RURAL COMMUNITIES: DYING OR BEING REBORN?

Lowell Bolstad

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Foreword

I have just returned from an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America pilgrimage to East Germany. Rev. Herbert Brokering, with passion for a people whose life is now being reopened, has led nearly forty such pilgrimages. Brokering does everything possible to make sure that touristing does not happen. Tourists, he contends, walk through a place and take pictures of exteriors.

People on pilgrimage enter into the interiors of people and places. They listen with all their senses. They feel the spoken and the unspoken. They think about their feelings. Pilgrimage people are participants. They dialogue. They risk. They act. They are held by a hope that does not disappoint!

To read Lowell Bolstad's fourth book, **Rural Communities: Dying Or Being Reborn?**, is to go on pilgrimage into the rural Midwest today. Those who would read like tourists will be perplexed. For he does not waste words on exteriors. **Rural Communities: Dying Or Being Reborn?** provides close-up views from the inside. From the inside of the recent and current pain. From the inside of stories past, present, and in the making. From the inside of hope and possibilities for new life.

Bolstad's collection of close-ups are not provincial. Skillfully he brings the reader into similar global realities in Latin America. Jerry Akers at work in Peru and Bolivia and Sandra Simonson in northwest Wisconsin are partners in extending hopeful invitations to all who would come close to "acknowledging the grief" of poverty and communal disintegration.

But, finally, to read this book is to be empowered by the Spirit of the Gospel. Jesus walked among the people, saw the needs close up, had compassion on them and blessed them with his healing presence.

Jesus still does that! The Spirit brings to our remembrance all that Christ has done for us. Bringing life out of death is the Lord's specialty! We can trust the leader and participate in the process. This book is a gift along the way!

Barbara J. Knutson, Synod Minister
Southwestern Minnesota Synod
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Redwood Falls, Minnesota

Part I

Death In The Midst Of Life

"Hear the story of the South Sea island. On this island were two villages — one village on the shore, another village high in the mountains. The mountain villagers rose one morning to see a huge tidal wave begin to roll in, and they knew it would destroy the village on the shore. But there was no time to run down and warn them. So they set their village on fire.

"The people on the shore saw the fire up on the mountainside and they ran up the mountain to help their friends. The tidal wave came, and both villages survived. You are the people who see the wave coming. You need to figure out where in your community and in your personal environment you need to light the fires to generate responses and to warn those who are still sitting on the shore so that the villages below might be saved."

—Anne Kanten in *Faith And Public Policy* at **Survival of the Planet: A Challenge To Faith Communities** event in Minneapolis, Minnesota on October 13, 1989.

1

A Matter Of Life And Death

In January of 1980 I accepted a pastoral call to serve two rural congregations near Prairie Farm, Wisconsin. My spouse, Robbi Rudiger, had previously accepted a pastoral call to two nearby village congregations. Considering my status as part of a clergy couple, I regarded myself fortunate to be called to adjoining churches. At the time, both of us were fresh from seminary, and I, for one, willing to admit that I did not know what I was getting myself into. Upon graduation, I had little idea where I would end up, only guessing that it might be in a rural area, since most first calls are located in town and country situations.

A decade has passed since that tentative beginning; much has happened during the 1980s. When I came to the Prairie Farm area, the words "rural crisis" were not mentioned. In fact, dairy prices stood at around 80% of parity; new farmers had come into dairying in the middle to late 1970s anticipating a stable livelihood. I began attending an ecumenical forum in 1981 at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Glenwood City focusing on land issues and using the Roman Catholic statement on *Stewards of the Heartland*. This became my introduction to an ongoing study of the family farm and rural community.

From 1982 to 1984 economic conditions worsened, and people started calling the situation a "crisis." Since then I have witnessed farmers in the congregations I serve and in the larger community gradually go out of business. The number of farmers in one congregation has declined noticeably, while the number in the other congregation has shrunk to a handful. Some of the older farmers finally wear out or retire while they are still able. During 1989, four farmers — age fifty-five or older who live along a two-mile stretch of a county road — all suffered setbacks. One died of a heart attack, while another had to cut back because of a heart condition. Still another had to sell out because of a heart condition and diabetes, while his neighbor across the road suffered severe pneumonia due to fatigue. There are no new farmers to take their places.

The older generation is dying. In 1989 I officiated at thirteen funerals, by far the highest number in any one year since I started serving the two churches. People bid farewell to long-time friends and neighbors. With their deaths go the memories and stories of early pioneer days. At one of the congregations I serve located in the midst of a declining neighborhood, the Sunday School has dropped to half the number from 1980. At the other congregation, which benefitted from an influx of young people at the end of the 1970s and their joining in the 1980s, the Sunday School has increased, but members wonder what will happen once this group of children passes through. Some ponder if their church will be around in another five or ten years.

Starting in 1983 I became actively involved in seeking to address the rural crisis. I joined other people in organizing efforts designed to bring about progressive social change. Out of this experience came my first publication **Who Will Stand Up For The Family Farm?** After that project I focused attention on more local activities and helped to start a monthly community newspaper for the Prairie Farm and Ridgeland area called the *Hay River Review* and assumed its editorship. Out of that effort came the book **Strengthening Our Rural Communities** in which I argued for building rural community. A year later, I self-published **Family Farm Or Factory Farm? A Time To Choose**, in which I made the case that, if farmers were ever to find their way out of the industrial agriculture mess, they would have to do it themselves; no one else was going to do it for them.

During the last decade I have witnessed how the church has responded to the rural crisis. My participation began in 1984. At the time I asked an assistant to the bishop what the Northern Wisconsin District of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) was doing in the area of rural concerns. He responded, "Our Committee on Rural Ministry is meeting next Tuesday. Why don't you come and find out?" So, as often happens, when you ask a question you get a job; I became a part of the committee and its work. Later, when the ALC became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), I agreed to serve on the Task Force on Town and Country Ministries in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin. In addition, I have had the opportunity to attend numerous Lutheran and ecumenical gatherings of people who share a similar commitment to peace and justice for the Heartland. Through this involvement I have seen how the church has matured in its response.

As you read this book, you could probably write your own story about the decade of the 1980s. You could share your observations about what you have seen happen, just as I have done; and you could tell of your participation with others. If you are like me, perhaps you wake up in the morning tired. You suffer from a feeling of exhaustion that would require more than one good night of rest to recover. You have given some of your best energy to the cause; you have kept going even in the midst of difficult circumstances. And, if you are like me, the odds seem overwhelming, the fight an uphill battle. You are disturbed at how many would like to declare that the rural crisis is over and can be forgotten. You are saddened when you notice how genuine public interest in the middle of the 1980s has been replaced by a conservative retrenchment in the 1990s. Perhaps, if you are like me, you are looking for a reason to keep going into this next decade.

The question can be asked, "Will we be able to live and work in rural communities?" If the question is framed, "Will we be able to live and work in rural communities *as we have known them*?," the answer is probably "No." Rural communities have been profoundly changed in the last decade; we cannot simply turn back the calendar to an earlier time. But if the question is asked, "Will we be able to live and work in rural communities *as they take on new forms*?," the answer is a qualified "Yes." No one knows exactly what those new forms will take, but with commitment, creativity, and courage, rural communities can be renewed with the quality of life that makes them humane places in which to live and work.

What energizes me to keep going in the decade of the 1990s? The answer lies with people like yourself who respond with boldness and confidence to the ongoing need for community building. What unites us? For many, a faith perspective provides motivation and direction. Others act out of goodwill in joining together with like-minded people. No matter what the extent of your participation or how long you have been involved, a common bond brings us together in a shared work. I take strength from knowing that a web of people across this land and world earnestly desire and work for new life in rural areas.

As you read the following chapters in **Rural Communities: Dying Or Being Reborn?,** I will introduce you to people I have met in my work and travels. Imagine yourself engaging in conversation with them — hearing their stories and asking them questions. Through these pages you will visit with people from as far away as Peru and Bolivia in Latin America who live in abject poverty and yet who work in community. You will see how church people in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, as well as those in the ELCA and the ecumenical arena, carry out concrete efforts on local, regional, and national levels. You will meet people in my home area of the Hay River Valley in the Prairie Farm and Ridgeland area of Wisconsin. You will also hear about those who have died and how they have been remembered. All of these are people whom I have come to know and respect in one way or another. Many of them have made such sacrifices for others that I believe I would be letting them down if I did not keep up the work.

2

Rural America Is Becoming Like A Third World Country

As we move into the decade of the 1990s, we leave behind a decade of the 1980s that brought profound changes in our rural communities. Signs of dying abound. Poverty is increasing, as people are earning less; debt is multiplying, as people are owing more. Fewer people are left in many rural communities, while those who are left have to work harder to make a living. Homelessness has moved into the countryside, and rural people are faced with a lack of adequate health care. Drugs and crime have come to the rural areas. In the first part, *Communities In Rural America Are Deteriorating*, I will draw on an increasing body of knowledge to demonstrate these trends.

Together with this, I will be sharing personal learning experiences in *Life In The Latin American Countryside Becomes Worse*. My understanding of this Third World area comes from a travel seminar to Peru and Bolivia in April and May of 1989. The trip was hosted by Lutheran World Relief (LWR), an assistance and development arm of Lutheran church bodies in the United States with headquarters in New York City. On the basis of these experiences, I will compare rural America and Latin America, show the global connection, and suggest an example for the possibility of change.

Communities In Rural America Are Deteriorating

Plight Of Rural Poor Is Worsening At An Alarming Rate

Even a major publication, like Newsweek magazine, has caught on to the deteriorating conditions in rural communities. In its August 28, 1988 issue, John McCormick called the rural areas "America's Third World" and said, "Poverty in the countryside now exceeds that in the nation's big cities."

