

Articles:

- Reflections on our first year in Colombia
 - Leaving Everything to Follow Jesus
 - What We Have Gained
 - What We Have Lost

Prayer Concerns:

- Pray for the MCC-sponsored HIV-AIDS conference we plan to attend in Cali, Colombia, on November 11th.
- Give thanks for the growing youth group and pray for several outreach events planned for October and November in which they will participate.
- Pray for the La Mesa congregation as it looks for a new pastoral couple for the coming year.
- Remember us as we finalize health kits for disadvantaged families in the town of Anapoima to be distributed on November 18th.
- Pray for teachers and students at Colegio Americano Menno as they finish the school year. Many of the students have to make up work, which stresses out them and the teachers.

News from the Kauffman family in La Mesa, Colombia

Reflections on Our First Year

One year of our lives. The older we get, the less significant that amount of time seems. And yet a lot can happen in a year. Getting to know new friends. Losing touch with old ones. Acquiring a new way of speaking. Struggling to communicate clearly. Discovering new abilities. Uncovering old faults. Gaining spiritual insight. Recognizing how little you actually know.

Jesus warns us against looking back once we've put our hand to the plow. We don't feel we've done that, but we do realize how much we left behind. Loving, supportive family. An active faith community with many young adults our age. Stable, meaningful jobs. A comfortable house in a safe, quiet neighborhood. An appreciation and understanding of the local culture.

Perhaps that's why some found our decision to leave so baffling. We had so many of the things that people look for. If we were not quite living the American dream, at least we were approximating the American *Mennonite* dream.

Leaving Everything to Follow Jesus

It was precisely when we began to feel so comfortable that God disquieted our souls with the call to go. Our earlier brushes with people and cultures of the global South had not just left an imprint on the surface of our lives. Those encounters had gotten under our skin.

So we moved to Colombia, one of the murder, kidnapping and drug capitals of



Aaron's parents, Rose and Dennis Kauffman, came for two weeks in July.



Mennonite
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Ericka and David Gingerich, MNM workers in Ecuador, visited us in August.

the world. We soon learned the news headlines overemphasize the negative. (As if that shouldn't have been obvious.) The differences were significant, but not like night and day. True, we didn't know anyone. But the church seemed vibrant, even if there weren't many people our age. We had job descriptions, but didn't really know what all our work would entail. Our hosts found us a very nice place to live, with such a large backyard that it made us nervous to think what might be back there at night. And if the neighborhood wasn't exactly quiet (Principal Guillermo had warned us that Latin America was a noisy culture), it definitely seemed safe. Despite some of the surprising similarities, it still didn't feel like home.

A passage from Mark (10:28-30) has come to mind often during this year.

Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

Continued on page 2.

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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Prayer Coordinator
Mark Mast

Church Communicator
Sharon Showalter

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First Year Reflections, Continued

While we don't presume to have left nearly as much as many followers of Jesus have in the last two millennia, we identify with Peter's statement, and find comfort in Jesus' reply. We've already mentioned some of the things we left behind. What has the hundredfold gain been for us in this first year of following Jesus in Colombia?

What We Have Gained

Gastronomically, we've enjoyed the bounteous fruit harvest produced in our backyard: oranges, tangerines, limes, mangos, bananas, soursop and avocados.

Certainly in the relationships we've formed we have seen evidence of this recompense. We've made lifetime friendships with Pastor Martín Gonzalez and his family, school colleague Ruth Daza, several of the Mennonite Central Committee workers, and our fellow Mission Network volunteers in Ecuador, David and Ericka Gingerich.

The spiritual harvest in our lives—and we believe in the lives of those we minister to—has been rich and plentiful. We've been immersed in a very different style of meeting God in worship, and the last few months, it's actually begun to be meaningful. Also, in a setting where security cannot be taken for granted, we've sensed a renewed dependence on God's presence and protection. And the relative simplicity of life here has made us realize just how many of the things we thought we needed before were really quite unnecessary.

We've received positive feedback about the ways we partner with the school and church. A student evaluation of teachers gave Aaron very high ratings. The students applauded Laura's participation in a sex education presentation in August. The youth group has grown from barely 12 to nearly 40, with many of the newcomers hailing from non-church backgrounds. The children's ministry in a nearby, marginalized community has grown into the vision of planting a new church. When Pastor Martín turned in his resignation letter saying they would step down in February of next year, the church invited us to serve as the pastoral couple. We gracefully declined, citing our desire to see Colombian leadership assume this important role, but we felt

very affirmed by this gesture of confidence in God's call on our lives.

What We Have Lost

Unfortunately, Jesus also mentions persecutions in the passage we quoted above. In the strictest sense of the word we would have to say that we have suffered no persecution. But suffering and loss have touched our lives in the last month, and we are struggling to learn to accept them as part of the commitment to follow Jesus, the one who suffered for us.

Laura had a miscarriage on September 11th of this year. The combined effect of experiencing personal tragedy for the first time, being so far from friends and family in North America, and receiving unsympathetic health care, made this a very painful event. We have been grateful, however, for the care and solidarity of our Colombian brothers and sisters, as well as the outpouring of compassionate e-mails and phone calls from the U.S. And in a very real sense we believe Jesus has been grieving the loss with us. We have not felt alone.

So it has been a year of conversion in many ways. Turning from a life of comfort and certainty to a life of simplicity and trust. Repenting of our fear and ignorance and learning to love the unfamiliar. Becoming less like North American Mennonites and more like citizens of God's global kingdom.

We believe the coming year will bring both more sacrifice and more satisfaction.



Suffering a "consequence" during the Newlywed Game at an MCC retreat.