



Church Planting in Greater Tulsa, **Oklahoma**



# CHURCH PLANTING IN GREATER TULSA



For many years, Christ Presbyterian Church (CPC) was the only PCA church in Tulsa OK. CPC was committed to planting more churches but lacked the resources necessary to plant healthy churches. In 2005 they reached out to the Southwest Church Planting Network, currently led by Bill Thomas. The Network director at that time, Brad Bradley, began making trips to Tulsa, assessed the community, met with potential core group members, agreed to fund the work, and eventually recruited Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) campus minister Ricky Jones. “We were a perfect match, coming quickly to a common vision to develop the Tulsa area through church planting, by being sensitive to what the Lord is doing, through a willingness to say by faith, ‘Yes! That looks awesome! Let’s do that.’”



Ricky Jones, pastor at RiverOaks Presbyterian Church.

A core group of 30 people from CPC was already meeting when Jones arrived. The new group led by Jones became RiverOaks Presbyterian and set three main goals:



RiverOaks Presbyterian Church, Tulsa OK.

to study the gospel together, to eat together, and to celebrate together. Though meals and celebrations drew people in, the real nourishment is a gospel of grace and rest, which the city so desperately needs. “A lot of churches in Tulsa do more harm than good with the message that if you’re not healthy, wealthy, and happy, you’re not a good Christian.” Jones explains. “Our main job has been sharing the good news that the gospel brings rest and healing.”

As RiverOaks grew, people began joining from Owasso, a suburb 20 miles away. Jones began leading a monthly worship service there. Through conversations and prayer over time with Blake Altman, a Dallas Seminary graduate who was serving in Princeton NJ, Altman became persuaded that God had prepared his heart for joining the church planting efforts in Tulsa. “I was ready to transition from campus ministry, but I longed to plant with a college of planters. Ricky and I shared similar desires for a team approach. CPC was supportive, too.

To collaborate and learn from each other felt right – something good is happening here!” said Altman.

Altman attributes the strong beginning of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Owasso to the collaboration between RiverOaks and CPC. “Both churches were instrumental in sending to us their congregants who lived in Owasso. It was a real testimony of the gospel in Tulsa – a place of division and hurt within the church – to see RiverOaks, CPC, and Trinity celebrating each other’s victories, preaching the gospel, working together.” Each church has a slightly different feel to match the needs of the area.



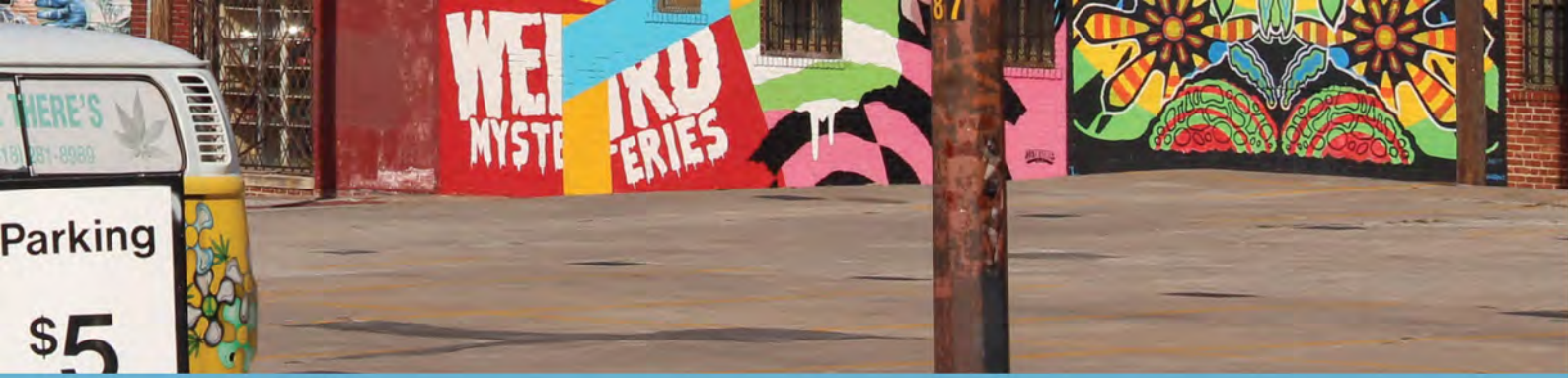
Blake Altman, pastor at Trinity Presbyterian Church.

“We are all committed to the same theology and yet we have a flexible methodology so we can serve the unique needs of our core demographics,” said Altman. “Trinity has a high liturgical order of worship and seeks to engage families and connect leaders in the city.”

*“We were a perfect match, coming quickly to a common vision to develop the Tulsa area through church planting, by being sensitive to what the Lord is doing, through a willingness to say by faith, ‘Yes! That looks awesome! Let’s do that.’”*

**~Ricky Jones, RiverOaks Presbyterian Church**





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**–Blake Altman, Trinity Presbyterian Church**

Trinity offers their church office building, a 1930s downtown office space called Trinity House, as a workspace for the community Monday through Friday. The church is considering purchase of a church building that

cially Cherokees, whose national headquarters are an hour east of Tulsa. Given the right person and funding, I would love to see a church plant there.”

