpits often ring with discourses on family life. A home takes on the characteristics of a jeweled Swiss watch, in which accurate time is achieved when father, mother and children fill their divinely assigned places.

Mendigo's home...no, he has no home. Mendigo's "place"—yes, let's just call it a place for lack of a more descriptive name—is in the red-light district where the woman who brought him into this world "works."

Mendigo is the third of four children. His mother is 24. Her girlhood ended at 12, when she went to "work." Mendigo has no recollection of her ever embracing him, of speaking a tender word, or of showing any sign of affection. In fact, he can't so much as recall a single time she actually smiled at him. This may seem strange.

But it isn't. Not in women of her profession. All during working hours she smiles, she laughs. When she can no longer bring herself to laugh, she begs drinks off of her customers. Then she laughs some more.

When the last customer leaves, she is tired. She is angry. She is sick. At times very sick. But she must keep on "working." Night after night.

Mendigo's mother must smile at her customers. But not at her son. The despair, the hatred she feels toward the life she is living is vented on her children. Mendigo's oldest sister was hardly 12 when her mother forced her to go to "work." Mendigo himself was hardly six years old when he was forced to spend long days in the hot sun with a tin can in his hand, begging for handouts. Each afternoon when his mother would wake up, she would look at his day's earnings. And give him a sound thrashing for not gathering more.

When he was nine, Mendigo left home... No, he didn't leave home, for there was no home to leave. He and several friends in similar circumstances began sleeping in abandoned houses. They survived by plying the only trade they knew: begging.

One day, shortly after his 12th birthday, Mendigo managed to slip into a fancy restaurant. He knew that the handouts in these fancier places were usually more substantial. The trick was to not be noticed by the waiters or the manager, for once noticed, he was unceremoniously trotted out. But, it was worth the risk.

On this particular day Mendigo stepped up to the table of a middle-aged couple. By their clothes and mien, he recognized them as wealthy people. He was aware that either the gentleman would snap his fingers to get the waiter's attention and point to the

“foreign object” in the restaurant, or slip a larger bill into his shirt pocket. (Most people dread making physical contact with beggars, the reason for putting money in their pocket, rather than risk touching their hand.)

This couple, contrary to so many others, smiled at Mendigo. He saw the man reaching for his wallet, when the lady spoke quietly to her husband. The man raised his hand and snapped his fingers. Believing that the smiles were fake and that he would now be thrown out of the establishment, Mendigo turned to flee. The man caught him by the arm (actually touched his dirty arm) and restrained him. Would he give him over to the manager and request that the police be called...?

In an instant a waiter was at the table and pointing to the door. The man, however, didn't turn Mendigo over to the waiter. In a kind, matter-of-fact voice he told the waiter, “Please bring a plate for this young man. Double our order. I believe he's hungry.”

The waiter appeared dumbfounded. He stood there, unaware of what to do. The customer, knowing he was creating a novel situation, spoke again. “This young man is our guest. Please help him be seated.”

To lookers-on, the meal must have appeared to be an abject failure. Mendigo couldn't recall ever having eaten a meal seated at a table. It wouldn't be correct to say his table manners were bad; he simply didn't have any. Several diners in nearby tables were so repulsed by the boy's lack of manners that they simply got up and paid their bill, without finishing their meal. Others had their curiosity whetted by what was taking place. A few looked sympathetic. And a few were amused.

The only ones who seemed totally unperturbed were the couple who invited Mendigo to have dinner with them.

In spite of his obvious discomfort, Mendigo enjoyed himself. He enjoyed the frank conversation with the couple, being treated as a human being. He was told they had dinner at this restaurant every Tuesday evening at seven o'clock, that if he would be there, he could join them again.

This became a routine. Mendigo's table manners improved. So did his appearance, especially after he began doing odd jobs at the couple's home and was often paid in clothes.

Then came the memorable day in which the couple invited Mendigo to move in with them. They treated him as a son. He was enrolled in a special school to make up for lost time. He went on vacations with his new dad and mother. He learned to know other cities and other states—even to fly in an airplane.

Intelligent and ambitious, Mendigo shed all vestiges of his beggar days. Handsome and intelligent, people not acquainted with Mendigo's past assumed he was their biological son.

