

**Third International Training Consultation
Emmaus Bible College**

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Workshop 4.4

Decentralising training – Extension ministries & other church-based initiatives

Facilitators: Eliseo Casal Chousa and Fares Marzone

Remit Explore the different experiences, strengths and weaknesses of either taking college-based studies into extension ministries, or developing church-based training methods.

Workshop Chair: Luis Mostacero

Some Discussion Questions

1. Is there a clear consciousness of the need for biblical training among the Brethren assemblies? What is the level of interest in churches nowadays?
2. At what level is this training set? Is it the same for everybody or is it understood that an accredited training must be provided to leaders and people developing ministries? Do we consider anyone in charge of ministries should have a proper training?
3. Would we agree that, in order to have a proper training, we should count on gifts and talents beyond the local church?
4. Is the support to the initiative of a biblical institute possible? How can we create a team of promoters and coordinators regionally?
5. How could we structure the relationship and collaboration between the institution and the local churches?
6. Which resources could we count on? Could a list of institutions and syllabuses work as reference? Could collaboration among already-existing institutions take place?
7. What could be the best methodology? Face-to-face seminars organized according to area and periodicity, a program carried out in the local church, correspondence courses and distance learning, Internet... Possible options should be taken into consideration.
8. Importance of the tutor figure in the context of each local church.
9. At what level would we be working? Required qualifications.

WORKSHOP DAY 4

Facilitator 1: Eliseo Casal

PROJECT RATIONALE

The society we live in today is subject to constant changes and progress in all scientific and knowledge fields. Technology keeps developing at such pace that it makes it difficult to keep up with every innovation. Moreover, we live in a globalised world where information is available to a high percentage of the world's population, thus overcoming any physical border and frontier. Likewise, ideas spread rapidly in the media and the world is becoming every time more urban by accessing it, its pros and cons.

The church cannot and must not be unaware of this reality, which could be involved in developing wise strategies that allow Christians to face new challenges. Such challenges may imply: an extensive educational level; a quick expansion of ideas, both good and bad; the need of contextualized apologetics in order to answer questions and present concerns (these may vary from Western countries to Latin America, Asia or Africa), which require a good knowledge of the social context, an appropriate cultural level to answer effectively and some biblical knowledge allowing the application of the Scriptures' principles in the current situation.

On the other hand, access to university and higher education is rapidly increasing. Nowadays, plenty of young people have a better cultural education than their parents.

All this demands that every Christian, but more especially church leaders, have a stronger and more in-depth preparation which provides them with the appropriate tools and training to face present challenges. Intellectual training plays an essential role in this educational process and it should be on the same level as Christian development, as long as the Spirit is leading. Church leaders must experience a constant spiritual growth and educational development, without undermining the basis of Christian life, such as sanctity and testimony. The contemporary world requests leaders to be well prepared. *"Leaders are facing new challenges which bring with them a higher academic standing, making it necessary to have appropriate answers to questions. Thus, we should be the first ones to follow a process of continuous training and encourage other qualified members in the church to follow the same path, especially those with the gift of teaching."*¹

At the same time, in some places church leaders are required to have some accreditation showing a degree or official qualifications that guarantee their expertise in carrying out their task.

Undoubtedly, all this represents a big challenge for churches and institutions devoted to biblical and theological training, which put the necessary resources within reach of believers and leaders.

Not only is it good to offer the access to studies in a determined academic institution, but also to develop the effort of putting it within practical reach of anyone interested in it, taking into account matters such as time and money investment. Most church members do not have the time or economic resources to spend three or four years fully dedicated to theological studies in a biblical school or seminary. If we wish to strengthen leadership with a good biblical-theological training, it will be necessary to bring it closer to everyday reality and, at the same time, encourage those working full time in ministry to have a complete training.

¹ Leadership and edification. Lecture in the first Brethren Assemblies congress in Spain 2012.

BENEFITS OF DECENTRALIZATION

- **Ever-greater scope**
 - More students benefitting from the studies. Especially where economy is weak and it is difficult for people to travel, spend years exclusively on their training and finance its cost
 - A wide spectrum including the training for the development of different ongoing church-based ministries and leadership training (which in practice means more prepared people)
- **In the local church**
 - They could count on more well-prepared members and leaders better trained to carry out their ministries
 - Implication of members and leaders in the training process: ones, learning; others, teaching and mentoring
- **Among churches**
 - A better use and application of the resources and gifts already present in churches
 - Strengthening of the fraternal link by means of the exchange and cooperation during training
 - Enrichment thanks to the exchange among churches and cultures if counting on the contribution of teachers and specialists from other countries, as well as periodic meetings with students

