

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)