

EAST WHITE OAK BIBLE CHURCH
HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS SERIES

PASTORS



The Pastors of East White Oak Church

Senior Pastors

Peter Schantz	1892–1910
Emanuel Troyer	1910–1928
Reuben Zehr	1928–1971
Ron Workman	1973–1989
Jeff VanGoethem	1990–2009
Scott Boerkel	2011–present

Associate Pastors

Emanuel Troyer	1899–1910
David Noden	1964–1967, 1976, 1980
Ralph Manchee	1970–1972
Greg Dykstra	1981–1985
Bob Orner	1985–1986
Wesley Ooms	1988–1991
Mike Fanning	1995–2007
Matthew Munn	1997–2003
Dave Wolfe	1999–2003
Traig Whittaker	2000–present
Walt Baertsch	2003–present
Rod Applington	2004–2013
Kendall Coffman	2006–2015
Larry Van Gundy	2008–present
Josh Prather	2015–present

Rev. Peter Schantz (Pastor, 1892–1910)

Peter Schantz's parents, Jacob and Catherine (Deiss) Schantz, came from Hesse Darmstadt, Germany, about the year 1847 and settled in an old log cabin on a farm near Congerville. Peter was born there in 1853. The family attended the Hessian Congregation. His father died in 1864 and his mother in 1866, leaving him an orphan at age 12. He was taken into the home of Rev. Christian Imhoff until he was 20. At age 19, Peter was baptized by Rev. Joseph Stuckey and became a member of the North Danvers Church. In 1876, he married Anna Kinsinger, daughter of Rev. Michael Kinsinger, and moved onto the Kinsinger farm, which he purchased in 1877.

At age 29 (1882), Peter was called to join the ministry of the North Danvers Church (it was the practice to have several supporting ministers at the time) and was ordained by Bishop Joseph Stuckey. In 1892, 60 charter members organized the East White Oak Church, and he accepted their call to become their first pastor. A church house was built and was dedicated in January 1893. Soon after, Christian Endeavor youth meetings and evening services were initiated. In 1900, Pastor Schantz was ordained a bishop and became very active in establishing new churches in several central Illinois communities. In 1910, he moved from East White Oak to Normal and started a Sunday school and preaching ministry as a mission outreach of East White Oak Church. In 1912, the Normal Mennonite Church was organized with 35 members. Rev. Schantz ministered there until 1928 when Rev. Troyer came from East White Oak Church to free him for other ministries.

Rev. Schantz became the field secretary of the Central Conference of Mennonites and was a leader in the development of home and foreign missions work. He was instrumental in establishing Mennonite Gospel Missions in Chicago and Peoria and the Mennonite Sanitarium Association in Bloomington. In the *History of the Central Conference of Mennonites*, Peter Schantz is described as an "outstanding leader, both in the establishment of new churches and also in the mission work of the church." Those who knew him well described him as "a kind-hearted, generous, sympathetic friend. He never turned a deaf ear to anyone who came to him in trouble—his life was lived for others."¹

1. *History of the Central Conference of Mennonites*, William B. Weaver, M.A., 1927

Rev. Emanuel Troyer (Pastor, 1910–1928; Associate Pastor, 1899–1910)

Emanuel Troyer was born in 1871 near Hudson, of Manasses and Catherine (Salzman) Troyer. He was educated in public schools and attended Moody Bible Institute. In 1888, he was baptized by Bishop Stuckey in the North Danvers Church. He was married in 1895 to Ida Horst of Bloomington. In 1899, he was chosen by the East White Oak congregation to become assistant pastor and was ordained by Rev. Peter Schantz and Rev. Joseph H. King.

In 1910, when Rev. Schantz moved to Normal to begin an outreach there, Rev. Troyer became East White Oak's second pastor. (He was the son of one of the men on the 1892 building committee for the original East White Oak Church.) Rev. Troyer built his residence just west of the church (later it was purchased by the church from a subsequent owner for our parsonage). He farmed 160 acres adjoining the church location. Although he received no salary (customary in that time), church members helped in various ways: donations, planting and harvesting his crops, and so on. As one of the conference evangelists, his calls for meetings at other churches became more frequent, and the congregation presented him with an automobile. During his ministry, the church was remodeled in 1917—stained glass windows and a basement were added, with classrooms, modern restrooms, and a kitchen (an Edison lighting plant was installed). The first full-time missionary from the EWO family, Erma Birky, began her ministry in the Belgian Congo in 1923 (Congo Inland Mission).

