



LUTHERAN  
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

# Pastor's Update

**Mike Housholder & Merv Thompson, Editors**

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By Pastor Merv Thompson

*"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).*

Several months ago we announced the formation of the Leadership Center Task Force. This followed closely on the heels of Pastor Mike's description of something he called "The New Millennium Leadership Center" in the Vision 2007 document. Therefore a task force was created to try and discern the specific details of this leadership center, and focus on God's vision for Hope. Since I have learned that the best way to discover God's vision for a congregation is to go through an extended and disciplined process of learning and struggling, we asked for people to volunteer to be a part of the journey.

Thankfully we have been richly blessed by those who stepped forward, and their passion seems to grow as the sojourn continues. Led by co-chairs Gus Gustafson and Cal Hultman, the other members include: Jim Adams, Comfort Akwaji, Judy Burns, Sandy Freeman, Dale Grabinski, Christa Hanson, Becky Hoyng, Melissa Johnson-Matthews, Intern Pastor Molly Juntunen, Steve Keay, Connie Kinnamon, Ed Nichols, Tim Peterson, Brian Rath, Jack Sheldon, Jim Stafford, Larry Lang and Pastor Merv Thompson.

A basic presupposition of this group is that Lutheran Church of Hope has been blessed by God far beyond what any of us could ever imagine, and the only proper response to this outpouring of blessing is to share it with both the wider church and the world. "Blessed to be a blessing," is a core value of the task force.

One of the major themes of the group has been to study the concept of the teaching congregation and try to discern how this applies to Hope. As author Loren Mead has stated, we have moved from teaching seminaries and teaching denominations to teaching congregations as the primary place where pastors and lay leaders are taught. Thousands of people flock each year to major teaching congregations, being inspired by dynamic ministries and an endless supply of new ideas. We believe Hope is to be the next teaching congregation.

We have entered into an intentional three-step process of discernment. First we have spent some months in the "learning phase," trying to discover as much as possible about other teaching congregations. We are reading books, perusing articles from magazines and the internet, we have watched a couple of very helpful videos, and we are studying biblical visions. We are also trying to understand this phenomenon called Lutheran Church of Hope—Pastor Richard came and gave a fascinating presentation on the DNA of the congregation as he sees it.

Also as a part of this learning, we took a road trip to the Minneapolis/St. Paul area to visit three very prominent teaching congregations. Our first stop was at Hosanna Lutheran Church in Lakeville, a church very similar in many ways to Hope. Of course this was where Pastor David Housholder, Pastor Mike's brother, was Associate Pastor for almost a decade, so it is not surprising that the two congregations might have similar styles of ministry.

Hosanna was birthed in the early 1980's, moved to a 23 acre site in the mid-90's and more recently have purchased another 35 acres. Its first unit was a 750 sanctuary, about the same size as Hope's present worship center. Just recently the congregation completed construction on a 2500 seat sanctuary. Senior Pastor Bill Bohline shared the dynamic vision of the congregation, which now worships about 4,000 people on a weekend, again very similar to Hope.

Our second step was at Wooddale (Baptist) Church in Eden Prairie. Senior Pastor Leith Anderson, one of the leading pastors in the country, described how the church outgrew its facility in the suburb of Richfield and moved to a new 31 acre site almost twenty years ago. Wooddale has been a major teaching congregation, and now has instituted what is called the "Wooddale Center," which has conferences and resources for church leaders.

Wooddale has been on the cutting edge of birthing new congregations. On any given weekend, Pastor

Anderson told us, there are some 25,000 people worshipping, 5,000 at the home site and the rest at new congregations which Wooddale has started. We were very impressed by the vision they had for starting new churches.

Our third visit was to Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Burnsville, where I served as senior pastor from 1970 until 1992. POP became a teaching congregation in the late 1980's, hosting many leadership conferences and creating numerous resources for churches through its publishing company. Together with Community Church of Joy Lutheran Church in Phoenix, POP has been among the forefront in Lutheran and mainline teaching congregations.

My long time co-worker Handt Hanson, Director of Worship and Music, described to us how the teaching congregation vision has been evolving, moving more to distance learning and the use of technology. He also said that they are spending much less time on teaching methods to leaders and more time focusing on the key issues of discipleship and growing deeper in faith. POP moved to a new location in 1976 in a joint venture with Fairview Hospitals and Ebenezer Society, and now has 23 acres of property.

We are not quite sure when the learning phase will be completed, we still have so much to learn and appropriate. But we are going to move soon into the second phase of our work, this called the "evaluation phase." Now is the time that we begin to sort through the stupendous amount of material we have garnered and begin to decide which applies to Hope. No congregation can be all things to all people and so we will have to pick and choose what seems to fit with our present and future vision. We begin with a four-hour marathon in January and we will spend as much time as needed in this phase.

Once we determine that we have a clearer understanding of the future vision of Hope as a teaching congregation, then we will enter into the writing phase. Until a vision is written, it is just a bunch of ideas floating around. The Old Testament prophetic book named Habakkuk says it best: 2:2-3

*Write the vision: make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time: it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.*

Writing the vision is an essential part of our work, for in the writing the vision becomes much clearer and in focus. Sometimes we really do not know what God is saying to us until we try to commit the revelation to paper. Thus we will have a smaller group from our task force become a writing team, and begin the process of drafting a document. Once the task force is comfortable with the written vision, then we will circulate it to the various groups in the congregation, and eventually to the entire congregation. We are hopeful we can complete this work by summer of 2005.

By the way, some things just will not wait. We are going to go ahead with a teaching church event next spring. April 21-23, 2005 will find Hope hosting a conference for pastors and lay leaders to come to Hope for learning and inspiration. We continue to receive many phone calls, e-mails and letters from other congregations wanting to come and visit with us, to see what is happening at Hope. Needless to say, we could spend much of our time doing this.

Thus we hope by hosting a conference, we can give many of these who wish to come and visit a specific time to be here. We will have some plenary sessions, break into smaller workshops, and have specific time when the participants can dialogue with staff and other leaders, and an opportunity to worship with us. Congregation members will be encouraged to be involved in this conference, so stay tuned for more information.

Please pray for the Leadership Center Task Force. As we have stated before, "we are just one new idea away from transformation." It appears as if this group has discovered several of these ideas." And as we learn together, pray together, study together, dialogue together, we continue to discover a vision which is far more than the sum of its parts, more than any of us could have found on our own. The best is yet to be.