



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

Pastor's Update

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

The eternal words of Isaiah 52:7 have graced countless ordination services down through the ages, including my own 39 years ago: *How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'*

Looking back on my own ordination day at Victory Lutheran Church in North Minneapolis, I remember also that the choir sang an anthem entitled How Beautiful Upon the Mountains. Even though my size 13 feet are rather pedestrian (pun intended) there is something biblical about heralding the feet of those who will bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring tidings, who proclaim salvation and who declare that God reigns. While clergy are hardly the only ones doing that, this passage became linked with pastors a long time ago and still is commonplace at ordination events.

However, we must say today that there are far fewer ordination services anymore, for the numbers of people being ordained are far fewer. In Roman Catholicism, for instance, the number of men preparing for ministry has dropped from 60,000 to 6,000 in just 25 years. Just about every Lutheran synod has continual shortages of clergy, not only because of the lack of new clergy but also because many of the current graduates only want to serve in very restricted geographical areas.

At the same time, it is also abundantly clear that an increasing number of newly ordained pastors simply are not equipped to fulfill the accelerating responsibilities of pastoral ministry and leadership. Every piece of information I have seen suggests that the numbers of new pastors who are willing and able to serve as pastors in vital congregational ministry is continuing to decline. Thus we have not only quantity, but it seems also of quality.

So the question which began as a whisper some years ago and has now expanded into a crescendo is this, "Where will the next generation of pastors come from?" It is clear every time I pick up The Lutheran magazine or read synod web sites is that large numbers of my classmates at the seminary in the 1960's are retiring. Some will stay on after

Medicare and social security, but many have been waiting for forty years to be off of the 24/7 treadmill.

And the second question follows quickly, "Is there a cadre of well-qualified, committed, visionary and effective pastoral leaders to take the place of the many hundreds who are leaving?" The answer: Probably not. All of these raises still another question, "Are our theological seminaries doing the job they were designed to do? Are they capable of producing the kind of pastoral leaders so needed for the 21st century?" The answer: Probably not.

Peter Wagner, formerly a Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, writes that the modern day seminary is a 15th century model in a 21st century world. Not much has changed in the way we teach and equip pastors from the 1400's. Christian Schwarz of the Institute for Church Development, states that "formal theological training seems to have a negative correlation in both church growth and church health in congregations." An extensive survey by his institute has determined that only 42% of pastors of the most dynamic and healthy churches were seminary trained. By contrast, 85% of the pastors were seminary trained of declining or dying congregations.

Leith Anderson, pastor of Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, MN writes "much theological education is based on the academy model of classical European universities, students are trained to be scholars. They are given the tools for research and analysis, and then are trained to be theoretical theologians. The rub comes when they face the realities of the parish ministry, where there is little time for the more leisurely life of scholarship."

I was one of those who was trained to be a theoretical theologian. Most seminaries have focused on equipping pastors to be scholars, theologians, and teachers. It was clear that my basic task as a pastor was to protect the Lutheran tradition, pass it on to the next generation, and take care of the sick. The whole concept of being a leader was hardly mentioned in my own training.

James MacGregor Burns in his classic book on leadership describes two basic kinds of leaders, what he calls 'transactional' and 'transformational.' Transactional leaders fill an office, they fulfill a role, they serve institutional needs. Transformational leaders, however, are change agents, reforming or revising the status quo. Most seminary students are steeped in the role of being a transactional leader.

Current research suggests that fully 70% of leadership development takes place through experiential learning, 20% takes place through mentors, guides and coaches, and 10% is academic or head knowledge. Unfortunately, just about all seminaries and certainly most graduates schools focus 90% of their attention on head knowledge, intellectual exercises. For a few rarified students, this academic knowledge propels them to go deeper and learn how to lead. But for most of the students, they have learned little that will help them be a leader, and perhaps even learned some wrong things.

In addition, it is becoming clear that the teaching congregation is replacing the teaching seminary and the teaching denomination as the primary resource for developing leaders for this new century. With the advent of the very large congregation in the second half of the 20th century, many of these churches are helping to reshape the church and to equip new leaders. Congregations such as Willow Creek or Saddleback are the most visible but there are countless others. It is the vision of Lutheran Church of Hope that we will also become one of these pivotal teaching congregations.

Of course the most serious challenge facing the teaching congregation will be how to implement the 70-20-10 pattern of leadership development. What does 70% experiential learning look like, how will we structure the 20% mentoring or coaching, and then what is the essential academic 10% that must be learned. If we can get this right, then I think we will create a new reformation in the church, and perhaps even in the world.

A part of this vision is now being worked out in the creation of the Hope Leadership Center, which we anticipate will be birthed later this year. Gus Gustafson and Cal Hultman are leading this huge effort to create the vision and the strategic plan for this important innovation in the life of Hope and the wider church. The Leadership Retreat held here in January with more than 450 people in attendance was a preview of what

is to come.

In addition, Lutheran Church of Hope will be hosting its second "God's Vision: Your Congregation" conference to be held on May 4-6, 2006. At this time congregational leaders from around Iowa and even beyond the state will be invited to spend a couple of days on our campus, interacting with our leaders and learning together. The pastors will be giving major presentations and then many of our staff members will be hosting workshops on specific ministries.

Please encourage people you know who might benefit from coming to this workshop to come and join us. The cost is very minimal for such an event, we are charging just \$50 for the first person from a church and then \$50 for the second and everyone after this is free. We want congregations to send a whole delegation, it is much easier to bring back new ideas when a group goes together. If you have family members or people from previous congregations where you have been who have wanted to come and visit Hope, this would be a good chance to invite them.

There is some evidence already that the teaching congregation is becoming the new seminary and graduate school for church leaders. Most likely the most common form will be a partnership between a seminary and a teaching congregation to equip the best possible pastoral and lay leaders for the future church. We anticipate that the Hope Leadership Center will be able to equip and empower thousands of leaders right here at Hope, and then reach out to offer such opportunities to people from a much wider circle. The large church can never get away from the biblical admonition, "to whom much is given much will be required."

For any questions about the Vision conference the first weekend in May, call either Lela Griffin at Hope 222-1520 ext 149 or Melissa Johnson Matthews 225-8858, the chair of the event.