

Newsletter #33 – January 2018

CRCN – CiRCLe M NEWSLETTER

A Joint Publication of
CANADIAN RURAL CHURCH NETWORK
and
CENTRE FOR RURAL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY

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*We Christians are called on,
as part of God's Mission in the world,
to share Jesus Christ's good news about healing and wholeness.*

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The CRCN is an organization of persons (lay and clergy) who have a passion for enhancing the quality of life in rural communities. Their vision is to be a supporting network for rural church and rural community development in Canada.



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CiRCLe M is a non-profit charity created by the seminaries of the Saskatoon Theological Union. The Centre's mission is to equip clergy and lay leaders in rural and remote places to help their churches be catalysts for the development of healthy Canadian communities.



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FAITH MATTERS

Advent Related Quotation about the Nature of the Christian Church

By Andrew Britz OSB, editor of *Prairie Messenger* (newspaper), November 2000

“We should take consolation that the church in its Advent liturgy admits to incompleteness, its smallness of spirit, its temptation to settle down and idolize its current structures as nigh on perfect ...

(but) “Advent reminds us that we can change and move beyond what satisfies us today ...

(by the Grace of God) “Advent also assures us our church can change, can change even those structures it has so carefully divinized. In this process we come to notice that our very concept of God also changes.”

Aboriginals Re-define Role in Anglican Church of Canada

Changes that Aboriginal members are making within the Anglican Church could help us begin to develop a deeper understanding between our neighbours...

Notes by Joyce Sasse

Many rural communities in Western Canada live geographically close to First Nations people, but are culturally and socially isolated from each other. Perhaps this example of changes that Aboriginal members are making within the Anglican Church could help us begin to develop a deeper understanding between our neighbours – and about the nature of our Church.

Information about
the “**National Consultation on Indigenous Anglican Self-Determination**”,
under the leadership of Bishops Mark MacDonald and Sidney Black, can be found at
<http://www.anglican.ca/im/>.

The Website Background Notes tell how the Indigenous People of Canada are expressing their desire to seek partnership in the World-wide Anglican Communion with the words:

“We proclaim and celebrate the gospel of Jesus Christ in worship and action. But through the Grace of Jesus Christ we also affirm our traditional spirituality and our place in God’s Creation. We know that Christ has come to fulfill our traditions too.”

A Covenant and our Journey of Spiritual Renewal (1994) (quoted from the website)

We, the indigenous partners in Canada of the Anglican communion respectfully affirm our place in God’s Creation and in God’s Love, manifest through the Grace of Jesus Christ. In specific, we address the Anglican Canadians with whom we are in direct communion.

We have shared a journey of close to three centuries in which we have been:

- denied our place in God's Creation
- denied our rights as Children of God
- treated as less than equal, and
- subjected to abuse, culturally, physically, emotionally, sexually and spiritually.

The result, in our communities, homes and daily lives, has been and continues to be:

- broken homes and lives
- sexual and family violence
- high recidivism and incarceration rates
- high chemical abuse
- loss of spiritual fulfillment
- loss of cultures, languages and traditions and
- poor stewardship of Mother Earth.

Because the National church's canons, structure and policies have not always responded to our needs nor heard our voice, we now claim our place and responsibility as equal partners in a new shared journey of healing, moving towards wholeness and justice.

We acknowledge that God is calling us to a prayerful dialogue towards self-determination for us, the Indigenous People, within the Anglican Communion in Canada. Through this new relationship we can better respond to the challenges facing us in a relevant and meaningful way.

As faithful people of God, guided by the Holy Spirit, we invite you, the Anglican Communion of Canada to covenant with us, the Indigenous Anglicans of Canada, in our vision of a new and enriched journey.

A Covenant

We, representatives of the Indigenous people of the Anglican Church of Canada, meeting in Winnipeg from the 23 to 26th of April, 1994, pledge ourselves to this covenant for the sake of our people and in trust of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ:

Under the guidance of God's spirit we agree to do all we can to call our people into unity in a new, self-determining community within The Anglican Church of Canada.

To this end, we extend the hand of partnership to all those who will help us build a truly Anglican Indigenous Church in Canada.

