



# Amazon Journal

by Chad M. Miller

## 2008 Amazon Journal

*July 3, 2008*

### Itacoatiara

When I first started coming to the Amazon, Itacoatiara was a place you just passed by. You would travel there to catch a boat to some other place on the Amazon River, but it wasn't a place to stop. That has changed. Now Itacoatiara is a place to stop and notice what God can do.



Pastor Abigenay, his wife, Erminia and Pastor John

Itacoatiara is a moderate sized river town at the intersection of the Amazon and the Madeira Rivers. It used to be a trashy place where sailors would make a pit stop to have a good time. The Pentecostal Church has had two small congregations here for many years, the result of a split from some church argument. But Itacoatiara has changed dramatically. Now it is a clean town, very young and full of life. And much of the

reason it's changed is the growth and influence of the Church.

One of the pastors leading this wave of change is Pastor Abigenay. He is about 5'2". But when you get to know him, he is a man of giant vision. He has been in Itacoatiara for only 3 years. In that time his church has grown from 40 to 500. He has raised up 25 lay pastors who he calls his disciples. He also has 75 small groups. Last year he leveled his old 30' by 50' building and has built this gigantic 100' by 300' church. The walls and roof are up, but the floor was finished being poured the day we had our first Convention Service. In the morning about 1/3 of the floor had not been poured. That night we were walking on it.

Pastor Abigenay's neighbors know about his vision. The other day one of his neighbors whose home is next to the church called him and asked him why a couple of the people from the church were measuring off his property. I'm not sure what Abigenay told him, but this pastor is planning to buy his neighbor's lot. His neighbors know nothing about Abigenay's ideas. But I found out he already has the plans drawn up to expand his building to include extra classrooms with his neighbor's property. This little man is one of the new apostolic style pastors emerging in the Pentecostal Church of God in Brazil. I fear Abigenay's neighbors will be moving soon.



*July 4, 2008*

### **Light's Out On The New Missionaries**



There has never been a Convention like this one in the history of the PCGB. In the last 2 years under Pastor John Nunes' leadership, they have started 14 new churches in major cities of the state of Amazonas that did not have a PCG church. In the prior

convention period, there were no new mission starts. It is an amazing explosion of growth, an outpouring of God's blessing on this emerging New Apostolic Church.

Last night after all the new missionaries were recognized in our Convention Worship Service, Pastor John said that there were still 43 major cities in the state of Amazonas where they needed to plant a church. John told me he thought maybe they could start that many in the next two years. I must admit I was doing a bit of

a reality check, but realized with the move of the Spirit of God in this place at this time, I felt it was possible. And the events of that evening convinced me it was a goal from God.

The Convention was honoring all the new missionaries in the evening worship service. Abigenay's half finished church was packed with 800 people. They dimmed the lights and the missionaries

walked in one by one, each reading a saying of Jesus about spreading the Gospel. They were tossing rice on the people as they went down the aisle to represent the sowing of seed they will do as missionaries. Each one had a little LED flash-light in one hand to represent they were bringing the light of the world. Honestly, I thought the lights were a bit small, like the ones you would have on your keychain for emergencies. But each missionary was so proud to be honored and as they made their way to the front, each one was wrapped in a specially decorated flag with their city's name on it. There they were up in front with their little LED's wrapped in their flag. And then it was time for them all to go up on the stage, unwrap themselves from their flags and stretch them out side by side to show all the new mission starts. It was a really great Brazilian style planned finale.

But before the missionaries could all get on the stage for the flag unfurling, THE LIGHTS WENT OUT, projectors went dark, and the music and microphones were dead. The whole end of the city lost electricity. I thought, "Finale ruined!"

There were a few minutes of "What do we do now?" Well, nothing I guess. A few folks started singing but not many people joined in. There was just this helpless feeling hanging over everyone. There was nothing anyone could do. As a pastor, you figure you are supposed to do something in a moment like this. And then I noticed up on the stage all those missionaries with their LED's. In the dark, you could really see them. At that moment, God was filling in that blank spot in my sermon outline I was going to preach after the honoring of the missionaries. It was a God moment. He wanted us to know and see that these missionaries were His light in the darkness of their cities. They needed our constant prayers and encouragement. But most of all, it was God reminding us He was the one in charge of not only starting these missions, but blessing their future ministry. Jesus is the Light of the World. I never saw LED's shine so bright.



Pastors Chad and John  
Enjoying Worship

I was paying close attention. I got the message. And after about 15 minutes, the lights came back on. We celebrated the missionaries and they unfolded their flags. And then I delivered the message for the service.

But that wasn't all the Lord had in store for the evening.

