



Some Remembrances of God's Gracious Dealings With Hope Community Church

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the people of Hope Community Church**

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Chapter One

Reasons to Remember

I have often told the story of Hope Community Church. When I meet with prospective new members I tell them about the remarkable things God has done in the formation of our church body. Though we are young and small, there is much to tell. Divine guidance. Miracles. Lessons (sometimes painfully learned). I want each new member to know of the ways God has moved in this church because, for those who join with us, our church's experience will become their spiritual inheritance. Our blessings will be their blessings, and our trials and weaknesses will be theirs, too. I believe every incoming member should know the story of Hope.

But the retelling of the story benefits me also. I find that I am blessed again, I am encouraged once more, I am moved to praise God each time I recount the great things he has done. This is Scriptural:

“Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name; make known among the nations what He has done. Sing to Him, sing praise to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts. Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always. Remember the wonders He has done, His miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.” (1 Chronicles 16:8-12)

“I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.” (Psalm 77:11-14)

“I will remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done. (Psalm 143:5)

Until now, the story of our church has always been an oral history. But we have lately felt a stirring from God to make a more lasting written record. The elders and I agreed to move forward on such a project. In October, 1999, I gave to everyone in the church a worksheet titled “Some Remembrances of God’s Gracious Dealings With Hope Community Church”. The completed worksheets were returned to me a month later, at Thanksgiving. These written remembrances supply some of the material for the little book you now hold. In fact the final chapter of this book consists almost entirely of quotes from the worksheets.

One of the original members of Hope Church, Debbie Boyer, gave some thought to the subject of WHY we should take time to publish these remembrances. She writes:

“WHY take time to record these remembrances?”

NOT because we are great now, or even expect to become so. Where we stand now, we don't know whether we will die of sin and sloth, or whether the Lord will graciously allow us to participate in an ever-expanding work for his kingdom.

NOT for our own sinful vainglory, as when David numbered the people. We want to record not what we did, but what God did, to his glory.

WE RECORD for the church body to remember. Israel forgot the exodus; we must not think we are beyond reading a record to remember God's goodness and power, and the lessons he has taught us. We need to remember God's works in our lives for:

- a. obedience to him
- b. rejoicing with and in him
- c. bringing him glory among angels and men
- d. maintaining humility by remembering his great acts and also our sins and lessons
- e. for strengthening and preparation for trials
- f. for strengthening of faith for future work

SECONDLY, WE RECORD for our children, both physical and spiritual, so they may know of God's goodness and power, and so they may learn of their spiritual heritage. As Rich Mullins said, "Stories like that make a boy grow bold; Stories like that make a man walk straight."



Chapter Two

1992 – Prenatal Development

The story of Hope begins in the early 1980s when Nora and I were students at the University of Michigan. For two years we were involved with a group of Christian students called InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. This organization had weekly Large Group meetings for worship and Bible exposition, as well as weekly Family Group meetings for Bible study, prayer and intimate fellowship. I saw this pattern as a parallel to the New Testament church in Acts chapter 2, where the believers met in the temple courts to receive the apostles' teaching, then gathered in small home fellowships for the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42-47).

During my stay in Ann Arbor God drew me to a few key people. One was Nora. She was saved during her first year of college, and her Christian life took off with a bang. She was never content with the spiritual status quo. She wanted to know and experience EVERYTHING. Nine months after she was saved, Nora went through her dorm and invited fellow students to a Bible study she planned to start. Almost twenty students came, and most stayed with it for the entire school year. Almost everything Nora touched, God blessed. Nora and I soon recognized that we shared a common spiritual passion and calling. In 1983 we were married.

At U of M I also met William Boyer. He was a Christian leader on campus. He met with me weekly and taught me things he had learned about God's character. One year William and I lived in the same apartment. I also met Wayne Hoppe. He soon became a leader, too, and eventually was the President of Michigan's InterVarsity chapter. I believe God led me to these two men, although it took several years for God's purpose to become clear. For ten years we were friends at a distance. Nora and I moved to Illinois, then to my home state, Alaska. William and his new wife, Debbie, lived in Ohio, then later in Fenton, Michigan. Wayne married Carrie and took a job as an architect in Pennsylvania.

My first inkling about a new church in Michigan came in 1990. I was pastor of a church in Dillingham, Alaska, a fishing town on the Bering Sea. Our son David was two years old. One night I was kept awake for many hours with a powerful sense that God was telling me I would move to Michigan and start a new church in the Ann Arbor/Detroit area. Further, God seemed to be saying the Boyers and Hoppes would join us in this task, even though neither of them lived in the region at the time. The next morning I told Nora about my new sense of God's leading. I had no idea how it would come about, but Nora was amazingly supportive, even confirming. We had an excitement about following God's guidance. We prayed about it together, although it was some while before we mentioned any of this to the Boyers or Hoppes.

As Nora and I waited, the Lord moved the other two families into position. Debbie was offered a job in Ypsilanti. The Boyers moved to the home on Hemphill Street. Meanwhile, Wayne was hired by a firm in Ann Arbor. The Hoppes moved to an apartment in Westland, then to their

home in Belleville. I finally wrote to both families, inviting them to consider involvement in a new church.

In the spring of 1991 I met with Wayde and William in person. Nora and I had come to Michigan for medical reasons--Nora was going to have a baby and she needed to be near a hospital. We stayed for a few weeks with Nora's grandmother in Ferndale. Peter was born April 30, 1991. In May we returned to bush Alaska. But while I was in Michigan I drove to Ann Arbor for a lunch time meeting with Wayde. We sat in his Ford Escort in the parking lot of Briarwood Mall. We talked about whether such a church planting venture was really possible. We prayed. To me, this meeting seemed a little like the haystack prayer meeting, that famous gathering of a handful of college men during a rainstorm in New England. From the humble prayer meeting under a haystack was born two centuries of sending missionaries from America to the world. From our Briarwood prayer meeting came an agreement between two men that would eventually lead to the establishment of Hope Groups and congregations to reach the Detroit area for Jesus. God's Word says, "Who despises the day of small things?" (Zech 4:10). That same afternoon I also went to William's science lab at U of M's North Campus. We also talked and prayed on the subject of church planting. It was an invigorating day, full of possibilities.

I was sure God was calling me to start a church, yet I didn't really know how to go about it. I began reading anything I could find. I was especially helped by a book called **CHURCH PLANTING FOR A GREATER HARVEST** by Peter Wagner. Wagner begins the book by boldly declaring that the single greatest evangelistic tool known to man is the planting of new churches. My growing vision for church planting can be seen in a letter I wrote to my father, dated March 3, 1992. I wrote:

"There is no doubt that the planting of churches is a biblical pattern. The Apostle Paul's ministry involved establishing new churches in each city that God allowed an opening. He then moved on to plant yet more new churches. This pattern is continued by every growing group of Christians.

This pattern is still needed in America, even though we have many churches already. The fact is that today 110 million Americans have no church home. Another 90 million belong to some sort of religious body, but are unsaved. That means there are close to 200 million Americans who need to be reached for the Lord. I believe the existing churches (Bible-believing ones, that is) are usually doing a great job of meeting the needs of people within the church, but new churches are needed to reach people who are not being reached by anyone as yet. In this way we will see the kingdom of God continue to grow.

It follows, therefore, that I am not just interested in planting ONE new church. I want to plant a new church that will in turn produce more new churches. This is not multiplication for my glory or for the glory of the mother church. I simply want to see the multiplication of Christians through the multiplication of churches."

As for the style of ministry that such a new church should have, in the same letter I wrote the following:

"As I see it, the new church will have some important distinctives. One would be an emphasis on small group Bible studies. I have seen how God uses Bible study groups to nurture Christians of every level of maturity. When the small group does not work well in

the church, it is usually because the group leader was poorly chosen/trained, or because there is not an appropriate focus on the Bible itself.

A second distinctive would be putting church members to work. The Bible teaches that every Christian is gifted, and that each of us must use our gift to help the whole body function. I have some specific ideas about how this might happen, but for now it is enough to say that there will be fewer committees talking about decisions and more ministry teams actually doing some work.

A third distinctive will be church worship services that attempt to focus on the Lord himself. Worship services that are WORSHIP. The singing will need to be well-planned and lead, with a right focus on God, not on the song leader or the people. The singing and prayer must certainly not feel like something we are doing to fill up time until we get to the sermon. I am open to forms of worship that are rather expressive and allow for a fair amount of variation; I do not want the worship to degenerate into a mechanical thing that is just too routine and lifeless.”

1992 was clearly a year of prenatal development. We were preparing for the birth of a baby church. One letter I sent to the Boyers and Hoppes started with the words, “Let’s name a church.” In those days I did not feel confident about hearing God’s voice with such clarity that I could simply ask him to tell me the name he had chosen. So I did what I knew how to do. In my letter to the Boyers and Hoppes, I gave a list of possible names. I asked for their personal reactions to each name. I also asked them to try out the names on their friends (especially non-Christians) to get a feeling for how well the church name might be received by those we were trying to reach for Jesus. I wrote:

“Soon enough we should arrive at a name we are all happy with. Then I can move ahead with the paperwork. It’s a little like naming a baby before it’s born, isn’t it? At least we don’t have to agree on two names, one for a boy church and one for a girl church.”

By July 1992 we had a name, Hope Community Church, and we were prepared to file articles of incorporation papers with the state of Michigan. I signed the document in Dillingham and had it notarized by an officer of the National Bank of Alaska. Meanwhile, the Boyers and Hoppes met together to sign the same papers. Debbie remembers:

“Hoppes came to Boyers’ home one evening to sign government papers officially incorporating the church. We had wanted to have a serious and solemn time of prayer and dedication, but every sort of interruption occurred. At first we tried sitting in the backyard so the children could play, but were interrupted by a criminal and then policemen hopping the fences, running through our yard, and the criminal being apprehended after a fight at gunpoint in our neighbors yard! (the likes of which had certainly never happened before or since!). Then we went inside, but the phone rang, the neighbors visited, the children were restless, etc. Finally we gave up our attempts (over two hours by then!) and laughed, recognizing yet again our weakness and God’s strength. We couldn’t even pray over some papers, and we certainly couldn’t build a church, but we knew it was going to be exciting to watch God do it.”

The theme of God’s ability and our human inability was pressed home to me when I received an unexpected prophetic word from another pastor. Four months before we moved to Michigan, my family took a vacation at the Oregon coast. On a Sunday evening we attended a

worship service in Hammond, Oregon (near Astoria). The church was called Philadelphia Church. We did not know the pastor or any of the people, yet we felt that God had led us to be in attendance that evening. During the service the pastor received a word from the Lord, and he began describing in detail the thoughts someone was having RIGHT THEN. The thoughts were Nora's thoughts. She was astonished. After the service she introduced herself to the pastor. Nora and I talked with him briefly. He offered to pray for me. He prayed some general things about God's blessing in my life. Then he stopped rather abruptly and said he was receiving a message from the Lord for me. Would I like to hear this message?, he asked. I agreed. He then began to speak over me words about the new ministry God was leading me into. He said God was arranging everything ahead of me, and that I did not need to be afraid to follow God's leading. Then the pastor summed it up by saying, "This ministry will be a success, not because of you, but in spite of you."

With this humbling message, God drove out of my mind any fear that the whole project might flop. I knew that at least half of all new churches die within the first year. And most of those had the financial backing of a denomination that was committed to planting a church in that location. Nora and I were going to be leaving a secure position in an established church to go to an uncertain future. But GOD SAID it would be a success. I did not doubt it. I did note, however, that it would be his doing, accomplished somehow IN SPITE of me.

One of the key questions for a church planter is "How will I pay the bills?" There will be no salary. Many church planters attempt to raise support from among their Christian friends. But during my vacation in Oregon I believed the Lord was telling me that I could not ask any person or organization for financial support. Until the new church became self-supporting I could spend my own savings, work additional jobs, and speak directly with the Lord about my financial needs. It would be a life of faith. In a letter dated June 17, 1992, I wrote to Wayne:

"Wayne, on the phone we talked about money. Thank you for showing your concern for us in this area. I have prayed about this a lot. I prayed about whether we should be involved with some existing denomination that would help support the work. God has said no. I prayed about sending out support letters. Again, I felt no freedom from the Lord to do that. So I have committed it to God and asked him to lay it on people's hearts to give as God directs them. One answer to that prayer has already come in the offer that our church in Dillingham has made to pay for our moving expenses. I praise God for that. I did not ask the church to do this. They offered!"

My family moved to Michigan in late August, 1992. Our first big financial test came right away. We had no home and no furniture. Our home in Alaska had been a furnished parsonage, owned by the church there. I told Nora I was sure that God would supply a house, so we started calling mortgage companies. These lenders all explained to us (sometimes using very simple words and "helpful" tones) that I had no "real" job and no actual income. They could not arrange a mortgage under such circumstances. But I was persistent because I knew God had something for us. I got the name of a company owned by a Christian man. He was familiar with church planting; his adult daughter was involved in a church plant. This man took us seriously and arranged for a mortgage based on my projections of potential future income. It was a faith-based mortgage.

Nora later wrote about how God provided for us during that season. Here is how she described it:

“God provided some inheritance money which we used to make a down payment on a house. Then God directed us to a Christian mortgage company that was able to work out a mortgage for us despite the fact that we were starting a new job and had no income. We looked for houses in four communities and weren’t finding anything. Then as we were driving one evening I popped into another real estate office and laid out what we were looking for. The Realtor said they had nothing like that, but he would keep us in mind. The next day he called to say he had something for us to look at. They had just put it on the market and priced it to sell fast. We loved it and signed that night.

So we had a house and mortgage but no furniture. Paul’s aunt from Indiana called. She said she was remodeling her home, and we could have the pieces she was replacing, plus some furniture from Paul’s grandfather. So Paul rented a truck to go and get it. Meanwhile, some of the aunt’s neighbors contributed some more items to the collection. Paul came back with a house-full of furniture that was exactly what we needed with no extra pieces.”

