

It's Time for Marketplace Ministry

For years, Christians involved in business thought their only usefulness was at church. Leaders now say most ministry will soon be happening on the job.

Those who sneer at business as a worldly endeavor with no heavenly purpose should consider what Christians are doing in the African nation of Zambia, where a network of community trust banks lends small amounts of cash to entrepreneurs.

Seventy-five percent of these loan recipients are caring for orphans victimized by the nation's AIDS crisis, and 90 percent are women. The loans include an innovative insurance provision—if the breadwinner contracts AIDS there will be funds for burial and the loan repayment.

With member names such as Jesus Saves Trust Bank and God Is Great Trust Bank, this network emerged from the Christian Enterprise Trust of Zambia (CETZAM). In recent years the organization received a \$13 million cash infusion from the British government. The grants came despite CETZAM's refusal to remove Christian from its name.

"This is a bonafide, demonstrable marketplace miracle," says Mike McLoughlin of Youth With A Mission, who chaired CETZAM during its fledgling days in 1995. "There's no question God did this," he adds.

McLoughlin is not alone in his endeavor to remove barriers between the church and the business world. In fact, an explosive trend toward "marketplace ministry" is occurring all

over the world today, empowering Christians in business who are realizing that God can use their careers and entrepreneurial skills to spread the gospel in innovative ways.

Groups such as Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International (FGBMFI) and Christian Business Men's Committee (CBMC) have proved for years that business and the gospel form a fruitful partnership. Today, more than 900 other ministries have sprung up internationally, many of them in the last decade, with diverse approaches to marketplace ministry. For example:

- * In Hong Kong, attorney Hugo Chan pastors a church of 1,600 doctors, lawyers and professional people who meet in four locations.

- * The International Christian Chamber of Commerce (ICCC) has produced a 10-part video series about starting a business. It has been aired to some 40 million Chinese over network television and distance-learning centers since 2001. Although prohibited from referring to Jesus or the Bible, the lessons unabashedly proclaim biblical principles. A second series will debut soon.

- * In London, consultant Richard Fleming—who oversees the Trinity Broadcasting Network's European operations—has started two business-oriented Kingdom Advice centers. Emphasizing hearing God's voice in the marketplace, five more centers in Europe and Africa are planned this year.

- * America is now home to 10,000 workplace Bible-study and prayer groups, with new initiatives starting at companies such

as Sears, Coca-Cola and American Airlines, according to Os Hillman of Marketplace Leaders, based in Atlanta.

Such activity prompted the Lilly Foundation, which has sponsored major church-related studies, to invest \$600,000 in three conferences this year on spiritual activity in the marketplace.

Similar conferences and seminars are being held from coast to coast in the United States and routinely draw standing-room-only crowds. When prayer leader C. Peter Wagner organized a meeting in Dallas last December, attendance was triple the amount that had been expected. In North Carolina, attendance at the recent International Coalition of Workplace Ministries annual conference was 20 percent higher than original estimates.

The movement also has led to a range of spiritual initiatives, including the hiring of corporate chaplains and intercessors. One company in California's Silicon Valley that is Christian-owned keeps both a prayer leader and prophet on its part-time payroll.

On May 19, evangelists Wayne and Marshell Bass began their second of three 40-day fasts this year for D&C Multimedia in Nashville, Tennessee, conducted at the media firm's offices. President Dwann Holmes Olsen and her husband provided the couple room, board and a small stipend during their intercessory vigils.

"It's very unusual, but we believe it's right on time," says Olsen, a former TV news reporter. "God's calling us to do this. It's amazing how many people are talking about God.

There's a great opportunity to tell others about Him."

A Developing Trend

Although taking Jesus on the job has gained recognition in recent years, Wagner sees this trend entering its third stage. He says the first originated decades ago with groups such as FGBMFI and CBMC teaching people to lead others to Christ on the job. In the second stage, Christians learned to redefine the connection between their occupations and God's purposes in the world.

Wagner believes that the third stage is now being recognized. It concerns the need to bridge the gulf between the traditional and "extended" church.

