

Voices: Pave charters path for church revitalization

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In August 2020, I took on the role of senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Cedar Hill. First Baptist is a historic church, celebrating 175 years in 2025.

The church was started on the outskirts of town on a piece of land now occupied by a cemetery. In the late 1800s, a local Native American tribe raided the church and burned it to the ground, which led the church to move into the heart of Cedar Hill.

The church has been blessed by God to endure many hardships, including the Great Depression, two world wars, the worship wars and a church split. However, the church was facing a bleak challenge that needed to be addressed—steady decline. As the community of Cedar Hill grew, the church experienced a few peaks, but statistics mostly display plateaus and decline.

As the church saw their pastor of 32 years retire, they began to hope for God to bring something new. More than a new pastor, the church hoped for new life, new families and new vision that would change their trajectory.

I was called, knowing the church's desire to see all the new. As excited as I was, I knew to lead the church effectively to obedience and health, I would need help. God would provide help through Jonathan Smith, director of Texas Baptists' [Church Health Strategy](#) and the creator of Pave.

I was invited to participate in the beta Pave training. During this training, we were given an outlook on the process of revitalization, keys to begin the process in our churches, and a cohort made up of a mentor and five other

pastors for the journey.

In the two years since that training, God has done a mighty work in the life of First Baptist Cedar Hill. God is using Pave to bring life back into what once was a declining church. There are three definitive ways in which Pave has provided help.

‘Know Your Church’

The first few months of Pave would require a deep dive into the state of the church. Whereas it was obvious the church was declining, defining the reason was not something that should be generalized.

The church was asked to fill out a survey provided by Texas Baptists that would provide clarity of strengths and weaknesses.

The survey indicated one of our biggest weaknesses was fellowship. I know. How could a Baptist church be struggling with fellowship? More than planning more lunches on the grounds to eat fried chicken and casseroles, we needed the church to be reunited. The church had lost sight of her mission and lost hold of one another.

Additionally, the survey indicated a weakness in discipleship, which I believe goes hand in hand with fellowship. Discipleship is a relational task. If we do not care genuinely for one another, we will not disciple one another.

Defining these shortfalls would impact our efforts to develop vision and strategies for greatest impact. In the months since, leaders have worked to define a healthy and customized plan for discipleship.

This plan features D-Groups—a self-organized group of three to five people meeting regularly to talk about God’s word and life.

We also have begun to promote Mobilized Disciples. This is a person making an intentional one-on-one commitment to help a non-Christian know and follow Jesus and/or to help a fellow Christian mature as a disciple.

This vision, introduced to the church at the close of 2023, is new, exciting and still developing. Currently, we have around 30 people participating in D-Groups. As we continue into 2024, leadership hopes to help train and send out Mobilized Disciples to reach our goal of at least 104 people by 2030.

‘Know Your Community’

Pave also provided us with a Know Your Community report. This report detailed numerous measurables within a 10-mile radius of the church campus—such as population, household income, generations, pet ownership, race and religious affiliation.

These findings indicated a few important realities for the church. First, we have a growing and diverse city. Second, the makeup of the church doesn’t mirror the makeup of our community. Third, the majority of people in our area are uninvolved with a church and/or spiritually lost.

Hearing these realities allowed First Baptist Cedar Hill to understand the mission field that lies before us. These numbers forced us—and continue to force us—to consider how we can engage better the expansive and diverse community around us.

Smith shared that to begin this work, there would need to be a difficult but necessary time of repentance. We needed to confess years of apathy and indifference to the Great Commission. Our issue was not that we did not have the opportunity to advance the kingdom and love of God in Cedar Hill. It was that we had lost sight of that purpose.

The call to repentance was not easy, and I do not believe we have surrendered and confessed fully. However, I genuinely believe when we recognize the grace and purpose of God, the result will be a mighty unleashing of the saints into Cedar Hill and beyond.

‘Know Yourself’

The final understanding Pave has clarified is self-perspective. A good leader must be self-aware, recognizing strengths and weaknesses. Pave provides resources such as StrengthsFinder and books such as *Replenish* by Lance Witt to help understand who we are and how we might improve.

Additionally, Pave has provided me with pastoral companionship. Pastoring can be a lonely endeavor, but through Pave I have been given a group to journey with. Jonathan Smith, Steve Quinn, Dustin Slaton, Bryan Cawley, Kyle Nieman, Darrell Beggs and Bobby Hicks Jr. have influenced and encouraged me greatly.

For pastors or those who desire to pastor a church in need of revitalization, I cannot recommend Pave enough. Your church, your community and your life will be impacted greatly.

Josh Prince is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Cedar Hill. The views expressed are those of the author.