Oklahoma. Three Rivers serves its community with the message that “grace changes everything.”

Trinity has already seen God’s blessing through church planting. What began as a community group at Trinity in January 2014

Just south of downtown Tulsa, Ethos Presbyterian Church is another congregation launched from RiverOaks. This time, rather than Jones searching for a church planter, Beau Berman found him. Berman, who grew up in Tulsa, returned to Dallas



Trinity Presbyterian Church, Tulsa OK.



Left to right: Alyssa, Pete, Kim and Jacob James; Mike, Hudson, Jenn and Meg Phelps; Ryan, Chase, Jessica and Brooklyn Siemens.

could also serve as a community center and base for non-profits serving Owasso. Trinity seeks to provide those exhausted, lonely, and distracted a place of rest, community, and calling.

“The single most evangelistic thing we do is help younger people find rest in the church. Often, Millennials especially don’t have a space in their lives free from the need to perform or stay connected. We try to provide rest for people who have never felt it before. How awesome that the church can be that place for them!” said Altman.

Looking to the future, Altman sees an opportunity to start a church plant to serve the Cherokee community. “There is a need to effectively reach Native Americans, espe-

has now grown into Three Rivers Church (PCA) in Grove OK, eighty minutes northeast of Owasso on Grand Lake. Their church planting pastor Mark Kuiper has pastored churches from coast to coast and loves ministering to the people of

Seminary after serving as a youth pastor in Memphis. While taking a church planting class presented by the Acts 29 network, he felt called to the Tulsa area. Acts 29 recommended that Berman serve in a church planting internship. The only problem was Berman didn’t know of any reformed churches in Tulsa.

“When Beau walked into RiverOaks, he had never been to a reformed church in Tulsa,” said Jones. “That visit led to him joining our church, and I ended up asking him to intern at RiverOaks with the plan to



Left to right: Mark & Tammy Kuiper; Joanna & Clayton Baker with baby Gentry; Justin & Heidi Chizmar with baby Eden; Ricky & Carrie Couch with their children Brodie & Carrie; Pat Dalke.



Beau Berman, pastor at Ethos Presbyterian Church.





launch him as the lead pastor of a daughter church in three years.” Not long after that, RiverOaks also joined the Acts 29 network. Ethos officially launched in January 2013, and today is a thriving church with the primary mission of reaching the lost and making disciples for Christ.



Pacto de Gracia (Covenant of Grace),  
Tulsa OK.

Pacto de Gracia (Covenant of Grace) is a Spanish language mission church of RiverOaks, begun in 2016 under the leadership of staff member Raul Bermudez, a Baptist seminary trained pastor originally from Puerto Rico. Upon moving to Tulsa, Bermudez sought wisdom from Jones regarding leaving the Baptist church due to his reformed beliefs. Bermudez joined RiverOaks and then joined the staff to help plant a church serving the Spanish language people of the city. Spanish speakers in Tulsa include both a more fluid working class community from Mexico and a more established upper class community of South American transplants with the oil industry. The church has drawn both into its fellowship.

Bermudez also leads outreach trips to Cuba. This ministry door opened when Bermudez went along on a baseball outreach trip with another religious leader in the city. “The sponsors of the trip noticed Raul’s honesty



Raul Bermudez, pastor at  
Pacto de Gracia (Covenant of Grace).

and courage and revoked the visa from the original leader – and gave it instead to Raul,” said Jones. This provided a way for Bermudez to go to Cuba quarterly, accompanied by up to 30 ministry volunteers.

When the presbytery and Tulsa churches began an RUF campus ministry at the University of Tulsa in 2001, they were nurturing future church plants as well as serving students. “Church planting and college ministries go beautifully together,” says RUF campus minister Brent Corbin. “College students need a welcoming church home and mission churches need energetic members. Students usually don’t mind if church plants don’t have much in the way of established programming and are often willing to help when a church communicates its needs.”



Left to right: campus minister Brent Corbin with  
interns Joey Kime and Kyra Fry.

Corbin grew up in Oklahoma and was invited to RUF in college. “Through RUF, the gospel actually became good news to me,” said Corbin. After seminary and an RUF



RUF Leaders.

internship at Vanderbilt University, he was called to Tulsa. Corbin is thankful that the growing number of PCA churches in Tulsa offer the students more choices in a church home. “When we moved to Tulsa, there were two wonderful PCA churches here: CPC and RiverOaks. Over the past six years, Trinity, Ethos, and Pacto de Gracia all love and support RUF,” said Corbin.



