

CRCN – CiRCLe M NEWSLETTER

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

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Editor: Joyce Sasse

“The Bible is not only about ‘spirituality’,
it is also a practical book about the good use of land and creatures as a religious practice,
and about the abuse of land and creatures as a kind of blasphemy.”

(from Spirit, Culture and Agriculture by Ellen Davis)

INDEX

FAITH MATTERS

Seeking Peace in Times of Frenzy
Nurturing the Spiritual Lives of Children
The Tea Party

RURAL LIFE ISSUES

Return to Rural – It is Possible
Sacred and Secular Interface

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Prayer Shawl Ministry
Messenger of God

RURAL MINISTRY STORIES

Community Conference in the Middle of Nowhere

CIRCLE-M NEWS

Up-coming Rural Ministry Courses
CiRCLe M Resource Centre

ANNOUNCEMENTS/UPCOMING EVENTS

LINKS

FAITH MATTERS

Seeking Peace in Times of Frenzy

Frenzy can destroy the fruitfulness of our work.

The Chinese word for “busy” is composed of two characters: “heart” and “killing.” Do you get so busy sometimes that you are killing your heart, the centre of your life, the centre of your capacity for care and compassion?

In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Thomas Merton writes: “To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is itself to succumb to the violence of our times. Frenzy destroys our inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.”

This is not about neglecting or denying the need for community and giving up our responsibilities. As Denise Levertov states, “The self will surely suffer if egotism leads a person away from the experience of the Human Community. And the commonweal as surely suffers if those who wish for its betterment are hollowed-out self-neglecters.” (*Light of the Cave*)

Where is the busyness in your life that is possibly killing your heart?
Have you become a hollowed-out self-neglector?

Can you name times when:

- you are carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns?
- surrender to too many demands?
- commit to too many projects?
- want to help everyone in everything?

How do you nurture the root of your inner wisdom?

How do you protect your heart?

How do you tend to your own spiritual health?

How do you hold together your commitments to community and your personal need for inner nurture and growth?

What biblical stories or images symbolize the need to find peace within the assault of frenzy?

What biblical characters demonstrate the wisdom of caring for one’s heart in the midst of a busy and demanding life?

*(Written by Anne Martin, Spirituality and Small Group Ministry,
General Council Office, The United Church of Canada)*

Nurturing the Spiritual Lives of Children

Children have an innate, natural capacity for awareness of the sacred in life.

In church we often behave as if children are ‘empty vessels’ or ‘blank slates’ and we need to fill them with all kinds of knowledge about God. Perhaps we think that if we fill their heads, it will somehow trickle down to their hearts and their hands. The reality is that children’s spiritual capacity and knowledge aren’t empty, blank, or less than that of adults. They have an innate, natural capacity for awareness of the sacred in life. Children know, without being told, about a God with no name, a God with the power to call forth a towering tree or a fragrant flower from a single seed. Children may not, however, make a connection with the God they *know* and the ‘church God’ that we often offer.

So how can we help children connect the God they know with the church God? How can we nurture what is already within them and help it to pour out?

In her book, *Children’s Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters*, Dr. Rebecca Nye suggests six criteria for ensuring strong spiritual foundations for children. These criteria can help us assess our ministry with children – in worship, Sunday School, after school programs, on the street, and in our homes. Dr. Nye uses the anagram of SPIRIT to describe these criteria or guidelines.

SPACE is the physical environment, including seating arrangement, furnishings, supplies, and décor. If you examine the space that children encounter in your church, does it say, ‘God is here’? Does it say that children are valued and respected? Emotional and auditory space matter too. Does the environment nurture a sense of closeness and security? Does the emotional space also allow for a sense of separateness, to be oneself and hold different opinions? Do you provide auditory space for children to offer their thoughts or to simply dwell in silence?

Allowing for **PROCESS** rather than emphasizing product can nurture children’s spirituality as well as model that one’s spiritual formation is ongoing. Spirituality isn’t something that can be completed and then graded or judged. Many of our Christian practices, including prayer and worship, are spiritual processes, not ends in themselves. If everything we do with children is focused on creating a product (a craft, a banner, a song to sing in worship), then we may be stifling fresh thoughts and feelings. We may not be fully present to the child or to the Spirit if we’re too product-oriented.

IMAGINATION is called for in the Christian experience. When Jesus was asked for information, he often chose an imaginative style to express the breadth and depth of spiritual matters. Humanity needs imagination if we are ever to discover how to live in peace, how to love our neighbours, how to grasp bread and experience God. The ministry we offer to children should allow their imaginations to flourish. Rather than providing children with a ‘craft in a baggie’, allow them free time and a range of art supplies with which to explore and create.

