

## Ministers at Sugar Creek

In the Mennonite understanding of the church, the local congregation is the basic unit and expression of Christ's Body. In the last decade or so there has been an emphasis from denominational offices, ministerial leadership groups, colleges and seminaries on what has been titled "the Culture of Call". The effort has focused on calling, for the most part, younger persons to pastoral ministries.

My calling to ministry came from the Sugar Creek congregation of rural Wayland, Iowa while I was a 26 year-old student at Hesston College. The voice of the local congregation confirmed the personal inner call which I had carried from an early age.

The Sugar Creek congregation is typical of many rural Mennonite communities. Agriculture and related businesses dominate the economy. Congregational leaders are chosen more on the basis of gifts and abilities than on educational level. Outreach and missions are important. We mourn the loss of talented youth who move out of the community. At the same time there is a sense of achievement in seeing our young people effectively serving in other locales.

For sometime I have sensed that Sugar Creek has nurtured and given an unusual number of ministers to the Mennonite Church. Some recent research revealed that in its 155 years (1855-2010) the congregation has had 62 ministers serving in the congregation or elsewhere, 53 men and 9 women. I was able to establish the year of birth, year of credentialing for each minister, and the year of death for the deceased.

From 1860 to 1962 eighteen persons were called from within the congregation to ministry in the congregation. Since then eleven persons were called from outside the congregation to serve as pastors at Sugar Creek. A total of 33 persons have gone on to serve in ministry in other venues. So, at this point, the congregation has produced 51 ministers and has borrowed 11 from other sources.

Thirty two of the sixty two are living today. A simple questionnaire asking them to rate the importance of family, schools, congregation, and mentors was inconclusive. Several persons said that in a rural community all four of these entities are inter-related and serve as a whole in influencing youth toward ministry.

I am not aware of any intentional effort on the part of Sugar Creek to nurture and call persons to ministry, although it was usual practice to call new ministers whenever the need arose. And one could assume the positive effect of having persons like J. D. and C. L. Graber in the list of sixty two.

Is this an unusual record or is this par for the course? I am not aware of other studies of a similar nature. It would be interesting to compare the records of other rural congregation across the Mennonite Church. Copies of the study are available from the church office.

Robert L. Hartzler

December 14, 2010

## **MINISTERS (1855-2010)**

Sugar Creek Mennonite Church

Wayland, Iowa

In 155 years of its history there have been about sixty persons set aside for Christian ministry at or from the Sugar Creek congregation. This listing is to identify and record each one.

Sugar Creek may be unique in the number of spiritual leaders it has produced. It would be interesting to locate similar studies from other congregations for comparison.

Robert L. Hartzler  
January, 2010

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chronological list of ministers	2-3
Brief Bios of ministers	4-10
Persons called within to serve SC	11
SC members called to serve outside	12
Persons called from outside to serve SC	13
Persons nurtured in SC serving elsewhere	14

