

PASTORAL VISITS

In September 2003, Mez and Miriam McConnell, together with their two young children Keziah and Lydia, went out with UFM to work in Brazil. Following their initial year in Belem, they had moved to São Luis.

As members of Swindon Evangelical Church, Mez and Miriam had already spoken with the leadership team about the issue of pastoral support. The elders agreed that every effort would be made to ensure that a pastoral visit would be made every two years while on the field.

So, in October 2005, Paul Williams (pastor), together with his wife Ruth, flew to Brazil for a two-week visit.

What are the benefits of a pastoral visit ?

The Missionary Is Encouraged

Travelling on three flights to North-East Brazil was a reminder of how isolated Mez and Miriam are from family, friends, and familiar surroundings. They need much encouragement. In addition to daily discussion, Paul and Ruth arranged with them to set aside two specific evenings to talk openly together about the work, and about the missionaries themselves. This was essential, and proved to be a great help. Mez and Miriam had previously stressed how vital it would be for Ruth to visit, so that Miriam could share with another woman. The home church were fully supportive of this too.

Shortly after the visit, Mez and Miriam sent out their monthly update. Part of this read as follows :

"...We managed to sit down with them and talk through some of the issues going on in our lives at the moment. We talked through just about everything and were greatly encouraged just by them being here."

The Pastor Is Refreshed

By visiting a different culture, the Pastor's experience is broadened. He is taken out of his daily routine, and may discover that one or two of his carefully guarded 'principles' are more cultural than biblical. He also sees for himself the kinds of challenges the missionaries are facing. For this reason, Paul and Ruth made it clear that they did not want Mez and Miriam to break from their regular weekly pattern of life. This was to be a working visit, not a sunshine trip. Having said that, the visit to Brazil resulted in a pastor and wife who were

refreshed, with a greater vision for the work of the gospel, and an even greater love for the missionaries.

The Church Is Informed

On the Sunday evening following their return, a presentation was given at Swindon Evangelical Church. Another supporting local church joined them, together with family, friends and other supporters. This was a great occasion. The meeting was planned for 5.30pm, so that children could be there too. Recent pictures were shown using powerpoint. The church were encouraged to hear how Mez and Miriam had endeared themselves to the christians in São Luis, and how excellent their Portuguese had become. Everyone was pleased to hear about the progress of the work. The challenges were shared as well.

One of the members later commented that a visual presentation like this helps members of the church to remember people and situations much better for prayer and practical help.

Perhaps the greatest encouragement of all came straight after the presentation to the church, as one of the members approached the Pastor and said "Thank you – I now feel as though I am a part of the work."

Is it beneficial for pastors to visit the mission field ?

Yes it most certainly is. The missionaries are encouraged. The pastor is refreshed. The church is informed.

When the church at Philippi were concerned for the welfare of the Apostle Paul, they did more than simply write a letter: they sent Epaphroditus to visit him on the 'field' (Philippians 4v18).

Surely we can do the same. ■



Paul and Ruth Williams
Swindon Evangelical Church



Top: Paul and some of the young people at São Luis.

Above: Mez and Miriam McConnell.

Left: Paul, Mez and two fellow workers.