

# Cincinnati Church Plant

- Oakley Cincinnati, OH -

## **Our Story...**

Before telling you about myself, I just want to personally thank you for taking the time to read this. I was born and raised in the sunny town of Panama City, Florida. It was there that my grandmother led me to the Lord and I felt God call me to ministry. I attended the Baptist College of Florida and had the privilege to serve at my home church (Hiland Park Baptist Church) in various capacities. After marrying my wonderful wife, Abby. We moved to Louisville, Kentucky to continue my studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. During our years at seminary, God revealed a divine call and deep desire to be a light in a dark place. After serving as NAMB summer missionaries, we knew that Jesus was leading us to join Him in building his Church. I continued to pursue this call while serving on staff at Highview Baptist Church as a church planting resident. As we desperately sought God's will in church planting, he began to open doors and give us a burden for the city of Cincinnati. We are excited, nervous, encouraged, and a million other emotions as we embark on this journey. Most of all, we are excited to watch God do amazing things for His glory and our good.

## **So... How does God plant a church?**

Jesus builds His church. We are only hoping to be tools in the hands of the Creator. In many places, there are not many Christians. Thus, there are not many churches. For this reason, our strategy for starting a church is quite simple. 1.) We share our lives and the good news of Jesus through personal relationships 2.) People experience the life transforming power of Jesus and are welcomed into a new family 3.) The church is that family 4.) A church is born as a body of believers begins to meet together regularly, be taught by God's Word, live in community, and practice baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that God has called us to be a part of this process.

## **Why Cincinnati?**

As we thought about where God would call us to plant a church, we looked at 32 strategic cities that had been selected by the North American Mission Board. After prayer, fasting, and visiting several cities, we felt that the Lord was leading us to plant our lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. Cincinnati is a day's drive from most of the U.S. Therefore, there is an opportunity for national impact. The close proximity to Southern Seminary will also give us opportunities to be a training, sending, and multiplying church from day one. We want to send people in our congregation to begin churches in different neighborhoods in

our city and to all nations of the world. Finally, we really like the city. We visited and quickly found ourselves viewing it as a place we could spend our lives, raise a family, and do ministry. God has already begun to open doors with likeminded pastors that have shown support for us. Even some non-believers have shown excitement for our desire to be a part of what God is doing in Cincinnati.

### **Our City...**

Cincinnati is strategically located and has been a center of commerce and connection for hundreds of years. As one of America's first boomtowns, Cincinnati's waterways, railroads, and roadways have brought many people in and out of the city. Today, Cincinnati's Metro is ranked the 28<sup>th</sup> largest in the country. Within recent years, Cincinnati has become home to more Fortune 500 companies per capita than Los Angeles, New York or Chicago. A large workforce, well-known universities, and a small-town feel have contributed to Cincinnati's success. The Greater Cincinnati area is home to over 1.6 Million people with about 300,000 of those living in the city.

Although Cincinnati has a lot to admire, the brokenness in the city is obvious. It is the 23<sup>rd</sup> most racially segregated city in America. Nearly 1/3 of the population is living below the poverty line according to the US Census. Crime, homelessness, and corruption exist pervasively throughout the city. While there have been many attempts to fix these issues, the hope of Jesus Christ is the only thing that can bring healing to Cincinnati. Over 56% of Cincy's population claims no religious affiliation at all. Only 13.9% are affiliated with an Evangelical church.

### **Our Neighborhood...**

We are intentionally planting our lives in the Oakley neighborhood of Cincinnati. There are several things that drew us to this particular neighborhood.

First, it is an area of town that is growing. We want to be where the people are. Oakley is a part of the city that is rapidly growing in business startups, young professionals, and commerce.

Secondly, we believe that this part of town is home to people that will bring long-term impact. Many of the young professionals that live in Oakley are on

the fast-track to be the movers and shakers in Cincinnati, the United States, and our world. In ten years they may be untouchable, but right now they are not. We believe that seeing the gospel transform lives in Oakley will have a ripple effect throughout our entire world that cannot even be measured on this side of eternity.

Finally, God is already at work in Oakley. Shortly after feeling called to Cincinnati, we were introduced to Josh Lenon, the pastor of Red Door Church. He explained to us that their church had already begun to lay some groundwork in Oakley. They were just praying for someone to have a desire to lead a church plant in that neighborhood. At the same time, we were praying for a group of people with a calling to reach this part of the city. God united our hearts with this vision to reach the city and expanded our launch team through the partnership of this sister church.

