

A NEW CHAPTER BRINGS HOPE TO BRAZIL

-- Sue Exner

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In September, Phil and I participated in the first annual National Seminar for Religious Assistance, which was hosted by the Brazilian military police chaplaincy and supported by the military Christian fellowship of Brazil – UMCEB. It was a remarkable conference that will impact the MCF, and the nation, in the years to come. We arrived five days early and were handed a full schedule of speaking opportunities. Phil was the main speaker in more than a half-dozen churches and other sites, spreading the good news about military Christians around the world. He talked about positive things that have happened, and negative things that hadn't happened, because of military members who are integrating their faith into their careers. He spoke about warriors who are held up by the Bible as examples of faith and character, and encouraged the churches to support military ministry. Phil also challenged and encouraged members of the Presidential Guard, Christians who work at the national Congress, and several military units, while I spoke to two women's Bible study groups, which were composed of military wives.

About 900 people attended the conference's opening ceremony. Phil was the keynote speaker, and he presented a challenging evangelistic message. The seminars and workshops were academic and informative -- Phil taught two of those sessions, and I spoke at the women's meeting about approaching our "Martha" world with a "Mary" heart and doing only what God wants us to do.

Other highlights included a communion service and recognition of the group Awaken Deborah, whose members pray for husbands and sons in the military. They were called up on stage, where all the MCF leaders and chaplains knelt before them for prayer.

One evening, conference participants met in the heart of the capital, where they were surrounded by the presidential office, Brazil's supreme court, and both legislative houses. There, they prayed movingly for their government leaders and country. Later, little children and people over 70 held up the Brazilian flag to symbolize the need to pass on their Christian heritage. But one of the most significant events happened on the last day, when the national MCF leader and a representative of military chaplains signed an official agreement to work together for the common goal of reaching out with the Gospel to the military. This commitment to cooperate and collaborate was the result of many years of prayer and discussion and was the highlight of a great conference. Everyone left with renewed hope, mutual respect, and thankfulness for the new direction Brazil is taking.