

ACLAME

Achieving Spiritual Fervor and Academic Excellence

Missionary Educators' Summit
Springfield, MO – August 15-17, 2006
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Those who chose to participate in our group were missionary educators who represented many years of experience in Bible school ministry in Latin America. Rocky Grams presented several papers (please see accompanying sheets) based on his experience as Director of the Rio de la Plata Bible School in Buenos Aires. His highly successful program serves as a model for resident Bible schools and sabatinos (Saturday classes).

Our discussion was based on the need to achieve both academic excellence and spiritual fervor in our Bible schools. Our discussion centered around seven questions for each area. Although there may not be one particular way of doing Bible school that will fit every country and its particular needs, there are some basic principles that come into play and can be adapted and applied to any school whether it be resident, non-resident, night, extension, or Saturdays.

Academic Excellence:

1. Where are we today in Latin American Bible schools compared to ten or fifteen years ago?

The consensus of the group is that students coming to Bible school today are better educated and more prepared to study at a higher level than they were only a few years ago. Most students are now high school graduates and many have studied at the university level. We now have access to better textbooks, better technology, and teachers who have received better training. We thank God for the progress that has been made. ISUM and Facultad have served well in producing highly trained faculty who in turn help raise the standard in our institutions. We highly recommend the use of the Plan Básico for the basic structure of studies as it is a proven asset to Bible school education.

2. Where are we today compared to where we need to be?

The answer to this question depends to a large degree on the individual school. Schools range from those that have a staff of professional, highly trained and well-equipped professors, to those whose faculty barely supersedes the level of the students. It is imperative that each school continues to work to elevate the spiritual and academic level of its faculty in order to keep up with the expectations for Christian education in this century. In spite of having better textbooks than we did in years past, many schools still have problems getting textbooks, and especially those with a Pentecostal basis.

3. Does emphasis on academics necessarily signify less dependence on God?

Anyone can begin to depend on his natural abilities, talents and academic preparation as a substitute for depending on the Holy Spirit, however this does not have to be the case.

There is a tension that exists between academics and the spiritual. The human tendency is to depend on “the arm of flesh”. The Apostle Paul is an excellent example of one who combined academic excellence with dependence on God. As we place our academic preparation at God’s disposition, we are giving him tools that He can use for building the kingdom. Some who claim to depend only on God use this as an excuse to not have to make the sacrifice necessary to improve academically.

**4. Why is it that in some circles “education” is seen as an enemy of the church?
Is this assessment warranted in full or in part?**

There are varied reasons why some see education more as a stumbling block than an asset for the church. The Bible school is seen as an enemy of the local church when it becomes an end in itself and does not serve the local church. It is true that many, especially in denominational circles, have allowed academics to replace the moving of the Spirit. Some Bible school students have returned to their churches with a superiority complex which results in a general negative attitude towards academic preparation. Certain pastors also seem to fear their own job security if they permit a young person to attend Bible school and become better prepared than the pastor himself. The Bible school needs to maintain contact with the pastors and can offer special training seminars for them to help promote interaction and good will. In spite of the possible negative connotations, a student with academic preparation who is filled with the Spirit is still the best combination for impacting the world.

5. What can be done to raise the academic level of our Bible school teachers?

ISUM and Facultad offer preparation for teachers at the B.A. and Masters levels. Many Bible school directors testify to the effectiveness of these two institutions in the preparation of pastors, leaders, and Bible school teachers. A worthy goal would be for every Bible school teacher to be at least an ISUM graduate, and even better if they could go on to graduate from Facultad. Each school needs to plan annual training classes to help its faculty. Teachers need to be made aware of the resources available to them through El Asesor and the Centro de Recursos y Adiestramiento. The administration should require course plans from each professor prior to the first day of class. Teachers should receive enough pay to make them want to continue to improve their teaching. The administration can reward them with a good book from time to time, and provide computers with internet access at the Bible school for those who do not have personal computers.