## **Church Gets A Rope**

My message revolved around the Proclamation of Jesus from Isaiah 61 when he visited his home town of Nazareth (Luke 4:16). You Spirit of Lifers will remember that from last Sunday's Sermon. The message of Jesus was that he came to set people free. It was July 4<sup>th</sup> and I shared about how important a day this is in America. In illustrating the idea of freedom, I brought out something I found 8 months ago on my previous trip to Brazil. I had a break from my seminar to the pastors in Minias in the mother church in Lou Agua Sancta. There was a stairway up to a balcony that is never used. I decided to check it out. At the top of the stairs I saw this 5 foot piece of heavy rope lying on the floor. Now this was an extremely tidy church, nothing out of place. But there was this rope. I just felt it was important, significant in some way. How fitting that there would be an untied piece of rope in this church where I was teaching that the core value of the New Apostolic Church is proclaiming a Gospel that sets people free. The Gospel of Jesus unties the knots of sin and shame that bind us in life. It sets us free and transforms our lives. Like the woman bent and hunched over with a demonic spirit (Luke 13:10-17). She was in the synagogue, but found no help or freedom. She couldn't straighten up. Jesus untied the spiritual ropes that bound her and set her free. The synagogue rulers criticized Him for performing the miracle on the Sabbath day. To them, his healing crossed over the line and was work that was forbidden on the Sabbath. Jesus responded by calling them hypocrites. They wouldn't think twice about untying one of their animals who needed to be led to water, even on the Sabbath day. But they criticized him for healing this woman who had suffered for 18 years.

The synagogue was supposed to be a healing place, a place where people were set free, and what a fitting thing to find an untied rope on the floor of the church. To me it was the symbol of the freedom of the Gospel and the core message of the Apostolic Church. So I took the rope, put it in my suitcase and brought it home with me because I felt I'd need it sometime in the future. I brought the rope with me this trip and tonight I told them the story of the rope and how I wasn't going to carry it any more. They were the New Apostolic Church and it was now their

message to proclaim. So I threw the rope in the middle of the floor below the stage. It had a profound impact on the people as they saw this rope on the floor of their church. They really understood that they were being given the call to proclaim the message of freedom in Christ.

Immediately after the message, the missionaries came up for a time of prayer. They came up and surrounded the rope on the floor. I didn't exactly plan it that way, but the rope seemed to be the focus of their attention. Then the pastors and people came up to pray and lay hands on them. The kids began to try to sneak up and get the rope. One of the leading pastors, Pastor Moses, got on to the kids, "That rope belongs to the church. You can't take it from here. We have to give it to Pastor Abigenay. He will put it in a frame. It belongs to the church."

I guess the next time I come to Itacoatiara, there may be an old worn rope in a frame in Abigenay's church.

*July 5, 2008*

## **My New Canoe**

We had a great final service at the Convention. The pastors were all tired of their parliamentary business and bylaw debating. Even in the Amazon, pastors and delegates get in the "Robert's Rules of Order" mode when they conduct their conventions. My guess is the American Missionaries taught them about conventions.

There was a lot of energy and celebrating in the closing service.

Of the 1,000 in attendance, about half of the crowd was young people. Abigenay's church has a dance team who perform during the songs. It was really a lot of fun. I shared a message about the future and challenged them to have the courage to let go of the past and be open to what the Holy Spirit has planned for them in this new Jubilee Cycle.



I used the story of Mary Magdalene on Easter Morning from John 20. When she saw Jesus resurrected, she assumed things would go back to the way they were. But Jesus told her, "Don't hold on to me." This was a new day with a new challenge. It wasn't going to be Jesus, his disciples and a few friends traveling around the country. They would be going different directions taking the Gospel to the world.

I challenged them to not hold on to the past, but to be prepared for the new things God had planned for them. Jesus wants them to be new wineskins; soft, flexible and ready to be stretched by the new wine He will pour into them (Luke 5:37-38). We prayed for God to bring them together in unity and asked for the new heart and Spirit that Ezekiel 36:26-28 promised. I challenged them to let God make them a new and revived Pentecostal Church. It was a challenge they really wanted.

We prayed for all the pastors and missionaries a final time. And at the end of the service, the Amazonas District presented me with a replica of a 3 foot Amazon canoe. Many of the missionaries in the past used these simple boats to travel from village to village in their early days of church planting. They said they wanted me to put it in my office so I would not forget about all the churches I've help start in the Amazon. It's amazing, if a visitor had been at that service he would have thought I'd been living in the Amazon the last 10 years. All I have done is cast a vision and encourage them. The way they see it, it was like I was right there with them starting their new churches. It's a powerful reminder to me of the power of prayer and encouragement.

## **On The River**

Many of the pastors at the convention have been extended what they call down here a "courtesy" by the hotel we are staying in. That means they can stay one more night free. Pastor John and Herminia are looking forward to unwinding and sleeping in. That will give us plenty of time to drive back to Manaus in the afternoon for their Sunday evening service.

But Pastor Jason really wants me to come to his church in Itapiranga. His plan is to bring his boat to Itacoatiara so we can take it to Itapiranga. We'll travel through the night and arrive about 5am. Jason will try to get in touch with all the people he can for a morning service so I can talk to them. Then at noon, he will put me in a taxi that will race (and hopefully deliver me alive) back to Manaus for the evening services at Pastor John's church. How do I get myself talked into these things?