> When Americans think about poverty, most conjure up familiar city scenes: welfare moms in tenements, jobless men under street lamps, wasted kids on crack. Those powerful images belie the fact that in the nation's urban areas poverty rates are actually falling. Lost in the shadows are 9.7 million impoverished rural Americans; they constitute 18.1 percent of the 57 million people who live outside metropolitan areas. A much smaller group of the destitute — the homeless — receive far greater attention, while this disturbing, widely dispersed underclass, call it America's Third World, rarely intersects with the rest of society. It is a world caught in chronic recession and in which violence — particularly family violence — is commonplace. It is a world of drifters, rusting mobile homes, marginal medical care, cheap liquor, and terrible nutrition. And it is a world in which conditions are deteriorating at an alarming rate.

The article even recounted the story of a farmer, Russ Schwebke, in my state of Wisconsin who lost his farm and could not afford to feed his son and who, as a result, fought humiliation and loneliness. At times, Schwebke could not afford fuel for his house and on the coldest nights slept in the barn warmed only by the animals.

Farm Policy Is Mortgaging The Future Of Rural Communities

A leading cause of the plight of the rural poor mentioned above is a long standing export-oriented farm policy that is mortgaging the future of rural communities. Loretta Picanno-Hanson addressed this feature in her presentation on *Religious Approach To The*

1990 Farm Bill at the **Rural Community in '90s: Vision and Response By The People Of Faith** event at Omaha, Nebraska in September of 1989.

> We have been getting information about the export orientation of certain counties in the United States. For a long time in the religious community we have questioned the strategy of the countries of the south who must have an export strategy that is imposed on them from elsewhere. We say that this is not a just strategy. We can apply this same analysis here in the United States. The United States Department of Agriculture did a study of farm export counties that produce the five major exports in the United States. What did they find? Those were the counties that were losing population, where fewer jobs were being created, and in even of the best of times did not have conscious economic development. The disparity between the rich and the poor increased. The product goes directly out of the county; the dollars do not get turned over in the county, and it takes away from the possibility for community development.

Low commodity prices and high debt are causing enormous pain in this country and in the Third World, she stated. Together with this analysis, she told of a global debt conference that she had recently attended. The conferees had concluded, "From an ethical point of view, we believe the debt of the so-called Third World is immoral and should not be paid; from an economic point of view we believe the debt of the so-called Third World cannot be paid; from a financial point of view, we believe the debt of the so-called Third World has already been paid; and from a political point of view, we believe that much of the debt has been contracted by undemocratic and unrepresentative regimes and should not be paid."

Where Are All The People Going?

Many rural communities are losing their people; some villages now look like ghost towns. The cruel joke goes, "Will the last person out of town please shut off the lights." In order to get a handle on this loss of people, I would like to turn to a presentation by Paul Voss at the **Conference for Church Leaders** at Williams Bay, Wisconsin in May 1989. Voss, a rural sociologist, spoke on *Midwest Population And Social Trends: What Does It All Mean For Mainline Denominations And Congregations*?

> The Midwest's rural areas, historically the nation's breadbasket, also are changing... Gone is the heady optimism of the 1970s as the realities of the 1980s have set in: collapsed land values, dwindling farm income, deregulated and reduced rural services, abolished Federal Revenue sharing, lost jobs, closed factories, and abandoned retail establishments. In brief, the 1980s have not been kind especially to the nation's rural Heartland... First the cruel swing in rural land values over the past decade has shattered the hopes of many farmers who started up or expanded their operations in the 1970s. Second, there exist today fewer opportunities off the farm arising from the general economic malaise in the Midwest during most of the 1980s.
>
> Declining farm income, and by all indications a heightened dependence among farm families for off the farm employment, comes just at the moment of stress in the non-farm sector of the rural economy as well... Most forecasts for the 1990s suggest little improvement from the past decade for rural areas of the Heartland. Agriculture is in the throes of a major restructuring, and manufacturers, who in former years sought out the inexpensive surplus labor of the countryside, have now made yet another move in search of lower wages by shifting sizable portions of fabrication and assembly to Third World sites. It is almost certain there will be little reprieve over the coming decade.

When the prices, which farmers can command for agricultural products, do not exceed the costs of production, then long-run problems are inevitable for the rural Midwest, he said.

Rural People Becoming Part Of The Informal Economy

What do people do when they have lost their farms, manufacturers leave the rural areas, and local businesses are closing? Some leave the area as evidenced in the previous material on depopulation. Others turn to self-employment. The Center for Rural Affairs of Walthill, Nebraska has been investigating this phenomenon in the farm-based counties in six states in the upper Midwest — Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, and Nebraska — and gave the following report in their January 1990 newsletter.

> If anything, the extent and importance of self-employment in rural areas are understated. Many people have small enterprises in their homes or on their farms that are either in an early phase of development or are designed to supplement the household income. These micro-enterprises are frequently unreported and therefore unrecognized as important parts of the economy. They make up what is referred to as an informal economy. Over two-fifths of all working people are self-employed in these counties, which is triple the rate in metropolitan areas. Half of all earned income in farming counties is from self-employment — five times the rate for the region's metropolitan areas.Twenty-seven percent of the nonfarm income in farming counties is from self-employment, more than three times the metro rate.
>
> However, the quality of self-employment is declining in this region. Income per self-employed job fell by one-third during the period of 1969 to 1986. Either more of the self-employment jobs were part-time or lower earning or both. But self-employment strategies do work. They are being used in other distressed regions of the country, from inner cities to rural areas in the South, to Indian Reservations. And they have been especially effective in the Developing World.

They concluded their report by saying it is time we in rural areas of the Farm Belt realize that we are more like developing nations than like Omaha, DesMoines, and Minneapolis-St. Paul, and we need our own development strategies different from urban areas.

Homelessness Comes To The Countryside

In rural Wisconsin the upheaval of the agricultural economy and the resulting decline of small communities has been equally devastating to families who once were gainfully employed and providing for their families. Homelessness is no longer a strictly a phenomenon of urban life. While reliable figures on homelessness are hard to find, local Community Action Program agencies have reported an increasing number of cases handled by their referral system. In one predominantly rural county alone, they reported an average of six cases a month. In another northern Wisconsin county, the social services department reported an average of ten cases a month being reported. Unfortunately, many homeless people go unreported because they do not fit the existing programs for the chronically homeless. They often move from one area to another in search of work or a place to stay and therefore present tracing problems for the agencies involved.

Homeless advocates say 18% of the USA's estimated three million homeless people — more than a half million — live in rural areas. Many social workers say the rural count would climb into the millions if it included tens of thousands of people living in tiny, substandard houses or shoddy mobile homes. In Ohio, 25% of the 140,000 homeless are from rural areas. Twenty-five thousand Ohioans do not have indoor plumbing. Minnesota homeless advocates estimate 35% of that state's homeless population is rural and that as many as 20,000 Minnesota residents will be homeless sometime during 1990. An Iowa Education Department study reveals that of the 15,713 Iowans found homeless, 53% of them were children. A 1989 Pennsylvania study found that the rural homeless were more likely to be families than their urban counterparts.

Quality Health Care Declining In The Rural Areas

Rural areas throughout Wisconsin are having a hard time finding doctors. Once an area has a shortage, it makes it that much more difficult to find doctors. The fewer doctors there are, the more often the doctor has to be on call. Many do not find that to be attractive. A number of the regions in western and northwestern Wisconsin are designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as Health Manpower Shortage areas in which there is fewer than 1 doctor to 3,500 people.

The U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging estimates that 600 rural hospitals will close in the next ten years. Right now, over 500 rural counties in this country are not served by hospitals of any kind. In Texas, for example, 54 counties have no hospital, 27 counties have no nursing home, and 14 counties have no physician. "These 14 counties," said James Hightower, Director of Texas Department of Agriculture, "have a combined area larger than that of nine states." When the absence of adequate health care in many rural communities is combined with the health hazards that are endemic to farming, you get a truly frightening picture.

In addition, the state of mental health in rural areas is sobering. A report released in 1988 by the National Mental Health Association takes a comprehensive look at the economic and social factors creating a drought of human services out in the countryside. Its in-depth analysis shows a severe decline in the quality of rural family and community life. Two issues are among those raised: Instead of being rewarded for their hard work, many are unable to succeed no matter how hard they try; requesting assistance is seen as the last measure of defeat where they uphold the value of private enterprise and problem-solving.

A Nebraska study reported that residents of farm households went from having the lowest rate of psychological distress in 1981 to among the highest in 1986 and that, even when not personally experiencing economic decline, those closely linked to the ag economy were significantly more depressed than urbanites. A 1986 Colorado survey of factors associated with admissions to mental health centers revealed three sobering findings: Child abuse had increased more rapidly in rural communities than in urban centers; there was more spouse abuse in rural areas; and depression admissions among children and teenagers in the rural community had doubled.

Drugs And Crime Reach The Rural Areas

One of the accepted notions about rural America used to be that you could escape the drugs and crime of the urban centers. No more. Drugs and crime reach the rural areas. **Newsweek** magazine, in its April 3, 1989 edition, carried an article on *The Newest Drug War: In rural America, crack and 'crank' are now hot commodities in the backwoods.*

> Dangerous street drugs, once regarded as an urban plague, are now for sale in the nation's remotest country lanes. Drug rings in Eastern cities are supplying small-town contacts with increasing quantities of cocaine and crack, and business is booming. In a recent survey, 83 out of 100 Southern sheriffs polled said crack is a "significant" problem in their areas. In the West and Midwest, according to an estimate by federal officials, mom-and-pop crank labs will produce 25 tons of the narcotic next year at a profit of $3 billion; the National Institute on Drug Abuse says crank "looms as a potential national drug crisis in the 1990s." In the not-too-distant past, a small community might expect no more than one murder every generation. In the past two years violent crime has risen dramatically in parts of rural Missouri.

The article concluded by saying that law enforcement in rural communities is a challenge because, with the small-town familiarity, dealers know who to avoid.

Life In The Latin American Countryside Becomes More Desperate

Nestled in a valley high in the Andes Mountains above Cusco in Peru is a small school. In early May, the grass was green, and the wildflowers were blooming. The range of majestic mountains surrounded us as we sat on the grass taking in the warm sunshine of the late morning. The air was clear, and the view was brilliant. Children's voices called out to each other as they played during recess. The students were attending school, while most of their parents were away at potato harvesting. With the seasons opposite of that in North America, they had to get the potatoes in before the cold weather came in June and July. The scene seemed idyllic and far removed from the rest of the world.

