

### The Methodist Church in Brazil: committed to prayer, to seeking God

The Methodist Church in Britain has a long-standing partnership with the Methodist Church in Brazil, and the church in the UK is blessed to benefit from the ministry of several Brazilian ministers. The Methodist Church in Brazil is well known across Methodism for being a missionary church and a church that sends its mission partners all over the world. It is known as a church that raises up its ministers to plant churches.

What is it that drives this church planting and growth? I went to Brazil in October to learn more about the vision the church has for growing and making disciples of Christ.

### GROWTH UNDERPINNED BY PRAYER



Great things can happen when Christians come together to seek God. Ephraim's Prayer Mountain, built on the top of a mountain that overlooks the town of Barra Mansa, a town in the south of Rio State, is a testament of this. The mountain used to be a place of killing, where local gangs would take their victims and murder them. Christians in the town got together to pray and seek God's solution for this situation of violence. The Holy Spirit inspired them to build a place of prayer, sanctified for God to enable Christians to pray at any time of the day. The Superintendent of Barra Mansa, Revd Sandra Fidelis, took me to the prayer mountain with members of one of her churches at midnight. The church prayed, sung, and cried out to God for Barra Mansa town and for Brazil. There were several groups of Christians praying there, and individuals praying fervently for God to bless their town and country.



**When:** 9-13 October 2019

**Where:** Brazil, Rio District

**Who:** The Methodist Church in Brazil

**Purpose:**

1. Explore themes of church growth and evangelism
2. Learn more about the mission context of the church in Rio
3. Plan for next vice president's visit to Brazil, on the theme of church growth



When I visited a mid-week prayer meeting in Rio de Janeiro's first Methodist Church, there were between 30-40 people present. This is an excellent number of people to have at a prayer meeting, in comparison to many prayer meetings in the UK. The prayer was fervent, extemporary and said in complete faith. They had no doubts that God was listening to their petitions and that God would surely answer them.

The commitment to prayer and spiritual revival that I saw in the Methodist Church in Brazil's Rio District during my recent visit was not as strong a few years ago, the District Bishop Paulo Rangel told me. At the time, the Rio District was in a state of decline and had an ageing membership. As the leadership prayed and sought God's wisdom to

turn this around, God inspired the District with a new vision that has underpinned their current growth:

***To activate members to live an intense and passionate relationship with Christ.***

The state of decline started to reverse as this vision was implemented. The objectives of the vision were three fold:

- 1) To win people to Christ**
- 2) To build up those who have made commitments to Christ through discipleship programmes**
- 3) To generate work for the labourers, those who are mature to serve, and support lay and ministerial training programmes**

Thanks to God's vision for the District, it has become the fastest growing District out of the church's 10 regional ecclesiastical regions in regards to new followers of Jesus and new members of the church. The national church itself has over 250,000 members.



Bishop Paulo Rangel, extreme right

## A CHURCH COMMITTED TO SOCIAL ACTION AND EVANGELISM



The photo is of an exercise class for women over 60 years old in the Methodist Church of Pilares (Rio state). Some of them are members of the church, some are members from other churches and some women have not yet made a commitment to Christ. Every exercise class starts with prayer and the fitness instructor encourages the women with the word of God throughout the class.

One of the women shared her testimony of coming to faith. She had been very depressed before coming to the group, but the fellowship and love she encountered in the group led her to accepting Christ as her Lord and Saviour. She says that Jesus has transformed her life!

The Methodist Church in Pilares, a church of over 1000 members, is an example of local churches in Rio that are bridging the gap between social action and evangelism.



Another example of this is the Barra Mansa Circuit in the Rio District. Here is Revd Sandra Fidelis (photo on the left, right of the photo) serving a hot, delicious, Brazilian bean stew with members of her church after a Friday night youth service. The church served the stew to local night workers and young people roaming the streets after 11 pm. They offered to pray with them and gave them a word of encouragement in the Lord. This strategy is clearly working, given that over time, their efforts have led to a substantial increase in the number of new followers of Jesus in every church in the Circuit. One of Revd Sandra's churches has grown to over 500 members since 2013. For local churches such as the ones in the Barra Mansa Circuit, social outreach cannot be done without evangelism.



Revd Sandra is looking to the future where there will be an increasing need to train lay workers to support the growing churches. Her vision is to build a training centre in Barra Mansa, and she shared her vision with me with tears in her eyes. She is a follower of Christ sold out to God and sold out to seeing God's Kingdom established in her community. The circuit has pulled its resources together and has bought the plot of land upon which the centre will be built. Right now the circuit is praying for the resources to start the build.

### **COURAGEOUS EVANGELISM IN THE FAVELAS**



An example of courageous evangelism that I heard about was of work the church is doing in the favela churches in Rio de Janeiro City. I did not get to visit the favelas for safety reasons, but was told that the Methodist Church has a strong presence there. These churches were planted through prayer campaigns and fasting, and their witness and dedication to God have attracted many people from the favelas. While the churches makes salvation of the soul the primary emphasis, all the churches in these neighbourhoods also have social outreach programmes.

The central Methodist Church in the touristic seaside town of Angra do Reis also works in the local favelas. The minister on the left hand side of the photo takes a small group of women into the favelas every week, to witness to the gangs in these communities. The witness of this minister and the group of women is such that the gangs will only allow this particular group of women to enter their communities safely, and when they do, the gangs disarm themselves of their weapons and spend time listening to them preaching the gospel and sharing the love of Christ with them. Although it is extremely difficult for gang members to leave gangs once they become involved in this lifestyle, several have been able to do so thanks to this church's outreach, and have become disciples of Christ.

## **A DEEP, INTIMATE LOVE OF CHRIST.**

What impacted me the most during my visit was to witness the passion for Christ of ordinary members of the church, a passion that naturally spills over into their everyday life. It makes them effective evangelists and ambassadors for Christ. It helps them to be committed and faithful to their calling and service in their local church. It causes them to break out in praise to God at any time. It makes them fervently and passionately worship God. It enables them to have deep love for one another and fellowship with others. From meeting members of the church in the Rio District, it is evident that the vision of the District is bearing fruit.



## **WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM THE RIO DISTRICT?**

In conclusion, the example of church growth in the Rio District prompts us to ask some key questions when thinking about how to grow as a church in the UK:

**How committed and passionate are we as individuals to our relationship with Christ Jesus?**

**Do we seek God and pray enough? Is everything we do really undergirded in fervent, effective, faith-filled prayer?**

**Is it obvious to others that we have an intimate relationship with Christ? Does it 'spill over' into our daily lives?**

**How comfortable or uncomfortable are we to preach the gospel to those whom we serve through our social outreach activities?**

**Is there a way in which we can bridge the gap between social action and evangelism? What fears do we need to deconstruct or get rid of in order to do so?**