



LUTHERAN CHURCH OF HOPE

Pastor's Update

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By Pastor Merv Thompson

"Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ ."

Food as far as the eye could see. Lutheran Church of Hope turned into a food distribution center. Canned food, boxed food, bottled food, bagged food, piled high and higher. Table after table bent under the weight of the largess of Hope members. Last week there was absolutely no food in the place, not in the pantry, not in the carts, zippo. Now there was tons of food, filling every nook and cranny of the church. What happened?

Last weekend was Souper Bowl III at Hope, a growing phenomenon in the DNA and consciousness of all of the people. During the sermon at all six worship services Pastor Mike issued one challenge to every one of the 7000 worshippers, "before the kickoff of the football game, each of you needs to go to the store and buy some non-perishable items and bring them back so we can fill the food shelves of central Iowa." Based on the response, it appears that most of the people took him seriously.

Mike explained that the food shelves in the area are usually well-stocked between Thanksgiving and Christmas; people are in a giving mood. But by the first part of the February, in the deepest funk of winter, the food shelves have long since emptied out, and contributions are at a trickle. So the Souper Bowl is a response to the growing needs in the larger community, and an attempt to take seriously the biblical mandate to feed the hungry. Some thirty food shelters will be filled to overflowing thanks to the generosity of people from Hope.

Malachi 3 frames the challenge, where God says, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. 'Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.'" Well, Hopeseters brought overflowing amounts of food into the storehouse, testing the Lord, and now the only way to have room is to share it.

Another amazing response to Souper Bowl came in the volunteers who showed up to help sort and package the food. On Monday, 125 people came to help, working all through the day to begin to organize the mountains of food. Some of them were the "usual saints" who show up whenever there is a need; others were, surprisingly, strangers who were moved by the challenge. For instance, a Drake student came for the first time on Sunday, and then showed up on Monday to help. Families with children of all ages came to serve. On Monday evening, with a storm closing down just about every activity in Des Moines, sixty people braved the elements to move tons of food.

In trying to put some numbers to the giving, it was clear that everything was approximate, although those in charge were certain that the giving in 2010 was up at least 50% from a year earlier. It is estimated by the fantabulous coordinator of this drive, Lela Griffin, that more than 100,000 separate items were donated, thousands of separate cans as well as countless numbers of jumbo sized boxes. How much did all of this cost? Some of the cans were less than one dollar, a huge number were around a dollar, but thousands of boxes were several dollars each. Also, due to Pastor Mike's fascination with peanut butter, we had many tables piled high with jumbo Skippy peanut butter containers.

If we can assume, and I think this is reasonable, that the average item brought to the church on Souper Bowl Sunday cost in the neighborhood of two dollars, then that means that more than \$200,000 was given in one day. It was a God thing. The local grocery stores said it was even busier than the day before Thanksgiving, as people flooded the stores after each of the worship services.

Of course this year not everyone who worshipped was able to give, many are in a world of hurt

because of the recession. So Pastor Mike also mentioned that anyone who needed food rather than giving it should help themselves to food as they exited, that is what the food was for. Interestingly enough, some of the people who brought back food mentioned to Hope staff that just a year earlier they had been among those who needed food, now they were able to give it.

All of this is consistent with the mission of Lutheran Church of Hope, "to reach out to the world around us and share the everlasting love of Jesus Christ." For those who have not yet brought food, or would like to bring more, this food will go to stock the Hope pantry which continues to distribute food. Grocery carts are at every door, where the food can be placed. In addition, NorthBranch and CityBranch both have had similar Souper Bowl celebrations.

One of the common experiences at Hope is that we are always surprised by God. We always think too small. Some years ago we had this audacious vision, feed a million in 40 days. Impossible. The congregation pushed right through the goal provided 1.6 million. On Easter we decided to worship at Vet's Auditorium and then Wells Fargo. Wouldn't it be embarrassing for a church that worshipped 4,000 to go to a place that held 12,000 to 15,000, maybe we would just meet in one corner? But we soon overflowed.

A couple years ago for Lent we had a rather ambitious vision of contributing eight wells in Ghana, at \$8,000 per well. When the congregation rallied around this vision, 61 wells were donated. Just recently Hope created a new worship space with 2500 seats, should be plenty of room for years to come. Overnight, it is almost filled. And now what started as rather modest food drives now has multiplied manifold. God always seems to be into multiplication. Surprise!

HAITI

Meanwhile, the other major concern these days is the desperate situation in Haiti after the earthquake. Thus far people at Hope have already donated more than \$200,000 for relief and the contributions continue to arrive. Pastor Mike told the story at worship of the nine year old girl at Hope who was so moved by the situation in Haiti that she gave everything she had in her piggy bank,

about \$12. But then she wanted to do more, and so she counted the remaining money she had from birthday and Christmas and decided to give it all, \$39. Stories of such generosity are commonplace.

Now Lutheran Church of Hope is partnering with Meals from the Heartland to provide thousands more meals for the people in Haiti. More than a million meals have been distributed in Haiti in the past year, but we are now planning to send an additional 280,000 meals to the region immediately. Each gift of \$50 will provide the materials for 332 meals, which will feed approximately sixteen children for a month. Hope will also provide the space for volunteers to package meals. Online registration for packaging will be open soon, visit www.hopewdm.org/haiti to learn more.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians sums up this past weekend, 2 Corinthians 9:10-15:

"Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you performed is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, people will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"