As we met the children, though, and listened to the teacher tell about their situation, we quickly came to realize the turbulence in which these children lived. Most of them went to school only until the fourth grade; in fact, just two of the students were studying in the fifth grade. Why were the children not able to continue? Most of their parents were so poor that they could not afford to feed their children beyond the age of ten. At that age, the children were abandoned and forced to migrate to the cities in order to fend for themselves. Later on, we would encounter children on the streets of Cusco trying to sell everything from shoe shines to cigarettes. At night they slept on the park benches. The contrast of children in the two settings stayed with me all the way through my visit to Peru and Bolivia. I asked myself what social and economic conditions were robbing these children of their future. In what follows, I seek to share my learning experiences of life in Latin America.

Peasants In Latin America Live In Abject Poverty

According to a 1987 study by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 130 million — a third of the Latin American and the Caribbean's 406 million people — live in absolute poverty. In addition, the report revealed that the region's farm populations are hit the hardest in that approximately 120 million rural dwellers are poverty stricken. Some 70 million rural people are living below the minimum subsistence level. In looking ahead, researchers expect the situation to further deteriorate so that the number of *minifundios* (small acreages) will increase, farmers will be forced off the land, rural women will be victimized, and indigenous cultures will slowly disintegrate.

Bolivia is second only to Haiti as the poorest country in the Americas. Unemployment stands at over 30%, and the minimum wage is U.S. $25.00. Life expectancy is only 48, while 80% of the people live in absolute poverty as they receive less than 70% of their minimum calories. One development worker, Jesus Duran, explained that food assistance from foreign governments is actually hurting rather than helping the situation. Duran, who is executive director of the Center for Multiple Services of Appropriate Technology, told how much of the food assistance comes from the U.S.

Under Public Law 480, the U.S. sends wheat, wheat flour, bulgar wheat, and skim milk to Bolivia. Per capita, Bolivia receives more U.S. food aid than any other Latin American country. Since the 1950s, U.S. as well as Canadian wheat has undercut local production and fostered dependency rather than self-sufficiency. People have acquired a taste for bread and become reliant upon imported wheat, he said.

Furthermore the bulgar wheat is hard to digest, and people often do not know how to use it. Imported skim milk is low in fat and causes diarrhea. Many times the milk arrives in poor condition because it sits in the port for a long time. Following the 1988 drought, the U.S. cut off shipments of lactose products to Bolivia. In so doing, the move revealed the uncertainty of counting on food assistance from foreign countries.

Photo by Serapio Verduzco (Ocongate — Cusco)
Peasant farmers in Latin America engage in a small-scale agriculture with the use of draft animals and hand labor.

Poverty is more than lack of money. Peasants who lack food and medicine, as well as money, are forced to the margins of society. They are separated from those resources that give help in times of crisis and, as a result, are left to fend for themselves. When the poor become sick, have handicapped children, or suffer from an accident or illness, they have no public services to which they can turn. In such a setting, they must create their own network of resources, but many poor people who struggle day in and day out have little energy left for the work of organizing themselves and their communities.

Bolivia is carrying out a New Economic Plan since 1985. This neoliberal economic approach to the monetary system designed by advisors from the international lending agencies makes for drastic cutbacks in health, education, and welfare. Austerity measures to slash government spending to the bone are intended to provide money in order to pay the foreign debt, balance the budget, and increase military spending. Together with this perspective, its authors believe Bolivia needs a "free market" capitalism to gain profits from the mineral resources of iron ore, oil, and natural gas.

The plan has cut the inflation from 9,000% to less than 10%, but at a tremendous social cost. According to Dr. Kevin Healy of the Inter-American Foundation, "The economic model has created more unemployment, even hyperunemployment, and instead of stimulating exports — which is what the model theoretically is supposed to do — it has stimulated an array of imports, making it more difficult for national producers, peasants, small industrialists, and a number of other producers as well. So it has contributed to this trend of pulling people out of productive activities into nonproductive activities."

Debt Exacts A Price Of Death And Despair

When a baby is born in Bolivia, the child will owe $700 in debt. In a country where the average annual income is $600, that amount is the equivalent of $20,000 for a U.S. child. Throughout the life of the Bolivian, this price will be paid in the loss of schooling, medicine, income, and opportunity. In effect this foreign debt causes death and despair. Bolivia's foreign debt amounts to $5.7 billion. Most of the bank loans were incurred during military dictatorships from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank and went into high-rise buildings in La Paz and agricultural estates in Santa Cruz providing few benefits for working classes. The debt is causing an economic catastrophe for Bolivia, as it is for other Latin American countries and Third World countries around the globe.

George Ann Potter has studied the debt and its impact upon the poor in Latin America. In a discussion with our group while in La Paz, Potter outlined the magnitude of the crisis:

> Bolivia is the fair-skinned child of the World Bank because they have done everything that the World Bank has asked. The theory is that export-led, privatized growth will benefit the poor by creating employment opportunities. In August of 1985 the newly elected president, Victor Paz Estenssoro, imposed wage freezes, elimination of price controls, and large government cutbacks. These measures led to an unemployment rate of 25% in 1988, the highest in Latin America. With the slowdown of factory production and privatization and restructuring of Bolivia's mining industry and central bank, 80,000 workers were fired. When the Bolivian workers' union, COB, fought for a monthly minimum wage of $40, the cost of a monthly food "basket" for a family of four, the government only agreed to $25.

Potter contended that every day more and more people are sacrificed to malnutrition and poverty-related diseases by the measures imposed by the IMF and World Bank.

Potter has spent much of her time with the popular movements and, as such, acknowledged a bias on behalf of the people most affected by the debt. She argued that the problem with debt forgiveness is that it is paternalistic; the only just solution is to repudiate the debt. She cited three reasons: economic, moral-justice, and political. Potter asserted that 25% is directly related to military expenditures and should be rejected. Another 25% to 30% is in flight from one bank to another and never came to the country and also should be rejected. According to the analysis of the popular movements, then, 55% of the debt is illegitimate.

The other 45% of the debt is legitimate but has already been paid, she maintained. Because of the variable interest rates imposed by the U.S., Bolivia assumed new debts to pay for the interest. Since 1984, Potter explained, $180 billion more has left Latin America than has come in. In other words, Latin America has funded close to three Marshall Plans. Potter pointed to the pastoral document from the Roman Catholic bishops in Brazil that declared it immoral to vote for any candidate who does not repudiate the foreign debt. Furthermore, she maintained, the debt is so large that politically it is impossible to pay.

Peasants Are Forced To Leave The Countryside

Peru is one of the cradles of civilization, possessing a rich cultural history going back at least 20,000 years. Cusco, Peru is believed to be the oldest inhabited city in the Western Hemisphere. Founded by the Incas as their capital, it is still largely populated by their offspring. Twenty-foot high stone walls stand over neatly bricked roads after hundreds of years. They did not use a single bit of mortar for its construction. The Incas had no written language, nor did they discover the wheel, but they demonstrated a sophisticated engineering with complicated suspension bridges, intricate irrigation systems, and buildings made out of carefully shaped and fitted stones weighing thousands of pounds.

As interesting as I considered Cusco, I found myself in awe of Machu Picchu, the "lost city" of the Incas located seventy-five miles from Cusco. The natural beauty of the valleys below and the mountains in the distance were breath taking. The well-preserved remains of the once-magnificent city showed an elaborate construction. The Incas taught themselves agriculture and rotated crops on the extensive series of forty terraces surrounding the city. They developed a foot plow that is still used in Peru today. In addition they domesticated more than two hundred different kinds of plants useful as food and medicine, such as the potato, corn, quinua, kiwicha, and the coca plant. On the coastland areas they used fish for fertilizer, and in the mountains they used llama and alpaca manure.

An awareness of the rich heritage of the indigenous peoples helped me to gain a context for understanding what happened to Latin America since then. When Francisco Pizarro's Spanish conquistadores arrived in 1532, an estimated 15 million Indians lived in the portion of the vast Inca Empire now called Peru. The conquistadores brought guns and horses, disease and greed for gold. Starting with looting of gold and silver from the Inca palaces, the Spanish sought to extract and export as much of the mineral wealth as possible.

With a system of forced labor, the Spanish turned millions of proud Indians of a great society into abject slaves. Many Indians were sent to their deaths in the silver mines of Potosi and in the mercury mines of Huancavelica. By 1571, there were only 1.5 million Indians. The Spanish established large landed estates, known as *latifundistas*, in the fertile coastal oases and in the Andean valleys, and forced the Indians to settle on small plots of land, known as *minifundistas*, on the infertile mountain slopes. Because of this history, the indigenous people are calling attention to 1992 as the 500th anniversary of colonization.

Today Peru continues to experience dramatic upheaval as people are forced to leave the countryside and migrate to the cities. Once known for its elegant buildings of Spanish colonial design and many highly decorated churches, the capital city of Lima is now known for its *pueblos jovenes* or "new towns" in which most of the population lives. Peasants, who have come down from the mountains in search of jobs for themselves and an education for their children, find themselves caught in a downward spiral of poverty and hopelessness. Each day a thousand people come to Lima only to set up cardboard shacks in the squatter settlements with no electricity, running water, or sewer.

Mario Padrone, an urbanologist and sociologist who does consultant work for many of the nongovernmental organizations in Peru and Latin America, expressed a grave concern about the increasing level of violence. At the root is a deep frustration over the abject poverty. He told a story to illustrate this structural violence:

> A friend of mine suffered the loss of a young child because the parents had no money to buy medicine for her. The father in his grief stated his anger, "What really makes me furious is that I cannot bury her in my home town, but I have to bury her here in the city." This is terrible violence. It is one thing to have a child die, but to not be able to bury her the way you want is to suffer great pain.

