



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

Pastor's Update

Mike Housholder & Merv Thompson, Editors

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"Grace and Peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

During the week between Christmas and New Years, I met for breakfast with a long-time friend of mine. He has been the senior pastor of a very large and dynamic congregation for more than twenty years, and is just completing a rather lengthy sabbatical leave. He talked much of the time about what he had learned during his time away, his first real break in his entire ministry.

Spiritually, he said, it has been a serendipitous time, a lot of time for reading, writing, praying, and attending some workshops around the country. Also he has focused on living a healthier lifestyle, with much clearer boundaries and a special emphasis on being truly engaged with his family. He was expressing the hope and conviction that when he jumped back into the go-go world of the mega church that he would not abandon many of the things he had learned.

When I asked him how he was going to prioritize his ministry during his final decade of work, he said that by far the most important task he was going to passionately pursue was that of equipping leaders. He wants to spend less time in meetings, less time in administrative detail, less time in staff management, and more time in discovering and mentoring and empowering leaders. I was affirming in his new-found zeal for such a work, stating that I too believe it is the highest priority for the future church, to raise up many more transformed and transformational leaders.

Thinking about Lutheran Church of Hope, I believe this is also at the top of the list for us as well, that we continue to equip and empower the kind of leaders needed to carry out God's vision for this church. Without effective leaders God's work often stumbles, congregations and communities atrophy, but with talented, passionate, dynamic leaders there are no limits to what can be done.

In a book that I reviewed some months ago, [The Church of Irresistible Influence](#), by Robert Lewis, the traditional paradigm of pastoral leadership was discovered to be wanting. In this model the pastor or the pastor and staff ran around on the playing field while the congregation members sat in the bleachers and cheered (or jeered in some cases) as the game unfolded.

All pastors have heard the cheers—"Way to go Pastor. Keep it going, Pastor. Great sermon, Pastor. You are winning

Pastor." We have also heard the jeers—"You are not playing as well as our former Pastor, your preaching is not moving me, you are not meeting all of my needs." At the end of the day the pastor and staff go home exhausted and sometimes discouraged and the rest of the congregation goes away frustrated. The entire model is counter-productive.

The new pattern, of course, which is not new at all, is that the pastor and staff are meant to be coaches, and perhaps even more often, cheerleaders. They roam the sidelines while the people in the congregation are out on the field playing the game. Of course leaders can help those playing the game to play more wisely, can organize, strategize and encourage, but the pastors and staff are not called to play the game. We have pastors burning out all over the place as they try to spend their time on the playing field, but much wiser to remember Martin Luther's emphasis on the "priesthood of all believers." Everyone is a pastor, every believer is a leader. Pastors and staff have to get off of the field and focus on coaching and cheerleading.

Of course it was this understanding of church that led Pastor Mike Housholder some years ago to propose the creation of a leadership center at Hope. He is well aware that there are very few places where leaders are being developed, where servant leaders are equipped and empowered. With the teaching congregations around the country becoming more and more influential in developing leaders, he saw a vision that Hope was to become one of these teaching churches.

His vision then led to the establishment of a task force, the Leadership Center Task Force, co-chaired by Gus Gustafson and Cal Hultman. For almost two years this group has been meeting, planning, visioning and praying. Thankfully the end of the work of the task force is in sight, with a couple of upcoming events helping us to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

The first event is a Community Forum on Leadership to be held on Saturday, January 28th from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. Nationally recognized experts on leadership, Ken Jennings and John Stahl-Wert, authors of [The Serving Leader](#), will be the presenters. This is planned for the entire congregation, for all who are or wish to be leaders.

Ken Jennings, PhD, is the Managing Partner of Venture Works, which specializes in organizational development. He was a co-director of the Global Leadership program at the University of Michigan Business School. He is also a managing partner at Accenture in change management. Jennings specializes in developing leaders, strategic planning, and information systems implementation. Their book was published in the Ken Blanchard management series.

John Stahl-Wert, PhD, is president of the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation which has created more than 50 social sector organizations, from a community health center, neighborhood housing, youth mentoring programs and drug treatment initiatives. He is a faculty member at Geneva College's Masters of Science in Organizational Leadership, also an ordained pastor in the Mennonite Church and founding member of the Board of Advisors for Habitat for Humanity International.

The other major event will also take place the same weekend of January 28-29. Gus Gustafson has also invited some other world-class leadership teachers to come to Hope for three reasons. The first is to meet with the pastors and the Leadership Center Task Force to test the vision that we have discerned, to see if we are thinking big enough, if we have truly heard what God is saying at this time.

A second reason is that each of these persons has been invited to be a part of national Advisory Group for the leadership center, and this will be a chance for them to meet each other and also meet the members of the task force and the Hope pastors and staff. The third reason is that they can experience something of the energy and dynamism and Spirit-presence of the congregation itself. They will attend worship on Saturday and be around all Sunday morning as well.

Some of these other guests will be:

Tom Brown, PhD. Author of Anatomy of Fire: Sparking a New Spirit of Enterprise. (forward by Jim Collins, author of Good To Great.) Brown is a member of the International Business Editorial Board. He became known especially for his 400 plus columns as Editor for Industry Week. He is now the publisher of Brown Herron Publishing, which e-publishes more than 50 authors and is a pioneer in 21st century publishing.

Larry Fidelus, PhD. Presenter at the Greenleaf Servant Leader Center, and the Director of Long Range Planning for the Carmelite Order of North America. Fidelus teaches in the graduate organizational leadership studies

program at Lewis University, and has worked extensively with such organizations as Starbucks, World Vision, and Catholic Charities.

Heather Hyde, MA, CPA. A founding partner of Venture Works with Ken Jennings, she teaches the application of the book on serving leaders. She is a consultant with many firms in crisis management and firm turnarounds, operational analysis and improvement planning.

Dan Webster. Founder of Authentic Leadership, Inc. Trained at Fuller Seminary, worked in education and was on the staff at two of the most influential congregations in the United States, Willow Creek Community Church and the Crystal Cathedral. He is the author of Increasing Your Personal Impact and The Real Deal: Becoming More Authentic In Life and Leadership.

Two other people who are coming for whom I do not have resumes are:

Mary Delegardelle, Leadership Development and Light-house Project Director, Iowa Association of School Boards.

Marcia Newman, Speakers Bureau Director, Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.

After experiencing this incredible weekend with all of these gifted and incisive people, the Leadership Center Task Force will then complete its final report to be presented to the church council the end of February. Once the proposal is approved, then we hope to launch the center sometime in the summer of 2006.

The first year will be spent primarily in building the infrastructure, designing the curriculum, preparing a business plan, developing a staffing scenario and creating partnerships. In addition the center will begin to select and equip mentors and teachers. The goal will be to launch the actual teaching and learning phase of the center by the summer of 2007.

These are very exciting days at Lutheran Church, something dynamic and transformational is about to occur. Pray for this effort and find a way to connect.