I got packed up for our little river excursion and we boarded Jason's boat about mid-night. This is the first time I've seen his boat. It's a moderate sized river boat, 35 feet or so with 2 levels. He's done a very nice job. He went into the jungle, harvested trees, cut them into boards and built the whole boat. There is no Home Depot out here so things are done with minimal tools

and very little machinery. I think he had some power saw to cut the trees into boards and plane them, but he built the boat with hand tools. It's pretty amazing.

Being back on the boat really takes me back to the early years of my mission work in the Amazon. The breeze off the river is cool at night and the motion of the boat is really relaxing. Everyone else crawled into their hammocks. Jason and I went to the top of the boat. The stars are amazing in the darkness of the jungle. We don't see them in the city because of our artificial light. Even hiking the desert, I've never seen the sky like this. The Milky Way is so bright and brilliant. It really looks like someone poured milk on a glass table. And to think this light show is always above us and we just can't see it.

I haven't visited with Jason in quite a while. For the last couple of years they have had me doing seminars in the south of Brazil so I haven't visited the rivers. Jason started telling me how earlier in his ministry, he didn't think he needed any help from anyone. He hit a crisis in his ministry where he just felt exhausted and didn't know what to do next. He said he was in his office praying for the Lord to show him what



to do and he noticed a small book in his library. His library has 3 shelves - two feet long. He pulled out the book and it was about discipleship. He realized he didn't know how to disciple anyone because he had never been discipled. So he prayed for God to send someone. 2 months later I came on my first trip to the Amazon. He said he attended one of my seminars on making disciples and it changed his whole life. It was a wonderful time for us to reaffirm our friendship.

Jason's life and leadership role has really grown. He is now supervising about 8 churches. He has started about half of them and is training pastors to lead them. God answered his prayers. He has definitely learned to disciple!

*July 6, 2008*

### **Early Sunday Morning In Itapiranga**

I only got a couple of hours of sleep until we pulled into Itapiranga at 5:30am. We went to Jason's and had some breakfast. His services are in the evening and he usually has about 350 attend. But on short notice, he could only get a hold of about 50. Actually, very few of his people have phones. We sang some songs and I had a devotional encouraging them and their mission planting work.

These people really have a hard life. They have one foot in minimal civilization and the other in the jungle. They have almost nothing by American standards and have to struggle every day just to survive. Yet they make time for their church and commitment to Christ. They are proud to be disciples and disciple makers.

At the end of our service time, Jason asked if anyone wanted to come up and say something to Pastor Chad. They do that a lot here in the Amazon. One old man got up to speak. He looked 150 years old. The jungle does that to you. He said it takes a warrior to follow Jesus and make disciples. He told me I was a warrior and I had taught their pastor to be one. He thanked me for teaching them to do that. Two young men got up to speak. They were men Jason has disciplined and they are leading two mission churches under his direction. They were at the convention and hung around me a lot of the time. They thanked me for the vision and training and wanted to make a commitment to me to be faithful to the Lord and to the task of making disciples and growing the church. Then an older lady got up and told me how much the church here loved me. She said, they tell people that I'm the "Father of the Church in Itapiranga" and I started the church. I thought I was misunderstanding her, but then she said almost all the people in the church had been saved in a small group. She asked everyone who was saved in a small group in the church to raise their hands. All except a couple of old timers raised their hands. She thanked me for helping them start their small groups.

We had a prayer time. I think everyone there came up and hugged me. Here they often give you a pat on the belly after a hug. You can't believe how many

comments I've gotten about getting a bigger tummy over the years. In light of all the encouragements, I guess I can overlook the tummy stuff.



Before leaving, another young man came up and told me that at the Convention, one of the mission supervisors had asked him if he would become the pastor at one of the new places they were planting a mission church. He had been hanging around me the last few days. He is also one of the young men Jason has disciplined in his church. The young man said the mission supervisor wanted him to think about it and give him an answer the next week. He then said I had

helped him make the decision to accept the call. He wanted me to be the first to know his decision. He was so happy. I was too. Praise God for the faith He has placed in this man's heart!

