

ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Spring, 1985

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RURAL MINISTRY

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Every builder knows that a building's foundation must be solid or the structure will be subject to developing cracks, leaks, sticking doors and other forms of deterioration. The foundation of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod organization historically was rural America. The authors of the articles in these pages give evidence that rural America is still a substantial part of the LCMS foundation. Concordia Teachers College is pleased to present views and news concerning what can and is being done to use the opportunities in rural ministry that the Lord is giving us.

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editorials

SOME REQUIREMENTS AND REWARDS IN RURAL MINISTRY

"The small church cannot afford a specialist and is not primarily interested in measuring success based on program activity. The small church is built around the relationships of people to people. They want to know the pastor as a person first, only second are they interested in the pastor's skills . . . The small church wants a lover." (Carl S. Dudley, *Making The Small Church Effective*).

That's true of small church ministry. It is especially true of rural ministry. And it is true whether talking about the parish pastor's work or that of the Christian educator.

When it comes to ministry in the rural parish — education, worship, outreach, service or fellowship — the church worker *must* be able to relate well to people. However, that key characteristic for success in rural ministry is quite difficult to teach in the classroom. Yet, when it comes to placement of teachers, DCEs, or pastors, this characteristic ought to be considered highly when placing workers into rural ministry. This becomes a great challenge to our schools and seminaries.

Our church body has a significant number of rural congregations. For us, all too often, rural ministry has become a training ground for the "fresh out of school" graduate. Over the years the rural church has served the church at large well in this capacity. Whether it should be that way is a matter of debate. But nevertheless, it's an excellent way to enter ministry. I speak to that from experience. Rural ministry has a way of developing people to people relationships. We owe a debt of gratitude to hundreds of small, rural LC-MS parishes which because of their unique character emphasized, brought out, and developed in church workers the importance of people to people relationships.

Rural ministry needs to be lifted up in our church body. In its own way it has been the backbone of our church body. And it needs to be studied! Its unique characteristics need to be understood and communicated to present and future church workers. Why not some sort of elective on differences in ministry in the various types of churches?

Rural ministry is important — important not only because the LC-MS still has a significant number of rural churches, but also because data indicate we are in the midst of an urban to rural migration. From 1920 to the mid-1960s basic population migration was from rural to urban. Reversal began in the mid to late 1960s. Today the dominant migration pattern in

A FOREWORD

Concordia College, Seward, Nebraska, has been on occasions referred to as "the college in the cornfield." Students of Concordia have been referred to by some as "the friendly farmers of Seward."

It seems only fitting that Concordia in Seward be the synodical college to recognize the importance of rural ministry in North America. Concordia in Seward has been and continues to be located in a rural environment.

The Schumacher Institute for Rural Ministries is a welcome addition to the Concordia program. The need to emphasize and recognize the role of rural ministry in North America is readily accepted here on the campus.

In some respects rural ministry is becoming an endangered species. The number of rural congregations is decreasing. There have been some who have said that those who are willing to serve in rural ministries are also becoming an endangered species. There was a time in the history of our church when serving in a rural area was viewed by some as being less than desirable. It seems that those who have known the joys and rich rewards of serving in a rural ministry endeavored to keep it a secret.

This issue of *ISSUES* focuses on the topic of rural ministry in North America. The challenges and the realities are surfaced in various articles. May the reading of this issue reinforce your appreciation for rural ministries. Perhaps it will cause you to ask that your name be placed in consideration for a rural call. Maybe you are able to give a few words of encouragement to a prospective student and ask him or her to consider rural ministry.

However the articles may affect you, it is our hope that you will be given a little better understanding and a greater appreciation for the challenges and needs of rural ministry here in North America.

Erich E. Helge
Acting President

the U.S. and most of Canada is from urban to rural communities.

As a church body that has done well over the years in this type of ministry, the future looks bright for growth, church planting, and education among us if we look also to rural America for such growth and somehow train and place church workers who are committed to building ministry around people to people relationships. The challenge is before us.

Because of its uniqueness and size the rural church will continue to be warm, personal, intimate, steady, plain, simple, and caring. It will continue to be somewhat small because of the very nature ministry must take in order to survive and succeed in this important, growing, challenging, and most rewarding kind of setting.

David W. Hoover

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES

Every time a pastoral vacancy develops within our Iowa District East, I route to the elders and leaders of that congregation a one page survey form which I ask each of them to fill out and return to me. The form has as its basic purpose to determine those pastoral skills and characteristics — *most, somewhat, and least* needed by this congregation in their next called pastor.

There are 22 different pastoral qualities/skills listed for their consideration. In addition to this, space is also provided for any other comments which the respondents might wish to share. The instructions on the form indicate that no more than five to six of the 22 skills listed can fall into the *most* needed category. The rest must be placed into one of the lower priority categories. Once the forms have been returned, it is quite easy to prepare a composite picture of those pastoral skills, from most to least, needed by this parish as viewed by its church leaders.

As one prepares the final composite picture, invariably there are two characteristics that appear in the *most* needed category of our congregations, especially in the rural and small town parishes. I am happy to report that one of these is *faithfulness to the Scriptures*. It is good to know that our congregations and people still consider this as a top priority requirement on the part of those who will serve them in the Word.

But it is the second most needed characteristic which I would especially like to underscore in this short article. It is the pastoral characteristics of a pastor whose ministry is marked by a strong, ongoing calling on his people program. Despite

rumors to the contrary, congregations in midwest America do still want pastors who have as one of their high priorities a regular, planned, systematic calling on all members within the parish program. It should include calls on the active members as well as the weak, calls on the young as well as the old, and calls on prospects as well as members. Our people are not off base in making this request of their pastors. For where this does happen, congregational leaders know that their parish will grow, their people will become more active and involved, and even the brother pastor will experience more positive feelings concerning his own personal ministry. Sure, it takes work and effort. Sure, it is time consuming and even tiring. But in the end our church leaders know that the results are more than worth the effort. Thus they can list it as one of those high priorities which they would like to see in their next called pastor.

I would encourage our congregations not to lower their expectation level here of the brother pastor. I would equally encourage our brother pastors to give this area of their pastoral work a correspondingly high priority, for where this does happen, the end results cannot help but be good, healthy, positive. God bless!

A.L. Barry

IS THE SETTING THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE EDUCATION?

Editorialization on the merits of smallness and rural settings for educational ministry in the Midwest is akin to evaluating motherhood or apple pie — potentially helpful, but risky. Smallness and rural settings are givens where they occur, seldom questioned, rarely evaluated, loyally valued, but diverse in effectiveness.

Missouri Synod Lutheran congregations cherish and emphasize the common threads which tie them together, regardless of size or locale. As a Synod we walk together through the same church year. We share a common foundation in doctrine, common worship and Christian educational resources. These fundamental similarities are for the most part blessings, especially in a mobile society, but because of the similarities, congregations are more inclined to study and evaluate their Lutheranness, than their effectiveness in matching ministry and setting. Checking Lutheranness is not bad as a starting point, but it falls short of recognizing the many ways the setting for educational ministry affects the way ministry can and ought to be done.

Even as we walk together in Synod we're not the same in our setting, focus, or quality of educational ministry. Ministry is not effective or ineffective simply because it is urban or rural, small or large. Unique opportunities and problems in Christian education challenge congregations in every setting. The need is to recognize and plan strategies to deal with those challenges.

Potential advantages of small rural educational ministries are many. Jesus spent much of His ministry in such settings, as did many inspired Biblical writers. Scriptures are rich in farm lore and rural examples which are especially applicable even today to the lives of rural people. Life in small and rural educational settings is often slower paced and less pressurized than in urban settings, except perhaps during planting and harvest. People are more likely to get involved in smaller groups. It's harder to hide! Individual opportunities to assume and practice leadership are enhanced in small groups. Close relationships can develop naturally from repeated contacts. The same people are involved in a variety of community activities. Communications are usually less complex, and formal. It's easier to "reach out and touch someone" without using long distance.

