

Spanish Bible Study at Catholic Worker House in Oakland

Becky's Reflection on Journey

After living and working in a Catholic Worker House in San Jose, CA, I was excited to learn about the work going on with the house in Oakland. Given my desire to be a part of Spanish-speaking ministry, I was particularly interested in this East Bay house, as it serves as a shelter to recent migrants from Mexico and Central America, and its history reflects shifting immigration stories. The house began in the mid-1980's as a sanctuary for refugees escaping the violence of civil war in Central America, primarily El Salvador. Currently, the house serves those who leave their countries to escape the violence of poverty, and increasingly, those who have been in the United States for a significant period of time but are unable to find stable work and affordable housing. In early October, my housemate and fellow seminarian, John Cummings, took me to the house and introduced me to Lupe and Mark, two of the live-in volunteers. Over dinner, Mark asked John if we were interested in reviving the bible study he had lead on occasion in the previous year. Though I had never lead a bible study before, I said that I would be willing to try organizing the group, and I invited Lara to come along.

We suggested the PLTS Chapel offering one week be put to purchasing Spanish-language Bibles. With the \$96 collected, we were able to buy ten Bibles from the Christian bookstore down the street. We began showing up to the house each Wednesday, and throughout the course of the year, plodded our way through weekly lectionary texts, our personal favorite passages and suggestions offered by those living at the house. Though the faces around the table change weekly, the space has become a holy one—one of learning, awkward and awed silence, laughter, food and prayer.

Lara's Reflection on Journey

At the beginning of fall semester, Becky invited me to come with her to the Catholic Worker House in Oakland to lead a Bible study in Spanish. Prior to going, I knew very little about Catholic Worker or the ministry that they were doing in Oakland. So I went uncertain of what to expect but excited to have an opportunity to practice my Spanish and connect with people from Mexico and other parts of Central America. Upon entering the home, we were immediately invited to a meal with the people living in the home. The relaxed atmosphere and welcoming hospitality made an immediate impression on me. This was a community that I felt welcome and was interested in being part of! As we sat down and ate we began to hear the stories of the people in the home, about where they were from, how long they had been here in the States and the journeys and trials they have gone through to get here. I could have sat there all day listening to their stories. I felt as though they were teaching me so much. Upon leaving that first day I knew that this Bible study was something that I was interested in continuing.

Initially we decided to do the Bible study every other week, since we did not feel we could fit it in our schedules weekly. However, we soon realized that both we and the people at the home were interested in doing this on a weekly basis. So we began going weekly. Each week we would gather first for a meal, which a member of the house had prepared and then the Bibles would be placed on the table and the study would begin.

Thoughts on how to lead a Bible study

Ways to select a focal text:

1. Read together the weekly Gospel text. In our lives at PLTS, we came into contact with the lectionary texts frequently during the week in private devotion, weekly Wednesday chapel or teaching parish. Using these texts again, and typically the Gospel text, was fascinating as it allowed us to hear it from yet another perspective. Participants also seemed comfortable and familiar with the Gospels and stories of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.
2. During Lent, we choose to follow the Old Testament lectionary texts because they were stories that spoke powerfully to the themes of suffering and liberation, which we assumed to be issues that would resonate with the people staying at the Catholic Worker and participating in the Bible study.
3. In the past month, we have focused on texts that were selected by members in our study. In one instance, one of the participants facilitated the discussion on the texts that he had a particular interest in.
4. Whatever text is chosen, it is good to have it chosen as early as possible, so that there is time to read it through a couple times, reflect on it and prepare questions.

Ways to make the texts come alive:

1. Our practice was to read the text aloud as a group and then try some sort of an activity to retell the story or highlight a theme of the reading in a different way. This was especially important considering the fact that many participants in the study could not read.
2. If there are multiple voices in the text, it works to spilt it in dialogue form, selecting different readers to go through the story for a second time. You can even have people stand up and act out the story as they read.
3. When we read the story in Genesis 12 of Abraham being told by God to migrate to another land, we used maps to talk about all the different places that ourselves and our relatives had lived. When reading the story of doubting Thomas, we did an activity that challenged people to believe that a person could walk through a single sheet of 8.5x11 paper. Though people doubted, the paper was cut in such a way that it became one continuous loop, which we were all about to walk through.
4. Activities that incorporate drawing or physical movement are also good to simulate different ways of learning and engagement.

Ways to encourage group participation:

1. Encouraging people to engage in the session can be challenging. Some people will talk a lot and some will be very quiet. Don't worry about everyone participating in the same way—just because someone is quiet doesn't mean that they aren't taking in what is going on, and just because someone is talkative doesn't mean they are engaging the text in a new way.
2. It is important to ask good questions (see Wink's [Transforming Bible Study](#)) and to allow space for silence and processing.
3. In [The Wolf Shall Lie down with the Lamb](#), Law introduces the concept of "mutual invitation" which is a helpful practice in creating a conversational and reflective study.

