

Brother John

Since starting a small storefront church in inner-city Chicago, John Eckhardt has guided hundreds of churches around the world, launched dozens of ministry schools and sold more than half a million books. Yet none of that has changed how he prays.

There's a war raging, and John Eckhardt won't relent. Fighting in the trenches for decades now, the firebrand fivefold minister has charted his own unique crusade against a known enemy, drawing enlistees from American inner cities and suburbs and as far away as Africa, Asia and parts of Europe. But don't go looking for shields, guns or grenades at his south Chicago church—befittingly named Crusaders Church. You won't find them.

This battle is not against flesh and blood. The enemy, Satan, won't go down with mere ammunition but with authoritative, Word-filled prayers that change lost lives and rattle the religious.

That's where Eckhardt—the pastor of Crusaders and a former elder in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC)—has set himself apart. Called to the ministry of an apostle in 1989, he now

makes it his business to train church leaders here and abroad with the spiritual tools necessary to keep evil out of their lives and assemblies, and prayer is an integral part of the formula.

He oversees his home church and two others in the Chicago area. There's also Crusaders Church Ethiopia, Crusaders Church Curacao and Eckhardt's own apostolic missions network that brings thousands of apostles together to confer and strategize about winning more souls for the kingdom. He and others like him believe the latter-day church needs a radical makeover and must be intentionally fervent about outreach and ministry that extends beyond cushy pews and cushier sermons.

That's what drew Toris Anderson to Crusaders more than 20 years ago. "Coming from the street as a 24-year-old young cat, I was looking for realness, not play church," says the now 47-year-old police officer. He and his wife are elders and prophets in the church. Anderson passed up a job opportunity in another state a few years ago so he could stay with Crusaders.

"I couldn't see myself without this family. It's such a part of me," he says. "I just couldn't leave. I respect him as a man of God."

Crusaders headquarters is located in the AFC World Outreach Center at 79th Street and Ashland Avenue on Chicago's South Side. The auditorium, with its towering pillars and

ornate

cornices, appears to have been a theater at another time. During a

recent Sunday service, a teen stepped on to the raised stage and blew

the shofar, commencing the beginning of praise and worship. Dancers

twirled in the aisles, youth popped up like popcorn with hands raised in

praise, others marched with banners, and prophets intermittently

stepped up to the mic and offered bold words of encouragement. When

Eckhardt got to the podium, his message was clear and consistent:

There's a strong need for deliverance, casting out demons and moving in

the prophetic ministry.

This is *not* your average

Pentecostal service. But Eckhardt says it's time out for average. He's a

proponent for churches to return to places of power, led by those who

believe in walking in it.

"All we need are some preachers who will

preach the gospel and will say, 'In the name of Jesus, come out,'" he

says. "If you want abundant life, you need to be delivered from the

demons in your life. When you get involved in deliverance, your life

will change. And the good news is you don't have to remain bound."

But many ministers shy away from the

casting-out-demons part and say "that's too deep for me."

Eckhardt's

response: "If it took all that in the Bible days, why wouldn't it now?"

Instead of finding a ministry that believes in deliverance, some people,

he says, have resigned themselves to living "with their demons."

He tells of visiting a church and being welcomed by the somber dirge: "Trouble in my way / I have to cry sometimes."

"We just accept life is like this. We all have challenges, but *trouble*,"—he shouts as if it's sitting in the pew—"you've got to go!

"I'm not climbing up the rough side of the mountain," he adds. "[Jesus] said speak to that mountain."

This is from a man who grew up Roman

Catholic in south Chicago and had never heard of the Pentecostal

experience until he got saved during a street meeting as a student at

Northwestern University. The church hosting the meeting was Crusaders

Church of God in Christ, the church he would eventually join, become a

minister with and, after the death of its former pastor, lead. (Crusaders Church is no longer COGIC-affiliated.)

Eckhardt met his wife, Wanda, at the church in 1978. They were married a year later and are now parents to five children: Shalonda, 30; Johnathan, 25; David, 22; Timothy, 19; and Joel, 15.

It was shortly before Eckhardt took the

helm at Crusaders that he began to understand the importance deliverance

needed to play in the modern-day church. "I got on the radio

teaching
deliverance, and the city went crazy. I started traveling. We
got a lot
of opposition, but I never took it personally. God gave me
boldness, and
anything I *thought* was God, I preached it and the more the
church grew," says Eckhardt of the congregation that expanded
from 100
to about 1,000 in that one year alone. Today, Crusaders
churches have
more than 4,000 members in the Chicago area.

First, he took care of home. "We trained
our members how to prophesy and how to cast out devils. In
fact, any of
them could stand up and do what I do," he says, proudly. After
making
sure that spiritual gifts were fully operational in his own
church,
Eckhardt visited multiple nations to help others work in the
apostolic
realm and establish new churches with active fivefold
ministries. His
interest lies in increasing the number of prophets and
apostles
worldwide, two of the under-represented positions in today's
church
world, he believes.