Padrone went on to say that only 400,000 were born in Lima. That means 7.5 million come from outside the city. Padrone regarded this lack of roots as "absolutely violent."

According to the Padrone, a lack of hope and a deep dissatisfaction also lies at the base for the rise of the Senderosa Luminosa, otherwise known as the Shining Path. The average age of these guerrillas is 16 to 18, and the youth between the ages of 18 and 24 are the favorite target for gaining followers. The people of Peru are caught between the goals of the Senderosa Luminosa guerrillas to obliterate the Peruvian society as it now stands and the government's attempts to combat them. The Shining Path has captured large parts of the

countryside with a major insurgency that borders on revolution. Their attack has assassinated scores of mayors and other local government officials.

Over 15,000 people have died since the civil war began in 1980. Violence on the part of the armed forces has led to the "disappearance" of more than 3,200 people in the province of Ayacucho alone since 1982. In 1987, Peru registered the highest number of "disappeared" people in the world. Fifty-five of Peru's 151 provinces are under a stated of emergency, and 40% of the population is denied civil liberties such as Habeas Corpus, freedom of movement, and the right of assembly. In a country of 22 million, 10,000 a month are moving out of the country in order to escape the violence. Jerry Akers, director of the Andean Regional Office of LWR, expressed his view of life in Peru by saying, "Each time I go to Peru, the violence and disintegrating economy seems to be worse. How the poor can bear so much is almost unbelievable. Where it will end nobody knows, but analysts are now predicting twenty years of war and violence for that country."

U.S. President George Bush announced in April of 1990 a $35 million military aid program designed to fight the guerrillas and to expand the war against drugs. Such a program would include the building of a new military training base in the heart of the coca-growing area of Peru, training and equipping six battalions, providing river boats, and refurbishing twenty ground attack jets. Officials claim that the trainers, members of the U.S. Army's Special Forces, are to be restricted to the bases and not to engage in direct combat.

Latin American Peasants Engaged In The Informal Economy

With the mass migration of people from the countryside into the cities, what do the people do to make a living? To receive a paycheck in Bolivia or Peru is a high privilege. Very few workers gain access into the formal economy. As I walked along the streets, street vendors jostled for nearly every vacant patch of pavement to sell their goods. From early in the morning until late at night, men and women as well as young children would sit on the sidewalks with their blankets spread out in front of them covered with whatever they were selling. Some slept on the sidewalk overnight and resumed selling the next day. This informal sector has grown to include 70% of the economy in Bolivia.

The poor have been forced to adopt this creative living strategy in order to survive the worsening economic crisis. A total of 80% of all women workers operate in the informal sector. A familiar sight would be an Indian woman wearing a bowler hat on her head, a blanket with a baby on her back, a full skirt, and sitting beside a small rack of cigarettes, candy bars, jams, sardines, and soups. The informal sector includes self-employment, small family businesses, and illegal activities. Many people, who formerly worked in the public sector, have suffered a loss of earning power and have turned to street selling. With the drastic drop in the GNP and per capita income and consumption, together with massive unemployment, people have been forced to the streets to eke out an existence.

In Bolivia, indigenous peoples comprise a majority of the population. They have suffered oppression in one form or another during the five hundred years since the European conquest. Before that, one ethnic kingdom imposed itself on the other. During the 1980s, the indigenous population has suffered from an economic and social oppression of a different kind. The acute financial problems in the country are driving more people into abject poverty and demeaning work. Part of the country's woes can be traced to the foreign debt. The government has mismanaged many of the major institutions since the 1952 revolution by engaging in reckless borrowing. Another part has to do with the 1985 crash of the world market for tin, which sustained the country for a hundred years. Thousands of miners have been laid off from their jobs and subject to the fluctuations of unsteady work.

With the economic crisis, many goods are repaired rather than replaced. Stall vendors offer repair work, used goods, and products made in their workshops. Most of the work is labor-intensive with little technology used. Workers show a low productivity and do not earn a salary. Over half earn less than the minimum wage as they serve the poor and the middle class. Because these vendors operate outside of legal licensing structures, they remain unprotected by labor legislation. Tensions are mounting between stall vendors and the street sellers, as stall vendors complain they cannot compete against street sellers, who operate with no fixed costs. The informal sector has been called a time bomb ready to explode in the next twenty years with more people becoming increasingly desperate.

Poor Housing A Fact Of Life For Peasants

With the waves of people moving to the cities, housing conditions are deteriorating. Mario Padrone told how many houses in the slums of Lima, Peru are being subdivided. Owners are compelled to take in more people in order to made ends meet. Overcrowding results. It is estimated that there is a shortfall of at least half a million dwellings. Thirty per cent of the population live in slums, while another thirty per cent live in shanty towns. Some shanty towns have been in existence for forty years, but still lack basic services such as a clean water supply and sewers. Others, newly established, consist only of rush matting and lean-tos. In Lima, a million people do not have access to a domestic water supply so that many turn to expensive and contaminated drums of water from visiting tankers.

Successive governments have abdicated any responsibility for providing low-cost urban housing and have acquiesced to the self-build system of cardboard shacks. Our group was scheduled to visit a shanty town, but a deputy had been killed in the area we were to go, and a large mobilization of police was attempting to catch the perpetrator. It was felt that it would not be safe for a busload of gringos to go into the place. So, we spent the allotted time talking with Gustavo Riofrio, an urbanologist and sociologist. He told how Lima is growing fast in a process that began shortly after World War II. During the war, Peru sold many raw materials at a good price to the Allies for the war effort. The large profits went to a comparatively small number of people. Many people came to Lima expecting to escape the poverty of the countryside only to end up in a worse situation.

The government does not build homes for the poor, according to Riofrio, for two reasons: On the one hand, there are too many poor; on the other hand, the government does not fear the poor. "This is why the people took the land in what have been called invasions. The government put people in empty places and left them to their own resources," he stated. In a flip side to this situation, Riofrio pointed out, "If the government leaves people to themselves, they had to allow the people to organize." The people bring a new sense of community to the melting pot in Lima. Even as they used traditional working together in the highlands, they are bringing it to the shanty towns. The people as a whole decide what to do with community space, for instance whether to build a church or a market place.

Health Care Is Almost Nonexistent For The Poor

When Maryknoll missioners Joe and Pat Walsh arrived in Bolivia, they were overwhelmed by the living conditions of the people. "No toilets, no water in houses, dirt floors, food for only two meals a day, severe malnutrition, and the reality of poverty goes on and on," Pat exclaimed. She further told how Bolivia is a land of great paradoxes:

> Rich in natural resources yet with a with a life expectancy of 47 and an average annual income of $516; with a great value placed on family life yet with a multitude of street kids and orphans; a deeply spiritual and Catholic people yet with a 40% divorce rate and a high rate of family violence; a country with a plenitude of native doctors yet with a 50% infant mortality rate and numerous health problems. We used to read such

> statistics and facts and feel sad. Now as we work with mothers whose children die of diarrhea and malnutrition, as we hear life stories of unemployment, lack of money for medicine and daily food, as we see children labor, we hurt in a different way.

Their experience caused them to wonder about their own lives and how everything fits together. Furthermore, though they love the United States and miss it deeply, they also question U.S. economic and foreign policy, which often exerts a negative impact on the Bolivian people with whom they work and live.

Ana Maria Aquilar, a pediatrician in Bolivia who works with women to improve their health, offered more background. Eighty per cent of the population is marginalized; most of these are found in the rural areas. Unemployment is increasing, while income is decreasing. During 1980 to 1985, income dropped 20%, making any accumulation impossible. Infant mortality is 169 per thousand in the country as a whole and 250 per thousand in the rural Altiplano valley. Women who speak only Aymara or Quechua have an increased infant mortality rate because they have difficulty gaining access to public health services. With little drinking water and no sewage, contagious diseases abound.

Bad nutrition further complicates the health situation, including the onset of mental retardation in severe cases. People suffer from respiratory problems, diarrhea, gastro-intestinal difficulties, parasites, tuberculosis, measles, and birth problems. Aquilar asserted that the foreign food aid programs have not enhanced nutrition. In fact, many people have problems with imported milk products that often sit in port for a long time and cause diarrhea because the people have a lactose intolerance. In rural areas, the mothers breast feed the children for up to four years, but now, when people are moving to the cities, many urban women have quit the practice because doctors do not promote breast feeding and commercial advertising promotes artificial milk products.

George Ann Potter told how the health and nutrition of the people is suffering in direct correlation to austerity measures imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. She related how a high UNICEF official in the country told her that one of every two infants in Bolivia dies before the age of one. While Bolivia has the highest birth rate in Latin America, it also has the slowest population growth. In addition, 67% of the people suffer from malnutrition. Yet the government yielded to IMF pressure in 1986 by cutting the health budget 67% from 12.6% to 4.2% of government expenditures. Two years later, the World Bank offered Bolivia $30 million in new loans if the government would privatize the health care delivery system and put into place a national birth control program. The World Bank backed down after a loud public outcry, but still asserted high birth rates to be the problem. Popular movements insisted that economic conditions are the real cause of poor health conditions.

In Peru, as subsidies on basic food products have been withdrawn, items like milk and meat have moved out of reach of the average family. The Ministry of Health estimates that more than half of all Peruvian children suffer from some degree of malnutrition. "Nicovita" (industrially produced chicken feed) has become a standard item of diet in the shanty towns, although its consumption is said to cause fibrous growths on the lungs. Health services are completely inadequate, and government spending on health stagnated throughout the 1970s and fell in per capita terms and as a proportion of government expenditure. Preventable respiratory and other infectious diseases (gastro-enteritis, tuberculosis, measles, typhoid) continue to be the most common causes of death in Peru, and their incidence is increasing. Many of these diseases are a direct consequence of appalling living conditions, very high unemployment and miserable wages, which result in an ever increasing incidence of infant malnutrition and death.

