

The DMin in Rural Ministry and Community Development: Investing in Mission

The Doctor of Ministry (DMin) in Rural Ministry and Community Development is intended to equip your congregation with new tools that will build energy in the congregation and reduce reliance on financial assets as the only source of support for congregational life and mission. These are tools drawn particularly from community development (for example, appreciative inquiry, asset-mapping, Photovoice). They help congregations to see what God is already doing among their people and to imagine new ways of using the church's peculiar gifts of gospel and liturgy in a public way.

This degree has a particular, though not exclusive, focus on churches located outside of major metropolitan centres. The Saskatoon Theological Union began this degree, in partnership with CiRCLe M (the *Centre for Rural Community Leadership and Ministry*) because we know that churches have gifts that are absolutely essential to healthy communities, but are often under-mobilized: e.g. the gift of hope — that communities are loved by God (as Zion/Jerusalem is in the Bible) and God is greater than the economic and other forces that besiege our communities and their people. Churches offer the gifts of reconciliation, when historic prejudice or harm has divided communities. They offer the gift of lament and liturgy that help a community move through crisis to healing. And so on.

This DMin is not intended to remove your minister from his or her work, or to add a new layer onto the work. Rather it is intended to equip the minister to focus your congregation's energies in areas where you can be maximally effective in your mission. You — not the seminary or the minister alone — determine what that focus will be. The minister is responsible to teach you the tools that they learn so that together you can explore fresh expressions of ministry and community connection.

Your minister would be working with a team of folks you help identify who are interested in the well-being of your community and in identifying and mobilizing your congregation's special gifts. The minister will also work with a cohort of other ministers who take instructional courses together. Over a three year period they will support each other as each minister and local team develops a local project to enhance ministry and community well-being.

We would ask you to re-allocate your minister's time so that they are able to take three 5-day periods per year for two years for coursework (about equal to most clergy's continuing ed time). At least one of these courses will be done on-line and may be spread over a semester (but the same amount of hours). In addition to the course work there will be reading associated with each course (perhaps 20 hours) and some assignments — about 40 hours in total perhaps. We assume that this latter 40 hours will be drawn in part from regular time that your minister is using for reading and professional growth. And finally,

there will be a two-day orientation to the program and two other brief colloquia for cohort sharing during the three years.

Of course there will be costs associated with the degree — about \$10,200 over the whole three-year program, which includes course tuition, program fees and colloquia costs. There will also be costs associated with transportation and accommodation during the five 5-day residential courses.

There are substantial scholarships available from the Saskatoon Theological Schools, denominational continuing educational plans, and the provincial and federal governments' support for graduate programs. But if you are able to assist with any gaps or with costs related to accommodations and travel, that would be great. Remember that this is an investment that will bring fresh expressions of ministry to your congregation, new outreach and connections to your community, new skills for ministry to church members.

So it is worth saying again: This degree is not intended to be private learning but rather a cooperative strengthening of the ministry in your context. Your minister's responsibility is to share his/her work with you and the team that is working most closely with him/her. Together you will determine how to apply these learnings and tools to your own ministry, and together will venture to on a project that will vitalize your ministry.

Because this is graduate work some aspects of your ministry will be "cutting-edge"— work that other congregations haven't done in the same way or in your context. It is our hope that you will be a leading congregation willing to share the resulting experience and expertise with other churches in your region and denomination.