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**Village Church at Park Street is Why I Do What I Do**

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Forty-five years ago during the summer of 1975, I visited four cities of the 15 where 100 churches were located I was studying as part of a research project. These were Baptist churches in changing communities. Most of these churches were experiencing membership and attendance decline because they had not been successful in adjusting to their changing context.

One of these churches was Park Street Baptist Church here in Columbia. I had developed some statistical information on them, and the pastor had completed a questionnaire before my visit. In 1975 Park Street had already been in decline for several years.

The pastor shared his perspective with me and became one of many pastors who over the years helped me formulate some of the principles of congregations who have lost their vision for a vital and vibrant future. They hoped for a miracle that would either restore past glory or provide them with a way forward. Basically, this pastor was in denial about the reality of Park Street and the future that lay before them unless they were willing to engage in significant transitions and changes.

The decline of Park Street continued for many years. But, because they had been a very large church, they were able to hold on for several decades without ever having to make significant transitions and changes. Yes, hold on, but never again be vital and vibrant.

Thirteen years later when I was on the staff of the SC Baptist Convention, I had the opportunity to lead Park Street through a consultation process known as a PACT study to help them discover God’s future for them. They were still unwilling even to engage in the transitions and changes needed although they were less than one-half the size they had been in 1975.

Again, about ten years ago I was asked to engage Park Street in the process I was using called a Spiritual Strategic Journey. Now only one-third the size they had been in 1988, they were still resistance to transitions and changes, and now had fewer than the number of leaders necessary to do any kind of turnaround short of the direct, dramatic, divine intervention of God.

Finally, in 2019, Park Street – with the commitment of a courageous remnant group of leaders, and an average attendance of less than 50 – decided it was time to move forward.

During the intervening years since my first visit in 1975, Park Street had experienced a split, and continually declined in membership, attendance, and leadership. God had sent them many open doors of opportunity to transform, but they never felt that any of the open doors were ones they wanted to walk through.

Their facilities had deteriorated to the point that one building had not been useable for many years. Deferred maintenance had made the cost of retrofitting the facilities almost prohibitive.

Eventually the Park Street community location once again became a highly desirable series of neighborhoods as various waves of gentrification took place. Elmwood, Earlewood, Cottontown, and the new Bull Street development offered many opportunities for new outreach and ministry.

During the past 20 years multiple churches looking for a great location or a facility in which they could house their new or relocating congregation came knocking on Park Street’s door. These churches wanted their facilities because it had a generous amount of space. Fewer of these churches wanted their neighborhoods. Then along came Village Church who offered to adopt Park Street because they saw the potential of the neighborhoods.

After months of prayerful consideration, Park Street voted by a two to one majority to be adopted by Village. But the new campus did not happen overnight. It took about eight months from the adoption decision for the first service as Village Church at Park Street on Sunday February 23, 2020.

But is was a hallelujah moment. After extensive renovations and upgrades in the church worship center, more than 200 people gathered for the first worship service. Where all of this will lead is uncertain. But I suspect there is rejoicing in heaven.

A congregation with capacity – Village – adopted a congregation with a diminishing capacity – Park Street – and a new journey began. Much hard work remains. The glory goes to God. But it has finally happened.

Other churches in our association need this same or similar open door. Seeing Village Church at Park Street, will they be more willing to consider this sooner rather than later? I pray for the sake of Kingdom ministry that it is sooner.