

Two local churches adjust locally to grow His kingdom

By Kevin Triplett, Executive Pastor
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When leaders at Indian Springs Baptist Church made the decision after nine years to combine its two campuses back into one, it was an emotional, challenging, but fitting example of following by faith

The story, to some, may start Jan. 26, 2020, when Dr. Pat Findley, lead pastor at ISBC for 13 months, laid out a 2020s Vision to the church regarding the starting point and direction for the next 10 years. During his first 13 months, between sermons, he had talked with leadership, deacons, church members, staff and even a team of church consultants. The church body was called to 40 days of individual prayer, followed by two weeks of gathering for corporate prayer. The goal? To discover the path God had for ISBC and the discernment to follow it.

“All of the process, the praying, conversations, planning, all of it, was never to get ahead of God and make our own plans or put him in a box,” said Findley. “It was to be better prepared to follow the plans He had for us.”

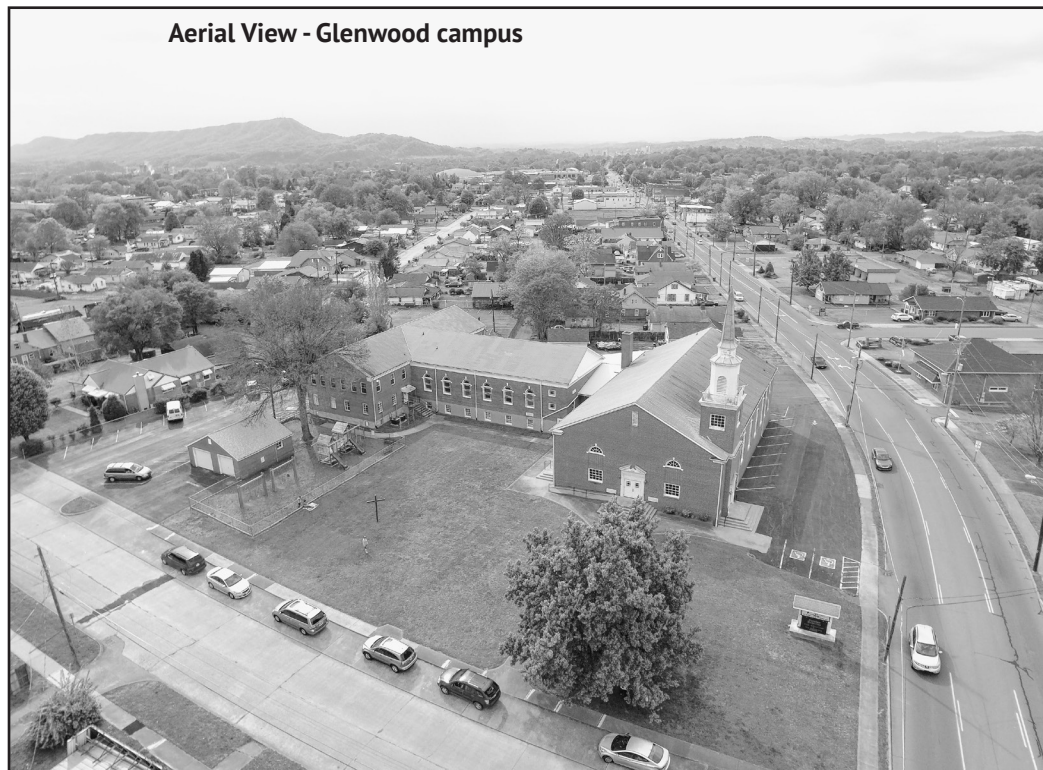
The starting point for the next chapter is to come together as one campus and utilize in force the gifts of the body as a whole. But the story does not start there either. That was a turning of the page in a larger chronicle of growth in God’s Kingdom. The account not only dates back more than nine years, but more than 120 — and, really, 2,000.

A look back

Indian Springs Baptist Church was planted in 1955, by, and remember this, Glenwood Baptist Church in Kingsport. Formed in 1887, Glenwood members in the middle of the 20th century felt a need to plant a seed for the Kingdom in a rural, agricultural, but growing community a few miles east of downtown Kingsport. That was the birth, the beginning, of what is Indian Springs Baptist Church.

