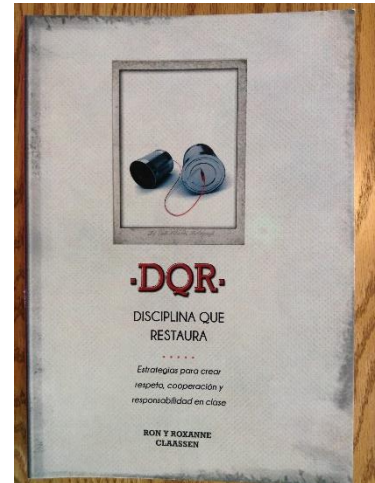


Report by Ron and Roxanne Claassen  
Trip to Paraguay  
The Month of February, 2016

We had a great trip to Paraguay. We were there for the full month of February 2016. We did two 3-day training events and one 4-day event and four 1- day consultations with several school districts. In addition we did some sightseeing and visited some Mennonite colonies in the Chaco.

We were met at the airport in Asuncion by Horst (Holly) Bergen. He is an area pastor who studied at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno and during that time took the course that I taught called a Basic Institute in Conflict Resolution and Mediation. It was great to see a familiar person and he was very gracious in helping us get settled into a hotel, Portal del Sol, and in giving us a general orientation to Asuncion and Colegio Johannes Gutenberg.

Our book, *Discipline That Restores*, was translated into Spanish by El Centro de Estudios de Teología Anabautista (CETAP) an Anabaptist organization (under the direction of Robert Wiens) at the Mennonite Seminary in Asuncion in 2013.



A few schools had all of their teachers read it and then they started to implement it. Our Restorative Justice Discipline training events (based on our book Discipline That Restores – DTR/DQR) involved more than 350 teachers and administrators. The schools that had implemented DTR (Disciplina Que Restaura – DQR- in Spanish) and CETAP, the organization that translated our book, were the ones that initiated our coming to Paraguay and they were our hosts.

All of the training and consultation was done with the help of translators. Gerado Panotto is translating for Ron. The first training was with Colegio Johannes Gutenberg, where Delbert Unruh is the Superintendent. They have 1300 students. The school was started and continues to be operated by and overseen by Mennonites. Most teachers and administrators had read the book prior to the training. They invited several other related Mennonite schools to join them in their training. It was the largest with about 250 participants. Role



play and discussion was a challenge and the participants were very cooperative and it worked out amazingly well.



Centro Educativo Nandejara hosted the second training. It was started by Monica Huck Guzman and her husband Gaston, an Argentinian/German couple, as an orphanage and now it has grown into a K-12 school. Our translator, Monica Benitez, is pictured with us. They have

worked at implementation and are very committed to full DQR implementation. They also invited several schools to join with them in the training and that included several teachers from a sister school and representation from three Mennonite German schools in the Chaco from Filadelfia in the Fernheim Colony. Pictured with us are two of the translators of our book, Valeria Guzman and Wilson Benitez, teachers from Centro Educativo Nandejara.



The third training, hosted by Robert Wiens (standing next to Ron) of CETAP, was at the Mennonite Seminary (CEMTA) and included some of their faculty, some Chaco teachers

and social/psychology workers (including director of the social services, Eduard Friesen, from Loma Plata in the Menno Colony) and several administrators from schools surrounding the seminary. Roxanne is leading the group with the help of our translator, Magali Sancho. All of the training event leaders invited us to include the underlying Biblical and Christian values, teachings, and references that are not explicit in our book because it is intended for the public school audience in the US.





The follow-up consultation days were with the leaders from several of these schools and we heard their immediate, 1-year, and 5-year plans. Their enthusiasm and commitment about ending their punitive discipline plan and implementing a restorative discipline system that reflects the Biblical ideas of shalom, agape, restorative justice, forgiveness, peacemaking and reconciliation was inspiring and encouraging for us. Their commitment to make the very difficult shift from punitive discipline to restorative discipline was amazing. Some even added a 30 year plan to not only create a model DQR school, but to train and help 80% of all Paraguayan schools implement DQR.

