



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

Pastor's Update

Mike Housholder & Merv Thompson, Editors

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By Pastor Merv Thompson

"To all of God's beloved in Rome (West Des Moines), who are called to be saints. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 1:7.

Something new is appearing on the ecclesiastical horizon. Of course we must preface this by saying that new doesn't always mean better, novelty does not always signal advance. Yet this new idea has some exciting potential for the necessary transformation of the Christian Church. The idea (some resist calling it a movement) is called "the emerging church." Whether the new name will stick is not clear, but the word "emerging" does reflect both the newness and the lack of settledness.

I admit up front that I am a novice in trying to understand this phenomenon, if you wish a thorough explanation corner Pastor Richard. But when both the liberal Christian Century magazine and the conservative Christianity Today both feature cover stories about this idea or movement, then it seems appropriate to pay rapt attention to what it means. Or it could use the rather redundant cliché of the moment (it is what it is).

One way to describe the emerging church is that it is seeking to discover a "third way." Much of the Christian Church today is highlighted by a struggle between evangelicals and mainliners, between conservatives and liberal. Countless articles comment on this dichotomy, and it even is working itself out in political circles. In recent years evangelicals have been on the ascendancy and mainliners have been descending.

What does it mean, a "third way"? It begins with a critique of both evangelicism and mainline, and seeks to appropriate some of the best of both into this new idea. Not surprisingly, it tends to be dominated by younger adults, often called Post Moderns or Millennialists. Unfortunately so many arguments have arisen about what to call young people today that it has often drained energy from mission and ministry. So we will simply acknowledge that the leaders of this "third way" are younger adults, many of them refugees from the two branches of Christianity.

A leading visionary of the emerging church is a parish pastor by the name of Brian McLaren. Look on the internet under emerging church and he is all over it. He describes his journey as follows: "so many of us have come close to withdrawing from the Christian community, not because of Jesus and his good news, but because of

frustration with religious politics, dubious theological propositions, difficulties in interpreting passages of Scripture that seem barbaric, or embarrassments from church history."

McLaren says he is trying to move "beyond a conservative or liberal way of thinking about Scripture, mission and theology. He says that when you have a liberal or conservative way of being a Christian that are both modern, and then you find that modernity is over, you have no choice but to find another way of being a Christian."

Trying to explain the whole concept of the emerging church would take volumes (in fact, volumes are now being written) but there are several major themes which are part and parcel of this new movement. Let me try and articulate them briefly:

The emerging church has a passion for Jesus Christ. McLaren elucidates seven different interpretations of Jesus which have influenced him: The conservative Protestant Jesus. The Pentecostal Jesus. The Eastern Orthodox Jesus. The Roman Catholic Jesus. The Anabaptist Jesus. The Liberation Jesus. The Liberal Protestant Jesus. McLaren summarizes by saying while each of these pictures of Jesus gives a particular dimension, Jesus is much larger than any of them.

The emerging church is above all "missional." It rejects parochialism, the sense that church is all about us. Mission is both evangelism and doing justice. McLaren likes the way evangelicals have real passion for evangelism, worship, prayer, but he is enamored of the mainline passion for justice. Mission is both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

The emerging church is rediscovering some of the forgotten (at least by Protestants) tenants of Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Anglicanism. There is a return to mystery and wonder. Richer liturgies and deeper sacramentality are embraced. A return to ancient faith is increasingly seen as a way forward in churches polarized by worship wars. Prayer is central, the Eucharist is often celebrated weekly.

The emerging church is primarily a lay movement, not clergy dominated like so much of Christianity. Lay per-

sons are set free to preach, teach, administer sacraments, lead mission and ministry. This movement breaks from much of evangelicalism by strongly affirming both female and male leaders as equal partners. Denominational authority structures and ecclesiastical bureaucracy as increasingly viewed as irrelevant.

The emerging church believes that the purpose of the church is to not just take care of members but to transform the community and the world. Building a great church which is like a country club, where people escape from the world, is not what Jesus or the Bible had in mind.

Worship is indigenous, it arises out of the particular community in which it takes place. Worship utilizes all of the gifts, the traditions, the people, the experiences, the history of that place. Where a church is filled with diversity, it then offers wide diversity of worship experiences. In the emerging church there is no one way to do worship, no central hymnbook or mandate.

So often such discussions remain on the purely theoretical or abstract plane. So it is always good to ask the question, "Where can we find an "emerging church?" What would it look like?" Who is actually trying to find a "third way?"

I will jump into the unknown by expressing my own conviction that Lutheran Church of Hope is an early example of the emerging church. Pastor Mike and the rest of the leadership has been rather intentionally creating a "third way church." Let me try and connect the vision of Hope with what McLaren and other emerging church leaders are articulating.

Lutheran Church of Hope is unabashedly focused on Jesus Christ. Remember the Core Value Statement: "Jesus is life. The rest is details." We will soon begin a sermon series on "Jesus Quest." Hope is all about Jesus. It is not about us, but about Jesus. We reject all theology which seeks to turn Jesus into a metaphor or a parable, but rather he is Lord and Savior.

Lutheran Church is centered in mission. During its short history Hope has never been content to be a country club, an island, but rather sees its call to mission. This is both the great commission and the great commandment. Not coincidentally, our overriding theme in 2005 is that of mission outreach. The tons of clothes lying around the church building right now give evidence to the first month of this mission.

Lutheran Church of Hope is revisiting some ideas of

Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Anglicanism.

Thursday night Immersion services are a strong case in point. Richer liturgy and deeper sacramentality is central. Our two traditional worship services on Sunday in the chapel also feature liturgy and every Sunday Eucharist.

Lutheran Church of Hope seeks to unleash lay leadership. Clergy and lay staff seek to empower servant leaders and then get out of the way. Laity are involved in every area of ministry, including preaching and administering the sacraments. Hope also strongly affirms both female and male leaders as equal partners. The installation of Pastor Caroline and the presence of Intern Pastor Molly Jun-tunen give evidence of this conviction.

Lutheran Church of Hope seeks to be a transformational community, both for people within and for the larger community. Hope does not seek to become a great church, to gain power and influence, but rather to humbly and prayerfully help to transform the culture and the community.

Our worship is indigenous, no other congregation does it exactly the way Hope does it. Worship arises from the gifts, the resources, the history, the theological underpinnings, the vision of people of Hope. For all of the reasons given above, Hope seeks to offer a wide variety of worship experiences, it is part of the vision.

In summary, I think Lutheran Church of Hope is a concrete example of much of what the emerging church movement is advocating. In many ways, we are becoming a "third way." The implications of all of this are unknown; they will, I'm sure, emerge at the right moment.

For those who wish to learn more about the emerging church, three books might be helpful.

[Emerging Church](#), by Dan Kimball, Rick Warren, Brian McLaren.

[A New Kind of Christian](#), by Brian McLaren

[Church In Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives](#), by Leonard Sweet.