The OakLeaf
NEWSLETTER

November 2026
VOL. 45 | NO. 4



the Sending Church

Sending is HARD, but WORTH IT

by Pastor Scott Boerckel

Why is our missions conference theme this year, "The Sending Church"? Why would anyone want to be a missionary?

Why should we raise children in our church to become missionaries? Why should our church send missionaries to unreached peoples and to train this world's Christian leaders in sound theology? Why indeed should we subject ourselves to the burdensome and painful challenges of sending missionaries?

Well, if hell is not real and if heaven is not real, then it is all foolish. If the resurrection of Jesus Christ did not happen, then it is all foolish. If Jesus did not command us to take the Gospel of Christ to the nations, then it is all foolish.

(continued on page 2)

IN THIS ISSUE

3 **My Experience with a Sending Church**
by Rylie

4 **The Challenges of Serving Among the Unreached**
by Steve Orner

5 **Growing a Passion for Missions**
by Katie Yates

6 **Professional Identity in Creative Access Nations**
by R.D.

8 **The Value of Theological Education in Tanzania**
by Jim Simmons

In Acts 13:3 the church in Antioch set apart Barnabas and Saul for ministry and "sent them off". We want East White Oak to be a sending church, raising up and sending missionaries from among us to take the gospel to those who have not yet heard. This newsletter highlights the importance of reaching unreached peoples, equipping faithful servants through theological education, and preparing young people for vocational ministry on the mission field. May God use these articles to deepen our commitment to the Great Commission. May we go, pray, give, and send workers into the world for the glory of Christ.

East White Oak
BIBLE CHURCH

As the Apostle Paul noted, *"But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised."* *1 Corinthians 15:13-16*

But hell is real, and many people will go there. Jesus said, *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many."* *Matthew 7:13*

Heaven is real, and few will go there. Jesus said, *"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* *Matthew 7:14*

The resurrection of Jesus did happen. *"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."* *1 Corinthians 15:17-20*

The Great Commission is Jesus' command to His church. *"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"* *Matthew 28:18-20*

So, we go; we pray; we give; **we send.** We GLADLY accept these challenges and bear any burden to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Someday, Revelation 7:9-10 will happen, *"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"*



It will not be only in English that this cry will be uttered, but in every language under heaven! It will be worth it all, every bit of it! That is why we must be a sending church. That is why we accept the responsibility of raising our children to become missionaries. That is why we send missionaries to unreached peoples and teach sound theology to this world's Christian leaders. That is why we accept with joy the burdensome and painful challenges of sending missionaries. The worship of our God Who sits on the throne and of God the Son by every tribe, language, people, and nation is worth it all!!

I hope that this makes you want to attend every session of our missions conference, entitled "The Sending Church." I can't wait!

For the worship of God among the nations,
Pastor Scott

My Experience with a Sending Church



by Rylie

Over the past 3 years, the Lord has guided my steps into learning more and more about cross-cultural, long-term missions.

What is missions? Can anyone be a missionary? Why is missions necessary? What does a missionary really do? What does it take to become a missionary? What is it like to be overseas? What is the role of the church in the life and sending of a missionary? These questions, among others, are ones I have been seeking to understand, and East White Oak has played an integral role in helping me find the answers.

Growing up at East White Oak, I heard often about missions, missionaries, and the need to go to the nations. Missionaries would speak at AWANA, in Sunday school, in the main service, and during Missions Month. Hearing them speak began to evoke questions like the above, but I suppressed them, convincing myself that missions was reserved for the "really smart" Christians. These questions remained dormant for many years until, at my mom's encouragement, I began to revisit them and seek answers once again. As the questions resurfaced, I tried with little success to push them back down. The Lord was making it abundantly clear that I needed to focus my attention on His heart for the world and what my role in that might be.