[This little story has three endings. Ending one:]

As Mendigo grew older, his awareness of who he was and who he would have been, had it not been for the largesse of his adoptive parents, grew ever more intense. He spoke often, and with deep feeling, of his erstwhile friends who still roamed the streets. A beautiful tradition developed in Mendigo's home. Each Tuesday he would go out on

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the streets and invite five or six street boys to have dinner in his home. Occasionally they would be taken to the same restaurant where Mendigo learned to know his adoptive parents. Those who responded to this singular act of love would be nurtured and finally be given a chance to work in Mendigo's dad's business. Once employed, these boys were given the right to live in a house rented for this purpose.

Mendigo's business acumen astounded not only his dad, but other businessmen as well. The business prospered and when his dad became ill and could no longer stand at the helm, Mendigo took over.

Mendigo married and had four children, a source of great pleasure to the grandparents. But best of all was the extreme dedication which Mendigo showed for his parents. As they reached their sunset years, they had need of nothing. In their last days, his parents spoken often of the chance encounter in the restaurant that brought dividends they had never imagined.

[Ending two:]

Mendigo rapidly shed his former life. Enrolled in special classes, he soon was studying with other children of his age group. A friendly chap, he got along well with others. About the only thing that would really upset him was when someone would remind him of his former life as a beggar. That life to him was a closed book.

Mendigo helped his dad at work during school vacation. He was an above average worker, doing whatever job he was assigned—but never looking for anything else to do. Around the house when asked to do odd jobs, he would promptly do so. But never did these jobs become a routine in his life. Each time he had to be asked and he would uncomplainingly comply.

After Mendigo got married, he moved to another state. Even though it was only a six-hour drive, he seldom paid his parents a visit. Yet he was always friendly and seemed to appreciate their visits. He would politely, almost dutifully, ask his dad about business, but showed no interest in being part of it.

As the years stacked up and health failed, Mendigo's dad had to relinquish the day-to-day management of the business. Although he, nor his wife, ever said so, they were deeply disappointed that Mendigo had not prepared himself to step into his place. The only way that seemed open was to sell the business.

Strangely, when Mendigo heard that his dad was selling the business, he began to show an interest in his dad's affairs. He would call almost daily to ask how negotiations were going. And how much he was being offered.

Mendigo's parents died. The morning after the funeral he looked up the lawyer who had drawn up the will for his parents. After the secretary had ushered him into the lawyer's office, Mendigo said, "Well, I'm here to see what my folks have left for me."

The lawyer, an elderly man with silver hair, carefully slit open an envelope and withdrew the will. After scanning the will, the lawyer looked at Mendigo and asked, "Young man, what are you expecting your folks left for you?"

"Everything. I am the sole heir."

In a grave voice, the lawyer began reading the will:

"Because of a deep love which my wife and I have for homeless children, it is our

last will and desire that all our earthly goods be used to set up a foundation for the care of such children, so that they may be given the chance of becoming useful, happy citizens.”

“Read on,” demanded the young man.

“I have finished,” replied the lawyer.

Red-faced and waving his arms, Mendigo fairly shouted, “How could they? Oh, how could they...?”

After Mendigo had regained his composure enough to listen, the silver-haired lawyer asked, “Would you really like to know how they could do what they did?”

“I really don’t know...”

“Let me tell you. I knew your parents for nearly 50 years. During these years your dad has shared many intimacies with me—not only as his lawyer, but as a close friend. I remember so well the night you had dinner with your dad and mother for the first time in the restaurant. He called me that night yet; he said he wanted me to know about the most wonderful happening. Thereafter, each Tuesday evening he would call me about the hopes he had for you.”

Now the lawyer paused for a minute. Maybe two. When he continued his voice was stern. “Young man, I worked out your adoption papers, at your parent’s request. The day the judge signed the adoption decree, your dad said to me, ‘This is the most wonderful day in my life. My wife and I have no children, but now we have an heir. Our business, our savings, all our properties, will one day be his.’

“For quite some time your dad was on cloud nine. Then I noticed something was changing. I asked him about it. He told me of how you were showing no interest in his business. Then after you got married and moved out of state and practically forgot your dad and mother, he was deeply wounded—although I am sure he always hid his feelings.