### **Taxi to Manaus**

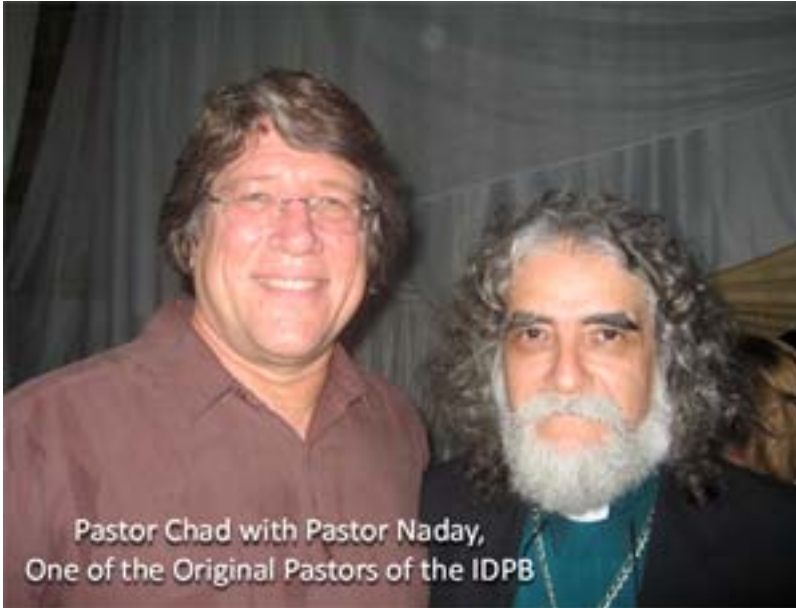
When you call a taxi in Itapiranga, let me tell you what you get. You get a late model midsized something with about half the chrome and accessories ripped off, dents all over the body, half bald tires, the outside latches don't work so you have to open the door from the inside, and either the trunk or hood has to be tied down with a piece of wire. Oh, you have to pay in advance because the driver will have to stop and fill up with gas before you get started. And figure you'll have to stop at least once to refill the radiator with water. We loaded my suitcase and I heard Jason say, "Just deliver him to Manaus alive."

I really don't know what holds these cars together. I got in and only one side of the seat was bolted to the floor. The seat rocked back and forth. The driver motioned for me to latch my seat belt. I thought, "Why? Do I want to be strapped in this piece of junk if it crashes?" Then just before we left town, the driver stopped and 4 people got in the back seat. With all the windows rolled down we were off for Manaus.

Half of the road to Manaus is unpaved dirt with gigantic potholes all along the way. The other half is sort of paved with gigantic potholes all along the way. Every taxi driver thinks he is a Mario Andretti. They average about 90mph along this route to Manaus. It's best to just close your eyes and pray.

July 7, 2008

## Finding The Way Home



Tonight I'm preaching to about 200 leaders in Pastor John's Church. They have just begun raising funds to enclose the church. John's Church is on a nice piece of property that has a number of trees. So He built a large pavilion styled worship center. The roof is about 24 feet high. The floor is finished concrete and the sides are all open except for a single wall behind a moveable stage. He has

several fans up high near the ceiling to create a breeze in the hot humid evenings. Pastor John has never wanted to enclose his church because it gives you a feel of being connected to nature while you worship. It's a beautiful sanctuary.

But Pastor John has a problem. His church is surrounded by residential housing and his neighbors have complained to the city about the noise. I can't blame them. The preaching and praise gets really loud. So the city gave him a decibel limit he has to stay under. It's pretty unspiritual when a Pentecostal pastor has to keep his eye on a decibel-meter during the service and limit the volume of preaching and praise. So the whole concept of being connected to nature is out and they are going to enclose the church.



As I was preaching, I recognized a young man I hadn't seen in a few years. His name is Isaiah. I first met him when he was a young teenager 8 years ago. He was always so bright eyed and excited to be at church and involved. He wanted to be a pastor and learn English so he could translate like Pastor John. He was always underfoot when I was at Pastor John's.

I never minded much because he was so connected at the church. It was his home. And I could always see how his church was shaping his values and goals as he was growing up. So I encouraged him over the years. But I hadn't seen him in a long, long while.

There Isaiah was tonight. He was one of the fund raising volunteers. And I noticed he had an attractive young lady next to him. After the service, there Isaiah was again - underfoot. Well I guess he is a little big for that, but he was there with the same excited look on his face, except he was all grown up now. He wanted to introduce me to his wife. As we chit-chatted, his wife drifted off and the next thing I knew, Isaiah had tears in his eyes. They have been married for 2 years and the stress of marriage, two step daughters, a successful career running 2 companies, and a new baby had just overwhelmed this couple. Isaiah was a mess. He was lost.

Isaiah had gotten away from the church and tried to make a life on his own. He had achieved a lot – family, career, house and car. But it wasn't working for Isaiah. What he failed to realize was that all the success in the world wouldn't get him what he was searching for. I waved to my brother Jackson, one of Pastor John's lay pastors from way back, to sit down with us. Years ago when Isaiah was a teen, I picked Jackson to be his mentor. The three of us sat down. I saw the young teenager gleam in Isaiah's eyes as we began to talk. He was underfoot again.

A mission trip isn't just about being the center of attention and preaching to large crowds. It's about seeing tears and gleams and helping the lost little kid in each of us find their way home.

When we get messed up in life, I am convinced that all of us are searching for that place our souls call home. Home is where we find the people who help our souls connect to God. They are the ones with whom we are most fully alive. Home is about love, relationships, community, and belonging, and we are all searching for home.