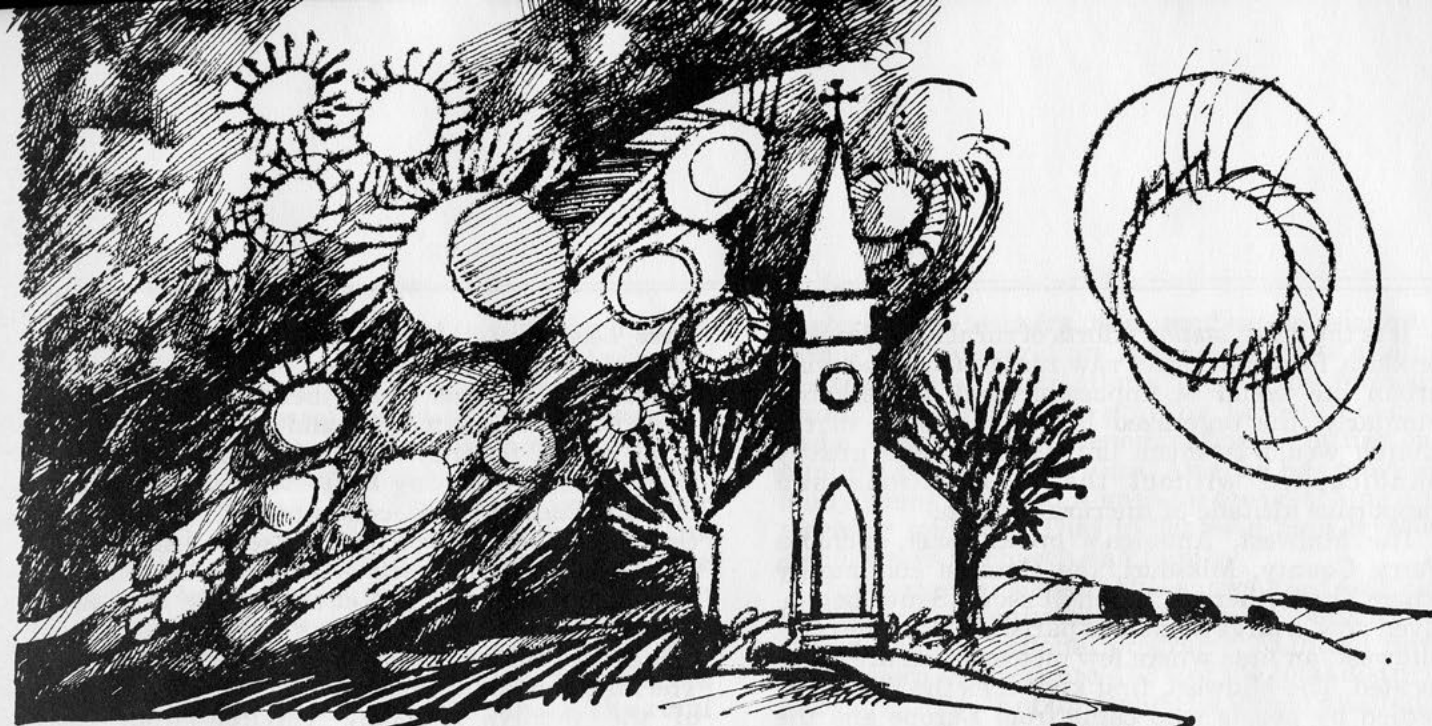
Of course, there are also potential disadvantages inherent in small rural settings for educational ministry. No bed of roses is without its accompanying thorns. Educational, human, media, print and program resources are usually less varied, available and accessible in small rural communities. This is especially true when farmers are hurting financially for any of several reasons. Educators must be generalists and sometimes assume leadership roles where talent and training are weak. Isolation may inhibit the influx of new ideas or the testing of limited viewpoints. Learning outcomes may therefore be diminished.

Which is better? Small or large? Rural or urban? Wrong questions! Effectiveness is not tied to size and locale, but it is a measure of how well congregations, schools, pastors, teachers and lay leaders match gifts with setting, how specifically they are trained to identify the strengths and weaknesses of setting, maximizing the former and minimizing the latter, and finally, how generously the body of God's people responds with their gifts to provide the human and fiscal resources needed for effective ministry.

Vital, vibrant, visionary Christian education can and does take place in small rural parishes, not as a given, but as a product in Spirit-led planning and implementation of Christian educational ministry.

Neil Sandfort

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The Value of Rural Parishes A PERSONAL VIEW

Eldor W. Meyer

When the early settlers came to America, they found a broad, rural land furnished with streams, mountains, prairies and a few native Americans. Soon towns and cities grew, and by mid-19th Century the industrial age was flourishing in the United States. Since then American society has directed a great deal of its attention to cities and urban centers.

During the last 140 years, people have moved toward urban centers. The United State Bureau of Census reports that the first fifty years of this century (1900-1950) saw the rural farm population decline from 35% of our nation's total to 16%. It is estimated that by the year 2000, 70-80% of the U.S. population will be living in urban centers.

A general perception among people is that urban life is glamorous and exciting. As the saying goes: "How can you keep them down on the farm after

they've seen gay Paree." Today, the depressed farm economy has also contributed to the movement of people toward urban centers. The number of farms is diminishing as farms get larger. Currently, the cost per unit increases and the profit per unit decreases in all areas of farm production — cattle, hogs, poultry, grain. And to imagine, less than 3% of the people in the United States are on-the-land farmers.

Even so, agriculture still plays a vital role in the total economy of the United States and the world. The U.S. is one of only a few nations which has abundant food and grain; and edibles stores in large quantities. Certainly, the most basic need in the world is food. As the world becomes increasingly urban it depends more and more upon agriculture for its existence. While the world looks upon urban life as glamorous and exciting — though ironically crime and overpopulation of cities grab people's attention

— it is the quiet, steady efforts of rural America that produce food and other raw materials. Otherwise, urban life would be impossible and unthinkable. Similarly, the organized life and mission of the church would be much impoverished and greatly handicapped without the contributions and supportive attitude of the rural church.

The Midwest, America's breadbasket, includes Perry County, Missouri, the German community where The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod began. Even now, a large number of parishes are in the rural midwest, an area where few metropolitan areas are located. The Midwest, first known as the West, was settled by people who came from Europe and the eastern seaboard. Here was much open prairie, swarming with buffalo, where native Americans claimed the land as their own. The Midwest was usually settled by a number of families who located in a particular area; when joined by other families and friends, communities grew. The people built churches to serve their spiritual needs and often Christian day schools to educate their children.

Characteristics of Rural Parishes and People

A rural parish is a congregation in which members have agriculture in common. The rural parish may be situated in the country, in a small town or in a city regardless of size. Rural parishes include people who own or operate farms, work in small town businesses whose customers are farmers, or agri-businesses which serve farmers or whose products are used by farmers and retired farmers. The rural parish is made up of families who live near each other, doing the same thing, only on a different farm, all having common interests, fears and joys related to agriculture.

Rural people are highly conscious of God's role in their lives. They live "close to nature." Hence, all kinds of weather are constantly on the farmer's mind. Unseasonable weather, drought or wet, can place the farmer in a position of having insufficient capital to maintain family and farm. Farmers know that they plant but God gives sprout, growth and harvest. Natural processes — weather and plant growth — encourage rural people to depend on God. Farmers trust God to provide seasonable weather for crops and pastures. Having no control over the weather, they regularly go to God in prayer, pleading for blessing so that their work may help to supply their families' needs.

Rural people do a lot of meditating on the job, thanking God for rain, sun, seasonable weather, and harvest, and recognizing that all depends on God. They are thankful for God's creative power, seeing God at work in producing crops and the reproductive process of their livestock.

Rural people are usually content with what they

have been given. If the harvest isn't what they wanted or expected, they say: "It could have been worse," or "We look to another year and God will provide." This attitude is understandable among rural people, for they observe God immediately at work in their everyday lives. Rural people bring a fervent thankfulness, contentment, and trust in God's providing power as they serve Him in their rural parish. The majority of the farms are still today a family operation. The entire family used to do chores together: one taking care of the calves; several doing the milking; others, chickens and the hogs. The farm is a family operation in which all members of the family, including children from early childhood through the teenage years, feel a strong sense of ownership because they are personally involved and responsibly committed.

Farm families have strong family ties, a sense of loyalty and sincere commitment to each other. Cooperation on the farm carries over into the rural parish family whose members work together in mission and ministry. It is easy to forget that we have taken the rural parish for granted and undervalue its impact on Synod. In The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod the rural parish sets the tone, the attitude, and values of the church and has made it what it is today. Lately, many rural parishes in the Midwest are celebrating centennials. Even after a century of existence, many members of the rural parish are direct descendants of their founding fathers. From generation to generation, the family ties remain intact and most importantly, their needs remain the same, but with a different intensity because of economic and scientific changes. A sense of loyalty and respect for family remains strong throughout rural generations.

