

Florida Megachurch Pastors End Marriage

✖ Florida megachurch pastors Zachery and Riva Tims ended their 15-year-marriage in late July, two years after it was discovered that Zachery Tims had an affair with an exotic dancer he met in Paris.

The Timses started New Destiny Christian Center (NDCC) in a hotel ballroom in 1996, and grew the Orlando-area church to more than 7,500 members. But in October 2007, Zachery Tims stood before the congregation and said he had committed “an indiscretion” and would be stepping down to seek healing.

He returned to the pulpit three months later, after beginning counseling with a group of ministers including Bishop Joseph Garlington, pastor of Covenant Church in Pittsburg; Bishop Harold Ray, senior pastor of Redemptive Life Fellowship in West Palm Beach, Fla.; and Bishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams of Ghana.

Many members left the independent charismatic church in late 2007 after Judy Nguyen posted details of her affair with the pastor on the Internet. In an e-mail interview with *Charisma*, Nguyen, who met Tims when he visited the men’s club in Paris where she worked, said the long-distance affair lasted from August 2006 to October 2007.

Riva Tims, 38, also left the church and filed for divorce in 2008. The couple share joint custody of their four children.

In a written statement to *Charisma*, Tims, 40, said he has been involved in counseling since the affair became public.

"I submitted myself to an ecumenical counsel of clergy that came into my ministry and ran the spiritual operations while I submitted myself to a counseling and ministry facility for several months out of state," he stated, adding that he is "still involved with monthly counsel."

Tims said he never meant to harm his family. "It was never my intention to hurt anyone, and over this reality I have spent many days seeking God's grace," he said. "I am grateful for the love my family continues to extend to me as an individual and as a child of God."

Riva Tims would not comment on the circumstances surrounding the divorce, but said she and her ex-husband are cordial to each another. "There's a whole new level of forgiveness," she said. "It's a supernatural forgiveness that I can't even explain. Zachery and I are friends."

She said she is "moving forward" with her life and ministry. In 2008, she founded Majestic Life Institute and on July 12 opened Majestic Life Ministries church in Orlando.

Much like NDCC, the church emphasizes outreach, with programs planned for children with special needs and youth gang prevention, as well as a job placement ministry for former inmates, drug addicts and alcoholics.

"We literally have to go out into the community and model what this Bible really means," said Riva Tims, who plans to begin hosting a Christian TV talk show in the fall.

Zachery Tims said he has been "greatly humbled over these past few years."

"It is now my focus to move forward whereby I can work to extend the love of God's grace and power as it was also extended to me," he said.

New Destiny member Lucy Pierre-Louis remained at NDCC throughout the ordeal, saying she did not leave the church because her pastor has a good heart. "When he preaches, you can tell he's sorry for what he did," she said.

"He is able to minister effectively, powerfully and with love through the Holy Spirit. I think the ordeal actually brought him closer to God."