Authentic **RELATIONSHIP** is at the core of Christian spirituality. A basic theological premise is that of the Trinity, a mystery of relationship. It is important that we nurture relationships between individuals and between individuals and God. Nurturing respectful relationships where varying spiritual perspectives are honoured can help to promote a non-individualistic style of spiritual life. Children can learn that faith is not just about their individual needs and desires, but about how they can be fed by and help to feed the spirituality of others.

INTIMACY may be the most difficult quality to build and protect in our relationships and ministry with children. Spirituality blossoms as we get closer, dig deeper, take risks, and chase our passions. A sense of safety is absolutely crucial to intimacy. The kind of safety that creates intimacy includes Duty of Care; it also guards against laughing at children's 'cute' answers and repeating responses they've shared in a small group to the wider congregation or with their parents at coffee hour.

TRUST is needed for spiritual development because we're not dealing with graphs, mathematics, and empirical evidence. The knowing and not knowing that is part of spirituality relies on trust. As adults we indicate our trust in God, our trust in children, and our trust in the practices of our faith as we loosen our need for control and authority.

As we take action to provide for and nurture these six criteria, the **SPIRITUALITY** of children has a greater chance of flourishing.

(Written by Amy Crawford, United Church, with reference to Rebecca Nye's book "Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters")

The Tea Party

Children bring vitality and seniors bring wisdom and grace.

The presence of children enriches our lives. One time I took six little girls, ages five and six, to the Senior Citizens' Lodge for a Tea Party.

I also took a variety of coffee spoons, butter knives and fruit forks so we could talk about their special use. We looked at luncheon clothes, and talked about table etiquette. Did any of them say a table grace at home?

I had to ask the children to explain the Mad Hatters Tea Part story to me. They all tried to tell the details at once.

With all this preparation we were ready to move to the tea table that was set up for us. Each youngster had a senior lady as a table partner, and they had to spend a little time having dinner conversation while they got to know each other.

I noticed the kids eyeing the tea-biscuits and counting the jam tarts even before we put napkins on our lap and said grace. Since there were only so many tarts, little hands were quick to reach for one. But they were reminded this wasn't proper etiquette. First you took a biscuit that was passed. Then you waited for the butter and jelly. Later, the tarts were passed. Meanwhile you had dinner conversation, asking you partner what they remembered about tea parties.

A few of the ladies reminded their partners not to leave their tea spoons in the china cup. They belonged on the saucer.

At the conclusion the proper courtesies were extended before the youngsters escorted their new friends back to their rooms.

All of us walked with a lighter step that afternoon. Children and seniors belong together. One brings the gift of wisdom and grace, the other the gift of curiosity and vitality. We each need to remember and celebrate God's gift.

RURAL LIFE ISSUES

Return to Rural – It is Possible

Alberta Program helps young families come back to rural.

It can be done. Young families can choose to build their lives in some of the most sparsely populated regions of Southern Alberta. It is being done through the *Return to Rural* project that SAMDA Economic Partnership Limited has initiated in the region around Hannah.

In May the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) sponsored the *Creating Rural Connections* conference in Lethbridge, Alberta (see ARDN contact information below). SAMDA was one of the conference participants.

The philosophy of the SAMDA project is to create an environment, enhanced by internet and technological resources, where citizens of rural communities can live the life they always dreamed of. The project is aimed at attracting and retaining. It is hoped that all different types of families will be attracted to or retained in to rural and remote communities.

Through *Return to Rural*, SAMDA provides exceptional technology and business supports, and strives to create social media, and municipal strategies that work for youthful demographics. Youth represent an amazing opportunity for rural Alberta; however, many communities struggle with developing strategies that resonate with them. The combination of timing, economics, climate and technology has created the opportunity for rural communities to reach out to their youth. Rural communities want young families, and SAMDA's project will help them get what they want.

The project has five main components:

- Encourages meaningful youth engagement
- Builds a technology network for rural Alberta
- Creates staff positions that are dedicated to business and technology support
- Implements an inventive social media strategy and targeted marketing campaign
- Designs a way for municipal plans to align with youth visions and values

Even one struggling rural community is one too many. Each struggling community is missing a link, and Return to Rural will be the way for SAMDA to find and insert that link.

To create this project, SAMDA partnered with Alberta Culture and Community Spirit and the Special Areas Board, which is also a project funder. They received additional funding from Rural Community Adaptation Grant Program.

