

## **Editorial**

### **The formation of lay people is an imperative**

In the New Testament the believers are the "laity" which the apostle Peter calls a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people purchased by God to proclaim his virtues in the world (Pet.2:9). It underlines the identity and mission that the Lord entrusted to the people of God (the laity). In the context of the Catholic Church, the laity were displaced by the clerics who became the teachers, interpreters, the performers of the mass and the mission; the laity were the laymen and were considered as assistants to the priests. The laity until Vatican II were considered uneducated and ignorant of the Bible, ecclesiastical affairs and mission. The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century recovered the role of the laity. The well-known saying "the universal priesthood of all believers" restored their place in the life and mission of the church. It marked the rethinking of the role of the laity in church life and the spread of the gospel.

Evangelicals today face new challenges. On the one hand, the laity does not receive adequate theological training. Seminaries focus their attention on pastors and missionaries. No doubt their training is essential for building up the church, pastoral work and missions. However, the laity does not receive the same attention: It limits their potential, presence and impact in society. This neglect makes the laity think that studying theology is only for pastors or Bible teachers.

On the other hand, there is a reduction in the role of the laity. Most of them dedicate their time and gifts to tasks within the temple: leading worship, teaching children, being marriage counselors, etc. These are important tasks for the growth of the believers. However, the mission of the church is not exhausted with these activities. Its potential is underutilized. The demand to "be salt and light" points to a public engagement with the world. Christian faith is not a private transaction between God and the believer. It implies a commitment to society by being witnesses to the gospel in science, politics, economics, art or world mission.

To achieve this influence, the laity need a biblical formation that develops their thinking and lifestyle in an integral way. They will be better prepared to bear witness to their faith, to fight for human rights, to promote stewardship of creation, to take on politics, science, art, etc. from a Kingdom ethic. Likewise, they need training to confront ideas and lifestyles contrary to the values of the Kingdom, so as not to be seduced by the gods of money, power or fame. They require critical thinking from the Word, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, to discern the signs of the times and to be agents of transformation in the name of Christ in society.

Mark Greene (2003:19) proposes that young people should study for two years in a Bible college before going to university or starting a job. He argues that this education is more urgent for working in a secular organisation than for working in the local church. Precisely because the point of view of non-believers may be opposed to Christianity, and because they will face a diversity of issues and problems that require discernment. He stresses that because Christians spend so much time in their work, they should be trained biblically and see their work as a mission field. It should be a training that connects the Bible with the reality and challenges of today's world.

The book of Acts shows the believers in Antioch as an alternative community. This church was established by unknown lay people who spoke passionately about Jesus to the Gentiles. They witnessed to their faith in Christ in a context of religious pluralism, ambition for power, patriarchal machismo, idolatry and moral debauchery. These lay people prioritised the study of the Word, expressed overflowing worship, were helpful and supportive, sensitive to the Holy Spirit and took on global mission. They broke the pattern of exclusion: They gave equal treatment to all, making no distinction of race, social or economic status or ideology. Their way of speaking and doing good had an impact on Antiochian society, which for the first time called believers "Christians". For sure, their way of life and mission reflected Christ.

So the training of the laity is an imperative. They must be trained by their pastors, be self-taught or seek training in biblical institutions. They need training that builds their thinking, character and skills for mission. In this way they will be better able to face the challenges of their environment. Centro Esdras, aware of this need, offers diploma courses from a biblical worldview, which connect the Bible and theology with the challenges of work, the environment, children and adolescents, integral health, discipleship, citizen advocacy and being witnesses of the gospel. Our vision is that they become agents of change following the model of Jesus, in favour of the spiritual and social transformation of the family, the church and the nation. As the laity assume their role as salt and light of the world, the church will have a greater impact on society, so that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified.