4. If you are dealing with people who are particularly talkative, one suggestion is the use of a “talking stick”. This stick is placed in the middle of the table, and when someone wants to speak they take up the stick. They place the stick back into the center of the table when they are finished speaking. This helps talkers remind themselves that they are talking and keeps people from interrupting one another.

Ways to pray in a group:

1. Light a candle at the beginning of every study. As the candle is lit, lead the group in a time of pray in which you welcome the light of Christ to be among you as you begin the study
2. Invite everyone to stand and hold hands. Tell participants that they are all invited to pray. You (the leader) will start the prayer and squeeze the next persons hand to invite them to pray. The next person is then invited to pray and then squeeze the next person’s hand or they may simply pass by squeezing the next persons hands. Be sure to say that all people are invited to pray but are welcome to pass. The prayer continues around the circle until it returns to the leader. Alterations: The leader can invite participants to share prayers of thanksgiving, prayers for a particular person they know who is in need, prayers that relate to topics discussed in the Bible study.
3. As the study is closing invite people to share their prayer concerns, thanksgivings and petitions. After the prayers have been shared say Amen and then invite people to close with the Lord’s Prayer.
4. Invite a person in the group to pray for the entire group.
5. Pass out heart shaped pieces of paper and invite people to write or draw their prayers on the paper.
6. Invite people to write prayer petitions on a small piece of paper, fold it and put it in a bowl in the center of the table. Then pray a general prayer for all the petitions gathered in the bowl. Invite people to take one of the prayer petitions with them to pray for that person throughout the next week.

Ways to work with Spanish translation:

1. Language is a difficult issue to deal with, especially if the study is bilingual. We used the “Dios Habla Hoy” Bible translation, which we found to be very accessible.
2. For the most part, the study was run in Spanish, though at times we had English-speaking guests. In these instances, we tried to sit someone who was bilingual close to this person or small group to translate simultaneously. Oftentimes, we were unable to translate each word, but we could do some simple things in both languages, such as introductions, that created a nice spirit of welcome.
3. Those who predominately speak Spanish are also very happy to use practice their English.
4. If, as a leader, you are nervous speaking a language that is not your first, don’t be. Your presence says more that your words could.

Ways to create community within the group:

1. We began our time at the studies with a meal. This was a nice way to ease into our time at the house. Meal time was a chance for general conversation and catching up. There was usually also some sort of dessert during or after our time.
2. For a time, we had a candle in the shape of a frog. When the frog candle came out and the Bibles were placed on the table, we knew that the study was to begin. Though it began as a joke, the frog candle became something of a group mascot.
3. We also tried to participate in the life of the house beyond the time allotted for the study. This included attending special house events and fundraisers, going to an A's game as a group and working on posters for an upcoming immigration march.

Book Reviews

Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc; New York, NY, 1970

This book is a must-read for all those who desire to be part of an educational practice that promotes empowerment and learning for both student and teacher. Though first published over 35 years ago, Freire's work continues to be relevant and thought-provoking. In four chapters, he discusses the distinctions between the "oppressors" and the "oppressed" and how a process of mutual learning and reflection can bring liberation to both. Freire rejects the traditional model of education wherein the teacher is the holder of knowledge and responsible for filling the mind of a passive student. Instead, he articulates a model in which all experience, be it from an ivory tower, a low-income housing project or a highway underpass, is a valid starting point for individual and communal transformation. He also emphasizes the power of dialogue and education as a continual movement of shared knowledge and experience. Many other theorists and practitioners went on to use Freire's ideas as their starting points in future work.

Eric H. Law. The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb; A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community. Chalice Press; St. Louis, MO, 1993.

Eric Law draws on the text from Isaiah 11 about the wolf lying with the lamb to illustrate both the hope and the challenge of multicultural work. He suggests that cultures are analogous to animals; they are comfortable when surrounded by their own kind but have trouble mixing with other animals. Law suggest that there are cultural differences particularly between people of European descent and people from cultural groups of color, in which there is an implicit power dynamic at work of which those with more power are typically unaware of. This type of power dynamic, Law argues does not follow Biblical teachings. Law writes, "If cultures are analogous to animals then Isaiah 11 becomes a vision of cultures living together in harmony and peace." This, he suggests should be the mission of the church in multicultural ministry.