May God bless this new vision and give us grace to accomplish it. Amen

Called Together in 2014

Indigenous Anglicans, studying the parable of the Great Feast (Luke 14:15-24), wrote "Jesus often described the ministry of God in creation as a feast ... It seems to us that Indigenous ministries and the Anglican Church of Canada are being invited to a feast of God's justice, freedom, and hope ..."

The Road to Warm Springs (September 2017)

Thanks to modern technology, viewers can listen to the presentations made most recently by this **National Consultation on Anglican Self-Determination**.

Visit: <http://www.anglican.ca/im/rws/>



Commentary on the Book “Saving Paradise”

A study of findings raised in the book “Saving Paradise” sheds light on the theological terms “Mission of God” and “Mission of the Church”, and how one relates to the other ...

By Joyce Sasse

A study of findings raised in the book “Saving Paradise” sheds light on the theological terms “Mission of God” and “Mission of the Church”, and how one relates to the other. Could such understanding show us why many regard Christianity as being but one way to look at how God works with what has been created?

“In the First Millennium”, Biblical scholar Rita Brock writes, “Christianity was an Earth-Embracing, Beauty-Loving, Justice-Seeking movement.”

“But by the 12th Century, Christians shifted from understanding salvation to be as baptism into paradise in this world – to an emphasis on salvation in the after-life through crucifixion”. The first crucifix found was in 965 AD, in Germany.

The basic questions Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker ask in their book “Saving Paradise” are:

- How did Christianity trade love for this world for Crucifixion and Empire?
- What are the implications of this shift?
- What difference does it make if we continue reading the Bible as Paradise Text?
Could it tell us how to live, what can go wrong when we leave the garden, and what must we do to reclaim Paradise in this world?

Practical Considerations for Practice of Ministry

Members of rural communities come from a wide spectrum of beliefs ...

By Joyce Sasse

In rural communities neighbours come from a wide spectrum of cultural, economic and faith backgrounds. To help us think about what God’s Mission in the world might be, and how our Churches understand themselves to be part of this mission, consider the following ---

- Ask teenagers what “spiritual thinking” means to them.

- Ask non-church attenders about their spiritual journey.
- Invite ranchers and farmers to talk about their encounters with God.
- Discuss with members of the Ministerial Association, what it means to affirm the importance of the Church's Mission while respecting the differences that distinguish each Denomination.
- Engage in dialogue, as Christians, with members of other World Faiths (e.g. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists ...).
- Could it be that the "Mission of the Church" one part of the "Mission of God"?

RURAL LIFE ISSUES

Rural Tourism: Bane or Blessing

Insights gained while enjoying a post-retirement cruise ...

By Rev. Dr. Cameron Harder, Executive Director, Centre for Rural Community Leadership and Ministry (CiRCLe M)



Cuba changed my thinking about tourism. About a year ago my wife and I and visited Cuba with a couple of friends. The sun and sand were life-giving for us solar-starved northerners. Even better were the amazing displays of Cuban culture to which we were treated every day: acrobatic dance, flying-fingered string music, soulful sax, heartfelt songs and stories, colorful art and costumes. But I began to feel a bit guilty—that our winter indulgence was a huge imposition on Cuban hospitality. So I apologized to our Havana guide for the annual flood of Canadian snowbirds. He said to me, "You can see of course that your visit gives some of us jobs. But you may not be aware that tourism has been a gift for *all* of Cuba. For decades we were under the thumb of Spanish, American and Russian occupiers. Their culture displaced ours. But in these last years you Canadians and others arrived full of curiosity about who we are. In order to present our native Cuban culture to you we had to recover it. And in the process we've been finding our soul."

Coming home, I realized that our Canadian rural communities are in much the same situation as Cuba had been. Our many local cultures are being overwritten by the powerful images and stories of global (mostly American) media. For the most part that pervasive culture is urban. But even when it's rural, it's someone *else's* rural. Modern media are so slick and persuasive that the stories they tell can easily supplant the unique stories, values and traditions of our own community. We can forget who we are.

