



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

Pastor's Update

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925 Jordan Creek Pkwy ■ West Des Moines, IA ■ Jan 26, 2007

By Pastor Merv Thompson

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

Ideas matter. Ideas motivate. Ideas inspire. Ideas transform. The Bible is the absolutely best place to look for creative and dynamic ideas. Jesus was the author of countless ideas, ideas about how the world could be changed, how people could be healed. Just look at the parables and the rest of his teaching.

The problem we have in much of the Christian church is that we seem to be so devoid of ideas, or we are stuck with only one idea from previous generations. New ideas and Christian imagination are essential for growing and thriving congregations. As one author has said, "We are just one new idea away from transformation." We are only two or three new ideas away from changing a whole congregation or community.

Rick Warren, senior pastor at Saddleback Church in Orange County, CA, has certainly emerged as one of the most prolific "idea" people in the church today. Warren was the one who originated the "Purpose Driven Life" idea, with books selling into the tens of millions. This led to his expanded idea of 40 Days of Purpose which took place in thousands of congregations in past years, including Lutheran Church of Hope.

Now Warren has done it again. His new idea is the "40 Days of Community", which Hope will offer during Lent, beginning near the end of February and continuing through Easter in early April. This year there is a huge new idea that accompanies these forty days. Not only will there be the large group-small group component, as there was two years ago, but this time there will be a strong service aspect to the program.

In other words, every existing small group and small groups that are formed to study the materials that will be distributed will also be encouraged to participate in some kind of service. Service opportunities will happen both within the congregation and also outward to the community and the world. For example, Saddleback Church has created a new vision, a new idea which is to deliver 40,000 meals to homeless people.

Of course one of the realities of ideas is that one new idea often leads to another. When Jesus said that he makes all things new, it means that he helps us expand our ideas. Pastor Mike Housholder and Pastor Pat Quaid have taken Warren's original idea and have multiplied it in manifold ways, leading to an incredible mission opportunity.

The new idea is called "Feed 1 Million in 40 Days." What this means is that Lutheran Church of Hope is enlisting its membership and other worshipers to help create and distribute one million meals to hungry and needy people during Lent. The goal of one million was chosen simply because it is so audacious, so impossible, so awesome that two things are true; it can only happen through the power and grace of God, and it is big enough to challenge everyone to respond. Small ideas often receive small responses, big ideas challenge us to overwhelming responses.

In the feeding of the 5,000 in Matthew 14:13-21, Jesus wants to feed the huge crowd. But the disciples have this pervasive attitude of scarcity, and their advice to Jesus is to send the people away. But Jesus wanted to see how much food people had brought with them, so they might share it. Yet the disciples could only find one small boy who had brought five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus took the food, blessed it, and it multiplied, and fed the whole crowd. Miracle of miracles, everyone was satisfied, and there were many baskets of food leftover.

If Jesus can take the food of one little boy and feed five thousand, what can he do with the food from 5,000, what kind of multiplication can take place? What is 5,000 times 5,000? Can it even reach a million meals? That is the idea.

"Feed 1 Million in 40 Days" has several components. In the first instance, all worshipers at Hope will be encouraged to take an empty grocery bag (7,000 of them will be available), and bring it home from church, look carefully at the list itemizing appropriate goods, then fill up the bag at a grocery store and bring

it back to church Monday through Wednesday.

This food will be distributed to several non-profit organizations in the Des Moines area, including Hope Ministries, Bidwell Riverside, Catholic Charities, and Children and Family Ministries.

Also, Lutheran Church of Hope is creating a temporary "storehouse" on its property, the storehouse being a 53 foot semi-trailer with windows, heat and light. The storehouse is an important biblical idea - "*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house*" (Malachi 3:10). Of course in those days the tithe was given in grain, the storehouse became a place where people gave of their means and the gifts were available to those who needed the food, namely the poor and the hungry.

In addition, the storehouse will also be able to provide meals for those who are hungry, a bowl of soup and half sandwiches will be available. The storehouse will be staffed by the hundreds of existing small groups and groups, which will be formed during 40 Days of Community. So the first piece of this idea is to help share 7,000 bags of groceries with the Des Moines community (which will create 28,000+ meals or feed 5% of the population of Des Moines).

Cargill and other food manufactures have created a meal that it is very popular in the third and fourth world, a meal created to curb hunger on a massive scale. This meal is made up of rice, soybeans and 21 essential vitamins. What the members and friends of Lutheran Church of Hope will do is to assemble these means for distribution.

Then 972,000 meals will go to the country of Haiti, certainly one of the poorest nations in the world. Hope is partnering with a non-profit called Kids Against Hunger. Pastor Pat and Missions Director Brad Krehlik are working out the logistics. Small groups will assemble meals all throughout the 40 days. We need to fill 4,500 boxes with 216 meals per box to reach the goal of 972,000 meals. The cost of one box of food is \$33, so we will encourage people to one or more box of food. What an investment! Give \$33, and provide 216 meals.

A major reason why Haiti was selected is that the United States military is partnering with Kids Against Hunger, and will transport all of the food to Haiti for no cost. Hope is additionally blessed by the largess of

one of its members, Max Holmes, President of the Kids Against Hunger chapter of Des Moines, who will store all of the food before it is put into meals, and then will help transport all of the boxes to a warehouse for distribution to Haiti.

In summary, every person at Lutheran Church of Hope will be challenged to be a part of the 40 Days of Community. Pastor Mike will focus on this incredible opportunity in the next few weeks. Everyone will be invited to join a small group for these six weeks, where people can experience spiritual growth, fellowship and now also service. Part of that service will be the food collection and the Feed 1 Million in 40 Days campaign.

The Feed 1 Million in 40 Days venture is one of those transforming ideas which do not come along very often, although they seem to come along quite regularly at Hope. We believe this idea will motivate and excite all of God's people at Hope, and will give impetus for people to give generously of time, talent and financial resources. Lent is not just a time to experience the sufferings of Christ, but it is a time to enter into the compassion of Jesus for the suffering of the world, and do what we can to help alleviate that suffering.

We cannot do everything, but we can do something. With the growth of the congregation now at 7,700 members, "to whom much is given, much will be required." An attitude of abundance believes that Jesus can multiply the food just as he did for the 5,000. Let this transforming idea bring about new life, new energy and new passion in each of us.