



A Brief History

Before I proceed, I just want to say that I have purposefully decided to not mention the name of anyone who has played a particular role in the Covenant Children's Home ministry for two reasons: (1) there have been so many it would be difficult to mention them all and I don't want to run the risk of leaving anyone out, and (2) many of them do not wish to have any notoriety for the role they have played and we should respect that.

In 1994, my wife and I moved to Dunnellon to help plant Springs Presbyterian Church. As the church family began to grow, it became apparent the Lord was bringing together a special group of people who had a common interest in the welfare of children in our area who were in need of foster care. One couple even became foster parents. This gave the rest of us the opportunity to interact directly with the children that came under their care. Eventually, this couple adopted one of their foster kids who also became an integral part of the SPC family. As a young adult, he joined the army and is now just a few years short of full retirement. He is married and has three kids of his own.

By the time we began to look for property to purchase, we intentionally looked for a parcel that would be big enough to accommodate both the church and the children's home. That is why we decided on the 28 acres on C-39 where both SPC and CCH are currently located. Shortly after the first phase of construction was completed for the church in 2000, a steering committee was formed to begin taking the necessary steps required to make the children's home a reality. One of the first of these was to come up with a name for this new ministry. From a number of suggestions that were submitted, Covenant Children's Home was chosen because it reflected the level of commitment we knew would be required to truly make a difference in the lives of these young people. We wanted them to know that we were unconditionally committed to helping them. In conjunction with this, the church kids were asked to submit possible ideas for a CCH logo. The one that is still being used today, is actually a composite of a number of these. About this time, the church also hosted an event that was intended to make our plans known publicly, especially to our Citrus Springs neighbors. We wanted to give them the opportunity to voice any concerns they might have before we proceeded. Even though a few had questions, everyone seemed to agree that this was actually a good thing for the community.

The next step was to incorporate CCH. A local attorney, whom we had a common connection with through the PCA denomination, did this for us pro bono. The by-laws provided that CCH fall under the oversight of the board of elders at SPC. The reason for this was not for the church to dictate everything that CCH did, but primarily to ensure that the children's home would remain a Christian ministry through the years. The organizational meeting for the CCH corporation took place on August 25, 2002. A short time later, an agreement was drafted in which the church leased approximately 20 acres to CCH at the cost of \$1.00/year. Things were

set up this way in order to protect the interest of the church in the event that CCH would have to shut down at some point.

For a time, things progressed very slowly. None of us had ever done anything like this before so much was simply done by trial and error. Initially the children's home was licensed through the Florida Association of Christian Child Care Agencies. Unfortunately, the CCH struggled at this point to locate children from our area who would benefit from living at CCH and so this association was eventually dissolved and the ministry became state licensed through DCF in 2012.

A major milestone was reached when the first residence was completed in 2009 and called "Faith House." A second residence is now under construction and will prayerfully be finished within the next year. The ultimate goal is to have five homes on the campus and a Christian school that will service the CCH kids and any local children who wish to attend.

At this point in the ministry, CCH has had numerous donors, board members, directors, office assistants, house parents, and volunteers. All of these are greatly appreciated for the personal sacrifices they have made for the advancement of this ministry. CCH could not have come as far as it has without them. Most important of all are the house parents who live with the kids 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Unfortunately, the commitment level required to fill this special role results in a high burn out rate. Our experience is that most of these couples last about a year before they become overwhelmed and feel compelled to move on. Like any ministry position, it takes a special calling to be an effective houseparent. The two couples who are currently serving had many years of experience before coming to us and appear to be committed to be here over the long haul. We are most thankful for this because it helps to create the stability we have longed to establish for these young people.

Much has been accomplished over these years through CCH, but much work still remains to be done. Please keep all of the CCH kids, as well as the board and staff, in your thoughts and prayers. They are greatly needed and much appreciated.

Pastor R. Keeth Staton
Springs Presbyterian Church, Dunnellon, FL