

# Confessional Lutheran Theological Education in Latin America from Its Beginnings to the Present: Part Two<sup>1</sup>

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## X. *Ablaze!* Emphasis on Cross-Cultural Mission: EdeM and Missionary Laboratories

At the 62nd LCMS Regular Convention in July 2004, under the theme “One Mission: *Ablaze!*”, this resolution was adopted: “Praying to the Lord of the Harvest, LCMS World Mission, in collaboration with its North American and global partners, will share the Good News of Jesus Christ with 100 million unreached or un-reached people for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The first part of this article can be found in *CTQ* 90, no. 1 (2026): 15–67. The Spanish original of this article is Sergio Fritzler, “Modelos de La Educación Teológica En Latinoamérica,” 2023, <https://media.ctsfw.edu/Text/ViewDetails/21688>.

The following abbreviations commonly occur in this article:

CETAL	Conferencia de Educación Teológica de América Latina (Conference of Theological Education of Latin America); same as LATEC
CITM	Centro Internacional de Treinamento Missionário (International Missionary Training Center), Instituto Concórdia de São Paulo
CLET	Centro Luterano de Estudios Teológicos (Lutheran Center of Theological Studies), Iglesia Luterana en Guatemala
CMSCR	Centro de Misericordia y Seminario Concordia “El Reformador” (Mercy Center and Concordia Seminary “The Reformer”), Palma Arriba, Dominican Republic
EdeM	Escuela de Misioneros (School of Missionaries)
ETH	Educación Teológica para Hispanoamérica (Theological Education for Hispanic America)
FPH	Formación Pastoral para Hispanoamérica (Pastoral Formation for Hispanic America)
IBL	Instituto Bíblico Luterano (Lutheran Bible Institute), Iglesia Luterana Confesional de Chile
IELA	Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Argentina (Evangelical Lutheran Church—Argentina)
IELB	Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil), or Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Boliviana (Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church)
IELCHI	Iglesia Luterana Confesional de Chile (Confessional Lutheran Church of Chile); now abbreviated ILC-Chile
ILC	International Lutheran Council
ILV	Iglesia Luterana de Venezuela (Lutheran Church of Venezuela)
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LATEC	Latin American Theological Education Conference; same as CETAL

<sup>2</sup> “Orando al Señor de la Mies, Misiones Mundiales de la LCMS, en colaboración con sus socios Norteamericanos e Internacionales, compartirá las Buenas Nuevas de Jesús con 100 millones

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The vision or movement was called *Ablaze!*, which in many of our countries was called “Burning” or “Igniting the World with the Love of Christ” (“Ardiendo” or “Encendiendo al Mundo con el Amor de Cristo,” based on Luke 24:32). Its meaning was: ignition, fire, burning, love, or passion for the Lord Jesus. It is about what the disciples of Emmaus lived and experienced on the evening of Resurrection Sunday. As a vision or movement, it was very good at encouraging and having a central focus on what the church always does in this world, preaching the Gospel to every creature.

*Ablaze!* represented a special motivation, an opportunity to gather wills and redouble efforts for the mission. This vision shaped and drove the regional focus on missions, mobilizing the Lutheran churches of Latin America to place their main organized efforts on sharing the Gospel to all nations. Special emphasis was placed on new missionary ventures, expanding missions, and awakening congregations. Also, emphasis was placed on the training of leaders for the mission: the universal priesthood, missionaries, and pastors.<sup>3</sup> What this vision highlights is the joint work with all the churches in the world.<sup>4</sup> This was carried out by World Mission LCMS in LAC as a central criterion for a project to be sustained. If a project did not have this centrality, it was not supported, as was the case with pastoral theological education.<sup>5</sup>

The vision of *Ablaze!* was very good at mobilizing the whole Church—perhaps not with Lutheran language but rather with the language of evangelical movements—and it succeeded in putting the focus on mission. It was announced that it was not a program but ended up being so in how it was carried out.<sup>6</sup>

What was previously affirmed in relation to the formation of leaders, began to be heard in the forums or meetings of that time: that all members are missionaries,

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personas no alcanzadas o no comprometidas para el Quinto Centenario de la Reforma en 2017.” [LCMS World Mission,] *¡Ablaze! Igniting the World with Christ’s Love: Encendiendo al Mundo con el Amor de Cristo [Plan de Enfoque Balanceado]*, unpublished PDF, 37 pages [St. Louis: LCMS World Mission, 2004].

<sup>3</sup> [LCMS World Mission,] *Perspectivas Teológicas de la iniciativa “¡Ablaze!”: Iglesia Luterana del Sínodo de Missouri*, unpublished PDF, 20 pages [Saint Louis: LCMS, 2005], 3.

<sup>4</sup> “La misión es muy importante y el trabajo que involucra es demasiado inmenso para recaer sobre unos cuantos misioneros de carrera o aún en los pastores y misioneros de LCMS. Esto no consiste en dar y ganar crédito por cumplir la tarea o parte de ella. El número enfatiza que trabajadores profesionales de la iglesia y ministros como también las iglesias Luteranas alrededor del mundo deben trabajar juntos para alcanzar tal grande meta.” [LCMS World Mission,] *Perspectivas Teológicas de la iniciativa “¡Ablaze!”* 3.

<sup>5</sup> So it happened that many projects of theological education stopped receiving financial support, such as the IBL in Chile, when I was its director in 2006.

<sup>6</sup> The four components: Prayer, Working in Society, Proclamation, and Reformation. The answers you have: Go, Pray, Learn, Give, Count, Send, and Celebrate. The components of the Balanced Approach Plan: Missionary, Mission Response, Partners, People, Leadership, and Board of Directors. LCMS World Mission, *¡Ablaze! Plan de Enfoque Balanceado*.

that all must proclaim the Gospel because all are witnesses;<sup>7</sup> that the most important thing that happens in the Church happens outside of it, namely, the mission; that pastors are for the maintenance of a church, while missionaries are for evangelization; that institutionalized church models with a professional pastor should have as an example and orientation to be a mission; etc. How did this influence theological education?

In Latin American theological education, *Ablaze!* promoted the already conceived “Escuela de Misioneros [School of Missionaries]” in Argentina (2004), as a separate institution from Seminario Concordia and gave rise to other educational experiences, highlighting the “Laboratorio Transcultural [Transcultural Laboratory]” of Uruguay. The CITM (Centro Internacional de Treinamento Missionário [International Missionary Training Center]) of Seminário Concórdia of São Paulo (EST/ICSP) already existed.<sup>8</sup>

#### A. Escuela de Misioneros (EdeM, School of Missionaries)<sup>9</sup>

The idea of the Escuela de Misioneros was to train workers for cross-cultural mission. Under this concept: “Missionary is that person to whom the Church entrusted the mission of developing a task, not specifically of evangelist, for the purpose of planting a new church or developing the resources that God provides to a congregation for the expansion of the Church.”<sup>10</sup> In its goals, one of them makes the linkage with *Ablaze!*: “To be an active part of the goal of sharing the gospel with 100 million unbelievers or uncommitted people, reaching 3000 people in the first year, and 15,000 in the next 4 years by multiplying training.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “. . . enfatiza la responsabilidad que tiene cada cristiano de tomar parte en la tarea de evangelizar, y la importancia de que cada persona comparta la fe que él o ella ha recibido como don de Dios.” LCMS World Mission, *Perspectivas Teológicas de la iniciativa “¡Ablaze!”* 3.

<sup>8</sup> In July 1996, the Faculty of Theology of the Instituto Concórdia de São Paulo (EST/ICSP) founded the Centro Internacional de Treinamento Missionário (CITM, International Missionary Training Center). Two years later, in 1998, the CITM held the first International Symposium on Mission, under the coordination of Prof. Erní Walter Seibert. The second symposium was held at the same location in 2001. After the closure of EST/ICSP, the mission’s symposia were only held again in 2006, at the Seminário Concórdia (São Leopoldo), under the coordination of Prof. Anselmo Ernesto Graff.

