

# Our World: Child of God

By LEXEY SWALL-BOBAY

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Photo by LEXEY SWALL-BOBAY

**Child of God:** Rev. Phil Simcosky, pastor of East Naples Baptist Church, asks Anthony Owens, 6, if he's ready to be submerged in the Gulf of Mexico to be baptized on July 12, 2009 just north of the Naples Pier. Owens was one of three members of the church to be baptized this day. "It is very important that he understand what it means to be saved at such a young age," said Michael Owens, Anthony's father. "I wanted him to understand the baptism is not what saves you. It's asking Jesus for forgiveness of your sins."

How much living can you do in the first six years of your life? Enough to make you want to change your path? Probably not.

But, maybe enough to know you want the rest of your path to be good.

Anthony Owens, above, knew just that.

Rev. Phil Simcosky, pastor of East Naples Baptists Church, looks down at Anthony, 6, and asks him if he's ready. Anthony, who goes by Tony, turns his sun-kissed face up, gives a big smile and shakes his head, yes.

He is waist-deep in the Gulf of Mexico. A white robe clings to his lower body. Several dozen members of the church sing Amazing Grace from shore as he anticipates being dunked.

He's about to be baptized.

Tony made the decision on his own, the way his parents, Michael and Tenahia Owens, had always hoped. Even though they are both Christians and are raising their four children in the church, they didn't want them to feel pushed in to baptism.

"One day, while at his grandparents' house he was outside playing with the other kids when he ran inside to use the restroom," Michael said. Tony stopped in front of the television as a preacher was explaining how to be saved on the TV.

"He said to his mom and grandma, 'I need to do that,' nonchalantly went to the restroom and ran back outside to play," Michael said.

As Tony was being lowered in to the water Tenahia's eyes filled with tears. She watched with pride from the top of Naples pier, unable to climb down the stairs or walk the 100-foot north to where Tony entered the water, due to a medical problem with her leg.

"He came running up to me afterward and I gave him a big hug and told him I was very proud of him," said Tenahia, who grew up attending the same church. "He said he knew I was there."

Tony was the first of three people to be baptized in the water that day. Lucile Handelman, 73, and Richard Craddock, 24, both of East Naples, also decided publicly to confirm their faith.

“They want to show something on the inside of their lives and something on the inside of their hearts,” Simcosky said. “They are simply saying to the world, ‘I am ending my old way of living.’ ”

For Tony, his new way of living may not look much different than his old way. But, it’s a path he wants to walk down.

“I was thinking that when I came out from the water, I was thinking that Jesus did that too,” Tony said. “It feels like it makes me very special.”

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