

# BIRTH OF A MOVEMENT TEE

ROSS KINSLER

CO-DEVELOPER, TEE

Ralph Winter played a key role in the birth of Theological Education by Extension (TEE), while on his first assignment as a Presbyterian missionary in Guatemala (1956–1966).

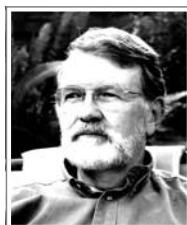
He and his family were assigned to a post among the Mam Indians, one of the poorest of the Mayan people groups in the highlands. He saw that the predominant Western pattern of ministry and mission based on highly trained, paid, ordained leaders did not function there or even more widely among most congregations. He spent long hours reflecting with James Emery and other colleagues about this situation, and at a critical moment, when he was a member of the board of the Presbyterian Seminary of Guatemala, he was able to put in

motion a simple but radical proposal, to take the seminary to the natural leaders of the churches instead of sending young ministerial candidates of less experience to the seminary.

The response from some of the older pastors was very critical,

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but among the natural leaders it was very positive. Soon the seminary's extension program enrolled 150 to 250 instead of the former average of 10 to 15. These students were part-time, responsible for congregational ministries, employed in "secular" jobs or small farming, with families, so they brought to the study process a wealth of real, ongoing experience. They needed access to substantive biblical and theological materials that they could



*Ross Kinsler was a missionary colleague of Ralph Winter in Guatemala, who, along with Jim Emery, worked to develop TEE in Latin America in the early days of the program.*

work through on their own in preparation for weekly seminars held nearby with a visiting faculty member or local adjunct professor.

The word soon got out, and key persons across Latin America and elsewhere immediately saw the potential of this new model of theological education, which was able to enroll women as well as men, older as well as younger leaders, indigenous as well as dominant culture representatives, of higher as well as lower academic levels. Beginning in 1967 Ralph along with others led consultations in Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil, and elsewhere, and he mobilized a major sector of the

## THE EXTENSION SEMINARY



missionary movement for a large workshop on TEE in Wheaton, Illinois in December 1968, under the sponsorship of the Committee to Assist Missionary Education Overseas. In 1969 Ralph published an influential 600-page collection of articles about TEE under the title, *Theological Education by Extension*. In following years many workshops and consultations were held around the world; many associations of theological education joined the movement; and thousands of TEE programs have emerged, some of them with hundreds or thousands of students. Some have said that this is the most important development in theological education over the last 40 years. (Editor's note: For more on TEE, see *Diversified Theological Education: Equipping All God's People*, Ross Kinsler, ed., WCIU Press, 2007, available at [missionbooks.org](http://missionbooks.org).)