<sup>9</sup> “A partir de febrero de 2005 se dio inicio con el Proyecto “Escuela de Misioneros” con la aceptación del Nombramiento del Rev. Sergio Schelske como Coordinador de la Escuela de Misionero. (El Rev. Servio Schelske también aceptó el nombramiento como pastor misionero de San Miguel de Tucumán.)” [IELA,] “Noticias de la Iglesia,” unpublished PDF, 2 pages [Buenos Aires: IELA, 2005].

<sup>10</sup> “Misionero es aquella persona a quien la Iglesia encomendó la misión de desarrollar una tarea, no específicamente de evangelista, con el propósito de plantar una nueva iglesia o desarrollar los recursos que Dios provee a una congregación para la expansión de la Iglesia.” [IELA,] *Educación Teológica Terciaria*, unpublished PDF, 5 pages [Buenos Aires: IELA, 2004], 2.

<sup>11</sup> “Ser parte activa de la meta de compartir el evangelio a 100 millones de personas no creyentes o comprometidas, alcanzando a 3000 personas en el primer año, y 15.000 en los próximos 4 años por la multiplicación de la capacitación.” [IELA,] *Educación Teológica Terciaria*, 2.

The needs described for its creation were:

- a. Total mobilization of the parts.
- b. Living the faith in community and context (thus avoiding parochialism, religious formalism, social isolation of communities, distortion towards “grace alone”).
- c. Share, live, and show definite Christian values, which are oriented towards a firm ethic as an application of the word received or implanted (James 1:21).
- d. Specialized training in the area of missionary work.
- e. Explore the formation of part-time ministries and missionaries (according to the Pauline model).<sup>12</sup>

The philosophy of the program was: (1) Grounded in the life and needs of the church; (2) Under the concept of “discipleship” (mentor/student); (3) Skills acquired according to the tasks; (4) Curriculum contextualized to cultural norms.<sup>13</sup> It consisted of three established stages:<sup>14</sup>

Stage I: Courses for missionaries in function (Salta, Tucumán, Rosario, and Spain) with the idea of sharing work experiences and complementing and strengthening the training of missionaries.<sup>15</sup>

Stage II: Deepen the process initiated in Stage I, incorporating a larger group of pastors and laity and to develop a missionary profile in each participant. In addition, the consideration of missionary work in the family group, integrating wives in the task of the missionary and encouraging them to live the faith as a family and for witness to the Gospel.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “a. Movilización total de las partes. b. Vivencia de la fe en comunidad y contexto (evitando así el parroquialismo, formalismo religioso, aislamiento social de las comunidades, distorsión hacia la “gracia sola”). c. Compartir, vivir y mostrar valores cristianos definidos, que se orienten hacia una ética firme como aplicación de la palabra recibida o implantada (Santiago 1:21). d. Capacitación especializada en el área del trabajo misional. e. Explorar la formación de ministerios y misioneros part-time (de acuerdo al modelo paulino).” [Sergio Schelske,] *Escuela de Misioneros - Etapa III - Propuesta de Trabajo*, unpublished PDF, 4 pages [San Miguel de Tucumán: EdeM, 2006], 3.

<sup>13</sup> Schelske, *Escuela de Misioneros - Etapa III*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> [Sergio Schelske,] *Escuela de Misioneros: Missionary Training School: Preparing People for the Harvest*, unpublished PDF, 18 pages [San Miguel de Tucumán: EdeM, 2009].

<sup>15</sup> [Schelske,] *Escuela de Misioneros*, 2. The courses given: (1) From June 27 to July 1, 2005 in the city of Tucumán. The course “Antropología, Sociología y Cosmovisión” by Eric Moeller. And the course “Misión Transcultural” by Sergio Schelske. (2) From 28 November to 2 December in Hurlingham. The course “Teología del Evangelismo” by Sergio Schelske and the course “Estrategias y Plantación de Iglesias Celulares” by Baptist pastor Tito Robert (el ministerio CRECER de la Iglesia Bautista Comunitaria).

<sup>16</sup> [Schelske,] *Escuela de Misioneros*, 4–6. The courses given: (1) From 22 to 23 April 2006 in Villa Giardino, Córdoba, with the course “La Familia Misionera. Definiendo su Perfil, Roles e Inserción en la Tarea Misionera” by Marcos Kempff. From June 26 to 29, 2006 in Rosario, Santa Fe, with the course “Consejería, Mediación y Resolución de Conflictos” by Olga Groh, and the course

Stage III: With the goal of developing a work program that will serve as a leaven to mobilize the Church towards a missionary practice committed from the grass-roots to society. Its objectives: continue with the programming of intensive courses; multiply the content and presentation of intensive courses through district activities aimed at the development of local missionary initiatives; develop and provide printed material applying the TEE methodology; coordinate the implementation of the Missionary Orientation of the Bachillerato Superior en Teología [Higher Baccalaureate in Theology, at Seminario Concordia, Argentina]; and establish a missionary formation program in Latin America in association with other institutions.<sup>17</sup>

The program graduated six missionaries in April 2009.<sup>18</sup> The EdeM ended up being inserted into Seminario Concordia of Argentina<sup>19</sup> under the “mission” area of the curriculum, with the call to Leandro Hübner in 2013. The EdeM was a pioneering experience in the Hispanic world by training pastors as missionaries.

#### *B. Laboratorio Luterano Transcultural (Transcultural Lutheran Laboratory)*<sup>20</sup>

The “Laboratorio Luterano Transcultural” (Transcultural Lutheran Laboratory) had as its predecessor the “Programa de Misión Transcultural” (Transcultural Mission Program) that was held in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay.<sup>21</sup> It was considered a

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“Antropología Misiológica” by Gregory Klotz. (2) In November 2006 in Viale, Entre Ríos, with the course “Apologética. Cosmovisiones confrontadas con el Evangelio” and “Evangelismo Congregacional” by Paul Brink. (3) From June 12 to 15, 2007 in Puerto Esperanza, Misiones, with the course “Renovación de la Iglesia Local. Desarrollo de Proyectos misionales en el contexto local” by Marcos Kempff and the course “Detección, Formación y Desarrollo de Líderes Locales” by Douglas Rutt. (4) From 15 to 18 October 2007, in Hernandarias, Entre Ríos, with the courses “Misión Urbana: La ciudad, sus características y cultura. Comunicación del Evangelio en el contexto urbano” by James Tino, and the course “Contextualización en las Misiones: Bases bíblicas, práctica histórica y modelos” by David Coles.

<sup>17</sup> [Schelske,] *Escuela de Misioneros*, 9–12. The courses taught: (1) From October 28 to 31, 2008, in the city of Paraná, Entre Ríos, with the course “La Misión de Dios en un Mundo que sufre” by Marcos Kempff. (2) From June 16 to 19, 2009, on May 25, Misiones, with the course “Los Medios de Comunicación y el Anuncio del Evangelio” by Alberto Groh; and the course “Comunicando el Evangelio en un contexto de creencias populares, y superstición” by Eric Moeller.

<sup>18</sup> a. pastor David René Belizán Theys, Parroquia Salta. b. Obrero Congregacional Irineo Gustavo Denis, Parroquia el Soberbio. c. Pastor Claudio Irineo Herber, Parroquia Paraná. d. Pastor Fabián Andrés Hill, parroquia Federal. e. Pastor misionero Laercio Knaak Roloff, Cuidad del Este Paraguay. f. Pastor capellán Daniel José Klenovsky, Hohenau Paraguay”. *Ceremonia de Graduación: Escuela de Misioneros 17 de Abril 2009*, unpublished PDF, 3 pages.