During September we began meeting with the Boyers and Hoppes to strategize and pray. We set some target dates for certain milestones:

October 1992--Start first Hope Group

December 1992--start private Sunday worship

Easter 1993--Begin public worship, the official birth of the church

In September, God provided us with our first new person. I was visiting with the Boyers one evening when a man emerged from their basement. He has just moved to the area to become an InterVarsity staff worker at Eastern Michigan University. He was staying with the Boyers temporarily until he could find a place of his own. As I spoke with this man about the idea of a new church based on hope groups, he immediately bought the vision. He had heard of church made of small cell groups, and he was ready to experience it personally. Clearly God had prepared him in advance. It was so easy. He was ours right away. That was my introduction to Karl Thuemmel.

In October the first Hope group meeting took place. It was at the Boyers’ home on Hemphill. We sang some hymns. We put out an extra chair and prayed that God would fill it next week. There was such joy and anticipation. Many weeks God did fill that extra chair. Laraba Parfitt, a co-worker from William’s lab, began coming. And then Laraba’s friend, Denise Toner, a dental student at U of M. Others, too. Almost every week had some hopeful development. Even so, it was clear that these visitors were still just visitors--occasional attendees who had not committed themselves to the vision of starting a new church. Karl was the wonderful exception. That fall our Hope Group used a Bible study guide to go through the Gospel of John.

December arrived. We had our first Sunday worship service together. We did not publicize it. We knew we needed to get some experience worshipping God together, and we needed to learn how to work together in running a nursery, a Sunday school, a worship team. We rented some conference rooms at the upstairs level of the EMU Corporate Education Center in Ypsilanti. Carrie, Nora and Karl lead the worship. We sang “Come On, Rejoice”, “Great Is the Lord”, “We Bow Down”, “May Your Kingdom Come”, “We Rest On Thee”, and “There Is a Redeemer”. I preached from the first chapter of First Thessalonians.

Here’s how Carrie Hoppe remembers that first Sunday service:

“I remember our first service at the hotel in December of 1992. Debbie Boyer was in the nursery with Peter and Benjamin. Pastor Paul was teaching Sunday school with David, Grace and Samuel. Karl Thuemmel, Nora and I were up front leading worship. William Boyer was changing the overheads and Wayde was sitting next to William. No one else was there! When Paul came in to preach and we sat down to listen I remember thinking two things. The first was, “Hey! Here we are planting a church with this fellow and I’ve never heard him preach before.” The second was, “God, this preaching is so excellent, you just have to bring other people to hear this.”

1992 had been filled with such wonderful, behind-the-scenes prenatal development. As the year came to a close, we were less than four months away from the projected date of our church’s official birth.



Chapter Three

1993 – Birth of a Church

It was time to start inviting people to come to the “birthday” service on Easter Sunday, April 11, 1993. We believed God had given us a plan for outreach. It was a program called “The Phone’s For You”, which involved phoning 20,000 people and inviting them to church!

Here’s how it worked. We used a reverse directory--one that lists people in order of street address rather than alphabetically by last name. This allowed us to use the phone to cover a neighborhood, street by street. We would place a call and ask whoever answered two simple questions. First we asked, “Are you currently actively involved in a local church?” If the person said yes, we explained that we really wanted to reach the UNCHURCHED. We told them we wished God’s blessings on them. We thanked them for their time. That was it. If they answered no, we followed up with the second question, “Are you interested in receiving some information in the mail about a new, nondenominational church that is starting in this area?” When we asked this, some people politely declined. Some suddenly “remembered” a church they were already involved with. Some said yes, they would be willing to receive something. Very, very few were negative or angry. Most people seemed surprised and pleased that we were not trying to sell them anything.

Everyone who requested more information received a series of five mailings, each piece containing news about the new church or a friendly reminder about the approaching birthday service on April 11. For two months, from February until April, Nora and I poured our lives into this project – phoning twelve hours a day and then, after Nora was in bed, I would work into the wee hours of the morning preparing the thousands of pieces of mail to send out. I hardly slept.

I was grateful for any help I could get. Nora was the champion caller; I think she made more calls than everyone else put together. Wayne arranged for us to use his company’s office on certain weeknights. The office had four separate phone lines, allowing a group of our friends and family to make phone calls together. My brother, Roger, put in some hours making long-distance calls from Montana to help the effort.

It was during these early months of 1993 that God sent us a wonderful dose of encouragement in the form of Kerry Dennis. She was an acquaintance of Karl who was, like him, new in the area. She came to one of our Sunday services, and even though there were more people on the worship team than in the congregation, she discerned that “the Spirit of God is here” and she stayed with us. She could see with eyes of faith. It was Kerry who once said with great earnestness, “This church has lots of people. We just haven’t met them yet.” Right away Nora and I invited Kerry over for dinner. During the meal I started recruiting Kerry for the phone outreach project. Nora started literally kicking me under the table. She was afraid I would scare Kerry away! But Kerry simply got very wide, almost delighted eyes and said that when she was a teenager she liked nothing so much as making prank phone calls to strangers. She said she would

LOVE to turn this “skill” into something useful for the Lord. Kerry became a faithful phone caller, Sunday school teacher, baby-sitter, and friend of my family.

Our experience with phone calling opened my eyes to the spiritual need in the area. So many people had no church, and among those who did have a “church” were members of cults, Eastern religions, and even a witches coven. Sometimes people ask why we need new churches when there are already “so many churches--one on every corner”. The answer is that as the population is growing, there are now fewer churches **PER CAPITA** than our nation has ever had. If you don’t believe that there are large numbers of lost people living right nearby, try phoning 20,000 neighbors and see what they say.

Through the phoning, we also saw some patterns begin to emerge. The people in one subdivision would be spiritually open; the people in the next would not be. On one street there would be many Christians, and those who were not Christians would ask to hear more about the church. On another street, the Christians sounded cold or indifferent, and their unsaved neighbors were all “not interested”. I remember phoning my way through a trailer park. Every person I talked to refused information about the church. Amazingly, they almost all used the same words--even the little children! I believe we were seeing the effect of spiritual influences (angelic and demonic) over different regions. There really are powers and principalities in this dark world (Eph 6:12). We found that it was profitable to give extra attention to streets that were receptive. We would place a second or third call to homes that we had not yet contacted on that street. In this way we were putting into practice the principle that Henry Blackaby articulates in his handbook called **EXPERIENCING GOD**: we were joining God in what he was already doing. And I must say, because the phone calling gave us a basis for some “Spiritual mapping”, we were able to pray for each region (Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Belleville, Canton) with much more insight.

As we were gearing up for the birth of the church, we experienced one unexpected snag. Wayne had dutifully sent the I.R.S. all the necessary papers to apply for tax exempt status as a church. Unfortunately, the I.R.S. people misread at least one key word. They thought Wayne’s last name (Hoppe) was the same as the church’s name, and they suspected Wayne was trying to name a bogus church after himself and get illegitimate tax exempt benefits. The letter they sent back was not friendly!

The I.R.S. agent said he would take punitive action against us if we could not prove we were a church. He demanded answers to many very specific questions. When I was done typing the answers I had filled more than thirty pages. I sent photocopies of my seminary degree, my certificate of ordination, copies of our church bulletin, even a copy of our new yellow pages ad. The most challenging demand was that we make a minor revision to our Michigan articles of incorporation. This transaction with the State of Michigan had to be completed, said the I.R.S., within a matter of several days. Days! The turnaround time for such business with the state was weeks. The problem was solved when our friend Rick Coen took time off work, drove to Lansing, and hand-carried the necessary documents through the entire bureaucratic process. I thank God for Rick. That was such a busy, busy time. We met the I.R.S. demands and deadlines. We got a bonafide I.R.S. tax exempt number. I keep a copy of the number in my wallet.

Finally the big day arrived. Easter Sunday, April 11, 1993. The birthday of the church. I was a little nervous. This was the moment we had been building toward for a long time. We had prayed by name for every single person who had been willing to receive information about the church. And now I was going to go and meet the people--strangers--that God was giving to our church. I practiced the sermon an extra time at home the night before. I arrived at church early

the next morning and prayed. Then I watched as new faces came into the auditorium. Over 100 people were in attendance that morning.

Nora, Karl and Carrie led the worship. I preached about the resurrection of Jesus Christ based on John 20:19-31. It was, after all, Easter Sunday. I had two points: A. The Proof of the Resurrection and B. What the Resurrection Proves. In the bulletin I wrote "Today a church is born! After months of praying and preparation, we are finally ready. Today marks the birth of Hope Community Church. We are eager to see the great things God will do in our church today, and in the months and years to come."

Immediately after the service a woman approached me and asked for prayer. She introduced herself as Jan Overall. She said her husband, John, was not with her because he was ill. In fact, he was waiting for the results of medical tests. We prayed together for John Overall that morning.

My encounter with Jan set into motion a series of remarkable events. Her husband was found to be suffering from an advanced form of untreatable cancer. He never made it to church. But I spoke with him about faith in Christ, and he received Jesus as Savior. He soon had a radiance, a peace with God. Four months later, in August, he died. I preached his funeral, the very first Hope Church funeral. John's granddaughter, Shontaya, lived with John and Jan. Shontaya saw the transformation in her grandfather's life. She heard his testimony as he face death. Shontaya chose to put her faith in Jesus, too. She was the first to be baptized at Hope Church. She was also the first teenager to come to our church, the first of many teens and baptisms to follow.

All this stemmed from Jan's attendance at the birthday service. In her remembrance worksheet, Jan says she was:

"Invited to the first official service by someone going through the phone list and asking if we had a church home. The call was followed up by a brilliant green card that came in the mail. I remember coming home from work and seeing that card on the kitchen counter. I remember reading "Come as you are, you'll be loved" as I looked at the Hope Community Church "swoosh"(~). I felt this incredible sense of peace flow through my body. My curiosity was piqued and I knew I had to go to that first service. Of course the rest is history. Thank you God for creating Hope Church for me and my family."

Rob and Susan Rotz also came to the birthday service. They remember:

"Original phone calling--flyers--talked to Nora. Searching for a church, needed one for Easter Sunday so we decided to try this new church. The night before I picked up a book and read the first chapter. That first Easter Sunday Pastor Paul preached almost exactly word for word what I had read in the book. Seemed a clear sign that we had found our church. Music good, too!"

Most of the folks who came that Sunday did not return. Some of them were merely curious about a new church but not really serious about finding a church home. Some who came were wary about churches due to past negative experiences; they quickly found some fault with Hope and moved on. Some of the visitors that Sunday seemed well-intentioned id not follow through. After the birthday service one man gushed about the service and preaching. He told me very emphatically, "You have just made a friend for life!" I never saw him again. But I know that our outreach efforts had a positive effect, even on those who never got involved in our church. One

woman told us she did not want to wait until the birthday service to get back into church. She immediately visited a nearby Baptist Church. Her husband went with her, he got saved, and they joined that church. What a victory for Jesus!

Our little flock had just about doubled. Before the birthday service Hope Church had about fifteen children (including children). After the birthday we had about thirty. It was especially pleasing to see how God answered the prayers of four year-old Grace Hoppe: "Daddy and I prayed every night for children to come to church and a lot of kids came". Adrienne Roden was one of those kids. She was also four years old. Her parents, David and Donna Roden, write:

"Carrie Hoppe called us in the spring before Hope's first service. We asked for info to be sent. We were in North Carolina during the Easter holidays and were unable to attend Hope's birthday service. We started attending Hope in September, 1993."

On the Sunday the Rodens visited, my David led the other children on a merry chase up and down the hallway. I wasn't sure what the new family would think. But Adrienne told her parents later, "I want to go back to that church and see David and his gang." They kept coming and served faithfully for a number of years.

The fact that we had more people coming did not mean we were functioning as a mature church. In truth we were just a newborn, still unable to sit up or roll over. For nourishment, I had the Hope Groups study through First Corinthians that spring, again using study guide booklets. That summer I preached some highlights from the book of Acts, focusing on the importance of evangelism and missions. I also did a short sermon series called "I Love My Church". I preached this because I knew plenty of Christians who were excited about Christian music, Christian literature, Teen ministry, short-term missions, and seminary education. But most Christians seemed to have such a shallow understanding of--and commitment to--the local body of Jesus Christ, his church. I was determined that our people would come to love Jesus and his church.

In those days of its infancy, Hope Church was unable to provide me with a salary. By that summer of 1993, I had spent all my savings. God now directed me to take a second job. I opened the classified ads and he told me which job to apply for. It was a position with a private driving school in Livonia. I was hired to take a car all over the metro Detroit area and teach adults to drive. Many students were elderly widows. Others were recent immigrants who spoke little English; I communicated with them by drawing pictures of traffic patterns and making car-smashing sound effects. For nearly a year and a half I worked full-time for the driving school , while at the same time working as a full-time pastor/evangelist/church planter. It was a time that Nora would not like to ever repeat. I was hardly available to her and the children. It was a great sacrifice for the whole family.

However, I did see the hand of God at work in the driving school job. As I said, I knew God was directing me to that job the minute I saw it advertised. I was able to set my own hours, so I could fit driving lessons around important church duties. The job also helped me to know the Detroit area very, very, very well. I was driving all day long. Around the block, and then around and around again. I believed God was showing me that I could claim all the ground I covered as territory for Hope Church. Wayne County, Oakland County, Macomb County, as well as Washtenaw County. It is no surprise that within a few years we had Hope Church members who lived throughout the entire metro area.

God also protected me. My student drivers had some mishaps, but no one was ever hurt. God also protected me against violence in Detroit. On one occasion I narrowly got back into my car ahead of some men who were closing in on me with apparent evil intent. Another time I found myself among a rapidly growing crowd of rioters. I was able to steer out of and then around the mob. As I said, I saw God's hand in my work as a driving instructor, but I knew the job was only a temporary tool to provide financial support. The Apostle Paul worked making tents; I taught driving.

As 1993 drew to a close, we had a few special church events. At the Thanksgiving service, we broke open plastic piggy banks called "Love Loaves". The coins were sent to a Christian agency for hunger relief. Love Loaves at Thanksgiving would become an annual Hope tradition. At our Christmas service we had a small choir that included Rob and Susan Rotz, Debbie Babcock, Dale Miel and others. In that service I did a one man drama on the birth of Jesus from the perspective of Joseph. It was our church's first Christmas in a year that had been filled with many firsts.