### **Our Vision...**

**“We exist to restore souls and city for God’s glory and our good through the gospel of Jesus Christ.”**

As a redeemed people, we have been given a distinct purpose. Yes, the God that holds the universe together has given us value and invites us to join Him in loving the people and places He has created.

A fundamental theme throughout our vision statement and the life of our church is restoration. When God created all things, He declared, “It is good.” Unfortunately, our first parents (Adam and Eve) disobeyed God and the relationship between God, Man, and Creation were broken. As a result, the plants that God created yield thorns. The people that God created are bent towards disobeying God. We rebel against his plan, we argue with one another, and we do not live the full life that He intended us to live. For this reason, we seek restoration.

Specifically, we seek restoration in two areas. First, we want to see souls restored by God. Since God desires to have a personal relationship with those that He has created, He restores the lives of broken people that place their trust and hope in Him. Secondly, we want to see the city restored. In the book of Romans, Paul says that all creation is groaning from the results of sin. As a restored people, we seek the restoration of the brokenness in our city as a

whole. When the people of Israel are taken captive, God instructs them to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” This means we contribute to commerce, beautification, and overall good for our city.

We want restoration for God’s glory. When we speak of God’s glory, we are confessing that He alone is worthy of fame, honor, and recognition for all that is good. In summary, He deserves to be worshipped. He is infinitely great, wise, mighty, and loving. As souls and cities are restored, He gets the credit. Only God can heal marriages, break the chains of addiction, give peace to the single mother, create unity in a divided city, and raise the spiritually dead to life. Therefore, we join God in His mission for His glory.

As we seek restoration for God’s glory, we experience the gifts of living in relationship with God. What is done for God’s glory, results in our good. As you remember, God declared creation good before sin entered the world. God’s relationship with man was good because sin was not between them and they were living as He designed. Followers of Jesus can claim the promise that Paul wrote in Romans 8:28, “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

The restoration of souls and city for God’s glory and our good can only happen through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the good news that Jesus took on human flesh as the perfect God-Man. He never sinned even though He was tempted in the same way that you and I are tempted daily. After thirty-three years of life on this earth, he was crucified to pay for our sins and absorb the wrath of God that we earned through our disobedience. Three days after Jesus was laid in a tomb, the stone was rolled away and He took up his life again proclaiming the defeat of sin, death, and Satan. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father forever ruling to one day return and restore all things. Jesus invites people to find life in him and turn from the broken way of living that so many people follow. He restores those who call on Him.

## **Core Values**

### Gospel

We value the Gospel because it is the story of Jesus that restores souls from death to life, gives us hope for now and eternity, and purpose for daily living.

## Community

We value community because restored life in Christ is designed to exist in a diverse community of believers that intentionally share burdens, victories, and growth in faith.

## Mission

We value mission because God is worthy to be praised by all people and gospel proclamation in word and deed is the natural response.

## **Proposed Timeline**

Preparation Phase: June 2015-June 2016

During the preparation phase, we are gathering our core team and developing our evangelism strategy. I am currently completing my Church Planting Residency at Highview Baptist Church & an recently graduated with an M.Div at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Phase One: June 2016-August 2017

During Phase One, our core team will move into the city and begin to meet in missional communities. As we develop relationships in our location, vocation, and recreation, these groups will multiply through evangelism and discipleship. These months will be strategically focused on community development, local investment, and vision fulfillment.

Phase Two: August 2017-August 2018

During Phase Two, we hope to have multiple missional communities scattered throughout the city. With critical mass, we will launch a series of preview services that lead up to the public beginning of corporate worship gatherings. We will use the established communities to assimilate guests and saturate the city with the good news of Jesus.

## **The Local Church is...**

### Intentional

Everything about the church that God has called to be salt and light in the world must be intentional. For this reason, nothing should be done in a way that is disconnected from God's Word, the mission that He has called us to, and the vision that we have received for restoration in Cincinnati. We are Biblically-dependent, Gospel-centered, Spirit-Led, and Kingdom-Focused.

### Incarnational

Jesus humbled himself by taking on human flesh to seek and to save the lost. In theological terms, this is the incarnation. Jesus set aside his own preferences and comfort for the cause of reaching those who are far from God. Our life as a church should be lived the same way. We go out of our way to serve, seek, and share with those who are far from God as well as those who are His redeemed children.

