

How Did We Get This Far?

Interested persons gather for meetings of the IRCA (International Rural Church Association), now held every four years, at widely dispersed sites around the world ...

In the Eighties and Nineties, “rural” was considered by many to be inferior. This happened both in Canada and around the world. However, pockets of rural church folks were coming together to name the unique strengths found in the small churches and communities.

By the time millionaire J. Arthur Rank died in 1972 in England, he had established a trust that gave birth to a church-based Centre which works hand-in-glove with the *Royal Agricultural Society of England*. The work of the *Arthur Rank Centre* includes “leading the Christian Churches in working to improve the quality of life of those living in rural communities...”

The first *Trans-Tasman Conference* (Australia and New Zealand) was held in 1984 and has met every four years since. They worked with the *Arthur Rank Centre* (U.K.) and the *Rural Chaplains Association* (USA) to call together an international, multi-denominational gathering of folk who advocate on behalf of rural people.

The first *IRCA (International Rural Church Association)* conference was held in England in 1994, and has met every four years since – most recently in Brandon, Manitoba.

We are now preparing for the 2010 IRCA gathering in Germany in October.

These gatherings have given participants opportunities to share their stories, talk about the issues that they face, form wonderful networks of contacts around the world, and affirm the unique strengths small communities offer.

The *CRCN (Canadian Rural Church Network)* grew out of the 1998 international gathering, and now works with *CiRCLe-M (Centre for Rural Community Learning and Ministry)*, which is our Saskatoon based training program. We also keep closely connected with the Ontario based *R. Alex Sim Rural Ministry Symposium*.

www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk
www.irca.net.nz
www.ruralsymposium.ca

www.presbyterian.org.nz (Rural Network Newsletter)
www.canadianruralchurch.net

(notes gathered by Joyce Sasse)