

Newsletter #5
April 2010

A Publication of

CANADIAN RURAL CHURCH NETWORK
and
CENTRE FOR RURAL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY

Editor: Joyce Sasse, Rural Minister

**All creation comes from (the earth), yet it forms not only the basic raw material
for humankind, but also the substance of the incarnation of God's son.**
(Prayer of Hildegard of Bingen)

INDEX

FAITH MATTERS

Dinner, Drumming and a DVD
Tough Times, Tough People

RURAL LIFE ISSUES

Finding Drought Resistant Seeds

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Celebrating the Seed Time
Prayer of Dedication
Prayer of Thanksgiving

RURAL MINISTRY STORIES

House Churches Show New Style of Ministry
Eco-Village Growing Pains

CIRCLE-M NEWS

Up-coming Rural Ministry Courses:
Peer Mentoring for Clergy New to Rural Settings
Rites in Crisis
Qualitative Research Methods in Rural Contexts

FAITH-BUILDING PIONEERS

How Did We Get This Far?

FAITH MATTERS

Dinner, Drumming and a DVD

Drummers carry outreach story ...

It was an interesting drive. Being on the 401 going east out of Toronto on a Friday evening is not on many people's lists of the top 10 things to do. I turned off on Westney Road in Pickering and drove through all the new development - houses after houses. And then I passed Taunton Road and suddenly it was rolling hills and a dirt road, and trees and a small rural community - Greenwood. Ah! Awe! Beautiful! I realized I hadn't been out of Toronto for a while.

I arrived at Mt. Zion United Church, a rural church. Lots of cars. People were gathering for a potluck dinner, drumming and a DVD. We were greeted warmly and given help to bring in our big load of drums and other musical instruments. Children, youth, parents, and leaders from the Guiding/Scouting movement were also there. Sixty five of us sat down for supper – I learned about some of the badges the youth beside me had earned.

Upstairs we gathered for a drum circle. The children sat in the first pew – curious and excited about all the drums and musical instruments in front of them. The elders sat right at the back!

The *Abbey North Drummers* led us in a participatory drum circle – we all got to choose an instrument. One young boy, wide-eyed, chose the biggest drum; it was as big as him! He told his Dad that he wanted to try every instrument before he went home!

What a fun night. Even the elders made a little bit of music. We can learn so much about freedom and joy from the young!

We told the story of "The Dondi Project", a Men's Ministries Network initiative of the United Church of Canada. We saw the 20 minute DVD that invites us to raise \$1 million for the Lutamo School, part of the Dondi Mission in central Angola. This will be done working with our long time partner, the Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola. We are also raising \$100,000 for our Mission & Service Fund. We are holding events like the one in Mt. Zion across Canada this year. We will be in the West in May; in Newfoundland in June; and in the Maritimes and Quebec in September.

What a fun evening we had together. And the event raised \$718.00 for the project and with all the drummers that night we are confident Mt. Zion will be one of our host congregations for our national Drumathon on October 1st and 2nd.

For more information about when we will be in your neck of the woods check us out at www.dondiproject.com. I would love to hear from you.

(Written by Lloyd Paul, Men's Ministries, The United Church of Canada, lpaul@united-church.ca.)

Tough Times, Tough People

Threats of drought reach across the Prairie ...

Across extended portions of the Prairie farm people are watching the skies and the weather forecasts with rapt attention. It has been one of the warmest and driest winters on record. What will happen this spring?

Of course we could bask in a luscious two feet of snow along the mountains, or enjoy a few days of downpour between the writing and the printing of this column. But with the climate changing the way it is, we are no longer confident about what to expect.

The land is drying under the Chinook winds. There may not be much of a hay crop for the livestock. Will the trees bud too early? Are we going to have to re-activate that twentieth century phrase "Next Year Country"?

This is the time for preparing the machinery, planning how we'll plant the acres, and cleaning the seed. But who knows how to make the forecasts and interpret trends?

I came across a quote in an old notebook, with no indication of author, but with a hearty piece of wisdom that might stand in good for the present.

"The Children of Israel stumbled out into the desert believing God could see them through, and they used that time in a special way.

"Our ancestors clung to the land and believed, and God moved so powerfully among them that even death could not prevent their ultimate triumph.

"If you have been seeing tough times in terms of the extremely difficult challenges of modern life, ask God to use these things as ways for you to know Him.