Tonight Isaiah found his way home.

*July 8, 2008*

## **My Attitude Change**

I was a little bit disappointed when I found out my new book, *The New Apostolic Era*, was not ready for the Convention. I guess Pastor John's publishers tried their best, but translating and printing took a bit longer than expected. The inside pages of the book are done, but not the cover. Publishing a book is a complicated process. The publisher Pastor John uses is down in the southern part of the state in Minas. That means everything takes longer because you're having to communicate half way across Brazil. The book has to be registered and get its own ISBN number. The cover has to be professionally designed. That takes a lot of time emailing "do you like this one" designs back and forth. But to be honest, I really didn't care about all of that. I was just disappointed it wasn't ready when I arrived.

Pastor John had not been able to get the publisher by phone in the last couple of days. Today they connected and Pastor John found out the publisher was waiting on him to approve the cover. I was thinking, "This is taking forever." Pastor John and I were driving to a meeting so he pulled into an internet café to download the cover design so we could approve it and get this book finished.

I was past my 'optimistic and understanding' point. I was just pretty disappointed the book hadn't gone according to plan. Of course we were in this internet "sweat" joint surrounded by teens totally engrossed on Myspace. And here John and I were waiting on our dial up speed internet connection to download the cover. It took about 20 minutes. Then we tried to open the file and the budget computer we were using didn't have Adobe on it so we couldn't view the cover. So we saved it to a thumb drive and went to find a computer with Adobe on it so we could see the cover. For those of you who aren't following all this download, software, thumb thing explanation, let me just say, NOTHING WAS WORKING OUT!

Finally we got to a computer with the right software to open the file and look at the cover design. It is so Latin American – dramatic red and yellow flame design. It was HOT, and there below the book's title was my name: CHADD MUELLER.

Well, I was glad the books weren't ready when I got here. I guess God still turns our messes and failures into something good. We need to remember that He is in charge of our agenda. And when things don't go our way, sometimes we need to get out of His way and let Him do his thing in our lives. We were able to correct the spelling of the author's name. And from that moment on, I was quite pleased with the progress the printers were making on my book. If you didn't get why I had such a change in attitude, my name is CHAD MILLER. I'd like to keep it that way.

*July 9, 2008*

## **OK, Now I've Really Changed My Attitude**

Spirit of Lifers all know that I talk a lot about giving up our obsession to be in control and letting God work things out His way. Even though those have been great messages, I personally find it hard to put into practice. I know I told you yesterday that I'd had a change of attitude about my book not being ready for the Convention. I may have been a little prematurely optimistic. It still bothers me... some. I can't tell you how many times I've said, "When you get the book...". So I guess it still does bother me... just a tiny bit. But I'm getting over it.

I really had a great 4 days at the Convention with the Amazonas Pastors. I haven't had that amount of time with them in a number of years. Pastors John and Montefusco have been taking me to the South of Brazil the last couple of years to help their weaker districts. So this has been a good time for me to reconnect with the Amazonas Pastors and meet the new ones who have joined the ministry.

Each night of the Convention we had a worship service that drew a crowd of about 800 people. My role was to give the messages at all three of these services. My messages revolved around the theme of their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The 50<sup>th</sup> year in the history of God's people was called the Jubilee Year. It was a year when all debts were forgiven, family properties were returned, and God invited everyone to return to Him and receive His blessing. This has been an extraordinary Jubilee Year for this denomination. God has blessed them with unity, growth and prosperity in their churches.

The first message focused on The Past. I reminded them how God started their church with a handful of young idealistic pastors who started preaching the Gospel in the river villages of the Amazon. The odds were against them. They should have failed. But God was with them and used them to give birth to their denomination. It is now their turn to be the pioneers of the next 50 years. There is still much of Brazil that needs to be reached. But they will go beyond Brazil to reach other countries. This is their legacy.

The second message focused on The Present. The Jubilee Proclamation of Isaiah 61: 1-2 announces freedom. Jesus himself quoted this verse to describe His ministry in Luke 4: 16-21. He came to set people free from sin, guilt, and destructive lifestyles. This is the key characteristic of the Apostolic Church of the Book of Acts. People received Jesus through faith and were born again into a new life of following Jesus as His disciples. I gave them a challenge to untie the ropes that are keeping

people in bondage. I tossed them a rope I had found in a church on an earlier trip to symbolize their mission to set people free. This is their message.

The third message focused on The Future. God is doing a new work in this church. Jesus told a parable to illustrate how His people have to be open and flexible to the new things God wants to do in the church. He describes how you need new wine-skins for new wine (Luke 5:37-38). God is recreating the first church of the Book of Acts here in their denomination. They are a New Apostolic Church. I challenged them to not hold on to the past, but embrace this New Spirit with an open and new heart like the prophet Ezekiel describes in Ezekiel 36:26-28. God is calling them to be a New Pentecostal Church. This is their future.