Rev. Troyer served at East White Oak until he moved to the Normal Mennonite Church in 1928, succeeding Rev. Schantz there. His ministry in Normal continued until 1936, when he resigned to become full-time secretary of the Central Conference of Mennonites. He later served as president of the Central Conference for several terms and was active on the Foreign Mission Committee. He was largely responsible for establishing the Mennonite Sanitarium Association in Bloomington (sanitarium, hospital, and nurses training school) in 1919 and served as its first president until his death in 1942. The nurses' home there is dedicated in his memory. Rev. Troyer also served as a board member of Bluffton College, Witmarsum Seminary, and Congo Inland Mission.

Rev. Reuben J. Zehr (Pastor, 1928–1971)

Born in 1899 near Flanagan in Livingston County, Reuben Zehr was the son of Rev. Joseph B. and Phoebe (King) Zehr. In 1910, he was baptized by his father and united with the Flanagan Mennonite Church. (Rev. Joseph Zehr often was a visiting evangelist and preacher during the early years of East White Oak Church.) Reuben attended Moody Bible Institute and maintained a close relationship with Moody throughout his life and ministry. In 1923, he married Magdalena (Lena) Irene Lehman. His father performed the ceremony.

Reuben Zehr was called to be pastor of the Congerville Mennonite church in 1925 and was ordained in January 1927 by Rev. J. H. King. In 1928, when Rev. Emanuel Troyer accepted a call to the Normal Mennonite Church, the East White Oak congregation extended their call to Rev. Zehr. His acceptance marked the beginning of his 43 years of fruitful ministry in Bloomington/Normal and the surrounding areas.

The period of 1934–1935 brought the first broadcasts in the radio ministry of Pastor Zehr over station WJBC on Sunday mornings (*God's Half Hour*). The broadcast became daily in 1936 and continued until the Lord called Pastor Zehr home in 1971—just three hours after his last broadcast (from his home). For 37 remarkable years, he was known as Radio Pastor to the WJBC listening area. Annual Radio Rallies became major events at East White Oak, bringing many visitors to hear well-known guest speakers, musicians, and local community leaders; funds to support the broadcasts primarily came from these rallies.

The years of 1934–1935 also brought to East White Oak (and several other Central Conference churches) the disturbing effects of long-debated differences among Mennonite / Amish groups around the world over issues perceived as “fundamentals” of the faith. Those considered to be social and religious progressives were referred to as “Modernists.” (These differences were found in much of Protestant society, dating back for many years.) In the Modernist / Fundamentalist discussions, the positions were reflected in the teachings of Bluffton College versus Moody Bible Institute. The Central Conference was aligned with the Bluffton College teachings, and Conference leadership felt Pastor Zehr and EWO had “lost interest in some of the programs and administrative restrictions of the Conference.” Subsequently, Conference leaders sought to silence Pastor Zehr from his ministry. After much discussion, the EWO congregation voted, by significant majority, to retain Pastor Zehr, withdraw from the Conference, and resume its status as an independent church. (EWO had joined voluntarily in the formation of the Conference in 1908.) This was a very difficult time in many close relationships among families and friends at EWO—some felt compelled to leave the fellowship over the next two years, torn in their loyalties.

The ministries of the Church continued and the radio ministry began attracting people from the towns around. Significant additions to the church building were made in 1951 (the southwest room for dual use as a Sunday school room and expansion of the sanctuary) and 1961 (two-story and basement education wing to provide much-needed Sunday school, library, and meeting space).

Two of Pastor and Mrs. Zehr's daughters made lifetime commitments to missions. Gloria and Rev. Jim Orner served in East Africa from 1957 to 1996. Phyllis and Rev. Dwight Zimmerman are directors of the Cedine Bible Mission in Tennessee (camping, seminar, and retreat ministries for

urban African Americans). His support for missions and encouragement for our people to be involved bore fruit throughout his ministry. EWO members went to full-time missions assignments in French Equatorial Africa, Kenya (two couples), Tanzania, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. In addition, the church agreed to support other new missionaries in Ecuador, Finland, Japan, and Tanzania.

For many years, Pastor Zehr served on the board of the Illinois Bible Church Mission.

