



## And Also with 'Cue

**W**hat do you get when you combine the efforts of an award-winning pitmaster with a church that wants to build community in new and creative ways? Can we bring our downtown neighbors to a table where they can share stories over a glass of sweet tea? How might we serve those who visit our Clothing Ministry with more than a pair of shoes? What might happen if we put great barbecue in our back parking lot?

This spring, Trey Davis sparked a conversation between Leah Reed and David With [see sidebar] about how we might use the church's mission project grant to blend their shared interests in a give-back business. At the May 2019 church conference, the church approved the major mission project grant of \$50,000 to purchase a food trailer that will launch a walk-up barbecue restaurant in our parking lot starting in August. This hybrid initiative will sell lunch to downtown neighbors and give away food to those in need.

We spoke with Trey, Leah, and David about the vision for this new partnership and when we can get our hands on one of those delicious sandwiches from the new walk-up restaurant, And Also with 'Cue. Comments have been edited for length and clarity.

### **Tell us about your vision for this give-back restaurant.**

**David:** The missional restaurant business concept is simple: when you buy a meal, you contribute to a meal for a downtown neighbor. With each purchase, you support the ministry. The goal is to serve delicious food and to contribute to the broader mission of building up God's kingdom in downtown Raleigh. We want you to know that your purchase of a BBQ plate will also go to support hungry people in your community. Being in the heart of downtown, we know FBC's parking lot is a great location.



My dad was a minister to churches in Virginia and North Carolina, so I have roots in both states, but I call eastern NC home. My mom was a public school teacher for 41 years. She retired to a life of gardening and traveling with friends following my dad's passing in April 2018 after a 10-year battle with leukemia. The two greatest loves of my life — even ahead of barbecue and ministry — are my amazingly supportive wife, Sarah, a research scientist at RTI International, and our energetic “three-nager,” Olivia. I attended Campbell and Wake Forest universities and now I'm finishing up my doctoral thesis at Boston University. Vocationally, I've served three NC churches during and since graduation from seminary. I served as the student minister at Hayes Barton Baptist Church and as the associate pastor at FBC Clayton before deciding to take a break from church ministry to focus on catering, writing my thesis and assisting with care for my dad. I've been fortunate to continue speaking and preaching at various churches during this time as well.

— David

**Leah:** And for the give-back component, we'll be taking the food truck out into underserved neighborhoods and agencies in downtown Raleigh, setting up picnic tables, handing out free barbecue sandwiches, and building community with people that might never set foot on our church property otherwise. Volunteers from First Baptist would join the truck at these sites and strive to connect with clients, offer prayer, referrals, or assistance with other needs, and form genuine community.

**Trey:** I'm excited about this project allowing First Baptist to address some of the goals we've talked about for a long time. I think this restaurant will bring people who live and work downtown onto our church property, giving us an opportunity to connect with them and introduce them to the kind of church we are. It's also going to expand our hands-on ministry to those in need downtown, building deeper relationships with that community and providing more opportunities for our own congregation to serve. Finally, after we set aside \$50,000 for an additional mission project, we will have established an alternative revenue stream for our church, allowing this project and many others at First Baptist to thrive. The chance to take a shot at any one of those goals would be exciting, but we have an opportunity to address all of them at once.

### And how will it work day to day?

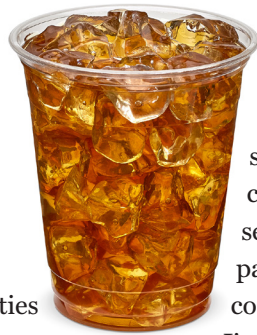
**David:** The food trailer would be open weekdays for lunch — 11 to 2 — and will operate from the FBC parking lot. The menu will include

barbecue sandwiches and a smoked meat-of-the-day such as brisket, chicken, sausage or ribs. We'll also offer a variety of sides, plus tea or soda. Down the road, we might include a daily pie or homemade old-fashioned banana pudding, but the initial focus will be on serving great barbecue and sides. This would be run as a regular food truck with the goal of being a self-sustaining business.

**Leah:** Then, two afternoons a week at 2 p.m., the truck will travel to downtown Raleigh locations to distribute sandwiches free of charge to those in need. I'm currently scouting out locations and reaching out to different non-profit agencies that serve our community. We love the concept of partnering with an organization that is already in relationship with our neighbors in need, doing the work of building community in downtown Raleigh. It's our hope to come alongside these established non-profits, partnering together to get to know our neighbors.

### What's the back story?

**David:** When the recession happened in 2008, my student ministry budget was hit hard, and those cuts really put the brakes on our program's momentum. So when I began a Doctor of Ministry program at Boston University, I started researching how churches have partnered with for-profit businesses as a way to approach long-term sustainability while giving back to the community. I've learned that churches through the ages have successfully sponsored, partnered with, and/or founded Christian businesses.



For example, Trappist monasteries in Europe have run cheese, beer/wine, vestment-making, chocolate, and farming businesses for centuries. The money goes to support local communities and to keep their organizations running smoothly. It's a win-win scenario for the church and the community.

