



# ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE CHURCH

Eric Bahme | Patrice Tsague

**W**hen a partnership launched between a pastor and biblical entrepreneur, what emerged is an effective model for churches to transform communities through entrepreneurship.

Eric Bahme serves as pastor of Eastside Foursquare Church in Portland, Oregon, which five years ago purchased a hotel that the church operates as a business while also holding its meetings in the hotel's conference center.

Patrice Tsague founded Nehemiah Project

International Ministries (NPIM) in 1999 to help churches and individuals fulfill God's plan through business. Nehemiah's Biblical Entrepreneurship (BE) training in churches and other locations in the U.S. and overseas, trains Christians how to operate businesses that not only fund missions through company profits but also make the business itself a mission.

Both promote a vision for kingdom businesses backed by churches as a community transformation model.

## **Churches and Businessmen Transforming Communities Together**

After Eric's church took over the Portland Airport Quality Inn & Suites and Rodeway Inn in Portland, pastors and members of the Eastside Foursquare Church working at the hotel found that they were able to touch the lives of new people every day. They became ambassadors for Christ in the marketplace. They have a new congregation every night, from their hotel guests and

coffee shop customers at their Sacred Grounds Espresso café to their inner-city neighbors with practical needs who come to visit the church. Income from the hotel helps fund a recovery center, a homeless shelter, a jobs program, and other ministries.

In most churches, pastors and Christian businessmen do not function as a team. After the Sunday service, they go their separate ways. However, the hotel operated by Eastside along with training like NPIM seminars are an example to other churches of a way to build a team effort where together they can fulfill the Great Commission.

Three important areas where business and ministry partnerships can become a model for community transformation include:

- Helping people in the church and community to start businesses according to the biblical entrepreneurship model.
- Assisting those who already own businesses to become more effective in operating their businesses biblically.
- Owning and operate businesses as a church.

#### Communities Benefiting from Kingdom Businesses

Marketplace ministers have answered the call not to do business as usual but to do business differently. Almost every time a business opens in a neighborhood, the community improves. The company provides jobs and local income levels rise. New construction and building upgrades beautify the neighborhood. The city gains tax income from the profits of the business and the customers are able to use the products and services that the company provides.

However, if those new businesses are kingdom businesses, communities are not only improved but transformed. Customers are treated with dignity and the owners have integrity because their business practices are based on the Bible and they understand that they are answerable to God. Employees are empowered as part of the management style.

Sometimes the new kingdom business has unexpected benefits, such as lowering the local crime rate. When

Eric and Eastside took over their hotel, they discovered to their dismay that the hotel guests were predominantly local criminals operating illegal activity like prostitution and drug dealing out of the hotel rooms. Because of their commitment to Christ and the church based in the hotel, during a period of weeks and months they were able to clean up the neighborhood nuisance, attract people to the church or drive them away. It is now one of the safest places in that town.

When local businesses are funded by local churches, a world of resources open up to the community. Every pastor knows he is called to equip his people for works of service (Ephesians 4:12). When a pastor also understands the principles of discipling and training people for kingdom businesses, the church's influence in the community is greatly expanded.

#### Business Empowerment Backed by the Pastor

Eastside Foursquare Church is involved in this type of community transformation on a daily basis and has also hosted BE training through Nehemiah. Some of the principles this church-entrepreneur model practices include:

- Bible-based teaching from the pulpit on kingdom business principles
- Hotel staff working alongside pastors and church leaders in the daily operation of the hotel as a faith-based business
- Mentoring (discipleship) taking place in daily business situations
- Customers being treated as if they were Jesus coming to the hotel
- Employees being encouraged to take responsibility for the hotel just as if they were owners
- Promoting employees to management responsibilities regardless of past failures when employees demonstrate changed lives
- Encouraging university education with a major in hospitality
- Investing opportunities in hotel ownership for pastors and staff
- Implementing community outreach programs such as a summer "bash" partnership with a Christian radio station

that takes place on the hotel campus

Using this model, Eric is also able to assist other churches to successfully purchase and operate hotels as for-profit businesses through his asset management company.

#### Church Sponsored Seminars Supporting the Business Community

NPIM offers a certificate business course that combines core business concepts and biblical principles. Course topics address principles of biblical entrepreneurship, practices of biblical entrepreneurship and planning a biblically-based business. Most graduates of the program have been able to start and operate small to medium sized businesses in the United States and other nations. The largest business to enroll and complete the course generates more than \$12 million dollars in annual revenue. To date, NPIM has trained more than 1,300 students in the United States, Mexico, Ukraine, Europe, and Cameroon, West Africa. NPIM also offers alumni support services to its graduates.