SAMDA Economic Partnership Ltd is a not-for-profit organization that fosters community economic development. For more information visit the organization's website at www.samda.ca.

Even one positive example of new sprouts in rural communities brings blossoming hope to the rest of Alberta.

The Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) is a partnership of the 21 publicly-funded, publicly-governed post-secondary institutions in Alberta, working together to support and enhance rural development. These institutions have combined their expertise, ideas and resources to sustain Alberta's rural way of life. For more information on the Alberta Rural Development Network and the Creating Rural Connections conference, go to www.ardn.ca.

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Sacred and Secular Interface

When secular friends ask about the church, what do we say?

Church folk have a pretty good understanding of the multiple roles the church plays in our communities.

But our secular friends seldom comprehend these roles in a world that is rife with institutional scandals and that is dominated by secularism. Weddings and funerals are no longer the exclusive domain of the church. Worship services are often more about form than content. And few are cognizant of the way denominations support each other and work together.

We are past the era when churches established hospitals and medical outreach programs. Programs for unwed mothers and their off-spring are no longer directly sponsored by the ladies of the church. Workers with the "homeless" may be church folk, but their funding comes from various levels of government. And the denominations no longer make presentations to

Parliamentarians. We got those things going, and handed them over to others with more funds. Now we are lumped together with NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations).

Is it not time we found new ways to tell about our work with the youth and elderly; our initiative in encouraging the development of viable local communities; our championing of environmental causes...?

These are places where people of all ages work together, struggle to cross social barriers, and search out how traditional values can be understood in a contemporary world.

When a secular friend asks why I, a minister, read the Western Producer, or how come I'm going to a government-sponsored Conference on Rural Development, or why my clergy colleague wants to be a member of the School Board, I need to be better prepared to speak out about how this is part of our ministry.

The cornerstones of our tradition include truth and justice and finding the sacred in the every-day. We celebrate life and feel one with creation. With humility we are always aware that God calls us to new duties.

(Notes by Joyce Sasse)

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Prayer Shawl Ministry

Prayer shawls are given at times of difficulty or in times of celebration.

Two women from Connecticut, looking for an effective way to offer spiritual support to others, were the first to develop the practice of the Prayer Shawl Ministry. Since that time, the ministry has spread across North America.

Shawls large enough to wrap around one's shoulders are usually knit or crocheted, with the makers often prayerfully remembering the spiritual needs of another as they work toward the completion of the project. Often the promise is made, also, that the prayer will continue after the shawl has been given.

A 90 year old lady from another congregation phoned me one day when I was having my chemo to ask if she could come to visit and bring the shawl she had made for me. I was moved to tears by her thoughtfulness and support.

Sometimes the shawls are given to those celebrating a special occasion, but mostly they are meant to bring solace and comfort. Sometimes these are given from individual to individual, but in many congregations they are brought before the congregation for a sharing of the blessing.

A special note may accompany the giving. One such note read

*May this gift made for you with love be a mantle and sign of God's sustaining presence.
May it refresh your weariness; surround you with comfort in your suffering.
May it encircle you with healing from your pain; be a consolation for your loneliness.*

How simple. How sincere. How blessed are those who are the recipients of this ministry.

(Notes by Joyce Sasse)

Messenger of God

Thinking about the transition from life to the life beyond ...

Moses was the most powerful hero in Biblical history. But he was not without blemish. Because he had once murdered a man, it was forbidden that he be allowed to follow his people into the Promised Land.

After moving through the Sinai Desert, the whole company stood on the east side of the Jordan according to one of the traditional Jewish stories. In his last hour, Moses blessed the tribes passing before him.

Then, escorted by a small entourage, Moses climbed Mt. Nebo, slowly entering the cloud that waited him.

With tears in his eyes he reached the top of the mountain, where God told him he had one minute more. Finally God told him to lie down, close his eyes, and fold his arms across his chest.

Moses did as he was bidden. "Then, in silence, God kissed his lips. And the soul of Moses found shelter in God's breath and was swept into eternity." (Noted by Elie Wiesel in *Messengers of God*)

Below the mountain people wept, and anger grew among them so that they refused to accept Joshua as their leader until their grief had been assuaged.

Moses' resting place is not known. Some say it is one place, some another. "Everywhere and elsewhere."

How I love that expression, "God kissed (Moses) into eternity". God took his faithful servant unto himself. What a wonderful way to think of the transition from life to the life beyond .. to have ourselves absorbed into the very essence of the Divine. What better resting place?

