
Case
Study
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 **INTERNATIONAL**
Research Department

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Brazil

Consultation with National Church Leaders

One of a series of practical missions research case studies

Key Words: institutional research, internal research, focus group

Abstract: The purpose of this project was to get an assessment of the status of the church in Brazil from the point of view of national church leadership and to identify the ways in which they feel a foreign mission such as OC can be of most help in reaching the country. The OC Brazil team chose about 40 leaders to invite to participate and divided them into two meetings. Brazilian moderators were selected and briefed ahead of time as to the desired information and meeting procedures. Each group summarized the points they felt most important at the end of each session. The meetings were videotaped and the proceedings transcribed by a Brazilian secretary. The text was subjected to a computerized word count analysis to determine the most, frequently mentioned subjects.

Background: OC has been in Brazil for nearly thirty years with the expressed goal of serving the Brazilian church, and yet on very rare occasions has OC ever formally asked the Brazilian church leadership how the team could be most helpful. In 1989, it was decided to call together respected leaders from a wide cross-section of the Brazilian church to critique the past influence of Sepal (OC's name in Latin America) on the growth and maturation of the Brazilian church and to seek their counsel regarding future ministry direction. The team made it clear that it would not be bound to follow the advice given, but that their counsel was being sought along with other research information to develop future ministry strategies.

Methodology: The first and perhaps most difficult task for the team was selecting the leaders to be invited. Each member of the team needed to support the choices in order to own the results and be willing to act upon them. It was decided that each team member could appoint one person whom he respected to be invited, and that additional suggestions of the team members would be put on the table for consideration. It was the intention of the team to invite a group of about 25 approximately twice the size of the Sepal team. In the end there were 38 total nominees and we decided to extend an invitation to each of them.

Figure 1

Rev. XXXXX XXXXXXXX
Address
Dear Colleague in Ministry,
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

I am writing this letter to share with you a need we have at Sepal and, as the Lord directs, to request your help in meeting it.

The Sepal team recognizes that the world is changing. Forces such as industrialization, urbanization, and secularization are so prevalent that our present reality is very different from that of our grandparents, and will be different from that which our children will experience. We know that Brazil has not been immune to these changes, but is, in fact a forerunner in some of these global trends..

This is why we need your help. Sepal truly desires to work with open eyes, observing well what the Lord is doing in this blessed country, and desiring to hear His voice as He leads us in ministry. But we feel we cannot make good decisions for ministry without the opinions and advice of our Brazilian colleagues. We cannot dream about the future without accurately understanding the present. So, we have planned a series of meetings in which we would like to hear what the leadership of the Brazilian church has to say about it's present status and current needs. We would like to hear the thoughts of the men that God has raised up to pastor His church as to where they feel Sepal can best serve and encourage. We need the input of our colleagues.

These meetings have been planned for December 7 and 14. You, as our chosen guest, would be brought to São Paulo on the date of your choice, at our expense, to participate in a group discussion with other Brazilian evangelical leaders. The Sepal team will provide a few questions for discussion, but will then simply listen to your comments. The meetings will last from 9AM-5PM, with time for prayer and worship together.

We recognize that your schedules are extremely busy, but we pray that the Lord would open a way for you to accept our invitation and help us in this way. Please find below a response form that we ask you to return as soon as possible so that we may begin to make travel arrangements for you.

May God bless you as you serve Him.

Respectfully in Christ,
Jaime Kemp
Director of Sepal

=====

Name _____

I will be able to accept your invitation to participate in a meeting such as you have described above. The more convenient date for me would be: _____ December 7 _____ December 14 (Please choose one)

I will be coming in from the city of _____ Signature _____

The team decided to fund the travel and housing expenses for those leaders invited from outside the São Paulo area so as to not allow cost to be a discouraging factor. Two dates were chosen in the middle of the week, consecutive Thursdays in this case, so as to maximize the possibility that pastors could attend. The pastors were given the choice as to which date would be best for them.