Latin America Increases The Production Of Cocaine To Satisfy North American Desires

Perhaps the most pathetic co-dependency relationship between Latin America and North America can be seen in the drug trade. Peru is the largest producer of cocaine, while Bolivia is second, and Columbia is third. Gilberto Hinojosa gave us a background of this problem from a Latin American perspective when we visited him in Cochabamba, Bolivia. According to Hinojosa, coca means the divine plant. "Our ancestors ate and drank this plant. At the time of the Incas and before, it was medicine. We gave potatoes, corn, and coca to the world," he explained. For thousands of years, peasants have chewed coca because it helps to deaden cold and hunger as well as the brutal conditions of work.

Three hundred thousand coca producers operate in Bolivia, while 700,000 are engaged in activities related to cocaine. Just ten years ago, only four thousand were involved in the production of cocaine. Now, 25 million in the U.S. take cocaine at least once a month. Cocaine has become Bolivia's biggest export with $500 million in income. No other export commodity comes close to it in importance. A distinction needs to be made, Hinojosa maintained, between production of coca leaves and production of cocaine. "The answer is to replace the production of coca with other food crops. When we have enough to eat, then we don't have to buy food from other countries," he said.

To poor peasants faced with the prospect of starvation, the production of cocaine becomes a preferred alternative. For many Bolivianss, the cocaine trade has meant more jobs and improved wages. Young men in bare feet will step into a plastic vat of kerosene and coca leaves and stomp all night. Even though they know the practice is destroying their feet and endangering their health, they see no other job opportunities. A union of coca producers, who operate on small, family plots, have become organized and militant. In 1987, some 5,000 coca producers surrounded a police post in Chapere, Bolivia and demanded that U.S. drug agents leave immediately, which they did.

The cocaine trade has brought enormous problems to Latin America. Thousands of acres have been taken out of production for basic food crops to grow coca leaves, further compounding the challenge of a country trying to feed itself. Also, production of coca is threatening ecological disaster in the delicate rain forest with some of the most biological diversity in the world. Deforestation, soil erosion, and pollution in the high jungles of Peru and Bolivia are causing irreversible damage. In addition, social ills of violence, corruption, and addiction abound with drug trafficking. Few sights are sadder than homeless children using cheap drugs to curb the raw ache of hunger and sniffing glue at night to stay warm.

The U.S. has taken an active interest in the affairs of Bolivia because of the drug trade. Hinojosa expressed fears about this involvement. "The U.S. is like the boss man to Bolivia. The welfare of the U.S. is connected to that of Latin America. So the U.S. sends a lot of soldiers into our country. On October 22, 1988, a new law said that, if Peru, Bolivia, and Columbia did not stop production of coca, then the U.S. will stop all aid. Also, the Organization of America States, together with the U.S., can come to Latin America with a police force. This opens the possibility of a U.S. intervention. In fact, little by little, the government has agreed to accept that possibility," he stated. The consumers are the problem, he maintained; instead, the producers are made out to the be culprit.

Just as Central America was the foreign policy obsession of the U.S. during the 1980s, Latin America may very well be the obsession of the 1990s. With the declared war on drugs, Bolivia will be pressured to yield to U.S. dictates. Many people in the popular movements are afraid that their country will become the *Honduras* of Latin America in providing the base from which the U.S. carries out its intervention in Latin America.

Rural People In North America And Peasants In Latin America Share A Common Plight

The continents of North America and South America are connected by the slender thread of Central America. Forces at work, which have widened the gap between the rich and the poor, have had a devastating affect on both Central America and South America. In addition, these forces have also created a Third World within the U.S. called rural America. Throughout this chapter, I have tried to show how both rural people in North America and peasants in Latin America share a common plight. Farmers in the U.S. may not be setting up shanty towns on the edges of major cities or selling candy bars on the street corners, but increasing poverty is the common denominator that connects rural America and Latin America. Rural people in this country have much to learn from the indigenous people of Latin American who have suffered so much for so long. Indications are that conditions may get worse in the countryside before they get better.

Latin American People Demonstrate The Strength Of Community Life

The Andean communities of Quechua- and Aymara-speaking people have used a network of reciprocity in relating to each other that has helped them to maintain strong community life even through five hundred years of domination and conquest. Dr. Billie Jean Isbell, who has studied indigenous cultures, describes this pattern of relationships:

> So that every religious and official activity is a family obligation, men and women share these obligations jointly. For every activity that is required, one calls on a wide network of kin relationships that must aid you; they are called "the people who love us." Anytime they have an obligation of a political, religious, or civil nature, that obligation is returned. The indigenous agricultural and herding system functions the same way so that through reciprocity they lend labor and wealth, expecting it to return in kind. In many areas of the Andes that system is under great pressure to change as people become more and more incorporated into a capitalistic mode of economy. But even in Lima I found that people were using this network of reciprocity. It was a basic and fundamental aspect of their ability to survive in an urban environment.

Isbell told how urban people continued their relationship with their country relatives and shared their obligations. The ethnic and kin basis remained an important aspect of survival.

Connected with this pattern of reciprocity is politics by consensus. Figuring out how decisions are being made in an Andean community can be frustrating, she admitted:

> If all you hear is talk, no vote — isn't that true? — no vote, but then suddenly a decision emerges and if you really pay attention, you see a very dynamic aspect of consensus politics. Consensus is expected and required for communities to function well. In the community that I studied the longest, Chushi, where Sendoro also began their activities, a group of migrants came back one year. I studied this community over a fifteen-year period and published a book, which was called **To Defend Ourselves.** The reason for the title is, I asked people, "Why are you doing 'X', a ritual house-building or 'ione' (which is the reciprocal form of labor), and they'd look at me and say in Quechua "to defend ourselves."

Isbell concluded by saying that cultural forms are a way of defense, and they are attempting to reconstruct those forms. She asserted her belief that this effective social structure and resilient culture will help the indigenous people to withstand the current crisis.

Part II

Latin Americans Engage In Self-Determination

"In Peru we are trying to maintain a fragile democracy. Each of the base organizations behave democratically. They are deeply and profoundly democratic. The only problem is that the system is not democratic. We exchange one general for a Republican and then a Democrat. In the local communities, people are controlling their leaders and their governments. Unfortunately they do not have direct representation with somebody who represents them in the country's government. We cannot count on the state anymore. There is no welfare program. The government does not know anything but scarcity. We have to take the future into our own hands.

"The people are living in unbelievable misery. Previously families bought four rations; now they can only buy two. They are suffering from undernourishment. Lima has 1,000 communal kitchens. Women make shopping lists and share the food with all their families so that the people will have at least one decent meal a day. One day I came to a communal kitchen and met Anna Marie stirring a big pot of stew filled with corn, maize, potatoes, noodles, rice, and beans over an open fire. She joked with me saying, 'You look skinny Mario. Doesn't your wife feed you?'

"I asked her, 'And what are you doing Anna Marie?' She replied, 'I am governing the country.' I answered, 'What do you mean by saying you are governing the country? You look to me like you are stirring the stew.' She asserted, 'If there is too much fire, then everything will boil over and we will have a revolution. If there is too little fire, then the food will not cook and nothing will be gained. I have to keep the fire burning at the right temperature. In this way, you see, I am governing the country.'"

—Mario Padrone, an urbanologist and sociologist in Lima, Peru who works as a consultant to nongovernmental organizations in Peru, throughout Latin America, and around the world.

3

A Practice Of Accompaniment Helps People Help Themselves

In the midst of the abject poverty for peasants within Peru and Bolivia, what course of action can be taken to improve living conditions? Lutheran World Relief (LWR) carries out a practice of accompaniment that helps people help themselves. Jerry Akers, director for the Andean Regional Office (ARO), explained to us how accompaniment works. "LWR looks for a horizontal interchange among local church organizations, other development agencies, and communities in order that Latins might learn from each other. Also we seek to increase the capacity by local organizations for evaluation related to the initiation and planning. Our office works to strengthen local organizations so that Latins can carry on their own work. In all of this we identify, support, and fund long-term development projects that address the root causes of underdevelopment and poverty," Akers stated.

A relationship and attitude of accompaniment is one that is based on the following philosophical bases:

• Mutuality — This implies a relationship of openness to dialogue, exchange of points of view and information, giving and taking suggestions, and jointly arriving at agreements that respect the integrity of both LWR and the partner organizations.
• Solidarity and responsiveness — There must be a sensitivity to the struggles, pain, and fears of people living in conditions of poverty and oppression, and a readiness to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the varied and specific needs and requests that arise from these circumstances.
• Contextual understanding — It is important to understand and respect the cultural, religious, and technical diversity that characterizes work with people in their various social, economic, and political settings.
• Accountability — There are rights and obligations in cooperative relationships that include: The right to timely communications; to be informed of criteria, procedures, and decisions; to jointly plan and decide on meetings, project visits and evaluations, and to make changes in the project design as circumstances dictate. The obligation to practice good stewardship, fiscal responsibility and accountability; to infom and negotiate when changes in projects are necessary; to evaluate results according to stated objectives; and to carry out the project to the best of their capacity.

In acting in accordance with these goals and philosophical bases, ARO works extensively with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) whose philosophies, objectives, and styles are compatible with ARO's and who undertake projects serving the poor. Through the wide variety of NGOs filling development needs in Latin America, ARO increases its impact, serves more people, and learns of local initiatives. These NGOs, when given relative freedom, create exciting new technologies and novel programs. ARO encourages this innovation to help promote self-sustaining development in the communities where it works.

Through accompaniment, ARO builds human resources, training programs, networking opportunities and lends technical expertise to the NGOs. This is not short-term alms giving, but long-term promotion of people and institutions through analysis, reflection, evaluation, and systematization. Jerry Akers summed up the approach by saying, "Our ultimate goal is for each project to be self-sufficient so that the management can be transferred from the NGOs to the organized poor by building and strengthening their capacities. We do not want to create a dependency. At some point we pull back and pull out."

Photo by Melchor Lima (Ayauiri — Puno, Peru)
Peruvian peasants work together in order to break ground for the planting of potatoes.

