

# ***Lutheran Mission Matters***



Volume XXVIII, No. 2 (Issue 57) November 2020

# Theological Education by Extension

Rudy Blank

**Abstract:** In Matthew 9:36, our Lord laments that the crowds He encountered in Galilee were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. The Lord concludes His lament with the command to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. The need for laborers is as relevant as ever in these times of worldwide pandemics, global warming, new revolutionary movements, hunger, drug trafficking, persecution, and rampant crime. Five million Venezuelans, including a good number of Lutherans, have fled the country of their birth to seek refuge in other countries. As a result, many Lutherans are being left in their own country or in some foreign country without ordained pastors and the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper. From where will the laborers come who will attend the Lord's scattered sheep? How are new shepherds to be prepared? It is the author's belief that a reevaluation of the TEE movement and its attendant philosophy can help us in finding solutions that will bear fruit in the twenty-first century.

In this article, it is my intention to discuss the Theological Education by Extension Movement as a viable model of theological education for churches in the twenty-first century. We inquire how TEE can aid churches challenged and compromised by pandemics, climate change, economic turmoil, racism, famine, and revolutionary movements. The topic of TEE is one that is dear to my own heart, not only because of my involvement in this movement for more than forty years, but also because of the crisis facing the preparation for ministry in today's world, especially in Europe and North America, but also in the Majority World.

I feel deeply that TEE has much to offer all Christian churches in this moment in world history. I know that the ministry and theological education have been hot topics among Christians and will continue to be so. I also know that some things I mention in this article will not sit well with some of my readers. My reason for writing on TEE



*Rev. Dr. Rudy Blank has served for three years as a pastor in Cambridge, England, and for more than forty years as a church planter and theological educator in Venezuela and other Latin American countries. [rudyblank@gmail.com](mailto:rudyblank@gmail.com)*

Copyright 2020 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 28, no. 2 (2020) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

is not to provoke controversy but rather to make space for dialogue among brothers and sisters who dearly love the holy Christian Church and who are vitally concerned with the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the Sacraments.

Perhaps the best way to understand what TEE is and what it wishes to accomplish is to study the early history of this movement in Guatemala and how this model was modified and developed in the Lutheran Church of Venezuela (ILV).

## **How the Extension Model Began in Latin America**

In the year 1963, the Presbyterian Seminary in San Felipe Retalhuleu, Guatemala, celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding as a residential seminary serving the oldest protestant church in the country. Presbyterian missionaries first entered Guatemala in 1882, being invited to establish churches and schools by Justo Rufino Barrios, the liberal president of this Central American nation. By 1963 there were sixty-five established Presbyterian congregations and 160 preaching stations. During the first twenty-five years of its existence as a residential theological program, some two hundred men studied in the seminary in San Felipe. As part of the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration, an investigation was carried out in order to determine how many of the graduates of the seminary were still involved in pastoral ministry. The results of this survey revealed the startling fact that only about ten percent were still serving as pastors of Christian congregations in Guatemala and elsewhere. Evidently something had gone wrong. Why did so many graduates leave the congregations to which they had been called or appointed?

One of reasons was financial. At the time of the survey, most of the Presbyterian congregations in Guatemala were to be found in small towns and villages in rural parts of the country and not in larger cities such as Guatemala City or Quetzaltenango. It was only the urban middle-class congregations that were able to support with their tithes and offerings the highly coveted position of a professional pastor. The pastors serving in rural areas had to find other work to help supplement the offerings brought by their parishioners, which in many cases amounted to fruits, vegetables, chickens, eggs, and an occasional goat or pig. As a result of the seminary education they had acquired, many pastors serving in rural areas were able to qualify for government jobs as teachers or civil servants. One by one, the seminary graduates left the congregations they were serving in order to seek a job that would enable them to maintain the semi-middle-class lifestyle acquired during the time spent as subsidized seminary students.

Coupled with the financial concerns of the seminary graduates was the issue of vocation. In many parts of Latin America, even today, it is believed that to get ahead in life one must study to become a medical doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, or an officer in the armed forces. Very few of the first evangelical believers in Guatemala could afford to send their sons to the university to study for a professional degree. The next best thing available to the aspiring student was to study for the ministry. In many cases

Copyright 2020 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 28, no. 2 (2020) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

well-meaning missionaries and seminary professors were able to offer scholarships to worthy students who would become the leaders in tomorrow's church.

Many young men accepted scholarships and enrolled in the San Felipe seminary to study for the ministry. However, what was lacking on the part of many prospective ministerial students was a sense of vocation. Having been supported as a seminary student by a scholarship, seminary graduates became accustomed to what in Guatemala was considered a middle-class lifestyle or at least a middle-class sense of superiority over against the presumed ignorance of the peasants in their congregations.

