# Passing on the Baton

Bret Bevan 13 March 2018



My family and I LOVE adventures and new challenges! Having said that, stress is always a very real factor when facing big changes, like leaving a Joshua Generation Church (JoshGen) congregation of saints who, by God's grace, I have been leading for 7 years, and taking the lead of another congregation. Questions arise like: How will my family fit into the new community? Will my kids make friends easily? Where will we live? How will this new congregation receive us? Will there be challenges in the giving and receiving of the leadership "baton"? Will the people we are leaving transition well? These questions have kept me up at night recently. The unknown is always scary, but isn't the essence of adventure needing to pluck up the courage to step out into the unknown? Choosing boldness, even when your gut reaction emotions tempt you to "feel" anything but brave. Deuteronomy 31:8 says, 'The LORD Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.'

Many people have asked me during this transition, 'How did you find the faith to move, and did you have a choice to say no to the move?' My answer has been that, in many ways, there was no faith needed. We did not even consider entertaining our own preference over what the leadership have strongly felt is God's will (bearing in mind that our filter is still always 'Does this contradict the Word of God in any way?'). Confused expressions normally follow.

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I further explain that our heart is to joyfully and completely obey God in everything – to do

anything and go anywhere, at any time. when He asks – and He usually asks through the leaders who oversee us. Where God leads, that's where we want to be. In the centre of God's will is the safest place to be, every time. Is it easy to live this way? No. Is it a simple decision to choose this way of life? Yes!

Hebrews 11:1: 'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.' God has been so gracious in preparing our hearts for this season! I feel so much peace in having handed over to Joey Calhau (who was one of the elders on our Sunningdale PM team). I am fully convinced that God is going to use Joey to take the Sunningdale PM congregation further than we could have, had we stayed. Because JoshGen is one family, one church, Joey's wins will be my wins. I'm excited for him and the saints he is leading, just as I am excited about helping to lead Edgemead PM into the new season that God has destined for them!

## Seven Practical Lessons I've Learned when Taking and Handing Over a Congregation

**1. It's God's church.** It's easier to make changes, let go and take up when your foundation is: 'It's not my church. I'm not the owner, Jesus is!' I want to steward as well as I can, but at the end of the day, Jesus is the head and He is the One building His church.

**2. 'Won' hearts make for smooth transitions.** The first thing I prayed for, after finding out that we would be moving congregations, was for God to give me the same love for our new congregation than I have had for our previous congregation. I prayed this same prayer over and over, and by the time we had our first meeting with Edgemead PM, God had supernaturally knitted our hearts together already. As I write this post, we will be going into our fourth week at Edgemead PM, but already these precious saints feel like family, and it feels like we've been a part of them for years. We have each other's hearts and we are moving forward in God together.

**3. Momentum is a game changer.** If we ask Him, God is gracious in giving us the keys to keeping momentum going as we hand over/ pick up the baton of leadership. We felt from God that one key to us keeping and building momentum as we moved over was to ask three deacons, a couple and a single person from Sunningdale PM to move with us. This they agreed to do, with joy and with an awareness of the sacrifice. Gerald, Tracey and Jazmin have already been such a blessing to the Edgemead PM team, and we are convinced that they themselves are walking into a new season of growth and blessing, as they commit themselves to this new, wonderful family.

**4. A good team is your safety net.** It was so 'lekker' (Afrikaans term for 'good') to see how the

leadership team (as well as the saints!) in Sunningdale PM settled people so quickly and gave confident reassurance that this move is of God and that Joey and Donna have been chosen by God to move the congregation forward. Unity commands God's blessing. It is our honour to be a part of making the Bride beautiful and strong, not only by recognising a lead elder's influence, but by encouraging the Body, each saint, to work together in moving forward.

**5. Communicate well.** We over-communicated (this is not a negative) and made absolutely sure that everyone was on the same page. We communicated heart, vision and painted the bigger picture and the importance of these changes. Communication is the foundation of a healthy family, because every saint is important in fulfilling the destiny of the Church, which is to glorify God. Every misunderstanding makes the body weaker. A healthy congregation is one where every saint feels a part of God's vision for this family.

**6. Have open hands.** There are seasons and times for everything, as we read in the Bible. For me, the most difficult part of this move was leaving solid, life-giving friendships behind. You might be thinking, 'But Bret, you are only 15 minutes away from Sunningdale. It's not like you have moved to a different country.' Of course, this is true, but the nature of being even a relatively small distance away, the busyness of life and just the natural progression of "out of sight, out of mind", will mean that relationships with these friends will take strain. We need to be willing to lay these friendships down, when necessary, in order to embrace a season of new friendships. More importantly, we need to trust God that He is enough – that He is good and will only take away if it is for our blessing, to move us into more.

**7. Slow and steady wins the race.** The golden rule for me in building relationships and winning people's trust is to go slow, because authentic relationships take time. Nobody wants to be seen as a quick project to be ticked off before moving on to the next task. Be genuine in your love, and realise that most often, both with our children and with anyone, love is spelt T-I-M-E. This is why it is so important to work as a team, realising that we cannot build with a congregation of people on our own. And lastly, we need to constantly rely on God's wisdom and timing through being led by the Holy Spirit.

John 13:35: 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.'