

Staff Member Bio – Charlene Dong

Hi Church Family,

It is a great pleasure and honor to be considered for the role of Starlight Ministries Pastor. It is my desire to continue my own discipleship journey and lead our Starlight congregation to become more like Jesus in our everyday lives.

My mother, a longtime Christian, had urged me to believe in God and commit my life to Him since the 1980s'. I was arrogant, seeing myself as an educated and successful professional with no need for a God. I immigrated to Canada on March 27, 2004, landing in Edmonton. The next day, a friend brought me to church Sunday service. The service touched my heart profoundly, tears rolled down my face throughout the sermon as I confronted my pride and sin for the first time—I was a great sinner, a failure! That day, the sermon changed my worldview: I realized success in God's eyes was not just defined by my work. The pastor's question hit hard: How would your family evaluate you when you pass away? Knowing my husband and my son were dissatisfied with me, guilt overwhelmed me. Days later, I prayed the sinner's prayer and embraced the Lord. I devoured the Bible, grasping God's salvation truth. The Great Commission to preach the gospel became my calling from the very beginning.

Looking back, God's gracious hand has guided me through every step of my life. Inspired by the love displayed on the cross, I felt called to seminary a year after giving my life to Christ. However, my pastor reminded me to prioritize Bible study, praying, and being a godly wife and mother. For eight years, marriage and family became my "first seminary." Through God's truth, I confronted pride and disobedience. I learned to respect and submit to my husband. Praise God—two years later, he was baptized, crediting my changed life as proof of a living God. Jesus saved me, renewed our marriage, and showed me the sweetness of a God-honoring union.

Raising children revealed God's love: I understood God's unconditional acceptance to us and learned the balance of grace and discipline through everyday life. In 2005, an unplanned pregnancy nearly broke me. I wanted an abortion. But my pastor exhorted: Christians can't take life. Children are blessings from God. Embracing this "cross," I chose obedience. Our second son Jacob ("grasping God's hand") transformed my attitude. While taking care of a newborn, I also rebuilt strong bonds with my older son Jerry. Daily tasks became service to Jesus, learning wise womanhood. My daughter Joylin's birth doubled challenges, but Micah 6:8 became my standard: act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Humbly serving children has trained my patience. I resolved to lead them to the Lord, sharing God's salvation and plans. This journey is challenging. I rely on heavenly wisdom, entrusting them to God's hands. Like my

mother, I pray fervently with tears, experiencing prayer's power every day. All three of my children are Jesus' disciples, learning to serve Him. Being a godly mother is a lifelong journey.

Church ministry was my second seminary, teaching me faithfulness, goodness, patience, and perseverance. As my children grew older, I increased my service: leading small groups, senior fellowships, Ladies Morning Out, baptism classes, and Bible Study Fellowship. These honed my endurance and challenged my servant heart. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 reminded me: God wants real life, not superficial work.

In 2016, I enrolled at Ambrose Seminary in Calgary. The next three years refined my life even more. The driving trips were prolonged praying times. Taking care of my children was still the priority while balancing studies and other responsibilities.

Graduating in 2019, I accepted ERBC's invitation to lead Starlight. Without pastoral experience, I humbled myself in earnest prayer, clinging to the Lord. When COVID hit, the situation only intensified my prayers. We established an online morning prayer altar, persevering every day since March 10, 2020. I have been on staff for almost seven years now. During this time, I have worked closely with both Pastor Dave Schmidt and Pastor Russ McDermott in growing our Starlight ministry. I have been guiding and coaching small group leaders, creating leader training resources, and launching the Bilingual Youth Discipleship program. I've also been working with the Starlight Leadership Team to continue running different Alpha courses, either in-person or online. We have provided Alpha classes for senior visiting parents, University students on campus, youth, new immigrants, etc. These classes have led many to baptism, a testament to God's grace and provision.

