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# COLOMBIAN NEWS

NUMBER SEVEN

THIS IS A  
CALL TO PRAYER  
FOR  
THE LORD'S WORK  
IN  
COLOMBIA.

Cachipay, Cund., Colombia, S. A.



INFORMATION SERVICE OF THE MENNONITE MISSION IN COLOMBIA

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## RESULTS OF FIVE YEARS OF PERSECUTION

The persecution of Protestants in Colombia, carried on by violent means since 1948, was studied in detail by the 45 delegates to the 4th General Assembly of the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia (CEDEC) during their five-day meeting in Ibaguè, August 10-14, 1953. CEDEC's office of information released the following persecution statistics.

Destruction of Churches. Forty-two church buildings have been completely destroyed by fire and dynamite, and thirty-one other buildings used by Protestant churches have been damaged. During the same 5-year period, ten structures on church properties were confiscated by government officials or civilians backed by National Police.

Protestant Schools Closed. Since 1948, 110 Protestant primary schools have been closed, 54 of them by government order, the others because of violence against Protestants. As there are in Colombia approximately 1,000,000 children of school-age for whom there are no public school facilities, this arbitrary closing of Protestant primary schools has aggravated an already critical educational problem. The 3,343 children of Protestants who attended the schools now closed are being deprived of the opportunity to get a primary education.

Protestants Killed. Fifty-one Colombian Protestants have been murdered because of their religious faith during the 5-year period under study. This mid-20th Century list of martyrs includes men, women, and children. Twenty-eight of the deaths occurred at the hands of the National Police and government officials.

Property Damage. The financial loss sustained by Churches and Missions in Colombia has been over 370,000 pesos (equivalent to U. S. \$148,000) in buildings destroyed, damaged or confiscated. This figure represents but a fraction of the total property loss suffered by the Protestants of Colombia, many of whom have lost farms.

#### CENSUS REVEALS PHENOMENAL GROWTH OF CHURCH

A 51% increase in Protestant Church membership since 1948 was reported to the delegates to the CEDEC Assembly. This rate of growth indicates the tremendous vitality of the still small Protestant movement in Colombia.

It becomes even more significant when evaluated against the background of religious persecution, for the increase occurred during a period when 27% of the Protestant Churches and 38% of their preaching points were closed by the action of National Police and fanatical Roman Catholics.

Over 50,000 Colombians and about 750 foreigners attend Protestant religious services each week, according to the report of CEDEC's Census Committee. The total Protestant constituency in this country is conservatively estimated at over 100,000 people.

In 1948 there were 312 Protestant churches and chapels. During the five years of religious persecution, 57 have been destroyed or closed. During the same period 46 new churches were organized. There are now 202 organized churches open in Colombia.

The growth in Church membership was from 7,908 members in 1948, to 11,951 in 1953. The committee reported 14,991 Colombians enrolled in Protestant Sunday Schools.

#### NEW COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT

On June 13, 1953, the Colombian Army ousted President Laureano Gómez and seized control of the Government. The new president is Lieutenant-General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. He has been very favorably received by his countrymen and he appears to be doing much to restore order, stability, peace and tranquility.

Since his government has been in power there have been less cases of persecution, although six new cases have been reported.

#### RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The freedom of worship guaranteed by the Colombia's constitution has been interpreted by government and Roman Catholic officials during the past year as freedom to worship in churches and chapels, but not the freedom to propagate any faith distinct from the Roman Catholic. Colombian Protestants find themselves prohibited from broadcasting religious programs over the radio, having street meetings, distributing Bibles or other literature, and in general, from making any public expression of their religious faith.

Even the minimum right to worship God in their own churches and chapels, grudgingly conceded to Protestants by the enemies of religious freedom, is not safe from the persecution of fanatical Roman Catholicism. During the past year Protestant Christians have been attacked 49 times while in religious services in their churches, chapels, and homes. The majority of the attacks were led by National Police and Roman Catholic priests.

