A 20/20 VISION FOR HOPE
Is this it?

That short and simple question seems so unassuming and safe, until it matures inside your soul and produces an unforeseen challenge to your entire way of life. You try, but you can’t shake it off. It surprises you, because you always assumed, along with the world around you, that satisfaction in life could be found in things like power, status and money. But now, you wonder ....

Really? Is this it? Is power, status or money really worth my best energy, time and effort? If this is it – the best I can get – and I have, in so many ways, attained plenty of it ... why doesn’t it satisfy my soul? (Mark 8:36)

Culture claims the more you have, the better your life, and the happier you will be. Get promoted. Experience power. Buy and consume more. Travel the world. Party hard. Win at everything. Be happy.

But on this sunny spring Sunday morning, driving down Ashworth Road with your above-average husband and two young children, you find yourself wondering what it will be like to attend church for the first time in forever; and whether or not you might begin to find a meaningful and honest answer to that question ....

Is this it?

Last time you attended church regularly, you were about twelve years old. Since then, life got busy. You grew up. Along the way, church started to feel like a hangout for people who either appreciated boredom, or had nothing better to do. People around you openly questioned the validity of organized religion, lauding instead the superiority of personalized build-your-own-god spirituality. Yet now, as a young adult who has recently realized a good measure of worldly success, you find yourself opening your mind to the possibility that only God – the One you met in Sunday school once upon a time; the One from the Bible – has the potential to answer this big question of life that annoys, disrupts and challenges everything you thought you knew for sure.

The world says you’re “winning,” but you don’t feel the victory. You have what you’re supposed to have in order to be happy and whole, but you are, for the most part, skimming through life, flirting with emotional numbness, and – to be painfully honest – feeling a bit disillusioned and far short of satisfied. You have discovered the big problem with living for this world. Achieving fame and fortune, or even respect and honor from your peers, does not have the potential to quench your thirst for a full life.

So you find yourself longing for more, like countless others around the world and throughout history, from the Magi who followed a star, to the rock band singing about a “Beautiful Day,” to modern-day agnostics who remain open to the possibility that God is. Somewhere, deep in your heart, you know it’s true: there has to be more.

There is more.

More love. More joy. More peace. More satisfaction. More beauty. More God. But your spirit went into a state of hibernation while you pursued the cares and values of this world. It’s not that you ever stopped believing in God. It’s just that you stopped letting God lead, and you stopped following. Lately, you feel the need to explore the big questions of life in a more open and honest way, not because you haven’t made it in this world, but precisely because you have made it and remain entirely unfulfilled ....
Welcome to Hope!

On a sunny spring Sunday morning in the year 2020, you turn into the Hope parking lot in your solar-powered sedan. The lot is filling up, and there’s a long line of traffic coming in. No worries – a parking attendant with an ear-to-ear smile waves, welcomes and directs you safely to a large, conveniently located section for visitors. The parking attendants are a hardy, fun and dedicated team who love Jesus, his church, and neon orange safety vests so much that they’re more than willing to endure all kinds of weather to provide a warm welcome and positive first impression for all who show up.

You step out of the car with your family, and feel a steady, warm wind from the west, carrying with it the distinct smell of new life: flowering trees, daylilies, and freshly cut grass. The immaculate landscaping surrounds a neon yellow painted pathway that clearly leads to the Main Entrance. You look up to read a dark green banner with bright white letters attached to a nearby light post: “Deborah’s Lot.” Color-coded names of Bible characters (Mary’s Lot, David’s Lot, Lot’s Lot) are displayed on every light post, all for the sake of helping worshippers remember where they parked after the service. With such well-kept and user-friendly grounds, the church sends a message that what happens here matters, and visitors are expected.

The warm and fresh spring weather contributes to the upbeat mood of those around you, but you also begin to sense that there’s something more. Perhaps the clear skies and refreshing breeze are appropriate metaphors for a deeper blessing of the Spirit’s brilliant light and warm wind today, illuminating and refreshing your soul. It’s a feeling that’s practically palpable; unseen yet impossible to miss. You’re starting to catch the Spirit of Hope (Matthew 5:14-16)!
Since your promotion and move to Iowa three years ago, neighbors and co-workers have shared with you their “Hope Stories” of renewed faith, life and purpose. You listened. You didn’t say much in response, because while you’ve always been open to spiritual conversation, you carry some serious concerns about church, particularly big churches like Hope. You assumed all megachurches were cold, impersonal, and all about themselves. Still, you did notice that when your friends talked about their experience at Hope, they used words like friendly, warm, welcoming, family and small groups. You also heard a lot about Hope’s outreach, generosity and compassion for the poor in the Des Moines area, and far beyond. What’s more, you picked up on a consistent theme shared by your Hope friends: a humble admission that the power center for the church is not the style, the programs, or the personalities. Instead, it's a God thing! God has moved through this church to bring about radical change and lasting hope for those who come, and that’s why it grows. Almost every “Hope Story” you hear starts the same way: “I never thought I’d be the church-going type, then someone invited me to Hope, and that’s when God surprised me …”

Now, in the year 2020, on so many levels, Hope has developed and matured into a church that lives up to its original vision statement, drafted and embraced by the congregation back in 1993: “To be a Spirited (Acts 2:1-42), Growing (Matthew 28:19-20), and Christ-centered (John 13:34-35) community filled with hope!” Even during those early years of newness and childlike big, bold dreams, no one imagined the miraculous ways God would move: atheists and spiritual seekers became believers, believers matured into followers, and followers were sent by the Holy Spirit to be servant leaders with a shared mission, purpose and language (Mark 4:20).