As I began taking steps to learn more, I was encouraged to be in open communication with East White Oak pastors and the East White Oak Missions Team for counsel, support, and discernment through these new experiences. Both the pastors and missions team have been crucial in this process. They helped me navigate various opportunities and discern next steps after each experience. I have learned that the local church is indispensable in the life and work of a missionary, and East White Oak staff and members have demonstrated that beautifully. I cannot adequately express my thanks for the remarkable willingness of the church to support me and what the Lord has led me to do.

"I have learned that the local church is indispensable in the life and work of a missionary, and East White Oak staff and members have demonstrated that beautifully."

Is the Lord prompting you to learn more about missions? Where can you go with your questions? I can say with confidence that East White Oak will fan the flame for the nations that the Lord is igniting in your heart.



Rylie has attended East White Oak her whole life where she learned the importance of missions and the need for the gospel among all peoples. Her desire is long-term, cross-cultural missions. She is currently studying TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at Moody Bible Institute.



The Challenges of Serving Among the Unreached

by Steve Orner

In 2014 my wife, Bekah, and I and our 3 kids (ages 4, 2, and 10 months) went to Madagascar to live among and bring the knowledge of Jesus to the unreached Antakarana people on Nosy Mitsio.

We learned the local dialect and have been living among them for the last 12 years. We live in a hut like them in a village with no electricity and no running water. This gives us the ability to relate and be close to every day life in order to have the opportunity to share the Gospel.

"It has taken us many years to see a few men and women...give their lives to Jesus"

Working to see the Antakarana people group have believers and see them grow into reproducing churches has been hard. It has taken us many years to see a few men and women, come and hear and give their lives to Jesus and start to change and live for Him. It's amazing to see and often it is not only a result of our witness, but also encounters with other Malagasy believers at other points in their lives. It's also hard because the entire culture and priorities around them make it hard for them to attend Bible studies and stand against temptation and grow in their faith. We have 2 brothers from a further village who have come to Jesus and have a desire to learn, but can't make it regularly to where we meet every week. When we try to arrange to go to them, they are often away working. There is not cell phone reception, so it is hard to arrange things with those who live farther away. We have also seen that there are many of the youth interested, but their elders keep them from coming, so we try to share and teach them during the short encounters we have in every day life. Another hard thing is the difference in language. We have become proficient in Malagasy but they do not have a complete Bible in their language. We try to share the truths in scripture and teach, but we often feel inadequate. Thankfully we see the Holy Spirit work in this and provide understanding.

"We take heart knowing that the Lord works in ways we cannot see and His timing is perfect."

Prayer is so important in this work, because the human interaction is the easier part, and the many unseen and deeply saturated beliefs and bondages can only be overcome by the work of the Holy Spirit. We pray for the older generation because their hearts are so hardened and we pray for the younger generation who are curious but also so carnal. Our faith grows with each spiritual victory and we take heart knowing that the Lord works in ways we cannot see and His timing is perfect as He draws people to Himself.



Steve and Bekah Orner and their 4 children serve with Global Outreach Int. in Madagascar. They work with unreached people groups and in training Malagasy missionaries.

Growing a Passion for Missions



by Katie Yates

Growing up at East White Oak Bible Church, I was surrounded by a deep commitment to cross-cultural missions.

You couldn't enter the old sanctuary without passing the world map of missionaries. My grandparents, Howard & Jean Frink, served on the missions committee, and members of my extended family were missionaries. I can't remember a holiday as a child when we didn't call Kenya to wish David and Darlene Noden, longtime missionaries sent by East White Oak, a Merry Christmas or Happy Thanksgiving. You could say I had a front-row seat to East White Oak's missions culture.

Though East White Oak was planted in the middle of cornfields, it opened my eyes to the needs of the world through visiting missionaries. I learned that faith requires action—to be doers of the Word, not merely hearers. Scripture grounded me in the purpose of missions, laying the foundation for a life of ministry.

