

Coral Ridge Names New Pastor

✖ **March 16, 2009** — In an overwhelming vote Sunday, the members of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church elected the Rev. Tullian Tchividjian, grandson of famed evangelist Billy Graham, to be their new pastor.

As part of Tchividjian's election, the 2,200-member congregation in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., agreed to merge with Tchividjian's 650-member New City Church, also located in the Fort Lauderdale area. Tchividjian will be only the second pastor to lead Coral Ridge, which was founded by the late D. James Kennedy.

In a posting on his blog Sunday, Tchividjian said 91 percent of the congregation voted to support his appointment. "That is a much higher percentage than I anticipated given the fact that this call involved a merger of two congregations," said Tchividjian, who preached at Coral Ridge for the first time Sunday morning. "God made His will known with an exclamation point this morning."

Kennedy, who died in 2007 at age 76, was well-known for his political engagement as founder of Coral Ridge Ministries, which mobilized Christians to address social issues such as abortion and homosexuality.

On his blog, Tchividjian said he and Kennedy don't have radically different convictions. But on Sunday he told Coral Ridge members that politics is just one strategy to engage the culture. "I also think that the sphere of art and the sphere of education and the sphere of media and technology are also strategic," he said, according to the Associated Press.

Hector L. Padron, executive vice president of Coral Ridge Ministries, which is separate from the church, praised Tchividjian's appointment.

“His fervent pastoral heart, vigorous intellect, engaging personality, and uncompromised commitment to fulfilling God’s purposes in his generation, just as Dr. Kennedy did in his, bode well for a long and fruitful ministry at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church,” Padron said in a statement. “We are excited about what God is doing to bring reformation and revival to our community and, we pray, the nation.”

Tchividjian, 36, is the son of Graham’s oldest daughter, Gigi Tchividjian. The middle of seven children, Tchividjian went through a season of rebellion during his teen years, dropping out of high school at 16, using drugs and partying in South Florida. He said he recommitted his life to Christ at age 21, went to college and later to Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Fla.

After graduating from seminary, he served as a young adult pastor at Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, Tenn., before returning to South Florida to plant New City Church in August 2003.

Coral Ridge and New City are expected to formally merge on Easter Sunday. The congregations will take Coral Ridge’s name and use its facility.

With his spiky hair and sometimes-scruffy beard, Tchividjian admitted that he and Kennedy may seem very different. But “our theological commitments are the same and our hearts beat with the same driving passion,” he said in a statement Monday. “Indeed, what he came to do in the 1950s—reach the people of South Florida with the gospel and transform the world—is exactly what I have been seeking to do ever since I moved back home to start New City in 2003.”