<sup>19</sup> The Escuela de Misioneros as separate from the Seminary concluded in 2010. “El Pastor Sergio Schelske de la Parroquia de San Miguel de Tucumán (Tucumán) aceptó el llamado de la Parroquia de Maschwitz (Buenos Aires).” IELA, “Llamados aceptados,” *El Nuevo Luterano* (Septiembre 2010), 14.

<sup>20</sup> *Laboratorio Luterano Transcultural* (blog), <http://laboratorioluteranotranscultural.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>21</sup> It happened from May 18 to 27, 2010. This meeting in Ciudad del Este arises from a proposal by Pastor Alceu Figur at an ILC meeting to bring together the missionary programs of the region. “La idea del Rev. Alceu Figur se concretó en una reunión junto con el Director Regional para América Latina de WM, Dr. Jorge Groh. Esto desembocó en la reunión de Bs. As. (Kairós) en el 2007 y

“Missionary Training Course,” organized by LCMS World Mission. It had the EdEM as a platform for this event. Thirty missionaries and their families participated (26 pastors, serving as missionaries, pastors, and teachers, 4 lay missionaries, 15 wives and many children) who came from Taiwan, China, Germany, South Africa, Kenya, Slovakia, the United States, Peru, Panama, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, and Paraguay. “The training was with talks, studies, devotions, worship, fieldwork, and visitation.”<sup>22</sup>

From this project the initiative in Uruguay emerged, led by Christian Hoffmann, to make a training program in cross-cultural mission and leadership. After promoting it, the “Transcultural Laboratory” took place from February 12 to 27, 2011, in Uruguay. It consisted of workshops, talks, cultural immersions, excursions, and various activities. Members of churches from Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, USA, and Panama participated.

To continue this project Gustavo Lavia of Spain was called in October 2009, but he did not accept. Then they called the candidate for the pastorate, Milton Hofstetter, as a missionary pastor for the Montevideo Mission, with the task of forming transcultural missionaries, but he, too, did not accept the call.<sup>23</sup> The project was discontinued because there was no one to take charge of it.

### XI. Red Teológica, e-Teólogos (Theological Network, e-Theologians)

The idea of a network appeared with CETAL in its documents and statements, as we have already seen. When the regional meetings of the ILC began, they were again affirmed, but it was the central theme of a consultation held in São Paulo (Brazil) in 2000, where Mark Kempff presented the theme of a theological network. The next meeting, which again discussed this theme, was in Panama in 2002,<sup>24</sup> in a call for “Co-Extension.”<sup>25</sup> These two invitations were supported by LCMS World Mission. In the regional ILC meetings, the need for a network was also repeatedly

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Montevideo (Uruguay) 2009. Estas reuniones trajeron como resultado la elaboración de un Programa para la formación de misioneros transculturales y la experiencia piloto en Ciudad del Este (Paraguay).” Schelske, *Escuela de Misioneros*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> “La capacitación fue con charlas, estudios, devociones, cultos, trabajo de campo y visitación.” Laercio Knaak, “CURSO DE CAPACITACIÓN DE MISIONEROS,” *Misión Ciudad del Este* (blog), June 13, 2010, <http://misionluteranacde.blogspot.com/2010/06/curso-de-capacitacion-de-misioneros.html>.

<sup>23</sup> IELA, “Comisionamientos no aceptados,” *El Nuevo Luterano* (January 2010): 1.

<sup>24</sup> It was in Balboa, Panama, from June 3 to 6, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> “Comité Coordinador de Instituciones Teológicas Luteranas por Extensión en América Latina.” “Already in 1971, some of the church bodies associated with SEMLA had formed Co-Extensión, a Lutheran association of programs from different countries in Latin America dedicated to TEE.” Kempff, “A Journey from Antigua,” 297–298. Co-Extensión had more than 50 printed TEE courses.

presented (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2000; and Olmué, Chile, 2002), where there was an insistant affirmation of a

theological education directed to the mission and accompanying the mission, in search of academic excellence, not exclusive, where gifts and resources are shared at various levels, respecting local characteristics and using the concept of network in order to respond to the needs of the moment and the context of the ILC member churches in Latin America.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, at the 2004 regional ILC meeting (Antigua, Guatemala), where the birth of *Ablaze!* was announced, the churches' joint request to LCMS World Mission Regional Director, Jorge Groh, to support a position for facilitation was formalized. The central purpose was to foster cooperation and exchange between the theological education of the ILC churches through regional coordination and facilitation. The work of the facilitation was to provide a [computer] server and connection between the programs (institutions) and the theological resources (courses or professors) in order to facilitate resources, reduce efforts, and generate unity of criteria and concepts. In the description of the position of the facilitator and editor of the publications, a central objective was to advance the work of regional theological education, promoting the coordination of a network of cooperation, in accordance with the vision *Ablaze!* in Latin America and with the Balanced Approach Plan that includes leadership training to reach people with the message of Jesus.<sup>27</sup> The following goals were set:

1. Draw up a list of human resources, materials, facilities, and infrastructure.
2. Create a method of communication between the programs, informing about events, activities, and resources (including a possible website).
3. Support a facilitator to start this work, who dedicates the time and has the resources to do it.

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<sup>26</sup> "Educación Teológica dirigida a la misión y acompañando a la misión, en busca de excelencia académica, no exclusiva, donde se compartan dones y recursos en diversos niveles, respetando las características locales y que utilice el concepto de red a fin de responder a las necesidades del momento y al contexto de las iglesias miembros de la ILC de Latinoamérica." Laureno Sitzmann, *International Lutheran Council, Conferencia Regional – Olmué, Chile, 9 al 13 de Septiembre de 2002: Acta*, unpublished PDF, 7 pages (2002), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Concilio Luterano Internacional, Carlos Winterle, and Cristian E. Rautenberg, *ACTA: 4ª CONFERENCIA REGIÓN LATINOAMÉRICA: Antigua Guatemala - Agosto [23–24] de 2004*, unpublished PDF, 14 pages (2004), 5–7, 11–12, 13. Kempff describes the ILC regional meeting thus: "At the Fifth International Lutheran Council—Latin America World Region Conference, held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, August 2006, plans were laid out to enter a trial phase. There were strategies, commitments, professors and tutors, printed and digital resources, and a deep Christ-rooted love for the expansion of the mission of the church." Kempff, "A Journey from Antigua," 299. Raymond S. Rosales was the first full-time Co-Extension coordinator.

4. Create a Latin American institutional network for exchange, interaction, and cooperation with a view to the creation of a faculty of theology.
5. Initiate the process of a common accreditation for our programs.

The commitment of the presidents of the ILC Latin America Region in Antigua (2004) was:

1. Support the development of objectives and strategies for coordination.
2. Support the work of a coordinator and the development of a job description and funding plan for the program.
3. Support the periodic evaluation of this project.<sup>28</sup>

Mark Kempff was elected to be the facilitator and officially began on April 1, 2005. After more than a year of work, at the ILC regional meeting in Cochabamba (Bolivia) in 2006, the facilitator shared a data compact disk with more than 200 liturgies and other liturgical materials. The RedTE (Red de programas de Educación Teológica de América Latina, el Caribe y España [Network of Theological Education Programs of Latin America, the Caribbean and Spain]) of the ILC-Latin America Region was presented as a virtual faculty.<sup>29</sup> For communication, RedCLITE (Red del Concilio Luterano Internacional—Educación Teológica en AmLatina [International Lutheran Council Network—Theological Education in Latin America]), a YahooGroups service (coordinated by Douglas Rutt), and the Journal *Tintero Teológico* (*Theological Inkwell*) were established, which had already been published several times (since 2005) with reflections, CITM papers, liturgies, and translations of articles.<sup>30</sup>

As a network that communicated through internet, Kempff coined the terms “e-Teólogo [e-Theologian]” and “e-Teología [e-Theology]” “to describe the people who are involved in theological education—teachers, directors, promoters, and

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<sup>28</sup> “1. Apoyar la elaboración de objetivos y estrategias para la coordinación. 2. Apoyar el trabajo de un coordinador y la elaboración de una descripción del cargo y un plan de financiamiento para el programa. 3. Apoyar la evaluación periódica de este proyecto.” Marcos Kempff, “Propósito de la red,” *El Tintero Teológico* 1, no. 1 (December 2005): 2.

