



AFRICA

Ghana: 25th Anniversary of Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Kumasi

Yes, as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do. This passage from the Book of Isaiah (Is 55:10-11) constitutes the motto for the 25th anniversary celebrations of the biblical apostolate ministry in Kumasi which took place in January, 2006.

It was a strong reason that drove the bishop of Kumasi in 1980 to become actively engaged in biblical pastoral ministry: the problems that Catholic religious teachers saw confronting them as a result of the increasing success of Christian fundamentalist groups were becoming ever more pressing. For this reason, Bishop Sarpong started an initiative that would supply teachers with practical aids that would help them to interest their students in the Bible and motivate them to consciously responsible ways of using Scripture.



From this initial action there quickly developed a series of biblical pastoral courses, with a broad range of specializations, designed not only for school instruction, but soon for almost every realm of ecclesial ministry – child and youth work, as well as Bible work in families and Small Christian Communities or the training of catechists and priests. The essential part is the so-called “Basic Bible Course”, an intensive, multi-year course in biblical pastoral ministry. It is designed for women and men, lay persons and clerics who are active in the most varied areas of Bible work. For two whole years they meet every third weekend in the month for a two-day period. During this time they receive a well-grounded biblical and biblical pastoral training – from an introduction to the Bible and its books to the learning of pastoral and didactic methods, and on to a discussion of questions of personal faith. Moreover, they commit themselves, in tandem with their course work, to helping out in their communities with biblical pastoral ministry, e.g., by leading Bible circles, monitoring youth groups, offering instruction to people applying for baptism, and much more. They receive a graduate certificate only after passing a final examination and receiving a positive report from their home parish regarding the community work they have accomplished.

More than three hundred women and men have completed this program since its inception. For this reason an ongoing education course was added as a second module a few years ago. It offers the graduates of the basic course the opportunity to meet once a month to exchange experiences, to deepen their knowledge of the Bible, or to receive new ideas and tips. For a long time now the participants have been coming no longer only from the archdiocese of Kumasi but from the whole of Ghana; and many religious communities send their novices or postulants to take the course.

What makes this training program so successful? Fr. Gabriel Acheampong, the diocesan coordinator for biblical pastoral ministry, names as a reason the training team, which develops the course contents and organizes the monthly meetings. It consists of about twenty women and men who have themselves completed the course and who now conduct it for the benefit of the “new ones”. They see this as continuing education for themselves which at the same time allows them to constantly improve the course offerings; they care for the participants and make themselves available even for their personal questions; and they make



sure that a suitable substitute person is found in the event that a member takes leave of the team. All of this insures that the functioning of the courses is not, as so often happens, made to depend on a single individual – whose departure can then quickly bring everything to a standstill –, but rather will have the support of a whole team, which will guarantee continuity and an invariably high-quality product.

Alongside this model training program, which a number of other dioceses have since also adopted, there are numerous other activities and course offerings which help to bring Sacred Scripture and its message of hope to men and women in the archdiocese of Kumasi. Among these could be mentioned, for example, the celebration of a Bible Week as well as the organization of the Bible quiz or other such contests for schools and in communities. Moreover, Fr. Gabriel and his team strive to have biblical course offerings included in the curricula of colleges and other educational establishments with an ecclesial connection.

(Report: Claudio Etti)

