

Business decision made decades ago allows continuum of ministry

*By Tanner Cade
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First: Taking care of business

In October of 1998, the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board MBCB purchased approximately six acres for a new church in Gulf Coast Association, utilizing the former church planting model of land acquisition.

According to the minutes from an MBCB Executive Committee meeting on August 25, 1998, Kiely Young, senior pastor of First Church, Gulfport, at the time and chairman of the MBCB New Church Expansion Committee, made the recommendation to purchase six acres in Biloxi for a new church plant.

A reversion clause was included in the warranty deed stating that if the property ever ceased to function as a Southern Baptist Church, title to the property and all improvements would revert to the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

Since 1998, the reversion clause has come into play twice with the first and second churches that closed on the property for various reasons.

Most recently, the reversion took place on June 5, 2022, as part of the dissolution of Bridge Community Church, Inc. Within a year, at the Executive Committee meeting on March 7, 2023, the committee authorized the transfer of ownership of the property to Harbor City Church with the same reversion clause.

Under the former church planting model, the reversion clause

was consistently utilized to assure donors that their sacrificial gifts would always be invested in Southern Baptist churches.



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“When we talk about the business side of ministry, or what I like to refer to as the “ministry of administration,” we need to remember that it is the Lord’s business and always approach it with that mindset.

“Stewardship is more than tithes and offerings and simply looking for the best bargains. Stewardship also includes the utilization of assets and resources entrusted to our care for His glory and Kingdom growth,” said Shirley, the son of a Southern Baptist pastor.

For MBCB, matching the vacant property in the Biloxi area with a congregation ready to invest in the community was the next missing piece to the puzzle.

Next: The planting process

In 2019, God opened the door for a new Mississippi Baptist

church to be born in the Biloxi area through the ministry of Michael Memorial Church, Gulfport. Harbor City Church Pastor Rod Wallace described the early meeting days of the church in their home as a little wild and chaotic at times.

“We moved to our house [on] Sunday mornings to worship there and [tried] to just be a church in our neighborhood to really reach our neighbors,” he said. “There were a couple of times I had to hold my dog while I was preaching, that kind of thing. It was kind of a wild ride there.”

Through the chaos, momentum grew as they moved into other venues including a local school. All too soon things came to a screeching halt during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown period.

“I tell people Hurricane COVID hit us that second week of March because it did. That was one of our hardest moves because our facility was gone and everything that we were excited about kind of disappeared,” Wallace said.

After surviving that tough season in 2020, the church resumed growing but their location continued to be a moving target. By the start of 2023, Harbor City Church had worshipped in several venues within a handful of years.

Not too long into the year, Pastor Rod received a providential message. “So we were just grinding through and I got a phone call actually from the pastor of Michael Memorial, and he knew about an open facility. He knew that it was empty and I kind of knew about the area over there.”

Wallace was initially hesitant that the church’s congregation might not be prepared to refurbish a building. However, he concluded after his first walk-through that the church was well maintained.

“They had TVs on the wall. There were kids’ toys still in a nursery. They still had wipes and containers and stuff like

that,” Wallace said. “It had a Fellowship Hall with a kitchen. It’s on five acres. It’s a nice place and so I walked around, looked at it, and I’m like, ‘Yeah, I think we might need to be interested in this.’”

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“Barri was just like, “Since you guys have been through a lot, we truly believe this is God’s timing and an appropriate match of resources,” Wallace recalled, “and I said, “Okay, well

let's keep talking about it.

"Our church leadership prayed and met and prayed some more over this opportunity and sent a letter to the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board formally requesting consideration for the use of this property," he said.

According to Shirley, MBCB Executive Director-Treasurer Shawn Parker and the MBCB Executive Committee also prayerfully discussed the opportunity and fully supported the transfer of the property to Harbor City Church.

Making it official

The approval was celebrated and the title was transferred. After receiving the deed earlier this year, Harbor City Church officially made 16121 Lorraine Road their permanent home – on Easter Sunday no less, noting the celebration of new life.

Pastor Rod loves telling people what God has allowed them to experience as a church. "We did the house church model. We did the set-up tear-down model. We did the borrow and space model. We did the zoom call model, and now we're in a great neighborhood with great neighbors and we want to build a great church there, and we're excited about what God has for our future there."

Harbor City Church has quickly settled into their new home and is adjusting to the new ministry opportunities afforded by the facility, which include using the space for multiple ministries throughout the week. Also, they are planning a large Christmas Tree ministry for later this year.

Twenty-five years ago, a business decision to protect a piece of property with a reversion clause allowed that property, which had changed hands several times, to continue to anchor ministry. "We're just praying, asking God how to care for our community, how to care for our facility, and how to reach people," Wallace said.



Ervin

“The Harbor City Church project is important to our state convention,” said Johnny

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“Also, it’s great to see the different departments in our state convention work together,” Ervin pointed out. “Barri Shirley’s work with Harbor City was critical in making this happen. Please let MBCB staff know if you are aware of other situations we can consider.”

For more information, visit <http://harborcity.life>. Mississippi Baptists may connect with Wallace to help extend the ministry impact in the Gulf Coast region by emailing rod@harborcity.life.

Go deeper

Hear more from Pastor Rod Wallace about Harbor City Church in a full podcast interview. Learn how their \$60,000 church planting trailer blessed another Southern Baptist church plant in Indiana: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1907765/13639611>.

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For more information on church planting, Ervin may be contacted at jervin@mbcb.org.

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