

God at Work on the Amazon 2008

God allowed 13 of us to return to Brazil this year to work with the towns and communities along the Amazon River. The team was made up of people from Wisconsin, Florida, Oklahoma and Texas. Four of us, Luanne White, Dianna Grindstaff-Abbott, Jackie Felix and I represented Valley Baptist Church.

Divine Appointment

“Would you come to my house?” A young man approached our team and spoke with Roberto, Pastor Dhemetrio’s brother, and a young man named Arthur (pronounced ah-too) who were visiting with us. I did not know it at the time but the young man had the mind of a small child. Roberto assured him that we would visit his house.

After visiting in another home, we walked to the end of the street where the young man lived. It was at the extreme edge of town, and it was late in the afternoon. We would not have visited this house without the invitation.

When we arrived at the house, it was a bit awkward when his family saw six people, the Brazilian and American team, standing by their house accompanied by this young man. We assured the family that we were visiting in their neighborhood and would like to visit with them. As is virtually always the case, we were invited in.

There were several people in the simple home. As in many homes there were no chairs and we all sat on the floor. The “donna da casa” (lady of the house) was there as well as two grown sons, their wives and children. And, oh yes, the young man responsible for us being there sat in the middle of it all with a big grin on his face.

We began to share how the God who created the universe loves them. We told how we are separated from God because of our sin and how God has provided the way to reconciliation through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As happened several times on this trip, God used each member of the team to share with the family. The donna da casa and two of the other young ladies responded to the message by receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We were able to pray for some serious medical needs the older lady was dealing with. We gave some personal care items for the home. There was a great sense of God’s presence there.

It all happened because God used a young adult man with the mind of a child to find us and invite us to his home. God truly uses the weak things of this world to confound the wise. He did what he could. We did what we could. When placed in the hands of God, that is always enough.

Back to the Future

Two years ago our team visited the community of Anori and met Pastor Dhemetrio, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Anori. I was so impressed with this inspiring pastor that when I came back from our first meeting, I challenged Valley to buy him a boat so he would have the needed transportation to lead his church to reach out further and further along the rivers. We provided the boat and Pastor Dhemetrio is using it to reach people in a marvelous way.

This year we were back in Anori on Monday and Tuesday of our trip. Our children's team held activities and shared God's love with over 100 children, the medical team provided some basic care and the evangelism teams visited homes in the town.

Anori is 120 miles up the Amazon River from Manaus where we boarded our boat, "Harpy Eagle," for the 20-hour trip. Amazon Vision Ministries (AVM) sold the "Marco Polo" last year but retained the right to the name for the new boat that is being built. Currently AVM leases boats for the scheduled trips.

Sick and You Visited Me

Encouraging people who are already followers of Jesus Christ is an important part of our ministry in Brazil. We had the opportunity to do this working side by side with our Brazilian brothers and sisters in Christ in Anori. Two visits stand out. One was to an 84-year-old man. His daughter, Benedita, cares for him. He is thin and frail, barely able to sit up on the side of his bed. He has been a believer for a long time. We shared Scripture, sang hymns and prayed with and for him. God's presence was powerful in that simple worship time as a few of God's people gathered together to honor His name.

Another visit was to a young mother, Catia. Only 27 years old, she was critically ill. It was very difficult for her to breathe, and she could barely speak. We visited, shared and prayed with her. Marcus Sizemore visited the next day and while he was there Catia stopped breathing and had to be rushed to the small poorly equipped hospital in Anori. A few days later we received word that Catia had died. We thank the Lord that He allowed us to minister to Catia in the last days of her life.

Provisions not Promises

"Others promised but nothing was done." Senhor Marcus, the patriarch of the community of Bom Jesus, made this observation after God used our team to provide funds for building materials for a new church. Currently there is no church in Bom Jesus. Senhor Marcus donated land for a church building. One of the strict practices of our team is never to promise, but to meet needs as we can. We looked at the small parcel of land and envisioned how God would use this place for His glory. We were able to give Pastor Dhemetrio enough money to purchase most of the construction materials. It was a

glorious moment as our team, along with our Brazilian brothers and sisters stood together hand in hand on the site of the future church building and prayed that it would be a place to magnify the name of Jesus. For three years people had promised to help, but nothing had been done.

