

# Delegate's Report

R. Alex Sim Rural Ministry Symposium

October 2010

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*Eric Skillings, chair of CRCN, reports on the Ontario Rural Symposium ...*

The R. Alex Sim Rural Ministry Symposium was held at Crieff Hills Community in Puslinch Ontario (near Guelph Ontario) on October 25 to 27, 2010. The 75 delegates represented Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, New York State, North Dakota, South Dakota and Pennsylvania. The three day Symposium is a time of learning and networking, and "a time apart". The accommodations and food at Crieff Hills were first class; much of the food is sourced within "100 miles", with several vegetables, spices and herbs fresh from Crieff's own garden.

The theme for this Symposium was "Therefore Choose Life". We have choices regarding our rural churches. "Our communities need our rural churches, as much as our rural churches need our communities". Choose to live ... abundantly.

Dr. Rene Van Acker from the University of Guelph, reminded us that even with the present market crop prices (quite good), increasing input costs, land costs, equipment and fuel costs, the risk margin has increased by 600% over the last 30 years. Gross income is higher, input costs have kept up, farm income has fallen as other costs rise – creating a vast risk factor for farmers.

Rene shared the statement, "Nature abhors a vacuum - where something does not grow - a weed will. In today's world, nature will take over where we are not doing a good job; such as continuous mono-agriculture and specialized livestock production. There are places for small, medium and large farms and farmers in Canada. We need each other to create 'Sustainable Agriculture'."

In fact, Rene suggests, according to recent news report, companies such as Wal Mart will require their suppliers to adhere to their new "Global Sustainable Agricultural Goals" (October 19, 2010 on PR Newswire). All farmers may be forced into sustainable agricultural production by their customers, such as Wal Mart.

Dr. Gil Waldkoenig, a director of the Town and Country Church Institute in Gettysburg Pennsylvania, suggests that rural churches can be leaders in working together with other rural churches and faith groups to build community, sustainable living and to declare collectively our faith with a new and clear voice.

Dr. Gil took us back to the first question God asked in the Bible. God asked Adam and Eve, on that first evening after eating the forbidden fruit, "Where are you"? Dr. Gil suggests that is the question churches should be asking ourselves versus that question we usually ask,

“Who are we”? “Where are you” immediately sets the response to include the church the community and everything in between. We as rural churches are part of the bigger community. To be sustainable we need to work together.

Kitchen table groups allowed for the participants to dig deeper into both presentation with practical and personal situations and interests. Add the four workshops that each participated in (out of a total of 16) and the Symposium was a fantastic learning and networking event. Oh yes, and maybe even “a time away”, although a busy time.

The annual meeting of the Canadian Rural Church Network met on Tuesday afternoon. We elected two new board members; Andrea Ahlers, Anglican (London Area) and Donna Mann, United (from the Mount Forest area). For more detailed information be sure to check out the Symposium website: [www.RuralSymposium.ca](http://www.RuralSymposium.ca). Click on “Resources”, then “2010 - Therefore Choose Life”. Hope to see many of you at the CiRCLe M Conference in the fall of 2011 in Alberta.

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