Rural Communities In Bolivia Try To Recover From Drought

The 1982 drought in the highlands of Bolivia was the worst since 1870. Crop losses were 80 to 90 percent; natural pastures were almost destroyed, and animal loss was extremely high. A severe shortage of seeds for planting new crops endangered a number of species native to the highlands. As our group visited in the province of Pacajes, I could better understand the difficult struggle for survival of the Aymara Indians there. The winds seemed to be blowing constantly across the wide open expanses; many of the people had faces chapped and burned by the wind. At 13,000 feet the air was thin and the temperature cold as the area experienced more than 200 days of frost. The ground was rocky, and the peasants had to let it lie fallow in order to collect moisture so as not to deplete the soil. Through the years the people had raised a sour version of the potato that can survive frosts.

Life is stark and harsh for people living in the Altiplano. The fact that we did not see many people accentuated the feeling of isolation. On the day we visited, many of the men were working in the rock quarry, while the women were watching the sheep and cattle in the fields and the children were attending school. The town looked deserted. As we heard the children singing, the music sounded mournful. When the young Aymara women brought the animals home at night, they carefully avoided contact with us and ran to their homes. Parents are protective of their daughters and keep them at home and in the fields.

In visiting the Center for Multiple Services of Appropriate Technology (SEMTA), funded and supported in part by LWR, we came to see how the people are seeking to grow a greater variety of crops in order to add more vitamins and nutrients to their daily diets. Rene Baptista showed us a number of greenhouses made of mud walls and plastic covers used to lengthen the growing season for a variety of vegetables. "We use traditional prod-

ucts to control diseases and insects that affect the vegetables. We do not recommend the use of chemicals and pesticides," Baptista explained. A mothers' club in the community of Haumacolla grows vegetables in their specially constructed greenhouses. During the summer they raise tomatoes and through the rest of the year they grow cabbage and other cole crops. The mothers organize themselves into groups of two or three to do the various tasks of planting, weeding, and harvesting. Men do the hard work of breaking the ground.

SEMTA works with eighty communities to communicate better ways to cultivate vegetables and to raise animals. Leaders appointed by their communities attend training sessions for four to seven days in dormitory style accomodations with their board, room, and transportation provided by SEMTA, after which they return to their communities to promote what they have gained. They learn about assuring food production through intensive irrigation, as well as improving food production by using new varieties of seeds and recovery of native species. Also they learn how to improve cattle production through breeding methods together with recuperating of native grasses and introducing new types of pasture grasses. SEMTA offers technical assistance, rotating loan funds, and appropriate technology and teaches health and nutrition. A 5,000 volume library is open to the public.

Jorge Omerez attended one of the training sessions. We visited with him out in the field as he was digging potatoes. He told us how he was experimenting with the best varieties to plant in the high altitudes. Some of his biggest help has come in learning more about working with livestock. In particular he now knows how to deworm and vaccinate his cattle. "I have improved myself through the training," he stated. Omerez explained that life is hard on the Altiplano; some years he does not have enough on which to subsist so that he has to look for work, but he was proud of the fact that he has not had to go to the city.

Peasant Farmers Seek To Increase Potato Production

Lack of roads, access to credit, technical assistance, and improved seed varieties have hindered land productivity in the T'oqo Rancho region of Bolivia. These factors have contributed to the area's chronic low agricultural production, public health problems, and poor organization. The Ecumenical Foundation for Development (FEPADE), supported by LWR and other funding agencies, works to improve the quality of life for 255 families of eight rural communities in the mountains near Cochabamba through increased agricultural production, improvement of health conditions, and strengthening of local organizations.

We traveled to some remote mountain villages in order to find out more about the life of the people and their attempts to improve the situation. It so happened that the day we came the people of one village were celebrating a potato harvest festival according to an ancient Quechua Indian religious rite. As a part of the festival, the villagers acted out the drama of planting, weeding, and harvesting the potatoes. Men played musical instruments, while a number of people danced. In so doing these Quechua Indians acknowledged their oneness with the earth and invoked a blessing upon the land for the next year's production. Afterwards, the men took part in a potato judging contest, and the women prepared a hearty meal of potatoes and vegetables. In addition, some of the people acted out a sociodrama showing what government policies do to people on the local level. Also in the sociodrama, they portrayed their struggle against injustice by organizing themselves.

Felix Justinio explained to us that FEPADE has been working on an irrigation system for the potatoes in order that the peasants will not be quite as vulnerable at times when there is a lack of rain. "Irrigation is our biggest need. This is especially true considering the long dry spell we had. With dams and reservoirs being installed, we have insurance for production even if there is no rain," he said. In addition, he told us that the peasants in the moun-

tain areas were experimenting with guinea pigs in order to increase the level of nutrition as well as to bring in more income. Also they are raising more vegetable gardens as a way of providing more vitamins and nutrients in the diet. Through credit programs, the peasants have been able to purchase sheep for grazing, oxen for plowing, and cattle for milk. FEPADE also sponsors breeding programs to improve the quality of their herds.

Alicia Quiroga, a nurse and a FEPADE staff member, works with four women's groups in order to train more than fifty women in primary health care. After receiving training, the women organize and train their neighbors and women in nearby communities in basic hygiene, proper diet, and preventive health care. FEPADE offers vaccinations to children every three months for measles, diptheria-tetanus, and polio. Quiroga asserted that the women have decided not to accept foreign donations of bulgar wheat and powdered milk, because the donations undermine their efforts at mass mobilization. "We now know more about our own food and grow our own grains so that we do not need donated foods," she stated. These women have gained another vital resource: their willingness to work to better their bleak lives. In the process they not only become better nurturers of their families but also find they have voice and influence in the whole community.

Radio Station Aimed At Rural Population

On May 2, 1984, the first program was broadcast over Radio Quillabamba. It was entitled "Mosoq Allpa," a Quechua term for "New Land." This unique radio station originating from the Center for Andean Rural Studies "Barolome de Las Casas" in Cusco, Peru seeks to disseminate to rural Quechua communities information, educational, and cultural programs in their own language that will reinforce the training efforts of institutions working in the region. When we toured the station, sponsored in part by LWR, we discovered that they train and use fifty community correspondents in remote rural areas for evaluation and reporting of community views.

Daily programs broadcast in Spanish and Quechua relevant to the needs and problems of marginal campesinos include:

- Training programs in agricultural/livestock production, disease control, crop diversification, health, nutrition, child care, and laws affecting campesinos.
- National and local news from a rural perspective and marketing information.
- Interviews with campesinos, debate on local/national issues, opinions of campesinos.
- Indigenous musical/cultural programs.

For instance, Mosoq Allpa provided onsite coverage and shared with its Quechua-speaking audience significant events they would be unable to attend or know about, such as the conference of campesino women at which more than 2,000 women were present.

Mosoq Allpa has made for a number of positive results in southern Peru where small farmers lack other sources for information. Agriculture marketing information led 12 coffee producer associations not to sell at a normal time because of low prices so that they sold later at a better price, and led wool producer associations to set and obtain higher prices. The announcement of availability of transport led 85 communities to sell directly to the city, bypassing those in the middle. Legal information led to 86 requests for legal assistance to obtain land title. Credit information led to a 10% increase in small producer loans from the Agrarian Bank. Information on organic fertilizers led to an estimated 20% increase. Broadcasting of regional traditional music, stories, puzzles, and humor from local people led to a congress on folklore attended by 150 people from 12 communities, and the first encounter on folk music attended by 200 people from 120 communities.

4

A Church In Solidarity With The Poor

Prior to going to Latin America, I had heard, read, and studied about the unique witness to the Christian faith being given by the church in Latin America. I had come to know something about the tremendous changes in the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s and how that perspective had found its clearest expression in the Bishops' Conference at Medellin in 1968. The Medellin document called into question the church's traditional link with the rich and called for the church to carry out an "option for the poor." It also condemned the structures of society that created a system of dependence and inequality and made for a massive class of people living in poverty. I wanted to know more about how the church in Latin America was working to bring about transformation in the lives of poor. In this chapter, I would like to share what I saw happening because of people of faith.

Living Out A Vision Of Liberation

Lima, Peru is the home for a world famous theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, best known for his books **A Theology of Liberation** and **The Power Of The Poor In History.** A Roman Catholic priest, born to poor parents, he has worked in the *pueblo jovenes* or "new towns" in which most of the urban population lives. An unpretentious man, Guterrez is known as "Padre Gustavo" or simply "Gustavo"; few parishioners realize his international reputation. He listens compassionately to the poor as they tell of their hardships in getting by with meager earnings in a country with rampaging inflation, and he understands when they relate how their efforts to organize for basic facilities such as sewers and running water are branded as subversive by those in power.

Our group had the opportunity to converse with his associate Jorge Alvarez. Alvarez, also a priest, has known Gutierrez since youth and has worked with him in the struggles of the poor. Alvarez started out by telling us the story of Barolome de Las Casas as a way of helping us to understand the historical context of liberation theology in Latin America. Barolome de Las Casas came to the continent with the first Spanish generation of the conquest. On Maundy Thursday, he heard a sermon denouncing the great injustice of the invasion, which came as a great shock to him. After a process of conversion, he entered the Order of St. Dominic and became a priest. Later he was made a bishop in southern Mexico. He preached against the sins of the Spanish society and spoke of Christ being whipped in that section of the world. Alvarez referred to Barolome de Las Casas as a great grandfather in the Latin American Church and the beginning of a theology of liberation in that continent. Alvarez also related how Gutierrez had written the story of this formative influence in **Christ And The God Of The Andes.**

Alvarez also explained how events during the decade of the 1960s brought about renewal in the life of the church in Latin America. "The Roman Catholic Church used to be a very sedentary church associated with the powerful, juridical and nonliving," he began. But, in the first place, a missionary movement, which began in the 1950s in response to a call by Pope John XXIII, brought English-speaking religious people from the U.S., Canada, and Ireland to the continent. Young, generous people came into direct contact with the poor, and both sides were changed. Secondly, Alvarez recounted, Vatican Council II brought about a great renewal in the life of the church with a rediscovery of the Bible for the people. They could read the Word of God and relate it to their lives. The liturgy was also given to the people in their own language. "The church used to be defensive, but now people read the Word of God and discover community," Alvarez stated.