That amnesia damages the connective tissue of a community. Wendell Berry, in an article entitled "The Work of Local Culture" writes "When a community loses its memory, its members no longer know each other. How can they know each other if they have forgotten or have never learned each other's stories? If they do not know each other's stories, how can they know whether or not to trust each other? People who do not trust each other do not help each other, and moreover they fear each other." We've seen some of that happening with the rise in rural crime rates. People who never used to lock their cars or homes are increasingly concerned about security.

Nonetheless, some communities are working hard to recover their own culture and share it with others. For example, Harris Saskatchewan created a musical called “The Pull of the Land.” It’s a compelling depiction of their life on the prairies that took pretty well every human inhabitant in the area to produce. The musical was so good that CBC picked it up and broadcast it nationally. Eventually Harris did a sequel and even commissioned artists to paint murals from the play on town walls. Harris put themselves on the map. But more than a name and tourism dollars, they incarnated the “spirit” of Harris in a form that can be shared with their children and grandchildren. And they discovered how much they can accomplish with good leadership and cooperation.

Berry also says that the retention of local cultures is critical for the well-being of the planet—including the city folks who live on it. “The local culture will carry the knowledge of how the place may be well and lovingly used, and moreover the implicit command to use it only well and lovingly. The only true and effective ‘operator’s manual for spaceship earth’ is not a book that any human will ever write; it is hundreds of thousands of local cultures.”

My wife and I noticed this on a retirement celebration cruise we took this fall. We were surprised to see how tourism is stimulating cultures in central America and the Caribbean to remember and care for their land. We saw tourism helping to: rebuild the sea turtle population in the Grand Caymans; generate research funds for endangered amphibians in the Costa Rican rainforest; renew the coral reefs of Mexico; and provide sustaining income for people on small islands who have lost their traditional means of living to hurricanes and big agribusiness.

Of course, putting your local culture “out there” to attract urban tourists has its risks. Seasonal floods of tourists can damage roads, overload local volunteers and infrastructure, and drive up real estate prices beyond what locals can afford. It can disturb fragile ecosystems, even change feeding and migration patterns (e.g. for marine animals). The dangers are real. And they are more likely to occur when tourism is treated simply as a stopgap measure to fill income streams lost to mine and mill closures, or farmland concentration.

It’s best when expressions of local culture grow organically out of a love for the history and inhabitants of a particular place. That doesn’t mean it happens automatically, or naturally. The amazing scarecrow festival we saw in Mahone Bay NS last year took a lot of time, leadership, creativity, sweat and tears to develop. But it brought in folks from all over the world and has become part of the lifeblood of Mahone Bay.

Rural churches can have a role in helping to grow local cultures, whether or not they lead to tourist initiatives. Congregations are a good place for a community to reflect on its core values. They often provide leadership in developing musical, dramatic and artistic skills. Their ministers generally know how to raise funds, recruit volunteers, and work things out when participant tensions get high. And churches’ broad denominational connections to cities can help communities understand and respond to urban tourist needs and interests. CiRCLe M has worked with the Saskatoon Theological Union to train rural ministers with such community-building skills, several of whom currently serve in tourist towns.

Tourism may not be the economic salvation for most of Canada's rural communities since it only directly employs about 3% of rural workers across Canada (somewhat higher in Atlantic Canada and the North). But it can have a lot of great spinoffs—not just economically, but also ecologically and even spiritually. As the Cubans said – “it helped us find our soul.”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Thoughts on The Supreme God

By: Carl Gorman

“It is said by some researchers into Navajo religion that we have no Supreme God because he is not named. That is not so. The Supreme Being is not named because He is unknowable. He is Simply Unknown Power. We worship His creation. The various forms of creation have some of His Spirit within them.”

Carl Gorman, a renowned Navajo artist, was a “Code-talker” in the Marine Corp in WW II.

Prayer Reflections

By Stephen Charleston

“Siddhartha sat beneath his tree, waiting for an answer. He saw a path, four simple stones, across the stream of sorrow. Rising to bend low, he called the Earth to silence, casting compassion all around him, like cherry blossoms caught on the morning breeze. Should I stand aside or look away from this kind and good man because his words are not in my book? There are many rooms in my Grandmother's house, with many places to ponder, a mystery greater than I can contain by building a booth on God's holy mountain. Deep faith is not a box, but a willingness to wander, knowing that there is a shepherd, who will always guide me home.”