"The gap is shockingly large," says Wagner, who recently added three dozen businesspeople to his international coalition of apostles. "There are two cultures; each has its own rule book. People in the extended church know the rules for Sunday and the rest of the week. Nuclear church leaders only know their rule book."

Wagner is quick to add that a rising awareness won't necessarily create smooth sailing. He foresees a seven-year period of friction between leaders on both sides until they reach mutual understanding of the Holy Spirit's direction.

To a leading practitioner of marketplace ministry, those who resist are missing the obvious. Rich Marshall is a one-time charismatic pastor who left the pulpit five years ago to teach businesspeople how they can be used by God. His efforts include replicating Fleming's Kingdom Advice centers in the

United States.

Marshall's original inspiration came from the Exodus 31 story of Bezalel, the craftsman God filled with the Spirit to help Moses create the original temple. The insight inspired a yearlong sermon series and prompted his church to maintain his salary while he established his new ministry.

The effusive speaker, who is also the author of the book *God@Work*, brims with enthusiasm whenever he addresses business groups. He often falls to his knees to apologize for the way pastors misuse members of the business community and fail to appreciate their God-given gifts.

"This movement is going to a much higher level," says Marshall, who devotes one week a month to starting advice centers in Houston. "But, we're still at the front edge of this. It's an ongoing thing of people stepping out to do things."

Still, the move is pronounced enough that Ed Silvoso—one of the leaders of the renowned Argentinean revival and a banker and hospital administrator before he became an evangelist—has redirected his ministry toward the marketplace.

His new focus includes a book titled *Anointed for Business*. Silvoso credits the inspiration for writing it to a divine revelation that his theology was incomplete—because it failed to apply Scripture to the workplace.

"Ed, change your glasses and get your marketplace glasses on," he says the Holy Spirit whispered. Silvoso saw that the anointing he has in evangelism is the same one he had in

business.

He also re-examined Scriptures such as Luke 19:10, in which Jesus said He came to seek and save what was lost. Historically, this passage has been interpreted as referring to man's relationship with God. But the evangelist sees a parallel to the marketplace, which suffered when God cursed the ground because of Adam and Eve's disobedience.

"Jesus said [He came to seek the lost] to defend Himself from accusations for going to the home of a successful marketplace leader," says Silvos. "Then He went on to tell the parable of the 10 minas, to explain why people such as Zacchaeus needed to get saved.

"If you do business in the marketplace, even though the Lord's enemies control it, and are successful, you gain authority over cities."

A New Paradigm

Silvos says Christians have typically perceived marketplace ministry to mean evangelizing co-workers. But he sees a new paradigm emerging that advocates bringing God's kingdom into the marketplace to open nonbelievers' eyes and whet their appetite for the gospel.

"Today, instead of blessing the lost, we curse them," Silvos says. "Instead of fellowshiping with them, we avoid them. Rather than praying for them, we hope they will go broke so they'll see they need God. Rather than following the pattern, we begin with preaching and get nowhere. We get rejected."

Silvoso remains optimistic that change is on the horizon. In his travels, he met a businessman in the Philippines who inherited several businesses from his father. The holdings included a motel chain with eight locations and 2,000 employees. Some of the rooms were rented five times a day, a clue to the prostitution conducted within.

Instead of selling the units, the Christian businessman hired 40 pastors to sit in meetings and pray silently for peace over the managers. That opened the door for fellowship and evangelism. Two years later almost all the employees had accepted Christ, and many of the owner's clients had converted.

The marketplace paradigm-shift is also sparking mercy ministry. In Minneapolis, real estate executive Dennis Doyle helped establish Hope for the City in an effort to match food, clothing and office supply businesses that have surplus with needy inner-city ministries.

In its first two years the effort generated donations with a retail value of more than \$23 million. Midway through 2002, an offer of free shipping opened a new avenue of overseas distribution of medicines, food, clothing and other supplies. The goods have helped furnish a hospital in North Korea, clothe people in Afghanistan and deliver vaccines to Indonesians.