Photo by Justiniano Huanca (Ocongate — Cusco, Peru)
Quechua Indians take part in the the Eucharist at a small Roman Catholic parish in Cusco, Peru.

As for the sociological and political changes in Latin America during that decade, Alvarez pointed to the demographic explosion after World War II with the population doubling every ten years. The poor invaded the city of Lima. They became aware of the injustice and began to organize themselves. The larger society begin to see the poor as one of the great challenges. Social sciences interpreted the situation as one of structural domination and dependency. For example, the Kennedy administration's effort in the Alliance for Progress grew out of a perspective in which a developed country needed to develop poor countries in order to develop a market for goods. According to Alvarez, studies showed that all the investment did not produce development but underdevelopment. To be more accurate, he asserted, the U.S. is rich because it has been robbing from the poor countries. For instance, copper is mined in Peru and shipped to the U.S. In addition many of the brightest people move to the U.S., resulting in a brain drain for the country.

Alvarez commented that, in this changing social awareness, Gustavo Gutierrez accompanied the students in their structural analysis and argued for the need to understand the movement of liberation theologically in order to permit a deeper involvement in society. "Why and how could they discover an opportunity to be the witness of the good news? How are we able to talk of God to those who seemed to be condemned by God?," Alvarez asked rhetorically. "The situation demanded an entrance to the roots and a reflection on the situation to rediscover the text of Exodus and explain it to the people in concrete terms." Theology then becomes a second act in which reflection follows action. Existential questions come from a believer who wants to be faithful to the Word and live concretely in the world today. God is seen as entering into history in the lives of the oppressed. A big challenge is for people to have their consciences raised to experience this.

Liturgy And Labor Go Hand In Hand

Having heard from Father Jorge Alvarez and gained a better understanding of how the progressive Roman Catholic Church lives out a vision for liberation, I was interested in how Lutherans approach their involvement with the poor. Our group had the opportunity to visit with Leif Vaage, a missionary working with congregations in Lima in the area of theological formation and pastoral training. Formerly missionaries served as pastors. Now Peruvians are leaders, and missionaries are doing facilitation and accompaniment.

Vaage summed up the dilemma facing the poor by saying, "There is not enough room in the course of a day or week to entertain a spirituality for its own sake. It is possible in the North to have church attendance as icing on the cake. Here the context of faith has to respond in a pretty immediate way to the inertia of life, which drags us down. Worship has to respond to hunger. They are so busy trying to make it to the next meal and are radically reduced to the basic question: 'How does the Christian faith make for life?' It puts the heat up for what is authentic. There is something extremely liberating about touching bottom in the sense of being in a real situation rather than a comfortable setting. I have learned a lot from the poor and have tried to contribute to their struggle."

The struggle manifests itself in many ways, according to Vaage. Members of a Lutheran congregation called Luz Divina meet in the front room of a house belonging to Lucila in Marquez, a *pueblo joven* on Lima's north side. A small group of women have established a *comedor popular*, a common kitchen. In so doing they are engaging in *minka*, a Quechua word for "working together." They realize that out of their own resources they do not have enough to feed their individual families, but pooling their resources they can provide one reasonably decent meal each day for the residents of the neighborhood. Families would prefer to eat alone, but have to establish food banks to work together.

When we visited the Filadelfia Congregation in the *pueblo joven* Julio C. Tello, we heard how the people there, with assistance from Lutheran World Relief, acquired and installed large concrete pipes, connectors, valves, and other materials that would provide water to every squatter's home. In going to their *biblioteca popular* or community library, we heard from Adita Torres, one of the members of the congregation's *equipa pastoral* or lay-ministry team, how they provide books, literature, reading, and learning for people who would otherwise not have access to such materials. Afterwards we went to their small brick church building on a Sunday evening and took part in the worship service, most parts of which were led by members of the *equipa pastoral*. Even though we were not fluent in Spanish to read the words, the order of the service was the same and we were united as brothers and sisters in Christ. The sharing of the peace became for us a universal symbol of people from North and South reaching out to each other.

After returning from the trip I was pleasantly surprised to find an article by Vaage in a magazine called *Lutheran Partners* (May/June 1989—pages 20-24) in which he argued that the daily work of the people constitutes their weekly worship. The purpose of their cooperative efforts is to promote life, and their tireless efforts become like unceasing prayer. Traditional worship can be seen, according to Vaage, as a way to encourage and facilitate the daily work of the people and to maintain *animador*, Spanish for "inspire spirit." Could this approach to liturgical renewal, he asked, be appropriate for rural congregations in the North caught in economic crisis and inner city congregations where people are moving out and neighborhoods are deteriorating? He went on to challenge Lutherans to think of what would happen if the experience of worship was extended to the satisfying of basic human needs, such as hunger, thirst, and education. Vaage offered a dream that liturgical renewal would then take place beyond that previously thought possible.

Evangelical Lutheran Church In Bolivia Emerges

On a Sunday morning, members of our group rode in a pickup truck on winding, bumpy roads to a congregation of the Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Boliviana located in the slums of Aliota outside La Paz, Bolivia. Aymara and Quechua Indians had migrated there. The area was famous for the fact that the pope had visited there. As we traveled through the area, children were playing in the streets, while women were washing clothes in puddles of stagnant water. We joined 150 people for worship in their recently completed adobe church building. Some of the people sat on wooden benches, while most stood. We heard Zenobia Corderbo, president of the Luterana Boliviana, deliver the message based on Peter's confession in Matthew 16:13-20 and the sharing of all things in common from Acts 2:43-46. In excerpts of the sermon, Corderbo speaks of the church's work in the community.

> The church is a place where there are not rich or poor. Everyone is included. The church is a place where the Word of God is spoken, not just a dry Bible but a rich word, which goes out, gives life, corrects, helps, gives peace, justice, love, and dignity. Peter did not forget what he was called to do. He started to spread the word. Christians became gathered and united. When we come together in worship, this demonstrates that we follow the same God and we have all things in common. There are so many needs in this place. Some do not have bread. Scripture says the early Christians shared their bread. This place can be a place where the word of justice goes out to help those who are in need and those who do not have a friend. If in this church we are to be examples, the light and the salt for all around us, then this area will be joining us. The church is the channel for the people.

Following the worship service we sat in the grass courtyard and took part in a traditional Bolivian stewed dinner of boiled potatoes, vegetables, and meat.

Later that afternoon, we had an opportunity for extended conversation with Corderbo, as well as with Ladislao Acona, a youth representative from the national council. Corderbo told how the Luterana Boliviana was maturing after breaking away from an independent mission society called the World Mission Prayer League. We could tell that the process had been difficult and painful. "We appreciate that missionaries brought the gospel message here fifty years ago. But we got to the point where we realized that the mission society called itself Lutheran, but was not Lutheran. It was something of everything, for instance Baptist and Pentecostal. We organized Luterana Boliviana in 1968, making formal contact with other Lutherans and in 1972 received legal status," he stated. The Luterana Boliviana even sent two of its leaders to Germany to gain a truer sense of what it meant to be Lutheran. The church was independent from its paternalistic mission society, but, at the same time, connected with the Lutheran World Federation and joined in an interchurch seminary of Lutherans, Methodists, and Roman Catholics. Acona added, "In the past the mission society tried to destroy our culture and all the good things we had. We want to use our Aymara culture and the Lutheran teaching to bring solutions to immediate problems."

When one of our group at the conclusion of the visit asked what Corderbo thought would be most effective for people of faith in the North to do, he responded, "Our church has a certain fear of the U.S. There has been a long history of intervention. Your military is building an airport in Bolivia. What are you going to do about it?" I realized then that the Luterana Boliviana did not want or need North Americans directly involved in their church. They wanted people of the North to work at stopping intervention in the South.

Part III

Synod Task Force Enhances Ministry In Town And Country

"The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin has become known in some circles as a *Rural Synod.* But that title does not adequately describe the life of the whole synod. There are, after all, large metropolitan areas in the synod. There are areas that serve as bedroom communities to larger cities. Perhaps a more appropriate description is to call the Northwest Synod a *Town and Country Synod.*

"*Town and Country* describes a geographic and demographic reality. Northwestern Wisconsin, in addition to the metropolitan and bedroom communities, contains numerous small towns, hamlets, and areas of open country. Some are devoted to the pursuit of agriculture. Others serve the tourist industry. Still others are situated near logging, fishing, and mining operations.

"*Town and Country* also describes a cultural reality. It describes a way of living and a set of values. It describes a view of the world. It's been said, 'You can take the person out of the country but you can't take the country out of the person.' This old saying describes a fact central to ministry in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin.

"The *Town and Country* world view is evident in the small towns and open country areas of northwestern Wisconsin. It is essential to understand this *Town and Country* world view in order to minister effectively in town and country areas. But it is also necessary to understand this *Town and Country* world view in order to minister effectively to town and country people who are transplanted in metropolitan suburban areas. Whether they are there as a student, a worker, or a spouse, they continue to view the world through *Town and Country* eyes."

—Pastor Dick Bruesehoff — Assistant to the Bishop working in the area of rural ministry and small membership congregations — Northwest Synod of Wisconsin of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

5

Responding To The Needs Of Rural People In Crisis

The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is a largely town and country synod. Of the 216 congregations in the synod, some 175 of them are located in and serve rural communities. The rural portions of northwestern Wisconsin have been hard hit during recent years. The area has experienced two years of drought during the summers of 1987 and 1988, and the farm economy continued to be weak and sluggish through 1989. In addition the Farmers Home Administration sent out some 700 loan servicing notices to farmers in the 23 counties that make up the synod.

These facts have had an effect not only on the farm families, but on all of the rural communities and the parishes that serve these rural communities. This has given rise to a growing incidence of rural poverty, homelessness, hunger, lack of adequate medical care, various forms of substance abuse, and mental health problems. The synod Task Force On Town And Country Ministries has attempted to respond to the growing needs of rural residents, communities, and congregations. This task force has worked with Rural Response Coordinator, Sandra Simonson, a member of the synod staff and a staff member of Lutheran Social Services. Also Pastor Dick Bruesehoff, Assistant to the Bishop, has worked closely with the task force and with Simonson.

