

# CRCN – CiRCLe M NEWSLETTER

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*A Joint Publication of*

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

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Let love be the ground in which we sink our roots.  
Let love be the ground on which we build our foundation.  
(Prayer following the Granum, AB Fire, 1997)

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## FAITH MATTERS

### Conference Gives Voice to Rural Issues

*Reflecting on the 2011 Rural Ministry Conference.*

Issues abound in most rural communities, and local congregations are challenged to help the local residents deal with these issues as they work together to build stronger communities.

This was the focus of the biennial Rural Ministry Conference sponsored by CiRCLe M (Centre for Rural Community Leadership & Ministry), an ecumenical organization located on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan. Clergy and lay folks came from Newfoundland, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC to the 2011 meeting, held near Calgary, to address a number of concerns.

The Slave Lake delegate, newly ordained, talked about her experience working with that community during and since the time of the fire that roared through the area.

An Ontario delegate wanted to know if and how the East could help the West in the face of the Wheat Board Debate. The discussion, while inconclusive, was most informative.

How can the church best serve in regions that are as extensive as the Cariboo-Chilcoltin region of central British Columbia? And how can the church serve in another rural area, heavily populated, where neighbours don't know each other? Church leaders from both kinds of communities told their stories.

A workshop on aboriginal ministries explored the teachings that assist in the presentation of the Good News for, to, and with all people.

Is it possible for more than one denomination to work together in shared ministry in a single congregation? I was amazed how many communities in Western Canada are served in this way.

What about theological reflection? Shannon Jung has done extensive research in the USA on the theology of food and agriculture. His musings were thought-provoking.

Throughout, participants were drawn together (Baptists, Presbyterians, Mennonites, Roman Catholic, Anglicans, Lutherans, United Church, Salvation Army, etc) to see how valuable it is to participate in this kind of cross-denominational network. Both at the time of meeting and through on-going exchanges, the ideas, questions and examples of what others are doing, enriched many ministries – and congregations can feel a renewed sense of mission.

*(written by Joyce Sasse. For resource information see [www.circle-m.ca](http://www.circle-m.ca) )*

## **Liberating the Church from Concrete and Glass**

*Liberating the body of Christ from concrete and glass – the ministry of David Webber.*

If David Webber was to serve his multitude of communities in the traditional clergy-centred style, he would have to learn the Santa Claus technique of covering vast areas on the same day.

The Cariboo-Chilcoltin Presbyterian Parish is humongous. Over the past twenty years Webber has simply been the facilitator in letting small house churches spring up throughout the region. In each of these people gather to pray, study the Bible, and share communion and fellowship.

Following Jesus becomes something very simple. The Bible teachings usually relate directly to daily life “because the person leading Sunday School is a practical bloke who has worked out how these words work in his own down-to-earth world.”

The Body of Christ in these communities has been “liberated from concrete and glass” and from hours spent in meetings. Budgets are minimal for those moving back to a New Testament style of gathering. Here, as then, the elders form their intentional communities of faith in small household groups around a meal. The regular presence of the clergy is not essential. The question may be asked “Whose table is it anyway?” The Bible and its traditions belong to the whole people of God.

While it may be hard for traditional religious institutions to make these abrupt changes, we can thank our Presbyterian friends for the work they are doing.

### ***For a more complete picture of how these house churches function:***

- 1) See the house church story at [http://www.circle-m.ca/rural-ministry-stories/stories\\_web/house\\_church.html](http://www.circle-m.ca/rural-ministry-stories/stories_web/house_church.html) or
- 2) View the power point and listen to the presentation given by Reverend David Webber at the November 2011 Rural Ministry conference. Go to <http://www.circle-m.ca/conferences-and-events/index.php>

## **The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating**

*We need to stop being against the corporation mentality and focus on where we are – in our local places with their politics and their economies.*

In his book “Food for Life” Shannon Jung reminds us how we must start with ourselves if we want to have influence on the rest of the world. In the Church one of the natural places to start is with food.

In our daily routine he suggests the following three core practices:

“Pray carefully in church and at home. Say grace before meals thoughtfully in a way that recognized the specifics of the meal and what is going on in your life... It helps us not only be

aware of this blessing, it also put us in relationship with God. It helps us to recognize we live in grace.”