The results of the survey carried out by the Presbyterian Seminary in San Felipe raised an important question for the members of the faculty, namely: who were serving as the spiritual leaders in the congregations that were not able to retain the services of a seminary graduate? Who was there to carry on a Word and Sacrament ministry? In almost all cases, the answer was the same. The small town and rural congregations chose an experienced and devout member of their congregation to lead them in worship. Generally, this person would be an older member of the congregation—in his forties, fifties, or sixties, a person who had gained the respect both of the members of his congregation and his community. In other words, congregations were served by a person like the elders described by the apostle Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus. One should note the description of the elder in the Pastoral Epistles highlights a person's lifestyle and commitment to Christ and not his academic achievements. Being apt to teach is the only qualification in the Pauline lists that could be classified an academic accomplishment. The other fourteen characteristics have to do with the character and lifestyle of the elder.

One should note the description of the elder in the Pastoral Epistles highlights a person's lifestyle and commitment to Christ and not his academic achievements. . . . Elders are not persons who aspire a future ministry but rather are already engaged in ministry in the real world.

In effect the village elders chosen by their congregations to lead the faithful in worship are, in fact, functioning as pastors whether they are called elders or simply *hermano* (brother). The sense of vocation of these village elders becomes manifest in the ministry they are already carrying out. Their vocation becomes evident in their dedication to their Lord and to their communities of faith. The San Felipe seminary faculty came to the conclusion that these village elders were the persons who needed the help of a seminary to assist them in better carrying out of their ministry. These elders are not persons who aspire a future ministry but rather are already engaged in ministry in the real world. They, in one sense, have already been contextualized into

the social, economic, political, and religious activities of the communities they are serving.

## **Roman Catholic Para-Church Organizations**

The emphasis placed on providing theological education for mature members of their communities coincides with that of the practice of the many *cofradías* or traditional Roman Catholic fraternities that characterize the towns and villages of Latin America. To achieve the position of a president of a *cofradía* a man must work his way through a complicated maze of ritual responsibilities exercised on feast days and on the festival day of the patron saint. The Latin American *cofradías* could be considered traditional para-church organizations whose activities are directed by the laity. These activities include caring for the sick, teaching the catechism, providing for a Christian burial for the dead, and arranging masses celebrated for the souls of the departed.

By participating in these activities, the members of the fraternities receive a theological education based on the cultural norms and traditions peculiar to each community. Here we see an apprenticeship model of theological education (utilized by Judaism, Christianity, and paganism) based on the learning and practicing of the many rituals associated with the traditional fiestas. We must remember that for thousands of years the celebration of feasts, festivals, and rituals has been an effective means of communicating the faith and in imparting a theological education to all who participate in them. This learning takes place in the communities in which the fraternities are located.

Like the members of the traditional fraternities, the leaders of local Protestant congregations were to receive their theological education in the midst of the communities in which they lived. If these local elders were, however, to be extracted out their communities and sent off to a residential seminary, they would not only become decontextualized but would also lose their present employment as factory workers or tillers of the soil. For this reason, instead of requiring the village and small-town elders to enroll in the residential seminary program in San Felipe, it was decided that the seminary must go to the students.

TEE means that the seminary must extend itself and to go out and help train the elders who have been chosen by God and their communities of faith. Many years before the establishment of TEE programs in Latin America, the great missionary thinker and prophet, Roland Allen, had stressed that congregational leaders be trained locally and not sent off to a seminary in another part of the

TEE means that  
the seminary must extend  
itself and to go out  
and help train the elders  
who have been chosen  
by God and their  
communities of faith.

Copyright 2020 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 28, no. 2 (2020) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

world.<sup>1</sup> Allen insisted that a church “should be built on the leadership and mentoring process that naturally occurs from within the local setting, and then flows out from indigenous churches.”<sup>2</sup> Allen strongly felt that real theology comes into being, not in seminary classrooms, but in the encounter between paganism and Christianity in the borderlands between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. Too often, in Allen’s opinion at least, seminaries, and not the mission field, become the seedbeds of heresy.

## **Pentecostal Models of Theological Education**

The rapid growth of the Pentecostal Movement in the Majority World has been greatly facilitated by the preparation of its leaders through an apprenticeship system whereby new believers, once they are baptized, are assigned specific responsibilities in existing congregations or mission stations (*campos blancos*). Such responsibilities might involve serving as an usher, passing out tracts, selling Christian literature and CDs in the public market, or going door to door selling Bibles or Scripture portions as did the famous colporteur Francisco Penzotti. The Christian worker learns through the completion of these responsibilities. As one successfully completes these tasks, they are given more difficult assignments: teaching a Sunday School class, giving a testimony at a street meeting, leading a small group or teaching a Bible class. Upon becoming faithful in such ministries, the leader will be asked to lead worship in a branch congregation, become an assistant pastor in the mother congregation, or to start and pastor a new congregation.