Far from a perfect church, Hope has always been a place where imperfect sinners gather to be touched by the One who is holy. It is a church where spiritually stagnant people are inspired by the light of Jesus Christ and moved by the wind of the Holy Spirit. It is a place where brokenness is healed, shame is crucified, and hope is resurrected!

So, on this sunny spring Sunday morning in 2020, you and your family will explore the church, and get a taste for the depth and breadth of Hope’s ministries … along the way, those who are reading this dream-like document a decade prior will begin to see a clear (20/20) vision for the future. God calls us to embrace, pursue, and realize. God is on the move, and those who come along for the ride over the next 10 years will see his Spirit at work, transforming lives and radically changing the world around us (Romans 12:2).

Giddyup!
Your husband carries your baby daughter, and you look over at your six-year-old son who checks his cell phone (!) for messages. You link hands with your son and, as you start to walk, take a closer look around. Obviously, based on what you see, this is a younger than average church, yet all generations are present. There’s a healthy mix of racial and ethnic diversity, particularly for a suburban Iowa church. No one seems to be in a hurry and overall the vibe is relaxed and comfortable, yet with a sense of genuine anticipation; the feeling people get when they know they’re about to spend some quality time experiencing God together as the body of Christ (Acts 2:1-21).

You look up and notice a small shuttle bus with large blue letters and the Hope logo painted on the side as it pulls up to the Main Entrance. You turn to see another identical bus heading out of the parking lot, and yet another one entering. A parking attendant walks by and, when you ask, she tells you that most of Hope’s members park in the shuttle lot at the mall on Sunday mornings, so visitors like you can park closer. He explains that the shuttle buses run all morning between the mall and the front doors of Hope, and it’s actually quite convenient to park and ride the short distance in a climate controlled, comfortable shuttle … particularly on busy Sunday mornings, or when the weather is less than ideal. As an added bonus, lots of new friendships start on a Hope bus. There are also six eight-passenger shuttle carts that run throughout the parking lot every Sunday morning, as well as Wednesday and Saturday evenings, transporting worshipers from the doors of the church building to their cars in the outer loop.

Turning back toward the building, you notice just off to the west a large, colorful painted wall. Ten years ago, it was nothing more than a necessary, dull, light gray eyesore of a retaining wall between the church parking lot and the street. Now, however, this Worship Wall is alive with a rich array of color and painted texts from Hope folks, that gets refreshed every year with Bible verses and proclamations of praise. The inspiring collage is part of the Express Your Faith (EYF) ministry, which encourages, educates and supports Christ-centered artists in the Hope community, displaying their work both outside and inside the facility. Throughout the year, EYF also offer workshops, classes and camps for students, all for the sake of helping them learn to express their faith through art.

Across the pavement from the Worship Wall, you spot a series of seven wind turbines, which now provide almost all of the power to the building. Hope was one of the first organizations in Iowa to install a wind turbine, and over the past decade has continued to add more, cutting monthly energy costs down to almost zero and taking better care of God’s creation (Genesis 2:15, Psalm 24:1).

On the subject of faithful stewardship, a neighbor told you last week that Hope became a 50/50 church as soon as they paid the mortgage for the building in 2018. Through a series of debt reduction giving campaigns, church members answered the simple and pressure-free call to pray and give whatever amount God lay on their hearts. No guilt. No pressure. No expensive fundraising companies. As a result, the mortgage was paid in full about 20 years early, and the church experienced the joy of giving cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7). Since the mortgage was paid, fifty percent of all offerings support the ministries of the church, and the other fifty percent goes directly to Hope’s mission partners in the Des Moines area and around the world (Luke 19:8) – a quintuple tithe. You had long suspected that churches, particularly megachurches like Hope, were really focused on bringing in the cash, “selling” God for the sake of raising money for selfish goals, instead of truly caring for the poor, or making any kind of positive impact on society. But Hope encourages skeptics to look around, your neighbor told you. In fact, she said that all of Hope’s financial books are open. Anyone curious about how offering dollars are distributed is welcome to come into the office and take a look at the church’s financial records. With nothing to hide, why not bring everything into the light?

Just a few steps inside the building, you sense the ongoing attention to detail: the building practically shines, and its simple design, complete with large new directional signs that were installed in 2011 throughout the facility, helps first-time visitors find their way without getting lost. You and your family receive a warm and sincere welcome from two of Hope’s greeters. The huge and happy team of extroverts overflows with the gift of hospitality … really friendly without making you feel like you just got “pounced.”
On your right, you see the **nursery** check-in area for infants and toddlers and head that way. Hope takes the care and safety of children seriously, hiring only thoroughly screened, trained and CPR-certified childcare providers. You notice the cleanliness of the room, and the genuine warmth of the check-in coordinator. The music is child-appropriate, and the decorations are bright. The registration process includes a simple security thumb scan for you and your husband, so no one else can pick up your baby. You also receive a nursery “call in number” for the day that you can key into your phone anytime to see a live video of the play space where your baby will be cared for this morning.