"When you know God, the saying is true, 'Tough times don't last, but tough people do.'"

O God, give us the grace to recognize your ability to work through us, to recognize the gifts you have given us, and to offer our weakness trusting in your transforming power.

(Written by Joyce Sasse)

RURAL LIFE ISSUES

Finding Drought Resistant Seed

Climate change is slowly forcing us to think about its implications ...

The threat of climate change is forcing our crop scientists to begin the search for heat-resistant and drought resistant seed sources.

As the climate heats up, current varieties of crops are going to be greatly stressed. We need to develop / re-discover varieties of rice, wheat, corn, potatoes, sorghum, millet and beans that can mature quickly and be robust in what they produce.

Peasant farmers are our greatest resource in this search.

In the Andes, peasants grow at least 50 varieties of potatoes each year. This diversity insures that at least a handful of these varieties will be successful, depending on the growing conditions. They will plant the same diversity next year.

In Burkina Faso (on one side of the Sahara) and Ethiopia (on the other side) peasant women have been astute enough to quietly create banks of seeds that have grown well despite the heat and drought.

It won't be easy for current scientists to re-build trust with these societies, because many have threatened them with seed patent control. Now they want to borrow their stories and secrets. But the search has already begun. It is obvious we cannot deny the challenges that for-shadow our future.

(Written by Joyce Sasse)

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Celebrating the Seed Time

Rogation Services are a time for blessing the people, the land and the seed ...

I applaud congregations that have Rogation Services to bless the seed-time and pray for the lives and livelihoods of those connected with the land.

But churches need to let agricultural people know these rituals are occurring. And they need to find ways to make meaningful links between 20th century liturgies and 21st century participants.

My father's vision of his calling as a farmer was formed in the Thirties when the theme song of the National Farm Radio Forum lauded "these giants of the earth ... (who) have fed the world upon the grain (they) have grown."

More recently, members of local ranch families spoke in church of their stewardship in terms of developing land management practices that are practical, cost efficient, and good for the environment. When they get together, they talk about sustainability, carbon sinks, natural capital, energy efficiency, and how to protect and save water resources.

Land measured by global positioning and tilled by computer-equipped machinery, livestock records kept so animals can be traced from birth to consumer, and dealing responsibly with genetic modifications are reminders that those who work the land need to find a balance between modern technological understandings and traditional wisdom.

All of this is seen in the context of the Abiding Presence of a benevolent God who walks with us through the storms, the grasshoppers and the ridiculous scourges of the market place.

Rogation Services need to mindfully encompass all who enjoy working with the soil, planting seeds and watching the mysteries of life unfold. Together we celebrate the gifts of land and community. We give thanks for the One who showed us how to see the Sacred Story unfold through the growth of the mustard seed. We feel affirmed that we do these things in partnership with the Creator.

(by Written by Joyce Sasse)

Prayer of Dedication – Dr. Edmond Oliver

Dr. Edmond Oliver (1882-1935), 1st Principal of St. Andrew's Theological College, Saskatoon and a man strongly committed to rural communities wrote the following:

If this bit of prairie be
Worthier because of me
Stronger for the strength I bring
Sweeter for the songs I sing
Purer for the path I tread
Lighter for the light I shed
Richer for the gifts I give
Happier because I live
Nobler for the death I die
Not in vain have I been I.
May we believe our lives
and our being here
helps to make this world
a better place.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Prayer for country communities ...

Thank you for the beauty of the country communities in our land. Thank you for the people who grow and fish the food that sustains us, for those who harvest the wood and mine the minerals out of which we build our homes and tools, for those who preserve places of recreation.

All: Thank you gracious God.

Thank you for the rural church and its unique role in these communities.

- ❖ For its smallness ... in a world governed by “bigger is better.”
- ❖ For its caring community ... where every member matters.
- ❖ For its traditions ... rooted and grounded in a heritage of family, community, work and church.
- ❖ For its closeness ... that makes us involved in and concerned for the life of every member.
- ❖ For its will to survive ... which keeps it going in spite of financial struggles and small membership.
- ❖ For its open doors ... that serve as a meeting place and gathering centre for the community.
- ❖ For the simple beauty of its sanctuary ... which sets the mood for close, real, joyful worship.

All: For these gifts of rural church we thank you God.