"People have achieved things in business and realized it hasn't brought meaning to their lives," Doyle says. "I get more meaning from shipping a container of blankets into Afghanistan and saving lives than doing another real estate deal."

Seattle business consultant Steve Gandara has chaired a more modest initiative. Last year Gandara, the leader of a weekly businesspeople's prayer meeting (which has since evolved into a Kingdom Advice Center), spearheaded the collection of a \$1,500 offering to help an agency working with homeless teens. The move came after it lost \$3,000 in government funding. The same week, the Kiwanis and another religious nonprofit group made up the difference, enabling the outreach to continue.

The business group continues raising money, including a link with a supermarket chain to generate funds for a homeless shelter. "We're working to get people off their duffs and deliver ministry," Gandara says. "We want people to get saved, healed, filled with the Spirit and transformed, so it's meaningful and not just a bunch of talk."

This desire to touch the marketplace can be seen in other ways. A woman who worked at a Seattle-based computer training center challenged her non-Christian boss to tithe from business earnings to support a missionary couple in South Korea. The year after he did, the company experienced a financial turnaround, says the woman's pastor, the Rev. John Roddam of St. Luke's Episcopal.

"There are people in the marketplace who haven't had their vocation validated," Roddam says. "People are being called there and they need that. People are tired of compartmentalizing their lives. They want to see God's kingdom in business."

Breaking Down Barriers

Marketplace participants also see the Lord breaking down

barriers that have existed in the church, among them gender and denomination.

For example, women constitute roughly 40 percent of Gandara's weekly meetings, and Hillman points out the modern movement has broadened to encompass females and various ethnic groups.

Such developments are none too soon for one West Coast advertising executive who prefers to remain anonymous. Though respected in the corporate world, the woman said when she helped plan one national prayer gathering, two pastors asked her, "Whose spouse are you?"

"I think the spiritual move in the marketplace is going to be extraordinary and fast because women don't have to overcome [the] archaic barriers they do in the church," echoes former TV executive Linda Rios Brook (see related story on page 58). "The marketplace looks at the church and thinks the things that keep women out of leadership are silly."

Nor do denominational differences divide business leaders. Covenant Group President Tim Habeck met Ron Burhoff of Cincinnati at a marketplace conference a year ago. Habeck came away impressed with Burhoff's prophetic gift. Despite their evangelical and Reformed backgrounds, the four principals of the Atlanta-based Covenant Group agreed to invite the charismatic intercessor to address the company last fall.

As a result of Burhoff's meetings with Covenant's management and employees, the insurance firm reformed some of its practices. Several employees were healed by prayer and about a dozen have accepted Christ.

"I almost don't care about all of the theology," Habeck says of their differing backgrounds. "I see the work of the Holy Spirit and our heavenly Father all over the outcome. I see people healed spiritually and emotionally. Is it taking down barriers? Absolutely."

The question is why God chose the dawn of the 21st century to accelerate this activity. For marketplace pioneers such as Fleming, it's a spiritual progression that originated two decades ago. Having seen God restore prophetic gifts in the 1980s and apostles in the 1990s, Fleming believes that, with those in place, the Spirit is ready to move.

He perceives a significant change occurred three years ago. "Something happened when the clock passed 2000," Fleming says. "The Lord allowed me to start Kingdom Advice Centers. I found people in various nations God had been speaking to and preparing. I think He began breathing on marketplace apostles and prophets."

Others, such as Minneapolis businessman Doyle, also see the changes that have taken place. "For years, people have embraced the idea that church was a place you went to on Sunday, forgetting that believers were portrayed in Acts carrying Christ with them," Doyle says. "Generally, Christians have focused their attention on church buildings and forgotten things happen outside the walls."

"We've all tried very hard to do prayer evangelism and bringing pastors together to bring revival, and it's not worked out very well," he adds. "We need the whole body of Christ if we're going to see revival in the U.S. I think God is saying it's going to happen in the marketplace."