Chapter Four

1994 – Steps Toward Stability

In January, 1994, It was time to formalize our church government. We held a meeting for prayer and business in the basement of Bob Babcock's home. At that meeting we adopted the church constitution and nominated elders for our church. The three men nominated were Wayde Hoppe, William Boyer, and Karl Thuemmel. The nominations were confirmed a couple weeks later at an annual congregational meeting held at the home of Mark and Maddy Mumm.

We began receiving members. We intentionally made the membership requirements fairly high. We required every member to meet the following qualifications:

- * Profession of a saving faith in Christ Jesus
- * Baptism as a believer
- * Agreement with the church's affirmation of faith
- * Faithful Sunday worship attendance
- * Active participation in a Hope Group
- * Service in a church ministry team

A relatively small number of people were recognized as formal members of Hope Church in 1994:

William and Debbie Boyer
Wayde and Carrie Hoppe
Paul and Nora Manwiller
Laraba Parfitt
Denise Toner
Robert Rotz
Karl Thuemmel
Mark and Maddy Mumm

This last couple, the Mums, illustrate how God answers prayer and arranges circumstances. Maddy had been a missionary in India. Mark was a missionary in the Philippines. They met each other at a training event in Hawaii. They were married in 1993 and moved to Ann Arbor. Amazingly, I already knew Maddy. I had met her and worked with her in Dillingham, Alaska! When the newly-married Mums came to Michigan, God placed them in our new church. Mark Mumm hoped to work in a Christian medical practice. We prayed for him. At the same time, Debbie Boyer was looking to step out of her job. We were praying that her employer, a Christian doctor, would find a suitable replacement. God brought the details together. Soon both Mark and Maddy were working in that office. The Mums have been a wonderful asset to our church. They have helped us grow in our commitment to world missions. Mark and Maddy would eventually become the first long-term foreign missionaries sent and supported by Hope Church.

To spark church growth, we decided to try another round of calling with “The Phone’s For You” program. Nora and I added a third phone line to our home so church people could come and help call. It was pretty much the same routine that I described in the last chapter. Somehow we did this marathon of calling and bulk mailing in addition to the pastoral work and the driving school job. As we called we were inviting people to a special service in April, 1994, celebrating the church’s first birthday. We would be one year old.

We wanted our outreach to have a foundation of prayer, so in March we had a series of four successive Sunday evening prayer meetings. Through such meetings we began to learn to pray together with unity. We learned to pray following the leading of the Holy Spirit. I really believe the one of the most important steps toward spiritual maturity, for a person or a church, is learning how to pray.

April 17 was the birthday Sunday. We had another good turnout, and some of the new people stayed with us for the next two or three years, not so much as serious disciples but instead as willing short-term church members. One man who came and really stayed was Rick Routson. He remembers:

“I had gotten a phone invitation from Nora and I decided to go. I wasn’t really going anywhere at the time. I went a second time in June when Ron came to visit and I needed to go to church somewhere. I had talked to Paul on the phone between visits and he asked me if I was going to start going to Hope regularly. When I visited that second time, with Ron, Paul put me on the spot in front of people about whether I was going to make Hope my church.”

Rick went on to become a worship leader, a Hope Group Shepherd, and the most outstanding church treasurer I have ever known.

During 1994 some ministry patterns were established that have grown into Hope Church traditions. For example, In January of that year we had an emphasis on world missions. I titled that sermon series “Missions First!”. We have had a missions focus in January every year since. As Hope has matured, we have developed a number of other traditions. The following events are more or less regular features of the church year.

- * In January, renewal of church membership and the annual church business meeting
- * In February, the Fur Rendezvous Talent Show
- * In March and April, a campaign of prayer and outreach, culminating in the annual birthday service
- * In the summer, a church picnic at the Hoppe home
- * In September, the Open House Sunday, a special Sunday to invite guests at the start of the school year
- * In November, a Thanksgiving Service that includes breaking open Love Loaves
- * In December, a Christmas sing

On the other hand, some of our scheduling has been much less predictable. Baptism services are held whenever we have need and wherever we can find water. The first three baptism services were held at Huron Hills Baptist Church in Ann Arbor. Since then they have been held at a variety of locations. There is a complete list of dates and locations of our baptisms at the end of this book.

Another ministry trend that developed in 1994 was the discipleship of college students. Before we started the church we had assumed we would have most success reaching others like ourselves--married couples with young children. But I remember that at one of our prayer meetings God moved our hearts to start pouring out prayer for the university students at U of M and Eastern Michigan University. I believed God was pointing at the campuses and saying he had a ministry for us with students. I was a little surprised, but Nora said she had long believed that God would give me young men to disciple. She reminded me that this was Jesus' strategy: to invest his life in a few young men.

I was not sure how to proceed. Fortunately, God had given us Karl, and he was already making plans to live with several college students. In the fall of 1994 Karl rented a house on Pearl Street near the EMU campus. It was one of those older homes that have been converted into commercial property and then rented to death. His goal was to use the house as a place for ministry, some of the ministry directed at the college-age housemates, and some of it aimed at the larger student world around them. Karl oversaw the life of the house: chores, house meetings, finances, meals, and devotions. He was the "dean of men".

During the next three years, a good number of young single men lived with Karl. A fair fraction of them got involved with the church. Among them were Chad Kimball and Brandon Carter (who both grew into worship leaders for our Detroit congregation), Mark Christensen, Dave Anderson, Ryan Scherz, Steve Ferguson, and Joel Van Sant. I spent a good bit of time that year at the Pearl Street house, and also at the larger house that Karl rented a year or so later on Olive Street. As I interacted with the students, I learned that they needed love, training, accountability and discipline. As our church matured, we became more proficient in providing for those needs. We slowly learned how to make disciples.

God opened another door for us at the university in an unexpected way. Cindy Rodrigues was living on the EMU campus as a dorm supervisor. In 1994 a student popped into her office and asked if Cindy would proofread one of his assignments. The student asked if Cindy attended a church. Then, even though he didn't know me or attend our church, he suggested Hope Church to Cindy. She and her husband, Reggie, began attending. They made their little apartment in the dorm available for church ministry; we had a thriving Hope Group meeting there. Some wonderful fellowship events, including our first two Fur Rendezvous Talent Shows, were held in a large lounge in Cindy's dorm.

In those early years, we had a nice number of EMU and U of M students attending church meetings. I recently got a note from Karen Fraser, an Eastern student whose experience with our church was pretty typical. She writes:

"I was involved in a Hope Group when I was attending Eastern Michigan University. The group took place on Monday nights at Reggie and Cindy Rodrigues' place. I just wanted to let you know that since then I graduated, landed a wonderful job in advertising and love what I do. I learned a lot in that Hope Group. I wanted to say thank you for making me feel welcomed while I was away from my home church."

For much of 1993 and 1994 I had been burning the candle at both ends. At the later half of 1994 I experienced two significant crashes--my health crashed and my car crashed. My health had been compromised for more than ten years anyway, due to a chronic immune deficiency. I tended to get sick easily and heal slowly. That summer I got a virus my body was unable to fight off. My physical abilities collapsed. I was barely able to stand. Almost anything I ate made me sick. It was

hard to think clearly. I had to give up the driving school job. This of course ended most of my income. I was evaluated by specialists at the U of M Medical Center. My primary care doctor, a Christian, said that steps could be taken to help manage my condition, but the only hope for a cure was divine healing.

From week to week it was uncertain whether I would have the strength to stand and preach on Sunday morning. One Saturday night I had William come over to pray with me. I was so woozy I could not sit up. As I lay on the couch, I went over the outline of my sermon with William so he could preach it in the morning. Then we prayed. It seemed clear to us that God wanted me to be present at the worship next morning, no matter how sick I was. In the morning I still felt terrible. Somehow I made it to the car, and then into the conference center. A sofa was moved into the auditorium for me. I lay half-conscious under a pile of blankets on that sofa. It seemed very humbling to have my weakness displayed so publicly. God made it very clear that I could do nothing. My health was broken. My income was mostly gone.

That fall we had an emergency prayer meeting at Laraba Parfitt's apartment in Ann Arbor. As the church members prayed, we came to believe that God wanted the church to undertake my full salary. That would mean an increase in salary from \$400 a month to about \$2400 a month. Yet God gave us the faith that he would provide it all. Wayde wrote a letter to every church attender so that even those who were not at the meeting would know what was happening. We did not ask for any money. The letter simply said why my salary was being multiplied six times over. Right away the church's giving increased. Most months Bob Babcock, the treasurer at the time, was able to give me a paycheck. On the months that he couldn't pay me, I trusted that God would supply some other way. He did. I never told anyone, "the church can't pay me," but during the lean months I received many financial gifts from unexpected sources. During times of plenty I never told anyone, "now the church is paying me again," but the flow of gifts would stop.

The other crash that affected me was a car accident in November. David and I were driving home one night from a Tiger Scout meeting at David's school. As we crossed a big intersection, a car on the cross road raced through the red light at high speed. We were broadsided on the passenger side of my car. That is, on David's side of the car. It could have been deadly. But, thank God, the angle of the impact was such that my car was not crushed. Instead, we were sent into a wild spin. When we came to a stop, David and I had some minor cuts and bruises, but we were O.K. Six year-old David looked at me and said very quietly, "Daddy, were we in an accident?" We were both very quiet, almost solemn, realizing that God had spared our lives.

My little red Escort was totaled. I had used that car during seminary in Illinois, then in Alaska, and then for church planting in Michigan. I really liked that car. Now we needed a replacement. The church helped us. David Roden loaned me a van for a few days. Cindy Rodrigues loaned me her little Honda Civic for a week or so. I put together the insurance money, some of my money, and some church money to purchase a three year-old blue Escort sedan. I still have that car.

At the end of the year my health was still shaky, but the church had grown in maturity. It's support to my family was proof of that.



Chapter Five

1992 – The Call to Detroit

In 1995 our church took some steps into new areas of fruitful ministry. Two areas that stand out are the teen Hope Groups and the beginnings of a congregation in Detroit.

For the teen work, God gave us Kalinda Jones. She was a 1994 college graduate who moved back home to Ypsilanti looking for a high school teaching job. She met Kerry Dennis at a Youth For Christ event, and soon began attending Hope. Kalinda joined a women's Hope Group led by Laraba Parfitt. Eventually, Kalinda became a co-leader of that group.

Kalinda's younger twin brothers started coming to church with her. David and Daniel were fifteen years old at the time. Kalinda approached me and asked, "What are you going to do with the church's teenagers?" She cared about her brothers, of course, and she was concerned for the couple of other teens, like Shontaya Overall, who were in the church. And so for many weeks she kept pressing me: what was I, the pastor, going to do for the teens.

Nora and I told Kalinda that perhaps God intended for HER to lead the teens. Kalinda disagreed. She had reasons. She already worked with teens all day at school. It might not be a good idea for her to lead her brothers. She had no vision for it. But by the summer of 1995 God had overruled all of Kalinda's objections. She started a teen Hope Group.

One of the keys to Kalinda's success was speaking plain, blunt truth to the kids. Kalinda says,

"I remember struggling when I saw such bondage in the lives of the teens. I was frustrated and ill-equipped. The Lord put a cornerstone into me when he answered my frustration with, "The truth will set you free". Truth! What power to cut through confusion, bring the light needed for repentance. What a powerful tool!"

Another key feature of Kalinda's work was her emphasis on teaching the kids to hear God's voice. I remember being a little doubtful when she told me she was working with the kids on prophesy and discernment. I wondered if she might do better to emphasize Scripture memory or personal quiet times. But I soon saw the results. The teens began to say things like, "I guess I had heard that I was supposed to have a quiet time, but I was never really very motivated. Then two months ago I heard God tell me to read through the Gospels and write down everything he showed me. Since then I have not missed a day of reading and I have filled a notebook with God's truths. I am so glad God really is alive and he speaks to me!"

For almost five years Kalinda has poured herself into the lives of the teens. She saw a harvest of souls in 1996. She has taken the teens to Fresh Wind conferences in Canada, and to a

Passion For Jesus conference in Kansas City. She has conducted camping trips and what she calls “teachings”. All this teen ministry got started in 1995.

Our church’s work in Detroit also had its origin that year, although I should say that Nora and I were certainly not looking for anything new to do at the time. I was recovering only slowly from my physical collapse and my health was still marginal. Nora was nearing the end of her rope after nearly three years of compensating for my high-pressure non-stop church planting schedule. I decided we should get away for a couple days, just the two of us, to some renewal meetings at the Toronto Airport Church. It was to be a time of refreshing with God.

The first night in Toronto, God’s presence was very strong. I suddenly knew what God had for us next. I could see a new church body in Detroit. I could see, by faith, a group worshipping the Lord on the Wayne State University campus. I knew we needed to start another congregation there. It was as real to me as the night in Alaska when God showed me we were to move to Michigan. Such specific vision was, for me, very re-energizing, but I thought it best to wait a bit before telling Nora.

We had been at the renewal meeting for about a day and a half. Nora was looking increasingly agitated and restless. She finally said to me, “I’m not getting anything out of our time here. Are you?” I told her I thought God was showing me something about his plan for us. “What?!” I tried to tell her what I was seeing: an auditorium in Detroit, young people, international students, evangelism, worship, the powerful presence of God. Her immediate reaction was not positive. Nora tells it in her own words:

“I just burst out with all my negative thoughts, frustrations and tears. We talked a bit and I finally asked what has been going on with him. He shared that he thought God was leading us to start a new church in Detroit soon. I felt betrayed by God. My plate was already too full. We had come here to be ministered to and all God had to say was that we had to do more. After I cried and Paul prayed, he suggested I stay in Toronto and continue to be ministered to. That sounded encouraging. Maybe I just needed more opportunities to be prayed for. So I stayed. Most of the week continued to be discouraging. I felt abandoned by God and now I was away from Paul and anyone else who could encourage me. I was full of self-pity.

