

April 14, 2007

“We experienced a **sleepless** night of prayer, conversation, and celebration as God gave us an *overwhelming*

BURDEN and vision for the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor area.

We knew the following morning God was calling us to **plant** a church.”

“God has given us a **passion** to seek the *peace of the twin-cities.*

We believe in the power of the gospel of **Jesus Christ** to bring **transformation** as we take up our cross in faith and **‘Go!’**”

Bently by Request

To continue receiving

The Bently, our bi-monthly newsletter, please email us with **“The Bently Please”** in the subject line.

It is by request only so please be sure to email if interested.

brianbennett121@gmail.com

cindybennett33@gmail.com

We have been attending First Wesleyan Church in Battle Creek since 2000. First Wes has served to grow us in our relationships with the Lord, relationships with others, ministry experience, and formation as a family. We have had an incredible time serving together with the young adult and high school ministries that are filled with true Christ followers, leaders, and warriors that will be carrying the good news of Christ to future generations and who have forever impacted us.

In light of all of this, we find this sudden move of God in our lives bittersweet as we have officially submitted our resignation at First Wes in order to step out in faith and start a new church in the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor (SJ/BH) area. We hope the words that follow will accurately express how God has led us to this point of surrender.



Behind the Scenes

The story behind our calling to start a new church in the SJ/BH area climaxed during a recent church planter’s assessment we attended February 26-28, 2007. However, the plot leading up to this climax has been unfolding in our lives for some time.

Brian’s Story

In the fall of 2003, during a time of prayer and seeking God, I wrote in my journal...

Lord, show us what we should labor for, what culture we are to commit to in order that the word is given to others. My burden for the city has grown into a vision for (church planting) ---I am scared and really feel foolish to dream so big---to have a vision for a real church that affects a city, a country, and a world... a springboard for change, a vehicle for the gospel, and advance for the kingdom. My heart’s desire is to pursue you and know your heart.

These words were the first step in my journey of setting aside the comfort of my plans and being willing to start a new church. Three years and many details later, we were led to the two-day church planter’s assessment this past February (more on this later).

Cindy's Story

God radically changed my life at First Wes on February 6, 2000 when once and for all, I surrendered my will to Christ; it has never been the same. Since then, I've continued to grow, serve, and learn what it means to look to the church as your family. I've met amazing people and value the close circle of friends God has blessed me with. The students will forever have a piece of my heart. Over the last 4 years, God has placed two awesome groups of girls in my path and I am thankful for that, as is Hannah who has named most of her Polly Pockets and baby dolls after them! I want to thank Pastor Phillip for one of the first messages he gave at First Wes. On a Wednesday evening Phillip walked off the platform, pulled up a stool, (and in a vulnerable state I'm assuming) opened up his personal journal and began sharing... I will never forget that. How awesome.

So please join me as I share a few of my journal entries as I believe this is the best way of explaining how God's been speaking to me these past few months.

January 9, 2007

I awakened to "I will set eternity in the hearts of men." [A divinely implanted sense of a purpose...which nothing under the sun but God alone can satisfy]. I then heard, "Adonai!" (Hebrew for Lord, Lord, Lord, master, or owner)

February 5, 2007

Mark 10:32 "... and those who followed were afraid. They were on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a new city..."

"They set out for Jerusalem. Jesus had a head start on them, and they were following, puzzled and not just a little afraid. (The Message)

February 17, 2007

I woke up to El-Shaddai (Almighty God & All-sufficiency) this morning.

February 25, 2007

Psalm 84:5 "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage." What is pilgrimage, Lord? Can you simply tell me what this word means? Pilgrimage is a way of life, a heart change, to go out and do My work, to obey My voice the minute I ask and set forth the plan I have for you.

John 12:24-26

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me..."

Church Planter's Assessment - February 26-28, 2007

February 28, 2007

Yesterday, Brian and I talked about where we might feel called to plant a church. We talked about and researched the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor area among others. No passion, no vision, simply researched the area out of curiosity. That night I had a dream. I saw an almost vacant mall, a stage, and a Jo-Ann Fabrics store in my dream with all peoples, a multicultural community, coming together in worship. I woke up early this morning and began praying for the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor area, asking the Lord to soften hearts and break off strongholds. I was praying so loudly that I woke Brian up. In his 'love your wife as Christ

loves the church' voice, he asked me what I was doing up at 3am. After telling him, he shared in my excitement. I had another dream that included a beach and driving over a bridge to a neighboring town... Today, Brian and I share a burden for the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor area. These are adjacent beach cities separated by a bridge.

Brian and I drove over to the BH/SJ area today. We found a mall, Orchards Mall, in the area and it is suffering with many vacant storefronts. The main entrance has a Jo-Ann Fabrics store that just opened! There was a stage inside the mall as well. We have no idea what all this means, just putting one step in front of the other. Not looking behind us, not sprinting ahead of ourselves either, tempted to join Jonah in the big fish.