If the goals of marketplace ministry are realized, a new breed of Christianity is in the making—the kind that will change the spiritual climate of the 21st century workplace, conduct business in the power of the Holy Spirit and generate tremendous financial resources for kingdom purposes.

‘Our Work Is Our Worship’

Former TV executive Linda Rios Brook challenges Christians to take their jobs seriously.

A television executive for 30 years, Linda Rios Brook today devotes her time to advocating a restoration of the biblical relation between the church and marketplace. The president of the Lakeland Foundation—which encourages people to answer the call of God on their lives—says there is no doubt God is at work in business.

“Throughout history, if you want to know what God is doing, listen for the refrain,” says the author of *Wake Me When It’s Over*, a challenge for people to integrate their faith and vocation.

“What are you hearing everywhere? Marketplace ministry,” she says. “This isn’t new, the church is just waking up to what’s going on. Every move of God begins in the marketplace, not in the religious sector. A lot of businesspeople want to minister, not just hear about it.”

A speaker last December at C. Peter Wagner's Anointed for Business seminar in Dallas, Brook also recently led two marketplace ministry courses at a church in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. She plans to teach another course this summer in the Denver area.

Some of its key concepts include:

How to retain a godly outlook as an employee

How partnerships between businesspeople and church leaders affect God's work

The need to join the work of prophets, priests (pastors) and kings (political leaders and business executives).

As evidence of the latter's biblical basis, she mentions that King Darius threw Daniel in the lion's den. But when the prophet Ezra pushed to rebuild the temple, the king authorized the project because of Daniel's earlier influence.

Likewise, she believes Christians need to make their presence felt in such arenas as the law, education, sports, media and the military.

"Prophets and priests minister to kings, and kings move things forward in the world," Brook says. "Do we need priestly anointing in medicine, with the health-care crisis and cloning? I think so. When you have only kings in charge, you have Enron and WorldCom. When you have only priests, nothing gets done."

Brook has observed practical application of these principles in her classes. One student has started his own business, while a woman who hated her job has been promoted to department chief. Another on the verge of getting fired later

received a special employee honor.

On a larger scale, Brook knows the impact Christian participation in business can have on the gospel. She was one of 40 investors who purchased a bankrupt TV station in Minneapolis in 1992 and sold it six years later for almost 23 times the purchase price.

After closing the deal, directors signed over more than \$2 million worth of stock to churches, colleges and parachurch organizations, a boon for Christian groups in the Twin Cities region.

“We believe Christian principles can be applied to any business and the Lord will bless it,” Brook says. “From Adam forward, our work is our worship.”

God @ Work

How one Detroit dentist brings God into his daily practice

J. Victor Eagan has been working to strengthen the bonds between faith and business for 15 years, ever since organizing Professionals for Christ. Today, the Detroit-area orthodontist sees God sweeping through the marketplace while bringing pastors and business leaders closer together.

Four years ago, Eagan and his wife, Catherine, asked God why pastors weren't warming up to this new area of ministry.

“The Lord told me one reason is because it had been a predominantly parachurch paradigm,” he recalls. “Because it was outside the domain of the local church some pastors had difficulty embracing it.”

Thus, the Eagans set up the Workplace Wisdom Institute, which meets weekly at Word of Faith International Christian Center. In addition to periodic guest lectures and banquets, participants review curriculum that emphasizes maintaining a God-centered focus at work.

The authors have put that idea into practice, incorporating prayer and Bible study into their office’s daily routine.

They play Christian music and videos in the waiting room, where patients can pick up a gospel tract or a free Bible, or fill out prayer-request forms. A paid intercessor (who also handles finances part time) and four volunteers pray over the submissions.

When employees take a break from their computers, Christian-themed screen savers pop into place.

Not surprising, then, that a Jewish patient once told Eagan, “I know what you’re doing in here, but I still like coming in here because I can feel the presence of God.”

Last fall, the orthodontist learned the Jewish man had died in a work-related accident. Despite the tragedy, the next day the man’s widow brought their children in for appointments.

When Eagan asked why, she replied, "I knew you would treat me nicely and love me."