It may take many years for one to move from usher to head pastor according to this apprenticeship model. This model of theological education operates on the basis of the words of the master in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:21, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.” In Mark 4:24–25, Jesus declares, “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” Those who employ the apprenticeship model affirm that this system is greatly enhanced by coupling it with a program of Theological Education by Extension.

Each course in the Presbyterian TEE model would consist of fifteen lessons and would require each student to spend five hours of study at home each week in addition to the hour spent in class with their itinerant tutor. Assignments would include tasks performed by the student in his community. In other words, according to the Guatemalan model, TEE students would spend the same amount of time (90 hours per course) as the students studying in a residential seminary. A student could study from one to five courses a semester, depending on time available for such study.

### Three Essential Components of a Successful TEE Program

In the many articles, pamphlets, and books published by the pioneers in the TEE movement, much attention was given to three issues that were essential to a successful program. The first of these three essential items was the use of self-study materials, that is, autodidactic textbooks and workbooks to be used by the students during the days when they are not together with a tutor and other students.

In the beginning, many itinerant TEE tutors expected their students to utilize the same textbooks as employed in most residential seminaries, many of them translations from materials in English. They soon found out that most of their TEE students had never been taught how to critically evaluate a textbook or how to contextualize its contents. Many students were prone to blindly accept all that a given author had put into print. For this reason, many proponents of TEE began to produce programmed study materials in Spanish. They employed techniques developed by the US Army in World War II, which were used to prepare mechanics, radio technicians, and paramedics in situations where experienced tutors were in short supply. In the model developed in San Felipe, the members of the faculty dedicated themselves to the study and production of programmed course materials that could be used by itinerant tutors.

### The Use of Textbooks and Programmed TEE Materials

It must be said that in some quarters TEE became overly associated with programmed training materials. Programmed materials had been pioneered in the works and writings of the renowned educational psychologist B. F. Skinner. Skinner's critics accuse him of fostering brainwashing through his theories relating to programmed education. Consequently, some TEE programs have been denounced as a form of brainwashing. Although there certainly are some materials and programs that could be considered examples of brainwashing, these are aberrations and not the rule. Paulo Freire reminds us that any educational program can become either an instrument of oppression or an instrument of liberation.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of the San Felipe faculty has never been brainwashing their students, but rather their liberation. Students are encouraged to question the dogmatic assumptions and attitudes found in many textbooks both secular and sacred. The exegetical courses developed by San Felipe professor, Ross Kinsler, (Mark, Romans, and Jeremiah) were designed to teach the TEE students the techniques to study the Scriptures in accordance with many of the insights developed by Paulo Freire of Brazil in such works as the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Many courses developed by the pioneers of TEE have encouraged writers and tutors to bring their lessons to the problem-solving level of learning.<sup>4</sup> Real learning, we are told, takes place not by memorizing data but by relating what is being studied to the needs and problems confronting the student and his community of faith.

Copyright 2020 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 28, no. 2 (2020) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

At the beginning of our TEE program in Venezuela it was our practice to work with the student through a book such as C. F. W. Walther's *Law and Gospel* or Roland Bainton's biography of Luther. Then a semi-programmed workbook was prepared to help the student interact with the author of the book being studied. Thanks to Concordia Publishing House—Editorial Concordia (CPH), a Spanish translation of Walther's *Law and Gospel* has stayed in print for over fifty years. This, however, has not been the case with many other textbooks.

In Latin America, many fine textbooks have been on the market at one time or another but only printed in small quantities and never reprinted. This situation forced us into writing many of our own study materials that would stay in print, thanks to CPH and our own printing press. In building our curriculum we would translate into Spanish TEE materials from Brazil originally printed in Portuguese. One helpful course, originally written in English, was an introduction to the study of theology written by Norbert Becker who for many years was director of the TEE program of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines.

The books and study materials we prepared for the “Juan de Frías” program in Venezuela were all written from the perspective of the church's mission to all nations. The writings of the authors have tried to focus on the missional themes in the Scriptures and in church history.

One of goals of TEE in Latin America has been to help each student develop a biblical theology of missions that is attuned to Latin American culture, history, and the times in which we live. It should be stressed that these materials were not written for the Academy, but for the thousands of congregational leaders who have never had the opportunity to study in a residential seminary or Bible school. TEE seeks to reach the ninety percent of all Christian leaders who exercise ministerial functions without seminary or Bible school training.