“Find a way of sharing food with others, especially others who cannot share in return. Do this for yourself, for Christ’s sake! Examples: volunteering regularly at a soup kitchen / food pantry, help at a shelter for the homeless ... Get to know individual people. Or prepare the meal yourself.”

Know where your food comes from. Eat as locally as possible ... Seek to discover where God is active in your local food supply system. Where does food waste go? All of this can bring great joy and be a spiritual blessing as you expect to find God at work here. “You may not be far from worship at this point!”

(Quotes from Shannon Jung’s book *Food for Life*<sup>1</sup>)

## **RURAL LIFE ISSUES**

### **Small Has Merit**

*Churches pull money from big banks.*

In the USA “a growing number of religious communities are removing their money from Wall Street banks”. This is a protest to what is seen to be “unfair mortgage foreclosures and an unwillingness to lend to small business”.

The Move Our Money campaign is suggesting the shift be made to deposit money in community banks and credit unions. That is because these institutions, some of which are quite large themselves, are committed to work with and invest in their local communities.

“A broad cross section of Christian, Jewish and Muslim congregations” are involved in this movement. According to my local credit union source billions of dollars have changed over.

The priority is people first. Keep them in their homes. Avoid foreclosures where possible. Reach out to local business. Stop the skullduggery. This is one of the great moral issues of our time.

*(Noted in the Prairie Messenger, November 30, 2011)*

### **Access to Internet Needed**

*Looking for amenities in rural communities.*

In the Rural Life Issues part of the March 2011 newsletter, Joyce Sasse wrote a thoughtful piece entitled “Hampered Communications”, wherein she decried the slowness of providers in

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<sup>1</sup> Jung, L. Shannon. 2004 *Food for Life. The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating.* Augsburg Fortress. Minneapolis MN.

extending high speed internet to rural residents. To me, this failure strikes at what I have long considered to be a hallmark of Canadian society. It is what is sometimes called 'postage stamp' pricing. The idea is based on the premise that it costs the same amount to mail a letter to anywhere in Canada, regardless of location. In other words, all Canadians are to be treated equally, in spite of where they live. This principle was once extended also to such things as telephone and bus service, but this seems to be eroding away piece by piece. So here goes an important part of our equality.

But there is one other matter at stake here: It is an equality of opportunity. A radio program a while back was talking about how many urban dwellers are retreating to the country, and many more should as well, if only the proper conditions prevailed in those rural communities.

What were they looking for? Five things: a feeling of community and belonging, a sense of safety, ready access to health care facilities, access to airports and major transportation hubs, and access to internet. The commentator was saying that rural communities with these facilities were poised for great things.

*(Something to think about. Michael Stonhouse)*

## **DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS**

### **Pastoral Prayer in Time of Tragedy**

*It hurt those affected by the Granum (Alberta) Fire of '97 to hear mistruths and false stories about what happened at the time of the fire. The local ministerial listened to their concerns and brought the following prayer back to the town's folk.*

O God, we are ever grateful for your presence among us.

- Even as the roaring fire raced across the land ...
- Even as the wind continues to abuse the fields ...
- Even as tragedy strike our communities by way of accidents and death ...
- Even as the fear of deteriorating health dominates our thoughts ...
- Even as whispers of broken relationships intimate a hidden reality ...

In the midst of all these things, still we know you are present ... your arms embrace us ... and lift us ... they carry us and give us strength when there is no strength in us ...

As people in mourning, let us feel the warm protective covering of your wings.

As friends and neighbours and loved ones, help us learn how to express ourselves in ways that are thoughtful and filled with compassion.

- Teach us how to show our care without being intrusive.
- Help us know when to speak and when to respect the silence.
- Remind us how important it is to be sincere and not sound pompous...

You have not promised us a perfect world, but you have promised that you would always be with us in the world that is ours.

- Show us how we can know you, even in our darkest days.
- Lead us from darkness to light.
- Lead us from despair to hope ...