March 1, 2007

I awakened to "El Shaddai" for a second time. Psalm 132:15 "I will shower blessings on the pilgrims who come here, and give supper to those who arrive hungry." (The Message)
Psalm 133:1 "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity." (NIV)

March 25, 2007

I had another dream about Benton Harbor. Lord, I just want to take the time right now to thank you. We are afraid, anxious, doubtful, and excited all at the same time. We desire to do Your will, please plan our steps. BLOCK all things not of you.

April 12, 2007

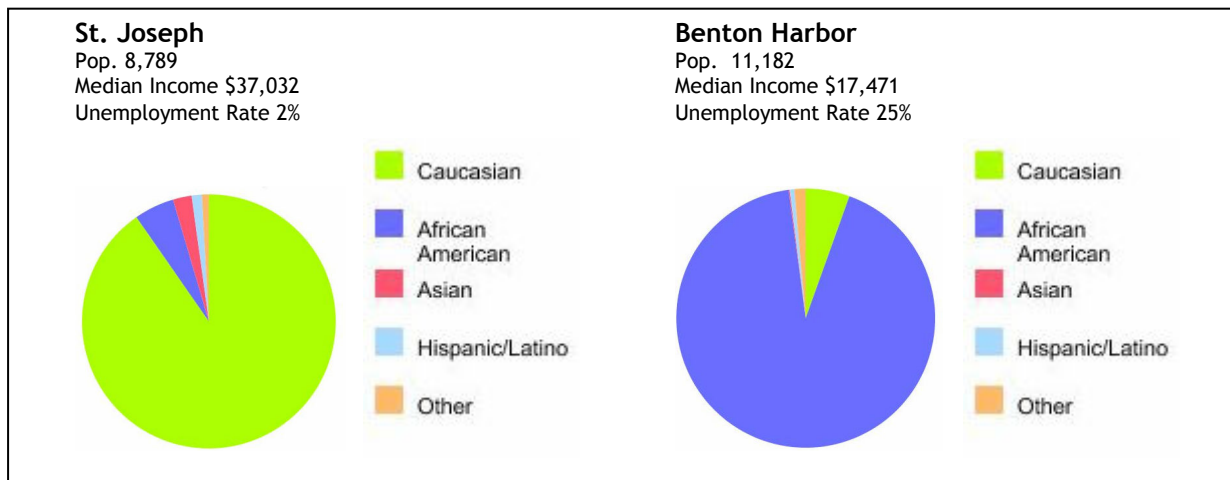
I felt like we were resting quietly and happily on this nice comfortable rug when suddenly God pulled it out from under us and said, "Go!"

Church Planter's Assessment

Through the assessment, Cindy and I thought, "Maybe this church planting thing could be for us, just not yet. We're very content right where we are at." On the last night of the assessment we experienced a sleepless night of prayer, conversation, and celebration as God gave us an overwhelming burden and vision for the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor area. We knew the following morning that God was calling us to plant a church there. Just hours later this was affirmed by the church planting assessment team during our exit interview. *After much hesitation, waves of emotion, and prayer, we've surrendered.*

The St. Joseph - Benton Harbor Community

The St. Joseph River runs north and west between St. Joseph and Benton Harbor and in many ways serves as a symbol of the division between these two places that is so painfully obvious with a look at the demographics. Benton Harbor is the poorest city in Michigan. Although these two cities are called the "twin-cities" there is very little that is similar about them and in 2003 a riot insued in Benton Harbor driven by racial issues demonstrated that these communities need more much than a physical bridge across the St. Joseph River.



Our Burden

The communities are literally in need of a movement in the region that both unifies and mobilizes people to know and follow Christ (CONNECT), seek Christ and grow in the Word (GROW), and serve those around them with Christ's love (SERVE). It is with this intent and understanding that Cindy and I have sensed a burden for this area. Jeremiah 29:7 says, "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." Another translation says that we are to seek the "peace of the city we have been called to.

Our Next Steps

- Pray, Pray, Pray
- Selling our home & relocating to the SJ/BH area
- Church Planter's Boot Camp, Chicago, IL, May 14-18, 2007
- Finding work, support raising, networking, and starting Bible Studies

How You Can Pray

- That God would continue to give us His peace and clear leading with each step
- That God would watch over the transition in our high school ministry and continue to bring growth to the students
- That our home would sell quickly and at a fair price
- That we would find the right home in the SJ/BH area

How You Can Be Involved

- Check in periodically to our blog: overflowcommunity.blogspot.com
- Help us to network with those you know in the area
- Prayerfully consider joining us in 2008, either through commuting or relocation

Thank you to all first for sharing your lives with us and secondly for your continued support and encouragement in this new step in our journey!

This letter was mailed to everyone in our community of friends and family. In the future, we will mail the letter at your request. If you would like to be included on our mailing list and receive future bi-monthly letters, please send us an email with "The Bently Please" in the subject line.

Thank you and God Bless!

Brian, Cindy, Hannah, and Dawson Bennett

brianbennett121@gmail.com • cindybennett33@gmail.com • overflowcommunity.blogspot.com