#### PALERMO CHURCH RETREAT

During the month of July, a group of 25 young people from the second Presbyterian Church of Bogotá came to our school in Cachipay for a retreat. Our school is located on a farm of about 10 or 12 acres and has ample space for retreat purposes.

The young people under the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Hector Valencia (Mrs. Valencia is the former Mary Becker) spent an enjoyable three days studying, worshipping, and playing.

The Young people were very nice guests and our own children very much enjoyed their presence and fellowship. It is our desire that our children have every possible opportunity to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ--and we have found that by sharing our resources with others brings great blessings to ourselves as well as others.

#### NEW PROGRAM MATERIALS

Mrs. LaVerne A. Rutschman has just finished writing and has sent to the General Conference Literature Committee a series of 6 programs to be used by the Junior Christian Endeavor groups of our churches.

The material includes worship programs, stories, and information relative to the work in Colombia. The material is to be printed and is expected to be available this fall.

#### GOSPELS FOR THE BLIND

The American Bible Society has made available in the Spanish language the books of the Bible for the Blind in braille. They are selling these at a very reduced price in order that the blind may be able to purchase them.

Although the children in our school have practically no money, they nevertheless took an offering in order to help one of the blind members of the church in Anolaima. Their offering amounted to over ten pesos and they were able to buy quite a few of the books of the Bible. One little boy gave all that he had-- 2 cents.

#### ARTHUR KEISER FAMILY RETURNS FROM FURLOUGH

Ten months and scores and scores of furlough talks after leaving Colombia the Keiser family has returned to their field of labor. They returned on September the 11th, and were given an enthusiastic welcome back by the children of the school and by their many friends.

Having travelled over 20,000 miles while on furlough, they were glad to settle down once more in their apartment in the boys dormitory. They came back by means of a United Fruit Co. boat which took them to Barranquilla. From there they flew to Bogotá where they were met by Gerald Stucky.

### CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

In a former issue of the Colombian News we had urged you not to throw away your old Christmas greetings but rather to send them to us. Many of you have responded and have literally deluged us with the greeting cards. We have enough of them now for quite some time.

The greeting cards are being used in the school as rewards for children that have good conduct. They are much appreciated and are often sent on to family and friends of the children. Thank you so much for your fine response.

### ALICE BACHERT GOES TO CANADA

Due to the serious illness of her father, Miss Alice Bachert has taken a two months leave of absence to be with her father in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

Alice has been in charge of the evangelistic work in San Javier and La Mesa. The work there has been difficult and has taken much patience and prayer, but the Lord has also blessed the efforts there.

### ANNUAL CONVENTION OF MENNONITES

On the morning of August 8, believers from La Mesa, Cachipay, San Javier, La Esperanza, and Anolaima met in the chapel of the Mission School for a devotional service addressed by Senor Antonio Rojas, superintendent of the Gospel Missionary Union Hospital in Palmira, Valle. This devotional service opened the second annual convention of these churches.

Over 150 people enjoyed a picnic lunch on the school lawn at noon. The afternoon was devoted to business.

The constitution, adopted last year, was revised to permit greater independence on the part of the local churches in keeping with the indigenous plan. This is an effort to nurture strong self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating groups of Christians.

Armando Hernández, a young man from Cachipay, a tailor by trade, was elected president of the organization. Two committees were named, one to procure and develop a plot of land for an evangelical cemetery, the other to study the possibility of forming a corporation legally capable of owning property.

We consider this a forward step in the development of the Mennonite Mission work in this area, realizing that the churches now have the authority to carry on even though legal action or persecution should force the mission as such to be dissolved.

### SPECIAL MEETINGS BRING BLESSINGS

At least once each year the Mennonite churches have been inviting an evangelist from some other part of Colombia to conduct a series of meetings. This year they were very well pleased with Senor Antonio Rogas from Palmira.