The high-tech and high-touch nursery check-in process is just the tip of the digital iceberg at Hope. The digital revolution hit this church sometime around 2010. A Director of **Digital Ministries** was hired, and Hope jumped in with both feet (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). At first, it was just the basics: Web sites, online offerings, class registrations, and participation in those old, archaic, and now obsolete social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook. Over the past few years, with the advancement of new digital technology, an **online campus** for Hope has been developed. Way back in 2008, Hope’s low-tech audio **podcasts** started to attract a large and growing audience. The weekly sermons went viral. Sometimes God moves despite the church! By 2009, more people heard Hope’s sermons via podcast than live and in person.

Now, in 2020, not only do more than 100,000 people worship with Hope every week online, but most of them are also involved in one of Hope’s satellite **house churches** located in cities all over the country (including Des Moines) and on every continent. Groups of three to 150 meet in homes and halls all over the world, then “tune in” to join a “live” service going on at Hope in West Des Moines, followed by small group discussions, prayers, communion and fellowship. What’s more, **small groups** and **student groups** here in Iowa, or those who meet anywhere else, can gather during the week to download an original pastor-led course like **Alpha**, or a **Bible study** that runs from Genesis to Revelation. Over the years, Hope’s teaching pastors have also developed easy to use **spiritual growth tools** that can be downloaded straight to your phone or home computer. New and improved **social networking sites** allow Hope members, and various ministries within Hope, to stay connected. During live worship here in West Des Moines, preachers regularly encourage active participation from the congregation via text messages that can be read and integrated into the sermon, creating a more interactive and participatory experience of God’s powerful and life-changing Word. Through the years, Hope has found ways to use digital communication tools to increase, rather than decrease, **community life and spiritual growth** throughout the church.

You take a quick scan from right to left, and notice a **Welcome Center** that sits in the middle of the large, bright Atrium. You move that way, with a question about the children’s ministry program for your six-year-old son. The Welcome Center host kindly directs you to the **Youth Booth** on the ground floor. He tells you that if you get lost, you can just press “HOPE411” on your cell phone and an easy-to-read interior map of the church building will pop up, along with a voice command option that allows you to simply say “Youth Booth” (or “restroom” or “free coffee”), and the system immediately finds your location and provides audible directions to your destination.
On your way down the hall, you notice the **Gym**, which was expanded two years ago, and now includes two full-sized basketball courts. The large, open space is used for kids’ worship on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights, hosts several adult and youth recreational sports leagues, a wide variety of ministry activities, and serves as an indoor playground for **New Horizons**, Hope’s highly acclaimed Christian preschool. Thanks to a strong and talented staff, New Horizons has introduced hundreds of children to Jesus, and has been the “front door” into Hope for many young families.

You soon arrive at the **Youth Booth**. One of the three friendly volunteers behind the counter efficiently registers your six-year-old son as a new student in the Sunday School, called **Kingdom Quest (KQ)**. Every Sunday, KQ embraces the biblical call (Matthew 19:14) to “let the children come,” pointing more than two thousand kids from age 3 through grade 5 to the everlasting love of Jesus Christ. Innovative, safe and age-appropriate approaches to teaching the faith bring familiar Bible stories to life in a 70-minute session that flies by so quickly, the kids don’t want to go home when it’s over. In the summer, **Vacation Bible School (VBS)** runs for several weeks, and attracts thousands from all over the region with a high-energy, wildly creative, and Bible-based approach to leading kids to Christ. On Wednesdays throughout the school year, **Worship on Wednesdays (WOW)** offers Hope’s elementary-age kids a program with more focus on Christian discipleship through worship, Bible study, prayer, memory verses, and service. Of course, the backbone for all these ministries consists of a highly dedicated team of leaders who live to connect kids to Jesus, plus over one thousand volunteers who share that same passion.

Once you arrive at your son’s KQ classroom, you meet two of those volunteers, called **KQ Shepherds**. There are at least two shepherds for each class. All of the shepherds are fully screened, trained and equipped to provide faithful spiritual guidance (and take really good care of) your children. Ultimately, KQ is designed to supplement the work that parents do in sharing and teaching the faith to their children at home, and Hope’s **Family Life Staff** is committed to providing a multitude of resources, seminars, workshops, and parenting classes – live and online – to help parents fulfill their God-given responsibility of passing on the Christian faith to their children.
You kiss your son good-bye, and smile when you notice his enthusiasm as he spins around and runs into the KQ classroom. You and your husband start to move on, and you see two large signs: “Hope Food Pantry,” and “Hope Clothes Closet.” Intrigued, you walk over to this area where an enthusiastic volunteer who serves faithfully in Hope’s missions and outreach efforts greets you. His disposition is gentle, and his spirit is quiet and peaceful, yet you also sense a deep strength, wisdom, and light that pour out from inside him. He’s filled with “ruah” (a Hebrew word for the “Spirit or breath of God”). A few minutes into the conversation with this inspiring and seasoned older man, you discover that he’s traveled all over the world, participating in several of Hope’s global mission trips, as well as volunteering with some of Hope’s local mission partners.

