

## **Dave and Susan Wilson**

Some of you may not know much about how Gulf Coast Community Church started. Susan and I were blessed to have a front row seat for the whole thing. About 19 years ago, we were a part of the Sovereign Grace Ministries church in Orlando, Metro Life Church. We loved being a part of what God was doing among that community of believers. Being members there really revolutionized our lives in so many ways.

One day, I was praying for the pastors, who were away for a leaders retreat. As I prayed, one of the pastors, Jim Britt, kept coming to mind, as did the Tampa Bay area. So the next time I asked him if the Lord might have been speaking to the leadership team about sending him to the area to plant a church.

Jim seemed somewhat uncomfortable at my question, and gave me a vague answer about their being open to different opportunities. I said, well that's interesting ... so what was the answer to my question?

Turns out that much of their retreat was spent discussing an as-yet-unannounced church plant in either Tampa or St. Petersburg.

Once it was announced, Susan and I began to pray about joining with a team of other families to move to a new city and help plant a new church. We didn't really know much about the area, but had a long-standing friendship with the pastor of the venture, Jim Britt.

We felt that the Lord gave us faith to go, and met with the pastors who also had faith for us to participate. So, we put our house on the market and I started putting together my resume to find a new job in St. Petersburg.

Our home sold very quickly, and we decided to go ahead and move to St. Petersburg, even though no one else had moved yet. We left the city we knew, a church we loved and our friends and family to step out on an adventure of faith. And by the way, I didn't have a job yet either.

So every day, I left Susan, and our four-year-old- and two-year-old sons to commute two hours each way to Orlando to work. It wasn't the best situation, but we managed the best we could.

Two months later, my company lost some major clients and needed to lay off a number of people. They told me that I could keep my job if I was willing to move back, otherwise they would have to let me go. We felt confident that we were supposed to be a part of the church-planting team, so we stayed in St. Petersburg, and I got laid off.

I now was an advertising consultant. Do you know what a consultant is? An unemployed guy with a business card. We had very little income for the next year and a half. The only job opportunities seemed to be back in Orlando. We lived off the proceeds from our house sale, until ultimately, our savings were gone.

Things were often very tough for the 17 adults and 18 children who made up the church-planting team. But as Susan pointed out to me recently, we learned so much from the Lord in those tough times, and he seemed to use the fires of adversity to forge a real community of faith ... people who loved and served each other no matter what.

On Easter Sunday 1993, Gulf Coast Community Church had its first public meeting. We had great times of worship, even though we were meeting in a hotel conference space. Don Korb had to deliver much of the equipment every Sunday in his trailer, and then return it at the end of the day to the garage of Seth Proffitt's family home. I think Ron Wilson handled the sound from the very beginning, as he has faithfully Sunday after Sunday for 18 years.

For a while, we met at the St. Pete Women's Club on Snell Isle. The main children's ministry happened in a commercial kitchen. Not exactly a kid-friendly environment.

Buying this church property was a work of God's grace in many ways. The sellers chose to sell to us even though two other groups had offers that were higher. Somehow, a church of about 115 people gave \$75,000 as a down payment. Several families put their financial well-being on the line by co-signing the mortgage for the church property.

In many ways, Gulf Coast Community Church exists today because nine families, who probably had no idea what they were getting themselves into, wanted to share the grace they'd been given with new friends in a new city. Even though we've experienced many trying times, we'd do it again in a heartbeat.

I wonder ... what new cities will be blessed by YOUR sacrifice and faith? All of us have the privilege of being church planters, or of supporting those we send out. It's one way you can love the gospel, live the gospel and ADVANCE the gospel in an amazing way!