

MOVING TO MOOSE DRIVE or How God Provided Property For A New Beginning

It is my purpose to give a concise account of the circumstances which led to the purchase of a piece of property. The acquisition of the property for re-location of the Christian Food Mission culminated five years of investigations and prayers. Plans were laid and many meetings and discussions ensued to bring this project to fruition. There were many disappointments and stalls along the way and lots of unplanned and unpredicted twists and turns to maneuver. At times it seemed nothing would come of this idea – a new beginning to perpetuate this work into the future.

Here's the amazing story as it unfolded. I will call no person's name, as I do not have their permission and I know some want to remain anonymous. My aim is to draw attention to the Father of Providence.

My dear wife had been diagnosed with cancer in January of 2010. A series of seemingly endless doctor visits and a schedule of treatments would be set in motion. It was into this scenario that the idea came to me, or was given to me, of a project. I needed a big project to divert my thoughts from the upsetting cancer at the time. So, in January of 2012, I presented my idea of building a spacious new building to the Board of Directors. I made an explanation and received approval to pursue the project but was instructed to "spend no money" on the scheme.

I did not know how to proceed so I called someone I knew who is a businessman involved in engineering and construction; he showed great interest in the project. The next day I met him in his office and he gave me encouragement and was confident my plan was of the Lord. I was only seeking suggestions on how to proceed and asked for nothing in particular from him. Unknown to me he had an architect on staff to whom he introduced me in his conference room and turned the job over to him!

Over a period of weeks I met with the architect and brainstormed. He loved the project because it was so different than anything he'd ever designed and came up with computer generated plans and sketches and proposals. In the end we planned the ideal 8400 sq ft building and a superb interior floor plan. He even went so far as to build a wooden model, to scale, of the building. To complete the work, another employee came up with a cost breakdown for the building, parking lot, and equipment. Another man made a clear plexiglass cover to place over the model for protection, and a printer produced color brochures with an explanation of the proposed project. All of this cost the Christian Food Mission absolutely nothing!

At our 27th Annual Meeting on April 19, 2012, I was able to publically unveil this proposed project. Things had moved quickly and I was highly optimistic. The model was placed in our entrance room where many people saw it, a few speaking opportunities were extended, and there were some private meetings held. Into the building fund came only a few thousand dollars when much more was needed. Initially, I'd conceived of a plan to secure a piece of property as a construction site and received stated agreement from the owners; soon roadblocks were set in the way of the proposal and it faded.

Something happened which gave us great encouragement. Someone contacted us who had heard about the plans to re-locate into more suitable facilities; he had a building for sale (this certainly was not the only person who'd approached us with a vacant building for sale). The building in question soon sold to someone else, but as a result of the contact, a person employed by the seller requested a meeting with me. At this private meeting between the two of us, he offered to write a grant for funding from a private foundation for the original proposed project. Once again, I had not specifically asked for anything but the offer came. I knew nothing about writing grants. Subsequently, our friend was given approval, after meeting with the Board of Directors, to proceed with his offer and it was left in his hands.

Months later he submitted a thick, professionally done application, complete with pictures and all sorts of necessary information from his research, to the Asbury Foundation of Hattiesburg. I was asked to sign a cover letter affirming the mission of our organization, but had absolutely nothing to do with submitting the grant. I did not even know how much money was being requested by this complex application.

(At this point let me interrupt the flow of this story. On March 4th of 2011 we had received, as a donation from an individual, a check for \$40,000.00 - a full year before this proposed building was brought to light. I recall that by 2013 financial contributions were so lean, a year after the proposed building was brought forth, with money for our operations so tight in the latter half of 2013 that employee salary payments were "delayed" several times. This was the background, into which the project was being presented. Did it seem reasonable to desire funds for the building fund at this time?)

On September 18, 2014 a kind letter was sent, addressed to me personally, informing me that my grant for \$650,000.00 had been denied. On September 23, 2014, I went to Hattiesburg to retrieve the multiple copies submitted to their Board. With me I took a letter I'd written for personal delivery. In the letter I explained the grant process thus: "...He [the grant writer] approached me with the offer to write a grant for a project he considered worthy and greatly needed. Later, at his request, he met with our Board of Directors to explain himself and gain approval to pursue grant writing. This is an area I know little about and it was placed completely in his hands." Also, with me I took copies of the latest newsletter I'd written and picked up from the printer that same day.

It seemed all this work had been for nothing. We were wrong. On November 24th we received an undesignated check from the Asbury Foundation for \$25,000.00, and another for \$25,000.00 on November 24, 2015, and yet another for \$25,000.00 on November 17, 2016! No one had ever contacted

the Asbury Foundation again, according to our knowledge, about funding.