The second to last night that I was there, I came back to the hotel room desperate to hear from God. I flipped through my Bible and tried reading things I thought would be encouraging, Psalms, favorite passages, but nothing seemed meaningful. Finally I felt some impression that I was to read Haggai chapter 2. I wasn’t entirely sure if this was from God, nor did I know what was there in Haggai 2, but I turned to it. I read, “‘Be strong, all you people of the land’, declares the Lord, ‘and work for I am with you’, declares the Lord Almighty. ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’”

I felt these words were speaking directly to my heart. God was telling me that his Spirit was still with me, even in my discouraged state, and that I mustn’t be fearful. The verse about the covenant seemed to imply that God had led Paul and me out of Alaska, and that his covenant with us was that he was going to use us to start a church. He was telling me not to be afraid of what all this would be like. He was also telling me to be strong and work. I had been whining and complaining, expecting God to say, “There now, dear, why don’t you rest a while.” Instead he was saying “I am the one who purposed to do these things and

whose Spirit is with you. Now stop whining and find your strength in me and get back to work. It was somehow comforting.

Then I read on. “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty. The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty.

I knew God was confirming the word Paul had heard about planting a new church in Detroit. God was going to “once more” shake the heavens and the earth and “all nations”. The “desired of all nations would come”. I understood that to mean that this church would be composed of people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. It would have people from other countries, perhaps international students. And God would draw those he desired. Further, he was telling me that he would fill this church with his glory. And that it would surpass the first congregation in some ways, particularly the sense of his felt presence in worship.

Also, he was saying that he would provide the silver and the gold. We need not worry about where the money would come from. Since the Ypsilanti congregation was small and not very strong financially, this was amazing to me. Finally he said, “And in this place I will grant peace.” He was saying that his peace would be there and we did not need to fear. After this I felt sure that Paul had heard from the Lord, and I was even excited about it. I was eager to see what God was going to do.

The next night the revival preacher was an artist. He preached about the harvest. He had painted a scene of a great harvest. In the foreground was a very sweaty, tired looking worker. But as you looked more closely, you could see more workers behind him, all around the field. They were all harvesting together. This was more encouragement for me. We may need to work hard, but we are not working alone. We are part of a great harvesting. We do not focus on our own tired, achy, sweaty muscles, but on the great field that is before us. We are part of something awesome that God is doing. I was excited. The sense of revival was powerful.”

When I returned to Toronto to pick up Nora, she was as excited about Detroit as I was. God had used his word to speak to her about his plan for us in Detroit, and those verses in Haggai became promise verses for Nora and me, as well as for our whole church.

As soon as I got home I started talking with the elders about this new vision. Wayde was not convinced that it was either the time (with our church still young and barely self-supporting) or the place (in the heart of Detroit!) to be starting the task of church planting again. He had some very good questions: Would this be a new independent church? How could my pastoral work be divided between two churches? (It was only later that we clearly understood how Detroit and Ypsilanti could function as two interdependent congregations within the same church). How were we to pay for all this? Were the people in Ypsilanti prepared to support an outreach in Detroit? And did we have any people who were prepared to be part of a Detroit congregation? These were good questions. I didn’t know the answers. God did.

I knew we needed unity before we could proceed. So I called for a series of congregational prayer meetings, which I asked Wayde to lead. The last of the special prayer meetings took place at an office building on Packard Road in Ann Arbor. When the people arrived that night, they all looked like they were doing very badly. I asked them if they were ready to pray. They were not. Most had just experienced an argument, a spiritual attack, or some other big upset. Nora drove to that meeting by herself. She arrived late, looking very shaken and upset. She said she had gotten lost and stooped to call for directions. While she was at the payphone she was threatened by a man with a knife. It seemed clear to me that Satan was trying to disrupt our meeting. I divided the people into some smaller groups and asked them to pray for one another. Next we had a time of worship and spiritual warfare. Finally we moved into prayer concerning Detroit. Someone said, "I think God is telling us that if we simply say 'yes', he will do the rest. He will supply the people and the funds and the guidance," There was agreement. So that night we said yes to God, and he poured out his peace that confirmed that this was his will. It was such a contrast to the fear and upset that had prevailed at the start of the meeting.

And so church planting in Detroit started in earnest. On our anniversary, August 19, Nora and I took some time to drive through the Wayne State campus area. We prayed as we drove. Nora "saw" in her spirit a vision of cars coming from the suburbs into the city, bringing people to worship at Wayne State. This was a little surprising to me. Most suburban folks don't venture into the city unless they have to. But, in time, we saw how God would draw people to us from near and far, from the city and from the distant corners of the metro area.

That fall I started a new Hope Group in an apartment tower owned by the University. This apartment was the home of my friends Paul and Donna Suckow. The Suckows were very hospitable. They usually had chicken and rice on the stove, cookies on the kitchen table. I asked Suranjan Soans to come and lead worship for the Hope Group. He was the best guitarist our church has ever had. God began to bring the people. Kristy Lameau was first. She invited the Dannug brothers, Norman and Tophe. Norman brought his classmate Josh Bell. Josh invited his friends Curtis Hatchell and Rhonda Shaw.

By December we were ready to start Sunday worship. I hunted for a place for us to meet. I talked with Christian groups in the area to see what was available, but I didn't get a very warm response. A church near campus suggested we go to another part of town. A student ministry at Wayne State warned their students not to associate with us. Apparently, the local ministries feared that we would steal away a share of the limited number of active Christians on campus. They didn't understand that our intention was to win the lost for Jesus. It seemed to me that there were plenty of unbelievers to go around. My search for a place to meet ultimately led us to a building right on campus. After some negotiations I had a contract to rent an auditorium in Science Hall. It has been a good spot for us. The university custodial staff has faithfully opened the building each week, and the campus police helpfully stop in to check on our safety from time to time.

For our worship leader in Detroit I chose Chad Kimball, one of the EMU students living with Karl in Ypsilanti. Our church paid his gas money so he could afford to drive to Detroit once or twice a week. He has backed up by musicians like Suranjan Soans, Brandon Carter and Kristy Lameau. Chad had an anointing for worship leading. As he sat on a tall stool playing his guitar, Chad poured out his heart to the Lord. He worshipped. And he drew us into worship with him. We followed him as he listened to the spirit and moved in and out of songs in a flowing, spontaneous style. His example influenced the worship leaders who have come after him in Detroit. The worship in Detroit is cited by many of our current church members as the thing that

drew them in and kept them coming back. Generation X visitors to our service say things like “You’re not just singing. There’s something ‘real’ happening. You were all so ‘into it’. And then I felt something myself.”

By the end of 1995 I found that my ministry was much expanded, even far-flung , as compared to how the year began. I had one congregation in Ypsilanti (20 minutes west of my home) and another in Detroit (30 minutes east of my home). I was preaching in Ypsilanti at 9:30 am and in Detroit at 2:00 pm. I now had people coming to Hope from four different counties, a fulfillment of the word God gave me back when I was working for the driving school. I also had a man who was prepared to quit an engineering job, get pastoral training, and move his family from Ypsilanti to Detroit to help with the new work there. The story of that man, Larry David, will be told as we move into 1996.



Chapter Six

1996 – The Beautiful Harvest

1996 was a season of rapid growth. That year we had higher Sunday attendance than any time before or since. We had a great many visitors at our services in both Ypsilanti and Detroit. And more importantly, we often saw people receive Jesus as Savior.

The story of this harvest begins in mid-February, 1996. I asked each of the Hope Groups to work up an entry in our annual Fur Rendezvous Talent Show. There was a little music, a little drama, a little dance, a little comedy. Some of the “acts” deliberately pointed toward Jesus. That evening David Jones had some guests with him. He had invited a fellow student from Ypsilanti high school, Mary Achatz. She in turn invited her friend Katie Delcamp to come with her. It was the first contact these two girls had with our church. They returned the next day for Sunday worship. They kept coming. They started bringing along other high school friends. But they had not yet yielded their own lives to Jesus. One Sunday Mary told me she didn’t agree with some of God’s commandments. I asked her if she thought she could do a better job of being God than God does. She said she believed she could. But not long after that she changed her mind. She repented and received Jesus as Savior and Lord--master of her life.

This started a chain reaction. One teen after another, mostly girls, prayed for Salvation. Some weeks I would get two or three phone calls from excited young Christians saying they had just prayed with ANOTHER friend who wanted to receive Jesus. Lauren Wright’s story illustrates the spiritual excitement among the Ypsilanti teens that year:

“I saw Rosie Howard at a party on July 4, 1996 (the summer before my sophomore year), and she told me she just got saved. She explained to me what that meant. I saw a bunch of the teens later at the Heritage Festival (end of August, 1996) and they invited me to a baptism where David Jones was baptized at Shontaya’s pool house. Soon after that I became a Christian! Praise the Lord!”

God was not just working on the hearts of teens. Almost every Hope Group in Ypsilanti was seeing answers to prayer concerning evangelism and salvations. Leah Ransom, a single young adult, tells about what happened for her:

“In January, 1996, my friend and co-worker, Heather Brunsink, invited me to attend a Bible study. Just a few weeks earlier Heather’s friend from college, Roopa Boaz, had invited her to attend this study, and Heather had asked the group to pray for my salvation. Shortly before I attended that Hope Group Bible study I accepted Christ as my Savior. God had answered prayer. This Hope Group, led by Pastor Paul, gave me a warm welcome. Although I hadn’t planned on joining Hope Church (because of the distance from my home), God had other plans. I visited the church one Sunday in February or March and have been here ever since.”

We saw many people baptized that year. Hope Church baptism services are always remarkable. We conduct a special service, separate from our Sunday meetings, at a location where there will be sufficient water for immersion. We have held baptism services in church buildings, lakes, YMCA pools, backyard pools, a kiddie wading pool, and a hot tub. I think the highlight of these services is the testimonies. Each person who is baptized shares his testimony, explaining exactly how he met Jesus and what a difference Jesus has made in his life. These real-life testimonies are compelling and powerful. Normally there are family members and some friends who come to witness the event. Praise God, some of these family members also come to trust Christ.

In early June of 1996 we had a baptism service at Wildwood Ranch Bible Camp near Howell. It was a bit of an adventure. I remember lots of mosquitoes. The little lake was green with water lilies, stringy plant life and thick pond scum. But in my judgment it was good natural scum, so we went ahead with the baptisms. I preached on the story of the Ethiopian eunuch who was miraculously saved when God sent Philip to explain the Scriptures to him. Right away, that Ethiopian man had stopped his chariot along the desert road and said, "Here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:37). The water was almost certainly stale, standing water in a desert wadi. I spoke of the way of salvation, then pointed to the green slimy pond and said, "Here is water; why shouldn't you be baptized?"

Among those who were baptized that evening was newly saved Mary Achatz. Her mother, Kyle, came to watch. It was Kyle's first time with our church. Many months later she was saved. Then Mary's sister, Linda, was saved. And her brother, John. Today the whole family is together in church. It was a similar story for David Jones' friend Andrea McDonald. She started attending Hope in the fall of 1996. She was saved in February of '97 as she witnessed a baptism service. In April of that year she was baptized. I saw her parents for the first time at her baptism. Now her brother, Joe, and her mother, Teri, have both received Christ and followed him in believers baptism. It has been amazing to watch. Starting with those first few teens we have seen younger siblings, older siblings, parents and friends come into God's kingdom. Truly, it has been a beautiful harvest.

Meanwhile, over in Detroit, we had a lot of activity but not a lot of stability. I needed someone solid to come and help me follow up and disciple the young adults who were drifting through our meetings. The Lord supplied Larry David. I met Larry and his wife, Margaret, in 1994 when our friend Anna Ruhl brought them to church in Ypsilanti. I think it is fair to say that Larry and Margaret had been spiritually drifting for several years. But God clearly had plans for this couple. I saw God moving quickly, answering one prayer after another. Larry needed God's direction about employment. God showed Larry and me a plan about when and how Larry would be hired into an engineering position. It all happened. Margaret had health problems due to a debilitating low blood pressure condition. She was receiving a lot of medical treatment with minimal results. Some weeks she would come to church and lie flat on the floor because she was unable to sit up. She was warned that if she became pregnant it might be life threatening for her. But God answered prayer for Margaret. At a Toronto renewal service she was healed by the hand of God. Since then she has had three normal pregnancies yielding three lovely children.

By 1995 Larry and Margaret were shepherding a Hope Group that was meeting in their apartment in Ypsilanti. When our church received a call to Detroit, the Davids received a personal call of their own. God was asking Larry to give up the security of his engineering work in exchange for a pastoral role with the infant work in Detroit. Margaret agreed. She had seen a

vision in which she saw herself in the city, living in a house that was dedicated to ministry. In 1996, at the annual January business meeting, our church agreed to send the Davids to the Toronto School of Ministry. This school is a crash course in ministry, with classes, practical service, and a short-term missions trip. This is where the David family--Larry, Margaret, and baby Gabrielle--spent the spring and summer of 1996.

The Davids returned in August of 1996 and settled into a small apartment within a short walking distance of Wayne State. There were some concerns to face. Money was an issue. Our church was not able to support two staff members. For a few months Nora and I went without pay so the church could support the Davids. Then the Lord opened a way for Larry to take a part-time teaching job. This helped ease the financial squeeze. And God used the job to shape Larry. He was assigned to teach math in a juvenile prison. His students were hulking offenders with an attitude. Larry learned about discipline and leadership. Fast!

Another concern for the Davids was safety. During the two years Larry and Margaret lived in the apartment on Prentis Street, every unit in their building was broken into except theirs. Their car was not touched either, although Margaret's parents once came for a visit and had the contents stripped out of their van. We have always prayed for safety in Detroit. I once had to pick up Peter in my arms and run away from a drug-addled pursuer. On another occasion I walked Rhonda Shaw to her car, where we found her window smashed and her tape deck stolen. Larry and Margaret willingly moved into this environment, and God covered them with his protective hand.

I am thankful that Larry came to Detroit that fall because we needed him right away. It may be normal for a new body of believers to experience some upset that threatens to divide the brethren. The early church in Jerusalem had a dispute involving Hebraic and Grecian widows (Acts 6:1-7). In our case, a problem arose when some of the Detroiters sought to redefine the church's mission and structure. Their idea, as I understand it, was that the Detroit congregation should be an independent entity, unencumbered by the pastor and elders. They wished to replace our evangelism and discipleship focus with a ministry of social service, with an emphasis on racial and gender issues. I met one-on-one with the unhappy brothers and sisters. I met with them in groups. These meetings promoted communication and brought temporary peace, but the problem continued to flare up.