The children of the rural parish attend school together, either a parochial school or a community school. The children, also, relate to agriculture and are thereby shaped accordingly. Interest in farming is evident in their discussions on the playground, on the gymnasium floor or in the locker room. The cohesiveness of a rural community, families in the rural parish family, shows itself most emphatically at funerals. Funerals in the rural parish touch the lives of all in that congregation since they are either related by blood or by agriculture. Funeral worship attendance sometimes surpasses that of Easter services. Weddings in the rural parish affect and become a joy for the entire congregation. Wedding receptions are occasions of community fellowship. Even the kegs and cases of beer at the receptions and "shivarees" can be church events which reach into and affect the community, giving marriage celebrations a positive, religious influence.

Sunday morning worship is the most regular occasion for fellowship by members who look

forward to going to church and to worshipping God and seeing their neighbors. The family feeling in the rural parish enhances worship attendance. It is common for the rural parish to have an average Sunday worship attendance of well over 50% of its members. The average worship attendance in the rural parish assists the Synod to have a better overall average Sunday worship attendance. The conversation before and after worship concerns planting, cultivating or harvesting, depending on the season of the year. On the journey home from worship a family in the car discusses what each member has heard, expressing concern for members of the family of faith, the rural parish. The rural parish serves as a place to meet family needs not only through worship but also through fellowship and the sharing of ideas. It is a gathering place for people in the country, in small or larger towns. The youth group, ladies aid, and the voters' assembly meetings, all offer additional opportunities for fellowship and joyful sharing of activities which relate to all because they are in the farming business.

Old fashioned mission festivals were grand opportunities for greater family fellowship, worship, and discussion. Guest preachers, one in the morning and another in the afternoon, attracted members from neighboring rural parishes. Dinner at noon and a large refreshment stand beside the church were conducive to *gemutlich* conversation, which centered on agriculture and the mission of the church.

The rural parish is other-centered. It is concerned about all congregational members and community members. If accidents, deaths or tragedies occur, the entire congregation rallies to assist a particular family through a crisis. If a father/husband dies, the neighbors and members of the congregation rally to assist that family. A caravan of tractors, combines and equipment is a natural scene when a tragedy happens to a farm family. They will together keep a family's farm operating for a year.

Rural parishes are closely related to their neighboring congregations. Often young men and women look to neighboring congregations for spouses because of the strong family relationship in their own parishes. There is a commitment to persons of the same faith and denomination. Finding impetus in agriculture, the ties that develop through intermarriage bind congregations in a given area together.

Rural Parishes Love God's Family

Rural parishes, strongly mission minded, have good, strong ties to the larger family of faith, the Synod. Concern about sharing the message of God's love in Christ beyond their community is highly important. The firm support for missions, training

pastors and teachers and sending missionaries throughout the world are primary interests of rural congregations. Their efforts helped the Missouri Synod to be the fastest growing Lutheran church and a mission-minded denomination for its first one hundred twenty years. Rural America has provided many young men and women for the preaching and teaching ministry. That indicates a high level of commitment to church and family.

This historical support still shows itself today in the financial contributions of rural parishes to Synod and for national programs. Eighteen rural midwestern districts are 47.3% of the total districts and provide 79.4% of the money for Synod's national programs. These same eighteen rural midwestern districts gave 63.7% of the contributions for Forward in Remembrance. The need of rural parishes to spend the Lord's dollars at home does not damage a commitment to share the Gospel of Christ with people everywhere. The rural parish enhances the concept of synod, a walking together. Farmers have had and still have today a strong and firm commitment to each other. Members of the rural parish are committed to walking together.

Rural Parishioners Work Together

Members of the rural parish embrace a work ethic. Working from early to late, they identify with the Scriptural maxim: "If any would not work, neither should he eat." They frown on being lazy. Indeed, industry, particularly agri-business, continues to move into rural areas because good hard workers are available for less money than urban laborers demand. Labor unions are not especially appreciated in the Midwest because farmers and other agri-business people prefer to give efforts which best benefit the total community.

Year after year, farmers have a habit of digging in their heels, hanging tough and getting the job done. Their tenacity is apparent in the life and activity of the rural parish. When a special project exists in the parish — a new roof for the church, an addition to the education unit — they dig in, get it done, and pay for it in quick order. Taken together, hard workers in the local church make a large impact on the total church.

The rural parish is filled with good people who have a genuine concern and love for others. Because God first loved them in Christ, they try to "love their neighbors as they love themselves." Their commitment to a family of faith assists them in being neighbor to each other. Pastors who have served rural parishes and then move to city congregations discover a different definition of "neighbor" and "family" in the city. Many of these pastors make requests to come back to the rural parish within a few years.

Farm technology has greatly affected the rural

Can you teach the Word efficiently to so few?

by Keith Jopp

parish and agricultural economics. The size of the farms used to be 80 acres, 160 acres, and a half section was a large operation. Today a section of land is a small operation and 2,000 acres is common. But the farms are still family oriented. Farmers often try to keep at least one son on the farm, thus maintaining the family interest. Farming has become an enormous investment of easily a million dollars and more. Operating capital can be several hundred thousand dollars per year.

One challenge of the rural parish is reaching out into the community, and into neighboring small towns which have few churches. Approximately 40% of the rural midwest is unchurched. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, (congregational, district and Synodical resources) is challenged to maintain and develop the magnificent heritage of the rural church, a force for God in Jesus Christ which has made ours a dynamic church. The rural parish today still has those excellent values — family life, mission minds, others orientated — which lift us up to reach out, serve our neighbors, and give a positive witness of our faith to the world.

Dr. Eldor W. Meyer, President of the rural Nebraska District, gives his observation on the present and past value of the rural parish in this article. His experiential background is centered in rural America.

He was born and raised on the farm in Oklahoma. He has an Agricultural Engineering Degree from Oklahoma State University. He and his wife, Edna, farmed the first six years of their married life. He served as chairman of a small rural congregation and on the finance and building committees. He served as an assistant cashier in a small town bank making loans to farmers prior to entering Concordia Theological Seminary at Springfield, Illinois. He served a rural triple parish in southern Minnesota upon graduation from the Seminary in 1964. He was campus pastor at Kearney State College, Kearney, Nebraska where 97% of the student population was from rural Nebraska. He was Senior Pastor and Director of Ministries for Trinity Lutheran Church, Grand Island, Nebraska, a large parish whose membership is basically related to agriculture.

He is still interested and involved in farming and spends a part of his vacations driving the tractor and combine on the family farm, which his daughter and son-in-law are farming. He travels rural Nebraska, rubbing shoulders with farmers at pre-call meetings, district programs and various celebrations. He has a special appreciation for the rural parish as this relates to his entire life and present ministry.

In the decades of the 70s and 80s the concept that quantity equates with quality has been popular. This myth has been prevalent in the ministry of the church as well. The major focus of this article is designed to share with you the fact that even small numbers of people can be taught effectively in a parish program.

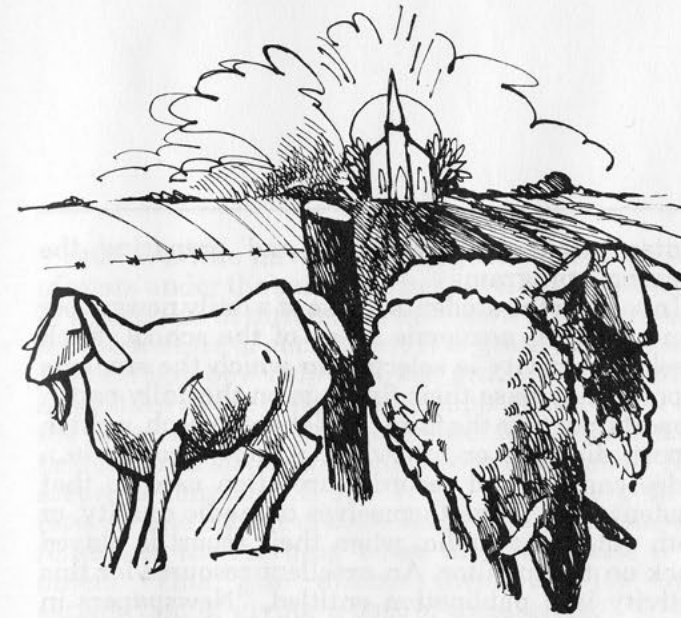
One-half of the schools of the Missouri Synod use multigrade classroom settings. Many of the parish's other educational programs involve a small number of people and yet provide an effective ministry. Often professional church workers are striving to seek positions in larger parishes only because their present ministry is in a small school or church. Such actions should prompt us to evaluate and focus on the strengths and advantages of being small.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Cheney, Kansas has celebrated a century of blessings this past year. As the years progressed, various educational dimensions were added to facilitate the needs of the members of the parish. These included a Christian day school, a high school youth organization, a Sunday School, a Vacation Bible School and a nursery school.