It was amazing to see how the messages of these 3 evenings united us all—our past, our present, and our future. My new book clearly casts the vision of what God is doing in this Jubilee Year. It's a good book. But words in a book can't bring hearts together like the experiences we had in those 3 services. Sometimes words just get in the way.

This whole thing about me being disappointed that my book wasn't ready for the convention – now I'm really over it.

*July 10, 2008*

### **Something Like This Has Never Happened Before**



Today Pastor John and I met with the National Mission Director of the denomination, Pastor Joel. Pastor Joel is a great pastor who I met on my first trip to Brazil. He is the one responsible for starting new churches in the capital cities in states of Brazil where the denomination currently has no churches. In the past 2 years,

Joel has started 10 of these capital city mission churches. He's done a great job.

In addition to the mission work on the national level, there are also mission initiatives on a state level. In the states of Brazil where there are existing churches,

the State District has the responsibility to plant new mission churches within their state. Pastor John is the President of the churches in the State of Amazonas. In the last 2 years, they have planted 14 new mission churches! Their goal is to have a church in each major city in the State of Amazonas. By the way, they have 43 more churches to start to reach that goal.

Pastor John has spent the equivalent of \$230,000 in US currency to start those 14 churches. With that money he has trained, relocated, and supported his 14 new missionaries, and in the case of 8 of the churches, they already have bought land and are building their first structures. Not bad. Basically, in the last 2 years, after paying for all necessary operational expenses, Pastor John has put the remainder of their state church's resources into starting new mission churches. I'm very proud of him and amazed at what the Lord has done through him.

Bottom line, in the last two years this denomination has started more than 30 new churches in the nation of Brazil. This has never happened before. It is amazing when you think that in the previous convention, no new churches had been started in the denomination. This is the power of God's blessing in the Jubilee Year.

*July 11, 2008*

### **OK, Now I'm Really, Really, Really Over It**

During one of the evenings of the Convention, I was able to meet with all the missionaries of Amazonas. These are the 14 new pastors that have been sent out in the last 2 years. I had not met any of them until now. But I was with Pastor John on a river boat 2 years ago when we forged the mission strategy that would lead them to their new mission starts. We opened up my map of Brazil and talked about the cities in Amazonas that didn't have a church. We circled the cities where we wanted to start a new church. Now I was putting faces to the circles.

It was good to get to know these pastors. I call them the Jubilee Pastors!

They were sent out under the special blessing God gave His church in the Jubilee Year. I believe there is a special favor on them and their ministries. I'm expecting that these 14 churches will thrive and become mission planting congregations.

I shared with them how they were answers to prayers prayed long ago. They were the men and women God had chosen to be pastors in this special time when He was reviving the Apostolic Era. I encouraged them to let God shape the vision of their ministries to receive this new outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

I challenged them to have clarity about their mission to reach the lost and to be innovative in empowering people to make disciples. Within just a few minutes, each of the missionaries was totally engrossed in our conversation. They didn't even realize what was going on behind them. First, Pastor John and Pastor Montefusco came in and sat in the back row. Then, Pastor Joel, the National Mission Director, joined them. And then, one pastor after another straggled in, until several of the back rows of the auditorium were full. It's not hard to figure out where the prayers for these new missionaries came from and in whom God was stirring the "apostolic gift".



After my session with the missionaries, Pastor Joel, the National Mission Director, came up and asked if I could come and speak at their upcoming School of Missions. This is their week long training time for candidates they are considering sending out to start new churches. He was wondering if I could speak 2 nights for about 2 hours in the training. I was intrigued and told him I was interested, but would have to think

about it. I really wanted to have a better idea about what they did at the training and what I might have to offer their process.

Later that evening, Pastor Montefusco, the denomination's president, took me out for some late night pizza. Actually, when Pastor Montefusco invites you out for late night pizza, it means he has something on his mind that he wants to talk about. After a few slices, he began talking about how he wanted me to help them train their new missionaries with the New Apostolic Vision and asked if I would consider it. I told him I'd want to talk to Pastor Joel and better understand their training process. He took that as a 'yes' even though I hadn't agreed.

Yesterday I had my meeting with Pastor Joel and Pastor John. These were the two men who were responsible for starting 24 of the 30 churches started in the last 2 years. They each sponsored their own individual School of Missions, one for the national missionaries and the other for the missionaries of the State of Amazonas. They wanted to consolidate their missionary training efforts and offer just one School of Missions with a focus on the New Apostolic Paradigm. That made sense.

I apologized "again" that my new book wasn't back from the printers yet. I gave him that same old "When you get the book..." line and then described to Pastor Joel what was in the book. He really got excited and said he wanted the new missionaries to have this vision. He then asked me again to come and be a presenter at the upcoming School of Missions. This time he wanted me to speak for 2 hours all 6 nights of the program. That's a total of 12 hours of training in the New Apostolic Vision. I then shared with him how important it would be to bring the current missionaries in to join the new recruits for this training. I explained how they needed to get everyone doing mission work on the same page with the same vision and build relationships with each other so they could network and work together. That made perfect sense to these two Apostolic Pastors.

