

# CRCN – CiRCLe M NEWSLETTER

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*A Joint Publication of*

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

Editor: Joyce Sasse (Retired Rural Minister)

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A wise person once made this distinction:

*“If you arrive on crutches and walk away without them, that’s being cured.*

*“If you arrive on crutches and walk away feeling better able to cope with your condition,  
that’s what it means to be healed.”*

*It is possible to work at healing the places where we once felt broken.*

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## FAITH MATTERS

### Caught in the Storm

*Whether it be matters of health, of finance, of relationships, many storms rage around us ...*

Those who face major health problems get caught in midnight storms. That is when the doubts seem the most threatening, and when the self-diagnosis causes our minds to imagine even more symptoms.

There is the quiet terror that haunts us as we attempt to keep our pain or seizures to our self. There is the snowballing terror that fills our thoughts as we face medical tests, and then are forced to wait days and weeks for the results.

Then, along comes light and help in the most supportive ways. It may be a word from a stranger in the medical waiting room who says "I know how you feel. I was there too!" It may be a friend or companion who simply encourages us to talk about our feelings and fears, and encourages us to vent our anger. One who then offers us a thoughtful, supportive gesture. It may be in the form of a diagnosis that names our condition, and gives suggestions as to how we can best carry on in spite of the problem.

One doctor, in an interview about patients in his Palliative Care Ward, noted that none of the patients there talked about suicide once they were assured that something could be done to control their pain so it would not be excessive.

Storms rage all around us. We feel broken, vulnerable, victimized by things beyond our control.

Then along comes something to give us a glimmer of hope. A light goes on, and chases away the despair. A voice speaks softly, and quiets our panic. A hand reaches out, and helps us move to a place of refuge.

"Bring your pillow and come along" someone says by way of reassurance, and helps us to again see the full picture. Someone helps us note the difference between truth and speculations. Someone names the diagnosis and helps us consider how best we can carry on.

From there, the healing work begins. We know we are not alone!

*Written by Joyce Sasse*

## **Barn Raising**

*Neighbours help build shelters against dire circumstances ...*

Remember the old barn raising happenings where the whole community sprung into action if a family was faced with an emergency? There was the gathering of supplies, the organizing of volunteers, the food brigade and the first aid tent.

Annie Lamott, in her book “Traveling Mercies”, remembered this activity when she witnessed a tragedy that befell a family in the neighbourhood.

Their neighbour’s daughter, Olivia, always had fragile health. Each cold or respiratory condition landed her in the hospital for a couple of weeks.

It wasn’t until she was seven that the doctor diagnosed cystic fibrosis. Regularly, with this condition, the patient’s lungs fill with a thick sludge that harbours infections. Twice a day these individuals have to be pounded between the shoulder blades for forty-five minutes to dislodge the mucus.

The routine of the affected household is turned up-side-down. With the added burden of the financial drain, parents can easily burn-out.

This is where the barn-raising imagery takes over. Others can help with the shopping, the cleansing, walking the dog, and the fund raising. Some are good at helping each of the parents find a time-out, though all try to hold back to insure they don’t intrude on family privacy. And they help each other find ways to be with the family without trying to instill messages of false hope.

The network of barn builders grows: some offer to help with the physical gifts of caring. Others have the spiritual gifts that may encourage tears and the need to talk.

Just as the neighbours of old helped build barns to insure shelter against the harsh conditions, Lamott writes “We, their friends, all know the rains and the winds will come, and they will be cold... But we will be building this barn all along, and so there will always be shelter.”

*Written by Joyce Sasse*

## **Falling Upward**

*Looking at the two stages of life ...*

It’s not hard to imagine life having two halves. But it takes convincing to think of the second half being the better half.

Richard Rohr, in his book “Falling Upwards”, suggests the first half is “about establishing an identity, a home, relationships, friends, community, security.” Some people are more successful at

building this platform than others. Some don't feel they get it right the first time, so they try again ... and never move beyond this stage.