Naked and You Clothed Me

God always moves on the hearts of people to provide for the physical needs of the people along the river. This year Luanne White made up personal care packages containing soap, washcloth, toothbrushes and tooth paste. One of the first visits we made after we left Anori was to an elderly couple. They literally had nothing. The man graciously received us into his home, apologizing for not having chairs. He told us that his wife had been bedridden for the past two years. Jackie and our translator Renata went back into the room where she lay. They found a small elderly woman, unable to rise from her hammock. Joe had a soft cotton t-shirt the ladies gave to her. She had nothing to wear. While the rest of the team went on to the next home, I went back to our boat to get two of the personal care kits. When I gave the kits to the man and told him they were for him and his wife, you would have thought I had given him a pot of gold. I will never forget how he threw his thin arms around me and repeatedly thanked me for the gifts.

Dianna Grindstaff-Abbott, also from Valley Baptist Church, was led to take fabric for the ladies on the river. Dianna communicated with a lady who had ministered in Brazil to learn the most practical way to package the fabric. Each zippered plastic bag contained 3 yards of fabric, matching thread, needles, pins, scissors, and a printed gospel presentation. Dianna worked with the ladies at Valley to make up 29 packages and then packed them all in her luggage. It was a joy to see the faces of the ladies light up as they accepted this very useful and needed gift.

Beverly Russell from Valley Baptist Church crocheted dish cloths and scouring pads. Jackie gave these at every home we visited.

Each member of the team brought an extra suitcase full of clothes. While the boat traveled, we sorted and bagged the clothing. As we visited in homes and saw needs, we gave the appropriate clothing. The children's clothing is very important because most families are so large. At one home we visited, Jackie Felix asked the lady how many children she had. "Seven," she replied, and then added that she had had eight but one child had died. "How old are you?" Jackie asked. She stunned us when she said, "Twenty-four."

Jack Janssen knew he had heard from God. He didn't quite understand why, but he told his wife Debbie, that he needed to buy a whiteboard to take to Brazil. She could not understand why Jack wanted the whiteboard. On several previous trips working with children, they'd never needed one. Yet, Jack bought the whiteboard and brought it with him. At the community of Liberdade I, there was a boy in a wheelchair. God immediately brought the whiteboard to Jack's mind. It fit perfectly across the arms of the

wheelchair, making a surface so the young man could write, draw and color. This illustrates why I have relied on Jack for several years as a team leader. This year he led our children's ministry team with distinction.

The Uttermost Parts

The leader of Liberdade I, David, told us of two lakes back in the forest. One was about 45 minutes away by johnboat. The other was even more remote. On Thursday morning, Pastor Dhemetrio, Pastor Eli, Joe Rozell, David and I set off for the lakes. Our first visit was to the lake we could get to with our johnboat. The other visit would require a boat ride, a walk and then a canoe ferry across the lake to the village.

The trip took us down the Amazon River, through a channel off the river and through the flooded forest. Forty-five minutes and two intense rain showers later we were at the village on Lake Paracuba. It is a breathtakingly beautiful lake. The beauty of the area and the hard lives of the people are in stark contrast, especially in these remote areas.

After we arrived and introductions were made, everyone in the community came to the small school building (about 12'X 15'). Joe, Pastor Eli and I shared the gospel story and gave away all the clothing we brought with us.

The next day Pastor Eli and Marcus Sizemore, a Physician's Assistant, went back to the lake community to meet some medical needs. The community was very grateful we had made the effort to come to them the first time; they were overjoyed when part of our team went back the second time. They are very interested in building a church in their community because the trip out to the main channel of the river is long and difficult, especially when the water is low.

We did not have a chance to visit the other lake. Our boat had to move on to a different community. It seems there is always one more place we could have gone, if only we could have had one more day. Perhaps God allows us to experience this frustration so we will always have the burden to return and minister to more communities.

Just the Facts

During this trip our team:

- † Conducted five worship services
- † Cared for 338 people with medical needs
- † Provided activities and shared the gospel with 253 children
- † Registered 85 adult decisions for Christ
- † Visited approximately 200 homes in one town and four different villages
- † Distributed hundreds of articles of clothing and all of the sewing and personal care kits we had with us

† Donated USD\$2020 toward construction of a simple church building in the community of Bom Jesus (Good Jesus). The total cost for this building will be about USD\$5000.