“God bless the church; our travelling tribe, our motley crew, caravan of the conflicted and courageous, stumbling toward paradise, the hurt and hopeful, wounded healers, singing along the way ... your quarreling brood, your stubborn flock, your love living for love, your dream of what might be.”

Stephen Charleston, Choctaw Nation, retired Episcopal Bishop, U.S.A.

On Darkness and Light

By Joyce Sasse

“Darkness gets a bum rap in our culture”, Mardi Tindal writes sitting, fear of getting lost in the dark, terms like ‘dark night of the soul’, or prejudices some have toward dark-coloured skin.

But Tindal changed her thinking when she read May Sarton's quotation "**Without darkness nothing comes to birth, as without light nothing flowers.**" Instead of always choosing light over darkness, Tindal began to look at life from the opposite perspective to try to embrace the dark. "Darkness synchronizes our biological clock and activates the production of melatonin, a powerful antioxidant." Light might coax a flower to bloom, but only after the bulb has been buried in deep, dark soil.

"The truth is that my soul does its best work in the dark, where I'm haunted by failure, doubt and brokenness, and forced to rely upon the power and creativity of the Holy Spirit."

Which makes her wonder "how the joy of Easter could ever be experienced fully without the pain and darkness of Good Friday. Jesus entered the darkness, giving birth to a new way of life. Crucifixion and resurrection remind us that darkness and light are both of God." She concludes "Embracing times of darkness may be a necessary passage into light."

Quoted from Mardi Tindal's column in the Observer, April 2015

Message of Hope

From Robert Kennedy

Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope ... Those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

Lament: God's Gift to Us to Move Forward

At the time when a church may be closing ...

By Eric Skillings

How do we say we are sorry, that we did wrong, that we have sinned against God – then move on? As a verb "lament" allows us to express passionate grief about what we have done or what we have lost. The Rural Church does a genuine tribute with funerals. We share our sorrow. We draw on the word of God. We share stories of the life of the one we have lost. We gather to support one another, in the church basement, with food and coffee. We know how to say goodbye to our friends and neighbours. This is lament.

What about other times in our Church lives? Many Rural Communities are shrinking; in size, resources and people. Our young have moved away to earn a living. Our rural churches struggle to meet their expenses with fewer people. The faithful give more, if they can. Eventually the weight of the struggle for the faithful few overtakes the strength and courage they can offer. The community rural church needs to close. And we feel guilty. We feel sad. We feel that we have let down those generations before us, including our parents, our grandparents, and our extended family. How do we move forward dragging all these feelings weighing us down?

Could we gather together as a community to lament – to express passionate grief about closing our rural church? We could share our sorrow. We could draw on the word of God. We could share stories of the church life we have lost. We could support one another, in the church basement, with a potluck. We have to say goodbye in a meaningful way to release that which holds us back.

Expressing passionate grief is a verb. It's an action. Actions take strength and energy. Yet we do not do it alone. We will find that many of us share the same thoughts and feeling. We call out to God and find that God is among us – also grieving. We move forward – one step at a time.

We should lament our rural church closing a bit before we actually close it. For on that final service as we gather we can celebrate the life of our church for the past 100 years. Many of our rural churches have been a big part of our rural community since it was settled. Think of and celebrate the ministry that has happened in this place – the baptisms, the marriages, the funerals, the church suppers, the Christmas Eve Services, the Good Friday and Easter Services. Remember the Christmas Pageants of the scores of children that shared the Christmas Story with the community. Remember the singing, the praying, the messages shared, the work of maintaining the church.

Tell the stories and celebrate the life of our rural churches. From death comes resurrection. Death does not mean the end. Nor does it mean we forget. Resurrection allows us to celebrate and share new ministries in the community, as the faithful move forward with God's help. After all the church is the people. Thanks be to God.

RURAL MINISTRY STORIES

I Just Became A Grandpa!!

Thoughts on leaving a legacy to the next generation....

