

# FRESH Start

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT CHARLOTTE SDA CHURCH



## IT'S A NEW DAY AT PCSDA!

"The Lord's loyal kindness never ceases; His compassions never end. They are fresh every morning..." Lam. 3:22,23 NET

### WELCOME HOME BEN AND TRIA


On January 1, 2010, Ben and Tria Shurtliff arrived at our church, fresh out of Andrews University seminary. They endeared themselves to our congregation and blessed us. Ben served as our associate pastor until they moved to Miami Springs in September 2013. He has been the senior pastor of the Brandon Seventh-day Adventist church since January 2016. We are delighted that they were willing to serve here again, this time in the senior pastor role. They moved to Punta Gorda and their first Sabbath to worship with us is October 22.

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*"Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"  
Esther 4:14 NKJV*

# FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

BY LAURA DANCEK, EDITOR

When Pastor Ben Shurtliff learned that the Port Charlotte church – the first congregation he pastored – was in need of a senior pastor, he reached out to our church leaders to gain information. As you will read in the interview that follows, he thought he would “throw his name into the hat” with low expectations of being selected.

Those first days of considering a return to our church initiated a rapidity of

events that no one could have anticipated – including Ben. On August 22, the Shurtliffs were here to personally meet with our search committee and representatives from the Florida conference. Immediately, Ben was chosen to become our new senior pastor.

With that decision made, many others followed, including choosing a date for the Shurtliffs to end their ministry at the

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Brandon SDA church and a date to officially begin their ministry at Port Charlotte. When those plans were prayerfully being made, only the Lord knew how lovingly and perfectly He was orchestrating the timing.

Pastor Ben was committed to stay at the Brandon church long enough to preach an evangelistic series in September. His last official day as their senior pastor was on September 24, only four days before our county was ravaged by Hurricane Ian. Within a couple of days, he brought down supplies and teams of volunteers to help our church members and community. Had the Shurtliffs already relocated, they likely would have been impacted and wouldn't have had the same ability to provide help and support that benefitted many of us.

Not only was God's hand evident in the timing, but a pastor who already knew the area and many of the members, would have a much easier time jumping in to help and to lead. Some of you saw him delivering generators or food. Most people did not see his leadership in the background, working with ServPro, and the FL conference, and having to make decisions for our church that preceded his official start as senior pastor, all while trying to find housing, pack and move his family.

The whirlwind of events (literally and figuratively) are now behind us, and we joyfully welcome the Shurtliff family. October 22 is their first official day and our church could not be more blessed.



# GET TO KNOW THE SHURTLIFF FAMILY

On September 13, Ben and Tria were graciously generous with their time to be interviewed for this newsletter. Even if you already know them, you will be inspired and blessed when you read what they had to say.



## **What would you like us to know about your family?**

We are a family of four. Hope is a first grader, Gage is in fourth grade. Tria and I are thrilled to be parents. As a family, we know that God has called us into ministry and I've told my kids that they are associate pastors and they take that role seriously. When I go to make a visit and I don't take them they're like, "How can you leave your associate pastors at home?" Recently they said, "Dad, we think we should get paid for this." They go on the hospital visits and whatnot. When I introduce them, I introduce them as my associate pastors and they're serious about it and it's pretty cute. It's a joy to do what you're called to do. Long ago Tria and I started on this journey, and we said "yes" to the Lord and it's just been a blessing.

We're pretty down to earth, not perfect by any means. We just love people. We love doing life with our church family and the community. That's so basic, but it's so true. That's kind of who we are.



## You began your family while here in Port Charlotte. How did it all unfold?

God worked miracles to make us the family that we are. We were told by a specialist that we were incapable of having our own children. But Tria, being the praying woman that she is, studied the Word of God and came across a passage in Psalm 113 that promises the barren woman will be a happy mother of children. We claimed that and started praising God. We chose to become foster parents because we realized there were kids out there that need what we had, which is a good, stable home filled with love. When we got into foster care our first placement was Gage. The caseworker told us from the get-go that she had a feeling Gage would be adopted by us. She was a woman of faith. And that was exactly how it went, against all odds at different times. The moment Gage entered our lives our hearts were full. There was just something that happened. That aching to be a parent -- Gage filled that void.

And then while we were still in the process of fostering to adopt Gage, hoping for permanency for him, Tria got pregnant! What is impossible for man -- nothing's impossible for God. And God laughs! It was amazing! Tria gave birth to our beautiful baby girl, and we named her Hope. God is a miracle-working God. He worked miracles in our family to make us a family. And it's the same miracle-working God keeping us together and keeping us strong and enabling us to live the lives that He wants for us. We're a family that is 110% grateful to God for everything He's done and He is doing.

### **What does your family enjoy doing?**

Our family loves play dates. The kids just love making friends and hanging out with other families. They love swimming. They love animals. Our kids have made money taking care of bottle feeding baby cows. They're good at it!