The leaders were formally invited by letter approximately four months prior to the scheduled dates of the meetings. The letter had an enclosed addressed and stamped envelope and a tear-off response form to facilitate a speedy response. An English translation of this letter is included as **Figure 1**.

While responses were coming in from the letters of invitation, additional plans were being laid for the actual meetings. A site was chosen away from the Sepal office so as to minimize contact with the team members. Some of the invited leaders had been disciplined by members of our team, and it was feared that they would be less open and honest in their comments if such team members were present. Only two American team members were permitted to attend the actual meetings, these two being the newest arrivals to the team and working in the area of research. Also, a Brazilian team member was chosen to videotape the sessions and a Brazilian secretary to take notes (it was decided that her hearing the actual proceedings would facilitate her transcription of the proceedings afterward). The decision to video tape came after much team discussion, as several team members feared that it would inhibit free conversation. In the end, the decision was made to position the video camera in the back of the room where it would not be readily seen by the participants, thus reducing the tendency to affect their openness.

Of the 38 invited, 26 were able to attend. We paid for airline (9) or bus (7) tickets for those coming from greater distances. We sent the money immediately upon their request or reimbursed them upon arrival in São Paulo, according to their preferences. Half of the participants were present each of the dates, as several said that both dates were convenient and we were therefore able to divide the group appropriately. Also, at each meeting there was a good mix from around the country and denominationally.

We chose a moderator from among the local participants for each of the meetings so as to minimize Sepal presence during the discussions. The team discussed the leaders who were going to be present and decided who to invite to be moderator for each meeting. One of those invited declined and the team had to be consulted to choose another in his place. The moderators were called together to be briefed about a week before the meetings were to take place. They were briefed by the researchers as well as by the area director, Edwin Martinez, who emphasized the significance that the results of such meetings would have for OC from an organizational leadership perspective. The moderators were provided with a variety of printed materials including a description of the goals of the meetings and a proposed agenda (**Figure 2**).

The document in **Figure 2** was discussed together with the moderators to make sure they understood their assignment. The proposed questions were discussed and several suggestions for changes and additions were provided by the moderators. The final list of questions for the morning, about the status of the church in Brazil, and the list for the afternoon, about the work of foreign missions, especially OC, in Brazil are **Figures 3** and **4** respectively.

Figure 2

Agenda for Advisory Council Sepal December 7 & 14, 1989

Purpose of the meetings:

1. Outline the present day needs of the Brazilian Church, especially in terms of the evangelization of the country.
2. Provide recommendations for the Sepal team regarding strategy and for future ministry direction. a) To help the Sepal team to perceive in what areas it should change its ministry because of changes in the context or due to the Brazilian church having developed new capabilities to carry out its own ministry. b) Recommend areas of high priority for new ministries or activities.
3. The team desires an honest commentary regarding its activities and is committed to not defend itself in the face of criticisms. All of the results will be seriously considered, but Sepal makes no promise to necessarily use them. These meetings are part of a large-scale research effort to better determine the needs of the Brazilian church for evangelism. Other aspects of this effort include interviews with pastors and leaders on an individual basis, demographic studies of the church and a detailed analysis of the current ministry activities of the Sepal team. All of the results will be considered together.

Procedural Details:

1. In order to permit greater freedom of expression, the Sepal team will not be present during the deliberations, however Larry and Stephanie Kraft and a secretary will be present to help with the administrative details of the day. All of the sessions will be taped for the team to study afterwards. The Sepal team will join the group for lunch at the meeting site.
2. The meetings will take place at the Methodist headquarters, Chácara Flora from 9:00 AM until 5:00 PM. Three hours during the morning will be devoted to the current status of the Brazilian church and the needs for evangelism. After two hours of rest and lunch with the Sepal team, three hours in the afternoon session will focus on discussing the ministry of Sepal and recommendations will be gathered. Breakfast and coffee breaks will be provided.
3. In order to help focus and stimulate the discussion, a one-page summary of the results of a survey of the 1,500 participants at the September 1989 VINDE leadership congress will be available to the group. In the afternoon, we will have a brief, one-page handout describing the overall purposes of the mission OC, mother organization of Sepal, and the purposes in Sepal being in Brazil.
4. The group should prepare a summary of up to 10 of the most important observations at the end of the morning session and 10 at the end of the afternoon session.

