

Elim Bible Institute & College

For almost 100 years, Elim Bible Institute & College (EBIC) has been an oasis, a spring of spiritual refreshment through teaching, missionary fervency, worship, Pentecostal/charismatic influence and leadership. Its name comes from this inviting passage in Exodus: “Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water” (Ex. 15:27).

Nestled on top of a hill surrounded by farm fields outside of Rochester in Upstate New York, in the small town of Lima, EBIC stands as a monument of Pentecostal/charismatic history. Ivan Q. Spencer, a farm boy from northern Pennsylvania, attended Bible school in Rochester in 1918 and found the message God gave him to promote for the rest of his life, simply: “Revival!” Not only was this message for Ivan Q. to proclaim, but for others to share as well. He started a college to provide a biblical atmosphere to train champions to trumpet the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world, fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, God used Spencer to birth Elim Bible Institute in 1924.

Fast-forward to 2020. On May 21, I have the privilege of being installed as the eighth president of EBIC. I’m blessed to have worked in many different roles through the years—senior pastor, radio personality, author, op-ed contributor, mental health professional and crisis marriage therapist—but this is a new and exciting challenge as I succeed Rev. Michael Cavanaugh, who has served as president for more than seven years.

Elim Bible Institute has been a familiar name for decades to many people within charismatic circles. Elim’s story, history and Holy Spirit impact for Christ around the world, however,

is less known. I have a deep passion to introduce this historic Pentecostal/charismatic Bible college to the greater body of Christ.

An Unconventional Career Path

My journey to the EBIC presidency is more novel than normal. I didn't exactly take the proper way to transition into an academic leadership post.

My father was an immigrant from Italy, so we were raised in an Italian home in Baltimore, Maryland. A product of the late '60s and early '70s, I was a baby boomer. My life was filled with garage bands, drugs and feeding my own desires as an apathetic self-centered hippy. The short version is I was raised Roman Catholic and had no real understanding of Protestantism. My girlfriend, Debbie, who is now my wife, was a United Methodist. She led me to Jesus in 1970 during the Jesus People Movement, when I was in the U.S. Air Force. A year after I was discharged, we got married, and within two years, we ended up at EBIC, where I became a student.

Looking back, my life has been a high-velocity journey from serving as senior pastor for 23 years to hosting "Rock Alive," a national Christian rock and metal radio show heard over the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and Salem Radio Network (SRN), to continuing my education as a licensed mental health professional with offices throughout the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Delaware to becoming president-elect of Elim Bible Institute and College.

I've often thought, Lord, either this next phase of my life is going to have an awesome outcome or you have a great sense of humor! I've been involved with Elim for 47 years, but it was my younger, formative years there that set the course of my evangelistic passion to this day. I know I'm not alone. That's the spiritual infusion EBIC has been giving young men and women for almost a century. It's not just what EBIC does, but

what EBIC is and has been. Students receive a historic, biblically sound Pentecostal/charismatic investment during their time at Elim. They come away with a solid theological foundation as well as a Spirit-empowered impartation of nothing short of a heart on fire to share the gospel to the nations!

The Charles Finney Connection

Many believers know the name Charles Finney, whose preaching brought about a great revival in the 19th century, and EBIC has a strong connection to the famed revivalist. Since 1951, EBIC has occupied the campus of the Genesee Wesleyan Seminary (GWS), which was started as a direct result of the 1830 Charles Finney Revival in Rochester. More than 100,000 people gave their lives to Christ during that historic revival. Just one year later, Genesee Wesleyan was built.

Finney, a Presbyterian minister, preached 98 sermons between September 10, 1830, and March 6, 1831 in Rochester. Shopkeepers closed their businesses, posting notices urging people to attend his meetings. Reportedly, the population of the town increased by two-thirds during the revival, but crime dropped by two-thirds over the same period. Finney said "the courts had little to do and the jail was nearly empty for years afterwards." The Rochester revival was a significant part of what would become known as the "Second Great Awakening" in the United States.