He’s been a servant leader at Hope for years. He tells you that Hope has always embraced Jesus’ call for us as his followers to reach out to the world around us, serving the poor, feeding the hungry, and bringing hope to the lost and broken. Every year, more than one thousand Hope folks participate in mission trips to Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, Mexico, the Navajo Nation, Appalachia, Haiti, Jamaica, India, China, western Europe, and South America. Hope also provides generous financial offerings and passionate spiritual support every year to dig of hundreds of clean water wells in Africa, feed over five million starving people, respond to natural disasters, work to wipe out extreme poverty, combat human sex trafficking, overcome the pandemic of malaria and AIDS, and proclaim the gospel globally through the church’s numerous missionaries. Closer to home, Hope members have launched several local outreach ministries, like Freedom for Youth, Meals from the Heartland, and Ruth Harbor.

The bigger Hope has grown, the more compassionate and involved the church has become. Every Thursday since 2011, Hope has offered a free dinner to anyone in the community who wants to come … and many do. At first glance, West Des Moines appears to be a community filled with wealth and affluence. Look closer, and you’ll find an abundance of people in our neighborhoods who struggle with poverty and the stress of wondering how they can afford their next meal, or buy clothes for their kids. The free Thursday dinner, food pantry, and clothes closet are all managed and run by Hope volunteers.

Over the past decade, several other local congregations, including Elim Christian Fellowship, have joined with Hope’s volunteers to serve together for the sake of bringing comfort to those in Des Moines who are afflicted, oppressed, addicted, lost, or broken. Serving side-by-side as one in Christ, regardless of racial or denominational distinctions, this ministry called 1Church has developed a reputation for active and effective outreach to the city, making a massive and positive impact for tens of thousands of our neighbors.

This all sounds good to you, but your husband wonders if Hope’s outreach efforts are mere “Band-Aids” that cover the wound, but don’t do much to provide the kind of long-term healing that is needed to make a difference in our community. It is one thing to feed the hungry and provide clothes for the poor, but what about lasting solutions?
“Funny you should ask,” the gentle missions volunteer says, “because I used to feel the same way.” He explains that there are two levels of compassionate mission outreach at Hope, and both are important, like “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-16). First, Hope seeks to meet urgent needs, responding to crises and natural disasters, and providing the basics (food and clothing) to keep people afloat. Jesus calls his followers the “salt of the earth.” Salt keeps bodies above water that might otherwise sink. So, Hope doesn’t apologize for meeting urgent primary “salt” needs, like feeding the hungry. Second, Hope engages in transformational outreach, investing time and money in efforts that foster long-term change for people who hurt. Jesus also calls his followers the “light of the world” – a light that cannot be extinguished by the surrounding darkness (John 1:5). Clean water wells in Africa save lives, minimize disease, extend the life expectancy of an entire village, and open hearts to meet Jesus, who offers new life and eternal salvation … and that’s an example of long-term transformational outreach.

Closer to home, Hope CityBranch, a satellite ministry that now meets in three locations (near Roosevelt High School, near downtown, and on the north side) serves as an outreach post for Hope in the city. All three CityBranch locations host worshipping communities that gather on Sunday mornings, some offering services in English, others in Spanish. Throughout the week, the mission volunteer explains, you’ll find a lot of hurting people who show up at CityBranch because they know it’s a safe place where they’ll be loved. And that’s when they meet Jesus, the one who can transform their lives in a lasting way. Somewhat blown away by this gentleman’s passion and wisdom, you thank him for his time, and he replies: “Oh, it’s my pleasure. I care a lot about people. To me, it just makes sense. God put me here on this earth to serve others, and the funny thing is the more I give of myself, the more I get!” He flashes a gentle and confident smile your way, and you feel like you might have just had a conversation with an angel.

Healing Happens

Still amazed, you walk up a different set of steps and gaze at the directional signs, trying to find your bearings. One of Hope’s chaplains notices the “lost look” on your face, and asks if she can help. Her eyes are kind. Her disposition is warm. Her nametag tells you that she’s been on staff for several years. She starts to guide you down the hall. You’re curious about what a chaplain does at Hope, so you ask. She explains that she’s part of a much bigger Care Ministry Team at Hope, which includes pastors, chaplains, coordinators, assistants and volunteers. Together, as a team, they offer pastoral care, healing prayer, spiritual counseling, hospital visits, weddings, funerals, and whatever else might be needed to care for the Hope family. They also oversee support groups for people who mourn, battle depression, or struggle with divorce, infertility, various diseases, eating disorders, abuse, sexuality issues, and addictive behaviors.