By the time Larry arrived on the scene things had reached a boiling point. For example, one new attender at Hope Detroit told me, "Pastor, I enjoyed my first visit to your church, but I was a little upset when one of your members came up to me after the service and tried to get me to help overthrow the church leaders." One Sunday a church member stood up and, saying it was a word from God, publicly denounced the pastor and elders. So that week the elders and I tried to "weigh carefully" what had been said (I Corinthians 14:29). The following Sunday I told the Detroit congregation that we could not confirm it had been a word from the Lord. The angry prophet never worshipped with us again. Within weeks several others, mostly women, also exited. A couple of these women said that if they could not change the church to their liking they would try to take as many of the women out of it as possible. And they did try. It was very disturbing to see professing Christians behave in such a manner.

Larry and Margaret's stabilizing presence in Detroit was such a blessing during that painful episode. Their apartment became a center of church life in Detroit. I am very thankful that the church elders had god-given unity during this and every difficult time we have faced. I am thankful for Mark Mumm, who was at that time serving as one of the elders. He had a great depth

of experience and a very calming influence. He would say things like, “We saw situations like this when I was with YWAM in the Philippines. Our mission director showed us from the Bible that God’s perspective is...” Those painful months were followed by some quiet weeks of healing and rebuilding. Then, as the year ended and the new year began, God bought us a beautiful crop of new people. They arrived all at once, within days of one another. I am filled with joy as I think through some of their names: Amy Bell, Esther Bell, Mark Compton, Katie Davis, Janson Deradourian, Brian Fair, Jason Hogans, Yvonne Janiriya, Kris Pooley, and Shawn Walker.

I should mention one other interesting note about 1996. That year I preached for nearly eleven months straight through the book of Acts. It is the longest sermon series I have ever done. It was most of a year before some of our new Christians in Ypsilanti heard preaching from anything BUT the book of Acts. Whenever I saw Jackie Drenning, she would nudge one of the girls standing near her, put on her Pastor Paul imitation, and say a phrase she thought I always started every sermon with: “As you now, we are working our way through the book of Acts.” I don’t know if I ALWAYS started my sermons that way, but that is how Jackie always greeted me. I think our time in Acts was a very positive time for a young church that was trying to listen to God and do church planting. This series also gave our church a taste for preaching that covers an entire book of the Bible. Before 1996 I did a lot more topical preaching. Since 1996 I have usually preached through one book at a time. I have even felt a freedom to preach through books (such as Daniel, I Corinthians, and Revelation) that are considered “difficult.”



Chapter Seven

1997 – A Painful Pruning

In 1997 there was still greater unrest in our church, this time coming from the Ypsilanti Congregation. The pressure had been building for a few months. In February, 1997, there was an eruption.

The situation involved a couple of women who chose to leave the church. The first woman was well-liked, with many social connections in the church. However, her Hope Group Shepherd and I found it necessary to provide some correction, even church discipline, in her life on a certain point. The discipline was not well received. She refused to meet with the elders and instead left the church. The second woman, a friend of the first, came to meet with the elders to express her displeasure over how this situation--and others--had been handled. Then she, too, stopped attending Hope. All this was bad. What followed was worse.

On February 1, a Saturday afternoon, I started getting phone calls from people in the church. "Have you seen what I just got in the mail? Why is she sending this to me?" The second woman had sent an aggressively worded nine page letter to everyone remotely connected to the church. It was mailed to members and non-members. Christians and non-Christians. Adults and kids. The letter spoke very negatively about my work as the pastor. It cast a number of other people, including Nora, Wayne Hoppe, Karl Thuemmel, Mark Mumm and Debbie Boyer in a dim light. Perhaps most alarming to the average person in the church was the letter's emphasis on the church's supposed legal liability stemming from the "misconduct" of its leaders.

Later that Saturday afternoon a copy of this letter arrived in my mail. Since I already had a general idea of its contents I did not open it right away. I needed to have my mind focused on a more immediate responsibility. We had a baptism service scheduled that night. The location for the baptisms was a little church building in Ypsilanti called The Bible Church. Our Hope Church people gathered there that evening, but there was not the usual festive mood. At the start of the meeting, almost everyone looked stricken with fear or grief or both. It felt like we were going to have a funeral. But God is so good. The testimonies of those being baptized had a powerful effect. At the end of the service we sang:

I believe in Jesus,
I believe he is the Son of God,
I believe he died and rose again,
I believe he paid for us all.
And I believe he is here now
Standing in our midst,
Here with the power to heal now,
And the grace to forgive.

As we sang, a teenaged girl named Brie Clark came to saving faith. Right then and there, she publicly declared herself to be a new Christian. Andrea McDonald, another teen, was also saved that night. There was much rejoicing. When the baptism service started, it had looked like Satan was winning the fight, but by the end of the meeting we had witnessed a great victory.

But there was still the distressing letter to consider. The church people were waiting for some response, some reassurance from the church leaders. The elders and I announced a special members-only business meeting. It was to be held on a Sunday evening later that month. The week before our special meeting, everyone received yet another letter. The first woman, the one who abruptly left Hope to avoid church discipline, had mailed out a letter that supported and supplemented the content of her friend's letter. This of course created further upset and confusion. I knew I would need the wisdom of Solomon to successfully conduct the special meeting.

At the beginning of our meeting I told the members:

* **THIS IS NOT A DEBATE.** Instead we will focus on information and teaching that will benefit the members of our church.

* **THIS IS NOT A CHANCE TO RETURN ACCUSATIONS AGAINST OUR ACCUSERS.** The Bible teaches us that we must return blessing for curses, must return intercession for accusation. Remembering this will help us to respond to these letters in a Christ like manner.

* **THIS IS NOT AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE COMPLETE DISCLOSURE OF ANYONE'S PRIVATE LIFE.** The Pastor and elders prefer to use restraint. We ask you to please refrain from telling personal information [about the letter writers or anyone else] that has not already been made public in the letters.

* **ABOVE ALL, IT IS OUR OBJECTIVE TO STRENGTHEN AND UNIFY THE CHURCH BODY.** Tonight's teaching, discussion and prayer will take place with this goal in mind--unifying and building up the members of Hope Community Church.

Next, I reviewed some of the church's beliefs that were relevant to the case at hand. I outlined the Biblical pattern for church discipline. I answered many questions, sometimes with input from the other elders. Finally, Mark Mumm, one of our church elders, spoke to the people. As always he spoke with a voice of experience. He shared some Scripture. He led a season of prayer. Mark has such a gentle, godly manner.

For many of the committed church members the meeting was a success and the issue was resolved. Some members, on the other hand, allowed the letters or other gossip to poison their relationship with me. Now everything I did was suspect. One man met with the elders to say that his family was leaving the church. I had previously been a good pastor, he said, but now I was "manipulative". His evidence was this: whenever I visited his home I said "Thank you" to him and his wife for his hospitality. Every time! He was sure my consistent "Thank yous" carried a deeper, twisted meaning. Another member said he had lost his confidence in the elders decisions. He would only stay with the church, he said, with the condition that I would meet with him every week so he could question and evaluate all the church's affairs. He would be, in effect, a self-appointed advisory board above and beyond the elders. We did not agree to his condition and he promptly left the church.

The greatest losses, however, came from those who were attending church meetings but were not formal members. In those days we had a good number of such people. They were making

steps toward God but were still shaky in their faith. Some had family problems. Some had medical or emotional needs. Many had had some negative experience with Christians in the past, so they were a little bit wary. These struggling Christians received the disturbing letters. One after another approached me and said just about the same thing: “I like you, Pastor Paul, but this is all too weird for me. I probably would do better someplace more stable, more normal.” In a way I couldn’t blame them. They rightly knew in their own spirits that there was something UN-NORMAL about getting mailings with inflammatory personal accusations against other people. One by one these attenders quietly slipped away. I suggested names of other good churches they might get involved with, but too many of them spiritually drifted instead. When I hear from these folks now, I hear about significant personal failures in their lives and, in some cases, divorces. It is very sad. When Satan’s wolves attack, it is the lame and the little ones who are devoured. I think of Jesus’ words, “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to son, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

This entire episode was very, very, very painful. Even so, God used these events to teach us some lasting lessons. Here are some of the things Hope Church learned the hard way:

1. GOD IS IN CONTROL. He knows exactly what is going on. In fact, about half a year earlier he had given our church a prophetic word, saying “The wolves are coming” (Acts 20:29). Even though we didn’t understand it very well at first, he warned us ahead of time.

2. LEADERSHIP IS HARD. In ten years of ministry (in Alaska and Michigan) I had never had any serious upset in my church. I think I believed that godly men with good pastoral skills could avoid such incidents. Then my ministry came under attack. I turned to the Pentateuch and read and re-read the accusations against Moses. God said Moses was the most humble man on earth. If the people rebelled against a great man of God like Moses, why should I expect everyone would love me?

3. GOSSIP IS EVIL. I had laid out a preaching schedule before we reached 1997. When trouble hit, I kept preaching what God had already directed me to ahead of time--the book of James. So much of that book is about sins of the tongue. “See what a great forest is set on fire by a small flame” (James 3:5). The message hit home. One young woman stood up and confessed to the church that she was a gossip at her workplace. Others confessed that they liked to hear about problems that were not their job to fix. They stopped. We learned to run away from gossip. Just because something is true does not mean it is my business to hear it or share it.

4. SLANDER IS DEADLY. A gossip may not mean to hurt anyone (although gossip is evil and will eventually do harm). A slanderer DOES mean to drag someone else down. Slander murders the reputation of the one spoken against. Slander also harms the one who hears it. If I were to hear an evil report about a surgeon, I might refuse an operation I needed. Likewise, when someone hears an evil report against the pastor, he likely will fear to receive the spiritual treatment he seriously needs. The hearer is harmed. Satan wins.

6. THE BIBLE IS TRUE. In a sense, I always have believed the Bible is true. But I am sure I didn’t treat the words of the apostles with a dead set literalism. I had never known a church to warn its people to NEVER speak of or listen to what isn’t their business. I had never known a church that brought church discipline against those who were divisive. But the Bible teaches such things, and now I saw that the Bible really means what it says. It is

our job to make the church look more like the Bible, not to make the Bible look more like the church.

6. GOD ESTABLISHES AUTHORITY. The church leaders are commanded by God to shepherd the people (I Peter 5:2). The people are commanded by God to submit to the leaders (Hebrews 13:17). Our church saw very clearly what happens when Christians want to join in the fellowship of the church but not come under the authority of the church. Our culture currently prefers nations, homes, workplaces and churches without authority. God established nations, homes, workplaces AND CHURCHES with authority. In 1997, during and after our painful pruning, the people of our church began to see the importance of coming under spiritual authority in the church. That year a number of young men took steps of baptism, membership, and discipleship because they wanted to come under authority. At the same time, some of the young women heard God's voice say, "Cover yourself"; these women took up the practice of wearing a head covering to symbolize their desire to come under the covering of their spiritual authority (I Corinthians 11:3-10).

These are among the lessons we learned in 1997. I have come to see that even in what Satan intended for evil, God used for our good (Genesis 50:20). As a result of the upset in our church, we soon had a smaller number in attendance, and a larger number of committed members. The intimacy we have with one another is now a secure, legitimate intimate, supported by the covenant of church membership we have each entered into. Today the church functions as a unified body, as a church. "Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" (John 15:2).

In the aftermath of all this, we recognized a need for some kind of training program where we could pass on the lessons we had learned to up-and-coming leaders. During the summer of 1997 Karl and I laid out the plan for a Shepherds Training School, a one semester class for future Hope Group Shepherds. The program we created called for weekly lectures, a good bit of required reading, practical leadership experiences for the students, and some intense confession and prayer for the sanctification of the students.

The book list for the Shepherds Training School has changed a little from one semester to the next. We gradually came to a fairly established canon of books. These were books that had made a lasting impression on me and the elders, books that articulated values that I wanted each of our Hope Group Shepherds to receive and carry into ministry. I had them read COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS by Keith Inrater, a Messianic Jewish pastor. Inrater shows how our intimacy with both God and man is properly established with a godly agreement, a covenant. The book exposes the instability of relationships where the intimacy exceeds the level of covenantal commitment. Another key book was THE CALVARY ROAD by Roy Hession. This little book is a modern classic that has transformed the spiritual life of many in our church. It shows the way of continuous revival through brokenness, confession of sin, and the filling of the Holy Spirit. I have also had the shepherds in training learn about prayer and faith through a powerful book called REES HOWELLS, INTERCESSOR, written by Norman Grubb. From the life of Rees Howells we learn lessons about hearing God's voice, and about prayer that is not scattershot but under the direction of the Living God. Another great influence on our church has been books by and about the well-known Chinese Christian, Watchman Nee. I am astonished by Nee's love from Scripture, his simple obedience to God's Word without adjusting it to conform to cultural attitudes. I am also struck by his humility and endurance during seasons of profound suffering. A good introduction to his life is WATCHMAN NEE, MAN OF SUFFERING by Bob Laurent.

In that first Shepherds Training School, Fall of 1997, I challenged the young men to see the role of a shepherd as far more than a Bible study leader who conducts a meeting. As shepherds they would be evangelists and disciple makers. They would be, in effect, church planters on a small scale. The world will not see or admire their work; even the people they shepherd may not express much thanks. It would be hardship and dutiful obedience to Christ. They would be, I said, “Heroic Underground Church Planters”> Were they prepared to accept the challenge? Yes, every man in that first class was ready for commitment and commissioning. There were five students that fall:

- 1. BRANDON ZYLSTRA, an inquisitive, perceptive man with a gift for helping others study and apply the Word of God. He now successfully leads a Hope Group in Ypsilanti.**
- 2. JOSH BELL, a recent college graduate with an uninhibited passion for Jesus. He now shepherds a group in Detroit.**
- 3. DAVID JONES, then in high school, had already yielded his life to God’s call to ministry. After the shepherds training, David led a teen Hope Group for a time. Today he is helping to establish a new Hope Group in Plymouth.**
- 4. DANIEL JONES, David’s twin brother, has remained in Ypsilanti to help his sister, Kalinda, with the ministry to teens. Today he shepherds a group of new Christians who are mostly in middle school.**
- 5. BRANDON CARTER, an alumnus of Karl’s EMU ministry house, has music gifts and a missionary calling. He has led a Hope Group in Detroit and has served as a short-term foreign missionary.**

The Shepherds Training School was a success. We have put new students through the same program in 1998 and 1999.



