



Pastor's Update

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LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

925 Jordan Creek Pkwy ■ West Des Moines, IA ■ Aug. 27, 2004

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).

Included in the Vision for Hope 2007 were the words, "Off in the distance, over by the small lake in the southwest corner of the property (only in Iowa would anyone call the puddle on our property a lake), you notice a sign that reads, 'Future site of Hope Retreat Center and Prayer Garden.' Plans call for a two-story building overlooking the water, offering much needed space for retreats, meetings and classes, as well as a few rooms for visiting residents who are studying and serving at Hope's 'New Millennium Leadership Center.'

Later on in the same document more is written about the leadership center. It is described as a training place for future pastors and church leaders, helping particularly fast growing congregations as well as rural churches which cannot find pastors. In addition, the center is envisioned as providing annual conferences, research, communication and internships."

With this dynamic vision as background, now we are faced with the daunting challenge of trying to discern exactly what this leadership center will look like, what will be its priorities and how it will fit with Hope's larger vision. We always begin with the conviction that God's vision for Hope, for the Leadership Center, and for each of us is always more expansive and exciting than anything we have imagined—and that the task of leaders is always to try and discover God's vision.

Another part of this process of discernment will be to look closely at the whole phenomenon of the "teaching congregation." As mentioned in the Update of Jan. 16, one of the most important developments in the life of the church has

been the growing influence of the teaching congregation. Until the past few decades most teaching and continuing education for pastors and lay leaders took place in seminaries, colleges, denominations and publishing companies.

But almost under the radar a new force began appearing sometime in the late 1960's, but became a full-blown movement in the later 80's. As a result thousands of church leaders have been flocking to teaching congregations, and it is safe to say that these teaching congregations have the primary means of educating and inspiring church leaders.

Church analyst and prolific author Lyle Schaller's new book, From Geography to Affinity highlights the teaching congregation. He writes, "by 1990 the new kid on the block had arrived. This was the self identified teaching church. A small but growing number of large congregations that had earned a reputation as a 'model for the American Protestant Church in the 21st century' began to design and offer two-to-six day events." The basic theme of these teaching congregations can be summarized in one brief paragraph.

"Come and learn from us. This is what we have invented. It has worked for us and you may want to adapt what we have learned to your situation back home. This event will be staffed completely by our own people, both volunteer and paid staff. We are prepared to share with you what we have learned and the mistakes we made that have had to be corrected. We will be glad to answer all your questions and we expect to learn from you as you push us to ex-

plain the why, the what, and the how of ministry.”

As mentioned in the January Update, the two most prominent teaching congregations today are Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago and Saddleback Community Church in Orange County, California. Thousands of pastors and church leaders have attended workshops and seminars and purchased resources created by these churches (such as Rick Warren’s books Purpose Driven Church and Purpose Driven Life.)

Within the Lutheran community the two most prominent teaching congregations are Community Church of Joy in Phoenix, AZ and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Burnsville, MN (where I was pastor). Other churches which have become teaching congregations include Hosanna Lutheran in Lakeville, MN, Lord of Life Lutheran in Anoka, MN, Nazareth Lutheran in Cedar Falls, IA, Hope Lutheran in Fargo, ND, Bethel Lutheran in Madison, WI, and Calvary Lutheran in Golden Valley, MN (I am sure I have missed a few others.)

Pastor Mike has stated that one of the visions for Lutheran Church of Hope is that it becomes the newest of the teaching congregations. (This is why he asked me to come to Hope, to help discover this new vision.) And both of us agree that the teaching congregation in 2005 most likely will look considerably different than the model which was created in the late 1980’s, but we don’t know yet what that means.

Therefore, we are now in the process of creating a Leadership Center Task Force, which will begin this discernment endeavor. Fortunately at Lutheran Church of Hope, we have an abundance of talented and creative people, so our creativity really knows no bounds. Ever since Vision for Hope 2007 was distributed, people with a passion for leadership and for such a

center on our grounds have been stepping forward, volunteering to participate.

We are very pleased that Cal Hultman and Gus Gustafson have agreed to co-chair this new task force. For the next few months we are going to be praying, learning, studying and discussing what God’s vision will be for the Leadership Center and the teaching congregation. Anyone reading this update who has a similar passion for such a journey is welcome to participate just contact Cal, Gus, Pastor Mike or myself.

Revelation 3:8 says it best, *“Behold I have set before you an open door which no-one is able to shut.”* God has put an open door in front of Hope which no-one is able to shut, and now we have to try and learn where this door is leading and have sufficient faith to walk through it.