**Leah:** As I began getting to know our neighbors that come to FBC through the Clothing Ministry, I started noticing a gap. When people come through our doors looking for clothing, they're almost always looking for something more. Some of them need food, a place to wash their clothes, jobs, showers, and we point them to other organizations that can provide those resources. But they're also looking for something deeper than a bag of clothes — community, connection, and a place to belong.

We've been inspired by the Relief Bus run by New York City Relief. Our youth group has worked with this non-profit on their mission trips. The Relief Bus serves as a mobile kitchen and resource center for the homeless in NYC. They take the bus into underserved neighborhoods, set up a long table for community-building conversation, and feed people a simple meal. They also distribute hygiene kits, socks, and offer to pray with people. The volunteers have conversations about housing, rehab, and employment as they eat together. Our vision is a food truck that can help meet the needs of our downtown neighbors by cultivating meaningful relationships over the table.

## Why a barbecue truck?

**David:** I grew up in Kinston, which claims to be the eastern NC capital of barbecue. My dad was from Kansas City, MO, which is for all intents and purposes the midwestern capital of barbecue. I've always had a passion for low and slow, wood-smoked barbecue. In 2010, I attended a barbecue

school led by the Number 1 competition cook in the country. I learned all of the secrets to success. In 2012, I talked my pal into entering a national-level barbecue contest held annually in Kannapolis — Jiggy with the Piggy. We showed up with a tattered blue tailgate tent and two little black Weber smokers. Surrounding us were shiny, hundred-thousand-dollar rigs. We were the David vs. Goliath of the barbecue contest world and we were just about laughed out of the field. We set up our little blue tent and cooked and fretted all night long.

At the awards ceremony the judges called out team names for 20th place through 10th and we didn't hear our name. We started packing up the lawn chairs and headed for the parking lot. As we made our way through the crowd, we heard the announcer shout, "...and in second place, Smokin' Story BBQ!" We dropped our lawn chairs, stunned, and sprinted to the stage to accept the big check and trophy. The rest, as they say, is history. In 2014, I started catering for friends and family. As that business has grown steadily, I've realized that barbecue and ministry are my true passions, and I've looked for ways to unite those loves. A barbecue business is a great fit for a church-based business because it's a beloved social food in our southern culture, has low overhead costs, and requires a minimal number of people to operate.

## How will the partnership be handled?

**Trey:** We set this up so that both sides would need to be committed to each other and to the joint goals. First Baptist is purchasing a catering trailer, and we'll open up part of our parking lot for it to operate at no cost. Smokin' Story owns the truck for pulling the trailer and will be responsible for day-to-day running of the restaurant. FBC will provide volunteers twice a week for the food

ministry in neighborhoods around us. Both groups have significant investment in the project's properties and the mission.

We've talked with multiple attorneys at First Baptist, and they're helping us think through the legal side of this partnership, everything from licensing Smokin' Story to operate in our lot to the tax implications as a non-profit organization. We're also forming a joint board to address these kinds of questions as they come up.

## What do you expect the impact to be?

**Trey:** I think the impact could be far-reaching. This is a really innovative approach to ministry, one that looks not only at what the Church is now but also at what the Church may be in 10 or 20 years. National and international trends suggest that churches need to get creative not only with how they reach out to communities but also with how they financially sustain their own ministries. There aren't many churches doing what we're starting here — none in North Carolina — and if we're successful, this has potential to shape and expand the way many other people think about ministry.

**Leah:** This is an innovative approach to ministry that meets so many needs we have identified as a downtown community of faith. The popularity of the give-back business model is on the rise, because people are looking for an opportunity to make a deeper impact in the world. They want to know that their purchases make a difference in the lives of real people. I think we'll have a following in our community because of this broader mission of feeding hungry people in our city. I hope we create an atmosphere in



our parking lot that feels like a gathering place for all people, and a space to belong. Church should feel like that, but for many who carry a variety of past, sometimes painful experiences, it simply does not. We have to be searching for new, fresh ways to connect with those people, and I think BBQ could only help. I hope that this overwhelming sense of welcome and hospitality sends a broader message to our community about what kind of church family they can find at First Baptist.

**David:** One of the books I read in my DMin program discusses the idea of wicked problems, those so complex that trying to solve one aspect of the problem only creates more issues. This partnership seems to work on a couple of those wicked problems — addressing systemic poverty and the widening gap between church and neighbors. I think this is an innovative experiment for good that will attract a lot of folks who otherwise are disconnected from church life.

## How can the congregation help this effort succeed?

**Trey:** Come eat barbecue, and tell your friends and family to come, too. We really want you to spread the word, especially if you are connected to downtown. We also need people to be invested in helping give away food and spending time with our neighbors in need who come to enjoy David's cooking.

**Leah:** We need your help spreading the word! We hope you'll find this to be your new favorite lunch spot, but even deeper than that, we hope that you'll help us tell the story of the greater mission we have of serving in our community.

**David:** And let folks know that eating here is going to help those who don't have enough to eat. Plus the food's going to be really good! 🌻