In Finney's "Power from on High" piece, he wrote: "This power seems sometimes to pervade the atmosphere of one who is highly charged with it. Many times great numbers of people in a community are clothed with this power when the very atmosphere of the whole place seems to be charged with the life of God. Strangers coming into it and passing through the place are instantly struck with conviction of sin and, in many instances, converted to Christ."

God used Charles Finney as a major player to form what would become the Pentecostal movement. In the 18th century, John Wesley taught what was known as the “second blessing,” which we know in the modern Pentecostal and charismatic movements as the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

This same Holy Spirit baptism is the power thruster that God has used since 1924 to preach the gospel through EBIC. As a result, EBIC has been a conduit of spiritually powered fervency both nationally and globally through missionary placement for nearly 100 years. EBIC has been one with Charles Finney’s revival emphasis since its founding. And for it to have been placed on the campus of Genesee Wesleyan Seminary where one of the most powerful evangelical movements in American history ever occurred, is nothing shy of providential!

The Syracuse Alliance

The Genesee campus also provides EBIC with another rich historical and educational connection. In 1849, the seminary upgraded its institution by adding Genesee College to the campus. By the end of the Civil War, the Lima location was seen as too limiting. Civic leaders in Syracuse were planning a new university in that city. This led to the decision to move Genesee College to Syracuse in 1870, where it became the basis of Syracuse University.

EBIC sits on a seminary campus built as a result of the Finney Rochester revivals that took on a nonreligious college that broke off and moved to form what is now Syracuse University. This is not uncommon, as seminaries during this period were slowly trending secular. Many started as a result of the Great Awakenings (1740 to 1830, in this case). Revivals led to the establishment of several renowned educational institutions, including Harvard, Princeton, Rutgers, Brown and Dartmouth universities. Sadly, however, what Galatians says is true: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9, ESV).

Education is a good thing, but when universities and colleges extract the authenticity of the Word of God from their institutional environments, the “leaven” takes over, God is kicked out, and society becomes the big loser.

In contrast, this has not happened at EBIC and, by the grace of God, it never will! EBIC’s board of directors has painstakingly worked into every fiber of its constitution, bylaws, mission statement and other legal, ironclad safeguards verbiage that will make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to change any aspect of its Christ-centered, Pentecostal/charismatic mission passion as we move into the future.

A couple of years ago as a board member of EBIC, I half-heartedly wrote a letter to the president of Syracuse University (SU). Because the campus of Elim sits on the old Genesee Wesleyan Seminary and College site from which Syracuse University was born, I thought I’d throw out a “Hail Mary.” I asked SU if they would be interested in contributing a financial gift in helping us to restore the two 1831 buildings on campus. It was kind of a, “Hey, Mom needs some money. Can you help out?” And no, it was no surprise that I never heard back!

The Latter Rain Movement

From 1948 to 1952, Elim Bible Institute was a key institution in what is historically called “The Latter Rain Movement,” a precursor to the charismatic movement and the Jesus People movement. EBIC was a pioneer in both “praying and singing in the Spirit” as well as singing the Scriptures, a practice that was not looked upon favorably by mainline Pentecostal denominations of that day. Believers were to sing hymns, not the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit could “move on you,” and if that happened, you could speak in tongues or even jump or shout. But to sing in tongues, pray in the Spirit, prophesy, pray for people to be healed, give a Word of wisdom or

knowledge or dance in the Spirit, these things were frowned upon in more conservative mainline Pentecostal circles. Ministries like Elim and Bethesda Missionary Temple in Detroit, Michigan, were among the few involved in this new, refreshing move of and liberty in the Spirit.

By the time the charismatic movement (1960-1968) and the Jesus People movement (late 1960s through early 1980s) came into being, EBIC had become a forerunner of these movements, which were powerful with the presence of signs and wonders; prophecy, healing and other spiritual gifts; and the baptism in the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues. Along with Elim, Asbury Theological Seminary and Roman Catholic schools, including Duquesne University and Notre Dame, to mention a few, were overrun with students hungry for Jesus and moving in spiritual gifts.

