

## The imperative to train the laity

### Editorial



The Protestant Reformation of the 16th. century recovered the place of the laity - believing women and men in the local church. Luther and other reformers rescued what we know as the "universal priesthood" of believers. The laity in the Catholic Church were mere acolytes - assistants of the priest. The authority, teaching, and mission were in the hands of the clerical leadership. They were the scholars, teachers and the caretakers of the being and workings of the church - the mass, liturgy and ministries. The laity were the common people, who were considered uneducated and ignorant of the Bible, church affairs and mission. This perspective only change in the mid-20th. century at the second Vatican Council.

Since the Reformation the laity - the people of God - regained its role according to the New Testament. The flawed process of the medieval church was reversed.

Since that time lay people have played an important role in spreading the gospel.

However, today we still struggle with some vestiges of clerical catholicism. Most biblical theological entities for example focus their major efforts on the theological education of pastors and missionaries. Without a doubt, it has been fundamental for the edification of the church the pastoral work and the missions. However, the same attention has not been given to the biblical formation of the laity. This deficit of formation has repercussions on the poor projection of the laity, and consequently of the church. Their incidence has been limited in terms of social impact in their communities and thus in the country.

Lay people need to be formed from the perspective of integral mission. Mainly, because most of them believe that their mission is to evangelize their peers and to keep their testimony. Advocacy for justice, care of the environment, or fighting for the workers' rights is not part of their mission agenda. In general, they not only fail to take up these challenges, but also allow themselves to be influenced by the system. For example, success is sought according to the success criteria of the market society, and not according to the values of the kingdom of God. Partly, because of the training they have received, they are trained in spiritual, family or ecclesial life, but not necessarily to face the challenges the world of work academy, the arts, politics or business.

It is therefore imperative that the laity have a biblical formation that provides theological criteria for discerning their world, so that they can be agents of changes in the name of Christ, and contribute to the spiritual and social development of their community and society. Mark Greene from his context proposes that young believers study for one or two years at a bible college before going to university or starting a job. He argues that is education is need even more for work in a secular organization that for work in the church. Precisely because people's views in this context may be opposed to Christianity, and because they will be challenged to work on a variety of issues and problems that require much discernment. He emphasizes that since christians spend most of their lives at work, they should be trained biblically and see their work as a mission field.[1]

In the Old Testament we find men and women that maintained their faith in God, and at the same time advocated for the common good in non-christian societies. For example, the midwives who fought for a medical ethic in defiance of Pharaoh's orders to kill the male babies of the Jews; the young servant of King Naaman who dared to suggest that he go to Israel to be healed; and what about Joseph, who in Egypt became second in command and saved the country and his family from a terrible famine and danger of death. Greene claims that these were not spiritual giants, but ordinary women and men taking up their faith in their workplaces.[2]

In the New Testament the leadership opened the way for mission, established churches and trained the laity, but it was the laity who carried the gospel throughout the empire. They embraced Christian deaconship, apologetics, teaching, pastoral care and evangelism as a way of life. The Thessalonians make this evident. They imitated Paul and fellow ministers and the Lord, they were an example to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believed, and they spread the gospel not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also everywhere their faith in God spread, so that the apostles no longer needed to speak (1 Ts.1:6-8). In Peter's words, the mission of proclaiming the virtues of God - not just the message of salvation - rests on the shoulders of the church (the "laos" of God, 1 Pet.2:9 KJV).

In today's context of society the laity are equally challenged: to bear witness to their faith in word and deed, and to be proactive for the common good in their fields of work. In this case, it is necessary that their pastors train them in these issues, and at the same time, encourage them to seek a formation that helps them to connect the Bible with the social reality, and provides them with criteria to know how to face the challenges of their environment. In celebration of the Protestant Reformation, let us affirm the universal priesthood of believers, and the imperative to form the laity in the Word from mission in the manner of Jesus. The Ezra Centre, aware of this need, offers various diploma courses that, from a biblical worldview, connect the challenges of work, the environment, children and adolescents, integral health, citizen participation and mission in their context, so that the laity can be agents of change in the name of Christ. To the extent that they are salt and light of the world, the church will be able to project a mission that will have a greater impact on society, so that when they see their good works, they will glorify the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. Israel Ortiz, Director  
Ezra Centre

[1] Thank God it's Monday ministry in the workplace. (Third edition). England. Scripture Union. 2003. P.19  
[2] Idem. P.20..

