

## **A large influence;**

### **Extension program trains church leaders throughout Portuguese-speaking world**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Campinas, Brazil--“When the Brazil extension school started, most of our leadership had never attended school. But, after four years a big change happened in the pastor’s minds. They changed their attitudes, how they taught the Bible, and how they handled their church members.”

Those words from Beth Kinas, secretary to Assemblies of God missionary Terry Jackson sum up the impact that the Brazilian Extension School of Theology (BEST) has had on churches throughout Brazil and in other Portuguese-speaking countries of the world.



“The school has trained its students to be better preachers and teachers,” Terry says. “One missionary told us that the quality of preaching and teaching has increased greatly since our extension campus opened in an Assemblies church in her area,” he reports.

The BEST school, which was started in 1979 by Terry’s father, Bernhard, currently has 17,000 students working throughout Brazil and in other countries, studying on 420 extension campuses. Over 13,000 students have graduated from the four-year ministerial training program. A more advanced program, the Brazil Advanced School of Theology (BAST) currently enrolls 800 students who are working on an Associate of Arts degree. Two hundred and fifty students have received degrees since the BAST program was started almost a decade ago.

“Each extension campus is set up in a local church with the pastor serving as a director,” Terry says. “The congregation provides a coordinator, a secretary/treasurer and monitors who actually give the classes.” While using textbook and teaching material provided by the BEST and BAST programs in Campinas, Brazil, Terry explains that “the extension campus becomes part of the ministry of the local church.”

Students in the BEST program study 32 subjects over their four year course, most of them oriented toward biblical and theological issues such as the Pastoral Epistles, eschatology, the Gospels, Old Testament History, an overview of the New Testament and the book of Acts. Practical ministry subjects such as homiletics and missions studies are also included.

“This is ministerial training,” says Terry as he and his wife Beth show visitors around their modern facility in Campinas, a city of one million people about an hour and a half west of Sao Paulo. “Pastors with no training, Christian workers and Sunday School teachers are the type of people who want to take these studies,” he explains. “The BEST program is designed to make Bible school education available to the thousands of ministers and Christian workers and laity who have no access to Bible school education or who could not leave their home, church or work to go to school.”

The spacious campus contains warehouses where textbooks are shipped to schools around the world. Student exams are sent to the central office for grading and the diplomas are issued by the organization rather than the local campus.

In addition to Brazil, BEST serves campuses in Portugal, Canada, the United States and Japan and BEST material is used in the Portuguese-speaking countries of Angola and Mozambique. “There are over 200,000 Brazilian descendents of Japanese immigrants to Brazil living in Japan,” Terry explains. “Now, two, three, four generations later, many have gone back to find their roots, go to school or earn a living. The

Assemblies of God and other denominations are involved in an effort to evangelize these Brazilian Japanese.” Terry says that BEST has three extension campuses in Japan along with seven in the United States and two in Canada.

There is also interest in BEST courses from Spanish-speaking Latin America. “Our intention is to put everything into Spanish because a number of Brazilian missionaries working in other countries of Latin America have requested our curriculum,” Terry says. “A Bible school in Argentina took six of our textbooks and translated them into Spanish already.”

Terry, a third-generation missionary in Argentina, has plans to expand his ministry’s educational efforts. “We are going to build a residential school here in the next few years. Once we open the school, a student will be able to come here and do the BEST and BAST courses in a four-year period. Eventually, the BAST residential program will offer a B.A. in Theology.

“We could use new missionaries to teach once we get the residential school going,” Terry says. The new school will offer more advanced courses and missionary teachers “have more teaching experience and their level of theological knowledge will be higher,” he explains.

While recognizing that Brazilian schools do not usually match the quality of stateside institutions, Terry says that his schools are striving for the highest quality. “We are striving for U.S. standards,” he says. “One of our goals is to offer masters and doctorate degrees through BAST.”

Meanwhile, the BEST and BAST schools are making a difference in Brazil. “A pastor in Brasilia said that the thing he likes about our extension campus in his church is that the students have four years to study which gives them ample time to absorb what they are studying. He said that too many schools speed students through in two years and they sit through the material and learn little. He commented that our program ‘makes them study and helps them to absorb better what they learn.’”