Chapter Eight

1998 – A Functioning Body

Man can make a machine or an organization; only God can make a living body. In 1998 we saw God joining the members of the church body in many wonderful ways.

For example, that year we saw a number of church families invite a church member to come live with them. In most cases it was a younger, single adult who was offered not only a room, but also some practical real-life discipleship. This was Lauren Wright's experience:

"In the summer of 1998 (the summer before my senior year of high school) my mom moved to California. God allowed me to stay here, gave me a place to live [with Kalinda Jones] and has richly blessed me throughout. My relationship with my mom is better. Kalinda's realness forced issues to come up that never had been before, resulting in an entire change of perspective for me and an ability to be real."

Jackie Drenning says:

"In the summer of 1998 I had to move out of Steve and Michelle's house. I prayed about what God would have for me. It got to be two weeks before I was scheduled to be out of the old place when Mr. and Mrs. Hoppe invited me to live with them. I didn't even think. I jumped up and said, "Yes! I'd love to!"

Dale Miel also received hospitality.

"When I needed a place to stay the Kendigs put me up for about four months until I found a place I could afford."

In 1998 Brandon Carter lived in my home until he got married. When Brandon moved out, David Jones moved in.

Another way that God was joining members of the body together was through marriage. In the early years of our church, we had become acquainted with the pitfalls of dating, so most singles in the church completely set dating aside. Weddings were rare. I did perform a wedding for Kerry Dennis and Brian Wright in 1995. I also married Roopa Boaz and Keith Kline in 1996. In both of these weddings, the woman was from Hope Church but the man was not. The first wedding that involved two members of our church occurred in June, 1997, with the marriage of Kevin Kendig and Laraba Parfitt. It was joyous. It was wonderful. It was a positive example for our church's teens. Many of them said to me, "This is the first CHRISTIAN wedding I have ever seen!" At about that time God spoke to me as I was driving one day. I believed he was telling me that young men we had been nurturing would soon be ready for marriage, and that our church should expect new marriages and families.

Within months it was happening. God started bringing couples together, not by dating, but through prayer and courtship. The prayer was used to seek God's will BEFORE a romantic relationship was established. The courtship process was designed to keep the relationship pure, and also to maximize the involvement of the couple's parents and spiritual leaders. Norman Dannug and Kristy Lameau were married in November, 1997. Then we had four weddings in 1998, all of them the union of two church members. Christopher Dannug married Josephine Mabesa in May, 1998. Karl Thuemmel married Jeanne Mullins in June. Brandon Carter and Amy Bell were married in August. In November Steve Ferguson and Rhonda Shaw were married. The notes in Steve and Rhonda's wedding program included the following statements:

- * Steve and Rhonda have yet to kiss each other or anyone romantically.
- * Steve and Rhonda's first official date was one week before they were engaged. Before that they courted.
- * During their engagement, Steve and Rhonda learned much about the roles God assigns to a husband and a wife.
- * Steve and Rhonda met at Mrs. Arquette's home while raking leaves [a Hope Group service project at Nora's grandmother's home]. Two years later Steve proposed at Mrs. Arquette's while they were again raking leaves.
- * Rhonda baked and decorated their wedding cake.

We not only had weddings that year, we also had a momentous first-ever event for Hope Church--an ordination service. On January 11, 1998, Larry David was ordained to the ministry and became the Rev. Larry David. He had already been ministering in Detroit for almost a year and a half, with success, and God had opened the way for Larry to end his part time teaching job so he could give full attention to the ministry. On Saturday the 10th of January our church held an ordination council for Larry. The elders of our church were present--Wayde Hoppe, Mark Mumm, Karl Thuemmel and myself. We also included two local pastors, Levonn Yuelle from the Bible Church in Ypsilanti and Joe Sazyc from Evangel Temple in Ann Arbor. During the ordination council the pastors and elders questioned Larry very closely about his testimony, his beliefs, his gifts, his life and ministry. At the end of this lengthy examination, the ordination council gave a positive recommendation concerning Larry's ordination.

The next day, Sunday the 11th, our entire church met together in Detroit for the ordination service. We used a large auditorium upstairs in Science Hall. These combined services (with Ypsilanti and Detroit together) are always joyful, but this was particularly so. A big worship team made up of members of both congregations led the praise. Pastor Levonn Yuelle came from Ypsilanti to preach the ordination sermon. I personally gave Larry a charge from Scripture. The elders and I laid hands on Larry and, with prayer, set him apart for a lifetime of pastoral ministry. We made it clearer that this can no longer be something Larry is doing as a job for a season. No, this is recognized and confirmed as his identity, his calling from God -- ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was an awesome moment, which I believe made a significant impression on Larry, on his family, on the other young men who witnessed it, and on the whole congregation. After the service we celebrated the occasion with special refreshments and gifts for Pastor Larry.

1998 was also the year Hope Church sent out our first full-time missionaries. We had supported some short-term trips in the past. Every January we have emphasized teaching on world missions. We were eager for God to raise up missionaries from among our own members. Not surprisingly, Mark and Maddy Mumm were the first. They had each served as missionaries when they were single, before they came to Hope. Now they were ready to go out and serve as a

couple. Our church prayed with Mark and Maddy all through the process of selecting a place of service and a mission board. In summer 1998 we had a commissioning service. The elders laid hands on Mark and Maddy and gave them over for the work to which God had called them (Acts 13:1-3). Today the Mumms are medical missionaries in Central Asia, serving under Youth With a Mission (YWAM). They are still members of this church. They are OUR missionaries. They are the hands of Hope Church extended to a spiritually needy corner of the world.

In 1998 my life was changed with the arrival of a new baby, John. The story of this baby is a testimony to the power of God. The summer before, God had clearly told Nora and me to prepare for a baby. He told us the day the baby would be conceived. However, Nora's doctor told us that Nora was medically unable to become pregnant. We chose to trust God. Nora became pregnant at just the time God had indicated. Next we were told that Nora might not be able to sustain the pregnancy. Again we trusted God, and Nora progressed to full term. Finally, the obstetrician told us that Nora would not be able to have a natural delivery in the birthing center. Nora and I prayed with a midwife right there in the O.B. office. Within an hour Nora went into spontaneous labor, and that very day John was born in the birthing center as Nora and I had expected.

During the pregnancy, God was revealing to us that the church of Jesus Christ is much like a family. The Apostle Paul calls the church "the household of God" (I Timothy 3:15). God impressed upon me the idea that I should expect the church to grow into maturity at about the same rate that my own children were growing up. In other words, God would give us baby Christians in baby congregations, and it was my job to invest twenty years into seeing these babies grow up. Baby John was, in the natural world, a token of what I saw God doing in our spiritual world. This was confirmed when I took my family to visit my brother in Idaho that summer. On a Sunday evening the Lord led us to a worship service in a home in Idaho Falls. Nora and I did not know a single person there. The church leaders offered to pray for us. After they prayed, the pastor told us that God was showing him that there was a connection between new birth in our family and new birth in our ministry. He said God was increasing our capacity as parents, in the natural realm and the spiritual realm. Our family growth was a sign of what God would do in our church. Nora and I were very encouraged.

When Nora and I returned to Michigan I called for a corporate prayer meeting. I wanted to tell the people about a vision I had for a new site for church planting. The Lord had given me a growing conviction that we needed to reach the lost generation that wanders the streets of Royal Oak every night. Three years earlier the church had said "yes" to God's call to Detroit. I wanted to see if we could collectively say "yes" about Royal Oak. We met at the Hoppe home. We prayed. God gave us images of water, living water, poured out on the dry, cracked, hard ground of Royal Oak. We agreed to begin moving ahead. We scheduled another prayer meeting, this time at Yvonne Janviriya's apartment in Troy. We prayed for the city of Royal Oak. Bill Jennings led worship. The atmosphere was charged with the power of God. For part of the evening all we could say, over and over, was "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus". That very night we wrote a bold resolution, accepting God's call to Royal Oak and giving ourselves to the task of planting a worshipping congregation in that city. We all signed the resolution and posted it on Yvonne's refrigerator.

Little by little, God continued to add members to our body. The stories of Cindy Urick and Elham Amini are representative of what we saw God doing in 1998. Cindy writes:

“I came to a Sunday worship service. Jenny Powers invited me. It was June of 1998. It was incredible. I had never seen people who loved the Lord and were open and free to worship him in whatever manner they were comfortable. I remember my baptism. I had only been at Hope for a few months and did not know many of the people yet, even by name. Yet all these people came to watch me dedicate my life to Christ and rejoiced with me. And my family and friends were there to celebrate with me as well. But the best part was three days later my brother, Darin, got saved!”

Elham remembers:

“My first visit to Hope Church was in the fall of 1997. I visited with a girl named Jessie Anderegg. I felt called but my sins kept me away. Eight or nine months later I visited Hope again, this time with Jenny Powers. Again I felt called to be in this church so I stayed. Since then God forced me to repent of my sins that kept me away--and I am thankful for his discipline. A special event that stands out in my memory is my baptism in September of 1998. It was the first time I felt that I belonged to a body--It WAS the first time that I belonged to a body! I completely felt God’s love for me, and the reassurance that he would always be near me. To be honest, every Sunday stands out for me. The Holy Spirit is ALWAYS present--and that is what makes it special.”

We saw some dramatic salvations near the end of the year. In October, Brian Fair invited Kelly Brokaw to a fire meeting. These fire meetings were Friday night revival meetings in Ann Arbor that many of the young people in our church were attending. While Kelly was there that night, someone prophesied over her. Kelly met Jesus. A couple days later she gave her heart and life to him. I especially remember the Monday night in December when Russ Mewha, full of desperate spiritual need, found his way to my Hope Group. He brought Robyn Lipnicki with him. That night Russ returned to Jesus while at the very same time, in the next room, Robyn prayed to receive Jesus as Savior. Their lives were radically transformed. No one who was present that night will ever again doubt the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

And neither will anyone who has been a faithful member of Hope Church doubt the ability of God to knit together a living, growing, functioning spiritual body.



Chapter Nine

1999 – Fertile Fields

1999 began with a blizzard. The storm started on Friday night, January 1, and ended on Sunday morning, January 3. Over two feet of snow fell. The wind shaped the snow into high drifts. Neighborhood streets were not plowed yet on Sunday morning. Most churches, I later learned, cancelled their services. Not Hope. The people of our church had developed such a sense of the importance of Lord’s Day worship that they did not call to ask if we were meeting. They simply came, any way they could. Rick Routson picked up some of the single women with his truck. Keith Kline drove from Livonia to Ypsilanti to lead worship that morning. William Boyer and his daughter, Sarah, remember what happened to their family that morning:

“Saturday night it snowed a lot. William got up early Sunday and spent one and a half hours shoveling snow as quickly as possible. The whole driveway needed shoveling out into the road because the snow was deeper than the ground clearance of the car. So we finally got the car out onto the road. Then, the snow the tires had pushed up needed to be shoveled before we could go. When William finally got that cleared, we all became convinced it was impossible--the snow in the road was just too deep. We prayed, “Well, God, if you want us to make it to church, you will have to provide a way. We’ve done all we can; we’re worn out; we cant make it.” William was just about to work on getting the car back into the driveway when a large farm tractor that had done a neighbor’s driveway so she could get to church came around us and plowed just enough of our street for us to get through! Sarah (two years old) crowed all the way to church, “Jesus sent us a snowplow! Jesus sent us a snowplow!”

Later in January we held our Annual business meeting at a recreation Center in Inkster. At that meeting, I reviewed our plans for church planting in Royal Oak. I also shared with the people a vision for yet another location. The Lord had been showing the elders that he would pour out the Holy Spirit’s fire on Detroit, then on Ypsilanti, Royal Oak, and also Livonia. God seemed to be pointing us to Livonia. The people received the vision willingly. If God wanted to give us one baby, they said, he could just as easily give us twins. So now we had said “yes” to God about a total of four congregations.

The next thing God did was to start giving us babies. In 1999 he generously showered blessing after blessing on our church families. First came Wayde and Carrie Hoppe’s baby, their eighth, a girl named Mary. Then Nora and I had another baby, Daniel, our fourth Boy. As the year progressed we had, in answer to prayer, one pregnancy after another. Margaret David. Roopa Kline. Laraba Kendig. Josephine Dannug. Rhonda Ferguson. Debbie Boyer. Cinday Rodrigues. Amazingly, nearly all these women had been regarded as infertile. Rhonda had a long history of endometriosis, but God healed her body and left no trace of the disease. She and Steve are expecting their first baby. Debbie Boyer experienced years of infertility. In 1996 God gave

William and Debbie a miracle baby, Sarah, who may be the most prayed for, long-desired baby our church ever welcomed. Debbie's infertility persisted, however, so the Boyers worked on adoption. They would have gladly received an adopted baby, but God gave Debbie another pregnancy instead. The Boyers are expecting a baby boy.

Nora received healing from God during her pregnancy. She developed symptoms of gestational diabetes that would not come under control. On a Sunday morning several church members prayed over Nora. That week the condition disappeared and never returned. Josephine Dannug also received physical healing, which in turn led to a baby:

"Before I was married to Tophe, I was diagnosed with a condition and my doctor said it would be impossible for me to conceive without taking certain drugs. I had been discouraged and prayed for wisdom about how God would bring us a family. In December, 1998, seven months into our marriage, the Lord said to me to stop taking medications that "eased" my condition. I obeyed, and trusted that he would prevent me from getting ill again. It was a tough battle. The Lord grew my faith in him--I had many days when I was in pain and attacked with fear. But in July, the Lord blessed us with a child!! And assurance that it was HIM who had healed me from my condition, and him who began knitting this precious gift in my womb!! And now, I have more faith in the great physician--the Lord Jesus!"