## Programme of Childhood, Adolescence and Family

**Karen Sipac**  
Coordinator of Programme

The Diploma in Integral Development of Children and Adolescents culminated with the participation of 10 students, who were trained for 8 months in subjects such as Theology of Children and Adolescents, Development of Children and Adolescents, Prevention and Care in Situations of Violence, among others. Through this space, the participants obtained tools to implement in the work and ministerial spaces.



## Theological Studies

### Jeison Rodríguez Coordinator of Diplomas

We extend a warm welcome to Venuz Rabin Perez Lopez, who as of September 1st is the new assistant of the Diploma Program. Venuz is an agronomist with a Master's degree in Integrated Watershed Management. She is currently interested in growing in the relationship between her discipline and Theology, especially how to contribute to the restoration of natural resources through the care and transformation of creation.

**Virtual Diploma Courses through the Moodle Platform.** Thanks be to God the diploma course Jesus Pedagogy is developing the 8th module for teachers of the Church of God and other churches. In the same way, the Mission in the manner of Jesus diploma course is coming to an end with pastors and lay people from various churches. Both diploma courses will be completed in November.

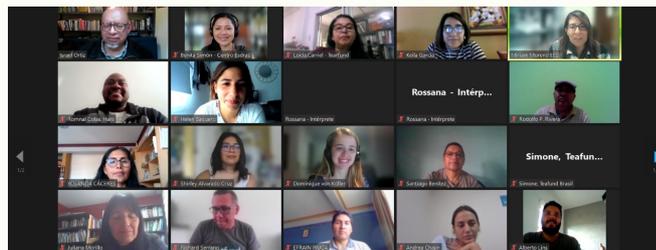


# Programme of environment

**Benita Simón**  
Coordinator of Programme

## Trainings with Tearfund

With much gratitude to God, the 7 sessions of the material "Hope for all creation", which have been developed since March with our dear friends and partners of Tearfund, were finished. It was a valuable process in which members of the different offices in Guatemala, from the Latin American region, took part. We dream that every day more and more people, groups, organizations, the Church in general, will continue to awaken an active passion for a responsible stewardship of God's creation.

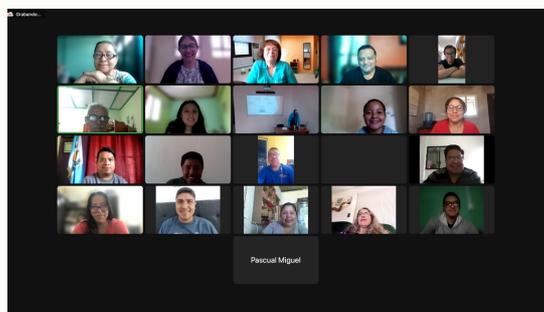


## Campaign #AcciónPorLaCreación (ActionForCreation)

We continue to encourage through our virtual campaign #AcciónPorLaCreación, practical ideas to reduce our ecological footprint with everyday actions.

If you have seen the posts from the page, we encourage you to take up the challenge and share with more people or groups. We also want to share testimonials from people who are taking on any of these challenges, if you have any

testimonials of these habit changes, you can share it with us so that we can unite to spread the word to more people.



## Programme of Integral Health

**Robert Reich**  
Coordinator of Programme

We are very excited about the opportunity to welcome 23 students to the "Integral Care of the Church Leader" course that is being taught in hybrid format at the Central American Theological Seminary. Students who are joining online come from countries such as Peru, Mexico, El Salvador and the United States. A pastor who received integral health coaching once commented: "I suggest that the topic of integral health be part of the seminary curriculum." Rather than trying to make changes too late in ministry, it is good to get off to a good start. This same pastor commented on how some of his fellow pastors were in poor health and this was affecting their ability to exercise their leadership. Just as he was able to implement good habits, he saw that it is possible to take action to prevent disease.



Also by surprise, the Lord has opened a door to give workshops on "The Biblical Perspective on Prevention" in conjunction with the Panamerican Health Organization with religious leaders in Coban. These workshops are being planned for mid-November.