By Tim Beadle

It's been seven long years, but this past Thursday morning at 3:47 am, I finally became a grandpa! The little tyke, Levi Brian, weighed in at 8 lbs. 13 oz. and mom and dad are doing well. Just so you know, I'm not doing too badly either!

What will the future hold for this little one? Some say his fingers are long enough to be those of a pianist. Family heritage might find him pursuing a career in music, engineering or even standing behind a pulpit in the decades to come.

I tell people he got my good looks, because his grandma still has hers! More importantly, I've made a commitment to the Lord to pass on something else... my faith! That is the best gift I could ever hope to model and pass on to this new little life that bears my family name.

A central part of my 'grand parenting' regimen in the days to come will be found in becoming accustomed to the developmental stages of my grandson... I have to know what is to be expected each step along the way – in the same manner I need to spend time in thinking through how Heather and I can pass on the same faith we passed on to our kids... to their kids.

This means I have to 'make time' for him in my life – realizing, as happens in most rural communities... there will come a day when he will pack up a bag and head off to school in the big city never to return 'home' apart from the occasional visit. Time is of the essence... I must live intentionally in being a godly example of all I'd love to see my grandson grow up to be... and become.

Deuteronomy 19 is a good starting place... "You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall teach them to your sons (and grandsons!), talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens *remain* above the earth."

Tim Beadle – Co-founder, Rural Church Pastors Network www.ruralchurchpastorsnetwork.com

Rural Ministry Story from Newfoundland

Reflections of Pastoral Outreach ...

By Wilson Gonese

Serving as a minister in Newfoundland has helped me to appreciate the richness of rural ministry in my life. I served for six years in a small community of Burgeo on the Southwest coast of Newfoundland. Burgeo is a remote and isolated community with a population of +/- 1400 people and only two churches, United and Anglican. The community works together in times of celebrations and sorrow. The ministry was very fulfilling as people are there for each other in good and bad times. The people of Burgeo are very proud because of who they are and they have over the years preserved their deep faith and identity.

I served for three years in the community of Springdale which is located in Central Newfoundland. It has a population of +/- 3000 and there are seven denominations, namely, United, Anglican, Pentecostal, Salvation Army, Jehovah's Witness, United Pentecostal Church and the Main Street Community church. Each denomination wants to be different from the other and people work to respect each other as churches. The churches come together in times of funerals and special services like Remembrance Day service, Advent community service and Canada Day celebrations.

I am currently serving in the community of Carbonear which is located on Conception Bay North on the Avalon Peninsula on the east coast of Newfoundland. The population is +/- 5000 and there are five denominations, United, Roman Catholic, Open Doors, Anglican, Salvation Army, Baptist and Jehovah's Witness. People are very proud of their heritage and respect each other. The churches

hold community services during Lent services which are done in rotation between the United, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Salvation Army.

I have discovered is that even though the population is declining in rural communities, the most important dynamic is that people know each other and they are there for each other. They are determined to keep going and with pride, courage, and strength. They want to keep their identities alive and they do not want to see their churches die by any means. I would say even though rural ministry has its own challenges, it is a very fulfilling ministry and people are still very strong in their faith with dedication, commitment and enthusiasm. People need to be affirmed and supported on their journey of faith. Their dependence on God is very deep and I would say their motto is Psalm 23:1, *"The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want."*

We are reaching out in the following ways:

- leading services in the 3 neighbouring pastoral charge with no ministers because they can't afford to hire full time ministers.
- visitation to the shut in and sick in their homes.
- leading services every month in two retirement homes in town.
- visiting sick people in hospital, even some who do not belong to my pastoral charge.
- donating supporting the food bank very Sunday
- we just started an interdenominational youth group in October and its promising to be a success.
- reaching out to young families and others who are not regular church attendees.
- we started including Sunday School and their parents children in ushering, collecting offerings and they love doing it.
- weekly community Bible study.
- our church building is used for the community exercise group, brownies and girl guides at no charge.

The Many Faces of God

Re-membling our life-stories helps us better understand our spiritual journey ...

By Joyce Sasse

My first Christmas away from home was 1963, when I was sent as a delegate to a Student Theologs' Conference in Toronto. Remembering back, I recognize how the presentations at that Conference formed the bedrock on which my understanding of ministry rests.

