

## BIBLICAL MINISTRY IN OUR INSTITUTE

### Brother Enrique García Ahumada

Biblical ministry consists of activities that are set up so that "all faithful Christians have full access to the Sacred Scriptures" (Dei Verbum, 22). For example: translation, publication or spreading of the Bible, Biblical training by means of specific courses or through a quality catechesis and liturgy; the creation of resources so that the Word of God is available to different human sectors: curricular designs, manuals, works of theater, poetry, songs, sound shows, movies, auxiliary programs, television programs, information, etc.

#### The Catholic Biblical Federation.

Founded by the Secretariat for the Unity of Christians in 1969, it aims to make effective the guidelines concerning the biblical apostolate from the council Constitution "Dei Verbum". According to the Statutes, there are two kinds of members: currently there are 84 full members, all of which are episcopal conferences and 219 associate members, that is to say, Catholic organizations recognized by the Church as active in Biblical ministry.

The plenary assemblies are held every six years to share experiences of the different work areas of the members and to propose Catholic Church policy in Biblical ministry and also to listen to news given by the President (appointed by the Apostolic See), the Executive Committee (elected by the plenary assembly for a six year term) and the General Secretariat. The first assemblies were held in Vienna, Austria in 1978, Malta in 1978 and Bangalore, India in 1984.

At the Fifth Plenary Assembly held in Hong Kong from July 2-12, 1996, the Divine Word Missionaries had 29 representatives from their Generalate, from several religious provinces, from publishing houses and houses of formation. Our Institute is an associate member and has sent a representative since the Fourth Assembly which was held in Bogota in 1990.

The Federation functions through its members who have established a regional and sub-regional organization on the various continents for their mutual support of Biblical ministry.

The General Secretariat (Mittelstrasse 12, Postfach 105222, D-70045 Stuttgart, Germany (FAX 49-0711-1692424) publishes the quarterly bulletin "Dei Verbum" in German, Italian, English, French and Spanish. In addition, the Latin American team publishes the magazine "La Palabra Hoy" (Calle 65 N. 7-68f A.A. 51513, Santafe de Bogota, Columbia, FAX 57-1-21-4 444).

#### Our Institute's commitment to the Bible.

The *Rule places the Word of God*, primarily expressed in the Bible, at the center of the Brother's life.

"To acquire and live by the spirit of their Institute, the Brothers find endless sustenance in studying, meditating and sharing among themselves the word of God. They have a

profound respect for Holy Scripture, especially the Gospel, "their first and principal Rule". By a spirit of prayer and attentiveness to the presence of God, the Brothers remain sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who leads them to an ever deeper appreciation of the realities of faith" (Rule 6).

"The spirit of faith kindles in the Brothers an ardent zeal for those confided to their care in order to open their hearts to receive the salvation revealed in Jesus Christ. This zeal, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, inspires their apostolic prayer and all the activities of their educational ministry. In this way they participate in the gospel mission of the Church. Through the promotion of justice and peace they cooperate in the building up of the kingdom of God" (Rule 7).

*The mission of the Brother is rooted in and animated by the Gospel.*

"As 'ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ', the Brothers participate in the Church's mission...in their educational activity they seek to integrate the effort for human advancement with the announcement of God's word" (Rule 12).

"...The Brothers consider that their 'principal function' consists in the work of evangelization and catechesis whereby they contribute to growth in faith of those who have been baptized and to the building up of the ecclesial community. This conviction plays a dominant role in the formation of the Brothers as well as in the choice of the assignments for which they will be prepared" (Rule 15).

"The Institute...participates in the missionary activity of the Church whose essential task is to announce the Gospel to everyone and to all cultures. The concern to bring the Church into being among peoples, either unaware of the Good News of Jesus Christ or as yet little informed about it, as well as the evident shortage of people working for the spread of the gospel in certain areas, constitutes a continual challenge to the Institute to make its contribution through its specific ministry" (Rule 19).

"Together and by association they labor to accomplish God's saving work in a profession where 'the poor have the gospel preached to them' and where young people grow as human persons and children of God. In faith, the Brothers praise God as they see his kingdom being extended" (Rule 20).

"The Brothers have always in view the promotion of justice in the light of the gospel and either the direct or indirect service of the poor as the preferred aspect of their ministry of education" (Rule 40).

"In their desire to make it possible for poor people to live with dignity and to be open to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Brothers show genuine creativity in responding to these new needs" (Rule 41).

"...By evangelizing young people and educating them in the faith, the Brothers help them to find their vocation in the Church. The Brothers witness by their personal and community life that their vocation has significance as a way of salvation for themselves and for those to whom they are sent" (Rule 82).

**The Brother's consecration is a way to live the Gospel in a radical way.**

"In response to their call of the Holy Spirit, each Brother, freely, and without any thought of turning back, bases his whole existence on the gospel in order to follow Jesus Christ" (Rule 22).

"The Brothers live out their consecration in a community of the Church. Their community is for all Christians a special sign of the covenant between God and human beings. Such a community affirms the duty and the possibility of renewing the world in the spirit of the gospel" (Rule 23).

"As they contemplate the history of salvation unfolding in their own lives, they find in the gospel journey of the Founder a call to conversion, constancy in adversity, and the strength to begin anew" (Rule 144).

### **The Brothers' community life is built around the Word of God.**

"The Brothers pray together. Together they hear the word of God and meditate on it. Together they recognize that they are sinners before God and they participate in the same Eucharist together. Together they seek God and it is together that they find him" (Rule 50).

"The community reappraises its goals and methods with a view to coming closer to the spirit of the gospel. It does this by reexamining the pastoral effectiveness of its activity" (Rule 51).