**MINISTERS at/or from Sugar Creek Mennonite Church (62)**  
Wayland, Iowa  
(1855-2010)

- 1855 Joseph Goldsmith – moved from Lee County to Trenton (4)
- 1856 Joseph Wittrig - moved to Henry County from Canada (4)
- 1860 Christian Bechler – ordained preacher (1)  
Peter Tschantz – ordained deacon (1)  
John Von Gunden – ordained minister at Trenton (1)
- 1862 Benjamin Eicher – ordained minister (1)
- 1863 Joseph K. Roth – ordained deacon (1)
- 1867 Joseph Schlegel – ordained minister (1)
- 1869 Sebastian Gerig – ordained minister (1)
- 1879 Stephen T. Miller – ordained minister (1)
- 1882 Martin Eicher – ordained deacon (1)
- 1887 Christian R. Gerig – ordained deacon (1)
- 1893 Daniel Graber – ordained minister (1)
- 1904 John Wagler- moved in from Germany (4)
- 1908 Simon Gingerich – ordained minister (1)
- 1922 Chris L. Graber – ordained minister (1)
- 1925 Joseph D. Graber – ordained missionary to India (2)
- 1928 Ellis Zook – ordained minister (1)
- 1935 Willard Leichty – ordained minister (1)
- 1940 Orie A Miller – ordained for Bible Church in Peoria, Ill. (3)
- 1945 Russell Krabill – ordained minister in Indiana (3)
- 1949 Vernon Gerig – ordained minister (1)  
Vernon E. Roth – ordained minister (1)
- 1950 Emery Wenger held services at Pleasant Point (2)
- 1951 Maynard Wyse – ordained deacon in Ohio (3)  
Gladys Widmer – missionary to Puerto Rico (2)
- 1952 Murray Krabill – ordained minister in Ohio (3)
- 1956 Jacob Stauffer – ordained Baptist missionary to Algeria (3)
- 1956 Willard Roth – licensed minister to Des Moines (3)
- 1958 Glen Richard – licensed minister to Mt. Pleasant (2)
- 1959 Arnold Roth – ordained minister in Indiana (3)
- 1962 Robert Hartzler – ordained minister (1)
- 1964 Ira Wenger – ordained deacon at Bethel (3)
- 196? Virgil Blosser – ordained in the Church of God (3)
- 1971 Orie L. Roth – called pastor from California (4)  
Willard Conrad – ordained minister in Indiana (3)
- 1978 Gail Fisher – licensed minister in Illinois (3)  
James Wenger – ordained minister in Arizona (3)
- 1979 Carl Smeltzer – interim minister from Kalona (4)
- 1980 Edmond Miller – called pastor from Indiana (4)
- 1982 Steven Reschly – licensed minister to Cedar Falls (3)
- 1983 G. Lamar Roth – ordained as evangelist with YFC (3)

- 1984 Scott Roth – associate pastor in Indiana (3)
- 1988 Wesley & Sue (Schlatter) Richard – ordained ministers in Ohio (3)
- 1989 David Boshart – ordained minister at Mt. Pleasant (3)  
 Dean Swartzendruber – interim from Kalona (4)  
 Pete Sutter – licensed minister in Florida (3)
- 1990 Ruben Chupp – called, licensed, ordained pastor from Michigan (4)
- 1991 Carol Stauffer Swartzendruber – ministered as a chaplain in Kansas (3)
- 1993 Roger Farmer – called, licensed, ordained pastor from Michigan (4)
- 1996 Wendy Miller – licensed minister in Virginia (3)
- 1997 Mark Miller – licensed minister in Ohio (3)  
 Heidi Miller Yoder – licensed minister in Virginia (3)
- 2000 Grant Nebel – licensed minister to Washington Mennonite (2)
- 2002 Pam Gerig Unruh – licensed minister to Wayland Mennonite (2)  
 John Schrock – ordained pastor in Ohio (3)
- 2003 Sharon Wyse Miller – interim pastor (4)  
 Robert Hartzler – interim pastor
- 2004 Nathan Luitjens – called, licensed pastor from British Columbia (4)
- 2005 Amy Chupp Kratzer – ordained minister in Indiana (3)
- 2008 Kelly Slagel – licensed minister to Wayland Mennonite (2)
- 2009 Sonya Stauffer Kurtz – licensed minister in New York state (3)

Key to (numbered) categories:

- 1 = Called by Sugar Creek from within the congregation. 18
- 2 = Sugar Creek member called to serve outside. 7
- 3 = Nurtured in Sugar Creek and served elsewhere. 26
- 4 = Called from outside the congregation to serve Sugar Creek. 11  
62

## **Brief Bios of Sugar Creek Ministers**

### Joseph Goldsmith (1796-1876)

In 1855 Joseph Goldsmith moved from Lee County to the Trenton community organizing an Amish Mennonite Church which met in homes.

### Joseph Wittrig (1816-1902)

In 1856 Joseph Wittrig moved from Ontario to Washington County assisting Goldsmith with the Amish Mennonites in Washington and Henry Counties.

### Christian Bechler (1827-1893)

In 1860 Christian Bechler was ordained preacher for the group which became the Sugar Creek congregation. Later he was the first minister at the present United Missionary congregation in Trenton.

### Peter Tschantz (1831-1895)

In 1860 Peter Tschantz was ordained deacon by Goldsmith to serve the Henry County house church.

### John Von Gunden (1827-1906)

In 1860 John Von Gunden was ordained preacher for the Henry County house church.