When Eastside hosted NPIM's training in October 2008, it was an opportunity not only to train hotel staff and those connected to the church but also to further expand the church's outreach into the community. People came to the church to learn how to start and operate businesses successfully and as a result saw how they could sharpen and use the gifts that God has given them. They gained a sense of purpose in getting businesses started. After the seminar was over and NPIM had left, the church's rapport with the entrepreneurial community expanded into other areas.

Once you have brought people into your church and taught them biblical entrepreneurship, a church that understands the business-ministry model can give potential business owners the push they need to get going. It can provide mentoring and nurturing. The church can be there for them when they need understanding and support. When they encounter obstacles, someone from the church with more experience can come alongside and provide mentoring and support. That enables businesses to more likely succeed and also keeps the church involved in individual and (Continued on p. 15)

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community transformation.

### A Community's Newfound Respect for the Church

One of the unexpected benefits that Eastside has received from operating a business is the increased level of respect from city government and the business community. When a church owns a business, it becomes a business member of the community. Instead of functioning as a non-profit entity—using city services without paying taxes—the hotel is now a contributor to the city's resource base.

Eric was pastor for years before his church launched the hotel but had never been invited to a Chamber of Commerce meeting. After the hotel opened, the Chamber rented a meeting room at the hotel conference center and invited one of Eastside's pastors to be their speaker

patrol car, the policeman said with a grin, "I heard a rumor that a church bought this place." (We hadn't yet placed any signs on the property to identify ourselves as a church.)

Eric said cheerfully, "That's not a rumor. It's true."

He laughed and said, "What church would be that stupid? Don't they know that this is the biggest crack house in Portland?" Then he reached out with a warm handshake and asked, "What do you do here?"

Eric paused for a moment and said, "I guess you could say that I'm the senior pastor of the biggest crack house in Portland." The policeman burst out laughing. Then he said with emotion, "I don't go to church. I'm not religious, but I always thought that if a church could

the beginning of their international outreach. To date more than 600 people in Cameroon have received Nehemiah BE training and several hundred are in business today.

Recently when a church in Mexico City wanted to uplift its community both economically and spiritually, they invited Nehemiah to train and certify 24 teachers who could teach BE seminars in other communities around the country. The church has a goal of teaching 3,000 people in the next year. If most of those 3,000 start successful businesses, it would have a tremendous impact on the Mexican economy.

When churches understand the potential for community transformation through biblical entrepreneurship, the results will be unlimited and the Great Commission can be advanced into all the world.

Pastors and business leaders start to see themselves as a team  
Church leaders learn practical ways to support business  
owners in the marketplace **Entrepreneurs** realize that they  
can start biblically-based businesses Churches gain a vision  
for community transformation Business owners understand  
success from a biblical perspective

that month. Portland's metro newspaper, the Oregonian, sent a reporter to do an article on the church and the hotel. She was so impressed with the community service programs like the My Father's House homeless shelter and the Freedom House recovery program that she asked to come back and bring her editor so that they could expand it to a full feature.

Three months after the church took over the hotel, someone rushed into the lobby shouting, "There's a woman outside throwing rocks at a guy! She's trying to kill him!" Eric went out to the parking lot and sure enough, there was a big, irate Indian woman cursing and throwing rocks like missiles at a little guy dodging them on the second floor walkway. Someone called the police (in those days, nothing that happened at the hotel surprised us).

As Eric walked with the officer to his

be involved in a community, this is what they should be doing. Way to go, pastor. You've got a lot of guts."

### Opportunity for International Influence

One church with a business mindset can affect a whole city. It can also change a nation.

In November 1998, Patrice's mother visited the United States and invited Patrice and his wife Gina to visit Cameroon, where he had been born. After they arrived in the country, they saw the desperate condition of many of the people. They taught a series of Bible studies, held prayer sessions, donated more than 70 French Bibles, and led many people to Christ. While they were there, the Lord gave them a vision from the book of Nehemiah that eventually became reflected in their name. It was



Eric Bahme is the founding pastor of Eastside Foursquare Church a congregation with numerous ministries and church services housed within a large hotel campus. He is the author of "The MBE Revolution — Developing Economic Engines that Drive Mission-Based Movements" published by KingdomPoint. He has served on several boards including My Father's House, the largest family shelter in the US not subsidized by the government. Currently he serves with Genesis Hotel Partners and Lincoln Asset Management. Eric Bahme can be reached for comment at [eric@KingdomPoint.com](mailto:eric@KingdomPoint.com).

With his wife Gina, Patrice Tsague developed the Biblical Entrepreneurship Certificate Training Program. He is a business coach/consultant for a number of start-up, small, and medium-sized companies, and serves as Chief Servant Officer of Nehemiah Project International Ministries and PG and Associates. Weekly, he also hosts a radio show and publishes a Biblical Entrepreneurship e-devotional. Patrice Tsague can be reached for comment at [ptsague@nehemiahproject.org](mailto:ptsague@nehemiahproject.org).