Eckhardt helped to establish churches and
ministries in more than 80 nations as head of the
International
Ministries of Prophetic and Apostolic Churches Together
(IMPACT), which
he founded in 1995. The main purpose of this group is training
in
intercessory prayer and spiritual warfare, deliverance and

healing,
prophecy, and church planting here and in other nations.

He helped to establish more than 300
churches in Ethiopia alone. And this spring he already has
planned trips
to South Africa, Uganda and Korea, not to mention his
nationwide
schedule.

As serious as matters of the kingdom are,
Eckhardt also knows how to relate to his audience. One Sunday
he tells
the congregation about having to hire two different plumbers
to fix two
different problems at his home per his wife's request.
Apparently, he
didn't want to do it. He then chimed: "But when a man loves a
woman"—referencing singer Percy Sledge's hit song, to which
the audience
exploded in laughter.

Eckhardt is also on the faculty of Peter
Wagner's Leadership Institute and is a member of the
International
Coalition of Apostles. But if it is a bit strange for some
that this
relatively unknown pastor in Chicago could rally so many to
the cause of
apostleship and deliverance, his simple, yet defining solution
of
achieving that goal is even more incredible.

In the 1990s, Eckhardt began to write
books about the modern apostolic move of the church. "A lot of
what we
were teaching in the church wasn't taught much," he explains.
"So every

time I'd teach something new, I'd write on it."

To date, he has authored more than 40 titles, including a popular series of books on prayer. "The prayers we are dealing with are *deliverance* prayers," he says, explaining, "I just started writing them down. It started with 50 confessions that we were doing for our church."

Soon after, book publisher Charisma House got wind of the prayers and asked Eckhardt to consider publishing them. Some 600,000 book sales later, he's become the forceful voice behind the words of deliverance prayers for many. Prayers for everything ranging from finances and relationships to spiritual warfare and depression are within the pages of these books that allow the reader to pick and choose the prayer that ministers to their needs. Most of the one- or two-line prayers have scriptural references by them.

His hope is to offer readers a greater prayer vocabulary. "There are a lot of prayers in the Bible but I don't think the Bible has written down everything," he says. "Even everything that Jesus did wasn't in the Bible."

Yet, he is not without critics. Eckhardt often shows up on Internet-based Christian watchdog sites, where his theology and methodologies are questioned. Even some who have partnered

with him in the past have severed ties and distanced themselves from him and his teachings.

But he says it's to be expected. "A lot of what I preach is controversial," he says matter-of-factly. "But as people read more, they're moving more and more toward it."

While he's had his detractors, he's also had a few high-profile followers. At one point, Marie Muhammad-Vaughn, the great-granddaughter of the Nation of Islam's Elijah Muhammad was part of the ministry, as was R&B singer R. Kelly and the late Eugene Record of the famed Chi-Lites, who served on the church's praise team until his death in 2005.

In the future, Eckhardt, an ardent soldier of the faith, says he looks to the day when "people are released in the gifts and limitations are broken off of churches."

Lisa Jones Townsel is a freelance writer and an editor based in the Chicago area.

Prayer by the Book

- ✖ What began as a list of confessions for the members of his church has turned John Eckhardt's

deliverance prayers

into a cause to celebrate in some intercessory circles. His prayer

books—four to date: *Prayers That Rout Demons*, *Prayers That Break Curses*, *Prayers That Bring Healing* and *Prayers That Release Heaven on Earth*—help

the prayer warrior call out to God while using powerful words to bring

down strongholds, establish new territories, plead for joy, believe for

healing and more.

“There is nothing really quite like this

... declarations to use and apply to the various areas of your life,”

says Woodley Auguste, director of marketing and publicity for Charisma

House Book Group, publisher of the seminal prayers.

Christians in the U.S. and other parts

of the world have been touched by Eckhardt’s emboldened prayers. On

popular book websites, many readers express great relief and satisfaction about his scripturally sound, unrelenting prayers.



The first in the series, *Prayers That Rout Demons*,

was printed in 2008, with several printings since, Auguste says.

Combined, Eckhardt’s prayer titles have sold almost 600,000 copies in

English and Spanish. Auguste calls the growth “phenomenal” among

intercessors and says people on prayer lines are “praying from it.”

The newest volume in the series, *Prayers That Activate Blessings*, is coming in July; a compendium volume, *Prayers That Bring Healing & Activate Blessings* in September; and *Daily Declarations for Spiritual Warfare* in October.

Books like Eckhardt's help redefine prayer and form the basis of community, Auguste says: "People are praying all over the world with these books, [praying] together on a global scale."