We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **True Worship**

*By Julian of Norwich*

Be a gardener.  
Dig a ditch,  
toil and sweat,  
and turn the earth upside down  
and seek the deepness  
and water the plants in time.  
Continue this labour  
and make sweet floods to run  
and noble and abundant fruits  
to spring.  
Take this food and drink  
and carry it to God  
as your true worship.

## **A Benediction**

The Lord lift you up.  
The Lord take your hand.  
The Lord lead you forth  
and cause you to stand  
secure in God's word,  
seeking God's face,  
abounding in love,  
abounding in grace.

*(written by Patricia Shelly)*

## RURAL MINISTRY STORIES

### **From Those Who Remember**

*Community members who faced a raging prairie fire in 1997 reach out to people in the rural area of Slave Lake.*

An invitation was extended this Christmas to residents in southwest Alberta to “help the rural people of the Slave Lake area who were in the path of last summer’s wildfires”. This from people who still remember the lingering smells, the charring of the landscape, and the sight of fence-lines and farmsteads burned when the horrific winds of southern Alberta set their countryside ablaze in December 1997. This action is but a token of their gratitude.

“We feel the attention has been mostly on the town of Slave Lake and not so much on the rural families.” We want to contribute now because “14 years ago we remember the help that came from near and far” to help with our rebuilding.

Even as one community reaches out to the other, the gift of sharing carries its own message of hope.

*(Letter to the Editor, Pincher Creek Echo, December 2011)*

### **Feeling a Sense of Ownership for Community**

*Local minister seeks to engage young adults in community-building.*

The Doctor of Ministry program through Lutheran Theological Seminary Saskatoon and CiRCLe M required that I conduct a project that researched the effect of community and church engagement. I chose to work with young adults since this age group is noticeably missing at both church and community events, and yet there are many young people living the area. My project sought to better understand their lives. Further to that, my research asked the question, what happens to their sense of community when they are given to opportunity to talk about what matters to them? I believe our culture makes it difficult for young people to engage in meaningful public discourse. I see the church as having much to offer as the church naturally brings people together to publicly engage in matters of the deepest kind, such as forgiveness, life, death, restoration, community, identity, God, and so on. The church has a role to play in community development just by doing what the church does.

The core group was made up of ten young adults who met in the church basement on Tuesday nights from March through June. The group included a cross-section of young adults from the rural community west of Millet, Alberta, 18-33 years old. They were a good mix of single, married, divorced, Christian, agnostic, seeking, Catholic, Lutheran, Mormon, Christian Reform, male, female, professionals, trades people, unemployed, moms, dads, new to the community and lifelong residents.

We met to share photographs of our lives. The photos were used as springboards to meaningful conversation about what it is like to be a young adult in rural Alberta. The most positive thing that happened was that the young adults in the group got to know each other – their own neighbors – and discovered they had much in common – similar questions, struggles, anxieties, experiences, and values. Friendships were fostered and participants expressed a sense that “we care about this place and want to invest in it.”

My tangible goals were modest, yet significant. I wanted the wider community to wake up to the fact that young people live in this neighborhood and care about it. I wanted our community associations and the church to begin to engage them more intentionally. As a pastor I wanted to know the answer to Jesus’ question to his first disciples. “What are you looking for?” I saw this question as a good opening to meaningful dialog with a population that has not been engaged in local activity, religious or otherwise. I saw this project as opening a door to further partnership and focused ministry to young adults. On an emotional level I was interested in giving these young people a sense of ownership in their community, as well as an opportunity to express their hopes and concerns and to develop some leadership skills in doing so. I also hoped the project would renew my congregation’s sense that we have something to offer our neighbours. The church has a wonderful ability to convene people around things that really matter.

*(By Pastor Tim Wray, St. Peters, Millet, Alberta)*

## **The Memory Box**

*Children and grief.*

At our recent Blue Christmas Service one speaker wanted to address the feelings of grief and loss experienced by children. Whether it be a pet cat or a favorite grandparent, the question is always about what others can do to help the kids work through their pain.

Their questions often come out concerning basic needs. Who’s going to take care of Ronnie? Will Allison be lonely?

I know of one family who witnessed their favorite farm dog attacking a new pet cat. The children, who were not from a church-attending family, knew there had to be a funeral for their little friend – a not just any funeral! Grandma and the kids had to dress up, with hats and gloves if you please. The kitten was placed in a tea-towel lined shoe box, and they all went out to the farm’s pet-cemetery in the trees. Each found a few words to say. Rituals are important. And it was also important to find a way to forgive old Ruff!

