

SMALL BIBLE-STUDY GROUPS HELP BUILD FAMILIES

University of Dallas' Bible school trains Catholic laypeople for ministry

As laypeople expand their role in ministering to families by leading small faith-sharing and Bible-study groups, their formation in Catholic teaching is essential.

In the dioceses of Brownsville, Texas, and Knoxville, Tennessee, Spanish-speaking parishioners were eager to serve but lacked training. So they turned to the *Escuela Bíblica Católica* (EBC), the Catholic Bible School at the University of Dallas, a four-year program that covers the entire Bible.

One Saturday each month for 10 months, participants from ages 17 to 85 attended day-long Bible classes led by professors from the university's School of Ministry. Students learned the basic tenets of the Catholic faith, studied the Old and New Testaments and received leadership training. After two years participants earned a certificate of basic biblical studies, and after the full four-year program, they graduated with a



Students celebrate their graduation from the four-year Catholic Bible School. **RIGHT** Rosario Hinojosa displays her degree.

certificate of advanced biblical studies.

To help the 150 participants, the University of Dallas lowered tuition costs. Catholic Extension funded tuition, books and travel expenses for many students.

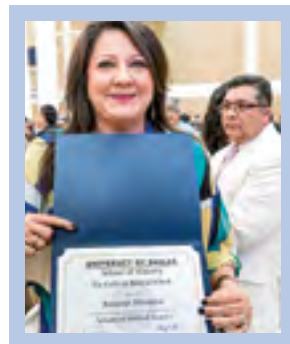
Deacon Luis Zúñiga, director of the Lay Ministry Institute in the Diocese of Brownsville, said Catholic Extension's support made this program possible for the 48 four-year graduates from his region.

While this part of Texas is predominantly Catholic, many parishioners don't have more than a sixth-grade education or a solid understanding of sacred Scripture, he said. Parish-

ioners need to better understand their faith for the good of their families, communities and the life of the Church.

"The goal is for the laity to go back to their parish and then organize Scripture-study groups in the parish," Zúñiga said. "That, in turn, builds the family, keeps the family."

The understanding of Scripture was important to participants from the Knoxville diocese, too, said **Lourdes Garza**, the director of Hispanic ministry there. Located in the Bible Belt, only 3 percent of Knoxville residents are Catholic and as a result are often questioned and converted by proselytizing Pentecostal, evangelical



or fundamentalist Christian groups, Garza said. Shortly after she joined the diocese in 2009, she dreamed of opening a Spanish-speaking Bible institute to help Catholics in her diocese.

"To have a Bible institute, we needed people prepared to teach about the Bible," she said. Now Garza and several EBC graduates are starting that institute and hope to open Bible-study groups in each of the diocese's 51 parishes. 🇺🇸