Experience has taught us to be flexible in the preparation of a curriculum for a TEE center, allowing the student to choose the courses which would best help each participant develop the spiritual gifts he or she has received. Students and tutors should not be locked into an ironclad curriculum that assumes that what is relevant for one culture or people group is valid for all.

Students and tutors should not be locked into an ironclad curriculum that assumes that what is relevant for one culture or people group is valid for all.



## **The Local Congregations as the Ideal Place Where Learning Takes Place**

The second essential element in the organization of a TEE program deals with the places in which learning was to take place. The most successful TEE programs were those in which students would be involved in practical work in their own congregations. In many instances the students are the leaders, often the functioning pastors of their churches. It was in their own churches where students would find the most direct application of the questions treated in their course materials and seminars.

The courses prepared by the seminary faculty in San Felipe were offered in regional centers in those areas in Guatemala where Presbyterian congregations had been established. The location of these regional centers was such that the student pastors could travel to them without that much difficulty. Classes would be taught one day a week in each regional center. On the other days of the week, the student was expected to spend at least an hour on each course being taken. Students lacking in the ability to learn through self-study and practical application would probably drop out of the program. In this way the program would eliminate the students lacking the vocation, self-discipline, and organizational capacity to finish the program.

According to TEE theorists, one of the functions of the movement is to eliminate at a minimal cost those students who are not ready for service as church leaders. This cost would be much lower than that accumulated by students who drop out of a residential program after several years of study.

## **The Frequency of Encounters and Seminars**

The third essential element in extension learning, according to the founders of the movement, is that of regular encounters or seminars with the students and their tutors. Research determined that TEE would be most successful when students were able to interact with their tutors at least one day a week.

The development and implementation of the Presbyterian TEE program in Guatemala was led by a group of competent missionary scholars: Ralph Winter, Ross Kinsler, James Emory, and Guatemalan professor, Benjamín Jacob. One of their tasks was to decide upon a standardized curriculum for their regional centers. Their Guatemalan model was copied, amplified, and modified by dozens of other programs that came into being in Latin America and eventually around the world.

Almost overnight TEE became popular not only among Presbyterians, but also by others who had become frustrated by traditional models of theological education in the Majority World. These included Baptists, Anglicans Methodists, Free Churches, Pentecostals, and Lutherans. Early on in the TEE movement, many of those involved in these new programs formed an association called ALISTE<sup>5</sup> whose purpose was to

share resources, publish a newsletter, sponsor workshops, and publish course materials that could be used by most of the programs in the northern part of Latin America.

One course which was, and is still, used by many programs uses a three-volume programmed textbook on NT Greek written by Irene Foulks of the Evangelical Seminary of Costa Rica.

This institution was also active in initiating a continent-wide network of university-level studies through which TEE instructors and professors could earn their doctorates by extension. In 1980, ALISTE merged with ALET<sup>6</sup> to form a common association for theological education composed both of residential seminaries and TEE programs. I personally feel that the amalgamation of ALISTE and ALET was a mistake because it enabled the established residential schools to impose their standards and their curriculum on many TEE programs.

Because of the diverse educational background of the Presbyterian TEE students in Guatemala, courses were prepared by the seminary on four different educational levels in accordance with the ability of the student to use the study materials. Missiologists who study the history of the Christian movement through the ages have pointed out that one of the characteristics of growing churches is the number and diversity of their leadership training programs.

In the Guatemalan model, the first level was designated as the Certificate Level. It was designed for congregational elders who had four years or less of schooling. In some areas the Certificate Level was broken into a part A and a part B. The part A was for students for whom Spanish was not their primary language while part B was for students whose primary language was Spanish.

Missiologists who study the history of the Christian movement through the ages have pointed out that one of the characteristics of growing churches is the number and diversity of their leadership training programs.

The second level in the Presbyterian program was called the Diploma Level. This program was designed for students who had completed the six years of study in the national school system. The third level was the Bachierato Level designed for students who had completed the Latin American equivalent of high school in the US. The fourth level was Licenciatura Level designed for students who had taken at least one year of studies at a recognized university. It is important to note that these levels do not compete, for they are fully recognized as ministerial training in what has been referred to as the functional parity of different academic levels.<sup>7</sup>

This scheme of providing theological education on different levels was adopted by the Lutheran TEE program in Venezuela.

Copyright 2020 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View *Lutheran Mission Matters* 28, no. 2 (2020) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

Theoretically in the Guatemala program, ordained church workers who have completed their studies at the Certificate Level are to be recognized by the national church as pastors having the same rights and privileges in the national church body as ordained pastors who have studied at the Bachierato or Licenciatura Level in either TEE or in the program of a residential seminary.