Everyone runs up against their mistakes. They face "what they cannot fix, cannot control, explain, change or even understand." Can we handle the change and growth that gets us through these experiences and help us mature spiritually?

Rohr sites the examples of "Francis (of Assisi) who did a lot of partying, David and Paul (who did) a lot of killing, Magdalene who did a lot of loving", and adds "all of us do a lot of ascending and descending" before we fall upward toward the next stage of the journey.

He dares us to separate ourselves from our comfortable platform "to find our own soul or destiny", to search for meaning, to learn how to practice discernment.

In the second stage we don't need to become obsessed only with health issues and letting go of physical abilities. We have the capacity to "fall upward and onward, into a broader and deeper world where the soul finds its fullness". The mystery envelops us.

This is usually a slow process where we test the new insights and learn to work for change and forgiveness. We catch a glimpse of other "soulful people who temper our tantrums by their calm, (help us) lose our urgency because of their peace, and exhibit a world of options and alternatives."

This search for inner radiance, can be ours – to walk or to avoid. God bless us as we journey.

*Written by Joyce Sasse*

## **RURAL LIFE ISSUES**

### **Rural Health Providers Applauded**

*An affirmation ...*

How good it is to hear a health care specialist commend rural health care practices and note how those working in urban hospitals could pick up pointers.

Our local paper reported that nursing scholar Jeri Bighee, from Boise State University, was much impressed with what she saw while visiting the local rural hospitals.

In her province-wide telecast to Alberta Health Services she noted that the hospitals she visited used an asset based approach that was used rather than focusing on health care deficits.

Instead of what's missing, the professionals she saw looked at the strengths they could call on. Thus they were able to build on the positive and the special things that were available.

A feature asset was the strong sense of community cohesiveness, and the way the staffs from each community offered services the neighbouring communities didn't provide.

"Cooperation in the rural community is absolutely essential, and it is really built into the culture... Folks have learned that cooperation and collaboration is how we all survive, especially when resources are limited."

Rather than placing their emphasis on disease and sickness in health care, these professional providers use their resources well to promote ways the residents can care for their health.

Of course there are downsides too. Geographic and professional isolation creates difficulties in retaining individuals. And, though they are deeply respected, most have the feeling they are "always on duty". This leads to burnout.

But what Jeri Bigbee saw firsthand was the professional dedication of the providers and their high level of commitment to the communities where they serve.

*As reported in the Pincher Creek Echo, July 31, 2011*

## **Acts of God?**

*Glimmers of hope in tough times ...*

Seven years ago we built a new house in east Saskatoon. We "xeriscaped" our yard thinking it would be ecologically wise given previous years of drought. To our astonishment, the first spring, there was a 6-ft wide river of water flowing through our yard every time it rained. And (thanks to irrigating neighbours uphill) the back part of our yard has never dried out since. It's become the habitation of frogs, and the occasion for a lot of expensive diking and drainage construction. What a headache!

Of course my minor urban water woes pale in comparison to the "once in 300-year" flood challenge faced by communities in the southern part of the prairie provinces this year. And perhaps I'd be envied by those in northern communities like Slave Lake AB and Wollaston Lake SK who have suffered ravenous forest fires.

But I have learned one thing even from my relatively protected urban experience: that living with the weather in western Canada is, every season of the year, an anxiety-inducing experience. Will the land dry out enough to get the crops in? Is there time to rebuild before winter? How do I drive to my job (just 15 km away) without getting mired in a low spot on a rural road or having to go 100 km around? How do pastors get to home-bound parishioners, and emergency services to critically ill patients? Life patterns are deeply disrupted and the toll on mental and spiritual health is substantial and constant.

Certainly prairie governments have been quick to offer funding to address the *physical* impact of these “acts of God.” Hopefully it will be timely and adequate. But greater attention needs to be paid to spiritual/emotional well-being—and not just of individuals but of communities as a whole. Repeated crises can create the impression that a person or town is being punished, or that God has forgotten about them. The resulting sense of shame or abandonment can suck what little energy for rebuilding is left and create a spiral of despair.