Something else happened in 2014 which was a financial windfall of a substantial magnitude. On June the 7th, a Saturday, I checked the mail in our post office box. There were two envelopes, each containing a check. I had to look two or three times at one of the checks since it was written for the sum of \$207,470.48! The donor was someone who had sent small amounts to the Mission at irregular intervals in the past, but this was unexpected.

Upon reflection, I had been invited to speak at a local civic club and made a report on the Mission. At that time I had taken the opportunity to speak about the proposed building project. This donor was present when I spoke. Also, at our Annual Meeting in April I noticed he was in attendance and heard another report about our work and vision for the future. Finally, I learned later, this same man met privately with one of our Board members and was made aware of our aspirations. He had determined, unknown to the officer on our Board, to make this anonymous contribution by closing out an account he held. His health was declining and he had considered his options.

On September 18, 2014 (the exact same date on the heading of the rejection letter from the Asbury Foundation) our Board of Directors held their bi-monthly meeting. At this meeting it was decided to take the \$207,470.48 and divide it thus: \$150,000.00 – building fund; \$25,000.00 – endowment fund; \$32,470.48 – general fund.

For the next couple of years several properties were considered, but in the end were deemed unsuitable due to cost, location, or condition. One particular piece of property was desirable as a building site, and after turning to it several times (there were delays in formulating the exact boundaries, agreeing on a price, and other issues to clear regarding occupancy), the Board became serious about the purchase. This was mid-August of 2016. It was recommended the neighborhood be surveyed. The vacant field where once a structure stood was in the midst of a line of homes. Innocently, this seeming to me a simple formality

and goodwill gesture, I went door-to-door meeting the homeowners and residents in order to introduce myself, explain our intentions, and survey the people.

After two late afternoons of visits I received only positive feedback and went home encouraged. One older lady offered an interest in becoming a volunteer once we were open. A man who had a catering business expressed a willingness to work with us as his time permitted and might have food to donate. The result was as I expected. Why would anyone have opposition to our fine work?

On the third day everything changed without warning. The woman who had been so supportive and even offered to volunteer, called to say she had changed her mind. She was against our proposal. Two hours later another woman called, whom I'd not met yet, and was stern in her opposition. She was so opposed to the project she threatened to go to the City Council. (In fact, I learned from a friend at dinner that she did go to the City Council to register a complaint so the zoning would not be changed.) After lunch a man called, in whose driveway I had stood and met his whole family. He and his wife were familiar with our ministry and had expressed how wonderful it was. He had changed his mind too! His neighbors had talked and they were against it so he would have to side with them. The reasons I received to justify opposition were declining property values, our dumpster likely attracting critters, and increased traffic.

(It was told to me that one older woman was adamantly opposed and got the ear of her neighbors to muster opposition. The individual who told me this knew the woman and was taken aback by her opposition. He tried to talk it over with her at church but she would not hear of it.) We went no further with the process. Intrigue.

In early 2017 another Board member became aware of property which seemed highly promising. Before a move could be made, he was told it had sold. We lamented the lost opportunity. It wasn't long until word was received that the potential buyer's loan had been denied and this property was again on the market. The Board moved quickly and

the March 23, 2017 meeting was held on Moose Drive to survey the two acres and the 8,000 sq ft brick building constructed on the land. The Board's vote was unanimous to buy it. This began a process of offers and counter offers and property inspections. The legal papers were finally signed by our President, as authorized by the Board, and the money was given to pay for the property in full on the closing date of April 26, 2017. We became owners of the Moose Lodge Building in Laurel.

The architect's model and the floor plan as originally designed, as well as the grant application, had served their purposes. Money had come and a starting point to open discussions was initiated and a search for property was pursued. The outcome was unplanned and unforeseen but our Father honored our efforts in His own way. My original plan to construct a brand new building has been altered. The building to be renovated is almost the exact size as the model. The size of the lot is comparable to that of the one we had hoped to buy in 2016. The Moose Lodge Property was had at a lower cost. The floor plan (on white foam board) can be used as a pattern for restructuring the interior of the Moose Lodge Building.

It took five years but we have a new beginning and renewed enthusiasm for the future. We will be moving from a 3,000 sq ft building in serious decline, with various inherent limitations, to an 8,000 sq ft building with all the limitations removed. This will happen once the existing property on Moose Drive is readied following extensive reworking and repairs. Now we finally have a location and own property we can show. Now donors have a reason to give to something they can actually see. Now we have a project folks can invest themselves into for the future.

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