

Theology students are eager to learn

NICARAGUA- Students taking the theological education courses in Chinandega, Nicaragua completed their first intensive course of studies in October.

Thirteen men and 22 women first studied an “Introduction to the New Testament” taught by Rev. Kurt Reinhardt (Trinity, Kurtzville, Ont.). The course began with a brief look at each of the 27 books learning about the writer, the reason for the writing and some of the key teachings in the book. Each subsequent day began with a brief test on the material from the previous day.

“There is an excitement in these students,” reports Rev. Dr. Ralph Mayan who taught Introduction to Christian Doctrine. “They have a multitude of questions... Some are questions of personal interest, but many are ministry questions.”

Although the course load is heavy the students were anxious to read the Scriptures. After class they gathered around the lectern for more questions and answers.

The doctrine class includes studying the teachings relating to the authority of Scripture; inspiration and use of Scripture; what the Scriptures teach us about the person



Students enrolled in theological studies in Nicaragua

of God; creation and the fall into sin; the purpose of the law; and the promise that is ours in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Mayan said that “with this kind of class, it is a joy to teach and to be involved in the discipline of learning together.”

The students now have the schedule for all their classes over the next two years. The next classes will take place January 23 to February 3, 2012. Rev. Dr. Roger Humann, professor emeritus of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, is arranging for all courses and teachers in consultation with Rev. Dr. Leonardo Neitzel, LCC’s mission executive.

With this kind of class, it is a joy to teach

This is the fourth theological education class conducted by Lutheran Church–Canada in Nicaragua and the first since the formation of Iglesia Luterana Sínodo de Nicaragua in 2008. The two-year intensive program prepares men for ordination as pastors and the women as commissioned deaconesses.

Partner In Mission



with

Concordia Lutheran Mission Society

(An Auxiliary of LCC)



CLMS
3074 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB, R3K 0Y2
Toll Free: 1-866-799-2567
concordiamissions.org

No mission-designated funds were used to pay for this ad.



Pastor Kurt Reinhardt and translator



Rev. Dr. Ralph Mayan continues discussion after class

Vibrant mission-minded outreach in Brazil

After several years away, I decided recently to visit my home country Brazil, where all my relatives still live. I was impressed with the progress Brazil is making – surprised by its many changes, both positive and negative. The Brazilian economy is growing rapidly. In fact, it is one of the largest and fastest growing economies in the world. Job opportunities are plentiful and capital investment is safe.

Brazil is also set to host the 2014 World Cup of soccer, and groups are lining up to invest in its promotion. In cities where the national team is scheduled to play, the cost of homes and properties near the stadiums has skyrocketed; they have more than tripled in value already. The country is also increasing its police forces in preparation for 2014, giving them special training to meet the demands of the event. In Rio de Janeiro especially, an enormous financial investment is being made to crack down on drug cartels, trafficking and the criminal activity rampant in the favelas (poor shanty town settlements).

The downside

Along with these improvements, I was sad to see the rise of faith-exploitation, as fanatic preachers and religious groups have preyed on large groups of the population. Television preachers, miracle-makers and religious-show performers have become millionaires, building empires through the exploitation of everyday people. Spiritism, sorcery, syncretism, Jehovah's Witnesses, idolatry and charismatic sects are all on the rise.

The result is that many people live in great confusion when it comes to religion. Among Christians, many are being led away from a truly biblical Christianity, to the extent that some seem content to worship simultaneously at God's altar and the devil's. While often called a "Christian nation," many in Brazil do not profess the Christian faith. Of those that do, many are terribly confused because of the fanatical teachings rampant in the country, and because of a general



Rev. Dr. Leonardo Neitzel and his wife, Maria (centre back row) enjoyed visiting with former parishioners in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

lack of knowledge of the Word of God. Too often, people are more attached to their superstitions (eg, Mariolatry and "saintolatry," relying on the special powers of images and amulets) than to a Scripture-based Christianity.

Something to ponder

During the month I was there, what struck me most was just how widespread and popular these promoters of false-religion are. They are so off the mark when it comes to a Christ-centred, biblical Christianity, and yet they are present everywhere, delivering their messages and "selling their products" anywhere people can be found – on television and radio stations, through social media, in homes, public transit, businesses, and in the streets and public markets. It's a 24/7 enterprise for profit! Their places of worship and theatres are packed all day every day, week in and week out. If only we, possessing the true unaltered and unchanging Gospel of Jesus Christ as we do, would be somehow as bold as these 'peddlers of God's Word'!

Fortunately, I had the privilege to visit some Lutheran congregations during my time in Brazil, and I was touched by their tremendous efforts in reaching out to their communities with the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

and also by their vibrant corporate worship services. We understand, of course, that the way we worship or reach out to others does not change, contribute to, alter or 'improve' upon the Word of God. That Word is what it is. Amen! In fact, the opposite is true. As God's people abide in His Word, in the means of grace, and in the fellowship of believers, their way of worshipping and witnessing is positively affected: it becomes current, lively, vibrant and involving.

It was rewarding to be part of a very interactive worship service in one congregation in particular that I visited: on a vertical level, as God came to us in His Word, in preaching, and in the proclamation of forgiveness; and on the horizontal level, as we worshipped with one another, confessing the Christian faith together. The service did not lack any rubric of our own Lutheran service, and was intentionally interactive and participatory. In fact, the pastor was aided during the service by several congregationally-appointed lay assistants. There was joy among the congregation over how the Gospel had been proclaimed by members during the week, and joy for the visitors who

continued on page 48



**Hurting
from
Abortion?**

A Word of Hope can help.

1-888-217-8679

www.word-of-hope.org

Confidential Caring

**Lutherans For
Life - Canada** 

Vibrant mission-minded outreach in Brazil continued from page 39

had been touched by the love of Jesus through their witness.

At another congregation in Northeast Brazil, a very special Reformation Sunday service was held that included a confirmation ceremony and a celebration of the Lord's Supper. A great number of visitors were in attendance. Youth and young adults led the congregation in singing contemporary songs focused on the Sunday's theme: Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone.

It was also exciting to see a number of visitors had come that day specifically to pick up their orders of a yearly devotional book called *A Mighty Fortress*. The book is put out by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, and many visitors had

come to pick up copies to distribute to family members and other non-Christian friends. At the end of the service, the congregation sang "A Mighty Fortress," and then many went forth with the goal of sharing the devotional book (and Christ) with others.

May the Holy Spirit continue to motivate, strengthen and encourage LCC's partner the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brazil in its witness of the Gospel. May He also be with each LCC congregation, strengthening and encouraging us in our efforts to reach out to others, build bridges for the sake of the Gospel, and welcome all people into our corporate worship services.

Rev. Dr. Leonardo Neitzel is the executive for mission and social ministry for Lutheran Church-Canada.