

Hello,

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Ben Sander and I'm excited to be partnering with NPEA to plant a new church in the Rapid City area. The Lord willing, my family and I will be relocating to Rapid from the Kansas City area by mid-summer. I'm thankful for this opportunity to introduce myself, as well as my family, and tell you just a little bit about our journey and our dreams for the future church.

My wife, Kelli, and I have been married for 18 years and hail from small towns in central Nebraska. We met at Nebraska Christian College and started our ministries in the subsequent years. Kelli has experience in children's ministry and is currently a pre-school teacher. I came into the ministry a few years after college as a music pastor. We have two wonderful girls. Hayley, age 14, is our eldest and is an introverted firecracker who keeps us on our toes. She loves to sing and write stories. Emmalyn is 10 and is the only extroverted morning person in our family. She loves to make crafts and bake.

We are all excited to get up to Rapid this summer and it has been quite a journey that has brought us to this place. I'll attempt to keep my testimony here brief, but it's difficult as God's hand has been so heavily orchestrating everything up to this point. It's difficult to pick and choose what to leave out. Here's my best attempt at making this concise.

I was raised in a Christian family in Arapahoe, NE. My parents loved the Lord and instilled that value in me. I grew up in the church, but it can be a messy place at times and my home church saw more than its fair share of turmoil. It took me a while to heal from some of those wounds and especially to answer the call to ministry. I knew I was called into ministry but delayed that call until the Lord graciously allowed me to have some involvement in healthier churches that rejuvenated my heart for the church and later vocational ministry.

I've been in full-time ministry as a music pastor for the past 14+ years. Eight and a half years ago we moved to Kansas City, KS to minister at Crossroads Christian Church which was, itself, a 1st generation church plant. Even though my heart wasn't for church planting back then, those seeds were being sown as I heard much conversation around the church's formative years as a young plant. Crossroads was and still is, actively seeking to plant other churches in the Kansas area, so those conversations have been ongoing in my time here.

Around 2019 I was noticing a strong shift in my heart. I became more interested in preaching than leading music. Leadership development was becoming much more critical, and I have grown to love forming teams and developing people. I also became focused on discipleship, evangelism, and spiritual formation more so than song leading.

At the end of 2021 I got Covid for the first time. It was severe enough that I was made aware that I was realistically looking at what could very possibly be the end of my earthly life. The Lord had different plans for me. After I was healed, I knew that God had a new direction for my life but wasn't quite sure just what. I gave it another full year before searching for other ministry opportunities. Whether serendipitous or divinely ordained (I think the latter), a past friend/mentor in ministry approached me about planting a church in South Dakota. He introduced me to Nexus first, and through them, I was then introduced to Matt Branum and the NPEA.

After extensive conversations and prayer, we decided to visit Rapid City in August of 2023 to see if God was stirring our hearts for that region. I could never have imagined how powerfully God can affirm a calling from one single visit. The rest of this has been an incredible journey of His affirmation of what we're supposed to do at every twist and turn.

We couldn't be more excited to get up to Rapid City and get started. Right now, we are still developing the mission and vision frame of the church, seeking the right associate pastor to assist, and finishing up fund raising, not to mention all of the relocating logistics. Needless to say, we very much covet your prayers and are so excited to do this together with the NPEA. We're thankful for their heart for planting churches in the northern great plains and are honored to be a part of what they're doing.

Thank you,

Ben Sander  
NPEA New Church Plant in Rapid City