

PARTNERSHIP STORY

CHURCH PLANTING

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REVITALIZING A CHURCH DURING a global pandemic doesn't sound like a recipe for success. And it wouldn't be successful outside of deep, committed partnership. Let me back up and explain how Christ Church became revitalized.

The Backstory of Partnership

Our family was blessed to be a part of Redemption Hill Church (Round Rock, TX) when it was planted in 2013. And after attending the Pastors College a few years later, it was a godsend to serve on staff alongside two brothers I love and respect, Jon Payne and Aaron Mayfield. Redemption Hill Church was a great spiritual home for me and my family.

Ironically, it was our love for our local church family which stirred a passion in our hearts to see that same gospel-centered life we enjoyed together spread to other areas. So, when Jon talked with me about an adoption opportunity that our region was exploring, I immediately sensed we may have a role to play.

He described a local church which has been faithfully served by their founding pastor. But, given his health and their independent status, their future was very much in jeopardy. The pressing question was who from our churches should be put forward as a potential elder candidate to lead that adoption process, were it to move forward.

The Build Up to Partnership

In the following months, Jessica and I began to pray and to seek counsel about whether or not this was what God would have for us. The word "opportunity" was something I couldn't shake. Certainly, we knew about the thousands of new homes slated to be built in the shadows of this church and we saw its prime location. But, most importantly, we got to know the precious

group of saints in this church who had journeyed together for decades.

While we knew there would be significant hurdles to overcome for this to work, the thought of a faithful pulpit going silent and a church community fading away weighed on our hearts. We knew we had to try. In the end, the deciding factor for us is that we knew we wouldn't be doing it alone. We would be doing this in partnership with Redemption Hill and with Sovereign Grace.

The Process of Partnership

The process that followed has brought together so many of the things that I cherish about being in Sovereign Grace. Here I'll mention a few of them.

First, our *Statement of Faith* made an immediate impact. We had a chance to share the sound doctrine that we cherish with this church as we preached through it. That document resonated so deeply that it eventually became a major reason why the members of this church wanted to pursue adoption. Several folks in the church remarked how they had never read a *Statement of Faith* as worship-inducing as ours. This document played a significant role in forging this new relationship.

Second, our relationship-driven pastors are a gift. The founding pastor of Christ Church was Dan Schiel, whose son Darrel is our Regional Leader. Darrel's local team of pastors in Pearland, on the southside of Houston, was integral in those early conversations making us and our region aware of this need for church leadership.

And it just so happened that Billy Raies (Sovereign Grace Church of Midland, Midland, TX) knew Dan when Dan was serving in Midland in the early 90's. So their connection, formed years ago, bore significant fruit in the adoption. Years ago Billy built that friendship solely as the means of encouraging another pastor in gospel ministry, never dreaming what it would turn into. This is yet another clear example of how our relationship-driven value, lived out so faithfully throughout Sovereign Grace, is a wonderful legacy.

Third, our polity brings functional value. Far from being a dusty binder on the shelf, our Book of Church Order enabled us to lay out our convictions on church governance along with a step-by-step roadmap to adoption. Clear polity helped the church to evaluate things and then make a faith-filled decision about which direction they thought was best. The three men who historically served as lay elders to this church are to be highly commended. They happily set aside their positions as elders to see the gospel go forward. Our polity helped plot a clear course when this church needed it most.

Fourth and finally, local churches sacrifice for the planting and strengthening of other churches. Even though it was difficult timing for Redemption Hill, that church, with Jon and Aaron leading the charge, sent some of their best to come with us. We had four families uproot their lives and leave jobs to come roll up their sleeves and link arms with the people of Christ Church. Redemption Hill gave us a life-saving transplant, and we can't ever thank God enough for their sacrifice!

The Fruit of Partnership

In these expressions of our partnership with Sovereign Grace many more, I'm pleased to report that God is still moving! In a few short months, we've witnessed miraculous financial provisions (like having our entire facility renovated inside and out for almost nothing out of pocket!), baptized a lady in her 80s (who's working on her Master's Degree), heard testimonies from people who are experiencing a new-found freedom and joy in Christ, welcomed families from the community, resurrected a basketball hoop for neighborhood games, and countless other moments. These have left us shaking our heads in wonder at a God who uses our small efforts to accomplish large things.

Christ loves the church. He's done more than just say that. he has demonstrated it again and again. What a privilege it is to join him in that mission! And what a gift it is to do that alongside other faithful, gospel-loving churches! I don't think I could put it any better than what one member recently shared with me. *"We were so sad here because we thought we were going to have to close the doors. You've brought us hope."* Sovereign Grace was the primary means of grace that God used to help me and Christ Church, even in the midst of a pandemic. This pastor and a church full of saints are grateful.