### Interdependent

The church is often referred to as the Body of Christ. This beautiful illustration reminds each believer of his or her need for one another. God has created each one of us in a unique way for His purposes. We are designed to serve one another with our spiritual gifts, wealth, skills, and passions. The church is interdependent.

### Inclusive

We want to welcome people into the life of our church that do not yet identify as a Christian. While membership is limited to those who confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, our gatherings and missional communities are open for all to join. It is our hope that many skeptics, wanderers, seekers, and persons that claim any other label would be a regular part of our church life. We believe that one of the best ways to experience the gospel is by seeing it lived out in the context of the local church. For this reason, we want to include everyone in our gatherings.

## **What does the church look like?**

### **The church Gathered & Scattered**

#### Gathered

In the New Testament, there is a gathered group of believers that meet for worship together. This is often called corporate worship because people are gathered together. The Gathered worship time has four components: Praying, Praising, Proclaiming, and Producing. As a gathered church body, we pray together. We also praise God together through singing, reading of Scripture, and study of it. We proclaim the gospel by speaking it to one another and by the preaching of God's Word. Finally, we produce disciples. Well, actually God

does. As people sing the truths of Scripture and study God's Word, those who do not know God come to know him and believers grow in maturity.

Scattered

The church will also meet throughout the week as they live in community together. Missional communities will be smaller gatherings that take place in homes, coffee shops, workplaces, and various other places. The goal of this time will be to cultivate relationships and connect the biblical teachings from the corporate worship gathering to everyday life. Missional communities also offer a friendly environment for our church family to invite unchurched and non-Christian friends. Each missional community is strategically located to reach a neighborhood that our church family lives in. These missional communities also have multiplication and reproducibility as an anticipated goal.

### **Missional Strategy**

There are three specific areas that we challenge every member to engage: your location, your vocation, and your recreation. Simply put, we want to reach people where we live, work, and play. In God's sovereignty, He has perfectly placed you in the neighborhood you live in, desk you sit at, and where you spend your free time.

In the first six months of our time in Cincinnati, we challenge each member of our church to establish 5 relationships in each of these areas. This would equal a total of 15 people. Of these 15 people, begin to pray for their salvation and invite them into your life. You can do this through a shared interest, a family gathering, or a missional community. In any case, we want you to use this relationship to display the gospel. As these relationships grow, we hope to involve these people in the regular life of our church and see them come to know Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Launch Team Essentials & Expectations**

Clear Calling

In the hopes of shepherding you well, I want you to have a distinct call to be a part of a church plant team in Cincinnati. Church planting can be one of the most difficult tasks that God calls people to do. However, those who have

received this call can persevere with the assurance that they are exactly where God wants them to be. As Peter stepped out of the boat onto an unpredictable sea, he walked with boldness because he was going to be where Jesus was. We want you to be where Jesus is because He is calling you there. No other reason will suffice.

#### Personal Walk with Christ

The vitality of your walk with the Lord will have a direct effect on your ability and effectiveness on the field. Each member of the launch team should be able to clearly articulate his or her testimony by recounting life before Christ, when he or she realized the need for salvation, and life as a growing Christian. Each member of the launch team should also be able to explain how they are practicing spiritual disciplines (Bible reading, Prayer, etc.).

#### Qualifications of Leadership

While many members of the core team may not be seeking a position of leadership, it is important that we maintain the high standards that God gives for those He places in leadership. Since we will be the picture of Jesus to many people who are unfamiliar with the Bible, we must live in a manner that is above reproach. See 1 Timothy 3:1-13 & Titus 1:5-9

#### Healthy Relationships

Being a part of God's mission is one of the most relationally vulnerable seasons in a person's life because Satan wants to destroy those who are seeking to glorify God. A person's marriage, family, and friendships are relationships that need to be examined. Since a marriage reflects Jesus and the church, your marriage should be characterized by selfless service and unconditional love. Since parenting reflects the way that God the Father treats his children, you should teach your children through discipline and grace. Friendships in the church should teach people about the family of God. This means that friendships of the opposite sex should be without question or accusation. Friendship in the church should encourage one another and build others up in the body of Christ. Friendships with nonbelievers should be grace filled and full of compassion.

#### Transparency

As people who live in a fallen world and still wrestle with the effects of sin on a daily basis, we will sin against God and one another. We must live in a way that is transparent. We are continually realizing our need for the gospel in our lives.