<sup>29</sup> It was a list of teachers.

<sup>30</sup> Seibert, who was ILC’s regional TE coordinator in Latin America, comments on how the network’s dream was happening: “The Latin American churches are working with this network perspective. There is no rivalry among the schools of theology. Graduate programs in theology, seminaries, Biblical institutes and boards for Christian education are all part of the same network. All make up the theological education of the Church and are part of the *Missio Dei*. God gives us great opportunities to work as a network in today’s world. We are able to share gifts and resources as never before in history. The network concept implies that every “knot” of the network is necessary, but at the same time illustrates the need for coordination and inter-dependence.” Erní Walter Seibert, “Curricula for the Study of Lutheran Theology: Currículos para Estudiar Teología Luterana,” in *Preparing Lutheran Pastors for Today: ILC - Theological Seminaries World Conference*, ed. Paulo Moisés Nerbas (Canoas: ULBRA, 2006), 266.

scholars in the field—and our tasks of theological formation.”<sup>31</sup> This is how Kempff himself describes it:

With the arrival and accessibility of the Internet and web-based education, new models of theological education came about. Again, in Guatemala, after the innovation of Lutheran TEE in 1959 (forty-five years later!), now was the bold step to online education, eTEE (e-ETE in Spanish). The term *eteólogo* (e-theologian) and *eteología* (e-theology) were coined<sup>32</sup> to describe a generation of instructors and professors committed to designing courses and resources and teaching in a collaborative manner across country borders. The Latin American churches were developing a collaborative vision and network of Lutheran seminaries and TEE programs to work together under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, within the context of the realities and needs of the member churches.<sup>33</sup>

Exactly as Kempff himself describes it, so it happened: he alone organized and proposed the TEE for the Latin American churches. At the Cochabamba meeting (2006) the “Plan de Estudios Teológicos [Theological Curriculum]” was presented, which dealt with a TEE proposal for the Lutheran churches of Latin America under four levels: Congregational, Diaconal, Pastoral, and Continuing Education.<sup>34</sup> The churches gathered wanted to change the direction proposed by the Facilitator, because they already had TEE and wanted to move towards a formal mode of theological education. For this, they asked for greater participation and leadership of the seminaries of Argentina and Brazil in the Network.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “para describir las personas que estamos involucradas en educación teológica – profesores, directores, promotores y estudiosos en la materia – y nuestras tareas de formación teológica.” Kempff, “Propósito de la red,” 2.

<sup>32</sup> Kempff himself coined these terms. He proposed them in the first *Tintero Teológico*.

<sup>33</sup> Kempff, “A Journey from Antigua,” 299.

<sup>34</sup> Main objectives: “1. ‘Preparar a los santos’ (Efesios 4:12), a hombres y mujeres, para la edificación y extensión de la Iglesia de Cristo, basándose en el concepto Bíblico que todo creyente es llamado por Dios por medio de su Bautismo para llevar el Evangelio de Cristo a tod[o]s los pueblos y naciones. 2. Formar líderes congregacionales, maestros, diáconos, pastores, misioneros y profesores para las congregaciones y la Iglesia Luterana. ... 5. Brindar a los educandos una orientación adecuada para servir como líderes contemporáneos, siervos comprometidos y fieles al Señor; esto incluye el uso de mentores en el programa.” Marcos Kempff, *Plan de Estudios Teológicos: Documento de trabajo*, 9th ed., unpublished PDF, 12 pages ([Panamá: Facilitación,] 2006), 2.

<sup>35</sup> The document “Red de Educación Teológica” prepared by the directors and managers of theological education of the churches affirms: “1) Se observa en el plan de trabajo (2006-2008) una centralización de las tareas en la persona del facilitador, ejecutando más que ‘facilitando’. 2) Se sugiere como una centralidad en el trabajo fortalecer vínculos y relaciones de institución a institución educativa, vía Red, teniendo como base la *información*. 3) Enfatizar en la Facilitación sobre la formación de los profesores (de acuerdo a su grado académico) para que formen en contexto, tanto en información, conexiones, becas, posibilidades, búsquedas de recursos, etc. 4) Establecer criterios para la Red (grupo Yahoo). 5) Dejar el tema de la acreditación de los programas para cada lugar o contexto, respetando a cada iglesia nacional con su programa, y buscando una formación adecuada para los profesores.” *Red de Educación Teológica*, unpublished PDF, 2 pages [Cochabamba: ILC Regional, 2006], 1. In addition, it was suggested to the facilitator: stop producing (especially

The next meeting of the directors of theological education in Latin America was at the ILC seminaries meeting in South Africa in 2007 (from March 29 to April 1), where the same thing was discussed about TEE, that is, there had not been any change of direction.<sup>36</sup> Finally, at the ILC meeting of presidents in Accra, Ghana, “in September 2007, presidents of the different churches that make up the ILC (International Lutheran Council) of the Latin American and Caribbean region gathered in Accra, Ghana, resolved to close the position of facilitator of the theological education network for the region.”<sup>37</sup> The idea was to take a break, because they did not agree with the direction they were traveling. But finally, the position of Facilitator was eliminated at the ILC regional meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in August 2008 by the Regional Director of LCMS World Mission, who removed the financial support, leaving the theological field in Latin America very confused. This was in addition to the removal of LCMS grants for programs and institutions, which sealed their fate in most cases.

After the discontinuation of facilitation and the end of funding from LCMS World Mission, the Lutheran churches continued as they had done before, although

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liturgical production) and dedicate himself to facilitation, unification of criteria considering the seminars, look to the Brazil Seminary for strength for the region, leave aside countries that are not from the ILC and other organizations such as Co-Extensión, look more at what the seminaries produce, etc. *Red de Educación Teológica*, 1–2. The director of World Mission LCMS had stated about Co-Extensión: “LCMS World Mission should *continue its participation in Co-Extension*. It is the only forum in Latin America in which like-minded Lutherans from various missions and churches can get-together. LCMS World Mission may need to become more involved, perhaps even providing personnel to serve as director.” Douglas L. Rutt, “Field Trip Report: Bolivia, May 4–13, 1999,” pages 96–101 of collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO, 97. This suggestion of the regional director of World Mission that was made concrete with the presidency of Gregory Klotz and then in 2001 by Mark Kempff, as director of Co-Extensión, until the association was closed in 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Although there are records that claim that the course was not what the churches wanted, Kempff argues otherwise: “El concepto del E-teólogo no fue exclusivamente el de servir en el trabajo de la ETE, ni de convertir toda nuestra formación teológica en ETE. Al contrario, estábamos ante una idea con beneficios para todos los programas. Quizás hoy el concepto sería llamado: una educación teológica ‘híbrida’. ... El intento, como yo recuerdo, no fue de aislar el Seminario por residencia de programas de ETE, sino más bien, de crear una red de apoyo y de interacción e interdependencia.” Mark Kempff, email message to author, 2020 (my emphasis). Although Kempff stated that the idea was not to convert all of Latin America to TEE, he finally ends up acknowledging it: “But, due to financial cutbacks and personnel downsizing in LCMS World Missions (LCMS WM), the vision toward implementing online TEE in Latin America was not fulfilled. In August 2007, the facilitator position, financed by LCMS WM, ended abruptly. Interestingly enough, not long after, the preliminary groundwork for a new regional residential seminary was inaugurated in the Dominican Republic, Seminario Concordia ‘El Reformador,’ in 2010, with a joint agreement with Seminario Concordia, Argentina.” Kempff, “A Journey from Antigua,” 299.

