

Where Are They Now?

Ed and Sandra Montgomery are still leaders in the ‘new black charismatic movement.’

Ed and Sandra Montgomery were on our cover almost 10 years ago as part of a report on independent black charismatic churches. The Montgomerys had founded Abundant Life Cathedral in Houston in 1981, and one of their major focuses was teaching people, particularly their largely African American membership, how to break the spirit of poverty. Ed had even written a book about it, *Breaking the Spirit of Poverty* (Creation House).

Today Ed Montgomery says not much has changed—except maybe the numbers. His Houston congregation has grown from 1,200 members in November 1990 to 6,000 today, and they constructed a 2,200-seat facility about five years ago, which he says is in need of expansion. The ministry is also broadcast weekly on Black Entertainment Television. And Sandra’s U-WIN women’s ministry now reaches women across Texas.

Ed Montgomery says he’s still teaching his congregation how to break the spirit of poverty, having written another book, *Heaven in Your Heart: And in Your Pocket Too* (Creation House). But now, he says, he’s into “real” estate too.

“I want to develop God’s ‘real’ estate, His people.” Montgomery says he wants to teach people how to build their strengths and become all that God wants them to be spiritually, financially and in their relationships. “There are a lot of people who have not found who they are in God,” he says.

He likes to think of himself as a “head coach,” rather than an authoritarian pastor. He sees his role as equipping the body of Christ to do the work of the ministry, and he would love to see his church become a hub with dozens of ministry spokes connected to it—ministries birthed by the laity because

they've found their purpose.

"We have to empower people," Montgomery says. "For years the church has always been program-centered. God is empowering people to build their ministries."

Montgomery believes it is crucial for pastors to:

1. Love people. "We must love them unconditionally—that means mistakes and all," he says.

2. Stop fishing in the church pond. "Much of our church growth has been the recycling of church members. That has contributed to a lot of the competition among pastors," he says. "When your birth rate in the world is bigger than the 're-birth' rate, we've got a problem."

Montgomery says the trend toward African American pastors founding their own churches is continuing, adding, however, that denominations are more open to the gifts of the Spirit than they were when the trend emerged.

"Denominations made changes because people were demanding those changes," says Montgomery, who was raised Baptist. "If I were to start a church today, I wouldn't necessarily have to change denominations."