

OUR STORY

City on a Hill is the direct result of a loving God using a sequence of events, His provision and the faithful obedience of His people to meet the needs of a community.

In Matthew 5:14 and 16 Jesus says, *“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ... In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”* Jesus calls his followers to be the LIGHT of the world, to be a “city on a hill” and bring praise to our Father in Heaven. This can be done in many different ways but God is always the one who inspires, leads and works through people and events to accomplish it. Nothing is too difficult or impossible to keep him from accomplishing it. No matter how “big” the plan may seem to be, or how inadequate or unqualified we think we are, God’s purposes will be fulfilled. He turns our obstacles into His opportunities.

This is true for City on a Hill. It exists because of God working through people and events. It exists in spite of difficulties and what seemed “the impossible.” It is here regardless of human inadequacies or lack of qualifications. It is here because it was God’s plan and His people were faithful in following his leading.

THE BEGINNING

- 2004 -

Zeeland Community Hospital was in the process of building a new hospital. Once completed, the old building would be available for new owners/occupants and it was the hospital’s hope that it would continue to be of use for the community in some way if possible.

The Zeeland Community was experiencing the country’s tight economy. The budgets of many organizations and ministries were being cut while needs were continuing to grow. It was getting harder and harder for many people to receive the assistance they desperately needed. Three compassionate women gathered for prayer asking God what could be done to assist local organizations to meet the growing needs of the community. As they prayed, a dream began to form for a facility where many different non-profit organizations and ministries

could come together to meet the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of the community; a “ministry center” where combined resources could help spread ministry even further.

Haven Christian Reformed Church was committed to meeting the growing needs of its community, but they were faced with space issues. A team was formed to look for a way to expand their facilities. The “soon to be vacant” hospital was mentioned as a possible means of expanding, but was thought of as only a “far-fetched” option.

- 2005 -

As the new Zeeland hospital was nearing completion, the hospital board began to look for a buyer for the former site; the women continued to pray for answers to meeting the community’s needs; and the church continued to seek an answer to their space needs. Again the idea of the hospital as a possible site was mentioned, so a few members of the team decided to take a tour of the hospital to see if it was an option for their church expansion. Instead of finding space for their church, they found a new direction and their objectives changed.

The team began to envision and dream of a separate non-profit organization established at the former hospital site. It would be a new place with a new and different type of ministry center for the city. It would provide various independent ministries with low cost space for serving the community thereby enhancing the ministry’s financial resources. The physical space needed for a ministry’s expansion would also be made available at a reduced rate, allowing established ministries a means to control costs, while new ministries would find special options for the “often difficult start-ups.”

But this team had originally formed to investigate options for the church’s facility issues. They realized they were now considering something more than they could have imagined. And this new and different place for ministry in Western Michigan, which would belong to the community at large, was beyond what they felt qualified to lead. The pastor at Haven Church encouraged the team members to dream and trust God for the necessary provisions.

The pastor had previously served in California and knew of a place in Los Angeles called the Dream Center. It is a home to over 200 ministries located in what was formerly a hospital building. Perhaps God was calling them to create something like this here? So, in order to learn more, several team members paid a visit to the Los Angeles facility to see if this could be duplicated in Zeeland. Upon returning, they felt convinced that they needed to continue to investigate this possibility, to see if this was what God was calling them to do.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Leadership: No one on the team had prior experience in establishing a non-profit organization. They started by asking the Haven Council to consider helping with the start-up of this new ministry place, unsure of the church or community's support for this organization. The Council met to consider the team's request and their support to proceed was unanimous. How was it possible that a venture filled with such human uncertainty would find such overwhelming support here as well as a growing support from the people in the community?

Considering a Bid: In August of 2005 the team met with representatives of the Zeeland Community Hospital to discuss the possibility of placing a bid on the building. By the end of August, the hospital had received a bid from another interested party. The team knew it would now take quicker-than-anticipated action to secure the building. With limited financial resources and only sketchy details on the actual use for the hospital site, the team considered various options, facing even the possibility that it might be time to end the process.

Crossroad: This was a pivotal time in the life of a dream, with many of God's people having to reach outside of their normal comfort zones. Preliminary indicators were that the Haven congregation wanted to move forward in spite of the sketchy details. In September 2005, a proposal was brought before the congregation to put in a bid for the building, and then raise the funds. The nod of approval given by the people of Haven was a sign of God's leading forward. They voted not only to proceed with a bid, but they also approved four start up teams, each with a specific area of responsibility, until a formal board of directors could be established for this new place of ministry.