Fast forward a few decades, ISBC experienced growth and Glenwood fell on tougher times. Attendance at the long-time church dropped to double digits. Costs climbed. It was time for an act of grace, support to be repaid.

In early spring 2011, after around 130 years as a church and more than 60 in



Aerial View - Glenwood campus

In 1955, Glenwood Baptist Church in Kingsport planted the seed that became Indian Springs Baptist Church. Decades later, Glenwood dissolved and became Indian Springs Baptist Church-Glenwood Campus. Now, Indian Springs and Port City Church are working together to continue to grow His kingdom in that community. (Photo courtesy of Tiger Brooks).

the same location, Glenwood Baptist Church was in danger of closing its doors. Several options were explored. Conversations with different churches took place. In the end, it dissolved and became Indian Springs Baptist Church, Glenwood Campus.

The child that had developed from an idea of its mother church now stepped in to return the favor.

Resources were poured into the Glenwood Campus of ISBC. Members moved eight miles across town to help teach, lead, sing and, soon enough, even pastor, as Dr. Tiger Brooks moved from student pastor at ISBC’s Hill Road Campus to Campus Pastor at Glenwood. Financial assistance was provided as well, in the sum of nearly \$500,000 in capital improvements.

Time passed. The Lord moved and blessed as He does when His children obey. Lost were saved and new believers baptized. But things transform over the course of nearly a decade. They always do. Both locations experienced highs and lows. And by late 2018 when the pastor search committee at Indian Springs called Findley, at least two of the many questions on the table were “What is the future of how we do what

we do?” and “How do two campuses look going forward?”

In other words, how can a church, this church, be —to borrow a line from either the U.S. Army or Christian author John Maxwell — “all it can be.” How could the church in this time of transition prepare itself, structure itself, for the future God had for it?

“We were trying to meet the needs of the community, reach the lost and nurture our members; at the same time, we had staff at both campuses duplicating tasks,” Findley said. “We had to be more efficient to be ready to answer God’s call while not forgetting why our church did what it did nine years ago.

“We asked questions. How do we continue to serve that campus body, the neighborhood and preserve the legacy of Glenwood to the glory of God? We all knew we, Indian Springs Baptist Church, would not be here had Glenwood not stepped out nearly 70 years ago and planted us. Obedience often brings challenges. Hard decisions come with it. But we are so limited sometimes in what we see compared to God’s view. Which is why we have to often remind ourselves to just get out of His way.”

Next chapter

Chris Alford is lead pastor at Port City in Kingsport, a Baptist church that has undergone some challenging decisions of its own in recent years. It was all in an effort to have a clearer view of their Kingdom purpose. Port City’s only been known by that name for around three years. Prior to that, since the 1940s, it was Litz Manor Baptist Church. But, again, times change. The area of the city had evolved through three quarters of a century and many people associated with the church, and even some who were not, did not understand the name.

The mission was the same, to reach and teach people about Jesus Christ. But how it looked became a discussion point, including the moniker it should carry. “But,” Alford said, “we worked deliberately to become a new church with old roots.”

Only eight-tenths of a mile, basically a neighborhood or two and a couple of schools, were all that rested between Litz Manor and Glenwood. Sitting on opposite sides, like bookends on a shelf, they served the same area — and many of the same folks.

Alford and his team worked to inject new life into the church. And it worked. Port City outgrew the location on its end of the shelf and had been meeting across town at Sullivan South High School. Now, pushing the space envelope there and wanting to find a more permanent location closer to “home,” Alford began praying and looking.

Alford stays busy. In addition to his pastoral duties, he serves as part-time director of the Sullivan Baptist Association — of which both Indian Springs and Port City are members.

Brooks has served on the board.

In casual conversation among friends one day, both expressed their churches were praying about their respective futures, their space and what that could look like.

Light Bulbs

Nine years prior, Indian Springs was not the only church in the conversation with Glenwood. Litz Manor was as well.