I'm still thinking about it, but the idea of having 12 hours with every current and future missionary is a great opportunity. These are the pastors who are right in the middle of what God is doing in unfolding the New Apostolic Paradigm. God will define this new movement through the way he shapes their hearts. It's what Ezekiel was talking about in Ezekiel 36:26-28: *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you... you will be my people, and I will be your God."*

You know that whole thing about me being disappointed that my book wasn't ready for the convention? It dawns on me now that I have had so many more conversations and connections with people that I would not have had if the book had been ready. It's a good book. But words in a book can't bring hearts together like catching a vision in the back row of the auditorium during a missionary meeting. It can't replace the face to face of a meal where pastors share their passion. Yep, the Lord really knows what he is doing. Now I'm really, really, really over it.

But I do hope they'll finish those books soon.

*July 12, 2008*

### **Car Salesman**

Today I went with Pastor John and Herminia to look for cars. Herminia was interested in a compact that she could drive around town instead of Pastor John's full sized truck. She was interested in a Peugeot which is common in Manaus.

We went into the showroom and looked at the 3 models they had to choose from. If she liked one, she could fill out the paperwork and in about 30 days her car would be brought by boat from Sao Paulo to Manaus. Car dealerships down here only have display models. The cars sitting in the lot already belong to someone. All new cars take 30 days.

The showroom was very nice. The salesmen were actually saleswomen, all twenty-something, attractive, wearing polo shirts, super tight jeans and stiletto heels. Actually, they weren't even saleswomen because they don't really "sell" the cars, they just fill out the paper work for you and process your request. I couldn't actually figure out why they were all women, unless in Brazil it's men who are actually buying the cars?

There was one snappy young man in the showroom. When we walked in he immediately came up to me, welcomed me to the dealership, and offered me a cup of coffee as we waited for the next available saleswoman. I thanked him and he picked up on my English. He smiled and gave me his welcome speech in excellent English. I was impressed. A little while later when John and Herminia were test driving the model she was interested in, he came over to me and struck up a great conversation. He doesn't get the chance to interact with many people whose native language is English. I found out he had lived for a while in England and was now back in Brazil as a trainer of the showroom staff.

He found out about me and my mission work in Brazil. I told him I was preaching in the area churches. He said, "I'd like to come visit your church and hear you preach." At first I thought it was just some of that "I'm interested in you" relationship building that salesmen do. But he was serious. He kept insisting, he wanted to come to my church. So we exchanged phone numbers and set it up. He would go with us to church tomorrow.

I was just amazed at how interested he was. The contrast to our culture in the States couldn't be greater. In the States, we have to bribe people to come visit our churches. Here, they are after you to take them. It made me think of how the Book of Acts describes the environment in which the church was born. Peter preached his first sermon and 3,000 were baptized and saved. And the church grew continually each and every day. You know, Christians weren't going out and bribing people to check out their small groups and gatherings. It just seems to me that God must have created an environment where people were hungry and wanted to find out about Jesus. The Spirit of God is not just working in the churches of Brazil, but also among the unsaved people, creating a hunger to know Jesus. It was a reminder to

me that long before we tell anyone about Jesus, the Holy Spirit has already been there and made their heart hungry and receptive for the moment they will meet a witnessing Christian. Sometimes I think I forget that.

I've always heard so many jokes and negative stories about car salesmen.

I thought I'd share one that was different. His name is Roosevelt. I'm sure there is a story behind that name.

*July 13, 2008*

### **Spiritually Significant Happenings**

Today I preached at two wonderful churches. The first was Pastor Montefusco's church which is called Redemption. This is perhaps the most beautiful church in the denomination. It's large with a recently added balcony. It has beautiful stained glass panels on both sides. It has a high stage across the front with 2 levels. They have a screen and a ceiling mounted projector. And best of all, it is air conditioned. This church has come a long way in the last 10 years since I preached on a piece of plywood because the floors were just dirt. God has prospered Redemption Church. It is unquestionably the strongest disciple making church, led by a large staff of outstanding leaders, with the highest percentage of professionals than any other church in the denomination. It's a great church.

The greatest danger for a church like Redemption is not success, but that they lose touch with the "have-nots" and broken people of this world. In my message I reminded them of their past and praised them for all that Redemption has accomplished for the Kingdom of God. Their accomplishments are considerable. They have built an outstanding church. They have the finest leadership training program. Their pastor is the President of the Denomination. They are on the cutting edge of creative worship and the arts in their ministry. And they are one of the new Apostolic Churches God is raising up in Brazil. So I asked them how it was that they had been so successful for the Kingdom of God?

