

Dream Center gets new CEO

In an office at the Los Angeles-based Dream Center, Raymond Ho is diagramming on the huge whiteboard behind his desk, outlining the Los Angeles International Church's some 200 ministries and their operational bases. Before him two well-dressed representatives for a local politician sit on an overstuffed couch, trying to soak it all in.

"The bottom line," he explains at the end, "is that each week 1,200 people come to salvation here."

While Ho's bottom line differs from that of local politicians, Ho, the Dream Center's new CEO, shares their zest for results. However, the election he relies on is divine.

"My biggest organizational challenge is to make sure we don't get in God's way," he said. "The task is so monumental in a city this size and given the scale of the project here, that's something far bigger than we can do on our own."

Ho brings to the job not only a versatile background and clear vision but also a call from God. In 1995, pastor Tommy Barnett, 61, ran from his Phoenix First Assembly of God church in Arizona to Los Angeles, raising \$3.9 million, and bought the aging Queen of Angels Hospital. Today, son Matthew Barnett has given new meaning to the word "outreach."

At 26, Matthew shepherds a fast-growing flock of former gangbangers, runaway kids, Skid Row homeless and prostitutes of several genders. Of the 500 who live there, about half are in rehab programs and half in full-time ministry.

Yet several hundred of the center's 1,400 rooms remain unfinished, and its several ministries pray daily for more space. Last year's 5,000 visiting volunteers returned home with such deep vision, Dream Centers are springing up from Wilmington, N.C., to Pakistan.

"We have the opportunity to be the model for how local churches can interrelate with parachurches," Ho said. "We can show how the two can work together to change the world."

Ho, 49, was born to an aristocratic family in Hong Kong. He was educated in England, at the University of Wisconsin and Syracuse University in Syracuse, N.Y. At 32 he became the nation's youngest public television CEO, heading the Arkansas Network. Later he ran Maryland Public Television, a six-station network with a budget of \$16.7 million.

After a divorce, he came to Christ and worked first as marketing director for Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and later held the same job at Food for the Hungry. At the latter's Scottsdale, Ariz., headquarters, Ho and wife Tere had their faith tested. She had breast cancer and was about to undergo a radical mastectomy. The couple began praying in earnest. About the same time, they met Tommy Barnett who convinced Ho to tour the Dream Center, then asked if he felt a call to become its CEO.

"I know that God confirmed my call here at the Dream Center with Tere's miraculous healing," Ho said. "God miraculously healed her and told me he was going to do that as part of the confirmation."

Four months after arriving in November, the church's \$850,000 debt had been erased. Now Ho will help the Barnetts blend the amalgamation of ministries into a tightly structured, diversely funded, salvation-discipleship machine that can be replicated around the world. "It's about making the church the center of the community," Ho said. "It's about finding ways to take the church to the people."

Ho is determined to broaden the funding base to include foundational and government grants for more assistance programs, installing a new medical clinic and planning programs for its nonsectarian, nonprofit corporation called City Help. He is also praying for and working toward hiring a core group of sustaining professionals.

Yet Ho's business remains God's business. At the end of the church's packed-out Thursday night service, you'll find him on his knees at the altar praying with the throng who come forward. Each day he writes in his spiritual journal and is as quick to pray with visitors as draw them a vision on his whiteboard.

"This church is different from any I'm aware of," he said. "It's not built from the inside out, but the outside in. Our focus will never be on the needs of the church, but on the needs of the people out there."