



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

Editor: Kiply Lukan Yaworski, Communications
Phone: 306-242-1500; Toll Free: 1-877-661-5005
communications@saskatoonrcdiocese.com

Centre for Rural Community Leadership and Ministry: **CiRCLe M ecumenical network supports rural ministry**

By Kristine Scarrow

An ecumenical support group for those involved in rural ministry is giving clergy and lay leaders training to help strengthen their churches and their communities.

The Centre for Rural Community Leadership and Ministry (CiRCLe M) is partnered with the seminaries of the Saskatoon Theological Union, Rural Alberta's Development Fund and the Canadian Rural Church Network.

The Saskatoon Theological Union includes: The College of Emmanuel and St. Chad (Anglican Church of Canada), St. Andrew's College (United Church of Canada) and the Lutheran Theological Seminary (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada). CiRCLe M is also involved with many different denominations including Lutheran, Salvation Army, Roman Catholic, Mennonite, Anglican United Church, Pentecostal, and others.



Cam Harder

When Cam Harder became director at the organization's inception in 2007, he realized that many of the graduates from seminaries were going into rural ministry and that there were no courses directed towards rural ministry and their training.

"Rural clergy are often isolated, under-resourced. They provide a number of leadership roles and are often called upon to be community caregivers, to process community crises and celebrations. That's not something they are necessarily trained for," he says.

Training is offered in rural stress intervention so that rural churches can contribute to the building of resiliency within their communities. The organization became aware of the kind of boom and bust experience that many rural communities go through. "How can we build capacity within a community for dealing with unexpected shocks? Rural communities undergo rapid change. Their population can rapidly shrink or increase and this type of scenario can be a major challenge," says Harder.

CONTINUED



He says CiRCLe M wants to be able to help clergy who are new to rural settings by providing them with a cross-denominational mentor to understand rural dynamics.

“Our goals are ensuring the clergy are prepared for it, are honoured for it and that they are mentored and prepared to transfer their skills to the people that live there.”

One of the focuses in the future will be using church as a bridge between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in order to strengthen relationships between their communities. “By recognizing that everyone has something to offer, distinct gifts of each denomination need to be brought into healthy community. We are harmed when churches divide,” says Harder.

Every second year, a conference will be held in which rural ministry can be reframed as a place of honour, where rural ministers can connect, where excitement can be generated about rural ministries and its possibilities. The first such conference will take place Oct. 15 to 17 in Lloydminster, Alberta.

Another important service that CiRCLe M offers is a resource library. “We want to make sure that rural churches, which don’t often have access to libraries and seminary colleges, have a resource centre where they can easily and cheaply get useful material,” says Harder. Materials are accessible either by mail for the cost of postage or are downloadable from the website.

CiRCLe M hopes to change the current model of ministry to be something more sustainable. “If a community loses its population for example, a clergy-focused model of ministry becomes unsustainable. The community can suffer low self esteem,” explains Harder.

“We want to build small, strong churches that are the spiritual heart for their communities. Each church has experience, skills, connections, access to natural resources and other institutions to draw upon. If we can build with this instead, communities can see themselves as rich. It gives them energy to move their focus outwards instead of inwards. Churches can discover their gifts and their assets, regardless of their size.”