### **What does your family enjoy doing together, just the four of you?**

One of the great things about this move is, in Brandon our kids are going to school 20 minutes north. We both work 45 minutes south. Tria and I have been working opposite schedules for the last three or four years. We just felt a conviction that God would have us spend more time together as a family, God would have us be closer and do more life together.

We've been homeschooling, up till this school year. Homeschool created an awesome opportunity for us to spend quality time with our kids. But we're on opposite schedules. So when Tria is working I'm with them and when I'm working Tria is with them. It's been a challenge.

Our farm is what we love. Tria loves taking care of her chickens, and we've had a ton of animals. We have a travel trailer and we absolutely love camping. The favorite thing we do and the thing that we invested in and get a lot out of is camping. We would go to state parks and not even all that far away. We were looking forward to going back to Highlands Hammocks. I'm also looking forward to taking the kids to the beaches and doing some shark teeth hunting.

### **Ben, where are you from and what is your family background?**

I grew up in Ogden, Utah. It's known for skiing and mountains. It was a beautiful place for me growing up. I loved winter sports. My family has been there for generations. My dad's family converted from Mormonism into Christianity. My mother was a PK [preacher's kid]. Her father was an Adventist pastor in Hawaii, New York and all over the east coast, and California, and Nevada.

I have a younger brother in Georgia and a sister in Utah. My father just retired from a career as a CRNA. My mom is an RN but has been a stay-at-home mom all my life.

I went to Weaver State University. I was going to go into chemistry and premed and eventually study medicine but God called me into the ministry.

### **Tria, tell us about your family and background.**

I was born in Oregon then we lived in North Carolina and in Southern California. We moved to Calhoun, Georgia where I lived from third grade until I graduated high school at Georgia-Cumberland Academy. Then my parents moved up to Tunnel Hill while I was at Southern Adventist University.

I have an older brother, Zach and a younger sister, Tekoa.

I am a medical technologist (medical laboratory scientist). I just began a great job in Fort Myers for Lee Health. I will be able to work Monday through Friday and then have weekends off so I can be at church to worship and have family days on Sundays.

### **How did you both meet?**

I met Tria in Los Angeles, maybe 19 years ago, working as colporteurs. Tria went on to become a student missionary in Peru. And that year I felt God was asking me to study at Southern. I actually moved in with Tria's folks. I rented an apartment from them while Tria was in Peru. And then when she came back, obviously I moved out. But it was awesome. God really did a lot for me. In my younger years as a colporteur I met the Lord. I met my wife. I met her folks. I met my call to ministry.

## **In what ways did you feel that God was calling to return as our senior pastor?**

Oliver Huff reached out to me and said, "Hey, both of our pastors down here are gone, when are you coming down?" I think he would say he was joking, but I thought maybe I'd put my name in the hat, what does it hurt? I didn't think I'd be a top candidate, but it doesn't hurt to have names. So I reached out to LaDonna and said, "You're welcome to consider my name. And just put me on the bottom of the list." I had no idea when I said that, that it would be like grabbing the tail of a rocket. I did not know that it would move as quickly as it did.

Then the conference said, "If you are over 50% sure that you'll want to entertain this call then we'll continue down the steps that need to be taken." I said, "Well, let me pray with my wife." I learned, early on, that Tria and I were both called into this work. On any call we've received if I'm open to it and Tria says "no" then I've said "no." I really thought, in my heart, that Tria would say "no" this time because it's not an opportune time to pull our kids out in the middle of the semester. Tria is a wonderful pastor's wife. She's a wonderful wife. But she's an incredible mother. And I just knew it was not going to work. I asked her, "Will you spend some time between you and the Lord just weighing this out?" And the following morning Tria came to me and said, "I have peace. I'm more than 50% sure God is opening these doors and God is leading." And that really rocked me because I was like, "wait a minute!" Tria said "I don't think it's ideal that the kids move in the middle of a semester, but if this is God's will, He's going to make up for whatever disruption that causes."

So at that point I was like, "God, all right." So we reached out to Steve Jencks and the conference told us it would be a three-month process. He got back to us in two weeks, and said, "We've done everything on our end." A three-month process became a two-week process and they fast tracked everything!

The day of my interview at 6:30, Tria had an interview in Fort Myers at 1:00. The woman told Tria, "I can't officially offer the job because it needs to go through HR but, unofficially, I'm offering you the job if you want it." And so, on the spot she offered Tria her dream job.

When we stopped by PCAS their classrooms were full in first and fourth grade. But they told us that actually there were kids that registered who never came. One in fourth and one in first. Perfect! They gave us those spots. So it was like, "Well God, you're working this out."

Then it was just left to the interview, and at the interview we all felt God opening every door. In my years of experience in ministry, this has all the telltale signs that this is the Lord's will. We have loads of peace.