### Benjamin Eicher (1832-1893)

In 1862 Benjamin Eicher was ordained as a minister for the Marion Township church in Washington County. The group built a meeting house in 1868 and the congregation took the Eicher name.

### Joseph K. Roth (1828-1882)

In 1863 Joseph K. Roth was ordained as a deacon for the Henry County group.

### Joseph Schlegel (1837-1913)

In 1867 Joseph Schlegel was ordained minister and became a bishop a year later.

Sebastian Gerig (1838-1924)

In 1869 Sebastian Gerig was ordained minister and became a bishop ten years later.

Stephen T. Miller (1844-1893)

Stephen T. Miller was ordained deacon in Wayne County, Ohio in 1877. After moving to Iowa he was ordained minister by the Sugar Creek congregation in 1879.

Martin Eicher (1828-1884)

In 1882 Martin Eicher was ordained deacon to succeed Joseph K. Roth.

Christian R. Gerig (1855-1942)

In 1887 Christian R. Gerig was ordained deacon and two years later as a minister.

Daniel Graber (1858-1930)

Daniel Graber was ordained minister in 1893 serving at Sugar Creek for 37 years.

John Wagler (1861-1949)

John Wagler brought ministerial credentials from France in 1904 preaching in both German and English at both Sugar Creek and Eicher congregations.

Simon Gingerich (1882-1971)

In 1908 Simon Gingerich was ordained minister to preach in English at Sugar Creek. He served as pastor for 41 years and the larger Mennonite Church for over 60 years.

Chris L. Graber (1895-1987)

In 1922 C. L. Graber was ordained minister. After two years he was released to become Business Manager at Goshen College. He was pastor of the College Church for ten years and served in many other church-related business and service organizations.

Joseph D. Graber (1900-1978)

In 1925 J. D. Graber was ordained a missionary to India with the Mennonite Board of Missions. He was the Mission Board's General Secretary until retirement in 1967.

Ellis Zook (1899-1974)

In 1928 Ellis Zook was chosen by lot at Sugar Creek to serve as preacher. He served five years until moving to Goshen.

Willard Leichty (1906-1988)

In 1935 Willard Leichty was ordained minister at Sugar Creek and became pastor at Bethel in 1959.

Orie A. Miller (1908-2004)

In 1940 Orie Miller started the Bellevue Bible Church near Peoria, Ill., and served as pastor until retirement in 1968.

Russell Krabill (1917-2005)

Russell Krabill was ordained in 1945 and served as pastor in three Elkhart County, Indiana congregations.

Vernon Gerig (1907-1988)

Vernon Gerig was ordained at Sugar Creek in 1949 and served there for 21 years.

Vernon E. Roth (1909-1992)

In 1949 Vernon Roth was ordained minister at Sugar Creek and in 1958 began pastoring the Eureka congregation until it moved to Washington in 1971.

Emery Wenger (1914-2006)

Emery Wenger was never ordained but he served as a lay minister from 1950 for over 40 years at Pleasant Point, a community church west of Oakland Mills.

Maynard Wyse (1914-1995)

In 1951 Maynard Wyse was ordained deacon at Lockport Mennonite near Archbold, Ohio.

Gladys Widmer (1915-2006)

Gladys Widmer was a missionary to Puerto Rico from 1951 to 1981. She also served Latino groups in New York City and the Quad Cities.

Murray Krabill (1923- )

Murray Krabill was ordained in 1952 at Mt. Gilead Mennonite in Ohio where he served for 37 years until retirement. He was an interim pastor at Sugar Creek in the years of 1988-89.

Willard Roth (1933- )

Willard Roth was licensed in 1956 to pastor the new Mennonite Church in Des Moines. He later served in several locations with MCC and MBM.

Jacob Stauffer (1925-1996)

Jacob Stauffer was ordained in 1956 as a Baptist missionary to Algeria.

Glen Richard (1916- )

In 1958 Glen Richard was licensed as a minister for the new Mennonite congregation in Mt. Pleasant.

Arnold Roth (1932- )

Arnold Roth was ordained minister in 1958 at the Shore Mennonite Church near Shipshewana, Indiana, and pastored later at Kern Road, College Mennonite, and Deep Run East in Pennsylvania.