Therefore, we embark this journey knowing that there will be moments of conflict, disagreement, or frustration. As a member of the launch team, you have the freedom to express any of these feelings. Ever since our first parents sinned in the garden, the response to sin has been characterized by blame shifting, isolation, and gossip. We want to create an environment where we are open about our sin because it magnifies the grace of God. Each one of us have committed sins so evil that they demanded the death of Jesus. However, we now stand before God pure and blameless through His Son. We need to be reminded of this. We need to remind one another of this. In the infancy stages of a church plant, Satan desires to sow seeds of dissension. Transparency is the best way to strengthen our church and be built up in Christ together.

#### Life on Mission

We want the life of each launch team member to be lived on mission. You should be actively building relationships with neighbors, coworkers, and others that you come in contact with for the purpose of sharing the hope of Christ. In no way does this mean that you need to have the boldness of a street preacher or door-to-door evangelist. It simply means that you make a habit out of opening your home and life to those that do not know Christ. Praying for lost friends and neighbors should be a part of your day-to-day life. Look for ways to include others in family outings, service projects, and recreational activities. We want to live the truths of the gospel with our hands and feet and share the truths of the gospel with our mouths. As people come to know Jesus, we train them and send them out on this mission as well.

#### **Core Beliefs**

The Bible is the Word of God - We believe that the Bible was written by men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is literally God-breathed and contains no mixture of error. The truth of Scripture and the person of Christ are the foundations of the church and the life of the believer (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

Salvation is by Grace Alone - We believe that we are saved by God's grace when we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Man is sinful and does not have the ability to save himself, no matter how many good works he does. However, once we place our faith and trust in Christ, our faith will be evidenced by good works, obedience, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 5:22-23).

The Believer is Eternally Secure - We believe that if a person has made a true, heart-changing decision to accept Christ, then they can never lose their salvation (John 10:27-28; Romans 8:38-39). When a believer sins, their fellowship with God is interrupted, but never broken (1 John 1:9). However, the Bible is clear that those who do not place their faith and trust in Christ in this lifetime will spend eternity in a Christless hell (Revelation 21:8).

Every Believer has Access to God - We believe that every believer, both young and old, has direct access to God through Jesus Christ. This is sometimes referred to as the Priesthood of the Believer. Because of Christ's work on the cross, the believer has no need for human intermediates, but can talk to God personally, as one of His children (1 John 2:1; Hebrews 4:14-16).

Baptism is by Immersion for the Believer - We believe that baptism does not save anyone, but is a believer's symbolic identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is done by immersion as an act of obedience by those who have put their faith and trust in Christ (Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 6:3-5).

### **The Story we tell...**

Our beliefs are rooted in the Story given to us in the Bible. The Narrative tells the true story of the world - the Story of a God who created a beautiful world, the sin that began to destroy his creation, and the plan to rescue it all. The Systematic of this story serves as an index of bullet points explaining in a brief summary what each piece of this story is all about.

#### BEAUTY

In the beginning God created everything, and He created that everything with nothing but His voice. As God began to sing: the light appeared, the oceans roared, the trees grew, and every animal began to move from nothing more than His words. But then something interesting, something different, something amazing happened. The song stopped,

And in that silence, God dug His hands into the earth, and from that clay, He crafted and formed the man from the ground. Making each detail and line as a skilled artisan bringing form and shape from the clay that ran through His hands. Then stooping down to the lifeless form that lay before him, He did the

unthinkable. He exhaled into man's nostrils on the ground and breathed life into him. As the man's eyes fluttered open - his first exhale the very breath of God - he came alive. .

Yet God was not finished. As the man slept, He took a rib from that man's side and formed the woman. When the man woke up, God brought this woman to the man, this creature formed from the very place that protected the breath given to the man. As he saw her he said, "At last! This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken from man." In other words, she was like him both inside and out. It was obvious they were for each other and now they were with each other.

God made both the man and the woman in his image and he blessed them and gave them work; to rule over the creation He had made. They were his image, His picture to the world of what He was like. There was a complete intimacy and harmony between God and His creation with human beings serving as the wise and good stewards over the creation he had made.

#### TRAGEDY

All of that beauty, all of that intimacy would be shattered the day the man and woman rebelled. God had placed two trees in the center of that garden: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They were told that as long as they ate from the Tree of Life they would live. But the day they took from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil they would surely die. It was as if they were presented with a choice - God set before them Life and Death. He wanted them to choose life, but they chose death.