Responsibilities of the Moderators:

1. Communicate clearly the purposes of the meetings and help the group to arrive at pertinent conclusions. Please be aware that the entire Sepal team is anxious to consider these results as they will be important for our future ministry. We can't serve the church without understanding its mind.
2. Maintain order in the discussions and keep them on the topic.
3. Help the group maintain an atmosphere of openness and honesty.

Possible questions to discuss:

About Brazil (morning) {See Figure 3}

About Sepal (afternoon) {See Figure 4}

Note: In actuality, the Sepal team did not join the group for lunch at the meeting site, having changed this decision after receiving a recommendation from the Area Director, Edwin Martinez.

Figure 3

Advisory Council--Questions for Morning Session -- 12/89

- ___ Comments and reflections regarding the report of the survey of pastors at the VINDE Congress.
- ___ Describe the people with whom the Brazilian church (all denominations) has had the greatest success in evangelism (age groups, social classes, ethnic groups, urban/rural, etc.)
- ___ Within which parts of the population does the Brazilian church need to improve in order to effectively evangelize all of Brazil?
- ___ On which social problems is the Brazilian church presently working?
- ___ How do the majority of the new converts come into the Brazilian church (or, what evangelistic methods have been most effective)?
- ___ What is the most common way people are trained for positions of leadership in the Brazilian church?
- ___ How does the Brazilian church need to improve or be strengthened for better leadership training, both lay and professional?
- ___ What is the greatest felt need of the members of the Brazilian church?
- ___ What, in your opinion, is the greatest need of the Brazilian church today?
- ___ What is lacking for the Brazilian church to be able to reach the entire country for Jesus Christ?

Figure 4

Advisory Council--Questions for Afternoon Session -- 12/89

- ___ What should be the role of a para-church organization in Brazil? How should such organizations relate to the church?
- ___ Considering the recent changes in the profile of the Brazilian church, how well has Sepal succeeded in accompanying these changes?
- ___ What have been the contributions of Sepal's annual conferences? How can they be improved?
- ___ In what areas has Sepal been most effective? Least effective?
- ___ Is Sepal a paternalistic organization? Or is it seen as such? In what areas? How can it improve?
- ___ Is there something that Sepal is doing that they should stop? Why?
- ___ How could Sepal better meet the needs of the Brazilian church?
- ___ How can Sepal best contribute to the evangelization of Brazil?
- ___ In what areas should Sepal increase or decrease its activities?
- ___ Should the ministry of Sepal be more focused or more diversified? Why?

A copy of these questions was provided to each participant as well as on transparency for the moderator to put before the group. Each question had a blank in front of it so the participants could mark off when that topic had been adequately discussed.

Two other handouts intended to stimulate discussion were provided to each participant. The first, used in the morning session and found in **Figure 5 and 6**, is a summary of the results of a survey of nearly 1,000 pastors at a nation-wide pastors' conference held in 1989. The second, **Figure 7**, is a summary of the

purposes and make-up of the Sepal team in Brazil. Great care was taken to make these handouts very short so as to not take away from the discussion time, but rather to give the group a springboard from which to begin their discussion.

About a month before the meetings, a final reminder letter was sent to each invited leader who hadn't yet responded. Also, team members were recruited to call those they knew personally. Other final preparations included the rental of the meeting facility, a neutral locale about a mile from the office, which could provide for the breakfast, lunch and coffee breaks; arranging for flip charts and overhead projector, pens, etc.; copying the discussion questions and other handouts for everyone; preparing name tags for the participants and for their seats so the moderator could see the names; arranging for taping; and arranging for reimbursements of participant expenses.