This was the experience of many Aymara church workers serving Lutheran congregations in the Bolivian Altiplano. Some of the most ardent supporters of TEE were Lutheran missionaries working in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia with the World Mission Prayer League. I recall an occasion in the early 1980s in which a sizeable group of Aymara pastors had to walk for a week in order to attend a weeklong program of TEE classes in La Paz, Bolivia, with visiting professor Robert Huebner of Augsburg Seminary in Mexico.

An extremely popular model of TEE in Latin America was developed by Antonio and Terrick Barratt, an Anglican father and son team working in Paraguay, Chile, and Northern Argentina. This program was called SEAN, signifying *Seminario Anglicano*. With the adoption of this model by many non-Anglican groups, SEAN came to signify *Seminario para las Naciones*.

The program was designed to teach student pastors how to teach, preach, evangelize, and administer funds through an intensive study of the Gospel of Matthew, the Pentateuch, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Letter to the Galatians. The courses were designed so as to enable ninety percent of the students to master ninety percent of the materials studied.

Our Lutheran program in Venezuela, with some modifications, incorporated the SEAN courses into our curriculum in order to give each student a firm biblical foundation on which other courses could be built. After fifty years in TEE, I have never had cause to regret the use of these Anglican materials in our extension seminary. In my experience the students who have worked through these SEAN courses have a better grasp of the life of Jesus than those who studied in other TEE or residential programs. In collaboration with the SEAN program in Chile, our Venezuelan TEE program for many years printed, distributed, and sold the SEAN textbooks to many other institutions in Venezuela.

## **The Lutheran TEE Program in Venezuela**

At about the same time that the Presbyterian program was being developed in Guatemala, the author of this article received a call to work as a church-planting and educational missionary in Eastern Venezuela. Arriving in Maturin in the state of Monagas in 1963, I found that my responsibilities would involve preparing twelve young men as Venezuelan catechists and evangelists in the eastern part of the country. It should be remembered that the Board of Missions had already endorsed a small

Copyright 2020 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 28, no. 2 (2020) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

Bible Institute for preparing church workers in San Juan, Texas, that functioned until 1954, then in Monterrey, Mexico.<sup>8</sup>

Later, DIMICAR (*Distrito Misional del Caribe*—Caribbean Mission District) was formed to organize and coordinate LCMS mission expansion in the area. One of the projects, created by Robert Gussick, was to train leadership for the new mission sites. The home base of this program was the city of Antigua, Guatemala—operating out of the *Centro Luterano of Antigua*. Two full-time professors, Robert Hoeferkamp, missionary in Guatemala City, and later, Edgar Keller from Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Villa Ballester, Buenos Aires, Argentina, were called to head up this Lutheran version of TEE.<sup>9</sup>

These professors spent their time in preparing materials and traveling to Venezuela, Cuba, and the Central American countries to hold weeklong training sessions for young men who wanted to become church workers and others who had served as church workers with the Central American Mission. Students included church workers of other denominations who wanted to be certified as Lutheran clergymen by colloquy. LCMS missionaries serving in the region were asked to spend one day a week, meeting with the students and helping them with their assignments.

The program involved sending the more advanced students to Antigua for a three-month period in order speed up their studies. The DIMICAR program thus helped prepare a goodly number of men who would later become pastors serving in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Venezuela. Among the pastors prepared in this way were Ciro Mejía, Raúl Alemán, and Napoleon Artigas. It should be noted that these students were recognized as lay pastors with the authority to preach and celebrate the sacraments while they were studying.<sup>10</sup> In this respect they were students involved in ministry and not laymen preparing for a future ministry. According to the missionary strategy followed by Robert Gussick, the senior LCMS missionary in Central America, the primary task of Lutheran missionaries should be equipping national workers for pastoral ministry and not carrying out this pastoral work themselves.<sup>11</sup>

During the years 1970–1980, the “Juan de Frías” program functioned only in eastern part of Venezuela and in the Guyana region in the southeast of the republic. With the closing the residential program of *Seminario Augsburgiano* in Mexico City, the “Juan de Frías” program was expanded to include the Lutheran congregations in Caracas and in Western Venezuela.

Over a span of several years about five hundred members of the Lutheran Church of Venezuela had taken or were taking at least one course in the “Juan de Frías” program. The inclusion of so many church members in the “Juan de Frías” Theological Institute was in conformity with one of the underlying tenets of TEE: namely that Theological Education by Extension is theological education for all of God’s people according to each believer’s spiritual gifts.