I’m proud to see the work that Leigh Sinclair, one of our graduate students and a pastor in Slave Lake, has been doing to mobilize pastoral care for her devastated community. It reminds me of studies by the Disaster Research Centre at the University of Delaware which showed that, after 9/11, people who classified themselves as *non*-believers sought counseling from a member of the clergy over a psychologist by a ratio of five to one. This is likely due in part to the cheaper cost of clergy care. But it also reflects the fact that, especially in partnership with health care institutions, churches have substantial resources to help heal the spirit of devastated communities: liturgies to help the community lament and hope together; networks of friendship and support; lists of people shut-in or vulnerable; people and professionals trained in caring for mind and spirit who are readily accessible.

In these difficult days of flood and fire our rural churches and health care folks can themselves be truly “*acts of God.*”

*Written by Cam Harder*

## **Life Events Reveal Hidden Gifts**

*Letting individuals have their own memories ...*

The 40ish woman confessed to her hairdresser she was excited about her weekend away, but was worried about leaving her husband at home with the kids.

This too oft repeated story bothers me. True, nothing is going to be the same as if mom was there, but maybe that’s OK.

Uncles can have a wonderful afternoon taking their 3-year old nephew in the truck with them. And that nephew will think his uncle is pretty marvelous.

Ten-year old daughters take on responsibilities at meal time that they would never try if mom was home. They and their dad might not get the dishes done until mom’s almost back, but they’ve had fun doing different tasks together. How important it is for us to hand control over to others, and watch the creativity that happens.

Margaret Mead’s daughter wrote a wonderful tribute about her mother, a renowned anthropologist. She wrote “Our mother always lets us own our memories”. None of this trying to correct or manage how another person thinks, for each of us see what happens through different eyes. Enjoy the gifts revealed.

Finally, I think of the young husbands and fathers suddenly confronted by a whole new set of demands because of the serious illness of a loved one. How wonderful to see boys become men. Until now their agenda has been to enjoy their “toys”, watch their ‘games’, have time with the guys. But when they are confronted with the need to support another person as they face medical tests or complex procedures, and as they face the unknown, these men know what it means to be called to the fore. They assume new responsibilities, they offer thoughtful suggestions, and most of all they explore what it means to be a companion to one in need.

These hidden gifts revealed become treasures of great worth.

*Written by Joyce Sasse*

## **DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS**

### **Caretakers of All That Is**

*The Prairies are far from boring. They hold a living world in the sod...*

I may live along the Eastern Slopes of the Rockies, but I’m a real prairie gopher at heart. And there are times I resent the short-shrift prairie folk receive.

So, when I’m invited to speak in a small prairie community I take a container of prairie sod for the story time. Mind you, I make sure to include a few extra angle worms and beetles for a surprise. And, hidden in the grass and litter I will plant my collection of plastic frogs, garter snakes and grubs.

When the children assemble, I invite them to commiserate with me about all that “boring” prairie I’ve had to drive through. Then I confess that I know a secret about the Prairie. To some people it may be boring, but those who are given the magic gift see that there’s a whole living world in the sod.

We start digging in the litter, and talk about how it protects the grass and critters from the burning heat and strong winds. Of course we find the surprises. Then we turn the sod onto a tray, and see a living world under the sod. Prairie might look like so much of nothing to the novice, but we know how to approach this world close up.

What a wonderful opportunity to talk about the unique ways by which God’s gifts of nature are given to us. On the prairie varieties of plants hover together and take care of each other through drought and cold, wind and fire. On the prairies we see the tiniest of birds and the power of the raptors. On the prairies the sky carries all sorts of messages of beauty and peace, of anger and power.

In the midst of all this, God places loved ones, watches over us, and invites us to be caretakers of all that is here. Hallelujah!

*Written by Joyce Sasse*

## **Finding Strength Where We Once Felt Weakest**

*Healing comes in many forms ...*

There is an old Chinese tale about the woman whose only son died. In her grief, she went to the holy man and said, "What prayers, what magical incantations do you have to bring my son back to life?" Instead of sending her away or reasoning with her, he said to her, "Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive the sorrow out of your life."