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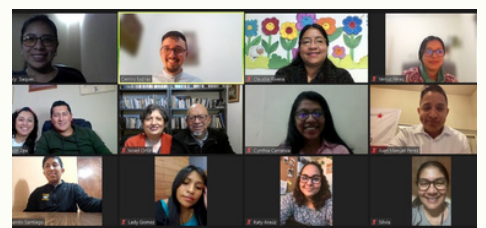
Dr. Israel Ortiz, Director  
Centro Esdras

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## Theological Studies Programme

On the 9th of November the diploma course on the Pedagogy of Jesus and contemporary education came to an end. The group was very committed, even though some of them could not continue, the nine who remained made a beautiful educational proposal of mooring in the last module. We had students from Guatemala, one from the United States, one from El Salvador and another student from Panama. And the graduation took place on the 16th of November at 6pm.

We thank God for the teachers who facilitated the modules. This year with a variety of educators from Peru, Costa Rica, Guatemala. And special thanks and congratulations to Venuz, who took on the pedagogical and technical support to students and teachers in a vital way.



**Jeison Rodríguez**  
Coordinador del Programa

# Childhood, Adolescence and Family Programme

## Diploma course in Child and Adolescent Development:

During this time we have been learning about how God sees children and adolescents, the challenges that this population faces, and the participants have been obtaining tools for implementation in work and ministerial spaces.

## School for Parents Project:

The School for Parents team has been progressing in the development of the contents of the Manual, which is based on the Biblical Worldview, we are about to finish the first module with the biblical, scientific content, tools for parents and the design of workshops.

**Karen Sipac**  
Coordinadora Programa



## Focus group of Centro Esdras diploma graduates

On the 17th and 18th of November we had the great joy of coordinating a retreat for 13 graduates of our diploma courses to participate in a new pilot project called "Focus Group". This project consists of a strategy to accompany the graduates of the diploma courses in the implementation of actions in favour of integral mission, and as a space for biblical reinforcement in their personal and ministerial formation. It will be carried out through 2 face-to-face retreats and 8 virtual meetings from November 2023 to March 2024, and through personal follow-up.

It was encouraging to hear how the Centre has impacted the lives of the graduates and how they encouraged each other by getting to know each other and being inspired for what the Lord is doing in their midst. They travelled from Huehuetenango, Quiché, Quetzaltenango, Patzún and the capital. All expressed joy in being able to spend this time in person despite the great effort to get to the retreat centre. The place was very beautiful, the food and the general atmosphere served us all as an encouragement and encouragement to be faithful to the Lord in our little corners of the Kingdom of God. We look forward with great anticipation to what the Lord will do through these 13 key leaders in the coming months.



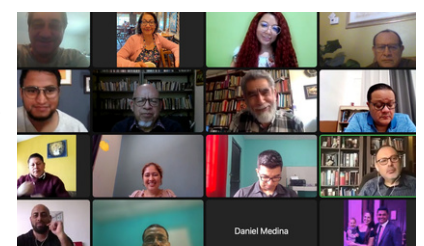
**Robert Reich**  
Director de Programas

## Cooperating with colleagues

### Doctoral Programme of the Central American Pentecostal Biblical Seminary

Our general director Israel Ortiz was invited to teach the course Theological Education, Human Development and Social Transformation of the Seminary's Doctoral Programme (14-18 August). He analysed the role of theological education in human development and social transformation. We thank the Lord for the opportunity of cooperation with the Central American Pentecostal Biblical Seminary (SEBIPCA in Spanish).

Testimonials: "Very grateful Dr. Israel for the exposition of your classes and all the contribution from theology and human sciences connected to relevant human development and integral transformation" (Héctor Cancino). In his final essay 'Critical analysis of the Pentecostal social ministry' student Celso Carrillo stated: "To conclude, I have pointed out in this text that the social practice of the Pentecostal church has been oriented more towards welfare than towards social transformation. Although welfare is a valid form of social action, it does not structurally solve problems."





## Virtual consultation "Public Advocacy of Protestantism in a Global Key".

It was sponsored by the International Network of Christian Higher Education (RIESC). It was held on 23 November, which analysed the role of the laity in public life, in coherence with the Gospel, and with what is happening in their countries. Our Director General participated as a panellist in one of the round tables. We hope that this effort will be of benefit to lay advocacy.



