Building Faith

Shaun Brauteseth 1 October 2015



It all started with a strange prophetic word from a visiting preacher, Tom Tapping. In 2006, four years after Oxygen Life Church was planted, he was preaching at one of our meetings and began to talk about us having our own building one day: 'You guys should be open to something different… I don't know, like meeting in a ship or something.' Okaaay. A ship. Maybe Tom was just being weird. But what do you do with that? Maybe you go and look at properties in the harbour, but he might as well have said that we should think about colonising Mars as a church. So we just kept on doing what we'd always been doing: trying to be the type of church Jesus wants and Port Elizabeth needs. God would lead us to the right place for us.

Since we began in 2002, Oxygen Life has met in a tiny coffee shop, then a slightly less tiny clubhouse, and then a primary school – our hosts for more than a decade. From the start, we've done what any church aims to do – find a piece of land to call our own. We looked in unconventional areas, entertained inconvenient locations, dreamed about impossible venues and, yes, scouted out the harbour. You know, just in case. Then, in 2014, the first miracle: we missed an open auction for a fantastic building on a busy road in the heart of the area we wanted to be. It didn't seem like a miracle at the time, but the fact that we weren't at the auction meant someone else bought the building; a large, double-story, former-buffet restaurant called Admirals. They bought it for R3.9 million, but if we'd known about it and been at the auction, we would've been prepared to offer anywhere up to R5 million because of how great a venue it was.

They got a great price for it, and that was that.

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Except when God is doing something behind the scenes, that is never that. The deal soon broke down, with a vital technicality proving the undoing of the sale: the buyer wanted the front façade of the building removed but didn't want to pay for it. And that façade? A large wooden replica of the hull of a ship. They lost the sale, allowing us to buy the building for the price they'd bid on it, and since then we've seen God's hand over the whole process of purchasing and renovating the building. There have been many testimonies of unlikely loans, services offered for free, and generous gifts and donations. Here's one of the most miraculous, though: before we found our building, which has now been named The Base, the church was giving around R13 000 a month towards a building fund. Once we announced that we'd found it at the end of 2014, the monthly giving towards the building jumped to over R60 000, and has stayed there ever since. That amount coming in every month is separate to tithes and offerings, in a church with many students and in the financially frightening year of 2015. When everyone else battens down the hatches and prepares to look out for number one, the church finds a way to look out for the true number one, Jesus, and for His house. That type of faithful, faith-filled giving is the sign of a powerful move of God in people's hearts.

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Our building is a sign to Port Elizabeth that we're here for the long haul. It's a glass-doored, open invitation to the city on a stretch of Heugh Road that sees thousands of cars pass by every day. People are going to walk into it just because it's there, and they're going to meet Jesus inside. Within its walls, which we've sanded down and painted ourselves, people are going to hear God's Word and encounter the Holy Spirit in times of worship. On the stage, which we hammered into place, beam by beam, people are going to stand and testify to healings, salvations and changed lives. And that's the entire point. The building is not the end goal – reaching people and discipling them into maturity is. Jesus isn't coming back for buildings – He's coming back for people. And yet that massive pile of bricks, steel and cement that we've spent millions on will play a huge part in the kingdom of God being established more and more in Port Elizabeth. So we're entering a new building, but also a new season as a church. Much faith has been required to get us to this point, and much more will be required as we move forward, but that faith is well-placed when it's put in the mountain-moving, ocean-parting, building-providing God.