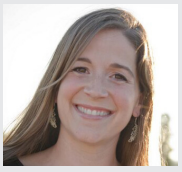
My passion for missions grew during my middle and high school years. In the 1990s, Pastor Jeff led our youth ministry while also serving as senior pastor. He intentionally created opportunities for us to grow in faith and discover God's calling. On a youth mission trip to the Florida Everglades, we served alongside the Haitian community, and I was introduced as a missionary. I remember thinking, "Me? A young teen from the Midwest, a missionary?" God stirred my heart as I learned to serve joyfully and love a community different from my own.

Our next youth mission trip in 1995 took us to Alaska to serve rural communities and lead a kids outreach. Amid the rugged landscape, God made His calling clear, igniting my passion for ministry. East White Oak didn't just give me opportunities to experience God but equipped and empowered youth to lead and do the work of ministry. That investment continued into my college years as I served as a youth leader, discipling the next generation.

> "I remember thinking, 'Me? A young teen from the Midwest, a missionary?'"

Today, I continue investing in high school students locally, while my full-time ministry with Josiah Venture focuses on equipping youth leaders to make disciples the way Jesus did. We support younger leaders across the United States, Central and Eastern Europe, and beyond, helping them make disciples who make disciples.

East White Oak shaped my heart and mind, expanded my worldview, equipped and sent me into ministry, and taught me to depend on the Spirit of God. You celebrated my calling and continue to support my family in full-time ministry. The young teen who once sat in the front row, surrounded by stories of missionaries, is now a missionary herself. I was blessed to be part of a church that doesn't just teach God's mission but empowers us to live it!



Katie and her husband Josh serve with the Josiah Venture USA team, equipping young leaders to fulfill Christ's commission through the local church. Katie also serves as the Admin and Operations Director for Concentric Global, Josiah Venture's global alliance. Josh and Katie live in Portland, Oregon, with their two children, Foster (19) and Jorie (16).



Professional Identity in Creative Access Nations

by R.D.

Let's consider a brief thought experiment. Imagine a peaceful neighborhood where you know your neighbors, exchange friendly greetings, and feel comfortable and secure.

Now imagine a Middle Eastern family moves into a rental down the street. They dress and groom differently, eat different foods, and have unfamiliar customs. They speak little or no English, and no one really knows who they are or why they've come. Suddenly, things take an awkward turn.

You watch as they purchase a vehicle, furnish their home, and acquire internet service. They appear to be settling in, yet they have no regular jobs, are in the country on tourist visas, and say they've come to learn English. Given these circumstances and the lack of further details, questions naturally arise.

What brought them to your community? What is their real purpose? How do they support themselves? What do they intend to accomplish and how long do they intend to stay?

Fair or not, with so many unanswered questions, you begin filling in the blanks yourself—and your conclusions are less than comforting.

Now turn the situation around. In many respects, this is the kind of situation cross-cultural workers both create and face when moving to *creative access nations*.

These are places where missionaries, churches, and the Christian faith are unwelcome, illegal or even actively opposed. Centuries of history, along with longstanding and contemporary political, social, and religious dynamics, have created significant barriers to Christian witness. Entering and living in these nations requires a level of forethought, planning, effort, and perseverance that the traditional missions community is only beginning to fully appreciate.

Enormous amounts of time, money, and energy go into getting workers to the field. They study theology, missiology, language, and culture. They raise support, sell homes and vehicles, complete screenings, arrange travel and schooling. They leave behind family, friends, and familiar surroundings. Getting there is a monumental accomplishment!

Yet considerably less thought, effort, and resources often go into preparing for what happens next—after arrival.

Workers may be told, "Study the language," "Take time to learn the lay of the land," or "Give yourself some grace as you work through culture shock." All of this is good advice, but it overlooks an important reality:

From day one, people in the community may be skeptical or suspicious of foreigners whose presence is unexplained. They're watching, wondering, and forming conclusions based on limited information and their own assumptions.