Copyright 2020 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View *Lutheran Mission Matters* 28, no. 2 (2020) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

## **TEE and the Preparation of Christian Women for Service**

A substantial number of these people were women who were eager to serve the Lord as deaconesses. Many of these dedicated women are the wives and daughters of men enrolled in TEE. Unfortunately, from my perspective, not all Lutheran TEE programs in Latin America have encouraged women to study together with men.

Some twenty-five years ago I interviewed the priest who was in charge of the program preparing deacons to serve in the archdiocese of Chicago. According to this amiable priest, I learned at the time of the interview there were 850 deacons serving Chicago's Roman Catholics. The director of the program assured me that it was these deacons who were keeping the Roman Catholic Church alive in Chicago. Without their ministry, the archdiocese would have had to shut down because of a lack of priests. When I inquired as to the qualifications for admittance to the program for Roman Catholic deacons, the director of the program told me that no married candidate for the diaconate could study unless his wife studied as well. A deacon and his wife are considered to be a team. Experience had convinced the RC Church that a deacon who could not count on the unqualified support and collaboration of his wife would be a failure as a church worker.

One of the most disturbing anomalies discovered by Roland Allen in his trips through China and around the world was that thousands of congregations had gone for months and even for years, without celebrating the Lord's Supper. For Allen, a High-Church Anglican, all Christians desperately needed the power of Holy Spirit given to them in Word and Sacrament in order to fulfill the Great Commission. The reason for this neglect of the Sacraments was that there was a great shortage of ordained priests authorized to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Allen insisted that if no priest is available the congregation must commission or ordain a layperson to celebrate the Eucharist.<sup>12</sup> If some version of canon law or ecclesiastical tradition prohibits the regular celebration of the Eucharist, the priesthood of believers must triumph over that tradition or that law. If war, pestilence, or persecution prohibit the celebration of the Sacrament, the priesthood of believers must be prepared and willing to carry on the mission of the Church, some as ordained elders, others as worship leaders, musicians, teachers, evangelists, visitors of the sick, exorcists, or those that feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Many Latin American church

All Christians desperately needed the power of Holy Spirit given to them in Word and Sacrament in order to fulfill the Great Commission. The reason for this neglect of the Sacraments was that there was a great shortage of ordained priests authorized to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

leaders who share this view see TEE as a way of preparing all of the members of the Church to use their spiritual gifts for the glory of God and for the good of the neighbor.

## **God Uses Many Different Ways in Preparing Leaders to Serve His People**

It must be understood that TEE is only one of the many ways in which the Spirit prepares God's people for service to God and to the neighbor. Residential seminaries, monasteries, mission societies, and Bible schools also seek to prepare shepherds to watch over the Lord's sheep, as well as a wide variety of mentoring programs. In the past, many pastors prepared their own sons or neighbors' sons to learn the ropes of ministry by taking the candidate along when visiting the sick, the dying, and prisoners. The candidate would be present during all meetings, classes, and conferences. According to Ralph Winter, the greater the commitment to the growth of the church, the greater the number of different programs.<sup>13</sup>

The different programs for equipping God's people for ministry must not seem to be in competition with one another but rather as different paths to providing competent shepherds for the Lord's sheep. One prominent NT scholar argues that the words of Paul in Ephesians 4:10–16 are not directed to a group of professionals serving a group of consumers, but rather a fellowship or team of believers engaged in a local ministry of mutual service in the community.<sup>14</sup>

Paul envisions the pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets, and other gifted leaders as arising out of the local community of believers.

In the Ephesian text cited above, Paul envisions the pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets, and other gifted leaders as arising out of the local community of believers and not being imported from elsewhere. As Ralph Winter and others have observed, when congregational leaders in the local fellowships are allowed to develop and practice their spiritual gifts, the church will become that mature corporate body that Paul speaks of in 4:13.

When an institution or an ecclesiastical leader fails to let the members of a congregation develop and proactively use their spiritual gifts, the work of the Spirit is hindered, the congregation remains immature and members are carried off by all manner of sects and heretical teachers. According to Ephesians 4:14, immature congregations are not able to survive the winds and waves of false teaching. They are like a boat adrift in a stormy and tempestuous sea, a boat in need of a crew of experienced mariners.