God, we know that with these gifts we also recognize its struggles and weaknesses:

- ❖ A conservatism that hangs on to things that matter... but may find it hard to accept change and new things.
- ❖ The struggle to survive ... which sometimes curves us in on ourselves, forgetting the needs of our community.
- ❖ For comfort and satisfaction ... which sometimes keeps us from new ventures.
- ❖ For limited vision ... which fails to see the wealth of resources God has given us.

All: Give us grace to recognize your ability to work through us, to see the gifts you have given us, and to offer our weaknesses to your transforming grace. Amen

(Written by Cam Harder of CiRCLe M Inaugural Gathering, 2007)

RURAL MINISTRY STORIES

House Churches Show New Style of Ministry

Reverend David Webber tells his story of what can be done by people from isolated and remote areas who wish to have the church in their midst.

The story of the *HouseChurch* mission in the Cariboo Presbytery is a testimony to how the church can be present and viable in remote, rural parts of the country.

David and his wife Linda felt called to build God's community in family homes in the Cariboo-Chilcoltin area of central BC. Patience, passion for a new ministry vision, and prayerful work gradually brought the dream into an evolving reality.

"...Over the years, regional work plans were developed with input from each of the house churches. These, too, underwent change. Fortunately, with no church real-estate or carpeting to worry or fight about, people were flexible and open to change."

"... Folks in every house are grabbing hold of the fact that they are the community of Christ within their community.... The people are being equipped for ministry to their neighbourhoods and in the world... The Lord's people are studying the Word. They are praying. And wounded and broken people are being healed in the name of Christ."

(for Rev. David's full story, visit http://www.circle-m.ca/rural-ministry-stories/stories_web/house_church.html)

(Learn more about the ministry at www.cariboopresbyterianchurch.bc.ca)

Eco-Village Growing Pains

Craik, Saskatchewan leaders were enthusiastic when an advisor suggested they could go green, but ...

While most of the small communities along the highway between Saskatoon and Regina have shriveled to nothing, the residents of Craik took a proactive approach.

In 2001 sustainable and green terminology was coming in vogue. They found they could obtain identifiable notoriety and a goodly number of "green dollars" if they became an "eco village". Besides, if they promoted themselves in the right way, by selling building lots for one dollar each they were confident they could attract more people.

Their showcase was the building of a post-and-beam Eco Centre that was a combination restaurant, golf clubhouse, meeting facility and educational centre for teaching others about environmentally sustainable technology.

People started coming with their one dollar, their minimal savings and their limited construction experience, to start building their green dream homes, but each project took much longer than the enthusiastic green-horns envisioned. Over the course of an extremely harsh winter, with little shelter to hide under, and no place to keep their straw bales in storage, they faced many bumps in the road including health issues, child custody problems, depression and threats of divorce.

Till now Craik citizens, who were long-standing conservative folks, never gave much thought to what their eco-venture would attract. Now they felt their future was jeopardized by such an assortment of folks. Little by way of neighbourly exchanges passed between the two parts of the community.

Into 2010 I understand there are now some glimmers of hope as the new comers offer their dreams and enthusiasm, and the others offer some social and practical support.

This will be an interesting venture to watch through the next decade. Their story can be instructive for all of us.

(written by Joyce Sasse)

CiRCLe-M NEWS

Three Upcoming Rural Ministry Courses

Peer Mentoring for Clergy New to Rural Settings

Starts Summer 2010

CiRCLe M is offering a *Peer Mentoring* program to help clergy make a gracious and informed entry into their new rural site by connecting them with a local guide to their community's history and cultural dynamics. This two-year program begins in Summer 2010.

Starting ministry in a rural parish can be daunting for someone who has never served a rural parish before. Even those who have previously done so, quickly recognize that rural communities and congregations are highly unique with complex social networks that must be navigated with care. It takes considerable time to know a community and for them to get to know and trust you.

In this program, Clergy will be paired with a local mentor who can help them come to understand the history, key players and important customs of the community. Clergy will be assisted to identify an insightful, long-time member of the community with whom they can form a mentoring team. This person may be a professional—a teacher or doctor, for example—but will not be a member of the clergy person's congregation. This allows for some freedom and confidentiality in their conversations.

