

# Economic Downturn Forces Changes For Tulsa-Based Charismatic Publisher

**Subsidiaries affected by layoffs and belt-tightening at Eagle Communications include publishers Albury and RiverOak**

After a difficult year of layoffs, Eagle Communications International Inc. (ECI) has announced a major restructuring of its organization. ECI subsidiaries include Harrison House Publishers, Honor Books, Albury Publishing, Sierra Gift Co., RiverOak Publishing, Access Sales International and LifeImpact.

ECI eventually sold Albury Publishing, with authors such as Tommy Tenney and former Charisma columnist Bishop Eddie Long, to Bethany House Publishers in Bloomington, Minn. Known as a leader in Christian fiction, Bethany House is an evangelical Christian publisher that developed more than 40 years ago from Bethany Fellowship International, according to its Web site, .

"We will not do titles that are so charismatic that we question the biblical base for them," said Alison Curtis, director of marketing for Bethany House. "Bethany House's general philosophy—when it comes especially to nonfiction books but to all of our line—is that we publish sound theology and sound doctrine with a bit of a charismatic flair.

"So if you look at the portion of the older lists that we picked up and will continue versus the portion that we didn't, you'll see that the portion that we picked up is certainly very sound theology and with a charismatic flair."

ECI, which formed in January 2000 by combining several existing companies, suspended the operations of Sierra Gift Co. as of January this year, sold Albury Publishing to Bethany House Publishers, made RiverOak Publishing an imprint of Honor Books instead of its own entity and closed down its LifeImpact retail display in Tulsa, Okla.

Approximately 100 people have been laid off at ECI in the last 18 months because of staff reductions, job consolidations and a slowdown in sales, according to Keith Provance, president and chief executive officer of the company for the last three years.

"The decision was made to centralize, thus reducing the duplication of efforts in areas such as sales, marketing and customer service, and several strategic publishing functions," Provance said. "The decision was also made by management to operate RiverOak and Albury as imprints rather than separate publishing houses."

Bethany House didn't purchase all of Albury's titles, citing a "wide spectrum" of reasons, including theological "differences, not concerns," according to Curtis. However, more than 60 titles were purchased, including both upcoming projects and about half of Albury's backlist.

"The acquisition is a good fit with our publishing mission," said Gary Johnson, president and publisher of Bethany House. "The backlist we acquired with the purchase are all sound titles that bring biblical truths to the believer's life."

The titles of approximately 18 authors were part of the deal, including best sellers Jesus Freaks by dc Talk, The Princess

Within by Serita Ann Jakes and The Heart of a God Chaser by Tommy Tenney. Woman, Thou Art Loosed! and other titles by T.D. Jakes also were purchased.

Those who did not cross over to Bethany House include Larry Huch, Rodney Howard-Browne, Ed Cole and Roberts Liardon, president of Roberts Liardon Ministries and founder and senior pastor of Embassy Christian Center in Irvine, Calif. Liardon recently stepped away from ministry for a few months as a result of moral failure and health problems.

“Roberts was contracted to do more books, but we decided to suspend all future contracts at the present time,” Provance said. “His books were not part of the Albury purchase.”

Rodney Howard-Browne’s titles also were not picked up by Bethany House.

“I had an agreement with Albury that my book The Man Behind the Myth: Seeing Jesus as He Really Is would come back to me this year,” Howard-Browne explained. “I think that their not taking my book was because of the agreement I had with Albury that my book was not included in the sale. This was the only book they had the rights to—they were distributing the others.”

Bethany House will begin fulfilling Albury orders in February. The name Albury will no longer be used as all books will bear the Bethany House name and logo.

Troy Johnson, director of marketing for Honor Books, indicated that Albury had offers previous to that of Bethany House.

“[Albury] had a pretty healthy offer back in the fall, but unfortunately it didn’t go through—or fortunately it didn’t go through in this case—on behalf of Bethany taking it,” Johnson said. A confidentiality agreement between Albury and the publisher who made the offer prevents identification of the publisher.

“Through the years, we have had several offers to purchase Albury. In the past, we felt the timing and/or the offer was just not right,” added Provance, who refrained from naming other suitors as well.

ECI will focus now on its two main publishing houses, gift-book publisher Honor Books and Harrison House, where, Johnson said, “Joyce [Meyer] is the lion’s share of the success.”

Meyer will continue to publish books with Harrison House, according to Provance. “We have published 50 Joyce Meyer titles over the last several years and have contracts for several more books over the next few years,” he said.

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