The woman set off at once in search of that magical mustard seed. She came first to a splendid mansion, knocked at the door, and said, "I am looking for a home that has never known sorrow. Is this such a place? It is very important to me." They told her, "You've certainly come to the wrong place," and began to describe all the tragic things that had recently befallen them. The woman said to herself, "Who is better able to help these poor unfortunate people than I, who have had misfortune of my own?" She stayed to comfort them, then went on in her search for a home that had never known sorrow.

But wherever she turned, in hovels and in palaces, she found one tale after another of sadness and misfortune. Ultimately, she became so involved in ministering to other people's grief that she forgot about her quest for the magical mustard seed, never realizing that it had in fact driven the sorrow out of her life.

*From Harold Kushner's book "When Bad Things Happen to Good People"*

## **A Prayer at Thanksgiving**

Loving Creator God, how rich and beautiful is your world!

We confess that often we forget to give you thanks.

We act as though what we have is of our own achievement.

We consume the fruits of creation, but forget that you call us to bear fruit ourselves.

We often do not share with others the way you intended.

Sometimes we are so blinded by our difficulties that we can see no reason to give your thanks.

Forgive us, God.

Help us to trust you enough that we will stop worrying and share freely with others.

Help us remember that we are loved, and that you are always ready to embrace us.

Thank you and Amen!

*Written by Joyce Sasse*

## **A Benediction**

Friends, this is the moment for which we are called together. The moment when enriched by our fellowship, strengthened with one another's love, and with our imaginations rekindled, we go to live God's love in our world. Let us go with the blessing of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

## **RURAL MINISTRY STORIES**

### **The Beef Ring**

*Around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ... rural people developed creative solutions for providing fresh food ...*

Mid-July heat. No deep-freeze units. The closest meat market at least an hour by horse. Yet many farm families were not deprived of a fresh supply of meat in those early summers, thanks to the "beef ring".

Seventeen or eighteen farmers would form a ring, and each would be expected to provide a beast of a stated weight range once during the summer months – each, that is except the farmer who acted as butcher. He paid for his beef with services rendered.

Friday the critter was delivered to the butcher's farm. It was slaughtered and cut. Along the wall of the slaughterhouse were cubicles, one for each member of the ring. The standard cuts had been charted. Today the Jones family was slated to receive the shoulder roast, and next seek they would get some rump cuts.

Early Saturday morning the roads were busy. The older youths came from miles around, each carrying a fresh white sugar sack. Maybe they would pick up meat for a neighbour or two as well. A little socializing, a word about the weather and the state of haying, and they were off home.

Always, fresh meat was cooked for Sunday dinner – enough to last into the week. What couldn't be kept safely, considering the limited "refrigeration", was quickly canned or fried down and sealed in jars for a future meal.

Never a dollar exchanged hands throughout the summer. The transaction was based on a neighbourly sense of common need and cooperative effort.

Today motors, machines, a clerk behind a counter, and cash are supposed to satisfy our needs. We live a sterile existence in more ways than one!

*Written by Joyce Sasse*

## When in Rome, Wear Overalls

*Participating in rural life can be an adventure...*

There's an old saying, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do... unless of course it's immoral, illegal or just icky." So, since I moved from downtown Toronto to Lucky Lake, Saskatchewan about a year ago to serve as a United Church of Canada minister, I've been eager to participate in all the events and rituals of rural life. Naturally, I was delighted when local rancher, Sandra Slater, asked if I'd like to help with a branding.

Sandra: You can manage the calves. When we're done, I'll cook up some Prairie Oysters.

Wonderful. A day of real life, frontier-style adventure, plus a seafood lunch.

Days before the event, I decided to get some idea of what branding was all about. I headed to the ranch of Doug and Linda Jones.

Doug explained that branding has come a long way since the "grab 'em by the hooves" hair-searing days of the Old West. With only two helpers, Doug can now process dozens of calves in an hour without touching a single hide.