Robert Hartzler (1936- )

Robert Hartzler was ordained at Sugar Creek in 1962. He later served as pastor in three congregations and was Conference Minister in the Northern District for nine years. In 2003 he was a twelve month interim minister at Sugar Creek.

Ira Wenger (1911-1991)

In 1964 Ira Wenger was ordained a deacon at the Bethel Church north of Wayland.

Virgil Blosser (1912-1993)



In the 1960s Virgil Blosser was ordained by and served in the Church of God.

Orie L. Roth (1923- )

Sugar Creek called Orie Roth as pastor in 1971. He had been ordained in Oregon, served Sugar Creek for nine years, and later retired in California.

Willard Conrad (1925- )

In 1971 Willard Conrad was ordained at the Holdeman Mennonite Church near Wakarusa, Indiana.

Gail Fisher (1947- )

Gail Fisher was licensed as Minister of Christian Education and Youth at Metamora, Illinois in 1978.

James Wenger (1942- )

In 1978 James Wenger was ordained at Shalom Mennonite Church in Tucson, Arizona. He later pastored congregations in California and Maryland.

Carl Smeltzer (1935- )

Carl Smeltzer served Sugar Creek in a four month interim in 1979 while living in Kalona.

Edmond Miller (1934- )

Edmond Miller was called from Indiana in 1980 and served as pastor at Sugar Creek for eight years.

G. Lamar Roth (1958- )

In 1980 Gail Roth was ordained an evangelist for Youth for Christ ministry.

Steven Reschly (1953- )

In 1982 Steven Reschly was licensed to serve the Cedar Falls Mennonite Fellowship.

Scott Roth (1957- )

In 1984 Scott Roth became an associate pastor in a church at New Paris, Indiana.

Sue Schlatter Richard (1940- )

In 1987 Sue Richard was ordained at the Church of the Brethren in Lima, Ohio.

Wesley Richard (1939- )

In 1987 Wesley Richard was ordained at the Church of the Brethren in Lima, Ohio.

David Boshart (1964- )

In 1989 David Boshart was ordained to pastoral ministry at Mt. Pleasant. He is currently pastor of the West Union congregation.

Dean Swartzendruber (1927- )

In 1989 Dean Swartzendruber began a four-year pastoral term at Sugar Creek from his home in Kalona, preparing the congregation for younger leadership.

Peter Sutter (1952- )

In 1989 Pete Sutter was licensed as a minister at the Northeast Mennonite Fellowship of Pensacola, Florida.

Ruben Chupp (1952- )

Ruben Chupp was licensed to ministry at Sugar Creek in 1990 and served as a pastor for eight years.

Carol Stauffer Swartzendruber (1937- )

In 1991 Carol Swartzendruber completed the Hesston College Pastoral Ministries Program and served as chaplain and pastor to students.

Roger Farmer (1947- )

In 1993 Roger Farmer joined Ruben Chupp in ministry at Sugar Creek and served as a pastor for ten years.

Wendy Miller (1938- )

After leaving Sugar Creek with her husband, Edmond, Wendy Miller was licensed as campus pastor in 1996 at Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

Mark Miller (1965- )

In 1997 Mark Miller was licensed for ministry at Lockport Mennonite near Archbold, Ohio.

Heidi Miller Yoder (1970- )

In 1997 Heidi Yoder was commissioned as Associate Pastor at Immanuel Mennonite in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Grant Nebel (1952- )

In 2000 Grant Nebel was licensed to serve as part-time pastor at Washington Mennonite.

Pam Gerig Unruh (1957- )

In 2002 Pam Unruh was licensed for ministry at Wayland Mennonite.

John Schrock (1969- )

In 2002 John Schrock was ordained as a minister in Bluffton, Ohio. He currently serves a church in Indiana.

Sharon Wyse Miller (1944- )

In 2003 Sharon Miller served as an interim minister for six months at Sugar Creek.

Nathan Luitjens (1976- )

Sugar Creek called Nathan Luitjens as pastor in 2004.

Amy Chupp Kratzer (1980- )

In 2005 Amy Kratzer was ordained to ministry at the Sunnyside Mennonite Church in Dunlap, Indiana.

Kelvin Slagel (1954- )

In 2008 Kelly Slagel was licensed for ministry at Wayland Mennonite.

