

A Story of God's Providence

Pastor William Heinrich

Providence is the actions of God in history in which He brings to pass His sovereign purposes. Specifically, it is God acting in the lives of His chosen people. God has always been a providential God, as clearly seen in the lives of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David, Paul, and especially the incarnate Jesus.

We will relate yet another story of God's providence and look at one small church, "Sovereign Grace Baptist Church." Even this story is too big to tell completely, but where do we start?

Perhaps we should begin with young Billy, who was taken to church every Sunday by his parents. It was the Old German Baptist Brethren Church located at 2766 N. Dakota Avenue, Modesto, California. Time moved on though, and when he was 21 years old, Billy met and married an Old German Baptist Brethren girl from Kansas, Ellen. And in a relatively short time, the family grew as God blessed them with four wonderful children.

When Billy, now called Bill or William, turned 26 years of age, God saved him. This act of God's sovereign grace brought an abrupt and wonderful change in Bill's life. He and Ellen were baptized and joined the Old German Baptist Brethren Fellowship on N. Dakota. Soon Bill was teaching two Bible studies in their home.

In January of 1971 God began making the first of many changes in Bill's life. Bill began attending San Francisco Baptist Theological Seminary. He also changed churches and began taking his family to La Loma Grace Brethren Church and then later the Ripon Grace Brethren Fellowship.

The next major change was the move from California to Indiana to attend Grace Seminary. After graduation, Bill was called by God to the First Baptist Church of Delphi, Indiana. He served the Lord there for twelve and a half years as the Senior Pastor.

In 1986, our sovereign and providential God made more changes. He led the Heinrich family back to California to serve Him for fifteen years as the Senior Pastor at First Baptist Church of Ceres. The stay at FBC was very fruitful. Every month with few exceptions, new converts were being baptized. The sanctuary overflowed into the small chapel. But God's providence soon revealed He had still another plan. The fruitful ministry of fifteen years ended, and a new, great challenge began to unfold.

On Aug 19, 2001, a small group of about 20 people, led by Pastor William Heinrich, met in the home of Andrew and Kendra Fletcher for "church". At a later meeting in Pastor Heinrich's front yard, the name was chosen and the fellowship of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church was formed. And in choosing the name, this small group acknowledged it was surely a work of God's providence.

Soon God's careful hand was seen again. This time, the kind people of Central Seventh Day Adventist Church opened their doors to the members of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church (SGBC). Since the Seventh Day Adventists met on Saturdays, they kindly allowed SGBC to rent their beautiful facilities on Sundays.

From the very beginning, God placed on Pastor Heinrich's heart the necessity of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church having a building to call its own, and so a building fund was established. During this time at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, SGBC was blessed with the visitation ministry of Pastor Shepard and the youth ministries of Pastor Worrell.

After almost three years of meetings, God put it on the hearts of Casey and Chris Van Ryes to show us a fine building on Kansas Avenue. The new facility's advantage was that it could be used seven days a week. However, the rent was too great for our church alone.

Once again God provided and the space was shared with the Harvest Fire Empowerment Center. The relationship with Pastor Jerry Smith and his wife Anita was very sweet. During the years we shared the building, Johnnie Sloan became the Assistant Pastor of SGBC and took over half the preaching. This providential act of God actually started way back in 1994 when Johnnie and his wife, Jaymee, came under the mentorship of Pastor Heinrich. Years of leading and teaching prepared Johnnie for the future ministry at SGBC. What a wonderful blessing they have been to the church.

Throughout this time, the "Building Fund," as it became known, was growing. After searching diligently for a building for two years, God led Pastor Heinrich full circle back to the very place where "Billy" got his start—the Old German Baptist Brethren property on N. Dakota Avenue. When Pastor Heinrich learned that the church would be offered for sale, he requested to be given first opportunity of purchase. However, when the church listed the property, the price was far beyond what SGBC could offer.

But time passed and property values began to decline. Soon the Dakota property was sold to another group, and it seemed God had told us "no," so we continued looking elsewhere. However, God's continuing providence was reflected a few months later, when the other group changed their mind and retracted their offer.

Pastor Heinrich, armed with faith the size of a mustard seed and an additional two years of building fund savings, approached the selling agent and an agreement was made. This story has its own amazing account of God's sovereignty and could fill three pages by itself, but there is just not enough time.