## **TEE as an Important Resource for a Church and Society in Crisis**

Paul's description of storm-tossed boats on a tempestuous sea are for me a vivid picture of the member congregations of the Lutheran Church of Venezuela, a fellowship of congregations associated with the LCMS. One of our family's most pressing concerns is for the welfare of the many members of the churches with which we worked for over forty years. Many of these members are also members of my wife's extended family. Because of political, economic, and social problems, five million people, including many of our family members, have found it necessary to flee their homes and find refuge in other countries in Latin America, Europe, Australia, and North America. Some of these refugees are pastors who because of illness, hunger, and persecution have had to leave their native land. During Advent last year one of our faithful pastors was murdered.<sup>15</sup> Of the Lutheran pastors who remain in Venezuela two have come down with malaria on five different occasions. At the same time these same pastors were afflicted with Lyme disease and prostate cancer. Another pastor, who has undergone a number of surgeries for different kinds of cancer, carries on in his eighties. Two other pastors are over seventy and in poor health, while another had to flee to the US with his family because extortionists threatened their lives.

Understandably, theological students studying outside of the country appear to have no inclination to return to the country of their birth. The question that concerns me is who will lead our remaining Lutheran congregations in Venezuela when there are no pastors left? Who will shepherd refugee Lutherans from Venezuela in parts of Bolivia, Peru, and Columbia where there is no Lutheran Church? Who will proclaim the Word and break the Bread for those who find themselves beyond the reach of the institutional church? The writings of the New Testament and the tradition of the Early Church provide us with an answer: The royal priesthood of all believers. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to raise up new leaders from the body of believers. Theological Education by Extension is one way that these new leaders can be helped, not only in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, but in our own country. It should be noted that many of the exiled, Venezuelan laypeople have become leaders in their adopted Lutheran congregations largely because of their participation in the "Juan de Frías" program.

Who will lead our remaining Lutheran congregations in Venezuela when there are no pastors left?

Many Roman Catholic proponents of Basic Ecclesial Communities consider small house churches led by an elder chosen by the community to be, not a para-church, but the original shape of the church.<sup>16</sup> The churches addressed by Peter and Paul must be understood as communities of faith led by local elders who shared the Word and celebrated the Sacrament with their fellow believers.

Copyright 2020 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 28, no. 2 (2020) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

Church historians remind us that for hundreds of years church workers were trained, not in seminaries, but in local churches, monasteries, cathedral schools, universities, apprenticeship programs, Wesleyan cell groups, humble parsonages (theological home schooling), or by a wandering prophet and his disciples. Missiologists who study the history of the Christian movement through the ages have pointed out that one of the characteristics of growing churches is the number and diversity of their leadership training programs.

We remember that the great missionary to the Delaware Indians, David Brainerd<sup>17</sup>, received his ministerial training from local pastors after being expelled from Yale. Such examples help us to understand that TEE is a movement dedicated to help equip church workers in the communities in which they live, work, and worship.

Unfortunately, the institutional church has sometimes been tempted to subordinate TEE to that of a preparatory program whose purpose it is to funnel students into an accredited residential seminary where they can receive a “real” theological education. Particularly unfortunate is the attitude that the graduates of one program are somehow a threat to graduates of another program or that the ministry of one program is inferior to the ministry of another. Such thinking reflects a misconception of what education is all about.

Over fifty years ago, Roman Catholic priest, educator, and philosopher, Ivan Illich, came to the conclusion that the primary function of education in Latin America has been to preserve the status quo; that is, to perpetuate the influence and dominance of the elites over the masses. According to Illich, only the members of an elite could afford to study in elite universities and seminaries in order to maintain their ascendancy in both society and the institutional church.

It was Illich’s contention that higher education in Latin America was responsible for creating both elitism in society and clericalism in the institutional church. In his writings Illich called for a revolutionary model of education for Latin America, a model that put education at the service of the people and not of the clergy.<sup>18</sup> In other words, ministry is not to be considered the exclusive function of a clerical elite, but of the people of God. Illich’s ideas have to a great extent influenced the goals of TEE, as well as those of the Basic Ecclesiastical Communities. They agree with Paulo Freire’s dictum that the poor must become the agents of their own liberation.<sup>19</sup>

Were a state church, a denomination, or a council of churches to limit the path toward ordination to that of the graduates of residential seminaries, thousands upon thousands of communities of faith would be left without a Word and Sacrament ministry.

Only students coming from an upper middle class or upper-class could afford a seminary education. Few coming out of a blue-collar community would make it through to ordination. (In my personal history, my great grandfather, a very pious



layman from the Black Forest region in Germany, always wanted to study to be a pastor, but could not afford a university or seminary education.) Financial realities in our own strife- and pandemic-ridden world are also making it impossible for members of the working classes to study for the pastoral ministry in a traditional seminary.

