



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

Pastor's Update

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925 Jordan Creek Pkwy ■ West Des Moines, IA ■ July 13, 2007

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

A few years ago, July 30, 2004 to be exact, I wrote an Update about an exciting new project that Hope was initiating called "Mission Riverside." The idea came from a conversation which Pastor Mike had with the director of the camp, of helping the camp build some much needed additional housing for campers. In that Update I had just visited the camp and was describing some of what I found in the visit. Let me repeat some of the previous Update as a way to provide context for what is happening now.

Riverside Bible Camp, which is located just a couple of miles north of Story City, about an hour from West Des Moines, has been reaching kids with the Gospel since 1943. Many adults and youth from Hope have profound memories of time spent at the camp, where their faith in Jesus Christ deepened and life-long relationships were formed with friends and adult leaders.

In more recent years, the camp went through some down years, thought was even given to closing it. But gifted new leadership and the development of a compelling vision has the camp thriving again, with some 200 students participating each week.

Nevertheless, one of the givens of most camps is a scarcity of resources, both financial and human. While tuition fees and gifts usually cover the expenses of staff and program and maintenance, not much is ever left over for reconstruction of aging facilities or the construction of anything new. Thus Mission Riverside was created to partner with the camp and help them with two specific tasks, revitalizing old facilities and building some new cabins.

Riverside has had a shortage of housing for campers throughout its history, thus the new vision is to add twelve new cabins, each housing a dozen campers. Also it is important that these cabins be constructed on "higher ground," many of the older buildings are located in a flood plain, and often are underwater in the spring. During 2004, Hope agreed to build two cabins during the summer, as well as help find the

estimated \$60,000 needed for all of the supplies and building materials.

The experience thus far has been incredible, contributions and resources have shown up. Engineering fees, architectural fees, soil testing, site grading, a job trailer on site, windows, paint and stain, plumbing supplies, electrical supplies, mirrors, bath hardware and an extra discount for lumber have all been gifted.

From the beginning, this effort was seen as more than a service project, more than building something, but rather as a spiritual growth opportunity and an opportunity to become connected, both to God and to others at Hope. What has been so impressive is that so many new members have responded to this challenge, in fact a number of the core committee have been at Hope for less than two years.

All who have come are called "missionaries" and that have participated in both a spiritual and physical experience at Riverside. God has shown up for these weekends and blessings abound, both for the workers and the camp personnel. Children have especially been welcomed and loved, and those from 3 to 73 have been participating. It is truly a God-thing." Thus the Update from 2004.

Incredible things have happened since those early days of four years ago. Six of the cottages have been completed, those with names of Alpha, Almighty, Shepherd, Prince of Peace, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. That means that this summer an additional 72 campers per week can be accommodated and experience the grace and love of Jesus Christ. Also the camp has decided to name the area where the cabins are being built as the "Hope Village," not so much to point to Lutheran Church of Hope but rather to the hope that God gives us.

In the summer of 2007, three more cabins are under construction, they are named Majesty, Creator and Redeemer. The goal is to finish them this year or perhaps by next spring, so they will be ready for the

summer of 2008, which means another 36 campers can attend per week.

The logistics of the weekend have evolved over the four years. For about ten weekends a summer, groups of 35 to 100 gather at the camp early Saturday morning. Breakfast is served from 6:30 to 7:30 am, and the work day is from 8:00 am until about 3:00 pm. Lunch and a time of blessing are provided during the day. Swimming is available to workers at the end of the day. Close to 600 missionaries will be involved this summer.

What has been so rewarding is that most of the people who come to work are not professional builders, many have done little construction work. Yet there is always much they can do and feel a real sense of mission and accomplishment. At the same time, some very skilled workers have also shown up, and they been invaluable to taking on the more technical and difficult projects.

Each cabin is about 600 square feet, and holds six bunk beds or twelve beds. Each of them has two baths, two sinks and every third cabin is designed for ADA standards, to house those with disabilities. Each of the cabins also has heating and air conditioning, a huge improvement over the cabins I slept in when I was a camper eons ago. But this also means that the cabins can be used year round, and the retreat ministry has been a growing segment of the camp's vision.

One of the reasons why "Mission Riverside" has been so successful has been that much of the original leadership is still in place. Sometimes projects begin with great enthusiasm but then people move on to other endeavors and the original energy is lost. Not so with this ministry.

Stories abound of how God has blessed this project. A common experience has been how often the right people and the right resources have shown up at the right time. Sometimes the leaders have had no clue as to how the next step was going to be accomplished, but then someone shows up who can help.

For instance, one time they were stuck, they had to put up large trusses and did not have the right equipment. Just then they got a call from a member of Hope who had a monster crane up at Mason City and was going to bring it back to Des Moines, he

volunteered to stop and help with the trusses. Such miracles have been repeated time and again. Just this week a small church from Story City, St. Petri, sent people who do construction to help with trusses and roof work.

What has given Mission Riverside new impetus this year has been the emphasis of Better Together, Hope's theme for this year. Better Together created a small group movement with an added component, each small group was encouraged to have a mission dimension. This led, of course, to the providing one and half million meals during Lent. But it also meant that a number of small groups decided to make Mission Riverside their mission project.

The last three cabins remain to be constructed. The goal would be to finish them in 2008 or 2009. These three will be named Immanuel, Messiah and Omega.

What this project demonstrates is that we are truly better together, together we can do far more than we can alone. Friendships have been formed and fellowship has been a core value. People have also discovered that it is much more rewarding to give than to receive, and being involved in missionary work brings many blessings. It is also clear that many people who first got involved in mission work at Riverside have been so energized that they have gone on to other mission endeavors.

In the end, when the twelve cabins are completed, that means that 72 more students can attend each week, 720 students over ten weeks, and countless numbers of people throughout the rest of the year. If Riverside Bible Camp is one of the best places where young and old can hear the voice of God, then we have provided places for large numbers of people to share in that experience. What a great idea this has been!