



## Indigenous leaders cry out for theological training

*"...make disciples of all nations..." Matthew 28:19-20 ESV*

God put the call to work as a cross-cultural missionary into my heart, from the moment of my conversion. In 1995 I was still an unbeliever, but I was interested in learning about the different structures and aspects of language. I took the Course in Linguistics and Missiology (CLM) at the Evangelical Missionary Linguistic Association (ALEM). After months of attending daily worship services, listening to the preached Word of God and to the testimonies of many missionaries, the Holy Spirit touched my heart and brought me to the cross. Since then, the indigenous peoples of Brazil, themselves the subject of many of those testimonies, have been in my heart. In 2008 I took the ALEM course again, this time with my family, in preparation to minister to these people.

In the first six months among the indigenous people, God blessed me with the opportunity to live in the chieftain's dwelling. Despite the difficulty of being away from my wife and daughters, I was able to develop a great friendship with him and the almost fifty people who lived in that house. The experience was the equivalent of an intensive course in the language and culture of that people. Eventually, our house was built, and my family remained there for three years, absorbing the language, observing, and learning the cultural expressions that would be of great use to us in the next step: the beginning of the translation of the Holy Scriptures.

When I informed the chieftain that we wanted to move to the city and begin translating the Word of God into their language, I received his authorization, with one condition: that I take his son to work with me. He gave me his son as a gift! His assistance was crucial in the translation process. Once again, we were able to witness God's providence and wisdom, having cultivated that relationship since my first days among the people.



*Missionary Fábio Ribas Dantas next to his coworker, Mike, and Pastor Esdra, a leader among the indigenous converts*

In the city, while our translation work was ongoing, another means emerged for creating and nurturing relationships with indigenous people in the region. We were offered the opportunity to take over the leadership of a Presbyterian congregation, which became a base for missionaries working in the region, translating the Bible into various languages, for many different people groups. These missionaries were not only spiritually sustained there, but they also brought along their indigenous converts and others who were getting to know the gospel. Five indigenous peoples were represented there, singing hymns, choruses, and reading the Scripture that would be preached that day, all in their own languages.

As many indigenous people had been converted by this point, we took some families to the AMI Training Center, which prepares these individuals for three years to return to their peoples and preach the gospel. This is especially important in a context where the presence of non-

indigenous people among these groups is prohibited with few exceptions, as is the case in Brazil.

Certainly, the greatest challenge we have now is bringing biblical-theological training to the indigenous leaders. The indigenous church is crying out for this. But Reformed Christians have only entered the history of missions among the indigenous people of Brazil long after other strands of Christianity. The Baptists have been doing this for much longer, since the mid-1950s, planting indigenous churches.

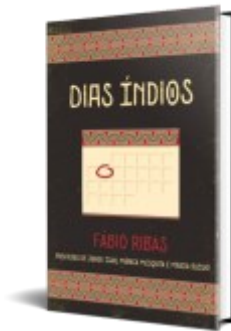
The training centers that exist today are under pressure and influence from denominations that tend toward Arminianism or theological liberalism or Pentecostalism. We need Reformed denominations and institutions to adopt these training centers and take the reins of their theological and educational direction, leading indigenous leaders to become ideologically and theologically rooted in the Word of God and to be empowered by the Reformed worldview. We need intercultural Reformed faith seminaries, growing out of partnerships between the IRTC and the many missions and missionaries who are already in the field, eager for this support.

This partnership would be essential to reach and train indigenous leaders of varying levels of education in Reformed theology. Some of them have difficulty with Portuguese, but others have already finished school and become teachers and nurses! In any case, the

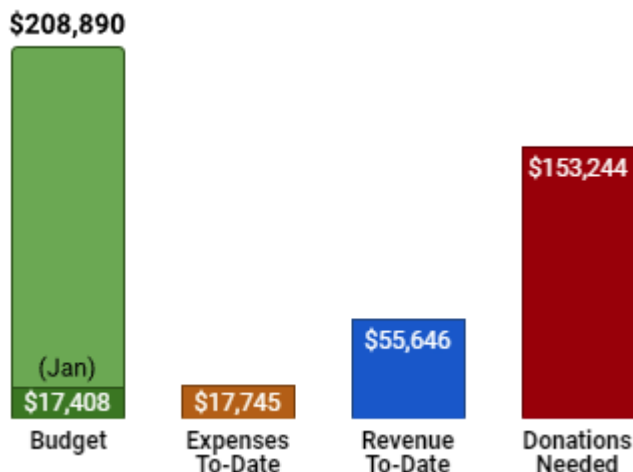
missionary who is there working with them can be a facilitator. The IRTC's teaching system fits this situation perfectly, since it requires each student to have a tutor, accompanying their studies and offering encouragement.

There is still much work to be done, and great opportunities to reach souls and educate the hearts of the indigenous peoples of Brazil. Please pray for the missionaries who are directly involved with them, translating the Bible and preaching the gospel. Also pray that the IRTC will continue to develop partnerships with missionaries and mission organizations, educating more and more indigenous leaders in Reformed theology, for the glory of God.

*Fábio Ribas is a professor in the Department of Apologetics and Missiology at the IRTC and author of the book Dias Índios ([available on amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B089L7L7L7)), which contains many accounts of his cross-cultural and ministerial experiences among the indigenous people with whom he lived.*



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