



# Pastor's Update

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LUTHERAN  
CHURCH OF HOPE

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By Pastor Merv Thompson

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

Author, speaker and church consultant Norm Shawchuck, author of Managing The Congregation, made a statement at a conference I attended some years ago that I have not forgotten. He said that "we are just one new idea away from transformation." In speaking about the church, and of course this could also apply to us as individuals or even for entire communities, the words are powerful, "we are only one new idea away from transformation."

Countless examples abound of people or institutions which have been stuck or dormant or out of energy but are suddenly transformed by a new idea. We are just one new idea away from transformation. The 9/11 commission criticized the intelligence community for a series of problems, but one of the strongest indictments was for "a lack of imagination," in dealing with terrorists and the war on terror. Perhaps this is the greatest threat to the church as well, a profound lack of imagination among leaders and followers alike. One new idea, better yet, a series of ideas, can bring about renewal, transformation, and rebirth.

Lutheran Church of Hope has been richly blessed by a whole series of new ideas throughout its ten short years of ministry. Some of these were entirely new ideas within the Lutheran Church but most of them were ideas which came from somewhere else and were new at Hope. We don't have to reinvent the wheel, most likely someone in some other location has already thought of what we need to do for transformation, the trick comes in discovering the ideas and then having the faith and courage to implement them.

Think of some of the new ideas which transformed Hope. I think of Alpha, which we wrote about in a previous Update, having enormous transformational power in the congregation. Or we have a very different style of worship at Hope, Immersion. Pastor Richard calls it "post-contemporary," whatever that

means. This worship contains some very new ideas, new to Hope, new to Lutherans, new to many of us. We are only one new idea away from transformation.

Finding a 25 acre site at the very pivotal intersection of Ashworth and now Jordan Creek Parkway was a huge new idea, many congregations would still be in a first unit somewhere. Immersion is a dramatically different idea each Thursday night. Taste of Hope, Worshipalooza, Mission Jamaica, Kingdom Quest, PIGS, Purpose Driven Life, are among some of the new ideas, and there are many others as well. We are only one new idea away from transformation.

Lutheran Church of Hope is presently being transformed by another new idea. Originating from the fertile mind of Pastor Mike Housholder, this idea was the creation of a partnership between Riverside Bible Camp and Hope. (While some of the new ideas have indeed come from creative pastors and staff members, such ideas often come from volunteers and lay leaders.) The Spirit blows where it wills, and new ideas pop up in some of the most unexpected places.

Some background information should be helpful. Riverside Bible Camp has been a center for reaching kids with the Gospel since 1943. Many adults and youth at Hope have profound memories of time spent at camp, where their faith in Jesus Christ deepened and life-long relationships formed with friends and adult leaders. In more recent years, the camp went through some down years, thought was even given to closing. But gifted new leadership and the development of a compelling vision has the camp thriving again, with some 200 students participating each week.

Nevertheless, one of the givens of most camps is a scarcity of resources, both financial and human.

Most congregations and non profits have similar experience. While tuition fees and gifts usually cover the expenses of staff and program and maintenance, not much is ever left over for reconstruction of aging facilities or construction of anything new. Thus the new idea was for Hope to partner with Riverside and help them in these two tasks, revitalizing old facilities and building some new ones.

From the beginning, this effort was seen more than a service project, more than building something, but rather as a spiritual growth opportunity and an opportunity to become connected, both to God and to others at Hope. What I found so impressive about this new idea is that it has captured the imagination of so many new members, in fact a number of the core committee have been at Hope less than two years. Right from the beginning, the steering committee has seen themselves as missionaries and has developed a ritual each weekend called "anointing of the missionaries."

Thus far several hundred people from Hope have become missionaries in this important effort, and have participated in both a spiritual and physical experience at Riverside Camp. God has shown up for the weekends and blessings abound, both for the workers and the camp personnel. Children have been especially welcomed and loved, with child care provided for ages 3 through 12, have been active in nature hikes, scavenger hunts, crafts, mission lessons, group games and swimming.

Riverside has a shortage of housing for campers. Thus they have created a vision of adding twelve new cabins, each holding a dozen campers. Also these new cabins are being constructed on "higher ground," many of the older buildings are in a flood plain and often are underwater in the spring. Hope agreed to build two of these cabins this summer, as well as help find the estimated \$60,000 needed for all of the supplies and building materials.

Surprising contributions have come pouring in. Engineering fees, architectural fees, soil testing, site grading, job trailer, windows, paint and stain, plumbing supplies, electrical supplies, mirrors, bath hardware and an extra discount for lumber have all been gifted.

One cabin is quite far along, it is "dried" and almost ready for interior finishing; the exterior siding is 50% complete, the windows and doors are installed, the interior wall framing is complete. Cabin 2 is roughed in, the roof is framed, sheathing completed, the building will soon be "dried in." The God-thing is that just the right people have shown up at the right time, so that the work can be accomplished in the right way.

In addition to construction, the large groups which have gathered each weekend have swept throughout the camp, cleaning, weeding, repairing, and painting. For instance, the camp director pointed out a bridge that was impassible and disintegrating. With the help of a structural engineer from Hope who just happened to be there, the bridge was transformed in two days.

We are only one new idea away from transformation. Two major transformations are taking place this summer at Riverside. The first is in the people who are participating. They are becoming missionaries, they are servant-leaders, they are discovering the profound joy which comes when they use their God-given gifts, and when they give to others. The other transformation is in the Bible Camp. Not only is the landscape of the place being transformed, but perhaps also its relationship to congregations such as Hope, which will most likely lead to other such partnerships with other churches.

Never underestimate the power of an idea. You are only one new idea away from transformation.