Pastor Zehr was a mentor and friend to many younger pastors and missionaries through the years. A very unique opportunity for the church grew out of his relationships with Glenn Wagner (from Washington, Illinois), a missionary with the Pocket Testament League. Glenn brought to EWO (1949) Mitsuo Fuchida, who was the Japanese air commander of the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, which led the United States into World War II. Fuchida shared with us the fascinating story of his encounters (in the mid-1940s) with an American missionary (former prisoner of war) that led to his conversion to Christ. The Lord works in wonderful ways!

An outreach to ISU students was initiated in the early 1960s encouraging members to pick up students at their dorms and bring them to services.

Our current EWO Constitution has grown from committee work guided by Pastor Zehr in the early 1960s—adopted by the Church in 1965. (Significant amendments in the late 1970s and early 1980s added clarification and revision of church officers.)

During Pastor Zehr's ministry, our Daily Vacation Bible School was introduced (in about 1967) and began its growth. In 1969, Pastor and Mrs. Zehr traveled on a church-sponsored visit to our missionaries on the field in Germany, Italy, the Holy Land, and East Africa.

Community service also was characteristic of Pastor Zehr. During his ministry (to the time of his death in 1971), he served 18 years on the McLean Country Board, including two terms as chairman.

Rev. Ron Workman (Pastor, 1971–1989)

Ron Workman was born in Muskegon, Michigan, in 1939 and lived there until his teens—he finished high school at Fremont, Michigan. He graduated from the Grand Rapids School of Bible and Music in 1960. While there, he sang tenor in a gospel quartet that traveled extensively. In 1964, he graduated from the Grand Rapids Seminary pastor's course.

While attending seminary, he served as associate pastor at the Church of the Open Door in Grand Rapids (1960–1963). In 1962, he was married to Sharon O'Nan, in Wausau, Wisconsin, who was a student at GRSBM—she graduated in 1963 with a degree in Christian education. Also in 1963, the Huggard Bible Church of Sand Lake, Michigan, called Workman to their pastorate, and he completed seminary training while in that ministry. Pastor Workman received a call in 1968 to the Bethel Baptist Church of Muskegon, Michigan, where he served through 1972. A new sanctuary and educational unit were constructed during his ministry there.

His call to the East White Oak Bible Church brought the family here in January 1973, and he served the EWO congregation through 1989. During his ministry here:

He encouraged and was active in the organization and functioning of key committees in church administration.

He supported the introduction and growth of the AWANA youth program (in the mid-1970s).

A major addition to the church was built in 1977, including the Fellowship Hall/gym, kitchen, restrooms, former pastor's study, nursery, Sunday school rooms, and storage areas. Many significant donations of materials and labor were made by the congregation; a Church Loan Fund helped in financing. This was our first air-conditioned space (and provided a much-needed place for worship after a 1994 fire destroyed the sanctuary and education wing).

Significant updates to the Church Constitution were made in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The church arranged an informational trip in 1982 for Pastor Workman and Sharon to visit our missionaries in Spain, the Holy Land, and East African countries.

Commitment of EWO's people to missions opportunities continued to develop during Pastor Workman's ministry. Members went to full-time works in Brazil (two couples), Puerto Rico, Sweden, Sudan, Tanzania, Youth for Christ staff, and a ministry of helps to other missions. Volunteers (non-support) went to a mission headquarters, a Bible camp, and a "tent maker" opportunity in China. Groups or individual couples went on short-term missions trips to Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, and Spain.

Our Children's Church program was started for younger children.

In 1986, Pastor and Sharon made a missions visit to Brazil to speak at the annual conference of the Brazil Gospel Fellowship Mission—he serves as a board member of that mission.

The Workmans left EWO in December 1989 to accept the pastorate at a large Baptist church in Clearwater, Florida. Currently, he leads Interim Ministries, Inc, in St. Cloud, Michigan—a ministry he founded several years ago to fill the temporary needs of churches without pastors and to assist in locating new pastors. Several states now are covered through linkages with other similar ministries.

Rev. Jeffrey VanGoethem (Pastor, 1990–2009)

The son of Gerald and Donna (Faull) VanGoethem, Jeffrey was born July 28, 1956, in Norway, Michigan (Upper Peninsula). His Belgian and English grandfathers and both grandmothers from Italy brought a largely Roman Catholic heritage. In his teens, Jeff had a hunger for deeper spiritual understanding. His search was influenced by the ministry of a high school friend. In March of 1975, after talking several hours with his friend about salvation, Jeff studied his Bible further at home and became convinced—that night, in prayer, he asked our Lord to be his Savior and guide. He was baptized in the summer of 1977, along with his high school friend Karen Gladstone, at the Immanuel Baptist Church of Kingsford, Michigan.