At the Blue Christmas service the speaker brought out a box. This box was to be used as a Memory Box.

What were some things they remembered about Grandpa? He took them on fishing trips. He read stories to them. He liked his big cup of coffee. With each memory, they thought of something they could put in the box that would help them remember – a battered lure, a pair of

eye glasses, a story book, a coffee cup. The kids even got excited about how they were going to decorate the box. Enthusiasm about the project grew.

Each time they felt the need to be near Grandpa they could go to the box and chose something special that would help them give voice to their feelings.

Stories connected with these memories brought warmth and comfort.

*(Written by Joyce Sasse)*

## **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.

### **Rural Ministry Conference in November 2011**

Approximately 60 people gathered at CiRCLe M's biennial rural ministry conference in southern Alberta (New Shoots from Old Roots). It was a pleasure to meet, listen, share, learn, sing, pray, laugh and eat with so many wonderful people.

Conference evaluations, a media report and keynote, workshop and panel presentation materials are available on our website at <http://www.circle-m.ca/conferences-and-events/index.php>.

Our next conference will take place in Fall 2013.

### **First Nations Rural Neighbours Friendship Initiative**

This initiative is an effort to help close the gap between First Nations and their neighboring communities using churches in both First Nations and nearby towns as bridges for conversation and friendship building. For more information please visit:

[http://www.circle-m.ca/misc\\_indexpages/first\\_nations\\_friendship\\_initiative.php](http://www.circle-m.ca/misc_indexpages/first_nations_friendship_initiative.php).

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

The seminaries of the Saskatoon Theological Union are now offering a newly accredited Doctor of Ministry degree in Rural Ministry and Community Development.

The new cohort of this three-year DMin program is filling up and is scheduled to start summer 2012. Some students may take graduate courses before that they can then apply to transfer in.

All courses will be in an intensive format so that clergy can minimize time away from their parishes. For more information visit: <http://www.circle-m.ca/leadership-training-programs/DMin/index.php>.

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

Rev. Dr. Cam Harder at [crharder@sasktel.net](mailto:crharder@sasktel.net) or phone 306-966-7864  
College of St. Andrew's Registrar: email: [standrews.registrar@usask.ca](mailto:standrews.registrar@usask.ca) phone: 966-5244  
Emmanuel & St. Chad Registrar: email: [esc.registrar@usask.ca](mailto:esc.registrar@usask.ca) phone: 975-1550  
Lutheran Theological Seminary Registrar: email: [susan.avant@usask.ca](mailto:susan.avant@usask.ca) phone: 966-7856

## **Rural Ministry Courses**

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

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

Date: TBA

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:**

College of St. Andrew's Registrar: email: [standrews.registrar@usask.ca](mailto:standrews.registrar@usask.ca) phone: 966-8970  
Emmanuel & St. Chad Registrar: email: [esc.registrar@usask.ca](mailto:esc.registrar@usask.ca) phone: 975-1550  
Lutheran Theological Seminary Registrar: email: [susan.avant@usask.ca](mailto:susan.avant@usask.ca) phone: 966-7856

## **2. Rural Community Crisis Intervention Training Webinars**

Our first (of 4) community intervention training webinars begins January 28, 2012. The purpose of the training is to equip town and country churches to better understand and employ their particular gifts in helping their community prepare for and recover resiliently from crisis and disaster. *Please note: these webinars are not intended to provide certified disaster relief training but to stimulate thinking about ways in which churches can contribute to plans and emo's in their town or region.* For more information, visit:

[http://www.circle-m.ca/misc\\_indexpages/crisis\\_intervention.php](http://www.circle-m.ca/misc_indexpages/crisis_intervention.php)

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

The R. Alex Sim Rural Ministry Symposium 2012

October 22 - 24, 2012,

Jackson' Point (north of Toronto), Ontario

<http://www.ruralsymposium.ca/>

## **LINKS**

An extensive listing of links to rural community and rural ministry sites can be found at

<http://www.circle-m.ca/links>.