This dynamic has serious implications for the effectiveness of our gospel witness.

What Is Professional Identity?

Professional identity addresses this challenge and deserves careful consideration early in the process of moving abroad, along with the time, effort, and resources needed to develop and maintain it.

Some use terms such as *platform* or *cover*, but these can suggest a performance, a role being played, or a story designed to conceal something. Professional identity offers a more straightforward approach.

What are you in this country to do? What is your legitimate professional role? How will you introduce yourself to your neighbors? What will you say when someone asks, "What brings you here?"

There are many legitimate possibilities: teaching English, working in an educational institution, joining a local company or hospital, practicing a profession suited to your skills and experience, or starting or joining a business.

Whatever the role, the principle is the same: Professional identity should be genuine, credible, and sustainable.

Whenever possible, it should be developed before departure and put into practice as soon as possible after arrival. The goal is to have a real, understandable reason for being in the country and demonstrate it through everyday life.

Professional identity is not about creating a story to conceal what we are doing. It is about establishing a genuine, credible identity through which we can live, work, build relationships, nurture trust, and contribute meaningfully to the community in which we've been called to live.

A Foundation for Long-Term Gospel Impact

A solid, viable professional identity offers significant benefits, both immediately and over the long term.

Rather than arriving as mysterious outsiders, workers have a recognizable place in the community and a natural starting point for building relationships and, over time, trust.

We can establish ourselves in ways that are legal, honest, understandable, and sustainable. By complying with local laws, paying required taxes, maintaining lawful residency, and fulfilling our professional responsibilities, we demonstrate respect for the country, its leadership, and its people. This can strengthen our standing with local and national authorities, support our long-term presence, and provide a more stable context for witness.

We want people to have good reasons to know us, work with us, become our friends, trust us, and listen to the message we bring.

Professional identity can also provide a model for local believers and the emerging church. If we encourage new

"Professional identity is not about creating a story to conceal what we are doing. It is about establishing a genuine, credible identity through which we... contribute meaningfully to the community."

believers to work honestly, obey the law, conduct ethical business, and contribute meaningfully to their communities, our own lives should reflect those same principles.

As the gospel takes root and the church becomes established, this example can demonstrate that followers of Jesus can be valued members of their societies. Our faith has something meaningful to contribute, and our lives can become channels through which God brings physical and spiritual blessing, healing, and transformation.

Ultimately, professional identity provides a foundation for access, relationships, and trust while gospel proclamation takes place. We pray that, in time, it also helps create a healthy context in which the church can take root and broader transformation can occur.

Professional identity is more than a means of gaining access. It is an opportunity to put our faith into meaningful action, so that the lives we live lend credibility to the message we proclaim —that the glory of God in the face of Christ might be* both seen and heard *among all peoples.

R.D. and his wife have served in Africa for the past 26 years – first in the Horn of Africa (20 yrs.) and then in N. Africa (6 yrs.). They have served in a variety of capacities – as teachers, team leaders, business managers, etc… all with the ultimate aim of seeing churches planted among the unreached in "creative access" nations.



The Value of Theological Education in Tanzania

by Jim Simmons

"I know that pastors are good in spiritual things, but why are they so incompetent in the physical things of life?" A friend asked me this question one day in town, and I've heard this frustration expressed many other times across TZ.

My introductory discussions with new students include thinking about the distinction between "revelation" (the content God has revealed) and "theology" (our interactions with God's revelation). From Moses' writings through the end of the New Testament and until today, the people of God have struggled to understand His truth within the context of the realities experienced in His world.

Everyone is a theologian in that everyone interacts with God's revelation in one way or another. When someone says, "there is no God" or "God contradicts Himself in scripture", they are doing theology. The real question is, "how sound is our own engagement with God in His Word and within His World?"