<sup>37</sup> “en septiembre de 2007, presidentes de las diferentes iglesias que componen la ILC (Concilio Lutero Internacional) de la región Latinoamérica y Caribe reunidos en Accra, Ghana; resolvieron cerrar la posición de facilitador de la red de educación teológica para la región.” Jorge Groh to Los Presidentes de Iglesias Hermanas Y Responsables de Educación Teológica en América Latina, March 10, 2008, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

some Bible institutes took a long pause in their work. Many of the Bible institutes asked the seminaries to open their eyes to Latin America beyond their local challenges, to take the lead of theological education in the region. Although they were willing, distances, local needs, ignorance of a Bible institute, etc., could not help. It was in 2010 that Seminario Concordia in Argentina opened its doors for candidates for the pastorate of the churches of Latin America.

## XII. Scholarships from LCMS and CMSCR (Mercy Center and Concordia Seminary “The Reformer”)

The Centro de Misericordia y Seminario Concordia “El Reformador” (CMSCR) began as a Bible Institute (Instituto Bíblico “El Reformador”) with Walter Ries in 2005, with written TEE courses. Then came Pastor Theodore Krey (2009), who asked Seminario Concordia of Argentina for help for theological education in the Dominican Republic. This request was brought to Argentina by Jorge Groh, who was the regional director of LCMS World Mission, and after being approved, an agreement was signed (by Jorge Groh for LCMS World Mission and by President Edgardo Elseser for the IELA), on March 13, 2010. The agreement was that the Seminary of Argentina assumed the theological education in the Dominican Republic under EPH (Educación Pastoral para Hispanoamérica [Pastoral Education for Hispanic America]) and the Dominican Mission was in charge of the deaconess program. In addition, it offered two intensive courses per year for candidates for the pastorate, sending vicars of IELA to the Dominican Republic (according to the arrangement and request of the Lutheran mission of the Dominican Republic), and the Seminary of Argentina was an honorary member in the FOROs<sup>38</sup> of the mission. Within the plan, it was stipulated: “The identification of a strategic plan by 2017 to install a theological institution under the historical modality of a seminary.”<sup>39</sup>

Starting in the same year (2010), in agreement with the authorities of the IELA, LCMS World Mission made the agreement to provide ten scholarships for students from Latin America to study at Seminario Concordia in Argentina. And on June 22, 2010, IELA President Edgardo Elseser presented a document written by Sergio Fritzler entitled “Proyecto Misional: Educación Teológica para Hispanoamérica [Misional Project: Theological Education for Hispanic America]” to the IELA Board of

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<sup>38</sup> I.e., “Forums,” partnership conferences for support of LCMS mission work in Latin America and the Caribbean. <https://international.lcms.org/events-foros/>. —Ed.

<sup>39</sup> “La identificación de un plan estratégico hasta 2017 para dejar instalado una institución teológica bajo la modalidad histórica de Seminario.” Misión luterana de la República Dominicana and Seminario Concordia Seminary of Buenos Aires, “Documento de Acuerdo.” Seminario Concordia of Argentina held the colloquy for Willy Gaspar in 2011, the first pastor of the Dominican Republic. Since 2015 Pastor Sergio Maita has been the link and person responsible for the courses with Argentina and for Theological Education in the Dominican Republic.

Directors, which was approved,<sup>40</sup> where he describes theological education as the “first need of mission” [“primera necesidad de la misión”] and the proposal is:

To open the doors of the Concordia Seminary for Latin America in order to contribute in the region with theological education and confessional theology, receiving people who are in other theological programs in order to complete the educational cycles, accepting the different realities to orient and assist in the implementation of a theological institution in the specific formation of the teachers.<sup>41</sup>

The project consisted of three Stages:

First Stage (2011): “Opening the doors to receive students from the different theological education programs of the Hispanic churches of the regional ILC or other Lutheran churches.”<sup>42</sup>

Second Stage (2012–2013): “Establish particular agreements with each institution or program of theological education in order to recognize what is done in the place (standardizing) and stipulate what SC [Seminario Concordia] would do in the different programs.”<sup>43</sup>

Third Stage (2014–2017): “Assist the institutions with whom there are agreements in the implementation of theological education programs, giving special training for teachers and guiding each institution to walk independently.”<sup>44</sup> This project arises from observing the reality in Latin America:

When observing the reality of our sister Lutheran Churches in Latin America, it is clear that each church tries to meet its needs according to its possibilities. The efforts are multiple but in many cases end up being limited. There are confessional deficiencies, scarcity of qualified human resources for teaching, and theological programs with deficient systems. Seminario Concordia is currently in a position to make a significant contribution to the mission, due to its

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<sup>40</sup> Sergio Fritzler, “Proyecto Misional: Educación Teológica para Hispanoamérica,” in Edgardo Elseser, “Recursos humanos para Hispanoamérica” (paper presented to the IELA Board of Directors, June 22, 2010), 4.

<sup>41</sup> “Abrir las puertas del Seminario Concordia para Hispanoamérica a fin de contribuir en la región con educación teológica y teología confesional, recibiendo personas que están en otros programas teológicos a fin de completar los ciclos educativos, acogiendo las diferentes realidades para orientar y auxiliar en la implementación de una institución teológica en la formación especial de los profesores.” Fritzler, “Proyecto Misional,” 5.

<sup>42</sup> “Abrir las puertas para recibir estudiantes de los diferentes programas de educación teológica de las iglesias hispanas de la ILC regional u otras iglesias luteranas.” Fritzler, “Proyecto Misional,” 5.

<sup>43</sup> “Establecer convenios particulares con cada institución o programa de educación teológica a fin de reconocer lo que se hace en el lugar (homologando) y estipular lo que haría el SC [Seminario Concordia] en los diferentes programas.” Fritzler, “Proyecto Misional,” 5.

<sup>44</sup> “Auxiliar a las instituciones conveniadas con la implementación de programas de educación teológica, dando formación especial para los profesores y orientando a cada institución para caminar en forma independiente.” Fritzler, “Proyecto Misional,” 6.

technical capacities to provide confessional and missionary theological education, as well as accompanying in the consolidation of indigenous theological institutions for mission in the churches of Latin America that need it. This willingness is based on gratitude to God, conviction of needs, and the generous example we have received from the LCMS.<sup>45</sup>

IELA President Edgardo Elseser, in the letter of invitation to the Lutheran churches in the region, writes:

The Argentine Evangelical Lutheran Church has the firm intention of collaborating and serving our sister churches in the formation of pastors. For this reason, it makes available ten scholarships to train as a Higher Bachelor in Theology at Seminario Concordia of Buenos Aires. They include matriculation, classes, lodging, and food (does not include travel expenses).<sup>46</sup>

Since 2011, with the LCMS scholarships, the doors were opened to the entire region, reaching residential students from six countries and together with the online programs, a total of 12 countries in 2015.<sup>47</sup> Initially the ten scholarships were only for singles. In 2015 they became twenty scholarships, which included married students, who received double scholarships because of their family. Seminario Concordia of Argentina formed four pastors under these scholarships, and then decided not to receive foreigners anymore. The students who were left hanging were then formed at the CMSCR in the Dominican Republic.