“Then when your dad took ill and decided to sell out, you began showing interest in his affairs. That is what hurt him the worst. He came to my office one day and said, ‘I believe it is time to make out my will.’ He talked at length about the foundation he wanted to set up for homeless children. He said, ‘I have done all I can for Mendigo. Please write in my will that everything I have I give to the poor...’ ”

At this point Mendigo arose and left the lawyer’s office. A half hour later when the lawyer left his office to do some business downtown, he found the young man leaning over his car, clenching and unclenching his fists, sobbing uncontrollably.

The silver-haired lawyer viewed the desolate scene for several moments, and then walked by, saying to himself, “There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

[Ending three:]

Mendigo was enrolled in special classes so that he could catch up with those of his age group. Since most of his classmates were from poorer homes and he was from one of the richest families in town, he became imperious. He challenged his teachers and dominated his classmates. The fact that he wasn’t catching up with his age group didn’t seem to bother him.

Mendigo never lost his beggar mentality; he merely upgraded his methods. Instead

of working people's emotions with a long face and tattered clothes, he now became enchanting. This was especially true in the case of his parents. If he decided he wanted something—a new bicycle, for example—he would come right home from school and mow the lawn without being told. He would find a hundred and one ways to endear himself to his dad and mother. Soon he would have his new bike. Mendigo would then brag to his friends about his accomplishment.

Once Mendigo felt secure in his new environment, he did something strange. He began seeing his biological mother. Rather than being repulsed by her heterodox way of making a living, he found himself admiring her stamina and determination. Worse, he enjoyed the atmosphere in her “workplace.”

Mendigo was never adopted. His parents sensed his disloyalty. This bothered him. If adopted he would theoretically be the only heir to a small empire. Finally, as a grown man, recognizing he wasn't being accepted as a son, Mendigo left home, with a hefty sum of stolen money which he used to buy a house in which his biological mother and other women of her profession could “work.” He got a percentage of their earning, which constituted his livelihood. He died a premature death.

Why tell the story of three beggars? Because you, good reader, are one of them. ▲

Readers Write

by Dean Mininger

Northern Brazil Adventures

For years we have desired to go see one of the most distinctive features of our country. We have flown over it many times, and have even heard that when we experience some turbulence going to or returning from NA, we are then passing over the mighty Amazon River. I still have my doubts, but the fact remains that this river does have a lot of influence on many things in nature, and on the lives of many people. We just recently had the privilege of seeing this marvelous work of God, and also the area in the state of Roraima where a few of our brethren are buying land.

We spent 4 days in the city of Manaus, which is the capital city of the state of Amazonas. It is located on the banks of the Negro river and has a million and a half inhabitants. This is approximately a thousand miles upriver from where the Amazon empties into the Atlantic ocean. Just below Manaus is where the Negro and Solimões, which is considered the Amazon, flow together into one river.

We found the people both of Manaus and Roraima to be very friendly and open. We passed out some tracts one afternoon in Manaus. I encountered virtually no rejections. A nice number even would thank us. At the hotels other guests wanted to tell us good morning when we would come in contact with them at breakfast time. Perhaps few would actually accept the whole truth but at least they are open to becoming aware of it.

The Amazon is the second longest river in the world and yet by far the largest in

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terms of volume. It carries more water than the Mississippi, Nile, and Yangtze rivers combined or 4 times that of just the Mississippi. It begins in the lowlands of northeast Peru at the juncture of the Marañón and Ucayali rivers, which rise in the Andes mountains. According to our World Book map, it appears that actually there is water going into the Amazon that comes from a spot barely 100 miles from the Pacific Ocean! The point where the Amazon crosses the Peru-Brazil border, which is almost 2000 miles upriver, is only 200 ft. higher than at the mouth, thereby making this river extremely slow and very deep. We're talking of up to 350 ft. deep. This is of course closer to the mouth and it varies a lot depending on rainfall, ocean tides and shifting sand bars

At Manaus the level of the Negro river varies up to 60 ft. throughout the year and so docks have been built on pontoons. Because of its size and slow current, the Amazon at many places resembles a broad, calm lake. Also, the ocean tide at new and full moon overcomes the river current and a *bore* (wall of water) 16 ft. high is created that rushes upriver at more than 40 mph. It is of such magnitude that even at 600 miles upriver, this tide is still up to a foot high.