Low offer: The dollar amount decided upon for the bid was below the hospital's asking price. The question loomed large, would Zeeland Hospital even consider the offer in light of the fact that they already had

another offer on the table? Holding to the dream, but knowing that God was in control of all things, the bid went out. If Zeeland Hospital turned down the bid, that too would be God's leading.

Bid accepted: The President of Zeeland Hospital found his heart touched by this vision, a "city on a hill," a ministry place. He also liked the idea that the hospital facilities could continue to serve people of the community through this vision. He shared his thoughts with the hospital board and by the end of September 2005, the hospital board of directors accepted the bid from the team.

Incorporated: City on a Hill Ministries became officially incorporated on December 5, 2005. The newly formed board held their first board meeting that day. The 501(c)(3) application was signed and submitted to the IRS for approval of tax-exempt status. The board then had to wait for approval from the IRS before donors would be able to receive tax donation receipts for their gifts, the gifts that were vital to the existence of City on a Hill.

- 2006 -

Praise Service: A praise service had been scheduled for late January to help raise community awareness, support and funding. It was fast approaching and there was still no tax-exempt status. Without this, donors would not be able to receive a donation receipt for their gifts. The team was concerned that this could affect the much needed giving. God was again calling His followers to trust Him. The IRS paperwork did arrive, two days before the praise service. The service was held and financial support came in from individuals, the community and area businesses.

Down Payment: Although the Team's offer had been accepted by the hospital, they still did not have all the funds to complete the transaction. In February 2006 a bank loan of \$880,000 became available if the board could raise the \$220,000 down payment required. When the payment came due, City on a Hill had raised much of the down payment, but still needed about \$40,000. God provided the remaining funds through a local church classis just in time to make the down payment.

Management: After agreeing to purchase the building for \$1.1 million without a full business plan, it became apparent to the Board that the organization would need an onsite manager to move forward. City on a Hill began to search for someone with a heart for ministry as well as a proven record of accomplishments. One of the board members was given the name of such a person, and after interviewing him it was obvious he was a perfect fit. In February 2006, the board hired Gary Ellens as a part time consultant. He was later hired as the full-time Director.

Possession: City on a Hill took possession of the hospital building May 31, 2006 with 6 non-profit organizations as their first onsite partners. The vision of City on a Hill, to unite in serving the needs of the community, had become a reality. But it was not complete. It had only just begun.

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The story of City on a Hill is centered on faith and acceptance of the fact that God will do things His way. It is an account of individual stories of those who stepped out in faith, using the talents and time God gave them. Different people with the same vision came together with the mutual understanding that it was not about them, but about Him.

City on a Hill will continue to *“let their light shine so that men can see their good deeds and give praise to our Father in heaven”* through serving independent non-profit ministries, enhancing ministries’ ability to bring hope, help and healing around the world. They will continue to do this through faithful obedience to God’s leading and dependence on God’s provisions and timing.

POST SCRIPT

You may be wondering why people would take on such a HUGE endeavor with such limited time, resources and planning. From a human standpoint, we say this was not very “wise”. But man’s wisdom is not God’s wisdom. The team was seeking God’s wisdom.

The Bible’s teachings and prayer were very influential in leading and guiding the team, as well as a book by Bruce Wilkinson called The Dream Giver. In the book, the author invites God’s people to leave their comfort zones and live out the call of “the” Dream Giver, God himself, and reminding ordinary Christian people to believe that God provides for the dreams He gives and the provision comes in His perfect timing.

The book goes on to say that when we are discouraged, God provides “white feathers” (figurative or actual) as reminders that He is leading. It could be an unexpected solution to a challenge, a word spoken at just the right time affirming God’s leading, unusual support or assistance, or perhaps even an actual “white feather” appearing during a day.

As the team continued their pursuit of this dream, there were times that they were discouraged and tempted to quit. But then they encountered their own “white feathers” that affirmed them in what they were doing and encouraged them to continue. Funds provided at just the right time, paperwork received by deadlines, unrealistic requests being granted, and even a white feather found on a windshield after a planning meeting. Yes, God was faithful in His leading, directing and providing. He continues to be faithful as City on a Hill continues to strive to be the “light of the world.”