## Contributing to key leadership training

Earlier this year we received an invitation from Hector Morales, director of Youth for Christ Latin America, to participate in the design and facilitation of the "Follower of Jesus" module as part of a training proposal for high potential leaders of the organization.

Israel and Lily Ortiz took on the challenge of designing and facilitating this module which lasted 4 weeks with two virtual meetings in August and September, and which had two approaches, the first in relation to Integral Mission and the second on the Theology of Childhood and Adolescence. We thank God for allowing us to contribute to the formation of this group of 28 key leaders from Nicaragua, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Uruguay and Guatemala.



Visita Dra. Annette de Fortin



Taller Historias de Transformación



Visita de Tim Klinger



Firma convenio con Tearfund

## Visits and cooperation

In August we visited Dr. Annette de Fortin, who is one of the founders of Ezra Centre, and she was presented with a special recognition for her work, support and collaboration with the Centre.

Members of the operations team in August received a workshop on "Stories of Transformation" in San Juan La Laguna, Sololá. This workshop was given by our colleagues from Tearfund.

In September we received a delightful visit from Tim Klinger, a member of the Faculty of Languages and Letters at Wheaton College in Chicago. During his visit we were able to discuss the possibility of students from the Human Needs and Global Resources programme having an exchange with theological institutions such as Ezra Centre. We hope to be able to establish an agreement with them.

On 7 October we signed a new cooperation agreement with Tearfund. We thank God for his support for more than a decade. We thank Alexis Pacheco, Director for Central America, for his strong support to Ezra Centre.

## Blog Centro Esdras

This year we started to publish different articles in the blog of [Ezra Centre](#) with the collaboration of members of the team, teachers of the graduates and friends of Centro Esdras. We encourage you to visit this blog and read the articles published there. Each topic is very important for our life. Here are some of the topics you can find:

- [Post-truth: Empire of lies? \(La posverdad: ¿Imperio de la mentira?\)](#)
- [Economy in times of crisis \(Economía en tiempos de crisis\)](#)
- [Beyond the October 1st celebration \(Más allá de la celebración del 1o. de octubre\)](#)



Foto de Kristina Flour en Unsplash

## Gratitude:

- Dr. Israel Ortiz was invited as a contributor to the magazine "Biblia y Teología Hoy" (Bible and Theology Today) of Editorial CLIE. His article "The God of the Orphans" was very well received by the editors.
- For the visit of Tim Klinger from Wheaton College in Chicago, USA, and the possibility of establishing a cooperation agreement.
- The Lord, through Isolda Fortin, opened doors at the Pan American Health Organization to give a workshop for religious leaders in Coban, Alta Verapaz.
- Collaboration agreement with the Central American Theological Seminary for the facilitation of the course "Integral care of the ecclesial leader".
- The visit of Andy DeBore, the new Latin America coordinator for Cornerstone Trust, who have been a key support for our ministry.

**We thank you dear brothers and sisters inside and outside Guatemala for your spiritual accompaniment and support in the journey of the ministry**

### *Please, PRAY for the following:*

- Our director Israel Ortiz was invited to share the conference "Rethinking the church in the 21st century", to be given at the Central American Theological Seminary on 22 October.
- For the planning and development of the "Biblical Perspective on Prevention" workshops to be held for religious leader in Cobán from 14 to 16 November.
- For the modules to be given to potential leaders of Compassion partner churches in the western region of Guatemala from departments in the western region. Modules: 1) Implementation of the analysis and solution proposals in November; and 2) Mission in the way of Jesus from 5 to 7 December.
- Robert Reich and the students of the workshop "Integral Care of the Church Leader" in cooperation with the Central American Theological Seminary.
- For the course "Jugando nos Fortalecemos" (Playing makes us stronger) that will be taught in a hybrid form during the month of November. For the successful completion of this year's diploma courses and for the health of the team members.
- For the 2023 budget. May the Lord open doors and provide for what we have planned.

## Do you enjoy reading?

**We have some books on sale (in Spanish)**

**Super special prices!**



- Diccionario Bíblico Contemporáneo Q.150.00
- El Shalom y la Justicia de Dios Q.50.00
- Esperanza para toda la Creación Q.60.00
- Reinventando la Misión en América Latina Q.150.00

\*\* Home delivery at additional cost

## DONATE!

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