Before the Negro and Solimões meet, they are both already huge rivers with very contrasting colors, different flow rates, different water temperatures, and different chemical make-ups. This results in a singular phenomenon, in which after they meet, they flow along side by side without mixing. This is called the "meeting of the waters." The water in the Negro is warmer, slower, and has a lower pH. Mosquitoes do not breed in this river. It is too acid. The water is not muddy at all but believe it or not looks like Root Beer or Coke! On the other hand the Solimões is a milky brown color. Its chemical make-up is totally different, making it a terrific breeding place for all manner of fish, turtles, alligators, dolphins, etc. Oh, and lest we forget, mosquitoes and piranhas also do very well here.

More than 750 kinds of fish are found in the Amazon river. One of these is the pirarucu, or freshwater cod. This scaled fish weighs up to 330 pounds. They say that by law anything that you catch under 59 inches must be thrown back in. While you are doubting, may we remember that this fish can grow to over 8 ft. long. Its scales are huge and are used to file finger nails and also for souvenirs. We dined on the meat of this fish twice while there. I don't remember of ever eating better tasting fish. There were no bones and the meat was exactly the way many of us like our fish. We like fish that doesn't taste "fishy". (By the way, is there such a thing as chicken that tastes "chickeny" or pork that tastes "porky"?)

There are all sorts of river tours available, starting from several hours on a small motor boat to several days on a luxury craft. We chose to take a small motorboat tour. We were gone about 5 hours. It was very enjoyable and educational. It's hard to comprehend that so much water can exist. Besides the terrific volume of water in the river itself, the surrounding forests along the river are flooded at this time of the year. Actually, the waters are already coming down. As we followed a trail through the woods in our narrow boat. we could see the water line over 3 ft. higher where the water had gotten to at the highest. We asked our guide how deep the water was under our

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boat. He said it would be around 10 ft. deep. This was out in the middle of the woods! At the peak of the rainy season the water goes out from the banks of the river up to 40 miles into the forest.

We went to the famous “meeting of the waters.” This can be seen from quite a distance from the air. We could actually feel the difference in the temperature of the waters and of course the color difference was very obvious. I wish we would have tried to find out how far it is down river until the waters of the two rivers are totally mixed.

After observing this amazing phenomenon, we went to a floating restaurant on the edge of the forest for dinner. Just as we were leaving, we suddenly saw two small canoes with Indian children that were quite earnestly paddling out to meet us. What could they want? They wanted to make a little money. How did they want to make a little money? By allowing us to hold their wild animals from the region that they had tamed! So we had the chance to hold a sloth, small alligator, turtle, and/or boa constrictor. The boa constrictor was the most exciting. So much so that the ladies made a good, genuine show of manifesting their eternal fear and mistrust of this calm creature any time I tried to edge a little closer to them. It looked like mom-in-law would have taken to the water if I would have insisted in proving that it was totally harmless. It appears that when these serpents are out of their element, they’re confused and quite helpless.

The sloths are so cute and endearing. They move ever so slowly. We had the same opportunity at another place way back in the forest, except that this was more exciting yet. Their boa constrictor was even larger. So I accepted all 10 ft. of him with my right hand around his throat right behind his head and my left hand to throw him up around my neck. Even though his tongue was doing that wicked looking thing, he just let me dominate him. My wife was the one that developed some snake-like movements when I tried to quickly give her a hug.

We saw something else very impressive there. Off to the side they had a used water tank that measured perhaps 5x3 ft. The lid was on it and I saw one of the locals there showing what was in it to our boat pilot. So curiosity got the best of me and I went over to it and peeked in. Feelings of incredulity, amazement, and pity to name a few, all go through you in a short time. It might take hours for someone to guess the scene we saw in that tank. There was a good sized anaconda lying in the bottom. I didn’t see it’s head but I saw a lot of snake body. Perched on the snake was a live chicken. She was just as calm as a clock and cool as a cucumber. She didn’t make any effort to get out when we opened the lid. She seemed to be quite contented. Her destiny was to be the next meal for the snake. She had been in there for a week already and the snake just hadn’t become hungry yet. They must have been taking her out and feeding her now and then. Over and over since then I have thought of how we as humans sometimes are in a situation that is actually much worse than that. We play around with a little sin. We let Satan deceive us by giving in to our fleshly desires. We are perched there in the domain of Satan, unaware of the final destruction that he has designed for us.

