

Latin America Area Seminar, Sao Paulo, Brazil, April 2019. Report by Alison Judd, World President.



Three World Officers were able to attend the Latin America Area Seminar in Sao Paulo, Brazil in April 2019. It came very soon after the East Asia Area event in Hong Kong, so we could have been forgiven for being tired, but the energy and passion of the women of this Area soon re-energised us. World Officers were not the only ones to have had long and arduous journeys to Sao Paulo, but everyone felt uplifted by the fellowship, worship and sharing of news that we experienced here. Our venue was the Faculty of Theology, within the impressive Methodist University of Sao Paulo, Sao Bernardo Campus. It felt very significant that this centre of learning was named after Mrs Otilia Chaves, Brazilian World President of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women 1952-6.

The Weaving Together Programme was an inspiring time of sharing news from World, Area and Unit Officers from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. We heard how the Area Officers, Leila and Jessica, had been busy visiting associate Units in order to encourage greater participation. We were also pleased to include in this meeting the two Helen Kim Memorial Scholars for this Area, Karen from Peru and Luiza from Brazil. It was good to see how they (and other young women) were being encouraged to contribute to the life and work of the Area.



I was particularly impressed by this Area's commitment to the Thursdays in Black campaign to end violence against women, raising awareness among men and boys as well as women and girls.



The Ketso resource was used enthusiastically and generated lively conversations and clear priorities for the future work. A real challenge for many of these Units is the difficulty of travel across vast nations, making good communications vital. Digital newsletters and a bi-monthly magazine for Brazil 'Vox Missionaria' provide regular and valuable information.

Most women in attendance spoke only Portuguese or Spanish so I was extremely grateful to have two excellent translators on hand to make sure those of us restricted to English could understand what was being said. Andrea Reilly and Keila Guimaraes were like angels, always on hand to share the message across the language barriers. Rev Margarida Ribeiro presided at our closing communion, a very special time of worship and rededication.

Once the Area Seminar began, we were joined by women from Ecuador, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, and also El Salvador who were welcomed officially into the Area as affiliated members.

The Seminar programme included plenty of lively and meaningful worship. Small groups were



formed for an excellent interactive bible study on Acts 9:36-42 the story of Dorcas, from which new truths about service and ministry were highlighted. Andrea Reilly used the Old Testament story of the 5 daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11) to help us consider how we can challenge the injustices of our own societies by speaking out as courageous and informed women of the World Federation to those in authority.

I was able to present news of the World Federation's commitment to proclaiming the gospel through worship and relationships and Mataiva outlined the benefits of the Helen Kim Memorial Scholarship programme with the help of the two current scholars. Ester Antunes spoke about her experiences as a Global Mission Fellow in Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Uruguay. We were all moved by what we heard and were so glad Ester had been able to attend and contribute to our seminar. Our final worship with communion on Saturday was led by Rev Margarida Ribeiro, a creative and inspiring leader for us all. Then, on Palm Sunday, many of us were welcomed at the Methodist Cathedral in Sao Paulo for their morning worship.



I returned home with the impression that the Methodist women of Latin America are committed, courageous and faithful to the call of Jesus Christ to proclaim the greatness of God. I shall pray that their significant contribution to the life of the church is fully acknowledged and valued by all. (My thanks to Josh Robertson for these photos).