Indian Springs, Port City launch new chapter in Glenwood's history

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But Litz Manor was not in a position to take that step which, at that time, would have been more of a leap. Indian Springs, however, was. Besides, Glenwood was family, right?

But almost as quickly as the idea was floated, the conversation stopped. Indian Springs was coming to the end of a visioning activity with consultants to analyze everything from every angle. The findings were coming soon. The members of Indian Springs were being called to 40 days of prayer for whatever God might say to members through the exercise. Any conversation otherwise by church leaders would have been disingenuous to the petitions of the body.

More than two months passed; 40 days of individual prayer; two weeks of gathering as a body to pray; two weeks of input from the church on what had been laid on members' hearts through the process; then a week of preparation.

Just like the ISBC pastor search committee had laid out to Dr. Findley more than a year earlier when it collectively asked, "what is the future of how we do what we do and how do two campuses look going forward?" members were asking the same. It came in the prayer and it came in the feedback. And it came from the consultants as well.

"As time went on and feedback started coming in from the time of prayer, it was obvious that many in our body were

wondering what we needed to look like going forward to fulfill our mission," Findley said.

So, how does a church like ISBC, that was not in the same place it was 10 years prior, continue to worship, connect, serve and share to a level that grows the kingdom of God? How could it do it better? How does it nurture the residents on its side of the shelf? How does it preserve the legacy of the church that was the reason it existed?

And how does Port City, coming out the other side of a strategic shift, balancing growth with lack of permanent location still meet in one place and nurture the needs of the folks on "its" side of the shelf — the same shelf, remember.

Simple. By working together.

Indian Springs Baptist Church agrees for Port City to take over the property and lead it through its next phase. Indian Springs owns the property. Port City now will manage it, be responsible for maintenance, repairs, improvements. In essence, Port City will use the property as its own. Indian Springs leaders wanted not only to see nine years of investment in Glenwood, the community and the Kingdom fulfilled, but continued. Port City needed space to do that.

Indian Springs folks wanted to somehow continue the food pantry it had operated at Glenwood. Port City had

been exploring how to reinstate one it had closed years earlier and partner with other churches to manage it.

The neighborhood around Glenwood had a large minority population, including a significant number of Spanish-speaking residents. Port City hosts a Spanish-speaking service. Alford, as a child of missionaries in South America, is bilingual.

"This is a God-thing," Alford said. "A member of our church recently told me they had been praying and knew we were going to find a building to serve this community. That was totally independent, totally through her prayer. And she is not the only one. This is not coincidence. This is our sovereign God."

True enough. The fingerprints of our Savior have been all over this process and continue to be — at an all new level in fact with the disruption the COVID-19 situation has caused.

While school officials in Sullivan County have been very gracious in allowing Port City to meet at one of the high schools, that option suddenly was off the table in mid-March. With schools closed — to all activity — Port City was without a location. The church's original property was not available, itself leased to another church when PCC re-located to Sullivan South.

"Even if we could have met, we couldn't have," Alford said. "We had no place to go. As it was, with the timing of

this partnership with Indian Springs, we were able to broadcast both services from our new location. Just like that, we went from what would have meant us going dark to being able to reach hundreds of folks online."

The comfort in following by faith is often felt way before it is seen.

"If we had not been blessed to do what we did nine years ago, stepping in and taking over the Glenwood Campus, it is highly likely the building not only would not be a church today, it might not even be occupied," said Brooks, now associate pastor at ISBC. "Being able to do what we did built a base for Port City to be able to do what it is going to do — what it was not able to do nine or 10 years ago."

"When this fell together, we were amazed," Findley said. "But we shouldn't have been. God's plan is so incredible and is only revealed to us when we are ready. He knows we probably will mess it up most of the time otherwise. "But he not only knew nine years ago what he was doing, he knew in 1955 when Glenwood planted Indian Springs. He knew in the 1880s when Glenwood was formed. He knew 2,000 years ago because He is omniscient. And He knows what will continue from here: two churches being stewards of what He has provided and giving Him all the glory in the process."

And that, is just the next chapter in this incredible story.