Hymn writer Natalie Sleeth reminds us: *"In our end is our beginning, in our time, infinity, / in our doubt there is believing, in our life eternity./ In our death a resurrection; at the last a victory,/ unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see."*

RURAL MINISTRY STORIES

Community Conference in the Middle of Nowhere

Field of dreams becomes a reality.

Pastor Corey Randell was called to Chauvin, Alberta: population 350; seemingly in the middle of nowhere.

Instead of backing down from his call, Corey had a vision that there should be a conference in this place. But how? Where? "The town had no hotels and almost no resources for such a thing."

... "You're going to hold it in the ball diamonds. It's for the youth and young adults," Corey heard.

He dared to share his idea with a couple of other youth pastors whom he met, and they responded with enthusiasm.

Tentatively he spoke with the church board, to hear a woman say "Go ahead. Six years ago another came to our women's group with the same idea."

The church offered some seed money, and plans and prayers melded together. It was amazing how people got involved. They donated rental generators and portable construction light standards, construction trailers, and snow fencing to designate the various areas. They fixed up the old kitchen that was on-site ... and the event came to life.

Two hundred people showed up. Many brought their young families. Everyone worked to make it a success. And within a month of the conference every bill was paid.

Corey says, "There's been a change in our community. The Spirit of God broke down barriers, new relationships formed, and they are still forming. Our community told us how pleased they were with the positive effect the *Middle of Nowhere Conference* had on the community, the kids, and the area. People became engaged through the Lord's vision."

Tentatively the question was raised whether to do it again. At the meeting the response was heartening. Many were ready to give it a try.

At the time of writing his story, "the ball diamonds and generators and trailers have been donated again. The fire department has volunteered to organize the kitchen. Hot water for showers will be provided by the community and others are bringing vacuum trucks to haul the gray water. Plans are in full swing for a second community conference in Chauvin – the Middle of Nowhere Conference, 2010."

For a more complete telling of Corey's story and pictures of the first conference see http://www.circle-m.ca/rural-ministry-stories/stories_web/middle_of_nowhere_conference.html.

CiRCLe M NEWS

Three Upcoming Rural Ministry Courses:

1. 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

2. Healthy Rural Communities

November 22 to 26, Camrose, Alberta

Rev. Dr. Dittmar Mundel

This course will examine the ecological, economic, political, social, and spiritual health of rural communities in an integrated and experiential way.

To provide an experiential basis, the students in small teams will spend a part of their time preparing to do a rapid diagnostic of nearby rural communities, learning to detect what hinders or promotes the health of the community. Part of our time will be spent in reflecting upon what we have seen and experienced as well as in both sociological and theological analysis. As tools for reflection, students will learn to use a variety of popular education techniques such as photovoice, casual conversations, role play, community mapping, and developing a 'tree of life' of the community. To deepen our reflection we will attempt to bring in a variety of local "experts", from area farmers and business people to university profs in areas such as ecology and politics.

Contact One of the STU Registrars:

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

3. Peer Mentoring for Clergy New to Rural Settings

Starts Fall 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 Fall 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.

CiRCLe M Resource Centre

CiRCLe M invites you to visit our on-line *Resource Centre*. It is a place where you can:

- download materials for rural ministry
- borrow books, videos, CD's which will be sent out to you at just the cost of shipping
- trade rural ministry resources
- sort through tools for reaching out to your community

Visit: www.circle-m.ca/resource-centre/

We are Looking for Book Reviewers:

We will send out the books at our cost (they need to be returned).

Our aim is to have the reader write a 500 word review of the book so that we can share it in our newsletter. Please contact us if you are interested (circle.m.ministries@gmail.com).

We are Looking for Newspaper Articles:

It would be helpful to have rural people watch and scan for newspaper articles that we may be interested in sharing on our website. Please contact us if you would like to volunteer (circle.m.ministries@gmail.com).

ANNOUNCEMENTS/UPCOMING EVENTS

September

- *Hunger, the Global Challenge. IRCA International Conference.* Germany. September 2010.
<http://www.irca.net.nz/events.htm>.

October

- *Nurturing Rural Congregations and Communities.* R. Alex Sim Rural Symposium. Ontario. October 2010.
<http://www.ruralsymposium.ca/#event>.
- *Taking the Next Steps: Sustainability Planning, Policy and Participation for Rural Canadian Communities.* University of Alberta Augustana Campus. Camrose, Alberta. October 2010.
<http://www.augustana.ualberta.ca/centres/acsrc/TakingtheNextSteps/>

LINKS

An extensive listing of links to rural community and rural ministry sites can be found at <http://www.circle-m.ca/links>.