How St. Paul's congregation has maintained and enabled these ministries to flourish and become more effective will be the focus of this article. A major thrust will deal with the day school and the challenges and rewards of such a ministry. There are also several factors in a parish's educational program that play a vital role in its success which will be reviewed in the course of their presentation.

A Team Ministry

The professional staff of the congregation consists of specially called people. The pastor and his support staff have many specific roles and functions to perform. Their primary goal is to equip the saints for service to their Lord, be they young or old. It is essential that they support one another in their roles. St. Paul's has been richly blessed with pastors and



teachers who have been able to work together effectively. Although the professional staff consists of only three people, we have found it very helpful and beneficial to meet weekly for staff devotions. This gives us an opportunity to pray for each other and share the joys and concerns of our ministry. This is done on Monday morning before the start of the school day. It enables us to communicate plans and our direction for the week ahead. We have found this to be time wisely spent. A harmoniously working staff will find it easier to engage the laity in an effective ministry.

An Effective Laity

For the various educational agencies of a small parish to be effective, the congregation must have a core of well-trained lay people who are not only supportive but also actively involved in the various aspects of the church's education programs.

The people of the parish must be committed to the stated goals and purposes of Christian education. It is important that parishioners know and understand what the goals are. These goals need to be periodically presented and reviewed by the congregation. The Lord has richly blessed our church with people whose talents and gifts are varied but often latent. Often times members of the professional staff can recognize these gifts. Many lay people are reluctant to recognize their gifts, but encouragement will help some of these people to blossom and to utilize their gifts to their fullest potential. A real sense of joy and satisfaction can occur, and the Christians often experience a fulfillment of purpose they never before realized possible. A motivated laity can develop a church on the move.

One area in which lay people play a vital role at St. Paul's includes the Board of Parish Education, formerly called "The School Board." Emphasis is now placed on the fact that their duties and responsibilities encompass all educational programs of the church. This group meets monthly, reviews the

progress of each agency and acts on recommendations that may be made. Its members fill an important position of service in the church, and having people on the BPE who are dedicated to the goals and purposes of the parish education program is essential. We utilize lay people as youth and adult Sunday school superintendents, Sunday school teachers, V.B.S. director, teaching staff of the V.B.S., midweek classes teachers, choir director and pre-school director.

Involving parents in many of the decision making processes is important because they have a sense of direct responsibility for the operation and success of a program. Small parishes should have a higher percentage of people involved because of the smaller number of people available to do the work.

The Day School

This congregation has maintained a Christian day school for 90 years. Through the first half century it was a one-room school. Since that time a two-room structured has been maintained. The school building was constructed in 1954. It was at that time that the congregation made the decision to locate in the city of Cheney, a town of 1200 people, located 25 miles west of Wichita, Kansas. In 1962 a new sanctuary was also constructed next to the school. The property consists of one city block. This foresight on the part of our church fathers has given us adequate room with which to operate.

The school has consistently maintained an enrollment of 25-30 students, most of whom are members of the congregation. A school of this size provides the staff with some unique opportunities in the area of education. There are several factors that have emerged which appear to be strengths of such an educational setting.

A Family of God Atmosphere

Because of its numbers, the students and faculty of such a school may be thought of as a family. As in any Christian family, worship, service, fellowship and learning are centered around the Lord. These four activities are not separated program segments but emerge throughout the day.

In the words, "With the Lord begin thy task," we find direction for the start of a new day. Classroom devotions are held four days a week. These are conducted by faculty and students and often reflect the season of the church year or topics that are being discussed in a religion class. On Wednesday of each week a chapel service is held in the church sanctuary.

These services are conducted by the pastor or faculty members. An offering is collected and sent to the mission project selected by the students. A different mission project is selected each month. Many times

materials are available from the selected project directors that enable the students to see what effects their offerings have.

At the present time the "Eternal Word" curriculum is being utilized four days a week. The students are grouped by ability in the area of religious instruction. Four groups are maintained. On the day that the chapel service is held, two religion groups are taught. It is at this time that a variety of materials are used. These may be based on the church year or other special occasions. Materials that have been utilized include a wide variety of Bible quiz games, Bible stories, an adaptation of a TV quiz program using Biblical facts and witness workshop material which gives the Biblical basis for witnessing as well as practical everyday situations to use for practice.

"Resources For Youth Ministry" has been a source of many activities. This past year St. Paul's has been involved in a "Church Growth" program. An important part of this program is called the "Master's Plan." Participants are trained to deal with individuals who are now non-Christians. Upper elementary students have been very receptive to this program and have enthusiastically begun work with their extended family.

Because of the small class size, attention can be given to individual differences. In some academic areas, such as the social sciences, science, art, music, spelling, physical education and our Wednesday religion lesson, the entire class is involved in the presentation or activities. It is then that a variety of activities are given to individuals or small groups for further study.

Projects Individualize Instruction

There are a number of group activities that address a wide variety of academic disciplines. Highlighting a country of the world for a period of time enables children to read literature, observe art, sing songs, prepare and eat food, practice various customs, study religion, wear clothing that is characteristic of the people and view other unique areas of interest found in the culture being studied. Often times this has given parents or people of the community the opportunity to become involved in the activities because of their ancestral background.

A family highlight of the school year occurs at Thanksgiving. An evening of feasting and entertainment is presented by the children for their parents. A meal of turkey, potatoes, home made bread, butter and jelly, plus cranberries, vegetables and pumpkin pie are prepared by the children. A mother volunteer helps each group of children prepare one of the courses of the meal. This activity takes place the three days prior to Thanksgiving. Meanwhile children, when not involved in preparation of the meal, are dipping candles, making

center pieces for the tables and preparing the evening's program.

Involving the students in use of a daily newspaper can touch all academic areas of the school. Each week an activity is selected on which the students report. They base their findings on the daily paper. Reports can take the form of a debate, speech, written report, dialogue or interview. A tape recorder or a video camera and recorder are often used so that students can judge themselves on audio quality, or both video and audio, when their report is played back on the monitor. An excellent resource for this activity is a publication entitled, "Newspapers in Education," published by the Lutheran Education Association.

In an attempt to enhance student's vocabulary, each child is assigned to post a word and definition from a selected area of study on a special bulletin board. This exercise can be correlated with any academic area.

An activity that is awaited with eager anticipation each year is what is called "Environmental Studies." It is during this time that our classroom setting moves from the brick and mortar building to a more natural setting in a heavily wooded area on the banks of the Ninescah River. Two or three days and nights are spent in the area. Preparations begin well in advance. Students select one of three committees on which they will serve. One group is responsible for acquiring all the equipment necessary. Another group purchases the food, plans and cooks the meals. The remaining group works on devotional and educational activities. A wealth of materials and activities are available from our state department of education. Doing this for the past 15 years has provided a wealth of unique experiences. An opportunity to study God's world in a natural setting is an experience that students long remember.

Grouping

Being in a setting with students who have a wide range of mental capabilities as well as emotional maturities, teachers have an opportunity to personalize education. Placing students in a group where their capabilities are allowed to function in such a way that they experience success motivates their work toward achieving their potential. Students move from one level to another without the grade stigma attached. This type of grouping can be rather easily accomplished. Because of the heterogeneous grouping students learn and review concepts as they are presented to other groups in the classroom even though they may not be directly involved in the activity. Students also assume more responsibility in the daily activities of the school. This increases their opportunities to develop leadership abilities.

Students who have worked together over a period of years under the same teacher develop a keen sense of awareness of differences and show a real concern for the welfare of each other. It is gratifying to see a junior high boy help a lower grade student with academics in the classroom or support him or her on the playground. As a result respect for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ becomes a reality. The students function in two roles. They are both a receiver and a giver of knowledge. The giving aspect reinforces the learning when they articulate it to others. This also affords them the joy and satisfaction of giving a part of themselves.