In 2012 the ETH program was started<sup>48</sup> (Educación Teológica para Hispanoamérica [Theological Education for Hispanic America]) that “offers a unified

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<sup>45</sup> “Al observarse la realidad de nuestras Iglesias Luteranas hermanas de Hispanoamérica se detecta que cada Iglesia trata de suplir sus necesidades de acuerdo a sus posibilidades. Los esfuerzos son múltiples, pero terminan siendo en muchos casos limitados. Hay carencias confesionales, escasez de recursos humanos calificados para la tarea docente, y programas teológicos con sistemas deficientes. El Seminario Concordia en la actualidad está en condiciones de realizar un aporte significativo para la misión, por sus capacidades técnicas para brindar Educación Teológica Confesional y Misionera, como también el acompañar en la consolidación de Instituciones Teológicas Autóctonas para la Misión en las Iglesias de América Latina que lo necesiten. Esta disposición se basa en la gratitud a Dios, en la convicción de las necesidades y en el ejemplo generoso que recibimos de LCMS.” Fritzler, “Proyecto Misional,” 4.

<sup>46</sup> “La Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Argentina tiene el firme propósito de colaborar y servir a nuestras Iglesias hermanas en la formación de pastores. Por tal motivo pone a disposición de diez becas para formarse como Bachiller Superior en Teología en el Seminario Concordia de Bs. As. Las mismas incluyen matrícula, materias, alojamiento y comida (no incluye pasajes).” Edgardo Elseser, email to the presidents of the Lutheran Churches (2011).

<sup>47</sup> The first student was Eliezer Mendoza from Venezuela. There have been many opponents of these scholarships, who have expressed it not publicly, but always personally. Beyond these criticisms, the most regrettable thing, which a few have expressed to me, finally after heated discussions, is that “Latinos do not need so much training,” a statement that is, unfortunately, discrimination against Latinos.

<sup>48</sup> “Dicho programa está organizado en tres etapas: la primera constituye la capacitación para el grado de Catequista, mientras que las dos siguientes completan la capacitación para el ministerio. El cumplimiento de la segunda etapa habilita al alumno para realizar su entrenamiento práctico

study program for the degrees of Catechist (giving qualification for auxiliary offices) and Bachelor of Theology (giving qualification for the holy ministry).<sup>49</sup> This program was initially conceived and intended for the IELE (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Española [Spanish Evangelical Lutheran Church]), and then was offered for the Dominican Republic. From there it was opened to the entire region. It was the first theological education program for pastoral formation in Latin America “online” by internet (in the AulaNET system) and with live classes (Skype and other systems). This program made the following assumptions (as is also the case with FPH [Formación Pastoral para Hispanoamérica, Pastoral Formation for Hispanic America]):

1. Students work.
2. Most students are married with families.
3. They cannot attend intensive residential classes (something like a week or two).
4. They cannot afford travel or studies in other regions.

Then came Formación Pastoral para Hispanoamérica (FPH, Pastoral Formation for Hispanic America), where ETH became FPH with the accent that theological education focuses on pastoral acts: preaching, baptism, and Holy Communion. A formal, written agreement was made between Seminario Concordia of Buenos Aires and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), in 2015 to work together, under the MyClasses platform of Fort Wayne, where each course was developed by three professors from different theological areas. The program was developed by the faculty of the Seminary of Argentina, together with CTSFW. In the words of Arthur Just:

FPH was worked on in 2015 together with Rast and Just in Buenos Aires. It was built on the simple premise: that theology is realized through the pastoral acts of baptizing, preaching, and celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Reflection that had happened at CTSFW from 1999 to 2005, questioning the Enlightenment model of four areas and the proposal was a 3–year program “based on the biblical foundation that the Word and Sacraments are the means to mission.”<sup>50</sup>

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(vicariato) en forma simultánea con el desarrollo de la etapa final de capacitación.” Seminario Concordia, *Educación Teológica para Hispanoamérica: Programa de Estudio*, unpublished PDF, 3 pages (Buenos Aires: Seminario Concordia, [2010]), 1.

<sup>49</sup> “ofrece un programa de estudio unificado para los grados de Catequista (habilitante para oficio auxiliar) y de Bachiller en Teología (habilitante para el sagrado ministerio).” Seminario Concordia, *Educación Teológica para Hispanoamérica: Programa de Estudio*, 1.

<sup>50</sup> FPH was developed in 2015 with President Lawrence R. Rast Jr. and Just in Buenos Aires. It was built on the simple premise that theology is realized through the pastoral acts of baptizing, preaching, and celebrating the Lord’s Supper. This reflection had taken place at CTSFW from 1999 to 2005, questioning the four-department Enlightenment model, and the proposal was a three-year program “basado en el fundamento bíblico de que la Palabra y los Sacramentos son los medios para la misión.” [Arthur Just Jr.,] *El Oficio de la Predicación y el Cuidado Pastoral*, unpublished PDF, 17

Arthur Just developed the idea of the program and subsequently an agreement was signed between the seminaries to carry out this joint program (at CTSFW it is the bilingual “Specific Ministry Pastor – Español/English” program). At the end of 2016, Seminario Concordia of Buenos Aires<sup>51</sup> decided not to continue with the agreement and FPH remained in the hands of CTSFW until in 2017 an agreement was made between CTSFW and CMSCR under the same parameters, setting forth the same program.<sup>52</sup> The FPH program has already trained eleven pastors and has regularly averaged 25 students enrolled per year.

In 2016, as a result of the decisions of the IELA authorities, with the departure of the director and the academic coordinator of Seminario Concordia Seminary in Argentina,<sup>53</sup> and the public statements of the president, Carlos Nagel, about discontinuing the scholarships of foreigners in the seminary,<sup>54</sup> the LCMS scholarships in Argentina were discontinued, a situation that hastened the start of the CMSCR in 2017.<sup>55</sup>

The *Centro de Misericordia y Seminario Concordia “El Reformador”* (CMSCR, Mercy Center and Concordia Seminary “The Reformer,” Palma Arriba, Dominican Republic) opened its doors on August 20, 2017, with an opening service and the graduation of Idjon Fritz (formed by ETH/FPH of Argentina and examined by CMSCR), and on September 11 the residential classes began.

The faculty consisted of the director, Joel Fritsche and professors Arthur Just (dean), Roberto Bustamante, David Preus, Jonathan Naumann, Sergio Maita, Theodore Krey, and Sergio Fritzler. And the external professors (distance): Andrew Schlund (Mexico), Brian Gauthier (Panama), Daniel Conrad (Mexico), and David Warner (Spain).

In the first semester of 2017, hard work was done to define the whole of the seminary, especially the profile and the curriculum of study. The profile was proposed by Theodore Krey and analyzed and deepened by the faculty: pastor (2 Tim

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pages [Santiago de los Caballeros: Seminario Concordia El Reformador, 2023], 3. He adds: “La integración, los cursos interdisciplinarios y la enseñanza en equipo serían necesarios en la mayoría de los cursos. Nuestro objetivo para cada estudiante era que llegaran a un lugar en su formación en el que entendieran, cuando estaban en la pila bautismal, en el púlpito o en el altar, todas las realidades bíblicas, sistemáticas, históricas y pastorales que los asistieron en cada uno de estos actos pastorales.” Just, *El Oficio de la Predicación y el Cuidado Pastoral*, 2–3.

<sup>51</sup> Jose Pfaffenzeller, email message to Arthur Just (2016), related to this author orally by Just.

<sup>52</sup> Replacing the parts of the teachers of Seminario Concordia of Buenos Aires.

<sup>53</sup> [The author of this essay, Sergio Fritzler, and Roberto Bustamante had been professors of Seminario Concordia in Buenos Aires until 2016. They are now professors of Seminario Concordia “El Reformador” in the Dominican Republic. —Ed.]

<sup>54</sup> References in numerous public meetings, both with the church in general, and with the students themselves.

<sup>55</sup> Although it was already agreed for 2017, it was not yet ready to start, mainly with regard to the facilities.