CHALLENGES

- Decentralizing the biblical training goes along with a bigger effort from teachers, as travelling means having to leave their families and local ministries more often
- The need to cover the expenses/allowance for the teachers
- The participation of the elders for pastoral monitoring of the students in their churches
- Providing students with the necessary resources for their studies (ie. libraries that put access to books within their reach)
- Cooperation among nearby churches so as to make the training process and the access to resources easier

THE PROCESS

1. Defining the aim and goals for the training program
2. Defining the necessary curriculum
3. Defining the methodology (only one system or more than one)
 - a. Creation of a program or setting-up of an institute or biblical school
 - b. Lessons taught in local churches
 - c. Face-to-face seminars in easy-to-reach areas
 - d. Periodic retreats (biannual, annual)
 - e. Internet connection wherever possible

4. Training the workforce
 - a. Qualified teachers
 - b. Administrators
 - c. Representatives and promoters of the program or institute organized in areas

5. Beginning with a group with great interest and clear targets which can work as a model in the future

THE PROGRAM

Once the aim and purpose of the program have been defined, the stage(s) being taught should be established, as well as the target audience for this syllabus.

By organizing the syllabus in different levels, a basic training is made available to those in charge of different ministries or taking part in teaching tasks, followed by a higher level designed to provide leaders with a proper training.

Both the length of the program and the time investment required from students must be taken into account in order to make the course compatible with their jobs, family and church ministries.

Similarly, the cultural and educational level of the different locations where the training will take place must be considered and contemplated.

Assuming that the program needs to have some official recognition, it will be necessary either to set up an institution meeting the requirements and acknowledged by the laws of the country, or to count with the support of an already existing one from which the training is taught in extension.

POSSIBLE DIFFICULTIES TO OVERCOME

- Resistance by churches to receive an “outside” program
- Unfamiliarity with the teachers and, consequently, lack of trust
- Costs and expenses of the trips (how to pay for them?)
- Time investment and commitment on the teachers’ part:
 - Some volunteers
 - Some full-time contributors

RESOURCES

The use of Internet: Decentralization without having to move a lot. Social networks for promotion; Skype for virtual lessons and program coordination.

PRACTICAL IDEAS TO GET STARTED

- Regarding churches
 - Building awareness of the need
 - Knowing the resources for the training in each and every country
 - Generating trust
 - Involving key leaders and at the same time establishing clear working criteria
 - Considering the advantages of a decentralized program: students are still church-based, develop their gifts and do not lose touch with their local community
 - Problems and how to solve them
 - Individualism
 - Sense of interference
 - Only fine if I do it or take part in it
 - Enrolling provided that it is already working (how can something like this get started?)

- Training the team
 - Starting with an already-existing entity
 - Starting with a new entity
 - Academic part
 - Administrative part
 - Seriousness and commitment
 - Teachers
 - Qualifications
 - Recognition

- Promotion
 - Starting with a group showing interest and results so as to encourage others and make people enroll in a successful undertaking seen as necessary
 - Making advantages known

- Activities
 - Holding an annual meeting or retreat for all the students, teachers and contributors so as not to lose focus of the program's identity and foster vision and companionship
 - Using these retreats to plan jointly with the corresponding leaders in decentralized centers. Exchanging experiences to learn from each other and pray together
 - Providing a special training for teachers on methodology as well as consolidation of some matters which would be carried out by guest experts

THE DISTANCE MINISTRY OF IBEI'S "EXTENSION SCHOOL"

Facilitator 2: Fares Mazon

- I. **Introduction or Preliminary remarks**
- II. **Why did it start**
 - A. The first reason: an answer to a specific request
 - B. The second reason: others would benefit
 - C. The third reason: not many enrolled in the residential school
- III. **How did we organize it**
 - A. The preparation stage
 1. Choosing the place
 2. Gathering the leaders
 3. Advertising in many ways
 - B. The teaching stage
 1. The students involved
 2. The teachers involved
 3. The teaching involved
 - C. The studying stage
 1. Reading
 2. Writing
 3. Exams
- IV. **How did it work**
 - A. The program developed
 1. The courses taught
 2. The material prepared and used
 3. The cost involved
 - B. People reached
 - C. The results achieved
 1. Help in studying
 2. Help to future leaders
 3. Help in increasing fellowship
- V. **How it's working now**
 - A. The organization
 - B. The program
 - C. The level
- VI. **Strengths**
 - A. The many people reached
 - B. The quality of the teaching
 - C. The benefit to the various churches:
 1. The students' immediate contribution
 2. The teachers' immediate contribution
 3. The students' contribution in due times

VII. Weaknesses

- A. Quite demanding for the students
- B. Quite demanding for the faculty
- C. Quite demanding for the families

V111. Conclusion

- A. Highly recommended
- B. Highly efficient
- C. Highly useful