The actual meetings came off very smoothly. To begin the meetings the participants were each given the opportunity to introduce themselves and the moderator gave a brief explanation of the purposes for the meetings. Then the discussions proceeded as described above. At the end of each day, the moderator for that day sat down for about a half an hour with the four Sepal representatives who were present to summarize his observations and to pass on the group's final conclusions. We had requested ten main points for the morning and ten for the afternoon, but actually received about 40 for each morning and 40 for each afternoon. The participants were glad to be there and really appreciated the fact that we were taking the time and expense to ask their advice. Only one invited leader who had accepted did not show up, a denominational executive. He did send a substitute who only stayed about an hour and a half. All of the others came and stayed for the entire time. We also took a picture of each group and sent a copy to each one who attended with a thank you letter afterwards.

The budget for this entire project came to approximately US \$2,600.

Figure 5

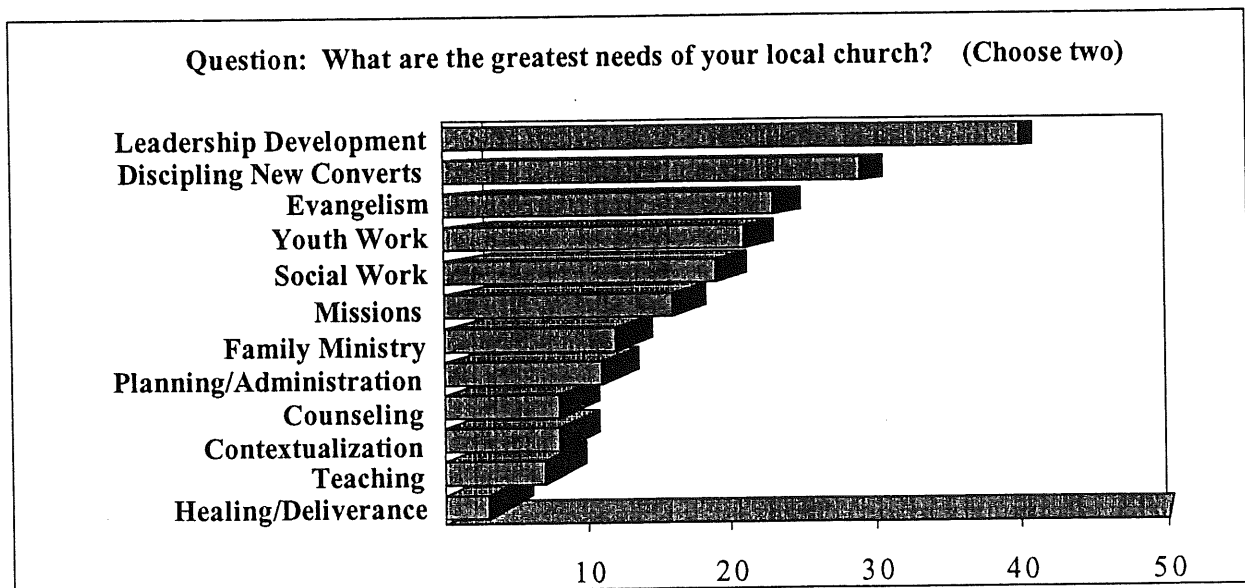


Figure 6

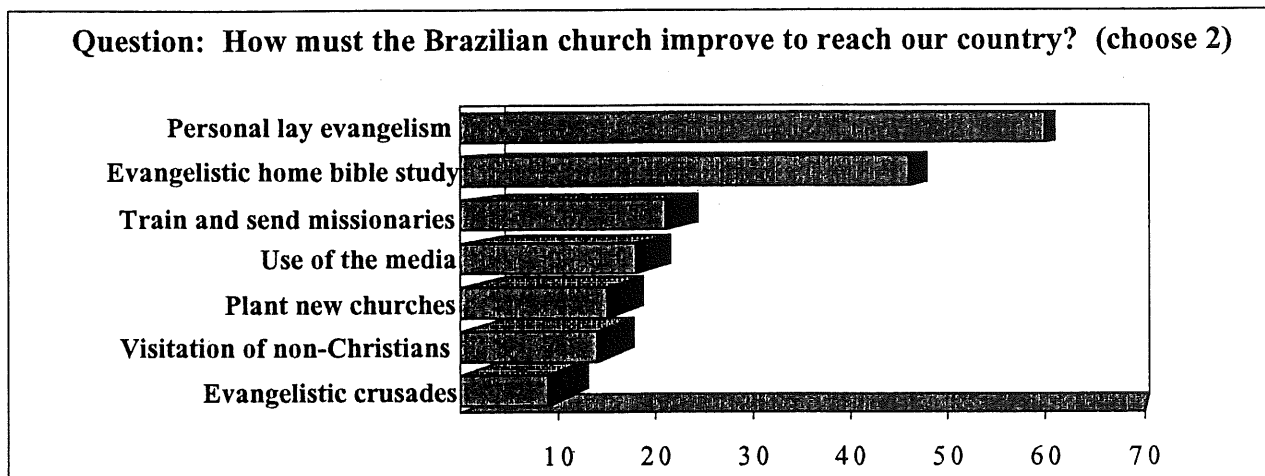


Figure 7

Sepal Of Brazil

Sepal of Brazil is affiliated with the international mission "OC International," headquartered in the United States. Sepal's purpose is to work in cooperation with the Brazilian church to make disciples on national soil and also in other countries.

Sepal's strategy of ministry is to serve the Brazilian church through:

- Research: for a greater understanding of the situation and needs of the church.
- Motivation: for expansion
- Training: of the church leadership, with the goal of more effective ministries.
- Mobilization: of the entire church to "...make disciples of all nations."

The missionaries of Sepal wish to:

- Demonstrate unity as a team.
- Develop a national focus of ministry
- Cooperate with the churches of the whole body of Christ
- Stimulate the multiplication of churches, recognizing that the most effective evangelistic strategy is to establish contextualized evangelical churches within cultural and geographical reach of everyone.

A brief history of Sepal...