Rev. Gwenyth Hubble, a Baptist Minister from England, was on her way home from a World Council of Churches meeting in Mexico City. The churches there were discussing "Missio Dei" – how the Mission of the Church was but one part of God's mission.

Instead of churches believing their job was to convert the whole world, they recognized the possibility that there might also be other ways people understand how a compassionate God can work to build a better world. Christians can learn from each other, from other World Faiths, and all of us can learn from those many label as "secular".

The second presenter was Fr. Gregory Baum. He had been raised by a Jewish mother and Protestant father, and was brought to Canada as a child refugee in WW II. Baum worked behind the scene at Vatican II in Rome. He brought the excitement of a reawakened Catholic Church. There the delegates stopped hiding behind liturgy and Latin. They heard God calling them to speak in the languages of the people, they considered engaging in dialogue with other Faiths ... and they let women listen in on their discussions.

Both presenters spoke of how faith-renewal begins at the edges of society. Christians can find God in surprising places.

This approach to ministry fit well with my own understanding honed in the little prairie community I called "home".

What a privilege for me to deepen my faith by learning from teenagers what "spiritual thinking" meant to them, and by encouraging non-church attenders to talk about their spiritual journey. Ranchers and farmers readily respond when I invite them to share thoughts about their encounters with God. A cooperative Ministerial Association in a community, I saw clearly, gives denominational leaders opportunity to work together while learning respect for each other's differences. Could God also be working through other World Faiths? Talking together is a good way to find out.

We are so privileged to be able to catch glimpses of some of the many faces of God.

CIRCLE M NEWS

Doctor of Ministry (DMin) Degree

The STU is accepting applications...

Are you currently in ministry and wanting to take your ministry further? Do you have a project you're interested in carrying out in your community? Are you looking for additional theological and theoretical foundations for your ministry? A Doctor of Ministry degree can help you respond to these questions!

The DMin Program at the Saskatoon Theological Union will be accepting applications to the program until **June 1, 2018**. (Our next intake will be in 2020).

The DMin program at the STU is a 3-year, in-community/in-ministry program that helps you engage with theological and theoretical foundations for qualitative research in your ministry or community. Together with a cohort of peers, you will engage in practical, reflective, engaged learning, in intensive and online courses. The courses provide the base to deepen your practice of ministry and to engage your ministry site and community in a project that will enhance their overall ministry.

For more information, please contact the Director, Rev. Dr. Jennifer Janzen-Ball at dmin.director@usask.ca or 306.966.8943. You can also find more information at www.standrews.ca and www.usask.ca/stu/luther

A Reflection on the DMin Program

Exploring what rural ministry is all about...

by Hati Mvundura

I invite you to close your eyes and listen to the sounds around you. In the silence I invite you to listen to the words of John the Baptist: "I'm not the Messiah, nor Elijah, neither a prophet but I am a voice of one calling in the wilderness." Listen to the sounds around you. Now you may open your eyes.

To me, the DMin project in the STU gave me an opportunity to close my eyes and listen. Through my listening I got to hear incredible professors with their voice of guidance. I learned to be more intercultural as I explored what rural ministry is all about. For rural ministry is about people from many places, backgrounds, languages, and cultures. It takes a different breed to do rural ministry with the long hours, the loneliness, the cold winters, and the warm summers. Through this program I learned more about myself, and more about God, and creation, and the essence of rural ministry. In the DMin program I got to explore and understand the nature of community as a sense of place, belonging and being.

The DMin community created for me a sense of place by articulating or by placing the Creator in rural ministry. With Jesus' crucifixion at the Place of the Skull, outside the city gate (Matt 27:33-43; Mk15; 22-32), there came a fundamental shift in the location of place and understanding: the centre (*centre is the temple's Holy of Holies*) was moved to the periphery (*Jewish religious requirement that all executions had to take place outside the city*). Jesus died in the rural country. The natural rural country became Holy ground as Jesus took upon the function of the temple as the High Priest (Heb 1:1-2:18). The sense of place was explained as humanity embodying the greater biotic and abiotic community.