4:5), teacher (1 Pt 5:1–4), evangelist (Eph 4:11) and mentor (2 Tim 2:2).<sup>56</sup> The curriculum was based on five core values:

1. Christological: The pastor is in Christ's stead to speak his voice in Word and Sacrament. Through these means, Christ himself becomes bodily present with the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation received in faith by the Christian people.
2. Sacramental: The pastor is at the font, pulpit, and altar, in the stead and by the command of Jesus Christ, in an office that follows the prophetic and apostolic pattern of the Old and New Testaments.
3. Missionary: The pastor is sent in love to sinners, to seek out all the lost in the streets and ways to call them to come to the feast of the living voice of Christ and to the banquet of his body and blood to receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.
4. Mercy: The pastor embodies mercy, as he brings the mercy and love of Christ to everyone in the church and in the world through his words and actions.
5. Pastoral: The pastor knows how to carry out his own pastoral functions: preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, intercession for the sheep, honorable control of his behavior, administration of ecclesiastical discipline, preservation of ecclesiastical rites, care for the poor, and visitation of the sick. The pastor knows how to preach, catechize, and defend his faith in different contexts; contradicting the false prophets, correcting in love and mercy those who are captive to errors because of ignorance, and always seeking to win the lost.<sup>57</sup>

The methodology has consisted of three areas: liturgy, classes, and fieldwork, which emphasizes the role of an evangelist. The *Practicum* states that the fieldwork<sup>58</sup> is done beside a pastor (who are often professors as well). They make evangelistic and pastoral visits every week. The missionary project of the last year, which is related to the planting of a congregation, is highlighted. One of the main characteristics, in addition to its particular focus, is that its professors are pastors at the same time.

In its first six years of existence (2017–2023), the CMSCR has trained to date 32 candidates for the pastorate, 20 graduates for the pastorate, two by colloquy, plus the ten graduates of 2023 (a total of eleven from FPH, nineteen from the residential

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<sup>56</sup> Krey had already used these concepts in Venezuela for pastoral formation in residence.

<sup>57</sup> Seminario Concordia el Reformador, *Perfil del Egresado*, unpublished PDF, 7 pages (2017), 3–7.

<sup>58</sup> Students have 15 hours of directed fieldwork per week, under a *Practicum*, which are distributed in 4 years of study and 2.5 of vicarage. That is why the vicarage has been incorporated into the study program. If the national churches so wish, in agreement with the Seminary, they may stipulate a vicarage in the home country.

program, and two colloquies).<sup>59</sup> In the deaconess program, 99 deaconesses from five countries have been trained.<sup>60</sup> The Mercy Center, which offers courses for laypeople, has conducted countless courses in some sixteen countries, reaching more than a thousand laypeople with its teachings, with about thirty teachers.<sup>61</sup> In addition, in the continuing education of pastors, four online courses have been offered (one per year) with the participation of an average of 70 pastors from 14 countries. The pre-seminary program (six courses) is also offered to churches to use as needed (through the Bible institutes),<sup>62</sup> and the Lutheran Teachers program (currently in formation) for teachers at our Lutheran schools or for Lutheran teachers in educational centers.

In addition to these models of theological education that we have analyzed, at present, although it is not from our region, it is necessary to mention that the Center for Hispanic Studies (Centro de Estudios Hispanos, CEH) at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, has an online study model, almost everything happens remotely by means of communication through the internet. Although the COVID-19 pandemic forced the use of the virtual modality, there were two important earlier programs that used this on-line modality: the Hispanic Lutheran Missionary Institute (Instituto Misionero Hispano Luterano, LHMI),<sup>63</sup> directed by Richard Schlak, in connection and partnership with CEH, and the program of Samuel Gómez (Grace Lutheran Church Latino<sup>64</sup>) which was an online program for Latino pastors on the U.S. border and pastors in Mexico, Belize, and Colombia. The online system is also used by the regional seminary “Luther Academy” of the Eurasia region of LCMS international mission (Livonian Lutheran Project, an online program based in Latvia that provides theological education in English).<sup>65</sup>

Today, all seminaries and theological institutions use, in some or all of their programs, the virtual modality, whether virtual classes (in part or all of the course) or virtual visiting professors. It is a reality that is here to stay and be part of the modalities that can be used very well for our times. Yet the rise of Large Language Models (“artificial intelligence”) and the ease with which non-residential, often very busy, students can use this technology to avoid difficult learning experiences or

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<sup>59</sup> Bolivia (5), Chile (3), Dominican Republic (2), Guatemala (3), Mexico (6), Peru (3), Spain (3), and Venezuela (6).

<sup>60</sup> Guatemala (22), Mexico (24), Panama (6), Dominican Republic (12), and Venezuela (35).

<sup>61</sup> The Mercy Center is part of Seminario Concordia “El Reformador.” It is under the direction of Deaconess Cheryl Naumann.

<sup>62</sup> They are completed courses that are available for churches to use as they wish, with the purpose of calling men to the pastoral vocation through these courses or strengthening them in their other vocations.

<sup>63</sup> “Instituto Misionero Hispano Luterano,” Lutheran Hispanic Missionary Institute, El Paso, TX, <http://www.instituto-misionero.org/>.

<sup>64</sup> “Latino,” Grace Lutheran Church, accessed January 7, 2026, <https://gracelutheranescondido.org/hispanic/>.

<sup>65</sup> Kevin Armbrust, “Whenever and Wherever,” *Lutherans Engage* (Spring/Summer 2021), <https://engage.lcms.org/latvia-spring-2021/>.

complete them without deep thought and significant effort could challenge all of our seminaries and theological institutions. How can we best ensure deep theological learning and pastoral formation in this context?

### XIII. Luther Academy

The continuing education of pastors has not been a major topic of this essay. Nevertheless, the work of the “Luther Academy” in the continuing education of pastors deserves to be mentioned for the efforts made in our region in the last two decades. The Luther Academy began in 1986 with the publication of the first issue of the “Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics” series under the International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research (IFLCR), with Robert Preus as editor of the publication, and David V. Dissen as president of the foundation. Initially only a Lutheran dogmatic project, the purpose was to promote the study of the Lutheran Confessions and orthodox, confessional Lutheran theology.<sup>66</sup> With the publication of the second volume (*Christology* by David Scaer) in 1989, the objectives expanded towards historical research in books and publications, and workshops and conferences to “increase knowledge of faithfulness to the Lutheran Confessions throughout the world”<sup>67</sup> and to maintain sound, orthodox Lutheran doctrine.

In March 1991 Robert Preus organized the Luther Academy and served as the first president of the organization, as well as director and chairman of the board. Other board members included Wilhelm Petersen and Robert Hoerber.<sup>68</sup> They also began publishing the journal *Logia* in 1992, which is “a free conference in print”<sup>69</sup> with articles on the most varied topics from the standpoint of confessional Lutheran doctrine. Erling Teigen was the first editor. In 1993 it started the *Luther Digest*, which was an annual journal directed by Kenneth Hagen to “profile the Luther Academy as a historically minded, theological and scholarly operation.”<sup>70</sup> The “Congresses on the Lutheran Confessions” began in 1995 and the conferences of “The Pieper Lectures” began in 1996. These conferences began to be held abroad starting in 1995.<sup>71</sup>

The Luther Academy arrived in Latin America through two visits by Daniel Preus in 2006. The first was to Panama, where he found no favorable responses, and the second was to Chile where he met with Carlos Schumann and arranged the first conference. This conference was held in Viña del Mar (Chile) in 2007, with the presentation of Leopoldo Sánchez, in cooperation with IELCHI, with the theme

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<sup>66</sup> Scott R. Murray et al., *Propter Christum: Christ at the Center* (USA: Luther Academy, 2013), 1.