I watched as calves calmly filed through a railed chute ending at a 'tipping table'. Two metal shields hold the calf securely in place, tip it on its side and the men efficiently vaccinate, ear-chip and apply a quick, electric brand. "What about castrating?" I ask. I had Wikipedia'd 'cow care'. "We stick on an elastic band and eventually the thing just falls off," Doug explained. "No fuss, no bother." I had to think the cow might not see it that way. Still, I left Doug's place confident that I would be entirely able to "manage" a calf down that little chute without so much as smudging my designer cowboy shirt.

Early Saturday morning, I arrive at Willowdale Farm, the ranch owned by Sandra and her husband, Lyle. Light snow speckles the hills surrounding their small, remote farmhouse. Two horses are saddled and standing in the yard. "To provide a little local colour," I think. A surprisingly large group of neighbours begin arriving. Someone asks if I want to borrow overalls. Smiling, I decline.

We head for the corral where some sixty cows and calves, deeply disgruntled about having been rounded up from the pasture, eye us suspiciously and snort in the cold morning air. I ask Sandra where the tipping table and the metal chute are. "Oh, we don't have those," she says, "We brand the old-fashioned way."

I experience a sudden tightening in my stomach. Like I know how those calves with the testicle bands feel.

Allan Allinson, a cowboy with some fifty years of branding experience, swings himself onto a horse and they wade into the herd. A whirl of Allan's lasso, a high-pitched shriek and they emerge dragging a calf by the hind legs. Sandra and Lyle's adult sons, Bryan and Brant, expertly grab the

calf by the flank, flip it on its side and begin shouting at me to come hold it down. The calf battles and bawls. The boys instruct me to position my left knee on its neck and my right on its curled front legs. I kneel on the calf and hold on for all I'm worth. A young woman jabs in a vaccination needle. The calf bellows and twists. Sandra swiftly applies a metal wand, red hot from the fire. A flash of flame and smoke, the stench of seared hair. I begin thanking God that it's all over, just as cowboy Trevor Tuplin wanders over, lops off the cap of skin and hair over the calf's testicles, applies one clean snip and plops them into a bucket.

The calf and I share a sudden, harmonious moment of human/animal sympathy. We both go into shock.

Hours later, in Sandra's farmhouse kitchen, I dab off my filthy, wilted shirt. Sandra serves up homemade bread and savoury slow-cooked beef with all the fixings. Then, the traditional delicacy of branding-time, Prairie Oysters; calf testicles, floured, seasoned and fried in as much butter as the pan will hold. The taste and texture are gummy. Normally, I would not say that "gummy" is an adjective that can be used to describe a taste but, in this case, it absolutely does.

Through a picture window I watch cows plodding back up into the hills, the calves already frolicking and sparing with their friends, the trauma of the morning forgotten. I muse for a moment on what I learned today. That sometimes, real life and adventure are not for the feint of heart. And, "When in Rome, wear overalls."

*Written by Anne Hines*

## **CIRCLE-M NEWS**

CiRCLe M is a non-profit charity created by the seminaries of the Saskatoon Theological Union (STU) to support training for ministry in small congregations and rural settings, with a special focus on helping them to build vital connections with their communities.

### **CiRCLe M Has Moved**

We're still in Saskatoon. We're still on the University campus. Our phone number is the same. But our new office is on the **top floor of St. Andrew's College in Suite 447 - 1121 College Drive S7N 0W3**. Visitors are welcome anytime!

### **New Doctor of Ministry Program (DMin)**

CiRCLe M is pleased to announce that the seminaries of the Saskatoon Theological Union are now offering a newly accredited Doctor of Ministry degree in Rural Ministry and Community Development.

The first cohort of this three-year DMin program starts February 2012. All courses will be in an intensive format so that clergy can minimize time away from their parishes.

