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Jakob in our new sand box - especially now, during the time without school, we are so glad that our children can use it!

Dear Friends

We should actually be back to school and university since the last week of July – but the authorities called off any greater public meetings due to influenza A (H1N1). Hence after only four days of school all lessons were suspended to prevent the spread of the bug. For Marit and Simeon this means a little more time to relax and for Stefan to be able to devote more time to the preparation of his long-distance university course and to the care of these students. Maybe the schools and Universities will delay (and shorten) the long summer break in Dec-Feb in order to cover for the days missed. Additionally we can collect homework on Tuesday for the children – so we'll have the experience of a little home-schooling. The fact that our older ones are not going to school obviously has consequences for our everyday lives. Now we are even more glad that we inherited a nice big sandpit from our colleagues. Fortunately we currently have beautiful winter weather – i.e. it is dry and not as hot as it can be. So they play happily in the sand for a few hours each day.

Visa revisited

At the beginning of July it was one year since our arrival here in Brazil. This meant we had to renew our visa. Again there was a little tension ... All had to be handed in 30 days before our visa expired. But – for us unexpectedly – we had to obtain a document from Germany. All the experiences regarding our visa crept up again. Thanks to a dear colleague in Marburg, who himself has had lots of problems with visas, we could complete the application with only a 10-day delay. Now we have a temporary residence document which is valid for 180 days. We do hope very much that the extension is now just a formal process. In the coming year we can apply for a permanent visa.

Church, faculty and sports

Stefan becomes increasingly involved with the church community - simply because linguistically things are improving. One of the projects was to plan and prepare a so-called "Escola dos Valentos" – a kind of training course for people involved in church work. Jacson, our pastor, finds it very important that many people are participating actively in church life. We figured that to achieve this we have to ease fears and uncertainties, which sometimes may hinder a greater engagement. This time the theme was on how to prepare a Bible study. The focus was on "How do I interpret and read the Bible?" Obviously, here Stefan's experience and knowledge was of good use. The next topic will be: "What does being a deacon mean to our church?"

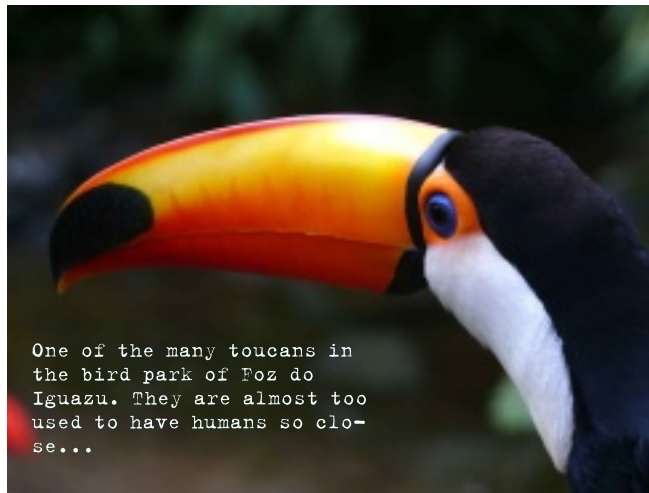
In the university Stefan will teach this semester the same course twice: Introduction to the Old Testament. Once in the residence program and once for the distance learning course. This has the great advantage that the content is complementary and so he can concentrate more on the language. The written preparation of the units is still very, very time consuming. A great help is that he always has a Brazilian professor at his side.

Another project is to try to reflect systematically on teaching and learning in the Brazilian context. As teaching (and learning) is always very much linked to culture and background, there are many hidden levels, which hinder or enforce the learning experience. These cultural influences are notoriously difficult to spot and there is a lot to learn and to adjust. The most difficult part will be to leave the European (German) way of doing things behind and adopt new strategies. But the students deserve it in order to optimise their lear-

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ning experience which of course is the teacher's responsibility – even if he is a foreigner. It is good that Stefan has the faculty at the FTSA and also colleagues in the wider team of the Marburger Mission with whom he can easily reflect things. The Book of Ecclesiastes puts it this way: "It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools!" This rebuke we would like to hear – only that it is someti-



One of the many toucans in the bird park of Foz do Iguazu. They are almost too used to have humans so close...

times really difficult to understand. To hear criticism formulated by Germans is not a big problem. They put things quite bluntly, so it's easy to identify. But the Brazilian way of formulating a rebuke escapes us Germans as we miss the subtle undertones very easily – but this hidden scolding has to be much more important than the straight and rough German one. Please pray with us for our perception of the silent messages of our Brazilian friends.

The fact that Birgit is a physiotherapist has opened a way for her to a new and lovely contribution she can bring to the women's drug rehab centre CERVIN here in our town: she directs a weekly "Fitness Hour". That is good fun and she is in contact with other Brazilians. Although the fates of the teens and women are often shocking, for Birgit this time is always encouraging. Regular sports is certainly a contribution to more stability in all of life.

Once again (and still) the language

Linguistically, we are of course still "under construction". There are still more than details to learn and above all we must have patience – sometimes the phrases flow rather slowly. We are certainly grateful for the patience of our friendly host culture. Brazilians are almost always willing, to listen to our attempts to communicate – even if at the end of our painfully slow sentences we receive an "oi?" in response – together with the corresponding facial expression. Well, we then try to find some other way to get the message across. We are working on it.

Vacation

During the winter holidays, we have had friends from Marburg around and took them for a small tour of our state (Paraná). We have enjoyed the most beautiful impressions of nature – we have been to the waterfalls of Iguazu and the empty, because wintry beach. Also, we met up on the way with some friends

and colleagues. This period was both arduous (2000km in the car) as well as refreshing. Brazil is now slowly coming towards the end of its "Winter" and that is good news. During the last two or three months it was at times rather chilly. We sent our kids to school wearing two pairs of trousers, two warm jackets and a woollen hat. But we'll not complain too much because compared to your winter... you know what we mean.

It is good to be in touch with some of you on a regular basis, but we also value very much the somewhat more sporadic contacts. It just feels good to be part of a closer and wider network of relationships at home. Please pray also that this network will be expanded and enriched more and more by new Brazilian friends.

As your life is just as challenging as ours, we wish you God's wisdom – let us know what you are currently up to, what you are reading and what your community is concerned with!

Um abraço (a solid Brazilian hug) and every blessing,

Birgit & Stefan.

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For Prayer

- for the speedy granting of the extension our visa
- for new and deeper friendships with Brazilians
- for the new course in church
- Stefan's preparation for teaching.
- Thanks to God for our holiday,
- that we experience increasing "normality"
- and that Birgit can contribute to the CERVIN.



If you wish to support us financially...

Important:

... Highbury Congregational Church in Cheltenham is supporting the mission work being undertaken by Stefan and Birgit in Brazil. As part of this support they are willing to collect donations and pass them on to the Stifting Marburger Mission. Gift Aid may be claimed for any donations and you could make out a standing order to allow continuing support to the mission work. To enable this request a Standing Order Authority from the Church Treasurer:
 Roger Gregory
 10 Albert Road Cheltenham
 GL52 2QX
 Tel: 01242 526002
 treasurer@highbury-church.co.uk

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