### What did you learn while being an associate pastor here in Port Charlotte?

I learned that God knew what He was doing. I was called to work with people. I love people. I don't just love old people. I don't just love young people. I don't just love middle-aged people. I love all people. It was a real confirmation for me that I love people and I love working with them and I love, I love sharing Jesus. I felt confirmed, that after all those years of study, that they were for a purpose. God knew that nothing I had done in my life was as enjoyable as working as a pastor.

I'm not saying I'm the world's greatest pastor by any stretch of the imagination. I grew a lot and the experience I had in Port Charlotte was so beautiful.

I also learned that you're not doing ministry alone. We had a team in Port Charlotte. I learned to be a team builder and that this is not a one man show. It's a team sport. And we're better together.

### What did you miss after leaving the Port Charlotte church?

I missed the retired population. I lived with my grandmother when she was in her nineties. My favorite person in the world was my grandfather before he died. I've always had a real love and respect for the older generation, because they're just wiser. I don't see that as a liability. I see that as a major plus. These people have years of experience.

I missed the kindness and the love that the Port Charlotte church family offered right off the bat.

I missed the, I don't want to say pace of life because that can be misconstrued as if I didn't like to work hard, and that's not true. But the expectation on the church. Church work is relational work and relationships take time. We're not pouring concrete. We're not laying bricks. We're building relationships, the primary relationship between people and God, and then the secondary relationships between people and people. And so I missed that. I missed the maturity in Port Charlotte.

We missed the people that we made friendships with. We just assumed that every church is going to be filled with people like this. That's just not true. Every church is filled with good people, but, there are some relationships and some friendships that, as you grow in ministry, you realize that are very unique.

## How have you grown and changed since you were here?

I've learned what I'm good at as a pastor. I've also learned what I'm not good at. So I've learned to build teams around me with people with gifts that I don't have. And that I'm an encourager, and I'm a promoter.

I love casting the big picture, and I lean on and depend on, people that have detailed minds and gifts. So I can say "Here's the big picture. How do we go from a big picture to boots on the ground? How can we actually make this work?" And I've learned that those individuals, God raises up are invaluable to me as a minister.

We've had some failures in ministry, quite frankly. Some of the big lessons I've learned is haste is not of the Lord. Patience is the first quality of love. And if we're in the center of God's will we shouldn't feel rushed or hasty, right? That's generally a place where we make poor decisions and do ministry out of angst. The anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God and when God's people are angry and want to fix things, that God's not asking us to use our anger to build up His kingdom. When God is leading is the only time I want to pastor. I don't ever want to pastor when I'm leading. When God is leading there's patience, there's a good plan. There's prayer, there's peace. It's a win-win when God's leading.

I would say one of the other lessons I've learned is that everybody has a place at the table. It's not my way or the highway. It's not my ideas. I'm not the savior. I'm not the change agent. I'm not the one that comes with the master plan. We have a Master, He has the master plan. We all submit to His plan as we study together, prayerfully, humbly. And everybody has a place at his table, even Judas. Just think about the night when Jesus was betrayed. He took bread and wine and He said, "Take eat, this is My body, which is broken for you, Judas." He didn't say, "Judas, you need to leave first." He offered Judas His broken body. He offered Judas the covenant of His blood. And everybody has a place at God's table. God doesn't push anybody away.

## What is your vision for our church?

I believe there's only one vision for every church. That is Matthew 28:18-20. That is God's vision for His church. It looks differently in the way it's implemented here or there. There are different opportunities. There are unique challenges. But that passage is God's mission.

I do not have a vision for our church. And if that makes people uncomfortable, then I want them to be more comfortable with the idea that they already have a Leader. He's unseen, but He's felt. He's given us 66 different books on how to do what He's called us to do. We have a very clear, simple mission.

The Adventist church, the more we stray from the simplicity of how to carry out that mission, the more ineffective we become. That may be uncomfortable for people to hear, but we will grow as a church. We will succeed as a church, the same way that the apostles did in the first century, the same way that they did in the reformation.

I have no authority to bring my vision to Port Charlotte. All authority is God's. I have no authority. Jesus has all authority. And then it says, go therefore, I have the authority to obey. And that is to go. And in this case is to go to Port Charlotte, go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

Everybody I meet that has yet to make a decision, to be a disciple of Christ, regardless of where they're coming from, regardless of their ethnic background, regardless of their education. These are people that I've been asked to make disciples for my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I am going to use the same methods that Jesus used. I'm going to preach the Word of God. I'm going to show the love of God. John 13:35 says "By this, all men will know that you're all my disciples. If you have love for one another." Our church in Port Charlotte cannot grow with the vision on the inside. If we can't love each other, and we have so much in common, we have so much held in common in beliefs, in common in background. If we cannot love each other, we certainly can't love all the tribes, nations, tongues, and people, God is calling us to serve.

The question we need to ask is are we willing to go back to the simple truths of God's Word, to trust with childlike faith, the basics of the gospel, the basics of the Bible, and are we willing to love each other, despite our differences to look past each other's faults and meet each other's needs.