## **New members and colleagues leaving the Centro Esdras team**

We extend a warm welcome to José Garza, who is the new Director of Theological Studies at the Centre. José has a Bachelor's degree in Theology, a Master's degree in Bible studies and a degree in Systems Engineering. He is married to Jassiel and has two children, Jadasa and Josias.

We also welcome Julianny Toala who from January 2024 will be in charge of Fundraising, Advocacy and Communications Coordination. Julianny has a theological background with a Bachelor's and Master's degree in theology. She is married to Luis Carlo.

We also welcome Venuz Pérez to her new position at the Centre. From January 2024 Venuz will be the Coordinator of the Environment Programme. Venuz is an agronomist and holds a Master's degree in "Manejo y Gestión Integral de Cuencas Hidrográficas", and a diploma in seminar science and religion among others. She previously served as a graduate assistant. She is married to Johnny.



We express with gratitude to the Lord for the life and ministry of our colleagues Benita Simón Environmental Coordinator, Silvia de López Fundraising, Promotion and Communications Coordinator, Jeison Rodríguez Diploma Coordinator. They all leave the baton to new colleagues who take up their respective areas of ministry. Thank you very much dear Benita, Silvia and dear Jeison, for your commitment, dedication and excellent ministry in Centro Esdras, in favour of the integral formation of the people of God. May the Lord continue to use and bless you and your beautiful family. We will miss you.

## **Visit of brothers from fellow mission entities**

On August 2nd we had the privilege of sharing with the Canadian Baptist Ministries of Canada. Our director shared with Brothers Bill Dyck, Bruno Soucy, Jay Campo and Byron Velazquez their local representative. CBM sponsored this year's creation care for churches in Guatemala, El Salvador and Bolivia.

On 11 October we were visited by Andrew Johnson and Mark Balfour from CMS. Andrew has been a friend of the Centre for many years through Latin Link, and is now the current Latin America coordinator for CMS, and Mark and his wife Rosalie support ministries caring for the most vulnerable in Guatemala. We thank God for their openness to seek future partnerships.

Finally, our colleagues Israel and Lily Ortiz had the privilege of attending a fraternal invitation on 9 November to share with brother Joel Hylton, who is SERGE's World Mission Coordinator and Dan H. is SERGE's Latin America Coordinator. We thank God for our colleagues Robert and Esther who serve at Centro Esdras as part of SERGE. Next year they will be joined by our siblings Bryan and Judith Hollinger to cooperate with the School for Parents at the Centre.



## TOGETHER SERVING FOR THE EXTENSION OF GOD'S KINGDOM

We thank our colleagues at Tearfund, Hilfe Für Brüder, Latin Link Switzerland and UK, Resonate Global Mission; Korean Prebyterian and Union Churches; local and overseas donor brothers and sisters for their prayerful and financial support. Likewise, we give thanks for the fellowship and spiritual support of GICE, United World Mission, Headington Baptist Church of Oxford, and Horizon Education Network. In thanking everyone for their continued support and companionship, we wish you a Merry Christmas filled with the grace of our loving Lord Jesus, welcome the New Year as a family and that in 2024, we will have the opportunity to serve together, strengthened and encouraged to continue serving the Lord.

### Gratitude:

- We thank God for giving us the opportunity to work in the ministry for another year in spite of the political instability in our country.
- For the new members of the Centro Esdras team who will be starting from January 2024. For the diploma courses in Child and Adolescent Development and the Pedagogy of Jesus and Contemporary Education. God allowed us to successfully complete both diploma courses.

For each of the students who participated in this year's diploma courses.

***Agradecemos a ustedes queridos hermanos y hermanas dentro y fuera de Guatemala su acompañamiento y apoyo espiritual en el caminar del ministerio***

### Please PRAY for the following:

1. For the Lord's provision in the Centre's finances as this year has been very difficult.
2. For the development of Centro Esdras operational plan for 2024.
3. For the proper incorporation of new team members.
4. For the diploma courses that we will develop in 2024. May the Lord bring brothers and sisters with a heart willing to learn and share what they have learnt.
5. For the political and social situation in Guatemala.

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Centro Esdras

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