The Old German Baptist Brethren church members were excited to sell to someone who grew up there; Pastor Heinrich and the entire SGBC membership were equally excited. And so the search for a sufficient loan began.

In the six and a half years of their existence, the membership had saved enough money to place a down payment for one-third of the asking price. But banks do not like to loan to churches, so God, in His awesome providence, provided a much better way.

Two years earlier, at approximately the same time that SGBC first looked at the Dakota property, the Aurora Baptist Church had closed and sold. A portion of the Aurora church's sale price was promised to the California Association of Regular Baptist Churches (CARBC) to invest and then use the interest earned to start new churches. *So just when SGBC needed a loan, the money became available.*

CARBC granted a loan with an interest rate far below normal bank offerings. CARBC's loan, combined with a smaller loan provided by a Christian individual, also at an interest rate lower

than the bank's, provided enough money for the remaining two-thirds of the purchase price. Also, an agreement was achieved with our bank allowing us to cash our certificates of deposit early and without penalty.

The final papers were signed on Pastor and Ellen's anniversary, February 13th and the first service was held on February 17th. It was held in the basement because the sanctuary upstairs was undergoing renovation.

The much anticipated first service in the sanctuary was held on March 2. It was an emotional and tearful event, causing Pastor Heinrich some difficulty at the start of his sermon.

All of this is part of God's sovereign grace, and we are supremely grateful, but the story continues. The large down payment left SGBC short of money, with many improvements still needed. However, God knows this and is seeing to the completion of the work He has begun. Let us look at some of His providential actions:

1. The sanctuary and other areas upstairs needed carpeting and a man said he would sell the carpet to us at cost. Then the manufacturer reduced the carpet's price below what a dealer pays. If that were not enough, the cost was reduced even more as two Christian men laid the carpet at a reduced rate as an act of worship.
2. A backhoe was needed to complete some drainage work on the property. God provided someone with his own equipment who is willing to donate his labor and complete all work as needed.
3. A Christian painter offered to paint the church free of charge. Additionally, the paint store sold to us below contractor price and then gave us fifteen gallons for free.
4. God also worked out an unusual concession for the church sign.
5. At the "Pastor and Wives" retreat in Cambria, a pastor from Gardena offered a "Wolfe" commercial range free for our kitchen. A man in our church then voluntarily went and picked it up.
6. The tile for the three upstairs bathrooms was donated by three different people. An antique mirror was also donated.
7. The labor to remove the old asbestos tiles from all of the upstairs flooring was donated.

God also raised up people to lead and see to completion all the many and various improvements:

- Ken Ernst was the vital and tireless real estate overseer.
- Todd Heinrich is overseeing the drainage needs.
- Mickey Prescott and Todd are hard at work completing the Sunday School rooms with vital help from many, especially Michael Marti with the heating and air conditioning ducting, Mike Boyd installing sheetrock, and free advice from James Fultz, a heating and air conditioning specialist.

- Steve Bell oversaw the removal of the old tile upstairs and the carpeting.
- General décor for the entire church was in the capable hands of Anne Ernst and Becky Heinrich.
- The nursery was painted with a Noah's ark theme by Brenda Rogers.
- The sign was seen to completion by Pastor Sloan.
- Pastor Sloan also oversaw the painting of the sanctuary, which was done for free by Kenny Chapman.
- Moving was in the able hands of Jim Collins and Doug Shipper.
- The platform was built by Sergio Magana and his brother Jose, who donated all their labor.
- Landscaping was donated by the able horticulturist hands of Steven Lybolt.
- Dan Matthew jump started the bathroom remodel, and Mike Mattox saw it to completion with special help laying new tile from Edgar Wheeler and Doug Schipper.

God raised up these people to provide the wisdom and labor as a sacrificial gift to God through His Church. Others that must be mentioned for their repeated help are James Parra, Mike Baca, Jeremy Blancarte, Ellen Heinrich, Randy Gisler, and members of the Polovin family. Add to this list the cheerful and lively help provided so freely by many others.

Since God's providence doesn't stop, we must acknowledge that even more has happened since this was written. We ask you to continue with us, listing each thing and rejoicing often. Our God shows His providence in many ways. It is thrilling to look to the future of this ministry and what our amazing and providential God will do here. We encourage believers to look for His providence, and you will be awestricken with how good God is to His people, bringing His will to pass and blessing His born-again children.