I believe there are several reasons for this remarkable outpouring of fertility. First, our church has come to a much more simple, literal approach to Scripture. What the Bible says is not just sometimes true or figuratively true, it is always really true. Our church began to take this to heart on a wide range of subjects. In this case, concerning children, we saw that God says, "Sons are a heritage from the Lord; children are a reward from him." God calls the father of many children "blessed" (Psalm 127:3-5). We believed it. Second, the men and women of the church repented for the way we adopted the world's values (about marriage roles, career goals, training of children, and more) rather than God's values. The world says children are a burden if they interfere with our plans and pleasures. We rejected this. We no longer want to listen to the "wisdom" of Jezebel, and we surely do not want to join her on "a bed of suffering" or have our children struck dead (Revelation 2:22-23).

A third factor is our practice of praying for healing. I am grateful for the benefits of medical care. But I am aware that there are many conditions that medicine can only manage, not cure. As we have prayed, we have seen many dramatic, miraculous healings. For example, I remember the day I went with a man from our church to see an infectious disease specialist at Henry Ford Hospital. The doctor carefully explained the conclusive test results: a fatal disease. There was no chance of a false positive. I drove home with this stricken brother in Christ. We hugged and shed tears. Then I felt a strange urgency to pray for healing, right that minute. God gave me a faith that this would not end in death, but would bring glory to God instead. By the end of the prayer I believed God had healed. And he had. The next blood test showed no sign of the disease. It was gone and has never returned. Others in our church have testimonies of God's healing power. Marilyn Bach writes:

"During a healing service in 1998, Paul and Nora Manwiller prayed for me. Symptoms vanished and have not bothered me since then."

We recognize that not everyone who seeks healing is finally healed. God is sovereign in these matters. He does what he deems best. But I believe God is pleased when we repent of our sin,

believe that the Bible is true, and pray for the releasing of God's power. The Bible speaks of God being the one who opens and closes the womb. In 1999, God opened the wombs of all our Hope Church Hannahs (First Samuel chapter 1).

As the year progressed the work in Royal Oak began to take shape. In March we started the first Hope Group. It met in a community center in Clawson, the city just north of Royal Oak. The room we were assigned was right next to a dance class with a D.J. who called out instructions for country line dancing. My outstanding memory of that Hope Group will be Bible study and prayer against a backdrop of foot stomping music, punctuated by cries of "FIVE...SIX...SEVEN...EIGHT! STEP RIGHT! STEP LEFT! AND RIGHT!"

In June, a group of about twenty five YWAM students (Youth With a Mission), including our own Brandon and Amy Carter, came up from Texas to give a hand with Royal Oak street evangelism. On Summer nights, the sidewalks of Royal Oak are crowded with aimless young adults. For several nights in a row we stationed groups of Christians up and down Main Street. Every group had a couple guitars and a hand drum. We sang praise to Jesus. We waved worship banners. One of the YWAM men drew elaborate chalk art drawings on the sidewalk. The aimless young folks stopped to listen and talk. We had many, many evangelistic conversations. We saw a few folks make significant decisions for Jesus. On that Thursday night, July 1, the YWAMers helped us put on an evangelistic outreach meeting at the community center in Clawson. They supplies drama, video and testimonies. Bill Jennings led worship. Debbie Boyer and Esther Bell did an evangelistic worship dance. It was a tremendous evening.

The street evangelism in Royal Oak helped to break our fear of man. It is a joy to see how we are growing in our ability to express our love for Jesus in public. One Sunday in September, the fire alarm went off during our Sunday worship in Ypsilanti. We left the building and waited in a paved outdoor courtyard. There were other groups meeting in the same conference center that morning, teachers and engineers who were holding professional seminars. They came out and stood among us in the courtyard. Before I knew it, Karl picked up his guitar and started singing praise songs. Daniel Jones joined in with a tambourine. Our church worshipped. One of the teachers came over and asked me, "What kind of religion are you from?" I briefly told about our church, then I turned back to focus on the worship. I saw that a great many of the teachers and engineers had joined the singing. Some were raising their hands as we were. When the alarm stopped, these strangers stayed with us until we were done singing. I was really proud of my church.

Still another high point of praise for our church was the wedding of Russ Mewha and Robyn Lipnicki in December. Everyone who came received a small worship flag and a bulletin containing a testimony of God's work in Russ and Robyn's life. Their testimony was worded this way:

"We had given ourselves to many things with abandon: dreams, ambitions, spirituality, the pursuit of fulfillment, each other, and so many of the empty promises the world offers. The giving of ourselves to these things was constant and exhausting--an endless chasing. After so many months and years we discovered what all this was worth. We were left broken, hopeless, and hungry.

In the course of one day, in the manner of a squall arising from nowhere on the sea, our hearts were torn in tow as our need for life became our only, desperate vision.

We found ourselves standing face to face with Jesus. To our amazement, He had been chasing us. Wooing us. Inviting two starving children to feast with him at his table. Now and forevermore we are seated at the banquet of our God, with a lavish and infinite table of grace, mercy, peace, joy and love spread out before us. Our combined knowledge of love from the whole of our lives from our families and friends was enviable by the world's standards. But when we discovered the Lover of our souls we discovered our ignorance. Our knowledge and experience of love was like a child whose experience of water was limited to a small plastic bathtub, then is suddenly picked up and dropped into the middle of the ocean. Such is Jesus' love. Every dream, passion, high, and delight are ash on the wind compared to the knowledge and experience of God. This is the all-encompassing love of God.

Such love can sustain and fulfill a marriage. Such love gives all it has until it is bled dry, only to be resurrected again. Such love can make a son of a prodigal or a daughter of a runaway. Such love continues to call out in the night and invite any who would come to the banqueting table."

The highlight of Russ and Robyn's wedding reception was a time of ecstatic praise. The groom himself jumped in and helped lead the worship. While a few invited guests chose to smoke outside in the drizzle, God's people were all inside having a mighty wedding celebration. The situation reminded more than one person of the contrast between the joy of the heavenly wedding feast and the sorrow of those who remain outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Plans for the two new congregations continued to develop. We established a new Hope Group in western Wayne County. At God's direction, Cindy Urick moved to the area and is hosting the Hope Group. Brian Fair is the shepherd. We believe that from this seed will grow, in God's time, a new congregation in Livonia. Meanwhile, in Royal Oak we found a place to hold Sunday worship services. In January, 2000, we started Sunday night worship at the Royal Oak Missionary Church in downtown Royal Oak. Bill Jennings, who is newly married to Angela, is our worship leader in Royal Oak. Karl and Jeanne Thuemmel have been helping me get this new work started. They are leading a Royal Oak Hope Group in their home.

I have told the people in Ypsilanti that I believe the year 2000 will be the best year we have had yet. I believe God will give us new success in evangelism and discipleship. We have laid out plans for a focus on outreach in 2000. We started Y2K in Ypsilanti with a special service, January 9, we called J2K--"Jesus 2000". I preached about heaven from the final two chapters of Revelation. About a dozen young adults from Detroit and Ypsilanti, led by Jackie Drenning, presented a wonderful worship dance. They were accompanied by Shaun Walker who sang, "I Will Not Forget You". The words of that song are included in this book.

As our church stands at this overlook and gazes toward the far hills of the future, only God knows what surely lies ahead. There are many questions that will one day be answered:

- * Who will God raise up to be leaders for the future? Shepherds and elders?
- * How will God lead those who are called to missions? When will Karl and Jeanne make it to the mission field? With which mission board?
- * How can our church give priority to evangelistic outreach and have each family give proper attention to marriage and children?
- * Is the current burst of fertility a promise of a spiritual harvest to follow?

*** What is God's plan for our harvest in the ripened fields of Royal Oak? What about Livonia?**

*** How can we become more proficient in using the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God? Will we have success in memorizing Scripture, and will the Spirit teach us how to use the verses we memorize?**

These and other questions will be answered in God's time. One day we may look back and remember the way God faithfully led Hope Church through the early years of the 2000s. Praise God.



Chapter Ten Highlights

Some of the memories in this book are drawn from the “Remembrance” worksheets that the people of our church filled out last Thanksgiving. In this final chapter I have compiled a sample of questions and answers, taken directly from the worksheets.

Q: What was your first experience with Hope Church? Who first invited you? When?

William Boyer: Paul invited me! While PCM was in Dillingham, AK, he said that while he was praying, he felt that God was calling him to domestic church planting. He asked what Debbie and I thought of it and if we would pray about joining he and Nora as a team. We thought, “Great! But you’re there and we’re here” (then Fenton, MI). It was something we had dreamed about in the past. We had long been interested in missions and wanted to be involved, and had thought a team approach sounded best. But we had never perceived a call (or even permission) to go. As we thought and prayed about it more, and listened to tapes of PCM’s vision, we gradually became more and more committed and excited about being members of the church planting team.

Kirsten Thuemmel: Karl invited me to visit during the summer of 1993. Paul preached on the Sabbath (from the series on the Ten Commandments). I had some free time that week. I stayed with the Boyers and helped Debbie with some Sunday school materials. I babysat for David and Peter Manwiller one day. After I returned from Japan in 1997 I moved to Ypsilanti. I was pleased to be part of Hope!

Roopa Kline: I visited with Jennifer Johnson--I think in ‘93--maybe ‘94. Lauren Edison invited us, and I had seen one of the postcards from Hope with “Come as you are, you’ll be loved” or something like that. After the service Pastor Paul spoke with us and spent time praying with us and some other visitors about God’s work in our lives. I was very encouraged by that prayer time.

Jeanne Thuemmel: My sister Margaret and her husband Larry invited me to the first birthday service in April, 1994. I remember crying because I felt God’s presence so strongly.

Nick McGuire: Mike Moore invited me to Hope in late ‘94. He said I would like it because I wouldn’t have to dress up. When I attended I was impressed by the Bible-based preaching and the examples of Godly living. Priorities were on Jesus, not the world.

Stacey Harsch: On vacation in Switzerland I met an acquaintance of Rick Routson’s. When I returned to the U.S. I visited her and told her about moving back to this area and wanting to find a church. She gave my name and number to Rick and he called and invited

me to a worship service. I visited and saw that Hope was exactly where the Lord wanted me...exactly where he would continue his work in me during this chapter of my life.

Josie Dannug: A Bible study--invited by Tophe, fall of 1995. I came with a friend from school (we were both unsaved), and was rather overwhelmed by it all! It was so different from what I was used to that I didn't return for seven months!

Russ Mewha: I was invited to Hope by my friend Kris. We were both finished with our first year of college and looking for a church. We had attended Hope once before at the invitation of Chad Kimball, a friend of a friend. I showed up at 2:00 pm (a perfect time for a college student) and was struck by the unchurchiness of Hope. The walls of the lecture hall where the service is held are the color of a severely unkempt aquarium. People breathing easy without neckties or suits. And freedom, sweet freedom in worship. I thought to myself, "Whoah...this is...different."

Kelly Brokaw: I was first invited to Hope about five years ago by Jessie Trunowski and Jason Hogans. I did not attend. Then, a year and a half ago, I met Shaun Garth Walker, who told me again about Hope and mentioned Brian Fair, whom I would be attending school with the following semester. I met Brian, who led me to Christ, and came to Hope for the first time on October 18, 1998.

Q: Describe a special event that stands out in your memory.

Jackie Drenning: A special event that stands out is Fur Rendezvous, 1997. Four of us girls (Shontaya, Amber, Lauren, Jackie) did a dance to a song. I expected to win first prize! Ha. I was humbled and we didn't get placed at all.

Leah Ransom: I was baptized in October of 1997. Because of my fear/nervousness of standing in front of a crowd, I had delayed getting baptized. I knew this wasn't a good reason; however, I resisted anyway. Pastor Paul offered an option of a small/private baptism. But I felt God was telling me I needed to share my testimony in front of the church, my family, etc. I knew that the testimonies I'd heard from others had made a big impact on me. So I prayed for God's help, and on the day I was baptized I felt like God was speaking for me because I felt like someone else took over my body and spoke for me. God was so good to me!

Rob and Susan Rotz: Rob remembers and will never forget the highly Spirit filled, Spirit charged joint meeting with The Bible Church. He truly felt the presence of God there during the fellowship, worship and preaching. For days after his dreams were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Nora Manwiller: *Cindy Rodrigues' baby party in our yard/driveway. We made and played "Baby Outburst". *Prayer meeting at Rick Routson's house--sense of God's presence. *Playing the tambourine on the worship team. *Chad's worship leading at Hope Group.

Jan Overall: The Good Friday service of 1999. The presence of the Lord was so strong that night--right from the moment I entered the auditorium. I remember Pastor Paul asking us to just leave quietly at the end of the service and keep worshipping. The Spirit was so

strong in me--I felt an incredible joy and strength that stayed with me the remainder of the night.

Kyle Achatz: Worship service on Good Friday, 1999, was an awesome experience. Thank you God for letting me be there!

Girlie Pascua: January 9th, 1999--my baptism at Westland YMCA. My baptism was a very memorable event for me because for me it's a symbol or an event where I proclaimed that I am God's and that I've chosen him above all else.

Jeanne Thuemmel: Mark and Maddy's visit in August, 1999, was especially nice. Since I had been to Central Asia during the year and had visited them there, it was fun to see and hear what God is doing in their lives and how they're adjusting. Praying with them in the park was wonderful.

Josie Dannug: I remember my baptism in July of 1997. It was in the Bell's backyard, and we used a kiddie pool as the baptistery. The whole day had been a severe spiritual battle for me--it was even a struggle to share my testimony. But when I was "dunked" and came up, the Holy Spirit came upon me and gave me peace and assurance of my position in Jesus!

Linda Achatz: A special event that stands out in my memory was at the baptism for me and my mom. I was afraid of getting baptized by myself, and when I found out that both Leahs were getting baptized, and also my mom and a couple of others, I felt so much better. This was about a month after I got saved, so around October, 1997.

Mary Achatz: The Baptism service at Evangel Temple where my mom and sister got baptized. That was, I think, the happiest day in my life.

William Boyer: Two hour long prayer meeting that felt like fifteen minutes, where it was difficult to get a word in!

Dale Miel: About two years ago I had to have a hernia operation. The whole Hope Group got together and made sure that I had food and company before, during, and after the operation.

