

REPORT FOR JANUARY 2008

January 2008

Dear brethren,

January has been a very exciting month for us and the work in this area. Dana and I are both well, as we trust you are. It has been cooler, with highs several days this week only in the high 70's. Just so you don't think it never gets cold here, the low in Aibonito (a town in the mountains) was 45 Wed. morning.

We began Jan. at home—New Year's Eve has traditionally been greeted with a lot of fireworks and even gunshots, so many that 5-10 people were seriously injured or killed by stray bullets. By the 10th, all the brethren were back home, so our attendance since then has been 11 in English and 6 in Spanish.

I was in Dominica from the 14th-22nd, spending the first 3 days in La Plaine, working with Elkin Vigilant. I had to spend the first night in Antigua because our plane was delayed and you can't fly into Dominica after dark—no runway lights. Tues. we visited an older brother who had quit attending—he has a bad knee and no one in the church has transportation, so it IS difficult for him, but he was at Bible class that night. Wed. we went to 2 studies in the morning and Thur. we had 3. Charlie Norman arrived Wed. night, so the 3 of us went to all the studies on Thur. and visited with an influential couple in the liberal church in Roseau, who are disturbed by the advance of liberalism there, on Friday. Brother and Sister Bass seem to be serious about being Christians and zealous for the Lord. Elkin has been talking with them for a couple of years and they now understand why some of the liberal practices are wrong. I guess they are both at least in their 60's and he is almost blind, but they still have influence. In Dominica we are now seeing the second generation of liberal preachers, who have been trained at the school of preaching in Trinidad, which has become more liberal. As a result these preachers are more liberal than the preachers they replaced, and as many of you have seen first hand, things their predecessors wouldn't think of saying, the next generation is doing. I'm praying that this will open many brethren's eyes.

We left Elkin in Roseau to take care of some business and we went on to Vielle Case, where we stayed until Tues. We spent Friday night and Saturday visiting with all the brethren, including Alphonso Graneau, a preacher who was raised in Vielle Case, but has been preaching in another village (Salisbury). He has recently been "replaced" by a preacher with full support (Alphonso works for a furniture maker and preaches on Sunday), at the behest of the other preacher's "elders". I've met him before and he's heard me preach, but that was about it. This time we were able to discuss some things with him and get to know him. So far I'm impressed with Alphonso.

My purpose in Vielle Case was to teach on the sponsoring church/church cooperation and institutions, which I did at the 2 Sunday services. I was very pleased with the brethren's response—they were ahead of me in the area of church cooperation and made some local applications I had not made. In the area of institutions, I don't think they disagreed, but will have to work through this, as one of their young men is presently in the school of preaching in Trinidad. Alphonso in particular understood about the problems of a sponsoring church and church cooperation—we discussed that with him afterwards. The other we'll have to see—he is also a graduate of the preaching school. I think there is good potential that he can be taught further and will accept all the truth. The church at Vielle Case needs a preacher and he has expressed interest in the past, so I'm hoping we can continue to work with him and he will come along to the point that he can be supported to preach there.

Mark Carbon, a member of the English speaking church, invited about 25 people to services (in Spanish) on the 21st and 25 of them showed up. Most of them were back on the 28th—about 22 that time. On the first Sunday Mark had told them we started in Spanish at 10:30, which is about an hour too early, so they began trickling in to the English Bible class about 10:35. So everybody got excited about their presence, as you can imagine. Patsy Fossas, another member of the English speaking church took the 5 children and taught them apart. The children were so excited about it, the next Sunday morning they were hurrying their parents—"We have to go to church today". None of our visitors had Bibles and don't know much about it either—not even enough to know there is an Old & New Testament. We received some Bibles free from the Lockman Foundation (NASB) to give away, so we gave each adult one. Since they all have the same Bible, as I preached the 2nd Sunday I would give out the page number first, then the chapter and verse and so we all could find it. Ed and I tried to visit 4 or 5 of them Tuesday night, but didn't find any of them at home. However, we spoke with all but one of them and they assured us they would be there Sunday and 2 of them want us to come teach them in their home. All but one of them are Dominicans and know each other, so they can encourage and even teach each other. We are excited by these prospects and ask for your prayers as we teach them. Our attendance jumped from 6 to 30, so the 20 new song books we bought are almost sufficient—we've ordered 20 more.

In Nov. one of the members of the English speaking church bought a coffee maker, coffee, cups, sweetener, etc. and brought it to the church building. They have had coffee between worship & Bible class in the past, although they've not done it in at least 2 ½ years. This was about a week before everybody scattered for the holidays so we had agreed we would talk/study this issue once everybody got back. Mark, who bought it all, wanted to discuss it on Sunday, during the Bible class, but understood we should not do it if we had visitors, which we have been having lately. So last night we discussed it. 4 of us are opposed to the practice and while those who "favor" it see nothing wrong with it, they are willing to not do it to promote unity. One of the stronger members now understands why we are opposed to it, and I think over time she may accept it, but the coffee pot is going. We will continue to teach on authority and trust the Lord to give the spiritual growth. The Spanish speaking church understands that there is no authority for such things in the work of the church.

If all goes as planned, Dana and I will be at the Florida College lectures next week, and then take 5 days to visit family & friends in FL.

Brethren, we pray the Lord may continue to guide us as we work here and appreciate your support—financial as well as in prayer. The brethren themselves still need much teaching and strengthening and 20 visitors is quite a load to attend to. It is hard to believe that we have already been here 8 months, but it is true. It has taken us that long to settle in and to get the brethren excited enough to reach out to others. Next Sunday I will complete 28 years of preaching full time.

Your brother,

Tol Burk
Caparra Terrace, San Juan, PR