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COLOMBIAN NEWS



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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THE BURNING TRUTH

Since 1948, through rain and sunshine, the Mennonite Mission has been conducting evangelical services among a group of believers in a large rural area near the town of La Esperanza (the Hope).

In November, 1953, this group of evangelicals, on their own initiative, sublet a large room on the second floor of a building within the town limits for the purpose of holding services each Sunday morning.

For a number of weeks meetings were held with a constantly growing attendance. But due to Roman Catholic opposition, only two days before their Christmas program was scheduled, the contract was cancelled despite the fact that the rent was paid in advance.

Fortunately a sympathizer whose house is located on the central plaza opened his home for the program.

After the program a group of Jesuit priests entered the town. Using a public address system they urged the townspeople to bring all of the Protestant literature which they had received to the central plaza. There it was publicly burned.

BEGINNING THE EIGHTH YEAR IN CACHIPAY

In January we began our eighth year in our work with the children of parents who are suffering with leprosy. We are grateful that the Lord has continued to bless us and has permitted us to go on in spite of many difficulties in the country.

This year we have 68 children in school, and 7 more that we are teaching some specialized studies. Of these children 10 are from the neighborhood and do not live with us. 43 of the children are from leper background or from the leper colony.

Since evangelical children have almost no opportunity to study in public schools, we have been able to receive 20 such children in our school to make possible for them a primary school education.

Seven of the children that have finished the fifth grade are being given some special training in English, typewriting, shorthand, writing and spelling. This is an attempt to prepare them more adequately to earn their own living. They are between the ages of 12 and 17.

These seven children work half days for the school and study half days thus helping to earn their own education.

Three of the teachers that we have this year come from leper-background and have been educated by our school, and are now serving the Lord in the capacity of teacher.

Because of the intense prejudice against Protestants here, we have thought it wise to change the name of our school from "Colegio Evangelico Colombiano" (Colombian Evangelical School) to "Colegio Americano" with the permission of the Presbyterian Mission who has long used that name.

VERNELLE YODER IN CACHIPAY

Vernelle Yoder who during the last year was teaching in Bogota, is this year teaching in our school and at the same time is studying the Spanish language. We welcome her as a valuable addition to our staff.

CHRISTMAS TIME BRINGS MUCH HAPPINESS

Although a large percentage of our children try to go to their homes or to the homes of some friend or relative over the Christmas holidays, nevertheless a substantial number always stay with us for lack of place to go.

Thanks to our friends of the English speaking Union Church in Bogota, Christmas is made very happy for the children. The gifts that they have been sending to the children have been received with much joy and gratitude.

Some of the Colombian evangelical congregations are beginning to take an interest in the work with the children of leper parents and are also sending us offerings to help in the work. Perhaps some day this work can become wholly Colombian.

WHAT A MEASLEY TIME WE HAD!

With the coming of new children from the leper colony in January there came also an epidemic of the measles. Every new year seems to bring its joys!

Already before we realized that the measles were with us, other children had been exposed, and so little by little it spread through the school. Of course all of the children did not become sick at one time - just 3 to 10 at a time. It lasts longer that way.

Since our nurse, Janet Soldner, is at the present time on her furlough in the States, it was urgent to get someone to take care of the sick. Fortunately we were able to get Silvia Diaz, a Colombian evangelical nurse trained in Costa Rica. She has given the sick most excellent care and has won the hearts of all the school by her efficient care of the sick and her willingness to serve in any task.

JANET SOLDNER ON FURLOUGH

In December Miss Janet Soldner who has been serving as nurse in our school in Cachipay left for the States for her furlough. She came to Colombia in 1945, and is at the present time on her second furlough.

Miss Soldner comes from Berne, Indiana, where also live her parents and sister. After a brief period of rest, she has gone to visit the churches of our Conference in behalf of the Lord's work in Colombia.

Alice Bachert who had been in Canada to see her father who was reported to be very sick, has again returned to Colombia and is undertaking her duties in San Javier.

LIVESTOCK FOR LIVE CHILDREN

A few months ago we bought three cows and two calves. We had thought of simply buying three cows without the calves, but when we found out that the calves always go with the cows - we did not refuse them.

It happens that Colombian cows tend to refuse to give their milk if they are not first primed by the calves. Consequently, milking is quite a special task, for it takes more than one to milk a cow. It takes one person to handle the calf while it primes the cow, and the other to quickly milk after the cow has been primed.

We would hardly have believed the above (thinking it simply poor management), but we are becoming convinced! Come down and try it some time.

CO-PASTORS ELECTED IN CACHIPAY

More and more it becomes apparent that the outstanding need on the mission field is for an independent national church.

In view of this need the Cachipay congregation met towards the end of last year and elected four co-pastors. Those elected include a tailor, a barber, a carpenter and a baker.

In order to better prepare themselves for this calling in the Lord's work, these four young men have been taking a correspondence course in Bible study and are also receiving instructions in practice preaching.

The young men have also been receiving practical experience by having charge of prayer meetings and directing the Sunday evening worship services in Cachipay. Besides this practical experience in the local church they also preach (OCCASIONALLY) in Anolaima, La Mesa, and La Esperanza.

A REVOLVING BUILDING FUND

Because of the difficulties Protestants often have in renting a house, and since their incomes are so small that they cannot afford to pay the rent, a plan of mutual aid has been established.