I told them the foremost authority on the New Apostolic Movement is Dr. C. Peter Wagner. For more than 40 years, he has had his finger on the pulse of what is happening across denominations around the world. He was the first to discover the New Apostolic Movement. He says that it started in 2001. So I asked Redemption this question: If the New Apostolic Era began in 2001 and this New Apostolic Movement is here in Brazil, what happened in 2001 to give birth to the New

Brazilian Apostolic Church? Did something spiritually significant happen here in this leading church? I asked them if anyone remembered?

I told them I knew of something spiritually significant that happened at Redemption in 2001. I had gone back and checked my set of journals which I have kept on each of my Brazil mission trips over the last 10 years. I pulled out my 2001 Journal and found the answer on the first page. That trip, I came to Manaus and introduced the Prayer of Jabez from *1 Chronicles 4:10*. I asked them how many of them were there on August 5, 2001 when I preached on this powerful prayer? A handful of people raised their hands and each one of them had a smile on their face. They remembered the Prayer of Jabez and how we prayed it together here at Redemption.

*"Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request. "*

Redemption prayed this prayer for blessing and enlarging their ministry. They asked for the Lord's hand to be upon them. That's what happened in Redemption Church in 2001.

And God granted Redemption's request!

I asked everyone who was not at Redemption Church when I shared the Prayer of Jabez to raise their hands. About 300 people raised their hands. I told them—the people who raised their hands—they are also God's answer to that prayer. It was a tremendous moment of recognition of answered prayer.

We had an altar call after the message. I encouraged any of them who wanted to step forward and commit their lives to being people like Jabez, to come forward and commit themselves to this New Apostolic Ministry. People poured forward. I would say 400 people crowded in front of the stage to make that commitment. It's powerful to watch people coming forward and a sea of white plastic chairs almost scooting to the back by themselves.

We prayed the Prayer of Jabez and asked God to give us the same blessing. There were very few people scattered in the back and balcony. I think they didn't come forward because there just wasn't any room in the front part of the church.

I'd say this was another spiritually significant night in the history of Redemption Church.

## The Other Church

Pastor Deslei came up to me as the service ended and took me to his church, my second preaching engagement for the night. We left the beautiful church of Redemption and traveled across town to a very poor neighborhood to Pastor Deslei's Church. The streets were narrow and dimly lit. You could feel the mass of humanity packed into the tight neighborhood. This was poverty.



Deslei's church was very humble, high on a hill in this ghetto. I felt bad because their service had started at 5:30pm and it was now 7:30pm. I guess Pastor John did not realize Deslei's services started so early when he made my schedule. I was really sorry we were so late. The church was packed with about 130 people that had been there for 2 hours waiting for me. I thought to myself, isn't it just like the poor who always get the short end of things? I'd been preaching in the only air conditioned Pentecostal church in Manaus and these folks were sweating it out, packed in wall to wall, waiting for me. I was really grieved.

I apologized to Pastor Deslei for having to wait on me. I asked him how long he wanted me to preach? I was thinking I should be brief in light of how long they had been waiting. Without batting an eye, Pastor Deslei said, "You are free to preach your whole message." I looked at their faces. They were so happy to have me there. It was as if they had just arrived, sang a couple of praise songs and were now ready to hear God's message. It dawned on me in that moment how it must have been when poor common folk gathered to hear Jesus, stayed all day, and had brought nothing to eat. That particular day Jesus fed the whole crowd by borrowing a boy's lunch of 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread. These people of Pastor Deslei's congregation seemed to me to be just like them, they were staying, too.



It was a great time. God brought His words of encouragement to their hearts and I was the one who got to say them for Him. 5 years ago, Pastor Deslei was given this church with only 20 people. Now the church was full and they are clearing the land next to them to enlarge their building. I couldn't help but think, what's so different between this church and Redemption?



We had an altar call where I challenged them to respond to the movement of God's Spirit and become one of the New Apostolic Churches. It seemed like everyone came forward. The chairs seemed to scoot back all by themselves. We had a wonderful time of dedication and prayer. And before Pastor Deslei dismissed the people, he wanted me to pray the Prayer of Jabez over them. You see, he had been at the Redemption service earlier, waiting

on me. Now I ask you, what's the difference between this poor little church and Redemption?

*July 14, 2008*

### **Exotic Amazon Food**

Today Pastor John told me that some of my friends at the church were preparing lunch for me. He said they were preparing some exotic dishes from the Amazon. I asked him what that was? He said, "I don't know. Maybe mocca," and laughed. Mocca is monkey. He was just kidding around with me. We didn't have monkey. We had armadillo and wild duck. It looked like the armadillo had been chopped up with a machete. The chunks of meat had the hard shell bands on one side and scraggly-haired skin on the other, all cooked in a thick brown gravy. You had to scrape the meat off of the shell and then de-skin it. I can assure you, it doesn't taste like chicken. By the way, the Portuguese word for Armadillo is tattoo. It might be good to know that if you ever come on a mission trip to Brazil and have the chance to eat some exotic Amazon food. When I returned to my room, I started taking the emergency prescription of antibiotics that I brought with me.