



LUTHERAN  
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

# Pastor's Update

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*"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Cor. 13:14).*

Lyle Schaller, the foremost consultant and church analyst of our time has insisted that effective congregations demonstrate what he calls "redundant communication." What he means is that churches have to take the risk of overcommunicating, because in this period of accelerating noise it is increasingly hard to be heard.

Well, having realized in my 36 years of ministry that I can be as redundant as anyone, I have sought to develop that gift. I wonder if Pastor Richard includes that as a spiritual gift. Thus instead of repeating the mantra of the real estate industry "location, location, location," I will instead substitute a different cliché, "communication, communication, communication. A congregation rises and falls on its ability communicate.

Another way of stating this, and please forgive my English on this one, "people tend to be down on that on which they are not up on." My college English professor just turned over in her grave. Lutheran Church of Hope is overwhelming blessed, Pastor Mike does an absolutely masterful job of communicating vision and values and concerns, through sermons, articles in the Hope Monthly and through personal contacts with staff and congregation.

But there is always more that we can do to improve communication. All this came to me in an "aha" moment about thirty years ago. Some former council members voiced some displeasure one day to me with the words, "We don't know what is going on around the church anymore. We used to be in the loop, but now

that we feel out of touch." The first response which rattled around my head, which I wisely did not verbalize, was the flippant (you will never know everything that is happening, the church is too big and too complex), but that is obviously not what they wanted to hear. So I agreed to give some thought, how could we improve our communication.

It was at that point that the concept of a weekly update came to mine. I was a frustrated author anyway, having written some books, and considered myself to be a better communicator through the written word than the spoken word. Therefore out of this deliberation was born something called the Pastors Update, something which I have continued rather religiously for most of my pastoral ministry.

The Update came to be a place where we could reflect upon what was happening in the congregation, in the wider church, in the culture and in the world at large. It was a forum for the launching some new ideas, of beginning a dialogue about certain issues and concerns. I also found the Update was helpful venue for lifting up certain prayer concerns or even some items which might bring out either laughter or moral indignation. In each setting where I have ministered, the Updates have been seen as adding value to the communication effort.

Pastor Mike and I will be the major contributors to the Update, but other pastors and staff will participate from time to time. Certainly we will consider that the Vision 2007 which Pastor Mike presented last weekend to be the

launching of the Update, and we strongly recommend that everyone get a copy of the Visions and absorb its contents. What an amazing dream that God is unfolding to this congregation.

Because of the advance of technology, we can save a great deal of time and hassle which has previously been the case in previous congregations, trying to mail the Update to each family. But with the Web, we can make the Update available much more conveniently, and not kill as many trees at the same time. Therefore on Friday of each week members of Hope and other interested people can log on and retrieve the redundant comments made by one of the pastors. As a reminder, our Web site is [www.hopewdm.org](http://www.hopewdm.org).

Now that I have taken up most of the space talking about how and why we are going to communicate, perhaps it is fitting to conclude with some actual interpretation.

It is my sense that there is rather indescribable momentum taking place right now at Lutheran church of hope. Words are difficult to find to adequately document it, except to use the words of John, *"The wind of the Spirit blows where it wills, we don't know where it comes from or where it goes."* There is a wind blowing here at gale force winds.

How do we know? We can sense it, we can hear it, we can feel its power and strength. It was Christmas Eve services, with many thousands raising their candles high. It is found in the e-mails, the personal comments, the spirit of the worshippers. The staff spent most of its time together this week reflecting on the Spirit blowing, almost knocking us off our feet.

Another sign comes in the numbers. Numbers do not tell us everything, but they do have

meaning. Remember the Bible made sure to tell us that the disciples caught exactly 153 fish in John 21, and that 3,000 people were baptized on Pentecost. Someone was counting, because numbers have meaning. And in this case, they tell us that the Spirit is blowing life wherever it wills.

For instance, last Sunday more than 150 people braved a snowstorm to participate in the new member class. 150 is the size of a medium sized church, and that many people braved the weather to make this commitment. The Spirit blows where it wills. Alpha, the movement which is transforming the church world-wide, already has 338 people signed up for this session, beginning Sunday evening. Simply amazing.

Are you sitting down for the next number? More than 700 people have signed up for the Rosberg marriage Retreat on January 16-17, "Discovering the Love of Your Life All Over Again." I have never heard of such a huge response. The Women's Neighborhood Bible Studies have more than 250 women signed up, incredible. A "Worshipalooza," a worship and praise event for women is well over 100 participants as well. Do you hear the wind? Are you getting connected?

Thanks be to God for the inexpressible gift.