Jeff graduated from Central Michigan University in May 1977 and entered Marquette University School of Law that fall. During that year, he concluded that the law was not the best choice for his life. His strong desire for more intense Bible study led him to apply for admission to the Dallas Theological Seminary. The friendship from high school with Karen Gladstone had grown into a life commitment to one another, and they were married June 16, 1978. Soon after, they moved to Dallas where he entered the seminary.

Both Jeff and Karen had considerable interest in missions throughout their years of training (Karen had become a registered nurse). The summer of 1979 was devoted to a short-term ministry with the Central Alaskan Mission, doing preaching and rural evangelism. Through the seminary years and related experiences, the Lord led them to see the pastorate as the ministry best suited for them. Their strong support for missions continues.

While in his last year of seminary, Jeff was contacted about the pastoral needs of two churches in communities not far from their roots in Norway, Michigan. Upon graduation in 1982, he accepted the dual pastorates at the Felch Mountain Bible Chapel (Felch, Michigan) and the Watson Bible Chapel (Cornell, Michigan). In 1986, he accepted the call from Community Bible Chapel in Norway, which replaced the work in Cornell (he continued the ministry in Felch). During those years before they came to East White Oak in 1990, the churches grew in numbers, spiritual involvement, missions support, and facility improvement. AWANA programs were implemented and grew to about 200 youngsters.

The EWO ministerial search committee received more than 100 resumes, which were narrowed to 10 for close review and correspondence. The committee invited three applicants to come as prospective candidates. From the three, Jeffrey VanGoethem was invited to return August 16–19, 1990, as our official candidate for pastor. In a congregational meeting August 26, a written ballot resulted in overwhelming approval to issue a pastoral call. The VanGoethems accepted, and Jeff's first day in the pulpit was November 4, 1990. He was only our fifth senior pastor in the 98 years of East White Oak! The formal installation service followed on November 25, 1990, including participation by:

Pastor Wes Ooms, Community Bible Fellowship, El Paso
Pastor Ted Loy, Evangelical Free Church, Bloomington
Associate Pastor Phil Tuttle, Grace Baptist Church, Normal
Rev. Ron Klassen, Director, Rural Home Missionary Association

In 2009, Pastor Jeff accepted an invitation to serve at Scofield Church in Dallas, Texas.

Rev. Scott Boerckel (Pastor, 2011–present)

Peoria, Illinois, is where The Oak's sixth pastor, Scott Boerckel, was born in 1956 to Bob (an accountant/auditor) and Lael Boerckel. The Boerckels welcomed three more children after Scott: Jim (currently a missionary in Western Michigan to Muslim refugees), Ritch (senior pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in Peoria), and Joy (a homemaker in the Peoria area). Scott trusted Christ when he was just 4 years old at a Sunday evening service. The pastor spoke about heaven and hell and how one went to those places—Scott says he knew his destination, so when the invitation was given to trust Christ as Savior, he did.

Soon after graduating from the University of Illinois (B.S. Ceramic Engineering), Scott met Carol, who had just returned from Alaska where she had served as a missionary nurse with SEND International. They married in 1980 and began serving the Lord together. They eventually welcomed three sons: Joel (a professor of medicine and mechanical engineering at the University of Pennsylvania; married to Monica; one son and two daughters), Mark (a financial analyst for TD Bank in Greenville, South Carolina; married to Bethany; two daughters and another on the way), and Wyn (a teacher at Cornerstone Christian Academy in Bloomington, M.Div. at Southern Seminary in Louisville; married to Kelli).

Scott attended Grace Seminary (Th. M. Old Testament Language and Literature) in Winona Lake, Indiana, as well as a year of graduate studies at Jerusalem University College in Jerusalem. His pastoral service began in Bremen, Indiana, first at Community Gospel Church (1986–1991), where he was senior pastor, and then at Bremen Bible Church (1991–1992), where he was the part-time interim pastor.

From 1992 to 1996, Scott and Carol served in La Paz, Bolivia, at La Paz Community Church. The Boerckels then went to East Moline, Illinois, where Scott was senior pastor at Wildwood Baptist Church (1996–2011). After Pastor Jeff went to Scofield Church in 2009, our congregation extended a call to Scott in 2011. The Oak has been nurtured by Pastor Scott's passion for ministry: to reveal God and His Word graciously and joyously in order to attract and raise up a group of people energized to follow Jesus Christ.