

By Pastor Merv Thompson

"Grace and peace to you from the God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Lutheran Church of Hope is focused very intentionally on transformation. We believe that as God transforms our lives and our values and our actions through Jesus Christ, we can help bring transformation to our broken world. One of the most consistent transformational events at Hope is participating in a mission trip, whether globally or locally. Once we become involved in ministering to those who are living in deplorable conditions, we begin to understand more clearly Jesus' passion for loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Pastor Pat Quaid reports that the seventh mission trip to the African nation of Ghana was just concluded, this being the largest group of Hopesters ever. Thirty-two people raised \$3200 each so that they could follow God's leading to participate in this ministry of love and service.

Our history with Ghana began in 2000 when we agreed to partner with Pastor Sam Dunya, who directs a ministry entitled "GlobeServe." The mission of this endeavor is to make disciples by planting new churches, but also to bring God's love and mercy through meeting deep human needs.

As of 2008, Pastor Sam has helped launch 41 new churches in Ghana, now being pastored by young men who have completed work at the Bible College founded by GlobeServe. In addition, this organization in 2008 provided 26 young girls an education in a vocational school. Finally, they have also created a school for orphans, unfortunately a growing phenomenon, due to the AIDS epidemic.

One of the reasons why so many people from Hope signed onto this sojourn was in response to the "well" project of last spring. If you remember, we learned that it takes about \$8,000 to construct a well, which must be dug at least 200 feet deep to reach clean water. The goal that was set at the time was to raise enough money to fund seven wells, which would have taken \$56,000.

The congregation, in an explosion of generosity, ended up funding sixty wells. Just imagine 60 wells at

\$8,000 each. Couple this with the plan that Pastor Sam is implementing of planting new churches nearby to the new well, and you have a beautiful theological statement. "Come to the water." Come to the water and drink. Come to the living water and be made clean. Come and be baptized, come and drink, for you will never be thirsty again.

Fifteen of these wells have now been completed, another ten are in the process of being constructed. The implications of a village having a well are profound. The incidences of illness drop by more than 50%. Women and children no longer need to spend much of the day walking up to four miles to find clean water, and then carrying these heavy loads back home. This means that the women can spend the day in more constructive activity and the children can go to school.

This gift from Hope for the wells is most likely the largest such gift in the history of this African nation, and will positively impact the lives of more than 30,000 people. But the work is by no means completed, as there are estimated 40,000 villages in Ghana, most of them without wells. Those on this mission trip were blessed to see people dancing and celebrating at the opening of a new well.

The average village in Ghana has about 300 - 500 residents. Most of the people are given a small plot of land on which to grow crops; mostly tomatoes and corn. Family life is under huge pressure, many of the men are forced to go to the cities to find work. If they cannot find work, their shame is often so high that they don't come home again. So villages tend to be populated with women and children and the elderly.

Pastor Molly Juntunen also made the trip. She and six women from Hope mentored sixteen Ghana women in leadership development. Each of these mentees had been persecuted or forced out of their village because of their Christian faith. Molly and the other women helped this group learn self-esteem, to see God's plan for their lives, and taught them about entrepreneurial and business principles.

One of the Hope members, Dr. Pamela Nerheim, spent the last nine months researching the devastating illness of malaria, and brought her knowledge to suffering people; she and other medical personnel treated people for malaria, worms and other diseases. Several other members of the group helped clean out a fifty foot culvert behind one church that kept flooding. Others harvested ten acres of corn.

Pastor Sam has instituted yearly conferences, gathering together some 600 church leaders. Lutheran Church of Hope will be partnering with him in this effort. The goal at this point is that within five years GlobeServe will be financially independent, earning enough through various ventures to fund the ministry.

Pastor Sam and his family will be visiting Lutheran Church of Hope in November, so we will have an opportunity to learn more about Mission Ghana. What great things God is doing through Pastor Sam and his partnership with us.

RIVERSIDE

Approximately 500 Hopensters gathered on a gorgeous Sunday morning at Riverside Bible Camp to worship and to celebrate the completion of twelve cabins. Outdoor worship is always a great gift, and to worship surrounded by these beautiful cottages was a thrill indeed.

Just five years ago, Riverside Bible Camp was struggling with significant shortages in lodging space for campers. Spring floods had devastated many buildings in the lower camp, located right next to a river. Camping weeks were cancelled, buildings were in disrepair and the ministry was suffering. At this point members of Lutheran Church of Hope agreed to construct twelve new cabins on higher ground, making it possible for another 144 campers to attend each week, and experience the love and grace of God.

The transformation is dramatic. Led by Garold and Gretchen Jones, hundreds of people spent Saturdays throughout spring, summer, and fall working on these twelve buildings in a "Habitat" like experience. Some of these workers were professionals; many others were just volunteers who were mentored by the leaders.

Having been at many Bible camps, I have never quite seen any cabins this beautiful. Each of them have their own bathroom area, with showers, no more sojourns in the middle of the night to some common bathroom. The cabins are heated and air conditioned, so they can be used 365 days a year, giving the camp much additional income. Some artistic types have been creating pictures on the walls and the bedposts, highlighting certain biblical passages and themes.

We sat in the huge circle area surrounded by the twelve cabins. Pastor Mike told his story about Riverside, as he preached at the outdoor service. When Mike and Sally arrived at their first parish in Huxley, Iowa, eighteen years ago, he had never heard of Riverside. The first day he was in the office, he was told that the youth of the congregation were at Riverside and he should go to the camp to hang out with the kids. His first day of ministry he was introduced to this Bible Camp, and has been sending youth to the camp ever since. Now to be here today and dedicate these twelve new cabins is kind of full circle for him. We are giving back to the camp for all it has given to young people and adults in the churches which Mike has served.

At the close of the service, Pastor Mike mentioned that not just pastors give blessings, but this is a power given to all of us. We all raised our hand and together we brought God's blessing on the new cottages. As Pastor Pat prayed, all of us joined him in dedicating these cottages to the glory of God, to the spiritual growth and transformation of all who stay here. We gave thanks for all who had helped build these cabins and to God for blessing our efforts. Then we all joined together in a picnic feast.

If you have not been engaged in a mission ministry, get involved. Be transformed. Jesus says to us, "whatever you do for the least of these my sisters or brothers, you do it for me."

Thanks be to God for these amazing mission efforts.