The DMin gave me a sense of belonging in a strange place. The concept of belonging was transformed and clarified. No longer did I look at ministry in a rural northern community as backward, a place to escape from. No longer was I waiting out my time in a cold wilderness; my focus was now on commitment to a life of rural ministry, as well as a place to belong. I found joy in becoming one with the people of the community as I serve them. Jesus died to save all people who, then, are called to a life of ministry. This ministry is described by the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 13:12).

The DMin gave me a means of being in, and articulating rural ministry, in other words, a freedom to be what God created us to be: a kingdom of kings and priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6; 1Pet 2:9). My call to ministry is to take the message of God's salvation and redemption and freedom to those who live in rural areas that they might become all that God created them to be.

In closing, my heart is filled with so much gratitude to the DMin program and the STU. The Circle M, through its envisioning process, gave me a lens to look at rural ministry and appreciate its challenges in a new way through my project. Finally, I thank my professor, Lynn Caldwell. Words alone cannot express my gratitude for her kindness and sincerity.

Hati Mvundura is a current DMin student, who has completed his project report and will present it on January 25, 2018. He is currently in ministry in Hillcrest United Church, Fort Nelson, BC. With successful completion of his presentation, Hati will be eligible to graduate in May 2018 at the joint Saskatoon Theological Union convocation.

IRCA CONFERENCE

Come and See!

International Rural Church Association executive member reminds us of up-coming IRCA Conference in New Zealand (April 2018)...

By Catherine Christie, IRCA Executive

If you are a member of Facebook, you will know how nearly every morning Facebook lets you see something you have shared in the past, and invites you to share it again. Well, this morning, I was given to remember a picture of where I was a year ago today. I was with a group from Korea called *Korea Life Giving Agriculture*, and we were at an international *Life-Giving Agriculture Conference* in Thailand. This group is an ecumenical Christian group, many of them pastors who are also farmers, which is common in Asia as congregations or denominations cannot support ministry personnel.

They talk about sustainable agriculture, and sustainable rural communities. The conversation they have is familiar to me, because we speak the same way in IRCA and in CRCN. *Life-Giving Agriculture* is a little more 'hands on', if you will, because they are into the practice of 'agri-culture', in addition to 'rural culture'. But we share many of the aims of caring for the communities that nestle into the earth and people who work with hands and hearts together. Like IRCA, LGA is a network which offers its people support and prayer. As the IRCA goals state: "we seek to support one another in our mission of connecting the gospel and rural life in our own local context. We share our stories of struggle and our stories of hope, joined by our reliance on the land and sea for our livelihood and by determination and hope because of faith in the triune God."

Come and see! It is time for the quadrennial conference of IRCA. We have met in Durham, England, in Chennai, India, in Brantford, Canada, in Altenkirchen, Germany, and in Lilongwe, Malawi. We have really spread throughout the world, haven't we, and experienced many different rural communities. This time again we stay south of the equator, gathering in Christchurch, New Zealand, April 15-21, 2018.

The core of the conference will be a 'learning community' approach, with groups from each country considering what IS (what God is doing in their area), what COULD BE (the God-given vision) and what WILL BE (action plan to move towards this vision). We will also look at two themes relevant to the rural congregations in most countries: collaborative ministry (and New

Zealand is in the forefront of new approaches) and ways to bring reconciliation to divided communities.

The event will provide opportunities to share stories, take part in worship from different traditions, share resources and develop international partnerships. AND, I believe there will be live-streaming of some of the sessions, so we can share widely.

Come and see! Information to register is on the IRCA website, www.irca.online.

LINKS

1. Reaching Out Through a Blog

A weekly spiritual reflections blog called "Country Preacher's Notes"

By Joyce Sasse

Found online at <http://circle-m.ca/blog>

It can be delivered to your e-mail box if you let Joyce know your address. Email jsasse@telusplanet.net.



2. TIPS ON HOW TO LIVE WITH RESPECT IN CREATION

For thoughts, facts and practical suggestions for living sustainably...

By Angie Bugg

Visit:

<http://www.circle-m.ca/rural-issues/social-concerns/index.php#environment>.