A sum of \$1,700.00 has been placed into a revolving building fund to help the Christians in Cachipay to purchase their own homes. The money will be used to build simple houses which may be purchased by the church members who will then pay a small sum monthly towards their cost.

It is estimated that this sum will build at least three homes. The money will in turn be reinvested to aid others in securing their own homes.

ANOLAIMA PLANS TO BUILD A CHURCH

Be it ever so humble, a church building in Spanish is usually called a temple. A new evangelical church "temple" in a Colombian pueblo does not bring to mind an expensive structure made of the finest of bricks and wood. Usually it can boast little more than a cement floor and a tin roof with simple walls to hold it up.

Economic considerations preclude something more elaborate. A benign climate does not demand more. Believers, joyfully liberated from the stifling sacramentalism of Rome, are happy in a simple meeting house.

The believers in Anolaima, depending largely on a small revolving fund designated by the Mission Board for church building, are making plans to erect their own church.

For years they have been meeting in private homes or patios. They feel strongly that God would have them construct a building which will meet more adequately their worship and educational needs.

Their small savings plus a loan from the Mission's revolving fund will take care of the cost of materials. Most of the work will be done by the believers themselves.

Many sympathizers, hesitant to attend in private homes, will find it easier to participate in Protestant activities in a building dedicated to the service of evangelism and worship.

THEY ARE REALLY POOR

Our readers will remember the story of Tulio Pedraza, a blind believer from the town of Anolaima. His profession of Christ in 1949 cost him his business.

As a dealer in coffins he had been able, despite his physical limitations, to give his family adequate comforts. A competitor, quick to capitalize on don Tulio's conversion, convinced the local priest that "Protestant" coffins could not be used in Roman Catholic burials.

With the able assistance of his wife and the cooperation of his older children, don Tulio began a small home paraffin candle industry. At times he has been able

to realize a modest profit.

Recently, however, competition has increased. Two weeks ago he found himself without paraffin. His working capital was so reduced that to purchase the weekly supply of paraffin would have meant no food for his children.

Last week the three children who are with us at the Mission School were told not to return home for the week-end. There was nothing to eat.

The state does not see its responsibility toward people such as don Tulio. The local evangelical church is financially incapable of helping. The Mission, recognizing fully the dangers involved for the evangelical cause, hesitates to engage in too much direct relief.

Yet here is a worthy family, suffering because of their Christian testimony, desirous of being self-sustaining, that needs and merits help.

POLICEMAN CAUSES DISTURBANCE

For several months we have been visiting the town of La Mesa to assist the small group of evangelicals in their weekly meetings and to enable them to become organized into a self-governing body.

On several occasions stones have been hurled on the roof of the house where meetings were held. On January 10 at 3:00 p.m. just as the opening hymn was being sung, an unusually large rock was thrown on the tin roof of the building.

A hostile crowd of some 40 persons led by a policeman gathered in the street outside of the door. Leaving the meeting to investigate, LaVerne Rutschman was told by this national policeman that no more meetings could be held and that the group would have to disband immediately.

Recognizing their arbitrary nature, his demands were not heeded. After a brief discussion the policeman walked away and the crowd dispersed. The meeting continued without further incident.

Later the mayor promised freedom of worship but forbade the distribution of Protestant literature within the city. We learned later that the policeman involved in this incident had forced the window to the house before the meeting, removed the tracts, and had burned them in the street in front of the meeting place.

With the opening of the new school term, some of the parents find it impossible to attend the meetings. School officials have threatened to deny educational opportunities to the children if they or their parents continue to attend Protestant services.

Despite the various facets of opposition the group continues with their weekly meetings and their daily witness. Their Christian vision will not be dimmed by arbitrary legal restrictions.

CAN THE CANDLE BE BLOWN OUT?

We have often wondered why the established church should be so concerned about the activity of the mere handful of Protestants in Colombia. They number only .1% of the total population, one out of a thousand. Of course we know that any totalitarian system, be it political or ecclesiastic, demands unanimity. In the eyes of the church the Protestant threat is much greater than that of the great hordes of the

nominally Catholic but religiously indifferent who make up the majority of the population in any Latin American country.

In the field of "legal" action the established church has been making tremendous progress even under the new regime. Recently the government has prohibited Protestants from engaging in religious activities outside of their own chapels.

One may be a Protestant but may not tell anyone about it outside of his own church building. This precludes the distribution of tracts, personal work on the streets, or in short, most of the work a missionary traditionally carries on.

Over two-thirds of the country has been declared mission territory of the Roman Church. Protestants are forbidden and the region is closed to them.

There can be no doubt but that the objective of the ecclesiastical authorities is the exclusion of all missionaries from the country and the silencing completely of the national Evangelical testimony. . . . Can the candle be blown out?

PRAYER REQUESTS

1. Pray that the forces of Satan may be overcome with the power of the gospel.
2. Pray that the newly-elected co-pastors in Cachipay may become a power for their Lord.
3. Pray that the many new children in our home and school in Cachipay may all be saved and that they may dedicate their hearts to Him.
4. Pray that the government may have its eyes opened and once more grant religious liberty to Colombia.
5. Pray for Miss Janet Soldner as she speaks to the churches in the States.
6. Pray for Miss Vernelle Yoder as she studies the Spanish language.
7. Thank God for the revived interest in Anolaima.
8. Pray that the missionaries may be Spirit led in all things.

SEC.34.65(e) P.L.&R.

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