

**Back to Basics at FRESH Church in Irmo**

Karee Richardson says her church is like family. She and her husband have been attending FRESH Church since 2016, because they were drawn to its welcoming atmosphere where they felt they could be themselves.

“At FRESH Church you come as you are. Pastor Greg is a gifted preacher and speaks the truth from the Bible. He keeps it so real and fresh. I’m always learning, and can’t wait to go to church on Sunday,” she says.

Founded in 2013 with 15 people who met in a living room each week, FRESH Church currently holds worship on Sunday mornings in an Irmo area elementary school. Small groups meet during the week and vibrant missions and ministry opportunities draw individuals like Karee to plug into serving as they grow in their faith.

“I’m proud to be a part of FRESH Church because it’s grown me, and Pastor Greg’s teaching has challenged me. I’m choosing to put that into practice, and it’s blessed my life. I’ve gone through some hard things and it’s helped me to be able to process those things in a healthy way,” Karee says.

According to Pastor Greg Dowey, God called him into church planting to reach people like Karee. From studying it in seminary to church planting experiences in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, he says God has used these experiences to refine and prepare him for the launch of FRESH Church.

“Being a pastor is not about glamor or fame, but about being in the trenches leading people and growing up a vibrant congregation for the Lord. When God calls you to be a pastor, you’d better be a pastor,” he says.

Greg talks candidly about how God has helped him focus on the fundamentals of church planting, namely bringing things back to basics.

“I don’t have any magic principle that I use except to know that we are seeking a holy God, and, to me, church growth is not a game. Our church is seeking after being in a deeper relationship with God and getting to know His righteousness and holiness. This leads us to do some basic things,” he says.

When FRESH Church members were recently learning about prayer, the church invested in kneeling pads bearing Romans 12:12 to remind them of its importance. Members are taught about giving and serving locally, domestically and globally. Following experiences through South Carolina Baptist Convention vision trips to Detroit and Canada, FRESH Church now partners with several churches through prayer and financial support in those areas and sent a 2018 church team to serve there.

About ten years ago, Greg and his wife Missie founded Simple Ministries, a Bible distribution mission organization that reaches countries closed to the gospel. It’s one way that FRESH Church members can participate in international missions, obeying God’s call in their lives.

Karee says the story of how God called her to serve on an international mission team began with an invitation from a young client, who asked if she needed Jesus. Struck by his boldness, Karee says she mentioned it to a coworker and took it to heart. The next four years held times of heartache and loss for Karee and her husband, but God used their experiences at FRESH Church to provide healing, growth and, as it turned out, an unexpected connection to that former client.

The man’s family attends FRESH Church and he now serves on the mission field in a country served by Simple Ministries. Karee was presented with an opportunity to join a FRESH Church mission team that happened to be visiting near the area where the former client now serves.

“I never imagined I’d ever do anything with ministry or be one of those people who went on a mission trip. But it was an overwhelming joy to be able to put this Bible - that I owned at least five of – into the hands of these people who were so grateful and thankful to receive it. God also orchestrated a dinner on the trip with my former client, so I was able to catch him up on what happened to me after that encounter five years before,” she says, adding that the trip has given her a new passion for ministry.

Seeing evidence of this kind of life change is a part of the experience at FRESH Church, where Greg says the focus is helping folks to grow deeper with God in order to go farther with God.

“I am seeing people that are disenfranchised with the modern-day Church who miss true discipleship and worship. We’ve got people that are coming to FRESH Church that dismissed God in their twenties and thirties, but now are saying ‘wait a minute…’ They are attracted to our real approach to doing church biblically and scripturally, that we put a high regard on the Word of God,” he says.

FRESH Church has recently signed a contract to purchase 20 acres of land. The move represents the church’s vision for future generations, which is a priority for the congregation that not only welcomes children into the weekly worship services but celebrates them through prayer and even applause.

“We want them to know we love them. If seven out of 10 kids are leaving the church after high school, then why are we doing the same thing? We are trying to take our church back to a real congregation instead of playing church. I want our folks – and children - to know this real God. I want our church to be unified, and have love for each other,” Greg says.

When asked about pivotal times in his church planting experience, Greg points to the realization that in order to be fulfilled as a pastor and church planter he had to fully submit to God.

“God took me back to finding out who He is. I had to be genuinely committed to Him rather than church growth, seeking His holiness rather than seeking a certain number of people on Sunday morning. Psalms says ‘unless the Lord builds the house it’s in vain,’ so that means I’m His errand boy. Whatever He wants to do I’ll do it. He called me to pastor in the Irmo/Chapin area and until I nailed that down and said I’ll be here for the rest of my life, I wasn’t happy. When we are seeking Him, He’ll take us farther,” says Greg.