After the staff prayed for her, Eagan felt the Holy Spirit directing him to do the rest of her children's treatments free of charge.

"She came back a week later and said coming to our office the day after her husband died was the thing that stabilized her and enabled her to retain her sanity," the doctor says. "We call our office 'The God Zone' and pray His presence will be manifested in people's lives."

A Marketpalce Miracle

One pastor's church debt was miraculously wiped out after he visited a prayer meeting for businesspeople.

Stories of miraculous healing and deliverance in church-based prayer meetings are common. But Sam Benson escaped a \$5 million debt after a prayer meeting for businesspeople in a suburban Seattle hotel.

Predecessors at his Assemblies of God church in Puyallup, Washington, had left behind the crushing deficit. As more than \$2 million in short-term notes came due, a once-thriving congregation of 1,000 dwindled to 300.

Despite issuing bonds and taking other steps to avert

disaster, the pastor of Destiny Christian Center had made little progress after 11 years. He was contemplating selling off pieces of the property, until a businessman approached him at the weekly prayer session.

“God just spoke to me,” the businessman said. “I don’t know what you’re trying to do, but He told me to tell you, ‘If it isn’t debt-free, it isn’t Me.’”

Benson immediately abandoned his plans. Within 10 days he received an offer for the church’s property from a wealthy developer. He wanted it because of its proximity to the Western Washington Fairgrounds.

Not only was the buyer willing to assume the church’s debt, he offered a 22-acre tract on the other side of town. When church officials signed the agreement 10 weeks later, they left with a \$250,000 surplus.

Although the church is renting space while securing building and other permits at the new site, attendance has rebounded to more than 500. Last fall they launched a new youth ministry that now draws 180 teens each week, many of them nonmembers.

Those who remained have also seen personal and family victories. Inspired by what God did for the church, many have paid off credit card bills and other loans, the pastor said.

Destiny envisions setting up a business incubator in its new building, giving entrepreneurs free space and access to office equipment to help them get established.

“Our situation is a microcosm of what God wants to do,” Benson says. “God used the business prayer meeting to help us tread water, get a word of encouragement and be sustained.

“Then he used a businessman who’s not a practicing believer to be a source of tremendous blessing.

“God has tremendous resources, financial and otherwise. The people power in the marketplace is unbelievable.”

Unlocking the New Market

The International Christian Chamber of Commerce’s recent move to Israel has opened ministry doors.

Vague terrorist threats worry many Americans, but in Israel they’re a daily reality. World tensions and threats posed by suicide bombers have drastically reduced tourism and damaged the nation’s economy.

Thus, the International Christian Chamber of Commerce’s (ICCC) impending move of its global headquarters to the Jewish state is both symbolic and practical.

Thanks to members from 80 nations, ICCC has opened once-closed business and diplomatic doors to Israel.

“God has called us to go into Israel through our business and

ministry to display the love of Jesus to the Israelis," says Dale Neill, a Long Beach, California, contractor and ICCC president.

"Like Ruth went to Boaz, we have gone in to serve them with that kind of submissive attitude. There are a lot of ministries there, but none quite have favor with the government like we have."

That favor included an invitation last November to a solidarity conference convened by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. The ICCC delegation attended a companion banquet with 200 top business executives and investors and listened to keynote speaker Gunnar Olson, ICCC's founder.

The November conference was not the first of its kind. A five-day gathering in Jerusalem last June drew more than 400 business leaders from 40 nations who met with three Israeli trade organizations.

Hosted by ICCC, the event included 1,100 matchmaking sessions between various delegations and Israeli officials, seeking ways to boost commerce there.

ICCC has also developed "Markets Unlocked," an Internet-based marketing tool to benefit the nation.

Although Jewish business leaders were initially hesitant to get involved with them, Neill says the relationships they've developed have alleviated suspicions.

"Now they're asking, 'What is it about these people that is so

different?'" the businessman says. "Now we have an opportunity to tell them. We haven't been called to evangelize, just love and serve the people. But they can't resist the love of Jesus."