Grading

A number of years ago the system of reporting to parents was evaluated and it was found that addressing individual differences was one of its glaring weaknesses. A system was adopted which calls for parents to visit the teacher three times a year in a formal conference. The student is evaluated with written and verbal comments in three areas: attitude, effort and achievement. No letter grades are given. The report shares with parents the work done and other accomplishments of the child. Shortcomings of the students are noted, but it is important to highlight the positive aspects of a child's academic, social and physical achievements. Beginning with prayer sets a tone for each conference in which positive, constructive communication can take place.

Scheduling

Often times one of the initial questions asked by student teachers as they arrive for their teaching experience is "What is your schedule, or how does one develop a schedule for so many groups?" Working with a small number of faculty members and students allows for a great deal of flexibility. Plans for the day's activities are outlined; but the amount of time devoted to each, and when they are to occur, usually can be easily adjusted. Communication between teachers, the pastor who teaches confirmation, and the parents and students is important.

For example, a student may have an appointment some time during the day for medical reasons. Although this is discouraged, at times it cannot be avoided. Prior notice of the student's absence will allow the teacher to adjust the time the lessons that that individual is involved with will be taught so the student can be present for them. Experience and a willingness to be flexible are important aspects of successful scheduling.

Extra Curricular Activities

Despite the fact that the school is small in numbers

of students, children are exposed to a number of cultural and physical activities that enhance the learning and growth process. All students of the school are involved in a choir. It is utilized at the church as part of worship services and it sings at the local Golden Age Home and the community retirement center. Several students are involved in instrumental music and are afforded the opportunity to perform at church and civic functions. Field trips that may complement an area being studied are easily arranged. These may involve the entire school or just a portion of the student body.

Athletic competition includes softball, soccer, basketball and track. St. Paul's is a part of an athletic league which includes other small parochial and public schools.

St. John's College of Winfield annually provides the students opportunities to display art and written work, hosts a spelling bee, and is the setting for musical presentations and track activities that are in competition with other schools in the spring of each year.

Teaching in a small school allows the faculty to become closely involved in and keenly aware of the progress of a child over a long period of time. In most cases a friendship and trust develops that carries on long past their years of formal education. Working with children over a period of many years on the strengths and weaknesses of each individual enables the teacher to do long range planning of activities that will accommodate and utilize a student's strengths and that will help overcome weaknesses.

The small size of the school encourages a greater amount of parent-teacher-child interaction. Parents, children and teachers have the opportunity to become better acquainted. The teachers and the pastor of the congregation get to know each child and family in the school and to develop a personal concern for the spiritual welfare of each. This frequent and personal contact helps enhance the family concept. A teacher in a Lutheran school has a unique opportunity not only to play an important role in the development of a child in relationship to himself and those with whom he or she may interact for the rest of their lives, but he or she also has the opportunity to work closely with parents in providing for spiritual growth. This can be a most rewarding and fulfilling experience.

An active Parent Teacher League helps to maintain the lines of communication between home and school. Matters concerning the role of the Christian parent are discussed at meetings. A variety of fund raising activities are conducted which enable parents and children to work together. These funds are then used to purchase educational materials for the school.

The Sunday School Program

The Sunday school program plays an important role in educating and training the laity of St. Paul's. A program is offered for people of all ages. In our children's program, ages three years through the eighth grade, each class consists of two grade levels. A special education class is offered not only for members of the congregation but also for others in the community who may be interested. Monthly meetings are conducted for the teaching staff. These meetings consist of Bible study, a presentation of teaching techniques and a discussion of the current program. "The New Life in Christ" material is currently being used.

An extremely important group to minister to through a Sunday school program is the high school youth. Statistics show that this is the period of time when the church begins to experience a high dropout rate on the part of these young folks. Contact with the church must be maintained. A strong youth Sunday school program and youth organization can help them, together with their peers, develop a sense of belonging and can encourage active participation in the church. A wide variety of materials are used in this program. Resources from "For Youth Ministries," as well as Augsburg and Concordia materials are used. There is a strong correlation between those youth who continue their activity through high school and those who continue on in the church as adults.

This past year St. Paul's embarked upon a Church Growth program. As an initial step in this program a great deal of statistical data was to be gathered concerning age and participation of the members of the parish in the programs offered. It was soon evident that in many cases this task was nearly impossible because of incomplete record keeping. Careful analysis of the church's programs revealed that only a small percentage of the adult population was being reached. As a result four new adult Sunday morning classes have been started.

It has been found that once a group reaches a certain number of participants, that group will no longer grow. It is then that a new group must be formed to involve new people. The Crossways Bible Study program is now being conducted on Wednesday evenings. In order that the church be truly effective in its mission, its laity must be involved in a study of the Word. St. Paul's has established some ambitious goals to help its people become more deeply involved in a study of God's Word.

Often times adults who have grown up in the church and have been involved in the day school or Sunday school program feel that they have no further need for Christian education; it ended with confirmation. St. Paul's is putting forth an extra effort to emphasize the fact that education and

growth is a life-long process.

Several years ago it was noted that attendance at Sunday school during the summer months dramatically declined. The board of education, Sunday school superintendent plus the professional staff developed a program for summer Sunday school which has had positive results.

The children age three through sixth grade are divided into three groups. The curriculum consist of topical subjects brought together from a variety of resources. Teachers other than those involved throughout the rest of the year are used. The remainder of the Sunday school participants, junior high through adults, are also put into one group. Thirteen topics are selected, one for each Sunday of the summer quarter. Some of the topics that have been considered are: "The Christian Home," "The Church Year," "A Study of Liturgy," "Dealing with Grief," "Church and Government," and "Our Church as Seen Through the Eyes of a Visitor." Each year new topics are selected. These topics are posted in the church vestibule. Families are asked to select and lead a topic for a given Sunday. All family members are encouraged to be involved in their selected topic presentation. This approach creates renewed interest in summer Sunday school and provides the regular teaching staff a refreshing break.

The Vacation Bible School

The V.B.S. program is conducted shortly after the regular school year. Plans begin during the month of January. A lay person is engaged to serve as superintendent. This is an important position and great care should be used to select an individual who works well with people and enthusiastically supports the goals of the program. Departmentalization has proven to be an effective means of utilizing the various gifts of the teaching staff. Promotion through the church and public media are important means for reaching prospective students, but the most effective means of outreach is found in peer contacts. This is encouraged on the part of the children in the congregation. Another important activity in Vacation Bible School is accurate record keeping so that follow-up can be made into the homes shortly after the program is completed. Good records are essential in other educational programs too.

Conclusion

The decade of the 80s is presenting some interesting and exciting challenges in Christian education. Many parish programs have passed the century mark. Their purpose for existence basically has focused on inward maintenance or nurturing those who belong to the Lutheran Church. Outreach

(Continued on page 20)

book reviews

AMERICA'S COUNTRY SCHOOLS by Andrew Gulliford. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1984.

The roots of the American system of public education are intricately intertwined with the history of the nation's country schools. Andrew Gulliford, who personally taught in the one-room schools of mid-America, recognized that these institutions were rapidly vanishing from the American scene. With a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and an investment of several years of his life, he assembled a comprehensive treatise. It is scholarly in its intent but presented in a popular style which makes the book a delightful basis for leisurely reading by the inquisitive amateur or the professional educator. The large number of photographs drawn from the National Archives, various state historical societies and personal collections makes the volume highly suitable for casual browsing as well as more intensive reading.

Gulliford's book may have special appeal for those persons who have never experienced the one-room country schools. It will also be read with some nostalgia by those whose lives were significantly shaped by these modest attempts to confront the young with realities which lay beyond their immediate horizons. The point is well taken that some of the priorities found in the very basic curricula of these somewhat austere agencies of education are once again brought into focus in recent reports such as "A Nation at Risk." Is it possible that with the inordinate expansion of the school curriculum some of the basics have been diluted? The author invites the reader to explore that thought further.

A somewhat unique feature of this volume is the emphasis on the architecture of country schools of rural America. The many photographs and detailed floor plans suggest that, as the programs of the country schools developed, local styles of architecture gave way to the standard school design.

Because The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod traces its roots to rural America and has historically followed a commitment to offer Christian education through its system of schools, those who wish to understand the development of its rural ministry will find much that is of relevance in this volume.

Those readers who have been familiar with Lutheran parochial schools in

locations called Elk Creek, Kiowa, North Friedensau, Green Gardens or Middle Creek will recognize the extent to which the contemporary system of church schools shares a past with America's country schools.