Our work there was very stimulating, exhausting, and encouraging. We look forward to ongoing contact with them over the next several years.

We also had some relaxation time and went on some sightseeing and educational adventures.

After the first training event we had a wonderful Brazilian BBQ dinner with Delbert and Mirtha Unruh, Theodore and Eleanor Unruh, and Holly and Norma Bergen. (Holly's brother was Paraguay's Minister of Commerce and Industry and then Minister of Finance for the Country of Paraguay. His book is a very interesting read about implementing Mennonite values and being accountable to the church while in these positions.) The food was delicious and the conversation was stimulating and educational as we



gained insight into the Mennonite migration and ongoing involvement in Paraguay. We discussed the amazing successes (e.g. Mennonite farms and businesses produce 80% of all dairy products in Paraguay) and the very significant challenges, both in their beginnings (starting in the late 1800's) and currently.

On Saturday we had lunch with Delbert and his family. They usually gather for lunch on Saturday for a traditional Guarani meal that is cooked in

a traditional pot over an open fire. The dish is called Guiso.



After lunch, Samuel and Damaris Wiens took us to the Mennonite Hospital at Kilometer 81 (81 Kilometers from Asuncion). It was started as a Leprosy Hospital and continues to address that issue along with other stigmatized illnesses like Aides. Samuel grew up there. His father was Dr. Carlos Wiens, one of the very early and continuing doctors developing and teaching about innovative and effective ways to treat Leprosy.

On Sunday, after attending a German speaking service at Concordia Mennonite Church, Betti and Wesley Kehler (pictured here in their home with their children) gave us a wonderful tour of Asuncion, including government buildings, cathedrals, hospitals, new public use waterfront recreational area including a biking, walking, jogging, skateboarding, etc. trail along the river, and the shanty town in the government plaza for families displaced by flooding. In the newer part of Asuncion we saw new high-rise buildings and beautiful modern shopping malls, and we took a break in our sightseeing for a wonderful cup of coffee and some traditional Paraguayan snacks at the Lido Bar in downtown old Asuncion.



Our second weekend trip was to the Iguazu Falls (It is one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, an amazing experience to see it both from a distance and very close.) and the Itaipu Dam and Power Plant (it was the largest in the world until China recently built a larger one). It is on the border of Brazil and Paraguay and the power from the 20 generators is shared equally by the two countries. Paraguay uses power from two of their generators



and sells the balance to Brazil (apparently the price is in constant contention).

We also visited a bird sanctuary with an amazing array of beautiful colors, shapes and sizes). We were taken on this trip by Delbert and Mirtha Unruh. On the way there we visited Colegio Gutenberg in Campo Nuevo (a new and very modern school that serves both German and Latin students). We had lunch in the home of the Principal (Marcello Warkentin who



attended the training along with many of his staff) and family. We enjoyed seeing their school's staff respect agreement, one of the strategies we suggest to support the Discipline That Restores system by modeling restorative justice in the adult relationships. On the way home, we stopped at an amazing pottery market and purchased a simple and very Paraguayan nativity set (to add to our collection from places we have visited around the world).



After the third training and on the third weekend we rested at our hotel. We also had dinner with friends who had studied here at Fresno Pacific University and attended our church. Together with Mathias and Cynthia and their children we enjoyed another Brazilian BBQ. An interesting feature of the restaurant was that they had a “supervised nursery” where the children could play. While we ate and talked for 3 hours, the children alternated between eating and playing. It was great. Mathias and Cynthia worked at the Leprosy Hospital, Kilometer 81. While working there Mathias was diagnosed with Leprosy (not from exposure there) and because of an early diagnosis and treatment, he has no ongoing symptoms. Mathias has become a board member and spokesperson for an organization and effort to reduce the stigma related to having Leprosy. He is frequently called on to tell his story.