We spent 3 days in Roraima in the area of the capital city, Boa Vista. For several years some brethren from here have been interested in buying land there. There is much land available at a very cheap price. Much of it lies quite fiat with little or no growth

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on it. So clearing the land is quite simple. Two of the brethren have bought for around \$40 an acre. That is about the price some paid 30 years ago when they moved here. But allowing for inflation would cut that at least in half. The ground here needed to be developed and today is producing good yields and selling for up to \$1500 an acre. This area in Roraima is one of the last frontiers in Brazil and promises to be quite an opportunity. In the four years since the brethren first investigated there, ground has already evaluated tenfold.

Not only that, the people are very friendly and surely there are some seeking souls among them. They are very open to visiting and receiving tracts. We went to the Boa Vista prison where 270 inmates are incarcerated and passed out tracts and visited. Even these criminals accepted the truth very well. Some would come and ask for tracts or call to us as we were passing out to others. Also, English speaking Guyana borders Roraima and is open to the spreading of the Gospel. So, would it be God's will for his Church to be planted in these far reaches of Brazil? And what about the rest of South America? When would it be time to seriously check out Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, etc.? If some of the people of God would colonize in some of these countries, would there not be souls that would come?

We enjoyed our trip immensely. We had barely left there and I was already desiring to go back sometime. There is so much to see and marvel over in the Amazon area. Our time wasn't nearly sufficient, but we felt it was well worth what we did see.

Thinking again of Roraima and the opportunity there, and also in many other places here in this country, it seems like we need our brethren's prayers for direction from God. The way it is now, it would be so easy to go at things in a big way and let our pilgrim and stranger status slip. I imagined that this soybean boom would fizzle before now, but even with the Asian rust problem and China balking at accepting our soybeans, the price, though down a little, is still holding out quite well. Are we going to find our balance as we encounter such open doors in both the material and spiritual realms? Where really are our priorities?

Come visit us and let's plan a tract tour to the Amazon! ▲

Paraguay

[Brian Isaac and his family spent several months in Paraguay investigating the mission possibilities among the Mennonite colonists in that country. Here is his report, actually a fax sent to the mission board here, which we intercepted.]

A Report on the New Work in Paraguay

In the year 2003, a man in Paraguay named Yacob (Jacob) Wahl boarded a bus and headed to central Brazil, where he heard there was an American colony of Christians. After asking directions a number of times, he arrived in the town of Rio Verde, in the state of Goiás. Now he asked questions about the American colony and soon was on his

way in a taxi. When he arrived at the church and school, he asked further directions, and soon arrived at one of the Colony homes.

Yacob's first impression was favorable. He later said, "Here was a people who had never seen me before. They inquired about my origin, why I had come, and immediately took me in."

Yacob's hunger is what a lot of Old Colonists are experiencing these days in the colony in Nuevo Durango, as well as in other colonies. Yacob's search was satisfied as he observed the congregation at Monte Alegre. The most outstanding feature to him was the young people and their behavior.

The Old Colonists are traditionalists. Their unchanging ways are their religion. It is probably the strictest Mennonite sect that there is. Their school is so strict that hardly a smile is allowed. As we sat there on a bench at the front of the class—my son Daniel and I on the boys' side and my wife Teresa and daughter Anita on the girls' side, scarcely a face looked up. They had their Bibles opened and were quietly whispering each word. Just before this they had sung a long song in a strong soprano; then altogether recited in unison a few long and ancient prayers, probably hundreds of years old.

The teacher constantly carried a long, wooden disciplinarian rod, giving a couple reminding taps to the occasional student. This is rigorous training and partly explains the unified practice in their conduct and dress. The men and boys all wear custom-tailored black bib overalls and a dark cap with no logo. The ladies wear dresses with long sleeves, all made in the same style.

These ladies can't speak Spanish or the Guarani language which is used throughout the country. (The Guarani is a rather difficult language and is what one commonly hears on the streets. It's compulsory to be taught in the public schools for half the courses, but even the language is becoming more mixed with Spanish all the time.)

These Old Colonists are hard workers. Together with the children, the ladies are responsible for the milking, which is usually done by hand.

In the homes and with friends, Plautdeutsch (Low German) is the main language. But in school and church, they strictly adhere to the High German. Once out of the German setting, the ladies especially are very helpless to communicate in the Paraguayan society.

