

Transformation in Brazil

A Report by Charles Barbosa & George Otis, Jr.

I. The Association of Evangelical Military Police in São Paulo

The Association of Evangelical Police was formed 2.5 years ago when senior officers watched Sentinel's *Let the Sea Resound* video. Major Alexandre Marcondes Terra was the first to review the stories, and shortly thereafter he shared a broader range of Sentinel videos with Captain Nilson Marcos de Castro, Lieutenant Joel Rocha, and Colonel Orlando Rodrigues de Camargo Filho. Major Terra now serves as the organization's Executive Director.

All of these gentlemen are part of the São Paulo police department's high command. They provide leadership for both the police academy and for neighborhood action. Their initial goal was to foster spiritual renewal within the police force. The effort struck a chord with others, and there are now more than 10,000 officers in the association. In time, the association's focus grew to encompass transforming revival in the city's more troubled districts. Their first step in addressing this challenge was to purchase a computer and database system with money raised from the member officers. Two years ago they launched a major research project that incorporated the spiritual mapping of São Paulo. More than 1,000 officers were directly involved with this effort.

The research covered a broad range of social indicators, both good and bad, in 250 distinct neighborhoods within the city. Six months ago they began to identify the worst of these communities — a process that was completed in January 2008.

The police then visited all of the churches in and around these communities and presented them with a summons to assemble at the police station a week or so later. When the pastors arrived at these meetings, they did not know what to expect. Many were surprised to see their fellow clergy were also in attendance.

As the briefings unfolded, the police presented the pastors with a comprehensive overview of the spiritual and social dysfunction within their neighborhoods. In each case it was a black picture filled with witchcraft, drugs, crime, accidents, hopelessness and poverty. When they had completed their presentation, the officers stepped toward the pastors and said: "It seems clear to us gentlemen that the churches are not doing their job."

The Christian officers then pressed in: "We are in this situation together. And if you feel the way we do, you cannot be satisfied. The question is, 'What are we going to do?' It is time to act, but we cannot move without God's power and wisdom."

Then one of the officers walked over to a video player and paused. "Do you believe that God can turn your neighborhood around?" he asked. "Is this possible?" He then popped in one of The Sentinel Group's *Transformations* videos.

When the video ended, the officer in charge of the meeting stood up in front of the assembled pastors and said, "If God can do it there, He can do it here!"

For the next three to four hours the Christian police officers led the pastors in a time of repentance and reconciliation.

Pastors in several of the needy communities are now holding combined communion services once a month, and taking up offerings to support the most needy congregations. The churches are also adopting police stations, schools and hospitals.

Changes have already surfaced in two of the seven communities that have embarked on this new course. Conversions are on the upswing while crime is beginning to fall for the first time in years. In one community police recently arrested 40 drug kingpins who had previously proven untouchable. Although this new process is just underway, hope is already being restored to people who thought it had been lost forever.