

All For the Sake of the **Gospel**

THROUGH PRAYERFUL DELIBERATIONS,
ACCESS CHURCH AND 17TH STREET
BAPTIST CHURCH BECAME **ONE CHURCH**

John and Michelle Hayden, along with their three children, live in Roanoke where John is the pastor of the newly merged **Access 17th Street Baptist Church**. The story of the Hayden family and this church vividly displays partnership, mentoring, and perseverance—all for the sake of the Gospel.

While John was serving in the US Navy as a corpsman at Portsmouth Naval Hospital, the Haydens lived in Smithfield, VA, where they were active members at **Harvest Fellowship Baptist Church**. Through serving at Harvest and being mentored by Pastor Randy Green, John and Michelle discerned God's call to ministry and ultimately to plant a church in Roanoke. After serving as a church planter apprentice at Harvest for two years, John and his family moved to Roanoke in August 2010 and had their first small group meeting at a Hardee's restaurant that month.

Hayden recalls, "Harvest Fellowship provided an excellent environment for me to mature spiritually and to learn skills in starting ministry. ...I matured through being in an environment where I could spend a great deal

of time in one-on-one mentoring with Pastor Randy Green, while also receiving encouragement from many peer believers." Part of the hands-on ministry preparation Hayden received at Harvest came through an assignment to start and grow a collegiate ministry from scratch. The Lord enabled Hayden to grow the ministry from 1



*Pastor John and his wife,
Michelle*

Pastors John Hayden and Randy Green

student to over 20 in two years in a non-college town. His ministry preparation was further enhanced by the mentoring of Pastor Green, who led Hayden through guided reading assignments and exposed him to his personal philosophy of ministry. Harvest Fellowship continued to partner with the Haydens even after they moved to Roanoke to plant Access Church.

“Harvest has stuck with us through thick and thin and always believed in us. This consistency and commitment has given us the support and base to continue ministry through some very difficult times.” One such occasion was Thanksgiving weekend of 2012, just two years after they arrived in Roanoke. A fire started in the basement of the house the Haydens were renting, and they lost all of their material possessions. Harvest led the way, along with other churches, family, and friends, to come to their aid. “Within two weeks after the fire, we were in another rental house, completely furnished with donated items...amazed at the way that God provided.” In the midst of recovering from this trial and other difficulties along the way, Hayden says, “God has taught us to pace ourselves for the marathon, not the sprint, and to keep priorities that will keep us healthy spiritually, emotionally, and physically.”

Eight years after the Haydens’ move to Roanoke, Harvest Fellowship is still walking alongside them in partnership. “Harvest has consistently come and provided physical support through annual mission trips—[they’ve] helped with community events, various ministries, and building renovation. Each year, these mission trips give us enough manpower to do as much in a week as we could in one summer alone. These trips also provide direct encouragement from pastoral staff, as well as rejuvenation from renewed friendships that remind us of the family we have in Harvest.”

Hayden learned in 2016 that a small church nearby was without a pastor and was contemplating its ability to continue ministry with limited resources. After prayerful deliberations, Access Church and 17th Street Baptist Church united as one church on May 21, 2017.

“Merging churches has been a healthy and Kingdom-minded experience for both churches,” says Hayden. “The benefits have included 1) combining work and facilities, 2) infusing life into a struggling church through a younger, vibrant church, 3) providing stability to the younger church through an established location, and 4) [being] a witness to the community that we were willing to put behind our desire for our individual churches’ ministries for the benefit of God’s Kingdom.”

For Hayden, embracing and respecting the heritage of an established church with many years of Kingdom service was the key. “We valued each other as believers, continued to emphasize that everyone’s opinion and feelings were important, and we knew as individual churches what we were willing to compromise on [and] what hills we were willing to die on.”

Now just a few months past their first anniversary as one church, Access 17th Street Baptist Church has hit its stride in reaching its community with the Gospel. Harvest Fellowship sent a team of teens and adults in the summer to tackle some remodeling projects in the church facility and assist with outreach ministries.

Perseverance in their calling has been a theme in the Haydens’ story. The crucible of consistent ministry in the face of trials has brought seasoning and growth in their lives. “There are some ways the Potter has shaped us over time that have helped us continue to do ministry,” Hayden explains. The Lord has taught them the lessons of contentment when the fruit of their labor wasn’t readily apparent; dependence on God for all things, including strength, joy, peace, and fulfillment; the need for genuine, loving relationships among those in their community; and finally, humility—something Hayden says, “helps open the door for encouragement from other partners in ministry from which a planter/pastor will benefit greatly, especially when it comes to persevering hardship.”

It has been said that perseverance is long obedience in the same direction. The perseverance of the Hayden family in their service to the Lord and the perseverance of a dedicated partner church are yielding lasting, eternal fruit.