Secretary Beth has first hand experience of what a BEST education can offer. “This school made a big influence, starting with my own father and the pastors in my home town where who never had the opportunity to go to school,” she remembers. “They went to school in my church where we introduced the BEST program. I’m very proud to be the secretary for this program which did such a big thing for this country.”

## ACCOMPANYING STORY

Most missionaries are involved in much more than their major ministry. A/G missionary Terry Johnson, his wife Beth and son Michael are no exception.

In addition to overseeing the work of an extensive theological education program that supports extension campuses throughout Brazil and in several other countries around the world, they also work to help local churches establish schools and they sponsor children’s crusades throughout the country.

“My father, Bernhard Johnson, saw the need to minister to children here in Brazil, so he formed a ministry called COBO (Children of Brazil Outreach) that ministers to poor, underprivileged children throughout the country,” he says.

“Through COBO we have built 12 schools and day care centers, we provide Bible curriculum for classes in public and private schools and we hold children’s tent crusades.”

Terry points with pride to a school built by COBO in cooperation with a large Nazarene church in the city of Campinas. The two-story building adjoins a low-income neighborhood and provides tutoring assistance and other social and evangelistic services to the area’s residents.

“This school is registered with the city as a religious institution for social assistance, not as a school,” explains Jucilene Rodrigues Lisboa, the school’s director. “The children go to elementary schools in the neighborhood and come here the other part of the day to do homework, take refresher courses, get music lessons, take PE classes and receive Bible teaching,” she says.

Terry says that the center also feeds many of the children. “The only meal many will eat during the day is from the school. Even during vacation time many will continue to come here for lunch because this will be their only meal during the day.”

Students understand that the neighborhood school helps to improve their lives. “The school has helped me with my school work and has tutored me,” says Jocilene, a 13 year old who receives sponsorship help from Compassion International to help pay fees at the school. Jocilene’s father is unemployed and her mother is a maid. After attending the programs of the COBO-related school, Jocilene made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, Now, her brother who also comes to the center has also accepted the Lord.

COBO is committed to helping a school in western Brazil build a new facility. “We have four other requests for assistance and we are planning to help with these projects over the next few years,” Terry reports.

Through COBO the Johnsons have sponsored children’s crusades throughout the country. “We invite the students at nearby schools to come to our big tent,” explains Beth Johnson. “It’s like a field trip for them. We have clowns to teach kids choruses, ventriloquists who do Bible stories and a drama presentation. We end with an altar call, then try to channel the children into the local churches.”

Ten-year-old Michael Johnson is a full participant in the crusades. “The kids sing along with us after they get the hang of it,” he says. “

All of the Johnson’s activities are a blessing to them. “We have seen God’s continuity and expansion in all of this,” Terry reflects. “When my father passed away we didn’t know what would happen with all this work. In the first year after he died, BEST grew from 13,000 to 17,000 students. To us that was a sign that the Lord was going to continue this work. We have seen similar miracles in the expansion of BEST and BAST. That has been a signal and a miracle for us.

Beth agrees, “This shows us that this work is not ours, it is the Lords.”

“We love it here,” says Terry as he and his family prepared for a yearlong furlough. “We go with mixed feelings. We have the work here and our heart is in it.”

## SIDEBAR

God often moves in mysterious and even humorous ways. Witness the story that goes back three generations to Terry John’s grandparents. “They arrived 60 years ago when persecution of evangelical believers was still strong,” Terry reflects. “In the city where they set up their residence, there was a lot of persecution, but they eventually gained the respect of the city. Today, the neighborhood where they lived is called “The Good Shepherd” in honor of my grandfather.”

Some results were miraculous even if slow to materialize. Terry says that his grandparents went out to one neighborhood to preach at an open-air meeting one Sunday afternoon. “They tried to preach on one street corner, but every time they tried to start, the crowd would stone them. They never were able to start a church in that suburb.”

Twenty years later the story was different. “My father wanted to build a Christian school through our children’s ministry. So, he went to the mayor and asked him to donate some property to the ministry. The mayor picked out a piece of property, did all the paper work and showed it to my father,” Terry relates. “It was the exact street corner where my grandparents had been stoned 20 years earlier!” Today the school serves 120 students and had recently been expanded to hold up to 500.

**Extension program trains church leaders throughout Portuguese-speaking world, *Pentecostal Evangel*,**