Law illustrates using theology and cultural anthropology how different cultures view the world differently and have different understandings of power. He then suggests that successful multicultural ministry needs to empower and equally value each culture. For cultures to work together, unnatural behaviors will be required by all people involved. He suggests a number of practical ways that peace and harmony between cultures might be facilitated, including a group facilitation method called mutual invitation.

Mutual invitation is a method of leading group discussions that helps to even power dynamics that typically occur in multicultural groups. In it each person is given the power to speak by personal invitation from another. The person may choose to pass or speak and then invite the next person to speak. Law suggests that with practice this model of group discussion can ensure that all voices are heard and that no one culture or person dominates the group discussion. Becky and I tried leading a Bible study at the Catholic Worker house using this method. We provided the question that people were suppose to reflect on and then explained the process. I found the process to work for a while. However it felt difficult to lead the whole class with this model. Perhaps we just needed to practice it more.

Bob Ekblad. Reading the Bible with the Damned. Westminster John Knox Press; Louisville, Kentucky, 2005.

The striking title of this book and haunting front cover is enough to make anyone curious about this book. Bob Ekblad is the executive director of Tierra Nueva an ecumenical ministry working with the oppressed. The damned, according to Ekblad are “Human being who perceive themselves as condemned to poverty or permanent exclusion, beyond repair, unable to change (xiv).” This book specifically considers how the Bible is read by people imprisoned, Mexican immigrants and Honduran subsistence farmers. For this class we read the chapters specifically about the Mexican immigrants. In this chapter, Ekblad suggests to Mexican immigrants that Jesus is a salvific figure like the Buen Coyote who “crosses us over into the kingdom against the law, by grace (182).” The author draws a connection with Paul’s theology of grace with the Buen Coyote, smugglers who help/guide undocumented central/south Americans to come into this country.

Although this book makes interesting connections between the oppressed of the Bible and the oppressed in today’s world, we found that in many places it also appeared patronizing to the oppressed. The title of the book itself suggests a negative label for those who are oppressed. Throughout the book, Ekblad highlights how he comes into situations with the oppressed and reads the Bible with them. Pedagogically, he comes in with more answers than questions, and seems to have his own idea about how ‘the damned’ should understand the stories he presents. As you can see from our other materials, we differ with Ekblad in how we pedagogically plan out our Bible studies. We found his methods to patronize the voice and the needs of oppressed people.

Justo L. Gonzalez. Santa Biblia; The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes. Abingdon Press; Nashville, Tennessee, 1996.

Justo Gonzalez is a well known Protestant Hispanic American theologian and church historian. In the beginning of this book he suggest that it is impossible to read the Bible (or any text) without a some interpretation from the part of the reader. He says that “reading is always a dialogue between the text and the reader (13).” In order for true dialogue to occur, the text must engage the reader from within the context to which they come. Gonzalez insists that the Bible must be read from within context of the people. Gonzalez challenges mainline traditions way of reading scripture by suggesting that they too often consider only the people in the center as being the powerful and on top. He suggests that reading the Bible from the margins challenges the mainline traditions to

bring people of the margins into the central focus of their mission and ministry. He then lays out how Scripture might be read through the Hispanic lenses of marginality, poverty, mestizaje and mulatez, exiles and aliens and solidarity.

Walter Wink. Transforming Bible Study. Abingdon; Nashville, Tennessee, 1980.

This book incorporates much of Freire's theory into practical suggestions. Wink describes how to facilitate group Bible studies centered on the needs and experience of the participants. Wink begins by emphasizing the importance of both critical study and personal encounter with scripture in the learning process. This is the in face of dominant educational practices that place a higher value on knowledge from rational facts as opposed to experience and emotion. In order to do more to encourage participants to articulate what it is like for them to experience a particular passage of scripture, Wink offers many suggestions, especially the integration of art. He also focuses on the importance of the leader's ability to ask compelling questions. Though firmly grounded in theory, this book is incredibly practical in its approach.

Carlos A. Dreher. The Walk to Emmaus. Centro de Estudos Biblicos, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 2004.

This short text, published by the Center for Biblical Studies in Sao Paulo, Brazil, uses the story of two disciples' encounter with the risen Christ in Luke 24 as a way to explain tenants of Bible reading and educational practice based on people's lived experience. Dreher asserts that God's word comes to us in two forms: life and the Bible. Before anyone can attempt to speak God's Word, he or she much come to a deep understanding of the reality of those who are listening. With this understanding and a comprehensive knowledge of scripture, the Bible becomes a relevant source of wisdom and encouragement. This text is mostly theoretical and itself proposes that “practice opens the eyes, theory only warms the heart”. It does not offer many concrete suggestions as to how to incorporate these ideas into a Bible study session. But, with frequent headings, straight-forward language, its brevity and use of the “Walk to Emmaus” story as an outline, it is easy to read.