Yacob is concerned about the condition of his church, and especially about the courting and evening activities of the youth. Much of this is winked at by the minister and bishop, because "this is the way it's always been."

Sunday evening the parents remain indoors while the youth walk the streets. Once a courtship agreement has been reached between young people, they are allowed in one of the most special rooms in the house, a room designed primarily for the purpose of allowing their young people to court. No one is permitted to enter or disturb this process.

Yacob's primary concern is the moral decay throughout the church. The percentage of pure marriages are alarmingly low. Of course, the greatest reason is a lack of Spirit-led lives. We see no discipline for immorality. Smoking and drinking are common among many, including the caretaker of the church building.

In other areas discipline can be very strict, for example, if someone should put

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rubber tires on a tractor or buy a vehicle. If someone gets drunk, there is no discipline, and that is one of the things that concerns Yacob.

We feel Yacob has had a new birth experience and is endeavoring to maintain it. His daily life and business transactions would indicate he is being successful. Most of his family would follow him if his wife would also accept Christ. Yacob needs support in his new-found faith and Marie needs help yet to find the faith.

It appears that if there were a small group of our people would locate nearby and set up a farming operation, it would be a real attraction to those people. There are quite a few who aren't satisfied with their church. They need to be able to witness the functioning of a group of born-again Christians.

There are 825 acres up for sale nearby for 400 US dollar an acre.

We have heard many questions about how we believe in our *gemeinde*—denomination. It's no wonder that there's wide-spread dissatisfaction. We as a family went to one Sunday morning service and observed first-hand how things work. The bishop was there that morning. He rotates among the five or six churches in the area. When he isn't there, the minister leads the service. The sermons always consist of only reading. He read from the Bible and some ancient prayers, always in High German. The young people can hardly understand it because it's not explained to them. The bishop only stopped to explain one or two sentences in Plautdeutsch. There were no children there at all. The youngest was probably 16 years old, which is the age they're allowed to start roaming the streets. Nobody except family members join the church. We haven't heard of any native Paraguayans who have tried to join up with them, and we haven't seen any signs that they are trying to convert anyone to their church. Maybe this is still the result of Catherine the Great of Russia, who told their ancestors: "You may move to my country if you promise to not indoctrinate my people."

Baptism into their church is administered after deciding to marry. The catechism needs to be memorized first. They merge into the church at marriage. There is no mention of a new birth at this time, or at anytime. They don't seem to understand what that is.

As far as the Nuevo Durango area and other Old Colonist areas, the need is great. To speak of spiritual things, Plautdeutsch is the best and a good grasp of High German would benefit any doctrinal discussions. All the men can speak Spanish, but in a spiritual discussion they would better understand the Dutch or German.

The next contact we made was with Bro. Guido Alvarez's parents and a few others in the Agua Azul group. Formerly, there were many Americans here who were forming a conservative group and now are in agreement with the Mennonite Christian Brotherhood (MCB). There was a warm welcome from Guido's parents, Daniel & Rosa Alvarez, where we spent two nights. We discussed many doctrinal matters after hearing their experiences. They've been attending the Assembly of God church, but say that as soon as our church sends missionaries, they will start attending right away.

There are others in that area who appear interested. As often happens in splinter groups, some are desiring more stability. I left a *Principles of Faith* and *Keeping the Faith* with Daniel Riehl, who is building a small house for Daniel & Rosa. Mr. Riehl belongs

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to the MCB there in the community. Bishop Paul Hollingswood, 65, has a son Jerry who is the minister. Jerry doesn't wear a beard, which they feel is optional. Paul said that their main challenge are the doctrines of excommunication and avoidance. This is largely due to their loose association with other groups and their application of discipline. I explained to Daniel how easy it was when there was *one* church. My request for him was they would read those two books and give his opinion when we met again.

Farther south...one day we were privileged to see two of the world's great wonders: the largest hydroelectric dam shared by Brazil and Paraguay and the Iguazu Falls shared at the border of Brazil and Argentina, close to Ciudad del Este, Paraguay. Nearby we went to an industrious Bergthal Mennonite town, Campo 9. North of Campo 9 are several religious groups. There was a reform-minded man by the name of Sam Lapp who began a conservative group here after not being able to agree with the Agua Azul MCB group. So here, close to Campo 9 (in Colônia Florida), Sam Lapp again came into disagreement with his church. The result was another fresh start for Sam, who started a second, smaller church with some Paraguayans this time. A wooden structure about 22 ft. by 16 ft. was erected. For the third time, he was found to disagree and departed to a place ten kilometers north along a dirt road.