"The Brothers find the principal sources for their prayer in Holy Scripture, the liturgy, and the challenges that come to them from their ministry, from the Church and from the world. They read and meditate on the Word of God every day; they prolong this contact with the Lord in their spiritual reading" (Rule 67).

"Every aspect of the Brother's life is energized by the mystery of the Eucharist. As far as possible they participate in the celebration of it every day. There, in communion with the death and resurrection of Christ and listening to the Word of God, the Brothers are a community united in mind and heart in the same Spirit for the same mission" (Rule 70).

"The Brothers meet together at least in the morning and in the evening to celebrate the liturgy of the hours in union with the praise and continual intercession of the Church" (Rule 71).

### **The Brothers' formation is strengthened by Holy Scripture.**

"Initial formation begins with a period of preparation before the novitiate and continues until perpetual profession. Its aim is to help the candidates to follow Christ according to the teaching of the Gospel and to meet him in their everyday lives" (Rule 86).

"With great respect for the personal progress of each of the novices, those in charge of the formation will urge them to enter progressively into the fundamental spiritual outlook of a disciple of Saint John Baptist de La Salle: abandonment to God as a follower of Christ for a community service of evangelization and education available to all but with a preference for the disadvantaged" (Rule 90).

### **Happenings in Chile.**

In the hope that other Districts may choose to describe the situation in their own Districts using the same means of communication, allow me to describe the Biblical ministry of the Brothers in Chile.

The initial formation period of postulants, novices and Brothers in temporary vows includes Bible training both in an experiential and an academic setting. The first setting consists of making Holy Scripture the inspiration and the rule of one's personal and community life. In 1995 the Novitiate Formation Program was reformulated and it includes systematic training in the Bible as well as training in the method of making mental prayer of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. In this effort Biblical texts play a large role. In the postulancy as well as in the scholasticate there is academic training in the Bible included in the field of religious pedagogy which is currently taken by all those in formation before beginning study in another educational specialty area.

Apostolic activity is carried out primarily by means of two schools that have one year of kindergarten and eight years of basic education and five other schools that in addition to kindergarten and primary grades they have a four year secondary school program. In all of the levels there are two hours per week devoted to the study of religion. In all the schools there are one or more chaplains who celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist with the students and at times with the teachers and the students' parents. Since 1968 there has been a program in all the schools for family initiation into the sacrament of Reconciliation and the

Eucharist for children. This program trains parents to read Sacred Scripture in a prayerful and reflective manner by means of married couples who serve as guides. These were initially prepared by the Brothers and now are prepared by catechetical diocesan teams, given the success of the spread of the national and Latin-American ministry system. There is also a systematic training for leaders in ministry among the parents who direct the ministry part of the monthly parents' meetings for each grade level. These are often based on Biblical themes inspired in family education. There are student groups for Young Lasallian Missionaries, pre-teen groups, Eucharist preparation groups, Confirmation preparation groups, faith communities for the young. These latter groups have a leader who is a student in the middle section and who is advised by Brothers or lay colleagues who have been trained in the Lasallian spirit. In all of these groups the Word of God plays a central role and is the inspiration for charitable and apostolic practices.

The District's Catechetical and Ministry Committee fosters the quality of religious education in the various educational centers by means of monthly meetings of delegates from all the schools. These meetings are supervised by a coordinator, acting in his capacity as a member of the District Leadership Team which was established by the 1995 District Chapter. The committee also draws up each year a booklet of Assignments and Communication for all students, with the Biblical reference to the liturgical texts for each day and an inspiring thought for reflection, generally based on the Bible. This is given fifteen minutes before the beginning of the regular school day.

Since 1980 this committee also coordinates the yearly School for Youth Leaders in Lasallian Ministry which is given over a three day period in an off campus location for some 60 boys or girls. These are divided into three levels for students in the middle school who have committed themselves to ministry activities in their respective schools. The progressive program of Biblical formation for this School for Youth Leaders in Lasallian Ministry includes exercises in "The Bible in Christian Life" for level one, "The Bible in Ministry" for level two and "Biblical Problems" for level three in addition to the Biblical content of other topics. Since 1984 this committee has also established a Rural Summer Mission under the direction of several Brothers, teachers, parents, former students and some students who are completing their final year. Since 1994 a School for Missionaries has taken precedence which lasts for three days and which gives practical training for evangelization in a pluralistic environment.

The District's Lasallian Family Committee for the Laity since 1990 conducts a School for Lay Lasallians at three different levels. This is a one day affair and later on there is a five day retreat. Each level includes a systematic Bible training program as a necessary condition for Lasallian spirituality. The goal of the School for Lay Lasallians is to create or strengthen in each school one or several faith communities that meet together periodically to connect their personal and professional lives with the Gospel.

In 1992 our District contributed along with the Marist Brothers, the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary the Helper, the Professional Home Catechetical Institute and finally the Episcopal Conference of Chile to the establishment of the Advanced Institute of Catechetical Ministry of Chile, the "Catecheticum" which was soon admitted as an associate member of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

The Catecheticum has a teaching staff of ten doctors in several disciplines and several others with licentiate. These people currently offer post graduate courses in Catechetical Ministry and an advanced degree in Educational Ministry. A specialization in Biblical Ministry is currently under study. It began in 1993 with 5 students and in 1996 there were 35, including two priests from the Dominican Republic, one from Panama, one from Colombia, two from Bolivia, a Venezuelan Sister, a Sister from Peru, another from Argentina and a Marist Brother from Paraguay and several other priests, religious and laity from Chile. •