By Gabriel Stovall

The truth is Gerald Gibson had never heard of the term “church planter” until about two years ago. Ironic, considering Gibson’s vision for church ministry is very much a parallel to the theory and logic behind the recent Southern Baptist Convention’s push to plant new churches and “re-plant,” or revitalize existing, dying churches.

“I never wanted to just be a part of church that just does church on Sunday and goes away,” Gibson said. “I’ve always thought about church ministry as a community that happens to do church.”

That passion, coupled with what he called an “unshakable” unction or calling from God, is what led him to plant Grace Temple Christian Church in Decatur.

Gibson, 46, has joined his church planting work with the Atlanta Metro Baptist Association and says he’s grateful for what his entrance into Southern Baptist life has done to fuel his desire for planting community focused churches.

The birth of his passion

He comes from the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, led by Timothy Flemming – a long-time fixture and legend, particularly in Atlanta’s African American church scene. A Gospel preacher for 15 years, Gibson said there was one main question that permeated his spiritual conscience, no matter where he was, that eventually served as his chief church planting fuel.

Gibson began the pre-launch phase of Grace Temple in March with a team of about 15 people. They have weekly worship and Bible study sessions on Sunday and a monthly time of launch team vision casting. He’s also going through the necessary process to be a recognized church planter of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board.

“The training and the information is something I truly needed,” Gibson said.

Unexpected support

Gibson has received support from places that he wasn’t expecting, including the ability to move into a storefront building in downtown Decatur where he and his wife live and work. The church has also connected with organizations with specific intentions to help it reach millennials and children in his planting context.

Gibson works bi-vocationally as a compliance inspector for the DeKalb County government.

“We want to be a very family-oriented church,” he said. “We want to be in the community where we live and serve. That’s why moving things to Decatur was perfect for me and us, because we’re already working and living among the people we want to serve.”

Vision for Grace Temple

Gibson said he envisions a ministry that provides help and assistance to those needing job skills and employment as a means of opening the door to plant seeds of the Gospel in their hearts. As one who is “committed to expositional preaching,” he wants to lead a Bible-based ministry that gives people more than spiritual cotton candy.

Ready to work

Currently, Gibson’s main thrust is to continuously keep his launch team connected to and reminded of this vision. They’ve been working to plan several community outreach events and are hoping to partner with schools and other local community organizations, just as a way of developing connecting points for the community to his ministry.

“We’re really excited about the opportunity to partner with the DeKalb County Crisis Center,” he said. “We’re connecting with them to do worship services there, and provide donations of items people in a crisis may need. My next step is reaching out to the principal of nearby Columbia High School.”

And it seems as if his team is ready to embrace the work.

“I tell them all the time. Let’s go back to not just going to church but being the church,” he said. “And really this challenge is not my vision. I believe this is what God wants to do in our communities, and I think they’re starting to see it.”

Grace Temple Christian Church is located at 4151 Memorial Drive, Suite C108 in Decatur. Current Sunday worship times are 12 noon until 1:30 p.m. He can be reached at (678) 763-7454, or call the church at (404) 492-4832.

Gabriel C. Stovall is a state missionary for Church Planting and Church Revitalization through the Georgia Baptist Mission Board for the metro Atlanta area. He also serves the Mission Board’s Baptist Campus Ministries as a campus pastor at Clayton State University in Morrow and is the senior pastor of the Historic Butler Street Baptist Church in Downtown Atlanta’s Old Fourth Ward Community.
Screven — O’Quinn Baptist Church typifies many congregations you’d find in Georgia. Situated in a rural area, a two-lane paved road runs in front of the church. Another road — this one dirt — splits the cow pasture out back. Facing the building from O’Quinn Church Road, a graveyard lies to the right. At left, a covered structure for outside gatherings partners with a basketball court, two sets of bleachers on either side.

And alongside an unmistakable rural setting, says Pastor Gerald Greenlee, is the congregation’s community atmosphere and desire to share the Gospel.

“The majority of our congregation is spread among many families,” says Greenlee in describing the church’s makeup. “All sorts of opinions get heard.” In other words, decisions aren’t dictated based on a person’s last name.

For instance, last year a member brought the possibility of a puppet ministry to Greenlee. The pastor liked the idea and before long it swept into motion. And while the ministry found its footing at O’Quinn, soon there were requests for Puppets of Praise (POP) to appear elsewhere.

**Huge support**

“In the summer they’ll help other churches during VBS. At our church, the group does evening services every 5th Sunday. It gets huge support from everyone in the church. And even though it’s geared toward children, our senior adults love it,” Greenlee points out.

Last year, it was brought up that perhaps the POP ministry needed its own space. Setup and teardown for practice was done in the fellowship hall and ate up nearly half of the time allotted.

“From a ministry standpoint it was practical,” recollects Greenlee. “From a financial standpoint, we needed to take it to the church and decide.”

In the end, the decision brought about the current construction of a 20-X-25-ft building behind the church for the ministry. All of it will come about from donations.

**In the environment**

The outdoor structure has hosted fish fries, oyster roasts, and VBS commencement events in the past. Some years, though, the heat and gnats (it is south Georgia, after all) lead participants toward the conditioned air of the fellowship hall.

Still, folks love gathering outside. The church’s annual spring fling fellowship happens there. So do Awana games on the basketball court. This summer, as they always have, youth will hang out on Wednesday nights. Easter’s sunrise service beheld a magnificent pre-dawn scene.

