

# It Happened Like This . . .

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## ***"And One Became Four"***

This is a strange mathematical equation. One is one and four is four, but one can become four. And this is not a mathematical story. This is a story about a multiplying church. One church became four churches. So how does one become four?

We don't have a hall of fame for churches but, if we did, Grace Bible Fellowship Church in Harrisburg would be a candidate. Its roots reach back to 1922 when the Gospel Heralds, our evangelists/church planters came to town. The faithful evangelistic efforts resulted in the formation of a church. In 1934, they were assigned a pastor and recognized as a church. In 1950, they were able to begin meeting in a new building on Division Street. By 1973, they had moved to their current location on Colonial Road. They have not moved since, but the Harrisburg Church has been on the move.

What happened in and through the Harrisburg Church is not a simple story. It seems as though when God moves to accomplish a task it cannot be traced to a single person or a single event. In the case of one becoming four that is the story. So, it is hard to say where the starting of other churches began.

Perhaps we can start with Carl Spackman who was serving as the pastor when the waters began to stir. Carl was serving as part of the Church Extension Ministries Board and therefore had more than a passing interest in new churches. Carl observed that the church was growing and drawing people from a distance.

In a curious "coincidence," two families were first time visitors to the church on the same Sunday. They introduced themselves to each other. One family was Clyde and Carol Snyder. They were long term, hard core BFC'ers. They had moved to Gettysburg and gravitated to the Harrisburg

Church. The other family was Mark and Ruth Barninger. Mark had been part of a church plant effort with another denomination that had not developed. He and his family just happened to wander into the Harrisburg Church on that Sunday when they met the Snyder's.

Growth in the church was continuing and it was clear decisions needed to be made. A task force was formed to consider the possibilities. They realized that three options were open to them. First, they could begin a building project for a larger facility. Second, they could began a second service which would allow them to accommodate more people. Or third, they could start a daughter church.

For two years they explored these options extensively through task force discussions and congregational input. In the end, the Elders determined that they should pursue the daughter church option. They would alleviate the problem of growing numbers through church planting, which they saw as an opportunity to further the kingdom of God.

Some of the threads were coming together. The result was a mindset developing both in the leadership and the congregation. That mindset was focused on church planting, so the suggestion of a new church was not dismissed but welcomed.



*Grace BFC Harrisburg*

In the meantime, Mark Barninger had joined the staff of the church and was working closely with Pastor Carl. Mark pursued his church planting "instincts" by talking to David Gundrum, the director of Church Extension Ministries. Mark was encouraged to gather some people who would join him in the investigation of a new church plant. After researching the various issues, they chose to focus on Grantville. When a property became available, a refocus took them to the community of Dauphin.

Meanwhile, the Snyder's, who were commuting from Gettysburg, began thinking about a Bible Fellowship Church where they were located. With the encouragement of the Harrisburg Church and support from Church Extension Ministries, they began meeting with a group of people in Adams County.



*Adams County BFC*

As this story is taking shape, you should notice something very significant. The leadership and congregation had now come to share the vision of beginning new churches. It seems fair to say that God was guiding them. They shared this vision and so proceeding was a natural step. They were counting the cost but also calculated the kingdom benefits.

themselves, the people of Grace BFC were ready to consider them.

Those who shared the vision were not naïve. Starting new churches and becoming involved in new churches comes at a cost. Pastor Carl recalls the Sunday after the Dauphin group left to begin their meetings. He said there were empty pews and Sunday school classes had empty chairs. That was hard on them. But, they understood this was how God was leading them and while they noticed those who were not there, they were firmly committed to doing God's will.



*Grace Fellowship, Steelton*

Their plan to begin a work in Dauphin now led to deliberate steps to form a church. They designated Mark to be the church planting pastor. Those who were committed began to meet and pray. Their first meetings were at

the church. Today, that group of people meets as Freedom Bible Fellowship Church in Dauphin.



*Freedom BFC, Dauphin County*

The factors leading to the ministry in Adams County were less deliberate than those that led to the church in Dauphin. The fact that commuting was required for the Snyder's added to their motivation to begin a work in their community. That has led to the formation of a congregation and a meeting place on Coleman Road.

So three churches, Dauphin, Adams County and Steelton, trace their connection to Grace Church in Harrisburg. The first church, Grace Church, has continued its ministry and the empty pews have filled. They are even wondering about starting another church.

As all this was unfolding, another "coincidental" event occurred. Mark Barninger met a teacher at a Christian School named David Smith. David was meeting with a group of people in Steelton and experiencing struggles. Mark suggested that David meet and talk with Carl Spackman. Soon, the Harrisburg Church was connected to another ministry. Church Extension Ministries joined the Harrisburg Church as the Steelton Church began to develop. The Harrisburg Church continues to this day in their support and leadership in Steelton.

This is what happens when a church is committed to multiplication.

Richard Taylor  
Mentoring Assistant

So, how does one church become four? It was the vision that God caused to grow there, which created a willingness to pursue new churches. The effort in Dauphin was a deliberate intentional work. Both Adams County and Steelton were the result of opportunities that appeared. There is no cookie cutter pattern here. God worked in different ways. When opportunities presented



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