Josué Raymond’s Life’s Journey

Born in Nassau, Bahamas to parents of Haitian descent, I was the second child with two brothers and a sister. We lived in the Bahamas, as my father served as pastor of a Baptist congregation, until I was six years of age. At that time, my father was called to return to his homeland as an iterant church planter.

We moved to Port-au-Prince, which resulted in a radical lifestyle change. Our home was very modest, and food was scarce. Shortly after we arrived, my mother left for the USA, and never returned. My father found it impossible to raise four children and meet his obligations as a church planter that required his moving around the country on a regular basis. As a result, we were sent to our grandparents’ home in Cassé-Pied, 152 miles and a world away from Port-au-Prince.

The nearest school was 5 miles away at the bottom of the mountain, and my siblings and I made the round trip daily. We had no running water, so I would go to the spring (4 miles round trip) each afternoon to get five gallons of water. Life was even more difficult in the country, but we eventually returned home.

My life consisted of school and church. I would be with my father several times a week to play guitar as the congregation sang praises to God. By God’s grace and hard work, I passed the national exams and graduated from high school. At the age of nineteen, I moved to Florida, passed a GED test, and entered Valencia College, all the while working at Denny’s Restaurant. I moved on to UCF and earned a Bachler’s Degree in education with a second major in French. My studies in French gave me the opportunity to travel to Canada and France as a UCF exchange student. Throughout this time my faith was strong, but I had no desire to follow my father’s footsteps and enter the ministry.

As I worked on my master’s degree, my mind went back to those days in Cassé-Pied and how I had once made a commitment to help the children who lived there to have a chance for a better future. In 2004, I formed The Hope N Literacy, International Foundation, Inc. (a 501 3c corporation) with three missions: 1) Instill hope 2) Educate a new generation 3) Provide humanitarian assistance. The Foundation purchased the top of the mountain in Cassé-Pied, (once believed to be the home of demons) where we built a church/school building and began to educate elementary-level children for free! In 2009 we expanded the school, hiring additional teachers and receiving more students.

On a personal note, my wife, Dawn, and I joined the Upsala Presbyterian Church. Our active support resulted in my being elected as elder. We would later move our membership to the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Mary.

On January 12, 2010, I received a call from my brother that my father was dying. While I was on the phone, he died in my brother’s arms. Forty-five minutes later, the devastating 2010 earthquake took place. I would be in Haiti days later to help bury my father and help provide humanitarian assistance to those affected in any way I could. With my father’s passing and the dire situation in Haiti, it became apparent that Hope N Literacy must assume oversight responsibility for the three rural congregations that my father had started.

Suddenly, I found myself responsible for the ministry of four congregations and an elementary school, through the work of Hope N Literacy. In addition, HNL made a commitment to send a young man to seminary, at our expense, totally on faith.

In the years to follow, the congregations grew, and the need for oversight and support also grew. This required my travel to Haiti on a regular basis. Sometimes others who wanted to contribute to the work of the mission joined me.

In 2013, I was recognized as an ordained pastor by the Haitian government and given legal authority over the four congregations.

In 2015, after much encouragement and prayer, I made the commitment to become a Presbyterian Minister of the Word and Sacrament. With Lake Mary’s support I was taken under the care of the Central Florida Presbytery. My journey was challenging as I balanced my family, my professional responsibilities as an assistant director with Orange County Public Schools, and my studies at Asbury Theological Seminary.

When Lake Mary lost their pastor, and the search for a new pastor continued, I was asked to serve as pulpit supply, which I have been doing almost weekly since 2017.

In May 2019, I graduated from Asbury Theological Seminary, and I am currently working to complete the steps that will lead me to ordination. Lord willing, I will pass my ordination exams and my CPE training in the coming months.

I am currently fulfilling my dream as a part time Pastor, TPR for First Presbyterian Church of Lake Mary.