

Amid Protests, Paula White Named Senior Pastor of Zachery Tims' Church

Despite protests from some members of the congregation, Paula White has been appointed senior pastor of the late Zachery Tims' megachurch, New Destiny Christian Center (NDCC) near Orlando, Fla., it was reported Thursday in a press release. White is also senior pastor of Without Walls International Church.

Riva Tims, the charismatic preacher's ex-wife, who co-founded the church with Tims, held a press conference on Thursday morning to announce she is filing a lawsuit against NDCC's board of directors to challenge the process of selecting White as its new senior pastor. The Tims founded the church 15 years ago with their four children.

"I've been hearing the cries, I've been hearing the concerns, I've been hearing so much that I have to literally, publicly take a stand and challenge what is happening," Tims said at the news conference. Her attorneys said a lawsuit was filed at 9 a.m. against the board of NDCC and White.

Many members wanted to see Tims return to the pastorate after her ex-husband's unexpected death in a W Hotel room in New York City in August. No cause of death has been publicly announced, but officials say a white powder was found in his pocket. T.D. Jakes at his funeral said he was unhappy, broken and afraid for people to see any flaw in him. Riva divorced Zachery after he had a much-publicized affair.

NDCC's board of directors said White was selected after an exhaustive process in close cooperation with the church's Board of Regents. White will serve as a non-voting member of the board of directors and will be subject to the oversight of

the board of directors and the board of regents. Her focus will be on preaching and ministering.

“We prayed fervently for guidance during our search for a new senior pastor and this led us to ask Pastor Paula to serve as our new senior pastor. We were searching for someone who could understand the history of our ministry, someone who had a close relationship with our members and our staff and someone who knew the heart of our senior founder,” the board wrote in a statement. “We earnestly know that the Lord led us to select Pastor Paula. We know she will honor the vision and the legacy on which our church is built.”

The congregation was in disagreement over the controversial preacher’s appointment. Beyond protesting with signs outside the church, a group of NDCC members led by Eugene Roberson wants to remove the NDCC’s board of directors. Roberson told the *Orlando Sentinel* the group is seeking legal action.

Some leaders in the body of Christ are also raising concerns over White’s new position. Bishop Rico Sharp, senior pastor of Spirit of Truth Ministries in nearby Sanford, Fla.—and who considered Zachery Tims a friend—says that Zachery Tims would never have put White in as pastor of NDCC and that White and Tims have had no relationship for the past four years.

“I know this because Dr. Zach told me that she cut him off when he fell, so therefore he moved on from that connection,” Sharp says. “There is a malicious story of deception, manipulation and greed developing and surfacing about Paula White that will totally dishonor the Holy Spirit, Dr. Zachery Tims and the innocence of the NDCC family.”

Bishop I.V. Hillard, pastor of New Light Church in Houston, publicly resigned from NDCC’s council of four bishops that were working to advise church leaders on Zachery Tims’ successor. In a video, Hillard said he was resigning because, “My commitment to integrity will not allow me to support

something that I believe is deceptive and that compromises previously agreed upon procedures and protocol.”

White took over Without Walls in July 2009, one week after her ex-husband, Randy White, resigned as senior pastor of the church. The Whites founded the church 20 years ago.

The Whites divorced in 2007, the same year U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley led an investigation into the church’s executive compensation and personal assets and expenses of the ministry and five others. Without Walls defaulted on a loan and its Tampa, Fla., site faced foreclosure before recovering, according to the *Tampa Bay Times*. The Lakeland, Fla., campus of Without Wall is currently closed.

White, 45, will step into the pulpit to lead the church’s annual New Year’s Eve services on Saturday. White did not immediately return calls seeking comment.