Where should this book be located? Libraries of colleges with teacher training programs should list it among their holdings. Local libraries in the small cities and towns should find readers eager to identify with its contents. Retired teachers will prize it as a possession in their private libraries. Those who wish to understand the church's rural ministry will find that it serves as a useful resource that conveys the strong spirit of independence which is still so characteristic of those rural families residing in middle America.

Lee Holtzen

RURAL EMPLOYMENT: TRENDS, OPTIONS, CHOICES by Ian Hodge and Martin Whitby. New York: Methuen, 1983.

This book was edited by an Australian and an Englishman. Hodge is Lecturer in the Department of Agriculture, University of Queensland, and Whitby is Reader in Rural Resource Development, University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. But much of what they write is certainly applicable to our agricultural problems in the states as well as Britain, Australia and other industrial countries of the world.

The main thesis of this book is that rural labor markets are at the core of rural depopulation in developed countries. Urban migration in search of work has been a major cause of rural decline, of course. But this, in turn, is decidedly related to the success or failure of policies seeking to moderate the process of decline and the policy maker's ability to influence labor markets constructively.

Even though recent demographic trends show signs of some recovery in rural areas, significant problems remain. The emergence of socially viable communities is, according to the authors, the highest aim in rural economic policy making. They argue that while economic viability is usually a necessary condition for social survival, it is by no means the only sufficient condition. It renews the old Marxian-Weberian

argument wherein Weber agreed that while the economic dimension was a significant factor in measuring the stratified health of a society, it was not the only variable and in that sense, not necessarily an independent but rather a dependent variable. To put it simply, wealth does not always assure one of control. Without proper social and political balance, economics can crumble.

The book is divided into three major sections: problems and policies in rural development; the actual and potential factors related to rural employment and the need for assessment; planning and implementation in the creation of rural employment. Pertinent areas considered include agriculture per se, forestry, recreation and tourism, rural industrialization, the service sector, and a regional approach to employment planning.

The book brings together a number of separate applied disciplines to focus on the problems of choosing appropriate policies for rural areas, but the main disciplinary roots remain those of the applied economist. Because of this orientation the authors have occasionally been somewhat critical of the pronouncements of planners and politicians, whether in local or central governments in the United Kingdom or state and federal governments in the United States and in Australia.

They also take issue, and I believe rightly so, with the on-going definitions of "rural" in the various countries. How is it possible in our own country to continue to think of "rural" as being 2500 or less in population, a figure established by the census bureau to serve a nation of a century or more ago? They would rather define "rural" in more continuous variables such as average population density, occupational structure or the dominant form of land use.

The authors contend upon the basis of their research and related experiences, that the prospects for communities which are not too remote and are attractive environments appear to be good. Such locations stand to benefit from immigrations of retired people and recreationalists, whose presence should stimulate employment in a variety of service activities. They should also attract footloose service activities. The authors point up that areas without these advantages would probably face continuing decline in the absence of governmental intervention and support. Intervention, however, must be carefully thought through and planned.

The authors firmly contend that such viability can become reality only if the labor market is used as the medium through which policies are transmitted. They conclude that attempts to retain viable economies in rural areas which ignore labor markets are unlikely to succeed.

E. George Becker

How colleges & seminaries should educate for rural ministry

by Alvin Bruenger

When I first took on the assignment of writing this article I did two things. One, I wrote to many of the colleges and seminaries of our church body to attempt to discover what they were doing to prepare students for rural ministry. From the replies I received, I think it is safe to say that very little is being done to prepare students specifically for rural ministry. I did receive one comment that indicated that it was the task of that particular school to prepare students for ministry in general and that they did not have time or resources to prepare them for every specific type of ministry that they might enter. Some schools do offer students the option of specialized study in specific areas of ministry, and maybe there is the opportunity for attending a workshop or seminar on rural ministry that is held on campus.

The second thing I did was to ask questions of colleagues in rural ministry as to what they thought our colleges and seminaries could be doing to prepare students for rural ministries. My sampling consisted primarily of pastors who have been in the ministry



for a number of years, and who have chosen to be in rural ministry at this point in their careers. Almost universally I heard one answer coming back, "Attitude!" By attitude was meant a viewpoint that would see the rural ministry not just as a beginning point or as a stepping stone to the "real" ministry in urban or suburban areas; but as worthwhile and honorable ministry to which to dedicate one's entire life.

Develop Positive Attitudes Toward Rural Ministry

How do you teach attitude? The answers I got to that question usually came out, "I'm not sure," or "I don't know." The attitude toward rural ministry is a problem that is very much built into the thinking of our society and of the church. A source of amusement to me has to do with the fact that a few years ago I was pastor of a larger congregation in an urban, primarily Lutheran community. At the same time my brother was pastor in a rural dual parish not far from me. When we were together at gatherings, it seemed that my opinion carried more weight and was sought after more. Now our roles are reversed. He is serving a large parish in a large metropolitan area; I am serving a smaller parish in a rural small town. Neither one of us has changed drastically as a person, or as a pastor, yet now his opinion seems to carry more weight than mine.

How can schools do anything to change attitudes that are so deeply ingrained in the church and our society? Back in the late fifties, when I was a student in the seminary, the glamour ministry was the inner city, and the issue of the day was the question of integration of the church. As a student body we sought out field experiences in the inner city; we took electives on "The Urban Church." I don't know anyone in our class who took the elective offered on "The Rural Church," though someone must have, but we got involved in interracial groups. Many of us had little or no previous experience with the inner city and maybe part of its appeal to us was that it was like exploring a new world; but I think the real reason for its appeal was that we had teachers who were vitally interested in it, who were personally involved in it as volunteers, and who shared their excitement about it with their students. Maybe it is too drastic to expect that the rural ministry and the plight of the American family farm can become the glamour ministry and issue of the eighties; but it would help if we had teachers who were interested, involved with, and excited about rural ministries.

Provide Field Experiences in Rural Settings

Another thing that would be helpful would be if the schools could provide students with training experiences in rural settings. I have a feeling that my

family's experience is fairly typical. My field work was done in a large city congregation, my vicarage was at a predominantly white collar congregation in one of our country's larger metropolitan areas, but my first call was to a dual parish in rural Nebraska. My wife did her student teaching at a large Lutheran school in St. Louis; her first placement was in a two-room rural school also in Nebraska. In neither case did the training experience we received prepare us for the positions in which we found ourselves.

Realizing that most rural churches do not have the resources to afford an intern, vicar, or student teacher, what are some alternatives? Large rural congregations with multiple staff, or large Lutheran schools do exist, but are probably more similar to large urban congregations than to the average small rural congregation. One alternative is to have the colleges and seminaries subsidize such experiences. Given the financial problems of most private colleges in our country today, that doesn't seem viable. Possibly the field work or voluntary training experiences of the schools could be structured to have at least some exposure to what is going on in rural congregations and with rural families. I personally think that some kind of opportunity to visit rural homes, not to deliver some kind of presentation to the people on behalf of the college, but to share the experience of their lifestyle and to learn what concerns them would be helpful. I also think it would be both possible and helpful for each student in training to be a part of some meetings in a small church (even if it is not rural) to get some exposure to the dynamics of how a small church operates. Beyond this I am convinced that the best thing that our colleges and seminaries can do to prepare students for rural ministry is to prepare them for ministry in any setting.

Teach Ministers How to Succeed in Many Settings

What do I mean by this? I suppose that to begin with it goes back to the whole matter of attitude. As ministers (I am using the term in a broad sense, including pastors, teachers, DCEs, whatever) we are called by our Lord to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12). We can do that any place there are saints. The saints are those who have been called, gathered, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. I know nothing in Scripture that would classify them in different categories as to whether they live in urban or rural settings. I would like to have a consistent message presented to the students of our schools that says, "It doesn't really matter where you live; it is the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is important."

Christ has given to His saints the great commission to "make disciples of all nations." That

can be done any place there are people who are not yet disciples, and if you can believe the statistics that have been gathered on the number of unchurched in various communities, there is plenty of opportunity for that in rural areas. The challenge of accomplishing that goal, while it may be different from one area to another, is no greater or less in one area than another.

Many rural congregations suffer from a rapid turnover of ministers who came there by assignment, not by choice, and who would rather be somewhere else, who then leave at the earliest opportunity for "greener pastures." They become congregations that are experts in hosting welcoming and farewell receptions, but who are not growing in the real work of the ministry. I don't blame our colleges and seminaries for this situation, but I think a conscious effort is needed on their part to get across the message that, unless you have a health problem, every climate has its advantages and disadvantages and can be enjoyed as a part of God's good creation, and that the density of the population does not determine whether or not a place is a "good place" to live and work. In other words, it is what we have to do, and not where we do it that gives value to our ministry.

