

## Volunteers return.....

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It was black because it was part of a dump, but mostly because it served as the village sewer, he said. The homes, little more than shacks built of random bits of plank board, were raised on stilts just above the water and each equipped with a hole in the floor. Beneath the hole was the canal. The hole was a bathroom, he said. The small, Thomas said, was unbelievable.

"Honestly, my first reaction when we stepped off the bus was how glad I was to have had been immunized before I came.

"This town had poverty the likes of which I had never seen before.  
"There were only three examples of any kind of civilized development. Fresh water pipes for people to cook and drink, electricity, and the

beginnings of a road out to the town. And, with our help, they were going to get a new church," Thomas said.  
First impressions, however, were deceiving, he said. Human beings, even Kentucky Baptists, have a tremendous capacity to adapt quickly to their surroundings, he said. What helped them adapt was the overwhelming acceptance and welcome of the Maio residents.

Despite the appearance of utter poverty, the town of Maio was not a community that had lost hope, Thomas said. Despite the foul sewer canal that composed the village backyard, despite the ramshackle buildings the residents of Maio called homes, the people were clean, nourished, and proved very resourceful in carving out an existence in what seemed an impossible area to live, he said.

"They won us over with warmth and trust. They were curious at first, but they accepted us. It was like a parade that first day. Everywhere we looked, we found examples of a community that had refused to be broken by their living conditions," Thomas said.  
A professional missionary, Ken Callier, whom Thomas met during his stay in the country said he had never met a Brazilian in poverty who was ever satisfied with living in poverty.

Using only what they could afford or find, there was evidence of engine building in the area, projects intended to make Primere De Maio a viable community any way they could, Thomas said.  
"They also don't believe in debt. You could tell they would build until they ran out of money, then stop until they

could get money to start building again," he said.  
For the two weeks the missionary group was there, they built up the interior of the church, paved it, and adorned it with a roof.  
By American standards, it was plain. By Maio standards, it was the most modern building in town.

Meanwhile, other group members ran a vacation bible school for well over 150 children and held revivals and bible meetings in the evening.  
Villagers chipped in with the construction and through that connection, the missionaries and townspeople developed a very personal friendship.  
"We didn't speak the same language. Interpreters were scarce. But we did find a universal language in which we

could communicate: rock and roll, and the movies. In his sunglasses, they said John Hall reminded them of Tom Cruise from Top Gun," Thomas said.  
"Toward the end of that two weeks, after the church was done and I was honored with giving the dedication sermon, I remembered how I had thought at the beginning of the week.  
"My inhibitions, revelations, and shock at the equaler of this town, I had been amazed at how happy and good people could be living in these conditions.  
"In all that time, I never thought that one of the greatest experiences of my life would be building a church made of adobe in a sewage canal," Thomas said.

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whole experience, he said, was summed up in a single vision.  
It was evening, Thomas said, and he was on a hill overlooking the village. The shacks, the footbridge, the canal, even the old church, maddled with the darkness. But in the midst of it all, the new church standing strong and silent within the village. For several minutes he stood staring at it, mulling over the sense of complete satisfaction at the work the mission had accomplished.  
"It was the most rewarding experience I think I've ever known," he said.  
There will be a slide presentation on July 26 at 6:00 p.m. at the Baptist Church about the Primere De Maio mission work and other sights in Brazil.



The wooden shack on the left of this picture is the former Baptist church in the Brazilian town of Primere De Maio. On the right is the church built by residents and missionaries of which Carlisle resident were a part. Their two week stay in the impoverished, and yet hopeful town of Maio left them with a lasting difficult to describe.

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