All left to right. Back row: Caleb Harlan, Brent Corbin, Philip Abode, Ricky Jones, Raul Bermudez. 3rd row: Ross Turner, Jason Averill, TJ Warren, Blake Altman. 2nd row: Beau Berman, Ethan Tonne, Caleb Long. Front row: Jason Bobo, Jonathan Dorst.

A key to the growth in church planting has been the regular times the pastors spend together. Understanding the isolation of church planters, Jones began a weekly lunch gathering for the pastors and pastoral candidates. Altman remembers attending the Monday lunch meetings from the very first week he was in Tulsa. *(Continued on reverse)*



# CHURCH PLANTING (CONTINUED)

“We meet together every week, no matter what. We are all very different people from different places with different style churches, but we all enjoy being together,” said Altman. “Our mutual love and respect for one another allow us to want to be together and to drop everything to make our Monday lunch a priority. Other pastors have visited and said, ‘what you guys have here is rare!’”

Philip Abode, the pastor at Crossover Community Church, a predominantly African American Evangelical Free Church in north Tulsa, has been part of that lunch group for years. Abode asked the group for prayer that he would find an intern. God answered, and Philip thanked the group for praying, “I got an intern! And he’s a PCA guy!” Covenant Seminary grad Caleb Long serves Crossover as an intern. When he completes his ordination process in 2017, Long plans to launch a multi-racial PCA church in north Tulsa, growing out of the Evangelical Free Church and supported by the PCA churches in the area as well.

“Everyone in the group is supporting and cheering on Caleb,” said Altman. What



Pictured at Crossover Health Services, left to right: intern Caleb Long, pastor Philip Abode, Dr. Kent Farish, and Justin Pickard, executive director of Crossover Community Impact.

started as lunch to encourage a few church planters has grown into what is now a Pastor’s College. In tandem with the MNA LAMP alternative seminary program, the Pastor’s College has the larger vision of developing pastors and church planters for Tulsa and the region. It grew out of a partnership of the pastors of CPC and RiverOaks and includes pastors and future pastors from six area PCA churches, an Acts 29 church, and Crossover.



LAMP program students and professors. All left to right. Back row: Jonathan Maust, Brent Corbin, Ross Turner. Middle row: Isabelle Beisiegel, Jason Averill, Jonathan Dorst. Front row: Amber Drew, Sheri Willson.

“There are eighteen men in the Pastor’s College and most of them have plans for or are involved in church planting,” said Jonathan Dorst, associate pastor at RiverOaks and site director for LAMP and the Pastor’s College. RiverOaks’ LAMP started with five full-time students, five part-time students, and Christian Education classes for churches. In 2016, they began offering classes in Spanish under

Bermudez’ leadership. “We are scheming and planning for the next five church plants in the greater Tulsa area. An additional four or five church plants beyond those will provide the base for a new presbytery in the region,” said Dorst.

Some ways God is using the PCA to advance his work in the Tulsa area:

- **Most of all, a commitment to the advancement of the gospel, changing lives through people coming to Christ.**
- **Growing churches based on the unique needs of each community.**
- **Recruiting pastors and training locally for ordination to the gospel ministry and church planting.**
- **Churches working closely together, with pastors enjoying encouragement through fellowship with one another.**
- **Celebrating and proclaiming what God is doing.**

For many years, CPC stood faithfully as the only PCA church in the area. Dorst summarizes, “A big key of the success we are seeing in Tulsa comes from a lack of territorialism and a sincere desire to cheer for one another’s success and the success of gospel ministry in the local church.”

*“[There is] a sincere desire to cheer for one another’s success and the success of gospel ministry in the local church.”*

**~Jonathan Dorst, RiverOaks Presbyterian Church**

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RIVEROAKS, TRINITY, ETHOS, AND OTHERS

# From the Coordinator

*“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* -Matthew 11:28



As summer rushes toward a close, its school breaks and family vacations now spent, we find ourselves still yearning for rest. Summer never seems to last long enough to give us the refreshment we crave. Underneath our dreams of an extended summer holiday are deeper longings, longings for deep rest, longings for peace and hope to saturate the core of our being.

Jesus promises this true rest, as we take his training harness upon us and experience his grace and love afresh through the gospel: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29)

I love that the whole Tulsa missional movement, growing across the last twelve years, comes from living and sharing this soul rest in Jesus.

Tulsa movement leader Ricky Jones says it so well, “Our main job has been sharing the good news that the gospel brings rest and healing.” Indeed. Blake Altman, church planter in nearby Owasso, notes: “The single most evangelistic thing we do is help younger people find rest in the church. ...We try to provide rest for people who have never felt it before.”

As fall arrives, with its schedules and demands, may true rest in Jesus be yours, as you wonder again at what his cross and resurrection provide: freedom from guilt and shame, release from finding identity through personal achievement, confidence of fruitfulness and blessing in missional living, all right in the middle of your fatigue, brokenness and pain. May you find rest in Jesus and share it with those in your world. Amen.

Paul Hahn  
MNA Coordinator