Each morning at 5:30 a group of believers met in Cachipay for prayer, pleading with God to revive His church that she might be faithful in witnessing. Believers faithfully brought friends and relatives to the evening meetings. A few accepted God's offer and passed from darkness to light.

As a result of these meetings, a new church membership class has been begun in Cachipay.

### A PLACE TO BE BURIED

As anyone acquainted with Roman Catholic customs and theology knows, Roman Catholic cemeteries are strictly for Roman Catholics and for no one else. Usually across the cemetery fence a plot of ground is reserved for suicides and others who refuse the ministrations of the Roman clergy.

In Colombia almost all government owned cemeteries as well as the ecclesiastical ones are under the control of the established church. To be buried in the "potter's field" is a great dishonor for the family. Prospective believers often hesitate to become members of the evangelical church because of this concern.

Recently, the Colombian Mennonite Churches of this area, with the generous help of the Mission Board, were able to buy a plot of ground which is to be dedicated to this purpose. The location is ideal, a rather level spot at the foot of the eastern range of the Colombian Andes.

### CONFEDERATION OF EVANGELICALS IN COLOMBIA

Very often national church leaders as well as foreign missionaries are heard to lament the presence in Colombia of so many different denominational and mission divisions which European and North American missions have found it necessary to import.

Such divisions, they point out, may have significance in the country of their origin or even in North America, but here they are utter meaningless and, in their opinion, should not exist. We cannot escape the force of this argument. Obviously they are correct.

But today this unhappy situation has been in part mitigated by the violence of persecution during the past five years. Colombian evangelical churches, facing a common front of opposition, have organized themselves into an efficient and authoritative organization known as the Confederation of Evangelical Churches of Colombia.

Once each year delegates from the different churches meet in some central location for five days of prayer, evangelism, and the consideration of items of business related to all. Much of the leadership of the organization is now in the hands of Colombian Evangelical Christians.

Recently the Mennonite Churches sent Armando Hernández, Otoniel La Rotta, and LaVerne Rutschman, to the convention in Ibagué to the Confederation meeting.

Shortly after six o'clock each morning all delegates met for prayer on the lawn of the Presbyterian Bible Institute campus. Each evening an evangelistic service attracted several hundred people. The entire first day of the conference was dedicated to prayer.

Presbyterians, Cumberland Presbyterians, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Mennonites and many other denominations and missions were represented. We discovered there how much we have in common as children of God.

Plans were made for united efforts in evangelism and in education. We were impressed with the fact that in Colombia the Gospel of Jesus Christ has taken precedence over denominational and other organizational divisions.

MISSION ELECTS OFFICERS

In a recent reorganizational meeting, LaVerne Rutschman was re-elected as president for the fiscal year. Gerald Stucky was named secretary.

Arthur Keiser is again to be in charge of the pastoral and evangelistic work in the Cachipay area. Helen Keiser is dietician and in charge of the boys dormitory.

Gerald Stucky is to continue his work in the school for the children in our care (healthy children of leper parents), while Mary Hope Stucky is in charge of the work program for the children and also is house mother for the girls.

Mr. and Mrs. Rutschman are planning to move to Fontibon, (a town near Bogotá) DV, to begin evangelical work there.

Alice Bachert, who has been pioneering some work in San Javier, will probably return to that town upon her return from Canada. She hopes to begin new work in another town soon.

Janet Soldner will be going on furlough in December.

PRAYER REQUESTS

1. Thank God for His marvelous care over us during the past four years of religious persecution.
2. Pray that the new government may give complete religious liberty to all, and may look favorably upon Protestant work.
3. Pray that the new leaders in the Mennonite churches in Colombia may be Spirit guided.
4. Pray for the opening of new areas to the gospel, and especially for the Rutschmans as they plan for the new work.
5. Pray that Alice Bachert may be able to return to her field of labor with renewed health and strength.
6. Pray that the new converts may grow in grace and may be able to overcome every temptation.
7. Pray that your missionaries may day by day be drawn closer to the Lord and be used more effectively in His service.