

MEET PTS



SEMINARIAN'S SANTA MINISTRY SHARES GOD'S LOVE

It is a little-known fact that in 2019, Santa Claus became a PTS student.

The tale of how second-year MDiv student Tom Harrison became a professional Saint Nick is part of the wonderful love story he shares with his wife. Years ago—before she met Tom and before Tom could grow a snow-white beard—Cherie remarked to a few friends, “I don’t think I’ll ever get married again. If I do, it will be to Santa Claus!”

Fast forward: Tom and Cherie meet online. They get married. Seven years into their marriage, Tom sees two beautiful Santa Claus outfits in a going-out-of-business sale at a local shop. With the encouragement of Cherie (who always saw herself as a Mrs. Claus), Tom buys the suits and begins his Christmas career.

Fairytale romance aside, Tom’s tenure as Santa Claus has brought him ministry opportunities that might seem incredible to those of us who have never donned the red and white. Each year, after an early-November makeover for his beard, Tom spends two months visiting shopping malls, tree lightings, photo studios, neighborhood parties, assisted living facilities, elementary schools, and Christmas concerts.

Of course, most of Tom’s Santa conversations are with children. For younger kids, his main objective is to impart to them that they share with Jesus in bearing God’s image, that they are precious in God’s eyes. With older children, Tom tries to help them shift their perspective from receiving to giving: “What does your mom want for Christmas? Do you know what gift you’ll give to your little brother?”

But Tom is also eager to express pastoral care for parents. “On the surface, Christmas is all about light, joy, and presents,” he says. “But underneath, there is often a current of anxiety, financial stress, and loneliness.” Tom views every outing and conversation as a little treasure entrusted to him by God, and he feels an urgency to be a good steward of each one.

Some Santa activities have shifted this year due to COVID-19. But the ministry opportunities haven’t disappeared! Tom recently recorded a video of himself, as Santa, reading “The Night Before Christmas.” When the video was posted online, within two hours it had received comments and likes from friends in India, Afghanistan, Liberia, Brazil, and Texas. Among those engaging the post were people who identify as Jewish, Hindu, Catholic, and atheist.

“Santa lets me fling open wide the doors of ministry,” Tom explains with a smile, “Doors that many regard as closed.”

Photo credit: **Always Remember Photography**

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