Ricardo Friesen, who also attended the CEMTA training, and his wife Wendy and their children invited us to their home for BBQ and an evening of stimulating conversation. Ricardo’s sister is Helmine, who came to study at our FPU Center for Peacemaking. Before we left for the trip, Dan and Helmine Bigler, who recently returned from living in Paraguay for the last 7 years and who now live in Visalia, CA. graciously invited us for dinner and gave us a very helpful introduction to Paraguay. Both Dan and Helmine studied and implemented restorative justice discipline. Helmine is the person who introduced our DTR book in Paraguay.

We were very fortunate not to have been sick on the trip. Unfortunately almost all of the schools we had contact with, reported needing substitutes to start the school year (their summer was ending and our training was just before school started for their 2016 school year) because many of their teachers, some who attended the training events, were sick with Dengue.

After some rest we were given a 5-hour ride by Harold Harder and a friend (who spoke German, Spanish, and Guarani but little English) to the Filadelfia Colony, in the Chaco. The Chaco is a region of Paraguay that until the late 1800’s was inhabited primarily by indigenous people who lived by hunting and gathering. It was an area that was frequently contested territory by Paraguay, Bolivia, and Argentina. It is an area that has no rivers and the water available is only what falls in the four to five months of rainy season, at least seven months are dry. We, in California, could learn a lot from the methods they have developed to gather water and use it more efficiently and effectively.

In the late 1800's and several times after that until the end of WWII, Mennonites migrated to many different locations, including Paraguay, to flee persecution, for religious and educational freedom, and freedom from mandatory Military Service. They purchased the land from the Paraguayan government and from a private investor who had purchased a large tract of the land. At the entrance to the Mennonite history museum park in Filadelfia is a replica of the gate that many Mennonites passed through on the train as they were fleeing from Russia. Passing through the gate, they celebrated freedom and safety.



When they first arrived they had no government services like water, roads, communications, power, etc. They had to collaborate to survive. They formed collectives that provided the usual government services. From near to their arrival and continuing to today, they paid taxes to the Paraguay government and did not ask for or receive any services. Now a few services are provided but most are still provided by the collectives, including a large system of roads that are graded regularly to prevent washboard and many are designed to channel water to collect for watering parks, etc.

We visited several schools in the Chaco. Here we are pictured at Colegio Filadelfia and Roxanne, with Principal Ronald Unruh, is answering questions from students about the USA. These students spoke German, Spanish, and English. A humbling experience for us. We visited a breeding farm (to protect prize winning blood lines), museums, and were introduced to the colony concept where the farmers live together in a community



and then drive to their farms. An interesting concept, common to some other parts of the world. We saw and discussed the disparity in the living, hospital, and school resources etc. of the German Mennonites and the indigenous, many who are proudly (in the best sense of the word) committed Mennonites. The disparity is significant, and somewhat reminiscent of the Mennonite

experience in Russia during the time of the Bolshevik revolution. Our Mennonite affluence here in the US is not so different but the setting is different. It is a very complex issue. Many Mennonites in Paraguay are aware of the issue, concerned, and working on it.





We had dinner one evening in Yalva Sanga (where Mennonites have helped establish a Bible school, K-12 School, hospital, and a store cooperative) with Melvin and Gudrin Warkentin (Melvin grew up in Dinuba, CA). The conversation was stimulating as we discussed their work and concerns related to the disparity noted above.

Eduard Friesen, who attended training at CEMTA, and his wife Trudy gave us a tour of Loma Plata in Menno Colony. The tour included a visit, conversation and delicious ice cream with the department of Social

Work, a service of the Cooperative of the Menno Colony.

Our return transportation was graciously provided through Eduard Friesen, director of Menno Social Services. We returned to Asuncion with Ms. Kehler, a counselor with the Menno Social Services (pictured here with Eduard), and her friend.



We traveled on the road that was originally built by MCC PAX workers in the 1960's. Until then there was no road connecting the Mennonite Colonies in the Chaco with Asuncion. That road opened up the possibility of industry and commerce that has thrived and it is that success that has also created the disparity mentioned earlier. Mennonite Paraguayans are faithful and constantly asking themselves how to better share their resources and faith.



Our month in Paraguay was educational, inspiring, and stimulating and this report, of course, just touches the surface of the full story.