

Paula White Returns to Without Walls

✖ Evangelist Paula White is returning to Tampa, Fla., to lead the charismatic megachurch she and her now ex-husband, Randy White, founded 18 years ago.

On Sunday, Paula White officially began her role as senior pastor of Without Walls International Church. The service paid special tribute to Randy White, who resigned last month citing ongoing health challenges.

The church once drew nearly 20,000 attendees each week, but had experienced declining membership since the Whites divorced in 2007.

In November, the church faced foreclosure when their bank demanded immediate repayment of a \$12 million loan on the property. In March the church had negotiated a modified loan agreement with its lender, the Evangelical Christian Credit Union based in California.

But as recently as June 23, Randy White said the church needed a “financial miracle.”

“We are at a critical juncture where we must have a financial blessing,” he said in a video e-blast.

“[God] spoke to me at the beginning of this year and said 2009 would be our greatest year, and isn’t it like the devil to cause confusion, to bring discouragement just before our greatest breakthrough,” he added.

White announced Paula White’s return the following week

through another video e-blast. In interviews with Tampa-area media, he said six doctors had advised him to take the stress out of his life. He said the illness was a private matter and would not name it.

"I prefer not to be honest," he told WFTS, Tampa's ABC affiliate, after Sunday's service. "It is a private issue, there are several issues, most of it is because of stress and pressure."

But he said his daughter's death from brain cancer at age of 30 last year might have contributed. "I can weather the storm with any type of media or the pressure of pastoring, but when my daughter passed, that has been a year ago, that is when the added pressure and stress came," he told WFTS.

Randy White told the congregation he had prayed about a successor who could continue Without Walls' legacy "so when I am gone it continues. Immediately my mind came to Paula."

Although she spoke at the church occasionally after the divorce, Paula White spent most of her time preaching and doing missions work through her Paula White Ministries. She said she felt it was her "mantle and mandate," according to a statement on her ministry Web site.

"I prayed seriously," Paula White told WFTS Sunday. "I did not take it lightly. I sought counsel and felt it was absolutely the right decision."

She added that her leadership style differs from Randy White's, but they both have the same goals for the ministry. "We have different leadership styles and management styles," she said. "So some of those will be different but the fundamentals of this church will remain."

Randy White told the *St. Petersburg Times* that he would make a "clean break" from the church, not even attending services

unless Paula White gave him her blessing.

Both Whites have been upbeat about the leadership change. Randy White said the transition would take the church “to the entire next level.”

“Pastor Paula is very excited about this wonderful assignment and opportunity from the Lord and covets your prayers during this time of transition for herself and the congregation,” her ministry reported. “We know this is the divine plan of God and that great things are in store.”