You ask her how many people are on staff to offer all these services, and she responds by telling you that the Care Ministry staff consists of about a dozen people, but there are over 250 care providers, all of whom have been thoroughly trained. Dozens more serve as group leaders for Christ-Life, a popular two-year holistic ministry that leads hurting people to new life in Christ. There’s also Celebrate Recovery® (CR), which includes over 300 volunteers who help facilitate this life-saving ministry for the 1,500-plus people who attend every Thursday night. Many years ago, Hope realized that addiction was a major issue in the Des Moines area. Rather than wink at it, or pretend it wasn’t real, Hope launched CR as a powerful and transformational ministry that leads people to freedom – and away from alcoholism, drug abuse, gambling problems, eating disorders, sexual additions, or the pain of being abused, neglected, or left behind – through the healing power of Jesus Christ. As a supplement to Celebrate Recovery, Hope also hosts numerous 12-step meetings each week, including Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Al-Anon/Alateen, Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and Gamblers Anonymous (GA). God has blessed Celebrate Recovery at Hope, the chaplain tells you, and we’ve helped several other churches all over Iowa launch CR in their own communities.
That sounds great, but you wonder why Hope would share its best ministry “secrets” with other congregations. Certainly, that approach wouldn’t fly in your highly competitive business culture. “Well, we don’t compete with other churches,” the chaplain responds without missing a beat. “We’re all on the same team. We compete with everything else that pulls people away from God. We want other churches to thrive, so we try to help whenever they ask, without hesitation. We’re way more interested in expanding God’s Kingdom and making heaven crowded for eternity than building up just one congregation.

Having led you back to the Welcome Center, the chaplain notices Hope’s Servant Leadership Director standing nearby, introduces you, and bids you a fond farewell. Next thing you know, you and your husband are standing face-to-face with a high-energy, sharp-as-a-tack, middle-aged man with active eyes – the kind that look straight into your soul. Before you know it, he’s telling you about something called the Hope Servant Leadership Center. He checks the time, realizes there’s only five minutes until worship begins, and offers you the “short version.”

For the next four minutes and 59 seconds, he offers you an overview of the way Hope does discipleship, partners with other churches and ministries, and raises up a new generation of leaders. You learn that in the early 2010s, after several years of planning, the Servant Leadership Center finally took off, with an emphasis on developing new leaders for the church, both at Hope and for churches all over the world.

A partnership was developed with a top-ranked, nationally acclaimed seminary, and Hope became a satellite location for this institution, providing opportunities for anyone in the Des Moines area to take seminary-level classes at a local church, and work toward earning a post-graduate ministry degree. As an added bonus, some of the best professors from that seminary occasionally serve as visiting faculty at Hope, teaching classes, leading workshops and retreats, and participating in the life and ministry of the church. The rest of the classes take place online, with professors’ video lectures projected on classroom screens or personal computers, followed by discussion groups. Of course, seminary education is also practical, not just theological, so all students are required to serve as interns at Hope or another regional partner church while they’re enrolled, providing experience for them, and pastoral assistance for congregations.

Many of the seminary students are Hope members, but most come from partner churches of all denominational stripes located in small towns and rural areas throughout Iowa and surrounding states. Lots of small-town and country churches have struggled over the past 25 years, to the point where they can no longer afford to pay a living wage to a full-time pastor. In response, Hope decided to partner with those churches, inviting them to enroll one or two of the most spiritually mature lay leaders in the congregation in the Servant Leadership Center, where they will receive a seminary-level education, and be trained to serve as part-time pastors (10-15 hours per week) who are fully equipped to preach, teach, preside at the Lord’s Supper, marry, bury, baptize, confirm, and counsel … and they can keep their day jobs! Along the way, relationships are created between Hope and these Main Street and rural congregations throughout Iowa, helping all of us to more faithfully live out Jesus’ call for his church to be “one.” (John 17:22)

These same opportunities are offered for Hope’s mission partners around the world – particularly in Africa, Asia and South America – all for the sake of developing a new generation of church leaders who are equipped to share the good news of Jesus Christ faithfully and effectively. So, with Hope’s partnerships, one congregation in Iowa can have a massive positive impact on the world – multiplication produces better results than addition for the Kingdom of God!

The need is urgent. The rewards are eternal. And Lutheran Church of Hope is all in, reaching out to the world around us and sharing the everlasting love of Jesus Christ (Hope’s Mission Statement). “Hope exists to make heaven more crowded for eternity,” the Servant Leadership Director explains, “but we also want to make disciples of Jesus right now (Matthew 28:19)!”
To that end, the Spiritual Life Team developed a discipleship program at Hope called Spiritual Life GPS: Growing People Spiritually, which helps every church member navigate an easy-to-follow path around the Hope Circle (Mark 4:20) – from seekers to servant leaders – by providing a personalized assessment and plan for spiritual growth. The GPS Discipleship Plan includes four components: study the faith in a comprehensive way, connect to others through small groups or house churches, discover your spiritual gifts, and serve others by sharing your gifts for God’s glory.

The GPS Discipleship Plan is not a roadmap to heaven. The Bible is clear that salvation comes to us only by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is, however, an extremely helpful and user-friendly tool for anyone who hungers for spiritual growth and the fullness of a new life in Christ (John 10:10).