This last move left a fair-sized group: the family of Isabelino & Luíza Ramos, Albert and a few other friends who customarily gather. This contact we again received from bro. Guido. He's a friend to Isabelino's son, Marcos Ramos, who is married to Sam Lapp's adopted daughter. They now live in South Carolina. Marcos explained to Guido about this group in Paraguay that was lacking direction and leadership. They are whitecaps and remind me of the Beechy Amish.

Here we arrived for dinner one Wednesday and got pleasantly acquainted. They served us a typical Paraguayan meal. It was good. They took us on a tour, using their small car and our Fiat, around the Bergthal community. There's a lot of progress, many American style homes, fair-sized dairies of 50 or more cows, etc. Land costs up to 600 US dollars an acre.

In the evening they had a short service in their little church. Isabelino, about 52 years old, was in charge. He has a fair grasp of the doctrines. Regrettably, we didn't have a *Principles of Faith* book along, but we had quite a few tracts. The people all received us warmly. They said they felt this was an answer to prayer. I brought my conversion experience, a couple verses and sang a Spanish song together with my family. They invited us to send a missionary, or to stay there ourselves. Anita said the girls liked her style of head covering and were asking if there was a place in Brazil where they could buy some.

I hope someone can review the *Principles of Faith* with them. They seem confused, misled, desiring stability and courage. It was impressive to observe how well their family got along. Would a Spanish-speaking minister be able to come for a year at least? We'll need to talk to Isabelino whether he'd allow a missionary to actually take over.

Their experiences sound genuine. It felt like they had the Holy Spirit leading their lives, but more time and interaction would be necessary to prove this better. The ladies wore white caps, and Isabelino had a nice beard without a mustache. He said he used to wear

one. They like to call all Christians their brothers. He seemed to accept our thought of other believers in the world, yet keeping it clearly defined as to communion, etc.

In summary:

Nuevo Durango. Through our travels from one group to another, we have come back once a week to Yacob & Marie Wahl's. As a family, we've found acceptance here. They have allowed us to use a couple rooms in their house as a home base to come back to. They have had some work for all of us. Theresa and Anita have cooked a couple meals, helped wash clothes, haul branches away on horse and wagon, etc. Theresa has had a good rapport with Marie, Anita with the girls and Daniel with the boys. Some other jobs have been milking cows, building on son Heindrich's house, butchering pigs and cows, filling sacks with soya, etc.

Yacob has suggested it would be good to have a few couples settle down close by to fellowship and sing together. They love singing and we've practiced notes quite a bit. This may be the road of entrance into this estranged and isolated colony. Plautdeutsch and High German, as well as the gift to sing, are essential here.

Agua azul. Daniel & Rosa Alvarez, as well as their married daughter Claudelina, appear sincerely interested in the gospel. Spanish and English (as the MCB group close by speaks English) are essential here.

Colonia Florida. Isabelino Ramos and family. Spanish and some knowledge of Guarani are essential here. This group needs leadership. ▲

Book Review

MUSIC in Biblical Perspective

By John Coblenz, published by Calvary Publications and Christian Light Publications, Inc., available at Gospel Publishers, Moundridge, KS.

Contents:

1. Music—An Expression of Man
2. Music—A Moral Issue
3. Testing Music by the Character of God
4. What About the Music Itself?
5. Testing Music by its Appeal
6. Musical Instruments and the New Testament
7. Music and Entertainment
8. We Have a Song—Let's Sing

The author has researched this subject well and gives lucid reasons for why we need to take great care to maintain purity in our singing. In chapter 7, on Music and Entertainment, he quotes a woman in her mid-thirties who attended a gospel concert in Tennessee. Later she was asked why she attended gospel concerts. Her revealing answer:

“First of all, there aren't too many things the whole family can do together these

Brazil ¹⁴ News

days and gospel music is certain family entertainment. The kids love it as much as we do. And, to be entertained while praising God, well, that's just something that really makes you happy.”

