

Brazil Mission Trip 2016

April Gilbert

I felt led to go on a mission trip to Brazil after serving on a Point Loma Love Works team last year in Acre and Rondonia. Our translator Igor Vale and I kept in contact so I approached him about coming as an individual. Even before I arrived he assisted me with planning and preparation, as well as dealing with my lost luggage over the phone. When I arrived he and Val greeted me at the airport. They were friendly and welcoming, sharing their home and preparing a place for me there.

The first three days were spent preparing for Vacation Bible School in Manaus. I was able to help with their son's care, decorated the church and classrooms, learned some of the songs, and prepared art materials for the students. I walked in the surrounding community passing our invitations to the event with the young adults. In spite of my lack of Portuguese language skills the church was welcoming and made every effort to make me feel welcome and part of God's family. The fourth and fifth day were spent on the actual vacation bible school. It was a joyful time learning and praising God. Many children brought their parents to church after that. We were also fortunate when the Jesus March went past the church and I was able to participate in praising God with Brazilians. During this busy time there was a missionary named Maria visiting from Sao Paolo preparing for 6 months in the field at a small village. Igor and she met and prepared for her mission. After seeing her off at the boat on Monday we enjoyed a family day on the shores of the River Negro. Tuesday we headed by bus to Novo Airao. This small community church in the jungle was celebrating their 9th anniversary. Igor included me as he met with the pastors, offered assistance in preparations, and preached in the evening. As an American it was such an honor to participate with local people I couldn't meet without the language, logistical, and personal support of someone known and respected by the church. The love, respect, and admiration they felt at seeing Igor, Val, and their son was apparent. The next day the pastor came and met with Igor again and later we headed home. Another missionary Carlos Cunha, arrived from Sao Paolo. On Sunday between services we visited the Jesus boat which will carry missionaries down the river: holding 30 people, hammocks, and equipment. This vessel can be used to train pastors, and conduct medical exams and treatment. 4th of July

was Val's birthday and we were able to celebrate with a river cruise and animal sighting. Then we traveled by small motorboat up river to two churches, one was the community of Sao Sebastian. There Igor met with Maria to check on her as well as the local pastor. We worshipped with the local church Igor and Carlos led the service and prayed over each member of the church. One of the most moving events in my visit to Brazil occurred that night as I slept in a hammock next to the church. I heard voices and furniture being moved. The people began singing "Usa Me." I love that song and was compelled to join them. It appeared that people had felt the spirit leading them to worship in the dark, praising God for His goodness and bringing missionaries to them.

Before I went to Brazil the media in the United States was full of stories about Zika and other mosquito borne diseases. I bought repellent, a mosquito net, and treated my clothing with Permethrin. I took shots and Malaria pills. I only ever saw one mosquito. I got a few bites on my legs that never even itched. No one I spoke to knew anyone who caught Zika in the Manaus area. I'm so glad I didn't let it prevent me from a wonderful trip. I didn't want to leave and wish I could go back right now.

I want to respectfully share an observation I made as I watched Igor and Val pour their love, lives, and energy into the local church and the Amazon region. This area is vast: the largest state in Brazil at 1,559,159.1 kilometers; covered in water, mountains, few roads, and small distant communities. Many places do not have internet or phone service so to reach people they have to physically go there to train and evangelize. This creates a big expense. The boat trip to Sao Sebastian was the only expense I knew about because I asked \$130.00, we also had to take a boat to see the Jesus Boat, and a bus to visit Novo Arao. Even travelling to the local church in Manaus for a family of three plus the visiting missionaries was done by bus since they have no car. That trip is made at least four times a week for services. This makes every trip last around an hour each way and difficult to navigate for out of town missionaries in a new place. To make a bigger impact they really need a car and some kind of travel allowance to get to the communities they are to serve.