In 1963, a small team of OC missionaries arrived in Brazil at the invitation of the national church to work with Billy Graham in evangelistic crusades. In 1967, a new team of missionaries came to Brazil and as the result of a research project undertaken in conjunction with the Brazilian churches began to create new ministries to serve the Brazilian church in requested areas. Ministries such as Vencedores por Cristo, Avante, Sete, Editora Sepal, Lar Cristão, and others which discontinued after a period of service, were established during the 70's and 80's.

Currently, the missionaries on the team are:

Ary & Carolyn Velloso	David & Deborah Kornfield
Carlos & Claudia Limpic	Ken & Diane Kudo
Dianne McGee	Luiz & Carmen Lemos
Jaime & Judith Kemp	Neuza Itioka
Ricardo & Janice Duncan	

SERVIÇO DE EVANGELIZAO PARA AMÉRICA LATINA

Analysis: The data gathered was in two forms. The most detailed was a transcription of the entire proceedings. This was prepared by the secretary who had been present from the tapes we made. In order to facilitate the work we copied the sound from the video tapes onto standard cassettes so that the typing could be done from a small tape recorder in the office. The text for the two meetings totaled about 50 pages of small type and it took the secretary several weeks to produce our final document. The second form of the data was a summary prepared by the group at the end of each session, morning and afternoon, of what they felt were the most important conclusions of the discussions.

The entire transcribed text of both meetings was analyzed by a word frequency count in order to give some indication as to the subjects most mentioned in the discussions (**Figure 8**).

A final treatment of the proceedings of these two meetings involved counting the number of times various themes were mentioned in the discussions (morning and afternoon sessions of both dates). Although not absolute in its ranking of the relative importance of these subjects, this list may suggest areas of greater and lesser concern to the participants.

The summaries provided by the groups and moderators were translated into English and then distributed to the team along with the above word count results. **Figure 9** contains an outline of the report as provided to the team and the number of points under each topic. The entire text of this report is not included here because of its length (about 13 pages). The full transcription of the text and the videos were also made available to all members of the team for their further study and several team members took advantage of this opportunity.