Chapter 6, on Musical Instruments and the New Testament, gives a very balanced view on why through the ages the New Testament church has never accepted musical instruments. It also points out how we can damage our position by using arguments that hardly apply to the subject.

This little booklet—only 44 pages—should be read by all, and especially by those who love to sing. I suggest that book agents keep it in stock and suggest it to readers. ▲

This & That

Latvia is one of the Baltic countries and was considered as one of the republics of the defunct Soviet Union. I had no idea we had a brother in this tiny little country so rich in history—that is, until Alexey Yevstafyev showed up on the Colony to spend some time with us. For Eduardo and me, it was an especially pleasant surprise since he spends approximately half of his time working for Gospel Tract doing translation work. We were able to talk shop and compare notes. Yet his visit caused a certain sadness when I saw firsthand again how that Europeans put so much more into the gift of tongues than we Americans, who believe that by speaking English we have an edge over the rest of the world. It isn't unusual for a European to know four, five or six languages. This is especially sad when we stop and think about how desperately the church today needs brothers and sisters who have applied themselves to foreign languages. Alexey plans on visiting us again. We hope it is soon. (By the way, how many of you readers even knew there was such a country as Latvia?)

President Lula. Our president, whom we so feared and prayed the Lord would not permit that a socialist become president, has now been the president of Brazil for over a year. Not everyone will agree with me, but I believe he has been doing very well. His macroeconomic policies are very similar to that of his predecessor. There have been no social eruptions and foreign investors have not pulled out their dollars. Agricultural exports continue to rise.

School has begun again. In the Rio Verdinho School, the teachers are: Dáfanne Batista, Cláudia da Silva and Julia Kramer. There are some 14 students. The teachers at the Monte Alegre School are: Arlete Arantes, Denise Santos, Iara Vieira, Michelle Dirks, Cheyanne Loewen and Starla Holdeman. There are 43 students. Michelle is the only teacher from N America this year. Since she was born here and has dual citizenship, there are no visa problems. The teachers at the Boa Esperança Cong. school are: Fayanna Kramer and Roseane Kramer. I don't know how many students there are in this school. In Tocantins there are three teachers: Barbra Dirks, Carolyn Dirks and Valdinéia Costa, each teaching a small group of students at different locations. The Rio Verde School, which follows the Brazilian calendar, is now halfway through their school year. The teachers are Flávio Oliveira and Ana de Moura.

BN—Some Changes

To say that Brazil News has been erratic of late would be an understatement. A few explanations are in order.

This last year has been very busy. My wife and I work at the Literature Center during the day. Even with Eduardo, my assistant, there is a lot of work. I have four chicken barns. My son takes care of them, but they still demand a certain amount of my time. So the time I have to work on BN is after supper, on into the night.

There are some things we can do even though we are tired or drowsy. Writing isn't one of them. When the mind throttles down, so does creativity. That, in a word, is what has been the problem recently.

A solution is looming on the horizon, but for the next I'm not sure how many months, things may continue slow. So obviously there need to be some changes.

The first one will be a change in the date you see on the front page. From now on the date will be the day, month and year in which the issue has been finished and set to the publisher. The date on this issue is September 4, 2004. The issue number will continue in its normal sequence. The expiration date of your subscription will be determined by the issue number, and not by the date. Thus, even though you may only get an issue every two months for a while, you will still get the same amount of issues for your money. The publisher will notify you when your subscription is about to expire.

I realize this may have been a trial for some of you readers, and apologize for the irregularity of the issues. Please hang in. There a lot of interesting things happening in Brazil which I believe will be of interest to all, several of which are:

The tract work. Brazil has been made responsible for the tract work in all of South America. This means we will be working with both Portuguese and Spanish tracts. It will involve tract tours in neighboring countries. In fact, one is being planned for this month.

Colonization is another subject that is coming into the limelight again, with several new groups in the state of Tocantins and one in the northern state of Roraima. Where the pilot project is underway is *north* of the Equator and only three hours from Miami by air.

Rio Verde today has a population of approximately 130 thousand. There are a lot of interesting things happening here, that we will be reporting on.

Book reviews. We hope to frequently include book reviews.

Patience is a virtue, so please continue to exercise this virtue with BN until we can get back on schedule. We will do our best to make it worth your while.