

Bible School Impact in Brazil

Over forty-five years ago when Bennie and Theresa DeMerchant arrived in the city of Manaus, and the Amazon Basin, there was not one apostolic believer. Not one person had been baptized in Jesus' name. Today, there are over 750 churches there, and they now have over 1,000 students studying at any given time in their Bible schools. There are now over 1,200 congregations throughout the nation.

We, in the Foreign Missions Division, express a world of thanks to the Ladies Ministries and their relentless efforts to support Bible school students around the globe. Here is what Bennie DeMerchant has to say about the importance and progress of Bible schools in Brazil: "I still remember the poster of 'Target Rio' at the General Conference in Portland, Oregon in 1970. We had spent our first term in the northern half of Brazil in the Amazon drainage and with hard work and few helpers had seen the church slowly rise by the preaching and teaching of His Word. It was a period that burned in us the need of trained men.

"Yes, the General Conference targeted Rio and raised the funds. That was a goal and it was reached. That financial boost by the General Conference made an enormous difference to the Bible school project in Rio, Brazil.

"The late Robert D. Norris built the first Brazilian Apostolic Bible Institute in Rio de Janeiro and he and his wife Jean started teaching students in 1972. Subsidized by the Ladies Ministries of UPCI annually students from the growing Amazon traveled by land and boats over 2,500 miles to ABI in Rio to study His Word till after eighteen graduations later something happened.

"Sometimes adverse circumstances happen that causes us to wonder about God's will. The late Sister Margaret Calhoun, a UPCI single missionary who taught in ABI in Rio, and José Cinque, a single pioneer worker who opened a work that is presently booming in the West Amazon, drowned in a seaplane accident in 1976 while visiting Manaus. Their deaths stimulated hundreds to pick up the torch and give their lives to missions in several General Conferences and Bible school services in USA and Brazil. God sometimes works in mysterious ways with His better plan for our lives and future of His kingdom.

"ABI in Rio swelled in numbers but the lack of jobs in the immediate area forced the school to assume operating a chicken farm to help cover operational costs. When all seemed to be going well, It was sad to see a disease wipe out thousands of chickens that had to be buried by students and teachers at ABI in Rio in 1991. ABI as a boarding school in Rio had to close. Maybe the Lord was telling us something and the chicken disease was what caused us to shift gears.

"We went from a central boarding Bible school to schools run by strong local churches and districts starting in Manaus in a central location two blocks from our home. We used experienced and Bible school trained pastors as teachers. The students would bus in from their jobs to the central bus terminal two blocks from Bible school at night for 620 hours of classroom time before graduation. Other districts copied this plan. In 2010 over one thousand students were studying in sixty-four Bible schools. Over 200 teachers taught. Our national alumni for ABI in Brazil has surpassed 5000 and many of these have gone into the ministry and

built fine churches. Presently our Bible school in Manaus has four new classroom additions and able to accommodate up to 550 students for school year 2011. Our goal is for 3000 students by 2015. We have seen what trained men and women can do in evangelism and establishing people in the way. We celebrate each of these goals with graduations sometimes with up to 10,000 church members and friends of graduates that arrive in 150 buses in Manaus. All other schools seem to follow the same plan for conclusion of their courses .

“Our trained students are also reaching new people in new cities, towns, villages and presently we are represented in seven indian tribes with Bible school trained indigeneous leaders who want to reach all tribes in Brazil.

“When Jesus said ‘Go ye...’ He also said ‘teach.’ Going, we obey the first half of the mission. Teaching is the second half. We cannot reach our generation alone. We must train men and women while the missionary is with them and equip, encourage, and empower them to carry on when the missionary leaves the scene.”

Check out <http://studentstories.org> for more articles concerning the great work our students, instructors, and Bible schools are doing to take the whole Gospel to the whole world by the whole church.