***For more information, contact:***

Rev. Dr. Cam Harder at crharder@sasktel.net or phone 306-966-7864

Colleges of St. Andrew's or Emmanuel & St. Chad Registrar: 975-1588; email: colleen.walker@usask.ca, or

Lutheran Theological Seminary Registrar: 966-7856; email: susan.avant@usask.ca

## **Rural Ministry Courses**

### **1. Foundations of Rural Ministry and Community Development**

#### **Dr. Dittmar Muendel**

Date: February 21-24, 2012

Place: TBA

This graduate course is the first in our DMin in Rural Ministry and Community Development. It introduces students to the cohort model of study, builds relationships and establishes protocols for the overall program. The course examines Canadian rural realities and looks at theological and theoretical models of rural ministry, particularly as it engages the surrounding community. Students will examine some of the challenges and possibilities inherent to interdisciplinary work. They will also engage in a collaborative project in their own context to map its demographic, social, economic and spiritual character. Finally, students will explore possibilities for their own research trajectory in the program.

#### **Expected Outcomes:**

As a result of this course students will be able to:

- a) Identify the theological and sociological model(s) for relating rural churches to their communities that are most appropriate for their own context.
- b) Map some of the social demographics of their church and communities.
- c) Begin to choose appropriate tools for interdisciplinary work and research in their field setting.
- d) Identify the core questions from their own context that will guide their study and research

#### **For details contact one of the STU registrars:**

Colleges of St. Andrew's or Emmanuel & St. Chad Registrar: 975-1588; email: colleen.walker@usask.ca, or

Lutheran Theological Seminary Registrar: 966-7856; email: [susan.avant@usask.ca](mailto:susan.avant@usask.ca)

## **2. Rural Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)**

The Swan Valley CPE program is located in the Swan River Valley District of west central Manitoba. The program is a satellite of the long-established CPE programs at the Saskatoon Institute for Pastoral Education.

The Swan Valley program is available to anyone. It consists of 200 hours of experience in a rural community ministry site as well as the opportunity for small group seminars and theological reflection with a trained CPE supervisor and ones' peers. Seminars in the program focus on guided experiences in community-based care-giving together with group, individual and mentored reflection. Students learn skills related to crisis intervention, suicide prevention, mental health issues as well as working with intergenerational families and issues of loss and grief. The program includes contextual immersion and reflection opportunities including a guided wilderness walk, a tour of a farming operation, an opportunity to reflect on the interaction of aboriginal and non-aboriginal culture, attendance at a farm auction, and the opportunity to lead worship in a small village church.

In 2011, five students completed the program. These participants included two United Church College students, one Mennonite pastor, one Roman Catholic Lay person, and one Lutheran Ministry candidate. Besides receiving 200 hours of classroom discussion, the students provided over 400 hours of spiritual support to persons in hospital, long term care facilities and mental health clients in the Swan River area. They also assisted with leading workshops and providing support and education to health care staff. Students worked with staff, management, local clergy and the Spiritual Care Advisory Committee on a number of initiatives to enhance spiritual care.

The students received a warm welcome from staff, management, local congregations and the community at large. The students were enthusiastic about their training and the CPE program has obtained national recognition as an innovative program from the Canadian Association for Spiritual Care. This program is one of the first of its kind to offer training in a rural context.

For further information contact Supervisor Rev. Margaret McCallum at [swanvalleycpe@gmail.com](mailto:swanvalleycpe@gmail.com).

### **LINKS**

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

## UPCOMING EVENTS

CiRCLe M Presents an Interdenominational Rural Ministry Conference:

# ***New Shoots from Old Roots: Celebrating Vital Ministry in Town & Country***

**Conference Workshops** will explore themes on revitalizing town and country congregations and building strong communities.

**Keynote Speakers:** Dr. Shannon Jung and Reverend David Webber

**Date:** November 15-17, 2011

**Place:** Entheos Retreat & Conference Centre (near Calgary, Alberta)

**Early-Bird Registration:**

by October 14<sup>th</sup> \$134  
after October 14<sup>th</sup> \$160

For details visit [www.circle-m.ca](http://www.circle-m.ca)  
email: [circle.m.ministries@gmail.com](mailto:circle.m.ministries@gmail.com)