The serpent crafted a great lie. One that told them that they were not loved. That God was actually holding back a greater life from them by not allowing them to eat from the other tree. So they reached up with their hands and took the fruit from the forbidden tree. As they sank their teeth into that fruit, they turned their backs on God and turned against each other.

The Bible phrases it, "Then their eyes were opened." It was as if for the first time they saw their flaws, their failures, and they realized their shame, their nakedness. So they did what we all do when we fail - They ran and hid. They hid so deep and so far that the Bible could only use one word to describe the condition man would now find themselves in - Lost.

## STRUGGLE

As this lost humanity fell deeper and deeper into her brokenness, she became just a fragment of the Image of God she was intended to be. Murder. Sorrow. Rape. Betrayal. Lies. Abuse. Death. Mourning. Crying. Shame. All became part of her broken existence. She was cursed.

In the midst of all of this chaos and cursedness, God comes to a man named Abraham and makes a very interesting promise. He says, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Did you catch that? God was going to bless the entire world through Abraham. He would use this man Abraham to rescue the entire world! He would be the blessing to undo the cursing!

Well this part is a really, Really long story and one that takes almost the entire Old Testament to tell. Suffice it to say, Abraham has a son Isaac, Isaac has a son named Jacob, and Jacob's name is changed to Israel. What an interesting name change. See... Israel means, "Struggle." Perhaps this is because this rescue promised to Abraham would only come through great struggle. The entire Old Testament ends, not with the whole world being blessed, but with Abraham's family enslaved, broken, and unable to be the people they were intended to be. They were supposed to be the people who rescued the broken world. Instead they ended up the broken ones, lost, enslaved, and looking for rescue.

## RESCUE

Out of the ashes of Israel's slavery would come one true and faithful Israelite. A descendant of Abraham and the one in whom their destiny would be fulfilled. When the fullness of time came, God sent his son to redeem and rescue a broken world. Jesus came, Scripture says, not to condemn the world but to save the world - to rescue the world. That was his mission.

But how does God end a world full of sin and death? And more importantly, how do you end a world cursed with sin and death without ending everyone of us? After all, we are the ones who are full of sin, we are the ones who bring death and live in death. This is the beautiful rescue of Jesus. This is the story of the Cross.

On the cross, Jesus went forward as the one true King to represent us all. But He was a King unlike any other. His crown was not one of gold, but one of thorns, his robes were not refined, but torn. Those who sat to his right and his left were thieves. Jesus was King of the Broken, King of the Rejected. King of Us all.

On that cross 2,000 years ago, God poured out all of His wrath against evil, murder, adultery, lies, deceit, and everything wicked on His son. God could not simply ignore the pain in our world, nor could He pretend it did not happen. He had to deal with it. He had to pay for it. God chose to pay for it Himself.

But it is not enough to simply deal with sin. He also needed to undo all of its effects. The death of Jesus put an end to sin, but the resurrection of Jesus was the undoing of all the wrong. The resurrection was the defeat of death and also the promise that the brokenness would be restored. Sin had done it's worse and Jesus had overcome. The resurrection was the restoration of all the wrong that had been done and a promise to all of us that our rescue was on the way.

Do you see? The story of Jesus is the story of the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham all those years before. In Jesus, God was beginning to undo the curse of sin and bless the entire world.

## MISSION

After the resurrection, Jesus comes to his disciples and says, "As the Father has sent me, so now I am sending you." He had a mission for them. But first, he does something that seems very strange ... He breathes on them. Remember the story of the first creation when God breathed life into Adam? Now Jesus breathes life into this New Creation, into his disciples and says to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." He is sending them on a mission of New Creation. A mission of forgiveness. A mission to announce to the world that Sin has been defeated and Death has been overcome.

This is the Mission of the Church. We are the ones in whom and through whom God is rescuing the world back to himself. It says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and

gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”

What a precious mission we have to carry out as heaven and earth – ripped apart since that day in the Garden – are now being brought back together as one.

## BEAUTY

The end of the story is nothing less than God himself returning with the promise to erase humanity’s brokenness and make her new again. At the end, heaven itself descends to earth and the two are united as one in a beautiful healing of all of creation. The Story of Scripture ends with these words...

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

This is our Story.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Narrative adapted from Josh Lenon, pastor of Red Door Church