More Resources for Leading Bible Study in Spanish

David Brondos. Sigueme: Preparando Luteranos Para la Confirmacion y el Discipulado. Concordia Publishing House; St. Louis MO, 1996.

Sigueme is a Lutheran Confirmation curriculum in Spanish written by the Rev. Dr. David Brondos. Dr. Brondos is a Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) missionary professor of Theology at the Theological Community of Mexico, an ecumenical consortium of seminaries in Mexico City, where he teaches systematic theology and biblical studies. This book is a great resource for Lutheran congregations to teach about basic Lutheran teachings and doctrine. The book is divided up into 15 lessons each include scripture, activities and questions for small group discussion and ideas for how to dig deeper into a topic. Chapter topics include; the Sacraments, the Creeds, Spiritual growth, history of our church, our life as members of the Body of Christ. I have used this book for First Communion and Confirmation classes. It also could be used for new member classes.

English as a Second Language Bible Study

This is an example of a curriculum for an ESL Bible study that I developed for my internship project while I was in Mexico. Although we did not use most of this material for our class at the Catholic Worker, it seemed appropriate to include it as a resource idea for ministry and Bible study in Hispanic settings. The initial setting for this study was a group of women and children who spoke only Spanish but were wanting to learn English. Each study consisted of a scripture reading. I would invite one person in the group to read the text in Spanish and then I would ask a few content questions to make sure the children understood the story and a few deeper questions for the women to discuss. I then would use flash cards (which I made simply using pictures in Microsoft Word), to teach the key words or phrases in the scripture lesson. I had the children and women repeat the words in English. Once we had gone through all the words I would read the story in English stopping at all the key words to see if they could remember them in Spanish. This class was meant to teach only very basic levels of English, such as words and pronunciations. It does not go into more complex grammar or idioms. In addition to the scripture study I also printed a coloring page and word search page using the curriculum found on Horizon International website.



http://www.horizonteinternacional.com/es/r_mini_ninos_nt.asp

Below you will find the study pages prepared for the ESL Bible study on the Luke text of the Last Supper. The coloring/word search pages for this study are pages 2 and 5 of http://www.horizonteinternacional.com/es/pdf/span_new/ESP229.pdf

Lucas 22:7 Cuando llegó el día de la fiesta de los panes sin levadura, en que debía sacrificarse el cordero de la Pascua, 8 Jesús envió a Pedro y a Juan, diciéndoles: --Vayan a hacer los preparativos para que comamos la Pascua. 9 ¿Dónde quieres que la preparemos? --le preguntaron. 10 --Miren --contestó él--: al entrar ustedes en la ciudad les saldrá al encuentro un hombre que lleva un cántaro de agua. Síganlo hasta la casa en que entre, 11 y díganle al dueño de la casa: El Maestro pregunta: ¿Dónde está la sala en la que voy a comer la Pascua con mis discípulos? 12 Él les mostrará en la planta alta una sala amplia y amueblada. Preparen allí la cena. 13 Ellos se fueron y encontraron todo tal como les había dicho Jesús. Así que prepararon la Pascua. 14 Cuando llegó la hora, Jesús y sus apóstoles se sentaron a la mesa. 15 Entonces les dijo: --He tenido muchísimos deseos de comer esta Pascua con ustedes antes de padecer, 16 pues les digo que no volveré a comerla hasta que tenga su pleno cumplimiento en el reino de Dios. 17 Luego tomó la copa, dio gracias y dijo: --Tomen esto y repártanlo entre ustedes. 18 Les digo que no volveré a beber del fruto de la vid hasta que venga el reino de Dios. 19 También tomó pan y, después de dar gracias, lo partió, se lo dio a ellos y dijo: --Este pan es mi cuerpo, entregado por ustedes; hagan esto en memoria de mí. 20 De la misma manera tomó la copa después de la cena, y dijo: --Esta copa es el nuevo pacto en mi sangre, que es derramada por ustedes.

Luke 22:7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." 9 "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. 10 He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, 11 and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 12 He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there." 13 They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. 14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly

desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." 17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." 20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

<p>Pan - Bread</p>	<p>Cordero - Lamb Cordero de Dios Lamb of God</p>	 <p>Comer - Eat</p>
<p>Mesa - Table</p>	<p>Gracias - Thank you</p>	 <p>Copa - Cup</p>
<p>Lo Partió - Broke it</p>	<p>Cuerpo - Body</p>	<p>Memoria de mi - Remembrance of me</p>

**Ultima Cena - Last
Supper**



Sangre - Blood

Mano - Hand