Life at O’Quinn has necessitated changes. Presently, renovations are taking place in the church office area in addition to adding the puppet ministry workspace. Missions involvement is encouraged, as for the last four years members have accompanied Greenlee to Les Cayes, Haiti to work alongside missionaries in putting roofs on buildings. The church has welcomed a new minister of music, Reggie Burgess, to serve alongside Greenlee, Minister of Youth Paul McDuffy, and Cheryl Westberry, who heads up the puppet ministry.

But in talking with visitors, Greenlee notices a constant theme.

“They say this is a place where everyone’s welcome. It’s a family environment,” he explains of O’Quinn Baptist. “They say this is a welcoming environment.”
The reason was clear; school is out in the summer. It’s not that I didn’t enjoy school, it’s just that in our home, summer was the season we got to spend more time together. Since Dad was a Southern Baptist pastor, June would present the first opportunity for us to travel as a family. The Southern Baptist Convention meets in June and wherever it met, we would usually begin our summer travel season by taking vacation going to and coming back from the annual meeting.

With the conclusion of the annual meeting, and shortly after our return home, it would be time for our annual Youth Camp at Panama City Beach, FL. Though Youth Camp was at sea level, it was always a mountaintop experience for me. I felt closer to the Lord in those days through Bible study, prayer, the singing of choruses, and campfire down on the beach every evening.

Vacation Bible School was always a very important part of summer. Did you know that essentially 20 percent of Southern Baptist baptisms every year come from decisions made at VBS? My desire is to see every Georgia Baptist church having an annual VBS, leading our children to faith in Christ.

Family vacation was the capstone experience for our family every year. Whether we were spending two weeks at the beach cottage of a family friend in the church, traveling through the Smoky Mountains to stay at my grandparents’ home in Lexington, Kentucky, or in a cabin on a farm in North Carolina, the place didn’t matter so much. It was the fact that we were together, just us, without the constant interference of others, calling my Dad away to conduct another funeral or to make a visit at the hospital. Dad and Mom were ours exclusively on vacation and we loved it, every minute of it!

The minister’s life is tugged at from more angles than you can imagine. Being away from that pressure for some alone time with God and family refreshes the pastor and his family.

Let me urge all of you to encourage your pastor and other ministers to take sufficient time away this summer, time with family, and quiet time with the Lord. Let them know that you expect them to do it. You will be doing the right thing, and you will have a rejuvenated pastor and church leader as a result.
ACROSS
1. Charges
4. Then ___ Moses and the children of Israel” (Ex. 15:1)
8. Beetle
14. Conservationist group
15. Symptom of malaria
16. “The tongue of the just is as ___ silver” (Prov. 10:20)
17. Record measure
18. “It is a ___ thing that the king requireth” (Dan. 2:11)
19. Flyers
20. Carrot eaters
22. Deli order
23. Used to preserve Jesus’ body (John 19:39) (sing.)
24. Snaky fish (pl.)
27. Russian country cottage
31. “Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the ___” (Ex. 15:21)
33. Volkswagen model
35. ___ Sea, site of Miriam’s song
36. Possible nickname for Paul’s “son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2)
38. “God created man in his ___ image” (Gen. 1:27)
39. KJV term for Korah (Jude 1:11)
40. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
44. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus tomb was ___ ___ (John 11:38) (2 wds.)
46. “Learn to maintain good works for necessary ___” (Titus 3:14)
47. Cool, in slang
49. “I count all things but loss... that I may ___ Christ” (Phil 3:8)
50. Chicken ___ ___ king (2 wds.)
51. Yang’s sidekick
52. Common among soldiers who fight in battle
55. Computer phone
58. Adventure story
61. Land measurement
63. Nickname for doubting disciple
65. Warned troy of equine gift
67. Nathan would ___ David of murder (2 Sam. 12:7)
70. Fix the socks
73. What Moses found the Israelites worshipping
74. Business name ending
75. Where Miriam died (Num. 20:1)
76. “___ me thrice” (Matt. 26:34)
77. Type of tree planted in Isa. 44:14

DOWN
1. ___ firma
2. Dismay
3. Tropical grass
4. Mombai dress
5. Stone on ephod (Ex. 28:19)
6. Deborah was Rebekah’s (Gen.35:8)
7. “To the right!”
8. Perhaps Miriam had this as her leprosy healed
9. When we first meet Miriam in the Bible, she’s one (Ex. 2:8)
10. Main Artery
11. Edge
12. Genius
13. Joseph’s baby brother, for short (Gen. 35:24)
21. Beds
25. MGM’s Lion
26. “Light is ___ for the righteous” (Ps. 97:11)
28. Farm Yield
29. Moses to God: “___ am I” (Ex. 3:4)
30. City in Yemen
32. “All the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall” (Ex. 11:5)
34. “Miriam became leprous, white as ___” (Num. 12:10)
37. Miriam is the Hebrew form of this name
39. Brand of cold remedy
40. Small Pacific island
41. Capital of Norway
42. Prayer for Miriam: “Let her not be as one ___” (Num. 12:12)
43. Podium
48. Genetic code
53. Nova ___ 
54. Israelites pass through the sea; Pharaoh’s army ___ (Deut. 11:4)
56. Musical composition
57. Miriam’s brother (Ex.2:7)
59. Forest clearing
60. Miriam’s other brother (Ex. 15:20)
62. Cain’s eldest son (Gen. 4:17)
64. Tulle
66. Miriam asked, “Hath the Lord indeed spoken ___ by Moses?” (Num. 12:2)
67. “___ for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein” (Jer. 6:16)
68. Professional numbers person
69. Villain
70. What God threatened Pharaoh through Moses, He ___

This special edition of The Christian Index is distributed online bi-weekly at www.christianindex.org to provide additional content to readers who prefer a print version of the publication. To read additional stories of how God is working through Georgia Baptists, visit the website daily for stories that inspire and inform.

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