Another thing that I think would be helpful would be to teach students not to assume too much about situations they will encounter in any given congregation. It can come as quite a shock to someone to learn that the congregation of "dumb farmers" they are serving may contain a higher percentage of college graduates than does that blue collar congregation served by their colleagues in urban settings. The fact that people have chosen a rural lifestyle does not mean that they are dull, unformed, inexperienced, or unsophisticated any more than the fact that one lives in a city means that a person knows what is going on in the world.

Lyle Schaller likes to emphasize that every congregation is different. He also makes a point that in categorizing congregations' differences, such things as the size of the congregation and the age of the congregation are much more significant than differences in the setting of the congregation, such as being urban, rural, or inner city.* These are things that I am convinced can and should be taught, whether or not they are fully perceived by the students.

*Three works by Lyle Schaller that I think should be on the reading list of everyone who is in preparation for ministry are: *ACTIVATING THE PASSIVE CHURCH*, Abingdon, 1983; *THE SMALL CHURCH IS DIFFERENT*, Abingdon, 1982; *GROWING PLANS*, Abingdon, 1983.

Teach Ministers to Listen and Respond Appropriately

So what is important in being able to minister to people? I am convinced that the most important skill in ministry, whether that be to urban or rural people, is the ability to listen. I do not want to downplay the role of our schools in developing scholars and theologians. It is just that if you are going to effectively share your knowledge and theology with people, you have to begin by listening to where they are and to what they perceive their needs to be. The ability to listen is in some cases a gift, but listening skills can be taught and the teaching of those skills needs to be a part of any curriculum that is preparing people for ministry.

Many of the problems rural people face today are common to people in any setting in modern day America. They have problems in their human relationships: between husbands and wives, parents and children, with friends and neighbors; problems in paying their bills; and problems in coping with the pressure of their work. People in ministry need to hear those problems and to share the Gospel with rural people in relation to those problems.

There are, however, certain stressors that affect rural people, especially farmers, today that students should be made aware of so that they may be alert to them. One of these has to do with the farmer's dependence on the weather. More than most people in our society, a farmer's whole livelihood depends not on what he does, but on the whims of the weather. Irrigation has altered this somewhat but not totally. He can plant and even fertilize, but if that .10 of an inch of rain does not come at the proper time the crop never properly develops, or if too much rain comes it is all washed away. So when a farmer talks to you about the weather, he may be making small talk, or he may be expressing great frustrations and even questions about his relationship with God. We need to be able to hear, to distinguish, and to respond appropriately.

Another farm stressor is the fact that a farmer's income comes usually in spurts while his expenses are fairly steady throughout the year. For many this has developed into a lifestyle of borrowing money to operate and then paying it back when the crops come in. These debts and the question of whether or not they will be able to repay them add a special dimension of tension to the farmer's life.

Another common stressor has to do with the fact that farming takes a great deal of investment in equipment and land. This means that most new people in farming are ones who have the farm passed on to them by the previous generation. The transition of the farming operation from father to son is often a time of great stress in the family relationship. Questions as to which child takes over

the operation, how to be fair to other children, and how to avoid estate taxes become very volatile concerns. The friction between a father who is "retired" and yet keeps his fingers in the operation and the son who wants to operate on his own seems to create its own special raw edges, and we must not forget that usually in the picture is a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law who often now lives in the mother-in-law's house. People who minister need to be alert to these tensions and ready to minister to them.

Farmers will be quick to point out that while their expenses have risen dramatically over the past decade, the prices of the commodities they sell have either remained steady or have even gone down. One of the questions that looms over them is "how long can this go on before we go under?" I do not want to imply that all farmers are in financial difficulty. Some are not. Some are very secure financially, but others are having a great deal of difficulty. We need to be able to hear in such a way that we know which is which and can respond appropriately.

And there is that vast sea of red tape, government programs, and the reams of record keeping demanded of farmers today. Many people, from many different walks of life, are screaming out in frustration at similar things; people who are in rural ministry need to know that this also affects the people they serve.

How should our colleges and seminaries prepare students to minister to these needs? I would not suggest special courses in "rural ministry" either elective or required. I just think that an awareness of these problems should be taught as a part of courses that do or should exist as a part of the student's preparation for ministry.

Learn to Apply the Word to Rural People's Problems

I do not think that rural people either want or expect the people who minister to them to be experts on farming or the farm problem and who can tell them how to handle these situations. They already have plenty of "experts" doing that for them. One complaint I hear is that the same bankers who were saying a few years ago that the way to survive was to expand operations are the same ones that are threatening to foreclose on mortgages incurred in the effort to expand. What rural parishioners do want and expect is that the people prepared by our colleges will hear their problems with some sympathy and understanding and share the Gospel with them in a way that will help them to cope, and that will help them live as the children of God in their chosen place to live, as they carry out their chosen profession.

Any courses that help students to better understand God's Word and which give them skills

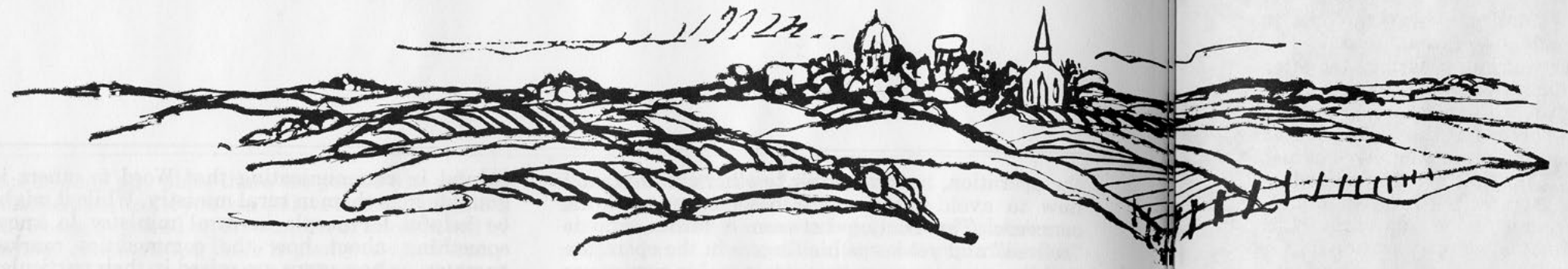
helpful in communicating that Word to others is going to help them in rural ministry. While it might be helpful for people in rural ministry to know something about how the commodities market operates, or how crops are raised in their particular area, I do not see that as the responsibility of the church's schools. After all, how could you include all areas? Things are different in wheat country, in corn country, in cotton country, or in the dairy industry. It would be better if our schools could alert ministers, teachers, directors of Christian education, etc., to the fact that our people have much to teach us in these areas. Then we might be open to learning from them as we teach the Word of God among them.

Ministry in rural areas does give some special opportunities to apply the Word of God in a unique way. It would be good if the existing courses in preaching and teaching the Word could point out some of these things.

Rural people have some very special responsibilities as God's stewards. What they do with God's land, with God's water table, and with God's produce from the land is going to have an effect on the quality of the life experienced by future generations. Helping rural people understand the responsibilities and the joys of their stewardship can be a rewarding challenge. At the same time this give special opportunity to cry out with a prophetic voice against the rape and pollution of the land in the name of profit by those who do not care about their responsibilities to the Lord nor have any concern for future generations.

Integrate Appropriate Concepts into Courses

What this all boils down to is that I feel that our colleges can best serve the rural church by sharing with students the fact that rural ministry can be a vital, exciting ministry, because it serves real people, with real needs, who face very real issues in their lives. I don't really care if this is done by incorporating these concepts into existing courses on ministry or with special courses, though I think the former would be more effective as long as the appropriate courses exist. If they do not, then maybe we had better devote our attention to getting the needed courses to develop skills in ministry in general. I have not really addressed seminars and workshops. I do think such events, addressing themselves to providing understanding of rural problems and opportunities are helpful, but they are more useful for those who are already in rural ministry and who are looking for insights and information on how to deal with the problems they are preceiving than they are for students who are preparing for their first ministry.



