

# Oregon Church Donates \$500,000 To Help Ministers Find Encouragement

**Larry Huch's Portland church paid the expenses for 800 leaders to find restoration and healing at a six-day conference**

When Eric Thomas received the invitation to attend New Beginnings Christian Center's World Leadership Conference in Portland, Ore., in August, he thought for sure there must be a catch. The 24-year-old pastor of Bethel Christian Church in Gainesville, Fla., was told that if he and his wife came to the six-day conference all of their expenses would be paid—including registration, airfare,

hotel accommodations and food. It sounded too good to be true.

But it wasn't. What Thomas didn't know is that Larry and Tiz Huch, founding pastors of New Beginnings Christian Center (NBCC), planned to pick up the tab for 800 ministers at this year's conference, spending almost \$500,000 on these sponsorships alone.

Although Thomas wondered if the offer was a gimmick, he and his wife hopped on a plane to Portland, joining more than 4,000 church leaders from around the world who attended the weeklong event. It didn't take long for his suspicions to disappear. The Holy Spirit ministered to the couple in the very first service, and they quickly recognized that the conference was an answer to prayer—saving their marriage and ministry.

"I was just about ready to wave my flag and say: 'I quit. I'm

not going to do this any more,'" said Thomas, admitting that both his marriage and ministry were on the rocks before attending the conference. "But this has been a time of reconciliation for me and my wife."

Bringing restoration and healing to hurting pastors and their wives is exactly why the Huchs started the World Leadership Conference (WLC), which was first held in 1994 with 100 ministers and spouses. The conference has grown annually and was attended this year by delegates from almost 200 cities across the United States and more than a dozen other countries, including Brazil, Indonesia, Ukraine and Ghana. Keynote speakers included T.D. Jakes, Keith Butler and Marcus Lamb.

"We had to turn down 200 applicants because we just had no more room," Huch told Charisma. "And there were 193 churches from Africa that couldn't get out of the country. Our goal is to eventually get up to 5,000 delegates whom we can bring in and touch."

WLC was birthed out of NBCC, the Huchs' inner-city church in northeast Portland. NBCC has grown from 10 people in 1990 to more than 5,000 members today, including 1,200 children and 400 teen-agers. The church is racially diverse and is known for its ministry to street kids, drug addicts, and prisoners.

That same passion for reaching the down and out in Portland is what drives the Huchs to find pastors who are on the verge of giving up and to bring them to the WLC each year for a time of healing and refreshing—all expenses paid. The 49-year-old pastor and author of the recently released book, *Free at Last:*

Breaking the Cycle of Family Curses (Albury Publishing), believes the return far outweighs the investment. This year alone more than 30 couples canceled their plans for divorce after the first night of the conference.

"Tiz and I knew what it felt like to be by yourself," Larry Huch said. "God said He wanted me to take 10 percent of the church's money as part of our missions [giving] and then find pastors who may have fallen, maybe are hurting or are just out there by themselves. Ministry is one of the toughest jobs there the stress wears these guys out."

And the Huchs certainly know about stress. The couple, who have been married for 23 years, have planted six churches in their 20 years of ministry, including two in Australia.

"People ask us, 'Why would you care about us?'" Tiz Huch said. "It's because we know what it feels like to be out there struggling and feeling the strain of having no one to turn to."

That compassion through WLC is making a difference today in hundreds of lives, changing pastors and churches around the world. Just ask Thomas.

"The curse [in our marriage and ministry] was broken at this conference," Thomas said. "I told my wife that next year when we [attend], I want to sponsor 20 people. Let's continue with what's been done for us."