



Pastor's Update

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LUTHERAN CHURCH OF HOPE

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By Pastor Merv Thompson

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:2).

Previous Updates have, on a couple of occasions discussed the rather new phenomenon of the "mega-church." If you remember such discussions, a mega-church is described as a congregation which averages at least 1800 to 2000 people in worship each week. (I have seen different criteria for the exact number.) Lutheran Church of Hope with its 3500 to 4000 people at worship became a mega-church several years ago, and, as such, shares a number of characteristics with other such churches.

Bill Easum, a well-known church consultant, author and speaker, has written a fascinating article in the most recent edition of Outreach Magazine. In the article he quotes extensively from the research done by Dr. John Vaughn of Church Growth Today, who is identified as the "definitive researcher in the area of church growth and is the nation's leading expert on mega-churches." Some of his conclusions include:

In 1970 there were only ten mega-churches in America. Fourteen years later in 1984, there were still only 24 such churches. Today, however, there are some 835 mega-churches. That seems almost hard to believe, from 24 to 845 in just twenty years. What happened? In 1994 there were less than 900,000 people who belonged to mega-churches, today the number has pushed past 3,000,000.

With this information as background, Easum then concludes that "the landscape of the Christian Church is changing faster than at any other point in American history." When Peter Drucker commented a couple of decades ago that the mega-church was the most significant development of the second half of the twentieth century, even he did not predict such an explosion of very large churches.

Easum contains two lists in his article, the 100 largest congregations according to their worship statistics, and the 100 fastest growing congregations, again by worship attendance. The 100 largest congregations average from 5,800 to

25,000 in worship. Sixty of the 100 are denominational churches (23 are Baptist), forty of the 100 are independent. Half of the independent are charismatic churches. Thirty of the 100 are heavily ethnically mixed, twenty-eight are African-American, and forty-two are mostly white congregations. Thirty-five of the 100 are less than ten years old.

Of the 100 largest, California is the most represented state with 14 congregations. Texas is second with 13. Minnesota has three and Iowa none. Of the 100 fastest growing, Minnesota has two and Iowa has one, that one being Lutheran Church of Hope. (Refer to the list later in this Update.)

According to Easum, many factors are driving this growth. He lists the migration of people to urban centers, word-of-mouth, sharpened leadership skills, churches becoming multigenerational and most recently, Web site access. He also heralds the growth of small groups. Fully 10% of all Americans are in small growth groups, and this is helping people grow spiritually. A final reason he lists is the willingness of churches to be more creative in their use of time and space, churches offering up to six or seven worship services each week. (Recognize anything here?)

To position Lutheran Church of Hope within the fastest growing churches, the following list should be helpful.

Fastest Growing Churches, 2000-2004, the gain is listed.

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|-----|--------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. | 14,060 | Lakewood Church | Houston, TX |
| 2. | 12,570 | Without Walls Int'l Church | Tampa, FL. |
| 3. | 11,300 | The Potter's House | Dallas, TX |
| 4. | 10,200 | North Point Community Church | Alpharetta, GA |
| 5. | 9,950 | Fellowship Church | Grapevine, TX |
| 6. | 9,400 | Mars Hill Bible Church | Grandville, MI |
| 7. | 8,787 | Second Baptist Church | Houston, TX |
| 8. | 8,687 | Life Church | Edmund, OK |
| 9. | 7,593 | World Changes | College Park, GA |
| 10. | 7,567 | Church of the Resurrection | Leawood, KS |
| 11. | 6,800 | Christ's Church of the Valley | Peoria, AZ |
| 12. | 6,500 | Christian Cultural Center | Brooklyn, NY |
| 13. | 6,050 | Calvary Chapel of Ft. Lauderdale | Ft. Lauderdale, FL |
| 14. | 5,900 | The Dream Center/Angeles Temple | Los Angeles, CA |
| 15. | 5,672 | Saddleback Church | Lake Forest, CA |
| 16. | 5,389 | McLean Bible Church | McLean, VA |
| 17. | 5,032 | First Assembly of God | Phoenix, AZ |
| 18. | 5,000 | Highland Park United Methodist | Dallas, TX |

19.	4,846	Prestonwood Baptist Church	Plano, TX
20.	4,412	Fellowship of the Woodlands	Woodlands, TX
21.	4,298	Southeast Christian Church	Louisville, KY
22.	3,891	Brookhollow Baptist Church	Houston, TX
23.	3,711	New Hope Christian Fellowship	Oahu, Honolulu, HI
24.	3,700	Faith World	Orlando, FL
25.	3,500	Christ Fellowship	Palm Beach Gardens, FL
26.	3,500	Church of the Open Door	Crystal, MN
27.	3,477	Granger Community Church	Granger, IN
28.	3,432	Cedarcreek Community Church	Perrysburg, OH
29.	3,300	Crossroads Community Church	Cincinnati, OH
30.	3,233	Hope Presbyterian Church	Cordova, TN
31.	3,100	King's Cathedral	Kahului, HI
32.	3,017	Calvary Community Church	Phoenix, AZ
33.	3,000	Calvary Chapel-Golden Springs	Diamond Bar, CA
34.	3,000	Victory Christian Center	Oklahoma City, OK
35.	3,000	Calvary Revival Chapel	Norfolk, VA
36.	2,978	Bay Area Fellowship	Corpus Christi, TX
37.	2,900	Highland Park Baptist Church	Chattanooga, TN
38.	2,600	Lutheran Church of Hope	West Des Moines, IA

As Rick Warren says in Purpose Driven Church, "The key issue is not church growth, it is church health." And a healthy congregation and a healthy cell tend to grow. Growth depends on a confluence of forces, the right timing, the right leader, the right location, the right theology, the right ecclesiology, the right evangelical spirit, the right programs, the right "love quotient," the right types of worship, etc. When all things come together, it is certainly a God-thing, and with God all things are possible.

It is entirely likely that Lutheran Church of Hope will experience another growth spurt in the year to come. We are adding three new worship services which were not available just last fall. Two services will be held in the new chapel at 9:00 and 10:30, and we have started a new service at 5:00 P.M. on Sundays. We have not counted the attendance at Immersion in our worship numbers either, but as it is certainly a worship service we think it should be included. Therefore, beginning in November we will be counting four new worship services. Amazing growth.

We always remember Paul's instructive words in I Corinthians 3:6. "*I planted,*" Paul writes, "*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.*" Praise God for allowing us to plant and water, but we recognize that it is God who grows the church. Thanks be to God.