THE SCHUMACHER INSTITUTE FOR RURAL MINISTRY

by Kenneth Block

A new program is being developed at Concordia College, Seward, Nebraska. It is a church professional program for pre-seminary, teacher and director of Christian education students who have expressed a desire to work in rural ministries. The Schumacher Institute for Rural Ministry (SIRM) is designed to provide support to congregations and persons now serving or planning to serve rural churches, which are such a vital contingent of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Walter Schumacher

The Institute is named after Walter Schumacher. He is a bachelor farmer from Dimock, South Dakota. For many years Mr. Schumacher has been concerned about Lutheran churches in rural and small-town areas. He believes that young men and women who are interested in serving rural congregations should be sought out and trained, especially for teaching and preaching in farming communities.

A member of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Dimock, Walter, in memory of his deceased brother, Marvin, has initiated funding for the Schumacher Institute at Concordia, Seward. Earnings of the initial endowment will support the immediate activities of the institute. A future gift from his estate will add to a sustaining endowment. Walter Schumacher invites others to join with him and contribute to this endowment. As the endowment corpus increases, so do the earnings, which will be used for improving the church's ministry to rural and small-town America. Mr. Schumacher has begun to support his vision; he is responding to the cries of rural parishes.

Pastor Robert Utecht comments on his parishioner's Christian diligence: "God's Word has for all of Walter's years provided direction for his life and death decisions. The future of Missouri Synod's ministry to rural and small-town citizens is his mission. He wishes to help his Synod improve its outreach to those areas."

Why Concordia-Seward?

Concordia, Seward was selected for the Schumacher Institute for Rural Ministries program because of its location and its close ties with people of the Midwest and many other parts of the country who see the needs of the Church in rural and semi-rural settings as important to the future growth of the Church.

The program, Walter Schumacher's dream

fulfilled, will be open to students who plan to enter the teaching ministries of the Church in rural areas. The program of the Institute will provide field experiences, seminars and workshops for both undergraduate students enrolled at Concordia and for pastors, teachers and DCEs in the field who are serving in rural-oriented ministries. The Institute will also aid in Concordia's recruitment program and for the generation of interest in rural ministry preparation.

The Institute will help men and women already in full-time rural church ministries to grow professionally. Pastors, teachers, DCEs, pre-seminary students, and lay people may meet in the Institute to share ideas, problems, solutions and to offer theological reflection related to their rural interest in ministry. Through these activities the Institute program will be supporting servants who answer the call to small town and rural communities.

The Focus of the Program

The motivating force of the Schumacher Institute focuses on a program which will help the participants offer a greater service to people as both lay people and church worker meet the ever-changing challenges of the new day. The program attempts

- 1) To focus a clearer vision of the rural ministry while identifying needs, challenges, and opportunities. Through seminars, workshops, field experiences, and consultations the Institute will share successful ideas of ministry and serve as a central resource where materials and skills are gathered and disseminated. It supports, encourages and advances rural ministry in a cooperative effort with congregations, districts and Synod;
- 2) To encourage college and seminary students and those already in the field to participate in course offerings specially oriented toward rural and small town ministry. The Institute will prepare materials providing educational support to students and working ministers; and
- 3) To prepare materials and programs with an emphasis toward recruiting talented persons who identify with needs in rural and small-town ministry.

The dimension of the program that will differ from the regular pre-seminary, teacher education and DCE courses will be in the area of attitude preparation for the students involved. This will be

primarily developed through the "hands on" experiential part of the program that is in addition to the regular academic courses. It is also planned that a special course, "Rural Ministries," will be developed and required of all on-campus students who are in the program. However, the church workers who are in the field and who would like to have the experience provided by the course will be invited to participate in evening or summer sessions.

Since many parts of the program are still developing, the following working guidelines were designed to govern the SIRM student training program. Some operating assumptions for the Institute are: 1) that the location for the Schumacher Institute for Rural Ministries will be at Concordia, Seward; 2) that the Institute will be the responsibility of a director who works with the directors of the Pre-Seminary, Teacher and DCE programs; 3) that students in the rural ministries training program may or may not be receiving scholarship monies; and 4) that financial allocations will be available to undergraduate, graduate, returning students, and field practitioners. The sums available will depend upon the amount of money generated through the endowment program.

Program Funds for Scholarships

The financial resources of the Institute will be divided into scholarships (approximately 80%) and for inservice and continuing education (approximately 20%). Based on projected financial resources, each summer the Institute personnel will identify the number of potential scholarship awards available for the coming year.

The recruitment of students interested in serving in a rural setting is to be set in motion during the 1985-86 school year. A special effort will be made to recruit students from rural congregations who may wish to return to serve in rural settings. Early initial efforts of the Institute, at least for the first five years, will be focused upon Concordia, Seward students. After 1989 a synod-wide approach to training people for rural ministries will be explored.

A student will become eligible for an Institute scholarship once he/she has been admitted to the college. In order to be considered for a scholarship a student must: 1) intend to enter the Pre-Seminary, Teacher, or DCE programs, 2) submit two recommendations from professional church workers, 3) submit a 250 word essay articulating his/her interest in rural ministries, and

4) declare his/her interest in and intention to serve in a rural setting for the initial three years of his/her ministry.

Continuation scholarship awards become available once he/she has been formally admitted to the training program of his/her choice. Ordinarily program admission is processed during the sophomore year for undergraduates. A student must have a G.P.A. of 2.50, be in the Pre-Seminary, Teacher or DCE programs, and declare his/her interest and intention to serve in a rural setting for the initial three years of his/her ministry.

A joint program committee will conduct the screening process. Students will complete specified application materials and personality instruments and participate in an interview with the screening committee. Both students who receive scholarship monies and those who do not may apply for acceptance into the rural ministries training program.

Both Campus Training and Field Support Planned

The on-campus training program will be a coordinated multi-training program. It will consist of supervised volunteer field experience, academic course work, and conference participation. Every effort will be made through these activities to clarify the viability of rural ministry for the students involved.

The Institute also plans field support for those who have completed their studies. For as long as the graduate continues to serve out his initial commitment in a rural setting the Institute may obligate itself to pay for the board, room, material costs of an annual "Rural Ministry Workers Support Conference." After the commitment years additional support will be offered as long as funds are available for continuing education grants.

An on-campus detailed undergraduate program for rural ministries is being developed. Experience in the next years will be helpful in modifying the program.

These paragraphs have presented the scope of the Institute and the current stages of development of the Schumacher Institute for Rural Ministries. Some alterations are sure to come. New endowments will advance the usefulness of the Institute and increase the number of students that it can support.

(Continued from page 12)

is often a stated goal, but all too often it is not the practice. Unless we direct our attention more toward outreach, we will be missing a tremendous opportunity to bring the Gospel message to those in our community who don't know their Lord and Savior.

Our Synod's system of schools is a strong part of our Lutheran heritage. We are far ahead of many other denominations in this respect. The question seems to be, "Will we as Christian congregations be willing to seize the mission opportunities that the Lord has laid before us?" A move toward a stronger evangelism thrust will cost greater amounts of time, energy and money. Risks will be involved. A change in the philosophical goals and objectives of the parish will require re-thinking its programs too.

Through research, people involved in church growth programs have found that approximately one-half of the people living in a given area are unchurched. The harvest is truly ripe. Many of our Synodical rural and small town parishes have been in existence for a long period of time. A strong sense of ownership exists among parish members. Changes in the way the church operates come painfully slow because of fear of the unknown. To bring a renewed commitment to the "Great Commission" requires a dramatic attitudinal change on the part of both professional church workers and the laity.

As a teacher in the small parish for the past 20 years I have made some observations that may be worth noting. Teacher training programs too often do not prepare the graduate to serve in a small school with a multigrade setting. Furthermore, graduates are inadequately prepared for the small parish setting, not only in terms of parish activity but also in terms of the adjustment that must be made in a small community or a rural setting. St. John's College of Winfield seems to be addressing this concern by emphasizing teacher preparation for the small school.

Even though they are educated in small numbers, those who have emerged from a rural setting show that these graduates can succeed, whether they remain in the community to serve as leaders in their church and civic affairs, or move elsewhere to reach their aspirations.

Students of the school consistently show a keen awareness of Biblical knowledge and how to apply it in their daily living. Most of the elected leaders of St. Paul's are graduates of the day school.

Many students of St. Paul's school have chosen to serve as fulltime workers in the Lord's Harvest.

Service in a small parish can be very demanding because of the many activities required of each of a very limited number of professional people on the staff, but the rewards are many as one sees the Lord's Church working together in the fields ready for harvest.



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