The text of the report was sent to the home office by modem and the research office sorted the comments according to major issue categories to facilitate discussion when several home office representatives came to Brazil shortly thereafter for a strategy meeting. The categories follow:

December 7:

- Taking advice from the national church (6 comments)
- Funds and finances (3 comments)
- Sepal retreats (4 comments)
- Lack of understanding of OC and Sepal (5 comments)
- Cooperation/lack of cooperation with the national church (7 comments)
- Relationships (2 comments)
- Role of women (1 comment)
- Missions in isolation to the national church (5 comments)
- Missionary lifestyle (1 comment)
- Value of cross-denominational ministry (1 comment)
- Condescension (2 comments)
- Questions about Sepal's internal functions (3 comments)

Figure 8**Word Frequency Counts***A ranking of the occurrence of prominent themes*

100+	pastor(s), pastorate, pastoral
98	theological, theology
75	social (57)/ society (18)
57	meeting or conference
53	vision
50	context, contextualize, contextualization
48	worship (24)/ praise (3)/ music (4)/ musical (1)/ sing (14)/ hymn (2)
47	politics, political (44)/ vote...(3)
47	personal or people
46	preach...(33)/sermon (1)/ pulpit (12)
45	city (36)/ urban (9)
44	denomination(s)
44	disciple, discipleship, discipling
43	Bible (18)/ biblical (25)
40	teach, teaching,s
39	seminary, seminar
37	family (19)/ home (8)/ homes (10)
37	literature (10)/ book(s) (23)/ read...(4)
35	reflection
34	money (25)/ finance(s) (2)/ bucks (2)/ budget (5)
33	healing
32	demon (13)/ demonic (3)/ exorcism (2)/ cast out (14)
31	identity
27	favela (3)/ poor (24)
27	project
27	youth (18)/ child, children (8)/ sons and daughters(1)
26	groups
26	spirit
19	model
18	friend (8)/ fellowship (7)/ alone (3)
15	woman, women
15	member
15	convert, conversion
14	transperency (12)/ transparent (2)
13	charismatic, charisma
13	media
12	professional, profession,s
12	liturgy(7)/ liturgical (5)
12	region (9) / regionalism (2)
11	middle class
10	worker(s)
9	college
8	simple life (3)/ lifestyle (5)
8	daycare center
8	local, locations(s)
8	spiritism (4)/ spiritist (3)
7	couples (4)/ couple (2)
6	modern
6	mystical
5	Sunday school
5	elitism
3	abandon, abandoned
2	liberation theology
2	ethnic

Figure 9

**Report on the Sepal Advisory Council Meetings
December 7 and 14, 1989
Chácara Flora, São Paulo**

1. Introduction

2. Format

3. Procedure

Summary - December 7, 1989

1. Characteristics of the Brazilian church (6 points)
2. Questions raised about the Brazilian church (5 points)
3. Affirmations made about the Brazilian church (14 points)
4. Observations concerning Sepal Brazil (40 points)
5. Written recommendations for Sepal (5 points)

Summary - December 14, 1989

1. Characteristics of the Brazilian church (32 points)
2. Questions raised about the Brazilian church (9 points)
3. Challenges that face the Brazilian church (14 points)
4. Observations concerning Sepal Brazil (26 points)
5. Written recommendations (12 points)

December 14:

- Relationship and ministry with pastors (3 comments)
- Missionary lifestyle (1 comment)
- Internationalization (1 comment)
- What Sepal has done well (1 comment)
- What Sepal has not done well (1 comment)
- Sepal has not been listening (2 comments)
- Sepal must listen (4 comments)
- Lack of understanding of Sepal's role, ministry and practice (4 comments)
- Sepal's public relations (3 comments)
- Cooperation and involvement together with the national church (2 comments)
- Wrong answers to wrong questions (1 comment)
- Role of foreign missions in Brazil (1 comment)
- Develop Brazilian ministry for Brazil (1 comment)
- Attitude toward the national church (2 comments)
- Understanding internal functions of Sepal (1 comment)
- Steps for Sepal (1 comment)

Finally, the summary was boiled down into about 10 comments about the Brazilian church and 10 about the work of foreign missions in Brazil. This was done especially to fill the requests we received from various mission agencies working in Brazil other than Sepal to share what we had gleaned from these encounters so that they, too, could better focus their ministries. Several talks have been given to such mission groups using this data as well as the results of demographic research on the Brazilian church and the information gained from the VINDE survey (Figures 5 and 6). These two final summaries are included as Figures 10 and 11.