“Wow!” the Leadership Director exclaims. “Where has the time gone?! It’s time for worship to start!” You smile as you say good-bye and realize that not only is this man incredibly enthusiastic about developing leaders for the church, he’s also quite compelling. You start to wonder if this might help you find it … satisfying answers to the big questions of life. You ponder for a moment what your own GPS Discipleship Plan might look like, and where God might challenge you to grow.

For now, though, it’s time for worship. As you and your husband stroll into the Worship Center for one of Hope’s Sunday morning Celebration Services, you realize that this church is already starting to feel like “home.” It’s big, but like a warm and healthy Iowa town with a centrally located town square, lots of friendly folks, and a buzz of activity. There’s no self-righteousness or pride in the “bigness” of the place – in fact it’s clear that the leaders in this church want every Christian church to be full. And, looking around this Worship Center right now … this place really is full! In fact, it’s overflowing. Average weekly attendance at the West Des Moines Worship Center in the year 2020 has matured into a fully-grown number of just over 10,000 people. Another 2,000 gather for worship at the rapidly growing regional satellite locations, and over 100,000 people worship with Hope worldwide when online church and house church worshippers are included in the total. While no one at Hope takes credit for those numbers, the church has learned to embrace fully its megachurch size, and realizes the growth is a miraculous gift from God (1 Corinthians 3:6)!

A worship leader greets the congregation and says, “We’ve been praying for you and believe it’s no accident that you’re here today.” Then he invites you to watch a two-minute Hope Weekly News Video on the big screens up front. The video grabs your attention and invites you in, like a well-produced and interesting mini-movie. The Production Team put the video together. They produce all
sorts of other big and little things that help Hope go every week: sound, lights, staging, wiring, satellite feeds, sermon “bumpers,” worship podcasts, online campus production, GPS videos, interviews, music recordings, tours, retreats, and concerts … just to name a few! The brilliantly creative and somewhat quirky crew, both staff and volunteers, carry out their work with joy. It’s fun to push people’s buttons, after all!

The compelling video concludes, and you’re still standing in the entrance without a seat. Along comes a helpful usher, who also happens to be the Operations Director at the church, identified by his nametag, but he doesn’t have any bulletins. He’s there, along with his team of 15 other ushers at this service, to greet and seat you and your husband in an overflowing Worship Center, and keep watch over the congregation during the service, responding to any medical issues or concerns that might arise. A rotating volunteer team of first responders is always on call during services, and there’s at least one doctor, nurse or EMT who sits in a clearly designated seat at every service. Medical emergencies at church are rare, but when they happen, Hope wants to provide care that is both effective and immediate.

You ask the usher where you can find a bulletin. A master of multi-tasking, he tells you quickly and efficiently as he motions you to follow him with a twinkle in his eye, “We’re practically a paperless church now. Everything you need for the service will be on the big screens up front, and you can type in “HOPENEWS” on your phone to download all the weekly announcements.” Next thing you know, you’re standing by two open seats.

Just in front of you, seated together on the main floor, is a portion of Hope’s One Body ministry – specifically designed for children with special needs, most of whom are smiling and hugging friends who happen to pass. One Body has grown to include over 50 students at Hope every week, plus they assist other local churches in developing similar ministries for their congregations.

Clearly, the Holy Spirit is active and alive at Hope, and there’s a buzz of enthusiasm everywhere you turn. It’s all such a pleasant surprise, just like the music you’re hearing now as the congregational singing begins. The music definitely fits the vibe of Hope: down-to-earth and contemporary, but not in a careless, showy or shallow way. This is your “heart music.” You listen to similar styles when you’re driving your car, or exercising with your iPod. But there seems to be something different about it, too, and on the way home it will hit you – it’s the lyrics. They’re simple and repetitious (repetition is an excellent teacher), yet deep, Bible based, and rooted in the eternal. You’ll keep singing these songs in your head all day, and when you do it will lift your spirit – another pleasant surprise (Romans 8:15-16).

Up front, you see song leaders, a band with a brass section, and a massive choir. All of Hope’s choirs and orchestra are open groups – anyone can join. In addition, song leaders, instrumentalists, soloists, duets, trios, quartets and ensembles include well over 100 volunteers, selected by audition. While at first the audition process might seem like a rather cold and unfriendly idea, keep in mind that anyone can sing in a choir or play in the orchestra at Hope. The auditions for potential soloists and instrumentalists take place as a favor to both the church and the musician. For more on this, please watch a season-opening episode of “American Idol” and note all of the singers who believe they have solo-quality voices. Bless their hearts. They just don’t, and after a while, it’s difficult to endure. Even more importantly, the music auditions at Hope test the heart of the artist. Hope insists that all worship leaders share music as an offering for the glory of God, not to the glory of themselves and getting noticed by an audience of thousands. Those who are singing for self-serving purposes are asked to take a break from the music ministry, so that what happens on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings will be worship, not a performance. There’s a big difference.