<sup>67</sup> Murray et al., *Propter Christum*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Murray et al., *Propter Christum*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Murray et al., *Propter Christum*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Murray et al., *Propter Christum*, 9.

<sup>71</sup> Murray et al., *Propter Christum*, 16.

“pneumatology.”<sup>72</sup> Then these conferences continued to be held in Buenos Aires with the presenters Martin Teigen, Daniel Preus, Douglas Groll, Dan McMiller, José Pfaffensteller, David Scaer, and William Weinrich.<sup>73</sup> The conferences were offered for the pastors of Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Bolivia.<sup>74</sup>

Since 2007 the Luther Academy has worked in the region under the direction of Carlos Schumann, in three areas:

1. *Conferences* for the ongoing formation of actively serving pastors with theological and pastoral themes. To date, 61 conferences have been held, taught by 26 teachers, serving 1,357 participating pastors in thirteen countries.<sup>75</sup>
2. *Pastoral meetings*: focused on themes related to pastoral activity. These meetings were held by zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic in the countries of Guatemala and Mexico.
3. *Translation of theological resources*: Articles from the quarterly journal *Logia* and the Lutheran Confessional Dogmatics series. Volumes published so far include: Christology, Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace, Baptism, The Lord’s Supper, Eschatology, The Church and her Fellowship, Ministry and Governance, The Holy Trinity.<sup>76</sup>

The Luther Academy has been and continues to be a great ally in theological education in Latin America, promoting the pastoral office and its Lutheran confessional identity. It has also been a promoter of new candidates for the pastorate, since in several of the meetings theological students from their countries have participated and then they were sent to study in the Lutheran seminaries of the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Since 2012 an agreement was made with the seminary of Argentina for the Continuing Training of Pastors (Capacitación Continuada de Pastores, CCP) program and the courses in Argentina for the southern cone were made jointly until 2016.

#### XIV. Conclusion

To use a computer analogy, it can be observed that there are many “links” that have been mentioned and that remain pending, because they need to be opened in

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<sup>72</sup> Murray et al., *Propter Christum*, 18.

<sup>73</sup> Murray et al., *Propter Christum*, 18.

<sup>74</sup> In 2011, the first regional conference for Central America was held in Antigua, Guatemala, with the theme “Doctrine of the Ministry” (presented by Klemet Preus and Sergio Fritzler) for pastors from Guatemala, Venezuela, Panama, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. Murray et al., *Propter Christum*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> Carlos Schumann, *Luther Academy – Latin America: Since 2007*, unpublished PDF, 33 pages [no place: no name, 2023], 9.

<sup>76</sup> Carlos Schumann, “Luther Academy – Latin America,” slide 3. See “Spanish Dogmatics Project,” *Luther Academy*, <https://lutheracademy.com/spanish-dogmatics-project/>.

new “windows” to explore and record for reflection.<sup>77</sup> There are three permanent tasks in relation to the history of churches and theological institutions: (a) to keep clear and correct records, such as reports, statistics, etc.; (b) to reflect on history and the current context to plan for the future; and (c) to give thanks to the Lord for past and present generations, and to ask the Lord of the harvest to continue to send laborers into the harvest and teachers to educate these laborers in sound doctrine. It is important to highlight the historical institutions that some churches have in order to preserve history and confessional identity, since preserving history is part of that same confessional identity, because it not only reflects the problems and successes of the past but also expresses how God has been faithful, how his promises are fulfilled in our region, and how God preserves his church in the midst of a changing world that opposes this church. God is faithful and His Word will not pass away, and so we need to celebrate Him! The study of history also helps us to recognize among ourselves those who have served the Lord, being part of the cloud of witnesses (Heb 11:1–12:1), and who have opened the paths on which we walk today.

We can identify ten models with their different formats, characteristics, and variants, in the historical development of theological education in Latin America:

1. Master-Apprentice
2. Pre-Seminary and Seminary (Residential Education)
3. Theological Education by Extension (TEE): (a) Classical; (b) Mixed (reduced residency)
4. Face-to-face Bible Institute
5. Intensive Seminar/Institute
6. E-Theologians/TE Network
7. School of Missionaries/Transcultural Lab
8. ETH, FPH/SMP, ETE-IELB
9. Seminary/University/Tertiary Center
10. Online virtual “face-to-face” model

All of these models have advantages and disadvantages, arise from contexts and their needs, but also arise from different theological approaches that are made evident in the differing results in the life of the church. To analyze them, the theological basis of theological education has been set down according to the Lutheran doctrine expressed in the CA, where what is considered is the church, the Gospel and the Sacraments, and the relationship with the Holy Ministry. According to these paragraphs, evidence has been given of models that do not have ordination as their goal, because they arise from other concepts for other purposes. It can also be observed

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<sup>77</sup> Surely there will be corrections or new information and sources to resort to that will change some or many of the concepts expressed here, which will be welcomed by this author.

that the seminary model (which has many shortcomings and things always to improve) has been and is still the best for pastoral formation in recent centuries.

As has been seen in this article, the churches that maintain the residential seminary model have had as their foundation the sustenance of a level of confessional Lutheran ministry, as well as the good formation, approval, and recommendation of its candidates for the pastoral office. On the other hand, the churches that only have set forth the formation of leaders have lost their appreciation for the pastoral office and its consequences for confessional identity, in strength and growth of their congregations, and in the forming of a national church. The solid formation of pastors is obedience to the mandate of Christ in establishing the office to deliver his pardon and salvation and is the extension of the Gospel unto the ends of the earth. Where Christ is, there is his Gospel, and there also is a pastor to proclaim and deliver the gifts of the cross to sinners.

In addition to the honest discussion of the models, their theologies, and their challenges, there is a reality in our context that is becoming increasingly evident, and more so today with the use of technology and virtuality: it is an opportune time to renew the idea of a “network” and make it functional in the churches of the region with the different programs, under clear concepts of theological education and confessional Lutheran pastoral formation. When we talk about the Network, it should not be under the concept of the Internet model or social networks, as it was in the 2000s, where each one took what they needed from what the other offered as users. Instead, this Network should be like a computer operating system, where there are protocols, categories, and coordination according to Lutheran confessional concepts that are clear and agreed upon between the parties, according to the CA and its concepts of the holy ministry and auxiliary ministries—a network where coordination, communication, information, and formation are clear, according to the situation and academic level of each theological institution. Perhaps we need to revise the ILC proposal or come up with a new one.

The topic of theological education in Latin America will continue to be discussed. There are many years, many actors, many churches and places, many challenges and developments. The only thing that unites all this rich diversity is the purpose of theological education, under the receptive dimension of the life of faith in Christ. Theological education is the work of God. There is a call from God, and teaching-learning is within His church, to be teachers of the Word. In John Kleinig’s words, “[God] makes theologians through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the power of his word, and the opposition of the devil.”<sup>78</sup> As a passive life of faith, it is nourished by several fundamental practices in theological education: The Divine Service, the

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<sup>78</sup> Kleinig, “*Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio*: What Makes a Theologian?” 30.

Daily Prayers,<sup>79</sup> the classrooms with the professor, in the field work and vicarage with its pastors, and in private confession.

Theological education does not stop at ordination. It should be continuous, for life. It includes seeking others for ministry: “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).

May our theological institutions be an *Ebenezer*, a “stone of help” (1 Sm 7:12) in the midst of our *Ichabod* (“without glory,” “the glory has departed from Israel,” “without God,” 1 Sam 4:21) to teach and remind us daily of Christ’s work for the sinner on the cross, forgiveness that gives freedom from our enemies and opens heaven wide for us.

“Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!” (Ps 90:17). And “whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pt 4:11). “For from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom 11:36). And “when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’” (Luke 17:10).

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<sup>79</sup> Kleinig, “*Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio*: What Makes a Theologian?” 30.