6. How can we challenge students to rise above mediocrity and aspire to academic excellence?

Students learn by example and the best way to challenge and inspire them is by the example of the faculty and administration. This is where the importance of faculty members having a higher degree than what the students are studying for comes into play. Scholarships based on academic excellence serve to encourage students to aspire to higher levels. Planning chapels that speak to the need to excel in what we do as Christians can serve to increase the awareness for excellence in the ministry. Invite outside speakers who have excelled in academics and ministry. Teach the need for academic integrity.

7. What is your National Church doing to help promote academic excellence in the Bible schools? How can we encourage more participation from the National Church?

Most National Churches require certain levels of academic preparations for the various ministerial credentials they offer. Mexico now requires all ordained ministers to be ISUM graduates and Colombia requires at least one year of ISUM in order to be ordained. Some National Churches have included Christian education in their annual budgets. National Churches should be encouraged to support the Plan Básico as the basis for study in the Bible schools. It is important to motivate the national leaders to be personally involved in teaching and promoting academic excellence. A national magazine gives opportunity for writers to inspire and encourage others to academic excellence.

Spiritual Fervor:

1. Are we producing Bible school graduates that are filled with the Spirit?

Many schools are doing an excellent job of producing graduates that are filled with the Spirit. Although it may be difficult to objectively measure the degree to which one is filled with the Spirit, the ministry does become a very good indicator. Many of our Bible school graduates are being used by God in evangelistic and pastoral ministry. However, there remains the need to constantly strive to produce Spirit-filled students.

2. How can we measure the level of spiritual fervor?

Daily observance of the lives of the students in and out of the classroom gives indications of where they are spiritually. A student who is not producing work in the classroom up to his or her potential may be experiencing spiritual problems. It is important for faculty and administration to pass time with the students to model spiritual fervor and to be able to detect when students needs spiritual help.

3. Do you see a tendency in your area for students to use “dependency on the Spirit” as an excuse to not do proper personal preparation for ministry?

God does help us and sometimes He does so even when we haven't done our part in personal preparation for ministry. We need to guard against thinking that He will always “be there” to bail us out. Hopefully this is more of a problem for non-Bible school students than for those who are enrolled in our institutions.

4. How does practical ministry help promote spiritual growth?

We need to encourage all of our students to be involved in practical ministry. Some schools require any student who aspires to graduation to plant a church as a pre-requisite. Others require their students to have at least the beginning ministerial credential. The importance of relating studies to practical ministry cannot be over-stated. A student involved in practical ministry soon learns the need to depend on the Spirit and not merely on his or her academic preparation, if they are going to see lasting fruit. Practical

ministry also helps promote academic excellence because the student begins to apply what is learned in the classroom.

5. What can we say about the importance of Spirit-filled faculty and staff?

The need to model what we teach is of utmost importance. The old adage, “Do what I say and not what I do”, will never fly in a Bible school situation. Students need to see the Spirit-filled life in action in their faculty and staff. We need to make room for the moving of the Spirit in and outside of the classroom. It is important for faculty and staff to “be there” actively participating in the practical side of living in the Spirit.

6. How can we avoid making the Bible “another textbook” instead of the inspired Word of God?

It is important to read the Word devotionally as well as critically. Students can be given assignments to look for devotional truths when studying books of the Bible. The teacher can share personal insights and experiences of what God is doing in his or her life and encourage the students to do the same. Give practical homework assignments that will foment application of truth and spiritual fervor.

7. What specific activities can we include in the Bible school experience that will help promote spiritual fervor?

We can begin each semester with a spiritual emphasis week to help set the tone for the semester. Daily or weekly chapel services give the students opportunity to worship, hear the Word, and seek God. These are also opportunities for student participation. It is important to include missions emphasis during the year, challenging the students to pray, give and go in order to preach the gospel to un-reached peoples. An annual missions convention and a monthly missions service help keep missions in the forefront. A missions or evangelism trip is a great way to maintain spiritual fervor. Times of corporate and individual prayer and fasting should be taught and encouraged. The Friday chapel can be dedicated to concentrated prayer for weekend ministry. Be sure and give the students an opportunity to share testimonies of what God is doing through them and their ministries. Invite ministers who exemplify spiritual fervor to come and share with the students.