One song leads to another, and this one features the awesome power of a 200-member choir, called Praise. There’s also a Chapel Choir (a 40-member choral group that sings at traditional services), a Men’s Choir, a Women’s Choir, and a 75-member Hope Orchestra to add depth and beauty to worship at Hope on a regular basis. Collectively, these groups produce an inspiring and much-loved Christmas Cantata every year. The week prior, it’s the children’s turn to lead worship with their annual KQ Christmas Musical, and following the cantata is one of the most anticipated worship events of the year: the Christmas Eve Candlelight Services, which attract over 20,000 worshippers to hear the good news of Jesus’ birth each year.
For the next 70 minutes, you worship God at Hope in a congregation of thousands, singing, praying and participating in an interactive Bible-based sermon that ends with an invitation to take some time to ponder God’s will for your life. The preacher also encourages anyone who would like to pray after the service to come forward where prayer partners will be ready to meet and pray for you, according to your needs.

Your husband looks at you and asks if you want to go up for prayer, and you agree. You obviously won’t be alone, as you can already see lots of people moving to the front. There are at least 20 prayer stations to accommodate the need. Once you arrive, a practically prophetic looking woman immediately makes you feel right at home. “How can I pray for you?” You tell her that you came to Hope today seeking to connect with God again, and she begins to offer a prayer that cuts to the heart of the matter. You walk away with a deep sense of God guiding your steps, and for the first in a long time, your feet feel lighter, and your spirit has been refreshed.

Following prayer, you head to the nursery to pick up your daughter, while your husband goes to the KQ classroom to pick up your son. Once you arrive at the nursery front desk, you overhear a conversation between two men right behind you who are talking about the Alpha Course. One tells the other that before he started the class, he had all sorts of questions about Christianity, the course had changed his life, and that over 1,500 people take Alpha at Hope every year. It’s an amazing experience — new classes start every month or so, and each one is led by one of Hope’s pastors, along with a large contingent of fired-up small group hosts and other volunteers. At the end of the class, dozens of “students” are baptized for the first time, and dozens more participate in a baptismal affirmation service in the Worship Center. The memories that are made at those services last a lifetime. God has used Alpha to spiritually awaken thousands at Hope, and the class sounds like it would be a perfect fit for you.

The same helpful nursery attendant who checked you in before the service confirms your thumb scan, tells you that your daughter was quiet at first, but really seemed to open up during the Bible story time with her new friends. “She was so sweet,” the attendant tells you, “and I hope she’ll come back and see us again next Sunday!”

You carry your daughter back to the Atrium, and while you wait for your husband and son, you decide to check out Café Hope. Once inside, you’re amazed by the selection of Bibles, books and music, and you’re pleased to breathe in the distinct aroma of some really good free trade coffee blends, fruit smoothies, and other delicious snacks. You notice one of the large signs hanging in the bookstore: “100% of Café Hope’s proceeds go directly to support Hope’s mission partners locally and around the world.” The purpose of the bookstore and café is to provide really good resources and products at a fair price for the sake of raising money for Hope’s mission partners around the world. It doesn’t make a dime for the church, but does support a lot of Christ-centered causes.

Still waiting for the rest of your family, you grab a cup of free “Lutheran” coffee (strong and mass produced), and start to look for a place to sit at one of the tables located just outside the bookstore. A young college-aged woman asks if you’d like to sit by her. You thank her, and she strikes up an easy conversation with you. She’s meeting the rest of her small group for breakfast, and they’ll worship together at the 11:00 am service. As the conversation develops, you realize she’s a student at Drake, and she co-leads a small group of high school girls as one of Hope’s 250+ Student Ministry Mentors. She goes on to tell you about the exciting things happening with the students at Hope. High school students meet weekly on Sunday nights for a service called Ignition, with over 400 in attendance. The music and message is designed specifically for teens. After
You thank her for the conversation, and decide with your husband to give breakfast a try. As you move that way, you see a large Missions Wall in the Atrium complete with flags from around the world, representing countries where Hope has a missionary presence. There’s a large table loaded with all sorts of information about Hope’s outreach efforts, and a video plays highlights of a recent mission trip to Haiti. Suddenly, you aren’t so worried about what your family will eat this morning, or what it will cost.

Still, you are surprised to discover a simple basket at the front of the breakfast line with a small sign: “Free-Will Offering.” Turns out, you can give whatever you want – another pleasant surprise. Somehow, God provides and the offerings always cover the cost of the food. The Food & Fun Ministry Team – a staff of four, and well over 150 volunteers – cooks and serves several delicious meals each week, supporting ministries such as WOW and Celebrate Recovery. But it’s more than just support. The Bible consistently lifts up the sharing of food as a great setting for building Christian community (John 2:1-11, Mark 8:1-8, Acts 2:46). The menu at Hope includes all sorts of healthy choices, and a few that the church encourages folks to consume in moderation (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The Food & Fun Ministry Team also contributes mightily to a midsummer party called Taste of Hope, which takes place every year to give the community a “taste” of Lutheran Church of Hope. On the annual agenda for Taste of Hope: outdoor worship, games and activities for all ages, free food, and fireworks to praise God and cap off the night (Psalm 150, Philippians 4:4)!
As you and your family find your seats at an open table, you notice Christian music videos playing on the screens, with an occasional announcement about one of Hope’s ministries. There’s a particular announcement that catches your eye: Hope’s Kingdom Expansion Pastor is on screen talking about satellites. Hope is one church that meets in many locations. In addition to Hope’s Mission Center Campus in West Des Moines, there are the two original satellite launches, and both of those satellites now worship in at least two locations. Hope CityBranch in Des Moines and Hope NorthBranch in Ankeny.

