

Articles:

- Reflecting on God's gifts to us this year (1)
- Recounting on our radical journey to bring young volunteers to La Mesa (2)

Prayer Concerns:

- Ask God for wisdom as we set our ministry priorities for our final six months in Colombia.
- Pray for the members of the RAD team as they continue to adjust to the culture and language and define their service assignments.
- Give thanks to God for the first two baptized members of the Mennonite church plant in Anapoima, and pray that others would take this step of faith.
- Remember church planters Martín and Elsy González and their support team (of which we are a part) as they raise funds for the coming year. Also ask God to grant the church a permanent meeting space.
- Pray for principal Guillermo Vargas as he makes hiring decisions for the coming school year. Pray that qualified teachers with strong personal faith can be found.

News from the Kauffman family in La Mesa, Colombia

Christmas Reflections



Warmest Christmas greetings from La Mesa! With great joy we prepare our hearts to celebrate Jesus' birth. It's a beautiful time to reflect on the many gifts we've received throughout the year.

Undoubtedly the safe arrival of our second child, Anna Sophia, on September 2, is the biggest blessing our family received this year. She delights us with her luminous smiles, adorable coos and inquisitive gazes. We are thankful that Abigail has assumed the "big sister" role with grace and tenderness.

The visit of siblings in July was a wonderful gift for our family. We are so grateful they took time and resources to come and experience life in La Mesa. We had many wonderful evenings together playing games, relaxing, and creating new inside jokes together. Most importantly, they were able to meet the friends here that have become our second family. Having family members in the U.S. who understand our life in Colombia will make the transition back to the States easier next summer.

It also was a very gratifying school year at Colegio Americano Menno. Aaron successfully managed large classrooms of middle and high school students (35 - 45 students), teaching English and Religion. Based on national standardized tests, the school once again received a Superior rating, with high marks in English. We are thankful for the

wonderful relationship we have with English teacher Ruth Daza and are pleased to see the positive results of working together. It feels satisfying to complete a second full year of classes and to be familiar with the school routines.

The arrival of the RAD team 6 weeks ago has been a source of joy and excitement in our lives. Preparing for their arrival took some extra work (see page two for details) but we are delighted to see them settled in their host families, Spanish classes, and various service opportunities. Many of the activities they are involved in are things we would *like* to do but simply cannot due to other family and job responsibilities. We're so appreciative of their willingness to come, serve and learn for these 8 months.

We cannot forget to give thanks for another year of health and safety in a country such as Colombia. It is a place steeped in a seemingly intractable armed conflict, where poverty and violence are daily realities for many. Yet this Christmas season we give thanks for new life, for hope, for the joy of family and friendship. And like the Israelites awaiting the promised messiah, we long for the Prince of Peace to be born among us in this land.



Aaron makes Christmas cards with children at the vacation Bible school in Anapoima.

Aaron & Laura
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*Trust in the Lord with all
your heart and lean not
on your own
understanding; in all
your ways acknowledge
him, and he will make
your paths straight.*

Proverbs 3:5,6

**Our Support Team
from
Zion Mennonite Church**

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Read more
about our ministry in
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Our Radical Journey: Preparing for the RAD Team

Last November we sat in our living room with Linda Shelly, Mission Network director for Latin America, talking about the possibility of receiving a group of young volunteers through the RAD (Reaching and Discipling) program. A year later five young women were sitting with us in that same space, sharing a Thanksgiving meal.

It was a long, sometimes stressful process to turn that initial conversation into reality. We felt enthusiasm when Darrell Gascho, RAD program director, visited us in February. We experienced anxiety as we awaited the June 1 deadline for applications to see if enough young adults would sign up for the financially strapped program to continue.

The deadline came and went, and we heard nothing. After an excruciating week of silence Darrell finally shared the good news that we would indeed have a team coming to Colombia. At first, we were elated. Then came the sober realization that we would be responsible for these young adults. Of course we had known this since February, but it didn't begin to sink in until we heard the confirmation that there was in fact a team to send.

Immediately we began working on the visas that would allow the volunteers to serve in Colombia for 8 months. There was a flurry of e-mails back and forth with Darrell and Linda, and several conversations with church leaders in Bogotá to nail down the logistics of the visa application process. Then we had to wait for passport numbers from the volunteers. We needed them in order to process documents here in Colombia that then needed to be mailed to the US before the volunteers could apply at the Colombian consulate in Chicago.

Because of the passport logjam in the US, we were worried we might not have them in time for the team's late October arrival. To complicate matters further, Linda, who needed to sign some of the documents for Mission Network, was only in the office sporadically due to a busy fall traveling schedule. We had to coordinate things just right for the visas to work out on time. After several trips to Bogotá and a last minute dash to get signatures, we were able to send the visa documents to Linda just before she left on an extended trip in mid September.

In the meantime, we had to arrange host families for the five volunteers to live with during their time in La Mesa. We were able to find four families quite easily, but the fifth family eluded us for several weeks. A month before the RAD team's arrival, we finally convinced one more family to participate in hosting. This gave us just enough time to hold some orientation meetings for the families in the weeks leading up to the team's arrival.

It was October, and everything was nearly ready. We only needed to finish organizing a weeklong orientation in Bogotá for the volunteers. By the time they arrived on October 29, we had everything lined up for them to meet important church leaders, learn about the culture, and get an overview of the political situation before moving to La Mesa. Thankfully, we had developed connections with just the right people to help with transportation, food preparation, and the orientation sessions to make the week a success. On Friday, November 2, we took them to La Mesa to finally meet their families.

We already knew each of the RAD team members a little bit from their application files and through e-mail contact. But there is nothing like meeting someone in person. We have truly enjoyed getting to know them and the gifts and experiences they bring. In the last six weeks they have been getting to know their families, studying Spanish, and helping out with church ministries in La Mesa and Anapoima. We've also been helping them adjust to culture shock and homesickness.

The process to bring the team to Colombia was a journey in itself. But now the real radical journey lies in the months ahead. Keep us all in your prayers.



Enjoying Thanksgiving dessert with the members of the RAD team (L-R): Stephanie Hollenberg, 18, Elkhart, Ind.; Rachel Voran, 19, Newton, Kan.; Amy Bradshaw, 19, North Newton, Kan.; Karin Esh, 24, Ephrata, Pa.; Melina Hunsberger, 18, Hollsopple, Pa. For more about the RAD program go to: www.radicaljourney.org