Once a mentor has been identified, clergy-mentor teams will come together for a two-day training event that will help them get to know each other in a structured way and provide some tools for intentionally exploring the life and culture of their community. It will also help to set expectations for the mentoring relationship. During the two years of the formal mentoring relationship, teams will be brought into contact with each other once a year face-to-face, and at other times by email, conference call, or other means. They will celebrate their rural ministry experiences and share mentoring strategies.

Participants will be responsible for their transportation. Accommodation can be arranged very inexpensively. The training itself will cost each team \$450 per year. In some cases subsidy for training and other costs is available from grants that support this program.

If you are new or about to move to a new ministry, give us a call and we will include you in a group.

Contact Cam Harder, Executive Director of CiRCLe M: 306-966-7867 (Saskatoon); email: crharder@sasktel.net.

Rites in Crisis

PL 314/414

Dr. Jann Boyd

May 10 – 14, Saskatoon

Participants in this seminar will reflect on the purposes and possibilities of Christian ritual for pastoral care both individual and corporate. Studying together ritual theory, liturgical theology, and sacramental practices, participants in this seminar will research individually their particular events and contexts of crisis for which there are no existing church rites in the ELCIC or their denominational traditions.

Cases and proposed rites are presented in two steps, with re-working of the rites to incorporate the insights of the group participants. Participants will complete the class with a working foundation of principles for developing Christian pastoral rites; a role for the “crisis” of the choice and a set of proposals from their peers for other pastoral events and contacts.

For details contact:

St. Andrews College Registrar: 966-5244; email: standrews.registrar@usask.ca, or
College of Emmanuel & St. Chad Registrar: 975-1588; email: colleen.walker@usask.ca, or
Lutheran Theological Seminary Registrar: 966-7856; email: susan.avant@usask.ca

Qualitative Research Methods in Rural Contexts

SA 481

Dr. Lynn Caldwell

July 13 – 15, Saskatoon

This course will focus on critical issues, questions, and decisions involved in designing and carrying out qualitative research projects in rural contexts. The focus will be on engaging

students with information about qualitative research in a broad sense, as well as with questions and resources particular to their own identified research interests and contexts. Specific methods for community-based research will be presented and a researcher's roles and responsibilities in selecting appropriate methods will be discussed. Attention will be given to critical questions about data generation, collaboration with and reporting to community members and research participants, and interpretation of research materials and experiences.

For details contact:

St. Andrews College Registrar: 966-5244; email: standrews.registrar@usask.ca, or
College of Emmanuel & St. Chad Registrar: 975-1588; email: colleen.walker@usask.ca, or
Lutheran Theological Seminary Registrar: 966-7856; email: susan.avant@usask.ca

FAITH-BUILDING PIONEERS

How Did We Get This Far?

Interested persons gather for meetings of the IRCA (International Rural Church Association), now held every four years, at widely dispersed sites around the world ...

In the Eighties and Nineties, "rural" was considered by many to be inferior. This happened both in Canada and around the world. However, pockets of rural church folks were coming together to name the unique strengths found in the small churches and communities.

By the time millionaire J. Arthur Rank died in 1972 in England, he had established a trust that gave birth to a church-based Centre which works hand-in-glove with the *Royal Agricultural Society of England*. The work of the *Arthur Rank Centre* includes "leading the Christian Churches in working to improve the quality of life of those living in rural communities..."

The first *Trans-Tasman Conference* (Australia and New Zealand) was held in 1984 and has met every four years since. They worked with the *Arthur Rank Centre* (U.K.) and the *Rural Chaplains Association* (USA) to call together an international, multi-denominational gathering of folk who advocate on behalf of rural people.

The first *IRCA (International Rural Church Association)* conference was held in England in 1994, and has met every four years since – most recently in Brandon, Manitoba.

We are now preparing for the 2010 IRCA gathering in Germany in October.

These gatherings have given participants opportunities to share their stories, talk about the issues that they face, form wonderful networks of contacts around the world, and affirm the unique strengths small communities offer.

The *CRCN (Canadian Rural Church Network)* grew out of the 1998 international gathering, and now works with *CiRCLe-M (Centre for Rural Community Learning and*

Ministry), which is our Saskatoon based training program. We also keep closely connected with the Ontario based *R. Alex Sim Rural Ministry Symposium*.

www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk
www.irca.net.nz
www.ruralsymposium.ca

www.presbyterian.org.nz (Rural Network Newsletter)
www.canadianruralchurch.net

(notes gathered by Joyce Sasse)