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WHAT IS BAMCREFOUNDATION

BAMCREFOUNDATION stands for Bro. Andelino Manuel Castillo, FSC, Religious Educational Foundation, Inc. formerly known as the De La Salle Catechetical Center. It is primarily engaged in giving Religious Instruction in the Public Elementary Schools of Manila and its suburbs. It is an extension of the De La Salle Brother's apostolate and is supported by a number of local and international socio-civic and religious groups, private corporations and individual donors. As a token of appreciation for Bro. Manuel's dedication to his mission, especially on his pioneering effort on the professionalization of the catechists, the legal corporation behind the Center was named after him and the center dedicated to his memory five years ago, on October 19, 1983.

When the De La Salle Brothers came in 1911 to start a school in the Philippines, they accepted students who belonged to the upper classes in order to offset the influence of the Protestant teachers and at the same time to train a corps of future leaders of the country. From this elite class were drawn student catechists and volunteer workers who served in the public schools of Metro Manila. Through their apostolate, the student catechists extended the mission of the Brothers to the public schools. The scope of their catechetical work was expanded during the late 40's and 50's. In 1952, De La Salle College, Manila, sponsored twenty nine student catechists, twenty three from its high school and six from its college department, under the direction of Brother Manuel. By 1958, the number of student catechists swelled to about a hundred. Since the services of part-time student catechists did not ensure continuity of instruction, Bro. Manuel saw the necessity of recruiting a corp for a full-time teaching position. Thus, the idea of "a professional catechist" was born.

Today, after almost twenty-eight years of existence and continuous service, the Center has twenty-seven professional catechists who teach 31,000 students in twenty public elementary schools. These schools are under the jurisdiction of six parishes within the Metro Manila area.

The professional catechists of Bamcrefoundation.

Each professional catechist teaches a combined load of twenty to twenty-two hours per week, half hour per class from Monday to Thursday. Specially designed syllabi for the public elementary schools, formulated by the Director of the Center, together with experienced catechists, serve as teaching guides for the catechists. A catechist may teach in as many as three grade levels during the schoolyear, but a few handle six grade levels depending on the assignment. A catechist prepares a detailed lesson plan for the grade level she handles.

Friday is set aside as In-Service Day for the catechists. Everyone reports to the Center where the day is spent conducting different activities to supplement the spiritual and professional needs of the catechists. The day starts with a Bible Service to provide time for sharing of experiences and insights regarding the Word of God. The First Saturday of the month is Recollection Day for the catechists. Three Saturdays after the Recollection, pastoral activities are held in their respective parish assignments. Preparations for special liturgies for children on special occasions and supplementary lessons during the school-year are also done during the In-Service Day. Problems regarding school and parish activities, scheduling of Parents' Sessions and Church functions that may have something to do with religious instruction, are also threshed out during this day.

The number of catechists assigned in the six parishes is not equal, because there are parishes that can afford only a limited number of catechists while there are some that can afford a team of ten. There is a parish with only two catechists despite the big student population in the area. Within the year, activities are planned so that the catechists can help each other. During religious activities in a parish where there are two or five catechists assigned, others from the bigger groups are called in to help their colleagues. This cooperation provides the Center the spirit of unity in the accomplishment of the tasks and gives the catechists the chance to visit schools and parishes where others are assigned.

BAMCREF as a training center.

In the Philippines, with an 80% Catholic population, there has always been a considerable number of volunteers to work as catechists. Priests and nuns find it easy to recruit volunteers both from the schools and the community. However, most of these volunteers do not stay long because of the problem on how to perform effective catechetical work—a problem on methodology of teaching. Most of the volunteers find the job monotonous because all they ever do is tell biblical narratives; they have only a slight idea of how to use visual materials or are too bookish to be able to draw lessons from the experiences of the children. Some of them pack their lessons with unnecessary information rather than facilitate the children's activities and help these children discover meanings from their experiences. The professional catechists of the Center, some of them working for as long as 23 years, experience this problem, but are very eager to learn better methodologies of teaching and are always ready to experiment with newer and better ways. Religious congregations and organizations, from time to time, request the Center to conduct catechetical seminars and demonstration classes for their volunteer catechists. Other religious organizations, intending to professionalize their catechists, both regular and volunteer, also request the Center to conduct seminars on syllabus-making and lesson planning.

Many of the requests for lesson planning seminars come from far away places and it is more convenient to provide a team of about five members to go to the area rather than for the seminar-participant to travel to Manila. The team, including the group to be taught, live together during the workshop. This schoolyear alone (1986-1987), the Center is able to conduct eight demonstration classes and two week-long seminars on methodology and lesson planning. Demonstration sessions were conducted in the nearby towns and cities of Metro Manila. This usually lasted for one day. The first week-long seminar was conducted for a group under the Franciscan Fathers in Alegria, Northern Samar, 20 hours south of Manila by bus and ferry boat. A follow-up seminar is being planned for this Samar group since the Franciscans have sent in their request again for this summer. The second one was conducted on Mindoro Island, 12 hours southeast of Manila by bus and ferry boat. The Seminar was participated in by the Mangyans, a native tribe

in the island occupying the highlands. The Mangyan Settlement is under the Divine Word Fathers.

The first catechetical exposition in the Philippines.

There has been a growing awareness of the value of the catechist in the propagation of the Christian faith. Last year, August 1986, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines honored the catechists by celebrating Catechetical Awareness Month. To heighten the effect of the celebration, the Archdiocese of Manila organized the first catechetical exposition. There were seven catechetical centers, including a number of prominent publishers of religious materials, that were invited to participate. The exposition was designed to pool together materials for religious instruction. BAMCREF presented its printed lesson plans and the activity books accompanying each plan.

Worthy of mention in the exposition is the presence of a large number of inspirational and reading materials, visual aids, religious textbooks and church paraphernalia. However, there was not a single book on how to conduct First Communion, Confirmation Activities for volunteer and professional catechists. In view of this, the Center is planning to write a guidebook on these. The experience and the knowledge of the actual condition of religious instruction in the country will be a big help for the Center.

During the 25th anniversary of the Center, Bro. Victor Franco, FSC, Provincial of the Brothers in the Philippines, wrote the catechists:

“The parable of the mustard seed certainly finds its fulfillment in your history, for little did the late Bro. Manuel Castillo realize that in planting the seed of the Center 25 years ago, it would grow to the huge tree that it is today”.

In fact, no other FSC affiliated apostolate “reaches so many with so few” and with additional improvements, BAMCREF has been reaching much more: A FULFILLMENT OF OUR FOUNDER'S VISION!

**Tomasita Carrillo-Endaya,
Program Director.**