We are still researching the history, but it appears that EBIC possibly could be the oldest evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic Bible college in the U.S. still on a campus that has been continuously used as a Bible college and seminary since 1831. That's 189 years to date! That means that the Genesee Wesleyan Seminary campus was built only 48 years after the American Revolutionary War, which ended in 1783. Now that's a godly heritage!

A Distinctive Christian Environment

Elim Bible Institute and College is a fully accredited undergraduate school. EBIC is a member of the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS), and the TRACS Accreditation Commission awarded EBIC accredited status as a Category I institution. TRACS is recognized by the United States Department of Education, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education.

EBIC is actively working on obtaining permissions very soon to

expand its programs to a bachelor's level and hopes this may happen in the 2020/2021 school years. At first, the college plans on offering a bachelor's in theology, followed by bachelor's degrees in business, social work and education, and plans for an associate's degree in culinary training. Built into all the degrees will be a firm biblical foundation that further elevates the worth of the diploma.

Spiritual experience is also important at EBIC. Elim is a place to not only learn about God but also to experience Him. This happens through intimate worship, prayer, gifts of the Spirit, prophetic ministry, spiritual growth and a deep appreciation for God's Word.

While classroom education is important, it only makes up a portion of the training students need to succeed in life, leadership and ministry. That's why EBIC places every student in real ministry settings each semester, coupling experiential learning academics. One way EBIC does this is to have each student, regardless of their field, experience a three-week internship in the heart of New York City at the New York School of Urban Ministry (NYSUM). Our goal is that every student in this internship not only walk away with practical experience, but more importantly an increased passion and understanding of God's heart for people living and even struggling each day in urban settings. EBIC and NYSUM have been working together for over 25 years to create an internship experience like none other.

EBIC is also approved by the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs and the Bureau of Veteran's Education for the training of veterans.

Probably one of the best descriptions I've ever heard regarding the unique heritage and biblical/educational environment EBIC offers came from Executive Vice President and Provost Danuta Case.

“Many colleges educate, but few transform their students,” she said. “EBIC provides a setting where transformation takes place. Intensive Bible study, the development of life skills and practical training are woven together. Students have the opportunity to grow in the knowledge of God’s Word and deepen their personal relationship with the Lord as they are developing efficient life tools for service. EBIC faculty and staff are wholeheartedly committed to guiding their students in reaching their potential and fulfilling the destiny God has for them.”

It’s worth noting that Danuta came to EBIC from Poland several years ago when an Elim missionary secured a scholarship for her so she was able to attend the school. From Bible college student to continued education to EBIC’s executive vice president and provost, she has an amazing story!

But that’s what separates EBIC from the rest of the pack. It is what has been drawing students to Elim for almost 100 years. Elim is a relevant community of students with godly professors, talented staff, ministry leaders, missionaries, worship leaders, biblically sound teaching and a Spirit-filled environment.

But what EBIC isn’t is a place that has compromised its Pentecostal/charismatic evangelical heritage and roots. To this day, the slogan for the Elim Fellowship, the ministerial arm of EBIC, is the same as since its creation: “A Christ-Centered Worldwide Revival Fellowship.” From Mexico to Spain to China, from Africa to South America, from the Middle East to Europe, Elim is for the nations, for the world and has been from its inception.

Looking to the future, Elim Bible Institute and College will celebrate its centennial anniversary in only three years. But in almost 100 years as the oldest charismatic Bible college in the United States with a rich Pentecostal history, the goal of Elim has never changed.

Rev. Paul Johansson, president emeritus of EBIC, said it best.

“Elim is a school with a unique balance between the classroom and streets, worship and study with a goal of preparing Spirit-empowered leaders for the church, mission field and workplace. The personal one-on-one discipleship environment forms true Christian character for service. In two words, life-changing!”

Fred Antonelli will be installed as the eighth president of Elim Bible Institute & College () in Lima, New York. A former senior pastor, he also earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology and was founder and director of Life Counseling Center in Easton, Maryland.