

Central Florida Pastor Says God Took Him From Dope to Hope

Once a drug dealer in Baltimore, today pastor Zachery Tims leads a fast-growing church in metro Orlando

When Zachery Tims was 14 and facing an attempted murder charge in 1984, he never dreamed he would be the pastor of a megachurch. Today, Tims oversees New Destiny Christian Center (NDCC), a 5,500-member congregation in Apopka, Fla., located in metro Orlando.

The charismatic pastor who became a drug dealer at age 12 and joined a gang at 13 was facing a lengthy jail sentence for shooting a drug dealer when God had mercy on him.

"The charges were dropped to juvenile assault," said the Baltimore native, who shares his testimony on national TV shows such as TBN's Praise the Lord program.

The teen spent a year and a half in Maryland's forestry camps for his crime. But it wasn't until years later, when he had three recurring dreams that he was being tormented by demons, that Tims realized his need for Jesus.

"I was 19 and terribly bound by cocaine," he explained. Tims ran to the home of a man in his neighborhood known as the "Holy Roller" and said, "I'm ready to get saved."

"These demonic things would be circling around my head. A bright light would come into the room, and then Holy Roller

would appear in the dream, and that's when the demons would flee," he recalled.

The new convert joined a Spirit-filled church and within seven years earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from Towson State University and a theology degree from Maranatha Bible College.

The 35-year-old pastor knows firsthand that God's power can transform a life. And that's the message he and his wife, Riva, who pastors alongside her husband, share with the thousands they reach through their ministry.

NDCC ministers to drug addicts, families, singles, the poor, married couples and others through its 33 ministries. But it wasn't until the church organized teams to evangelize the community that the membership began to swell.

"Pastors Randy and Paula White of Without Walls [International] Church in Tampa, [Fla.], taught us evangelistic outreach," Tims said. "We went from being just another church on the block to being a church."

NDCC's reach can be felt throughout the Orlando area. The church's Higher Ground TV program can be seen on The Word Network and on other stations. The pastor can also be heard repeatedly on radio. Locals say the church's huge billboards that bombard central Florida's skyline also draw people. NDCC's philosophy: "If Budweiser can promote its product, we can promote Jesus."

For Tyrone Mitchell, 34, New Destiny is a lifesaver. After serving five years in a federal penitentiary, Mitchell arrived

at NDCC “a broken, messed up man.”

“When I showed Pastor Zach my monitoring ankle bracelet from jail,” Mitchell said, “he placed his hand on my shoulder, and through his tears told me he would do whatever he could to help me. The church didn’t judge me, they loved me.”

In an effort to accommodate its growing, racially diverse congregation, NDCC purchased 21 acres of property in 2000 to build what it calls the City of Destiny. The first phase includes a building currently serving as a temporary, 2,000-seat sanctuary. Its three-story Generation Next youth building, which is near completion, houses a cafeteria, six basketball courts, a fitness center, a 400-seat youth chapel, a two-lane bowling alley and more.

As NDCC continues its project with a 5,000-seat worship center slated for 2006, Tims oversees the church in three locations. Every Sunday, the pastor zips across the city in a helicopter to make it to the church located in Kissimmee, Fla., roughly 30 miles away. A family life center is housed at a third location in Orlando.

The Tims have seen God’s supernatural provision in their lives and ministry. During the early days of his pastorate, Tims and the family lived off \$15,000 a year, a salary his wife earned as a customer service manager at a hotel. But again, the pastor said, God proved faithful when a stranger appeared at NDCC and donated thousands of dollars to him.

“The man said, ‘God told me to give you enough money to pay off all of your bills,’” said Tims, who told the man his bills amounted to \$10,000. “I was depressed because they actually

totaled \$23,000.”

Within weeks, the donor returned and paid all of the pastor’s bills, and years later, paid NDCC’s \$54,000 TV debt. “I deserved nothing from God,” Tims said. “Jesus took me from dope to hope.”

Valerie G. Lowe