

PARTNERSHIP STORY

MINISTRY IN HARD PLACES

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THE FRANKFORD NEIGHBORHOOD OF Philadelphia is saturated with the effects of decades of urban crime, poverty, and brokenness. The schools are terrible, government services are overwhelmed, and most people have little hope things will ever improve. That hopelessness often leads to substance abuse, immorality, and violence. Most families and businesses leave the neighborhood as soon as they are able. The properties they leave behind fall into blight or are converted into shelters, drug rehabs, or boarding houses. Other properties become “bandos”—a slang term for abandoned properties that are new occupied by homeless people and drug addicts.

All of these dynamics make Frankford a challenging place to plant, build, and sustain a church. However, by God’s grace and the partnership we have in Sovereign Grace, Grace City Church of Frankford has been established in this neighborhood and continues to thrive.

The Backstory of Partnership

My wife and I did not grow up in a neighborhood like Frankford. However, about 20 years ago, we sensed a call to do ministry in a poor, urban community. After living in several low-income neighborhoods in various cities and receiving seminary training and experience in urban ministry, we continued to seek guidance from the Lord on where he would have us go. After I graduated seminary, we had a desire to join a denomination with which we had theological solidarity as well as a shared burden for urban ministry in low-income neighborhoods. We were delighted to find both of these in the pastors and churches we interacted with in Sovereign Grace.

We joined a Sovereign Grace Church in the Northeast section of Philadelphia that desired to plant churches in other neighborhoods in the city. While serving at that church, we bought a home in Frankford and eventually led a small group

in our home that was attended by people who lived in the Frankford area. However, we were traveling all the way to Northeast Philadelphia to attend church. In 2018, our small group finally was sent out as a church plant in Frankford.

Financial Support through Partnership

Our sending church, our region, and other individuals and churches all recognized that it was very unlikely that our church would ever be completely self-supporting if we remained focused on reaching the people of Frankford. Most churches in neighborhoods like ours cannot support a full-time pastor on their own, and many churches occupy large buildings they struggle to maintain.

As a result, many pastors in neighborhoods like ours work second jobs to support themselves while trying to keep pace with the regular preaching and leading of the church. Additionally, the pastoral care and discipleship needed for many of the people raised in these neighborhoods is significant. As a result, pastors quickly burn out or take positions at churches in other communities.

However, by God's grace of partnership, that was not our experience. The partnerships that we have in Sovereign Grace and with other churches have provided abundantly for us. I am able to serve full-time as a pastor of the church. In addition, we have been able to purchase and renovate our own building in Frankford that will serve as a church, Lord willing, for generations to come. The financial provision has just been incredible to see—and it's all from God's grace of partnership. However, the grace of partnership goes well beyond financial support.

Partnership Supports the Pastor

Through partnership, I am personally encouraged. I meet regularly with pastors from our sending church and our region for counsel and support. Those meetings are so life-giving to me and have a positive impact on my family and our church.

Through partnership, I am equipped. I participate in monthly video meetings with pastors in our region where we discuss preaching and in other regional meetings where we discuss evangelism.

Through partnership, I am accountable. Our *Book of Church Order* and judicial processes protect our church should I ever go astray.

Through partnership, I am a part of stewarding a denomination—a trellis that supports local churches around the globe.

Through partnership, I am refreshed at Regional Assemblies, regional events, and at Pastors Conferences.

Partnership Supports the Church

In addition to the benefits of partnership to me personally, our church as a whole benefits in even more ways than financial support and having a well-supported pastor. Through partnership, our church has access to events and conferences in our region that a church our size in our location would not normally have.

Through partnership, our congregation is able to be a part of helping refugees in Ukraine, training pastors in Africa, and planting churches in the Philippines.

Through partnership, our church has access to incredible resources for music, children, and counseling ministries.

Through partnership, we are able to reach out to like-minded churches for help with hygiene bags to give to the homeless, school supplies to give to children, and clothing to give to the needy in our neighborhood. Partner churches have provided preaching help and worship leaders when we needed them.

Praise God for Partnership

Partnership is an amazing gift from God. My soul and our local church have been so blessed by it. Our church's resources are limited, as are my personal resources to fulfill my role as their pastor, but God's grace meets us in our weaknesses. Very often, the way he meets us is through partnership. Praise God for partnership!