

## The Survival of Rural Communities

*“Rural Decline and Resilience”* and *Spirituality and Sustainability*” are two papers Brother Andrew presented to a conference on rural ministry at Lloydminster, Alberta in October 2009. Brother Andrew is a UN Advisor on Food, Water and Sustainable Development. The full text of his lectures can be found at [www.circle-m.ca](http://www.circle-m.ca) (Conferences & Events).

### ***Against all Odds***

*Reflecting on the paper “Rural Decline and Resilience”*

The odds are that a lot of us live in rural communities that suffer from decline: often because of bigger farms, closure of industry, encroaching urbanization, or environmental degradation.

Brother Andrew drew on his long experience as a UN Advisor on Food, Water and Sustainable Development to tell an October 2009 conference on rural ministry that this is where the church can have a special leadership role.

Most churches in these small communities would have already closed their doors if they didn't possess generous quantities of resiliency. It is that resilient strength that they have to offer to struggling communities.

When a community feels hopeless, the church can bring hope. It is trusted by a cross section of the community and can draw a network of interested parties together. It may have the kind of leadership, or can draw on innovative resource persons, who will help the community talk through their situation. As Brother Andrew said, “The church can help trigger the resilience response.”

The gathered network of persons can name their assets, discuss needs and consider innovative ideas.

It is important to encourage the women to talk. Ask them how they would like their land to be used. Many women own land. Many also are farmers. Most want their land to be used for the good of the community, and in a sustainable manner. Their intent is to grow food for families (not for export). They recognize that food is a vital commodity, and with value added work, can be made economically viable. These women can offer fresh insights into how to envision a future for their community.

The church can encourage both economic and spiritual revitalization. Spiritual revitalization, as will be noted in the following reflection, can make a significant difference. Participants work with passion because they understand this is their home-place, and they bring to it, their home-based understandings.

*(Reflections by Joyce Sasse, January 2010)*