Figure 10

The Brazilian Church Today

- ◆ Urban church using rural methods
- ◆ Lack of vision of the priesthood of believers
- ◆ Leadership vacuum
- ◆ Immature in its theological reflection
- ◆ Needs to be more concerned with social matters
- ◆ Must be integrated into its community
- ◆ Needs to improve in the integration of new converts
- ◆ Must become relevant to men
- ◆ Little room for theology students to engage in creative thinking
- ◆ Structure is elitist, imported and inadequate
- ◆ Evangelical literature is largely North American.

Figure 11

The Place of Foreign Missions in Brazil today:

"Yes, there is still space for foreign missions in Brazil as long as they are willing to:"

- ◆ Fill up empty spaces (geographical and social)
- ◆ Initiate non-existing ministries
- ◆ Distribute more widely geographically (spread out from São Paulo)
- ◆ Create constant mechanisms to regularly listen to Brazilian leaders.
- ◆ Plan its activities in cooperation and consultation with the national church
- ◆ Diversify in the use of speakers and authors
- ◆ Maximize use of national speakers and preachers
- ◆ Plan a program to transfer its ministries to nationals
- ◆ Challenge itself in the area of cultural and ideological importation

Evaluation: As we look back on this study, there is little we would do differently. However, if we do such a consultation again, and we hope we will, we will probably invite fewer leaders, those who showed the most interest and insight the last time, and do it in only one meeting.

There was an inherent bias in the manner in which the participating leaders were selected since those invited were chosen by the Sepal team. The benefit in such a selection process is that the team members who are to learn from the comments of these leaders are more likely to listen to someone they respected enough to recommend. However, the bias could perhaps be reduced by requiring that the group make-up reflect the denominational proportions within the country or by selecting randomly from a larger pool of nominees. All of these considerations must be balanced with the need for an interested and open group of leaders whose opinion the team will consider seriously.

Perhaps the discussion could have been better focused if the moderators had better utilized the prepared questions. Yet it is understandable that they did not want to interrupt, recognizing the calibre of Brazilian leadership present.

In the analysis of the data, the tapes were used only to transcribe the audio portion of the proceedings and could be replaced with good quality sound recording. The main benefit of the video recording for us was that the microphone was powerful enough to pick up the voices from the back of the room, thus avoiding the feeling of being taped which could make some feel uncomfortable.

Impact: The full text and videos were available to the team. This precluded any feeling that something was being hidden from them, but the result was that as team members read the text they tended to remember the things which directly related to their individual ministry focus and not necessarily those which the Brazilians felt most important. Also, as a result, less attention was given to the summary of what the leaders themselves felt most important. Although the information helped to set the stage for team strategy discussions, little practical change has resulted to date. However, sometimes change is slow in coming.

If nothing else, the fact that we took the time to do these meetings increased the respect of Sepal as a foreign mission in Brazil. It was certainly the consensus of the Brazilians that they would like to see us do it again. On the other hand, there were several comments which showed that they wanted to see if we would really act on their recommendations or were we just paying lip service to getting the input from Brazilian church leadership. Because of the skepticism about our doing these meetings, our field director has maintained on-going contact with the participants in the form of letters telling them how much we appreciated their help and recounting how we are attempting to implement some of their specific suggestions. This has been very important.

In summary, we feel the results of this consultation were very positive and instructive regarding the ministry of Sepal in Brazil, both past and future. We hope we can do such a project on a periodical basis in the future, perhaps every three to five years.

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