Seminaries not only in Latin America but also in the US are finding it difficult to recruit candidates to study for the ministry. The amount of money invested in the training of a pastor is among the highest for producing a professional worker, not only in the US but also in the Majority World. All around the US and Canada church bodies are finding it difficult to maintain their seminaries. In the UK, many beautiful old cathedrals and once proud parish churches are falling into decay or have been converted into flats, nightclubs, climbing gyms, and pubs.<sup>20</sup> In the US, more and more congregations are discovering that they cannot afford to support a professional clergyman, much less, a staff of professionals. Many programs of theological education are cutting back programs and faculty. Many residential brick-and-mortar seminaries, both Roman Catholic and Protestant have closed their doors and sold their property. In the midst of these realities, the Theological Education by Extension movement serves to remind us that the ministry is not a profession but a function of a body of believers.

Were a state church,  
a denomination,  
or a council of churches  
to limit the path toward  
ordination to that of  
the graduates of  
residential seminaries,  
thousands upon thousands  
of communities of faith  
would be left without  
a Word and Sacrament  
ministry.

It is our sincere hope and prayer that all programs and institutions dedicated to the theological education of God's people may prosper and produce much fruit. As we say this, we realize that resident seminaries, Bible schools, the institutional church, synodical headquarters, and denominations as we know them might all cease to exist. This possibility does not mean the end of Christianity. We have Christ's promise that the Church will endure to the end of the age and will overcome even the gates of Hades. "Built on the Rock the Church shall stand even when steeples are falling."<sup>21</sup> God will preserve and guide His people. The institutional church that will endure till the Second Coming is likely a network of local congregations who confess Christ as Lord and Savior and who proclaim the Word and celebrate the Sacraments.

If present conditions continue, I expect that many of the leaders of tomorrow's congregations will not arise out of the academy, but out of their own local confessing communities. As in the days of the Early Church, many leaders of the coming Church will receive their theological education in the context of the local congregation. It may come to pass that this theological education resembles some version of TEE. It may

Copyright 2020 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View *Lutheran Mission Matters* 28, no. 2 (2020) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

very well be that the Theological Education by Extension movement has come into being for such a time as this.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 100.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Oxbrow, "Pentecost and the World: Roland Allen, the Spirit, and Remodeling Twenty-First-Century Mission," *IMBR* 44, no. 3 (July 2020), 223.

<sup>3</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Pelican/Penguin Books Ltd, 1972, first published 1968)

<sup>4</sup> F. Ross Kinsler and World Council of Churches, *Ministry by the People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> ALISTE means Asociación Latinoamericana de Institutos y Seminarios Teológicos de Extensión.

<sup>6</sup> ALET means Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Teológica.

<sup>7</sup> Kinsler, *Ministry by the People*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> From 1957 to 1959 the LCMS helped support a program for the preparation of pastors for the *Sínodo Luterano de México*, it was known as *Instituto Concordia de México* and functioned out of the facilities of Santa Cruz Lutheran Church in Monterrey, México. The director and only professor of this program was pastor Fred B. Growcock. During its existence, *Instituto Concordia* prepared some 8 or 9 pastors for the Lutheran Synod of Mexico. In 1957 a student out of *Instituto Concordia* was assigned to serve as vicar in the State of Monagas in Venezuela.

<sup>9</sup> See the following article by Marcos Kempff in this issue for greater detail.

<sup>10</sup> During the time of the civil war in El Salvador when many pastors were persecuted and assassinated, the term lay pastor was used to designate laypersons chosen by the Lutheran bishop of El Salvador to provide a Word and sacrament ministry to the congregations without an ordained pastor. These lay pastors were later ordained as pastors upon completion of supplementary courses on Lutheran doctrine and liturgy. Christoph Jahnel, *Historia de la Iglesia Luterana de El Salvador* (Neuendetelsau, 2007), 204–205.

<sup>11</sup> Jahnel, *Historia de la Iglesia*, 121.

<sup>12</sup> Roland Allen, J. D. Payne, ed. *The Ministry of Expansion* (Pasadena: Wm. Carey Library, 2017), 54–55.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Winter et al., *Theological Education by Extension* (Pasadena: Wm. Carey Library, 2009), 395 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Arnold E. Clinton, *Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 256–262.

<sup>15</sup> "Missing Venezuelan pastor found murdered," *The Reporter Online*, Dec. 18, 2019 (accessed at <https://blogs.lcms.org/2019/missing-venezuelan-pastor-found-murdered/>) on Oct. 11, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Eclesiología* (Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1986), 13–14.

<sup>17</sup> John Piper, *Tested by Fire* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 128–130.

<sup>18</sup> Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing LTD, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Kinsler, *Ministry*, 145.

<sup>20</sup> John Carswell, "Learning to Lament: Complaining to God about the Decline of the Church," *Expository Times* 131, no. 9 (2020): 394.

<sup>21</sup> Nikolai Grundtvig, *Built on the Rock*, public domain, *LSB* 645.