

An Alternative Model for Rural Ministry

The church is a living entity where death gives rise to new life...

New windows of insight often invite us to address old issues in new ways. This is what is happening in the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan (U.S.A.) where small congregations got caught in the survival mentality.

With the help of resource people from the Diocese, these congregations developed Ministry Support Teams. After some discussion, key team members invited others to actively participate in ministry, each according to their own gifts. Instead of “purchasing” ministry from the professional provider, the congregations were invited to become “ministering communities”. Their slogan: “Stop Attending Church, Start Being the Church”!

When a congregation agreed to try the model, a consultant was selected by the bishop (from among seminary professors and other resource people) who would have an on-going relationship with the congregation and help them move through the process.

Members participated in orientation sessions where they discerned their gifts and became equipped to fulfill their various functions (see www.upepiscopal.org).

NOTE: In CRCN Newsletter #3 David Webber (Caribou-Chilcotin Region, B.C.) made reference to the fact that “many small communities will not have an ordained minister leading them”. The change in organizational structure such as that noted above by the Episcopalians seems to fit in with what David (Presbyterian) refers to when he writes about having trained overseers (episcopes) who will help equip the laos to be preachers and teachers.