Pastor Scott recently invited everyone to consider a year in formal Bible study – I wholeheartedly agree! A good seminary will first expose you to the entire Bible (God's direct revelation using human language). Second, you gain tools and skills necessary for greater understanding of His revealed Word including training in the original languages. Third, you are built up in the way of thinking about important, complex, and difficult concepts (Rom 12:2). Peter says that **some things in Paul's letters** are hard to understand adding, "… ***things*** *the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction*..." He extends the thought, "… *as they also do to the rest of the scriptures*." (2 Pet 3:16). The author of Hebrews also highlights this need for theological competence. The major argument (Heb 5:1-10 & 7:1-28) about the priesthood of Christ gets interrupted with a parenthetical discussion (Heb 5:11-6:20) exposing the necessity for more theological maturity so that people are able to follow that major argument.

One theological issue which Tanzanians struggle to understand is the distinction between the spiritual and the physical (remember my friend's frustration?). "Ignorant and unstable" people are twisting these distinctions and confusing the culture toward destruction. Under the name Prosperity Gospel, **they divert attention away from Christ** and **onto their own capacities** to cross the divide **on behalf of their people.** Pastors not trained with a solid "understanding of the knowledge of…Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge…", will be deceived, "through arguments that sound reasonable." (Col 2:2-4).

May we all continue to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!" (2 Pet 3:18)



Jim and his wife Susan serve as missionaries with Africa Inland Mission in Tanzania. They attended East White Oak for many years before leaving for language school in the summer of 2021. Jim is on the teaching staff at Nassa Theological College in Tanzania.

Why Do We Have a Missions Conference?

by Pastor Jeff VanGoethem



It is true, many churches no longer have Missions Conferences. And many churches do not have a strong missions vision or emphasis. Times have changed.

Some churches have lost interest in missions (or never took up an interest). Some churches have concluded that modern people are too busy, overcommitted, and tired for the church to schedule additional time-consuming events. Some churches still do missions but only through projects they sponsor and so don't bother with broadly informative conferences.

At East White Oak, we continue to gather for our special missions conference every year in the conviction that as one pastor put it, "what you celebrate you become." We celebrate the gospel of redeeming grace, we rejoice wherever it is proclaimed and received, all around the wide world. After all, the biblical narrative of redemption from sin, misery, judgment and hell is EVERYTHING. So we celebrate the gospel and its holy mission.

Why do we still have a missions conference? Consider:

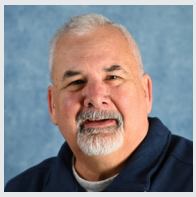
It is Biblical. God is a sending God. God is a reaching God. If you survey the narrative of Scripture you will see that God was always sending someone somewhere to reach someone. That's what God is into, so we are into it too.

It is Missional. Much is made these days about being intentional or missional in our local church ministry. Well it was Jesus, the Lord of the Church, who instructed His followers to take the gospel and bear witness by the power of the Spirit to the ends of the earth. There are many ways and means to do this. So we have a conference to think about this mission and how to implement it.

It is Practical. A missions conference works. It is useful. For learning about the world and gospel needs. For connecting with and refreshing visiting missionaries. For encouraging one another in the tasks of gospel ministry. For learning how to pray for missions. For having some fun together and being joyful in the work of the gospel.

It is Personal. For the children of the church, who must be raised up to learn about the Lord's world-wide mission. For our young people (and some older people) who can be led to ponder, "Is God sending ME?" And for all of us, so we can ask afresh: "What am I doing and what could and should I be doing in the cause of global missions?"

So yes, as a biblical, missional, and practical church, we need to have Missions Conferences. As a sending church, we have a responsibility to do so, with each member responding personally.



Pastor Jeff VanGoethem serves as the Associate Pastor of Spiritual Development and Missions at East White Oak. He is married to Karen. He loves the Packers, his four daughters and his five grandchildren. (Not in that order.)

**This article is copied from the 2026 Missions Conference Brochure and included in the digital November OakLeaf.*