Sonya Stauffer Kurtz (1963- )

In 2009 Sonya Kurtz was ordained a minister in Rochester, New York.



**Persons called by Sugar Creek from within the congregation (18)**

**(1855-2010)**

Christian Bechler, ordained preacher, 1860

Peter Tschantz, ordained deacon, 1860

John Von Gunden, ordained deacon, 1860

Benjamin Eicher, ordained minister, 1862

Joseph K. Roth, ordained deacon, 1863

Joseph Schlegel, ordained minister, 1867

Sebastian Gerig, ordained minister, 1869

Stephen T. Miller, ordained minister, 1879

Martin Eicher, ordained deacon, 1882

Christian R. Gerig, ordained deacon, 1887

Daniel Graber, ordained minister, 1893

Simon Gingerich, ordained minister, 1908

Chris L. Graber, ordained minister, 1922

Ellis Zook, ordained minister, 1928

Willard Leichty, ordained minister, 1935

Vernon Gerig, ordained minister, 1949

Vernon E. Roth, ordained minister, 1949

Robert Hartzler, ordained minister, 1962

## **Sugar Creek members called to serve outside the congregation (7)**

(1855-2010)

Joseph D. Graber, ordained missionary to India, 1925

Emery Wenger, served at Pleasant Point, 1950

Gladys Widmer, missionary to Puerto Rico, 1951

Glen Richard, licensed minister to Mt. Pleasant, 1958

Grant Nebel, licensed minister to Washington, 2000

Pam Gerig Unruh, licensed minister to Wayland, 2002

Kelly Slagel, licensed minister to Wayland, 2008

**Persons from outside the congregation who ministered at Sugar Creek (11)**

(1855-2010)

Joseph Goldsmith, moved from Lee County, 1855

Joseph Wittrig, moved from Canada, 1856

John Wagler, moved from Germany, 1904

Orie L. Roth, called pastor from California, 1971

Carl Smeltzer, called interim from Kalona, 1979

Edmond Miller, called pastor from Indiana, 1980

Dean Swartzendruber, called interim from Kalona, 1989

Ruben Chupp, called pastor from Michigan, 1990

Roger Farmer, called pastor from Michigan, 1993

Sharon Wyse Miller, called interim pastor, 2003

Nathan Luitjens, called pastor from British Columbia, 2003

## Persons nurtured in Sugar Creek and served elsewhere (26)

(1855-2010)

Blosser, Virgil – ordained in the Church of God (196?)  
Boshart, David – ordained minister at Mt. Pleasant (1989)  
Conrad, Willard – ordained minister in Indiana (1971)  
Fisher, Gail – licensed minister in Illinois (1978)  
Krabill, Murray – ordained minister in Ohio (1952)  
Krabill, Russell – ordained minister in Indiana (1945)  
Kratzer, Amy Chupp – ordained minister in Indiana (2005)  
Kurtz, Sonya Stauffer – ordained minister in New York State (2009)  
Miller, Heidi – licensed minister in Virginia (1997)  
Miller, Mark – licensed minister in Ohio (1997)  
Miller, Orié A – ordained for Bible Church in Peoria, Ill. (1940)  
Miller, Wendy – licensed minister in Virginia (1996)  
Reschly, Steven – licensed minister at Cedar Falls (1982)  
Richard, Sue Schlatter – ordained minister in Ohio (1988)  
Richard, Wesley – ordained minister in Ohio (1988)  
Roth, Arnold – ordained minister in Indiana (1959)  
Roth, G. Lamar – ordained evangelist with YFC (1983)  
Roth, Scott – associate pastor in Indiana (1984)  
Roth, Willard – licensed minister to Des Moines (1956)  
Schrock, John – ordained pastor in Ohio (2002)  
Stauffer, Jacob – ordained Baptist missionary to Algeria (1956)  
Sutter, Peter – licensed minister in Florida (1989)  
Swartzendruber, Carol Stauffer – ministered as chaplain in Kansas (1990)  
Wenger, Ira – ordained deacon at Bethel (1964)  
Wenger, James – ordained minister in Arizona (1978)  
Wyse, Maynard – ordained deacon in Ohio (1945)