Today, over 1,000 people call NorthBranch home, meeting in a beautiful, still relatively new five-year-old church building on the north side of Ankeny. Last year, NorthBranch launched a second worshipping community in a rapidly growing neighborhood on the south side of Ankeny.

Collectively, Hope now worships in 14 different locations every week: West Des Moines, NorthBranch, CityBranch, Ankeny South, Downtown, Martin Luther King Neighborhood, Zone Mountain, SouthBranch, Hope at the Mall, Hope Cafeteria, Hope Grill, Hope University of Iowa, Hope Iowa State University, and Sanctuary Lake Retreat Center.

The video announcements continue in the Bridge, with a focus on the new retreat center. Sanctuary Lake is surrounded by majestic trees and rolling hills, and within easy driving distance of Des Moines. Hope hosts a weekly satellite service there, as well as retreats, conferences and meetings for a world that desperately needs to “get away” and spend some quality quiet time with God (Psalm 46:10). The retreat center was built by Hope volunteers on land donated by a family that had a dream to create sacred space in the midst of God’s beautiful creation. Hope continues to support and send campers to both Riverside and Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camps, but because of the growth of the church, additional space was needed, and the Sanctuary Lake site has become an extremely popular destination for thousands of “retreaters” each year.

Additionally, within the walls of the West Des Moines Mission Center, there are two ministries which function as a “church within a church”: the Hope Chapel which provides smaller, liturgical worship experiences on Sunday mornings for those who prefer a more traditional approach to expressing their faith, and RE:VIVE, a ministry designed for young adults that meets on Thursday and Sunday evenings, attracting several hundred worshippers every week, most of them previously unchurched. The video announcements conclude, and by now you and your family are well into finishing your breakfast. The delicious food hits the spot, and you find yourself thankful that there’s one less meal for you and your husband to prepare today.
Just as you are about to leave, a married couple sits down at your table. The man is in his 70s, and to put it mildly, he’s rather gregarious and outgoing. He immediately strikes up a one-sided conversation in which he rambles about all the ministries available to help get new folks connected. At first, his hyper-extroverted approach comes on a bit strong, like a half-bottle of really cheap aftershave. Still, the more you listen, the more you start to appreciate his quirkiness and the fact that his heart seems pure. In the midst of his awkward jokes and roaring laughter, he tells you and your husband more about the small groups you’ve been hearing about all morning at Hope. He calls them the “bedrock” of Hope and the place where he finds his church family: study groups, support groups, activity groups, marriage groups, parenting groups, men’s ministry, women’s ministry, singles’ ministry, and the 55+ ministry. Groups meet all throughout the week, morning, noon and night. They grow, support, bond and pray for one another, holding each other accountable in their quest to be more authentic followers of Jesus. “It’s all about loving one another in this church,” he says with a suddenly much more serious tone … and you can see in his eyes that he really means it.

Only he’s not quite done. Next, he brings up his 33-year-old “baby” daughter, who’s getting married soon to a quiet young man (go figure), and how impressed he’s been with the Wedding Coordinators at Hope. From the pre-marriage class to planning the service, it’s all been “top notch.” Hope does hundreds of weddings every year on-site in West Des Moines, plus a bunch more at satellite locations, particularly the Sanctuary Lake Retreat Center.

“Hope does a lot of funerals too,” he bluntly and somewhat awkwardly adds. “People are just dying to get in here!” Everyone around the breakfast table stops, before smiles and laughter break out. Without missing a beat, he drops a hard piece of news. He’s been fighting cancer for three years, and lately the news hasn’t been good. Even so, when his time is done here, his ashes will be placed in the beautiful new Hope Columbarium that the church just constructed back by the little brook and the big trees in the southeast corner of the lot. “That’s where a lot of us around here are going to end up,” he says, grinning at first, then abruptly pausing, lost in quieter ponderings of his own mortality. “But you know what? It’s not so bad. Because I know … I know that my Redeemer lives. Life here … is short. But with God, life goes on. Forever.”

That’s when it hits you. You’ve already developed a sincere fondness for this big-hearted, boisterous, dying man. And just now, just for that moment, it hits you that he’s got what you want. Glancing over at your husband, you can almost “see” it in his eyes too … that he’s thinking the same thing.


It’s all here. You can feel it. You can see it. You can practically taste it. The Spirit of God is on the move … and he’s starting to fill your soul. Fascinated and overwhelmed, you walk back to your car in the parking lot. How could this be? The sunlight seems even brighter than before, and the wind has definitely picked up.

Turns out, there is more. There is Hope …

Spirited: Alive, Relevant, Vibrant (Acts 2)
Growing: Deep & Wide (Matthew 28)
Christ-centered: Loved & Loving (John 13)

A radical, transformational church with a massive local and global impact, producing new life in Christ for hundreds of thousands here on earth, and making heaven way more crowded for eternity!

Welcome home!