

Terry Ryan Pastoral Team Leader
Cordele, GA 31015

Bro. Terry began serving as Penia Baptist Church's Senior Pastor on the 30th of September 2018. Prior to that, he served as the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Cutler Ridge in Cutler Bay (Miami Suburb), Florida. He has also served on the staff of the Florida Baptist Convention, and Long Branch Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fl. He is a veteran with 20 years of service in the United States Navy.

The attributes that best describe Pastor Terry as a pastor are leadership development, determination, and a desire to proclaim the truth of God's Word. He celebrates and is honored to shepherd a church like Penia Baptist where biblical views are embraced and encouraged, with members who care about the needs of those around them and who want to connect others to the body of Christ by actively cultivating new believers. Pastor Terry takes worship and preaching very seriously, sticking to the conservative and unmistakable truths of the Scripture in every sermon.

He is a native of Warner Robins, GA, and graduated from Perry High School and attended Middle Georgia College before joining the Navy. He is a graduate of The Baptist University of Florida with a degree in Ministry Studies. Pastor Terry has been happily married since 1981 to his wife, Sybil. They have 2 married adult Children: Dustin and Tyler and five grandchildren.

<https://www.peniabaptist.org/about-us/our-team/>

After retiring from U.S. military, Georgia's Terry Ryan proves himself in Lord's army

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By ROGER ALFORD, *The Christian Index*

CORDELE, Ga. – Retired Navy Chief Petty Officer Terry Ryan spent 20 years serving in the U.S. military. Now, he's in the Lord's army.

Ryan, pastor of Penia Baptist Church outside Cordele, spent much of his military service as a flight technician aboard a Lockheed P-3 Orion plane, searching the oceans for enemy submarines.

Having shifted from the military to ministry, Ryan is now on the lookout for people in spiritual need, bringing to his new mission the same courage and tenacity he was known for among his Navy brethren.

With a Bible in one hand and his flight helmet in the other, Ryan took time on Wednesday to talk about his childhood, his military career, and his ministry, the past five years of which has been spent in this south Georgia farming community known for watermelons, peanuts and pecans.

Ryan didn't grow up in church. Instead, his earliest memories are of life in bars, rough ones that drew a tough clientele.

"I remember shootings and drug use," said Ryan, who, as a teenager, had become adept at hustling people at the pool table and the card table. "I was prideful. I was arrogant. I was cocky. I was promiscuous. I thought I had the world by the tail."

That began to change when, at 17, he met a Christian girl who would later become his wife, Sybil.

"Sybil was so different than any girl I had ever known," Ryan said. "She wouldn't even hold my hand. She wouldn't let me get close enough to try to kiss her. She was from a stable home. She lived in a Leave it to Beaver world. I lived in a world of chaos. She just could not fathom the world I was from."

Yet, Sybil saw God-given potential in the young man who had the romantic notions toward her. She also was not blind to the fact that he could be self-centered and manipulative.

"I knew that came from the way he was raised, in the sense of having to make it on his own," she said. "After he was saved, it was a drastic change. It amazes me how God has used him to lead so many people to the Lord. God has used him wherever he's been. I am so proud of him."

When Ryan enlisted in the Navy in 1983, he and Sybil had already been married two years. He had been going to church with her but hadn't yet surrendered his life to Christ. That changed abruptly when he was called on to accompany an admiral to an overseas military conference.

Ryan had been out on the town with one of his Navy buddies when a pastor, Louis Demuir, and some of his church members approached and invited him to take part in a survey looking at how people felt about God.

“I told him I was the last person you want to ask questions about God, because I don’t know anything about that,” Ryan recalled. “He said, ‘That’s OK,’ and he invited me to go to church the next morning. I said, ‘sure,’ with no intention of actually going.”

But when Ryan awoke the next morning, he got dressed and went to Demuir’s church.

“I got to the church just as the service ended,” he said. “The pastor invited me to lunch at his home. We ate on a folding card table. We sat on folding chairs. He had so little. Yet he was so happy. I had everything, and I wasn’t.”

That encounter caused Ryan to rethink his life. He dug out a Bible that a Gideon had handed to him when he first enlisted. In it, he found the greatest need of his life in October 1987.

“I surrendered to Christ in a barracks in Spain,” he said.

Then, Ryan rushed to a telephone to call Sybil to let her know.

When Sybil answered, an overseas operator told her to please hold for a call about her husband.

Sybil was suddenly frantic. Such calls typically weren’t good news.

Then she heard his voice.

“Are you OK?” she asked tentatively.

“Yes,” he said. “I just need to tell you I have surrendered my life to Christ.”

The two wept together over the phone.

Ryan said the simple one-sentence prayer he prayed that day was life-changing. Jesus had given Sybil “a totally different husband.” He had been radically changed.

When Ryan completed 20 years in the Navy, he retired and moved into a new chapter in his life, first at Long Branch Baptist Church near Jacksonville, Florida, then to the Florida Baptist Convention where he served as associate director of Florida Baptist Disaster Relief, then to Cutler Ridge Baptist Church outside Miami, before moving to Penia Baptist Church.

Samuel Ayala, missions consultant for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board in the state’s south region, said Ryan is a kingdom-minded pastor bent on fulfilling the Great Commission.

“He’s passionate about being on mission for God,” Ayala said. “He’s focused.”

Ryan's former pastor, Bill McLeod, said the Cordele pastor learned valuable leadership skills in the military, leading from both the top and alongside people.

McLeod said Ray has totally submitted to the lordship of Christ.

"He allows the Holy Spirit to flow through him just as was patterned by Christ while He was physically present upon this earth," McLeod said.

Ryan, a graduate of the Baptist College of Florida, said his military service was a great training ground for ministry.

"It's no accident that we are called the army of God," he said. "And so, we are supposed to function like an army. There's supposed to be order. There's supposed to be structure. And in that order and structure, we can achieve our mission and our purpose and our goals."

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