Amy Carter: At the baptism service in my back yard, it was amazing to see new Christians come out of the water with shining, renewed faces. God is real and alive and changes lives significantly.

Bill Jennings: The prayer meeting at Yvonne's apartment in honor of the new church plant in Royal Oak. God was truly present and moving in our midst. This was early 1999.

Brian Fair: The special event that stands out in my mind is the shepherds huddle/prayer meeting that was held at Yvonne Janviriya's apartment. As we started to sing, the power of God began to fall. As we continued to intercede for royal of through worship, the Spirit continued to reveal Jesus to us. I remember the music stopping and everyone (or a good number of people) just repeating "Jesus, Jesus" etc.

Tophe Dannug: My baptism on February 2, 1996 was a significant event in my life. The Lord challenged me, “are you going to follow me with abandon, or are you going to go your way?” I had never been baptized even though I had been a Christian since I was a boy. So I took that opportunity to declare to myself, to the Lord, and to the church that I was going to follow hard after God. The night of the baptism was electric. Mostly Hope Detroiters were getting baptized this time. We were all excited about the newness of what God was doing in the city. I knew something was going to happen that night, and I sat in anticipation of the move of God. When it was my turn, I gave my testimony of the Lord’s work in challenging me to “give all my possessions and follow Jesus”. Then, while in the baptismal water, Pastor Paul asked me the two questions. “Yes. Yes.” “Now, based on your profession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” I half expected the heavens to open and the Spirit to descend like a dove at that point. But the Lord had better plans. When Pastor Paul immersed me under the water, I felt very natural (as opposed to supernatural). Though “nothing happened” (i.e. the heavens opening), I knew in my heart the Lord said, “I receive you, my son. I bless your decision.” Since then, God has given such a freedom to cast off things I held onto so tightly. Since that time, I have had such a burning desire to have all of Jesus, and none of me.

David Manwiller: I liked doing the Love Loaves where we filled those brown plastic loaves. I filled mine until it couldn’t get fuller. Then, BOOM!, I smashed it.

Teri Piziali: It was an Easter Sunday--Pastor Paul described what Easter was like through the eyes of Mary Magdalene. I was so moved by his sermon and saw so much of myself in the description of Mary Magdalene. I was in tears. I felt drawn to Carrie Hoppe. Carrie hugged me and asked if I felt Jesus working in me. I remember saying “I don’t Know”, but I was confused and afraid to say any more, for fear I would lose control of my emotion. Then Carrie asked if she could pray for me. All I could do was nod my head, yes. Carrie prayed for my salvation. Every time I think about that Sunday, I still get moved to tears.

Andrea McDonald: Nora’s baby shower for John. My Hope Group made a quilt for him.

Jenny Weisiger: I think the church picnic this summer was great. I had never played most of the games, I hardly knew a lot of the people (but they were really nice). It was really fun and we worshipped God, too!

Marilyn Bach: I particularly remember the special workshop called “Walk Thru the Old Testament” when an outside speaker made the presentation. I would like to do it again!

Laraba Kendig: I remember with enormous gratitude two separate times of special prayer for me. I was healed of many things during these prayer times, and God showed himself to me in amazing ways. God is awesome!

Q: Please tell about a significant answer to prayer.

Amy Carter: I was praying about being involved in the music ministry, but I didn’t think I should ask if I could join. Sometime later Pastor Paul approached me and asked if I wanted to be a part of the worship team! He said he felt like God told him to ask me. I was so blessed and happy!

Teri Piziali: I prayed for a peaceful and loving home and family. We had been so filled with anger and conflict. Now it feels so wonderful by comparison. We talk, share and love one another so much more than before. It's not perfect but I don't feel anger and rage anymore. Peace is wonderful.

Laraba Kendig: There are so many, but the one that springs immediately to mind is God's answer to prayer for a baby. God told me on November 17, 1998 that we would have a baby in about a year. Our daughter is due December 22nd. Praise God!

Elham Amini: A significant answer to prayer was when I asked God to teach me how to pray a few months ago. Prayer is something that only God can teach and lead. The best prayers are the ones that are led by the Holy Spirit--next thing you know you've been on your knees for an hour and feel awesome!

Donna Roden: During prayer time at Larry and Margaret's Hope Group, we (Margaret, Jackie Whitehouse and I) prayed for David to not get bronchitis that winter or ever again. He had a history of getting it every year. David didn't get bronchitis that winter and hasn't had it since that prayer.

Debbie Boyer: *Healing of always fatal disease. *Sarah's conception and birth. *Five infertile couples getting pregnant at once. *A nice wife for Karl. *Mortgage and houseful of furniture for Manwiller's based on "potential salary". *We prayed for one or two teens for Shontaya to be friends with. *Gracie prayed for more children in her Sunday school class--soon there were seventeen regulars!

Stacey Harsch: Jan/Feb 1999. After being in my apartment for almost a year I received notice that my rent would increase with a new lease. My budget was already tight and I began praying about whether I should find a cheaper home. I felt the Lord saying, "Stay where you are. I will provide." I shared this in Hope Group and prayed about it. Soon after I received a significant raise which covered what I needed for the increase and for an I.R.A. contribution, which I needed to start. God gave exactly what I needed. No more. No less.

Rob and Susan Rotz: While going through an ordeal where Rob had a medical condition that had the potential to severely impact our marriage, we prayed for trust in God and trust in each other and healing for Rob. God answered that prayer because it was trust that brought us through, and God had mercy and healed Rob's condition.

Kyle Achatz: Prayed in December, 1997, to have the privilege of being in a situation in which someone came to Christ. Answered in April, 1999.

Girly Pascua: Hope Church is a significant answer to my prayer. Before I ever started going to Hope, I prayed to God and asked him to help me find my way back to him. I wanted to be a part of a church, but I didn't know which church to go to. He did answer my prayer by giving not only a church but a family and a body to belong to.

Roopa Kline: *Nora and Margaret prayed for the removal of some significant spiritual strongholds in my life (I think in 1995) during a prayer time at Margaret's house. There was obvious victory and release--which has been lasting. *This pregnancy! I had a difficult time getting pregnant but God enabled it.

Q: What is a key lesson you have learned from God?

Wayde Hoppe: *Learning to worship in ways other than to what I'm accustomed.
*Trusting God for financial needs--asking only God for money.

Katie Delcamp: Philippians 4:6. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus." If you pray and go before God with thanksgiving, he will give you peace. Very simple.

Kalinda Jones: God is sovereign! I guess I always "knew" this, but since we studied the book of Daniel I began to believe it with all of me. God's sovereignty has become a rock that causes me to feel safe because I serve a God who is in control!

Amy Carter: I've learned the importance of being part of a body and being stable and accountable. It's not enough to attend the same church every week if you're not submitted to the leadership, and you have to know that God placed you at the church you're at. It's not a random decision.

Laraba Kendig: I learned many key lessons while at Hope. My entire mindset changed, essentially. Maybe the biggest thing I learned is that God loves me because he chose to love me, not because of what I do or accomplish in this life. I also have learned much recently about God's sovereignty and holiness. He is not a God to be trifled with. He expects and deserves my worship, adoration and praise.

Debbie Boyer: *Listening to God (possible for everyday Christians, not just prophets, about everyday issues, not just big deals). *Valuing what God values (character, holiness, people, babies). *A more literal and simplistic interpretation of Scripture.

Stacey Harsch: There is so much that God has been teaching me. Obedience--I have often failed or "half-heartedly" obeyed God. He has been teaching me the joys and rewards of obedience. About a year ago he spoke to me about turning off the radio when I drive to work. For quite a while I obeyed once in a while. When I finally made a commitment and fully obeyed, the Lord blessed me so. He began to speak to me during that time. The Spirit would guide me in prayer, often for the work in Austria, and he would lead me into worship. Several times I was stuck in traffic jams due to bad weather and just enjoyed the time in praise and worship.

Nora Manwiller: *Children are a blessing. *God is Good. *God is faithful. *In submission is protection and in submission is release of power. *Distrust and fear of the future is blasphemy. *Pastoring is spiritual parenting.

Jeanne Thuemmel: *God's voice is not necessarily audible; he can direct me and speak to me in my thoughts. *Jesus in us is enough! It's all about Jesus. *Don't look to your circumstances for contentment. Look to Jesus. *The importance of knowing God's Word and memorizing it.

William Boyer: *Value what God values--call good what he calls good. And trust him that it really is (or will be). Especially children. Repent of blasphemy of calling God's blessing evil. *His sheep know his voice--still praying to learn this one! *Submitting to authority

helps and protects us. And I must take up the authority that God calls me to exercise. *Faith means trusting God that whatever sacrifices he calls us to make will really be for our (ultimate) good. And the burdens he lays on us are carefully fitted to what we can do. If they feel like too much, it's because we are twisting the yoke around because we don't trust him.

Carrie Hoppe: God knows best what authority to place in our lives. When I saw people rebel against the authority of the church I saw how they refused God's blessing in their lives. I saw how rebellion hurts those who are in submission because we are a body. I thought I understood submission the day I was married 14 years ago. I didn't. God has taught me that the benefits of submission to God's authority are far reaching.

Cynthia Urick: There are so many things that God has taught me that it's hard to pick one thing. But, I think being submissive and humble before God is the biggest thing. Dying to everything I was and allowing him to give me everything anew. And boy, has he blessed me!

Lauren Wright: God has been teaching me in this past year about love. True, real powerful love (His) versus false intimacy (the world's). He has showed me that my ministry will be built on love. Also he has changed my heart to begin to see that his love is not just enough, it's more than enough.

Nick McGuire: At Hope Church I have learned through teaching, discussions and by example that love is about being selfless. Zero expectations--just love others and look to God for your own needs.

Robyn Mewha: I have learned over the last few months how important it is to draw close to Jesus. It really hit my heart when we studied Hebrews. I had begun to get very busy with life, and long quiet times turned into "Hey, what's up? You okay, Jesus? I guess so am I." Now I realize how I began to drift from our tight bond of love and it really allowed a lot of footholds to come into my life from Satan. Now, I really try to treasure my quietness with Jesus and rebuild our first love!!!

Kelly Brokaw: I am learning that, as a child of God, I am a "work in progress". I am learning to trust the way Jesus shapes me, the timing in which he shapes me. I am learning to trust him as he trims parts away and colors my heart. I am learning to be patient when I think that I have to be perfect now. That is the biggest part of my walk--letting the creator of the heavens and the earth recreate me.

Sherwood Pope: The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. Although I have known this in my head for years, studying it again in Hebrews has made it clear to my heart.

Amy Waterbury: Submission to his authority and to those authorities he has placed in my life.

Yvonne Janviriya: To obey my parents' wishes and give them honor.

Q: Do you have any other special memories?

Susan Rotz: Fur Rendezvous. I was amazed at how talented and creative our church members were. All the “Furs” were always a blast. A good hearty laugh, great entertainment all centered around God and his message. Love it.

Leah Ransom: Two or three years ago I attended a baptism service for Hope Community Church. It was the first one I’d ever attended and I was still new to the church and Christianity. The testimonies of those baptized that day were encouraging, and the people became more “real” to me. I realized that many had struggled with issues that were familiar to me. They weren’t perfect people. They were human.

Jan Overall: The first time we sang “Shout to the Lord” at Hope Church, Shontaya sang the verses solo until we all joined in at the chorus. It seemed as though the earth held its breath as Shontaya sang. I was so touched by her depth of feeling for the Lord conveyed through her voice as she sang the words. I didn’t want it to stop.

Linda Achatz: I think my favorite song always will be “Break Dividing Walls”. This song helped me come to Jesus. My most cherished memory was when the fire alarm went off and Karl picked up his guitar and everyone started singing, along with some other people.

David Manwiller: My favorite song came to be “We Want to See Jesus Lifted High”.

Andrea McDonald: When Daniel, David Jackie, Lauren, Katie, Rosie, Mary and Kalinda went to Kansas City for the Passion For Jesus conference.

Jenny Weisiger: When Laura got saved in August right before we went off to school. I had been trying to talk to her about salvation and stuff, but nothing was really happening. Then I felt like I should invite her to the baptism. I did, and I was able to talk with her about it, and she got saved a few days later, It was awesome!

Cindy Rodrigues: *Theology class for women that Nora taught. *Talent show. *Christmas sing. Summer picnic.

Nick McGuire: Singing Christmas Carols at the Michigan League, U of M.

Carrie Hoppe: *Church picnics. *Being on the music team. *The day I met Joan Gockenbach and we had so much in common. *All the meals and housekeeping help when our babies were born. *Early business meetings when we prayed about giving Paul and Nora a salary and trusting God to give us an income. Those were big steps of faith. *Jackie living with us for a year. *The Sunday Samuel knocked down a tower of hotel water glasses.

Debbie Boyer: *Many memories of our small Sunday school class--making Christmas ornaments with dough, glue and glitter. Mess! David and Adrienne hugging and forgiving each other after a tiff. Samuel just lying on the floor during the whole lesson and looking inert, and then repeating it practically verbatim to his mother later. Running races with David.

*Karl and Jeanne’s wedding--so worshipful and answer to many prayers.

*John Overall’s Funeral, knowing he was with the Lord.

*Watching the teens worship.

***Watching the Detroiters lead worship: When we started we said the we would be flexible regarding the forms of our gatherings in nonessentials, shaping them to meet the needs of the people God gave us rather than our personal preferences or traditions. So I had no clear idea what our worship “style” would be, although I had a pretty good idea that it wouldn’t include Handel and 15th century crumhorns like our previous church. Now when I watch the Detroiters lead worship--loud, free and in love with the Lord--I just love what the Lord chose for us.**

***Peter’s ascending cloud of revived bugs, released during the worship in Detroit.**

***Sarah saying “Amen” loudly after each song or prayer when she was small.**

***IRS ready to crack down on the Hoppe Community Church based in the Hoppe home. Rick’s emergency trip to Lansing to fix.**

***Larry’s ordination.**

***YWAM visit.**

***Worshipping upstairs at the Radisson. Singing “Shine, Jesus, Shine” out the windows into the sunshine outside--”Fill this land with the Father’s glory”, and asking him to do something with our humble beginning.**

***Having had baptisms, hymn sings, parties and prayer meetings all over the place.**