



Pastor's Update

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925 Jordan Creek Pkwy ■ West Des Moines, IA ■ Oct. 16, 2009

By Pastor Merv Thompson

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

I once attended a seminar on long-range planning where the theme was "data-driven." Planning must focus on data. "Pie-in-the-sky" speculation often is just wishful thinking. So we were told to follow the data wherever it led, then interpret the data. While I would usually tend to begin with vision, with biblical truth rather than empirical data, in this case we will begin with the data and then try to interpret it.

From 2000 through 2009, West Des Moines grew about 12%, from 46,000 to 55,000

At the same time, Des Moines grew about 10%, from 199,000 to 210,000

Also greater Des Moines grew about 12%, from 481,000 to 556,000.

In contrast, Lutheran Church of Hope grew in membership by 424%, from 2100 to 11168

Also, Lutheran Church of Hope grew in worship attendance by 400%, from 1240 to 6500

Looking more closely at the past decade:

Year	Jan. class	April class	Sept. class	Membership	Worship Attendance
12/31/1999				2122	1241
2000	cancelled	109	274	2487	1308
2001	268	235	109	3099	1701
2002	394	311	315	4101	2216
2003	291	189	271	4852	2548
2004	179	358	324	5813	2877
2005	225	168	215	6521	3592
2006	304	310	331	7466	3929
2007	359	300	362	8487	4504
2008	355	452	499	9773	5644
2009	428	388	479	11168	6500

Interpreting the Data

*Membership numbers are important to some churches, not to others. Mainline congregations tend to put a strong emphasis on membership. Evangelical churches tend to emphasize worship attendance. At Hope both membership and worship attendance show similar trends, increase of 424% for membership, 400% for worship attendance.

*Such rapid growth is truly counter cultural. David Olson in his book The American Church in Crisis quotes studies that anticipate an average 12% decline during the first decade of this century among all congregations in Iowa.

*If a mega-church is measured by an average worship attendance of 2000, as suggested by Scott Thumma and Dave Travis in their book Beyond Megachurch Myths, then Lutheran Church of Hope became a mega-church in 2002.

*Congregations often experience a spurt in membership or attendance after building campaigns are completed. Hope moved into new space in November of 2000, in October of 2004, and April of 2008. The data shows growth around these events.

*If Kennon Callahan is correct in stating in his book Twelve Keys to an Effective Church that congregations tend to serve at least 50%, perhaps up to 70% more people than membership suggests, it would mean that Hope serves between 15,000 and 20,000 people

*While the average member to worship attendance ratio in Lutheranism and mainline is about 25%, in other words if a church has 1000 members, 250 worship on a weekend—for Hope the ratio is over 50%. I am not aware of any other Lutheran church with this kind of ratio.

*If Lyle Schaller is correct that a congregation with a membership of 350 is a "very large church," then Lutheran Church of Hope is adding a very large congregation to its membership and worship every four months.

*Since 2007, the growth rate seems to be accelerating.

*When I was the senior pastor of a mega-church in the Twin Cities, it seemed as if we were just one large congregation among many. But in Des Moines, only First Assembly is listed as a mega-church along with Hope. This means that Hope is much more visible in the Des Moines area than it would be in the Twin Cities, Chicago or Dallas.

*Lutheran Church of Hope is now the largest Lutheran congregation in the country in terms of worship attendance. Mt. Olivet in Minneapolis still has more members listed.

*In the latest Outreach Magazine statistics, Lutheran Church of Hope is listed as the 17th fastest growing church in America and the 62nd largest overall.

Interpreting Beyond the Data:

*One reason for the incredible growth is that from the very beginning Hope has had a biblical vision of growth. There has been no ambiguity, the vision is to "reach out to the world around us and share the everlasting love of Jesus Christ" and "to be a Spirited, Growing, and Christ-centered community filled with hope."

*Pastor Mike Housholder is above all an evangelist and has enlisted many others of a similar vision to partner with him in ministry and mission.

*Worship has provided the "public face" of Hope, six dynamic worship services with varying styles, all attracting a constant stream of visitors and members.

*Life transformation is at the heart of the Hope story. Alpha, mission trips, worship, Christ-life, Celebrate Recovery, Prayer Ministry, Support groups, Small groups, etc. all focus on life-change through the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Satellite congregations have been established to reach predominantly young adults, a generation largely being lost to most congregations. Some 16% of people who are members of Hope are now in the young adult age group.

*Garage door events have thrown open the doors of the church to welcome thousands of visitors each year, including Christmas and Easter, Taste of Hope and Vacation Bible School. (See Update July 6, 2009, Vacation Bible School.)

*Hope is not only great commission but also great commandment, living out loving our neighbors as

ourselves. Feeding a million in forty days, constructing twelve cottages at Riverside Bible Camp, funding sixty wells to give living water to Ghana, partnering with Habitat for Humanity, providing hundreds of thousands of pounds of food to food shelves, send over 20 mission teams around the world are part of the DNA of Hope.

*Hope has a strong buzz in the larger community, and people experience a very positive first impression when they visit Hope. (See Update March 20, 2009, Church First Impression.)

*Small group ministry brings the experience of intimacy and friendship, "the larger a congregation becomes the smaller it must be."

*Timing and location are without a doubt "a God thing," for no-one could have possibly planned all of this ahead of time. The crucial functional elements of a growing church, visibility, accessibility and surplus parking all resulted from the move to the incredible site on the corner of Ashworth and Jordan Creek Parkway at the beginning of the decade.

*A congregation is only one new idea from transformation, and Lutheran Church of Hope continues to find new ideas for ministry and mission.