Bishop Gerhard Knutson brings a commitment to the uniqueness of rural ministry. According to Knutson, "The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin and its staff have a commitment to ministry of the Gospel, to the people, congregations, and pastors of the rural areas and towns of the synod." Knutson stated that this ministry has three elements:

• Seek to understand the unique dynamics of small congregations, towns and countryside;
• Give support and understanding as people experience the Gospel and live out their faith. The care of the land, the care of families, and a caring for one another.
• Be neighbors to one another, support those in need, and also interpret the meanings of the Gospel in such a way that we live out its call to mission and ministry together.

Bishop's Emergency Crisis Fund Established

The synod Task Force On Town And Country Ministries encouraged Bishop Gerhard Knutson to establish a Bishop's Emergency Crisis Fund. Word traveled throughout the synod, congregations took special offerings, and the fund began to take shape. Shortly before Christmas during the first year of the fund, a farm family lost their home in a fire. Another family lost their barn to a fire. Their pastors were able to submit applications to the fund, and grants of up to $500 were given to assist rural families in need. Other rural people in need have been able to pay past due utility bills, purchase feed, make emergency repairs, pay for the services of veterinarians, and sometimes just put food on their tables with the grants. Through the first twelve months, the task force made over $15,000 available to rural families struggling to make ends meet.

Coordinating A Haylift From Iowa To Wisconsin

The impact of the drought of 1988 left many hay mows and feed bins dangerously near the empty level. A growing number of farmers were sweeping out empty hay mows, knowing that they were unlikely to cut any of their own new crop of hay for nearly three

months. This situation presented a crisis not only for the livestock on the farm, but also for the farmer and the farm family. The stress created by feed shortages, financial pressures, and concern about the weather proved to be immense.

Pastor Dick Bruesehoff recounted a telephone conversation that began a haylift. "Hello, I'm calling from Humboldt, Iowa. I've heard that you folks up there in northwestern Wisconsin are short of hay this winter because of the drought you had last summer. We have more than enough hay down here in Iowa." That telephone conversation was the beginning of the cooperative effort to spring up in rural Wisconsin. As a result of that conversation, some 30,000 bales of hay were moved into the synod from Iowa in less than two months. In all 60,000 to 70,000 bales of hay were transported between the two states.

Earlier in September, all synod pastors received copies of a hay assistance information form that were distributed to Lutheran and non-Lutheran farmers in the community. During the fall months, the forms were returned to the synod office. The picture was grim. The need for hay during the coming winter would be immense. Farmers projected the need for one million bales of hay to feed their cattle until June 1. During the summer of 1988, parts of Iowa enjoyed a better-than-average growing season. The rains came. There was plenty of sunshine. The result was a good hay crop. Farmers were able to put up adequate supplies to meet their own needs. Some who no longer were actively involved in farming enjoyed the sight of full barns, knowing they would be able to sell the hay later.

This haylift provided an opportunity for members of the effort to make contact with farmers and their families. Austin Belschner noted, "People are getting physically sick when they are going up to the hay mow now." Dick Bruesehoff added, "This gift of hay gives farmers free space in order to make some decisions. Some farmers are so overloaded that they cannot make a decision about which shoes to put on."

Dale Woods, a farmer from Clear Lake, stated, "It's not necessarily the gift of hay that is the most important, but the people we met. I remember working with a man who was planning suicide and helping him to gain a reason to keep on living. Another time, I met with a family who did not know where to turn when their father had heart surgery." Sandra Simonson offered, "People are coming to our support group meetings because they are grateful for the hay."

Distributing Care Packages At Christmas Time

According to Sandra Simonson, "Conditions are so difficult for some people that they almost decided not to celebrate Christmas. When we brought care packages, they felt better." These packages consisted of toilet paper, tissues, paper toweling, used magazines, feminine supplies, personal care products, deodorant, tooth paste, hand lotion, laundry and hand soap, and food, as well as supplies needed for the farm, like oil and nails. Sometimes donors gave toys, along with extra feed, and even firewood.

She pointed out that these farm people are hard working folks who have suffered the misfortune of sliding land values and decreasing farm prices. Donations came from as far away as Texas where one woman gathered a semitrailer load of food to be distributed in Wisconsin. One Christmas, over 300 Wisconsin farm families received care packages as distributed through a network of support groups. Simonson related how on numerous occasions she has seen farmers break down and cry over receiving something as simple as a sack of paper goods. "The care packages bring cheer, hope, and conversation to families facing some big challenges over the holiday season. It lets them know that they are not alone and that someone cares," Simonson stated.

Establishing Support Groups

For Simonson, another important part of her work as Rural Response Coordinator is to establish and maintain support groups. She has a goal of working in and establishing support groups in each of the conferences in the synod and in making a presentation in as many of the congregations of the synod as possible. To begin with, she holds a general meeting that involves a cross section of the community — farmers, business people, pastors and priests, and extension people. Through a variety of exercises, she gets people to talk with each other. An important part of the meeting is the taking of a survey in order to find out what is going on with people in that room. During the summer of 1989, for instance, Simonson noticed many explosive situations in family relationships. Many of these she attributed to the conditions brought on in the families who received the loan serving letters from FmHA.

After getting an idea of some of the problems among the people, she passes out a *response ability* list, in which she lists some ways that people can take part in being a solution to the problem. These include the following: help organize future meetings; start a Rural Ministry Fund in the congregation; join a support group related to grief, farm, health problems, and for men, or for women; be a group leader; take a leadership training class; furnish food for meetings; donate supplies for care packages; write letters to people in position; be a telephone caller; do some secretarial work; testify at legislative hearings; help organize a teen group; belong to a prayer group for rural situations; be on a Rural Task Force; and be willing to talk to groups. People often stay to talk long after the meeting has formally ended. Many times participants at the meeting decide to start a support group.

The church, Simonson contended, has a crucial function to play in the midst of the chronic rural crisis. "An important question we must be asking is 'What is my role as a fellow farmer?'" she stated. Church people can give support in different ways — spiritual, emotional, financial, and neighborly, she said.

Offering Peer Listening Training

Sandra Simonson also offers peer listening training made possible as a congregational response to the rural crisis by Lutheran Social Services. Such work with people has as its premise that active peer listening is basic in establishing an effective helping relationship. Active listening is an understanding response that simply encourages the other person to continue talking. It allows the helper to understand what the other person is experiencing and allows that person to talk openly and honestly without fear of how the helper will react. Most importantly, it helps the other person to feel accepted and understood.

Here a basic skill needed for helping others is the ability to convey concern and caring. A helper's nonverbal behavior — eye contact, body posture, hand and arm movements, facial expressions and vocal patterns — provide the language through which attentiveness and caring are expressed most directly. Effective verbal responses are important for communicating care as well. A helper's words make a difference — they can encourage the person being helped to discuss a concern with greater openness; they can also help a person to solve problems or resolve issues.

The peer listening class is held once a week for five weeks with a commission service done during the church worship on a Sunday morning. During those five weeks Simonson covers the following areas with the class: first session — become acquainted with the people, learn one's own listening skill level, identifying concerns in a community, and closure; second session — learn and practice listening and communication skills; third session —

review and practice of communication skills, explore ways to identify problems, learn where there are resources in the community that can help them respond to the needs they find as wells and how to refer people to the formal agencies for help; fourth session — experience a support group and look at the possibility of the group taking on a community or church project; and fifth session — share how people have used their skills.

Simonson recounted one group with which she worked. "We just finished a peer listening class at Colfax Lutheran Church. Donna Fortin, my cotrainer, and I were very impressed with the level of care and the energy level they had as a group. There were nineteen who came every week, and the Sunday worship where they received their certificates at a commission service was very meaningful to all of us," she told.

Many people have given testimony of how peer listening training has helped them. One pastor commented, "Having peer listeners in my congregation has made me a better parish pastor because I have deliberately sharpened the focus of the gospel in a more sensitive way. We have become more intentional about caring for each other." A farmer stated, "The parents of our son-in-law went bankrupt. Our daughter and son-in-law were able to keep enough stock and machinery to try again. We would not have been able to understand the reactions within that family had we not been trained in peer listening."

A farm wife volunteered, "Because of peer listening and the literature we received, I was able to help an abused runaway and a farm woman and her children to get help through Family Advocates. I have tried to listen more carefully to my children and grandchildren. Through the rural forum meetings, we have become closer to neighbors and our pastor. At this time I am thinking of trying to have the group work on each others' farms, such as taking down an old barn, cutting wood, or doing something for an elderly person. It is like going back to the good old days of working together."

Sandra Simonson offers her own experience in answering a question she posed, "Does our work count for anything?" During a short period of time she received contacts connecting her with people she had met with on previous occasions. One evening her phone rang; it was a farmer she had worked with two years ago calling from a telephone booth in California, wanting to know more about the truck driving school she had mentioned to him one night in his barn in Wisconsin. She got the information for him and then asked him how he remembered her name and number. He said he had kept the business card she had given to him the night she made a barn call. A second call came during a weekend from a woman with whom Simonson had worked thirty months earlier. She was doing outreach at her neighbors and wanted help with doing referrals.

The third event happened when Simonson stopped on September 2 at a farmers' market to purchase fruit and vegetables for the Labor Day weekend. A woman came over to greet her saying, "Hi, my name is Mary. Remember how you came to our home right before Christmas in 1987? You helped make that Christmas one of the best we ever had." Simonson concluded by saying, "I am sure there are times when we wonder if what we are doing really counts for anything. This past month I have been totally reassured of that. Know that this is true for you, too, especially when we allow God to help us!"

Establishing A Working Relationship With A Five-County Mental Health Clinic

Northern Pines Unified Services Corporation (USC) is a public mental health agency serving Polk, Burnett, Barron, Washburn, and Rusk counties in northwestern Wisconsin. The Northern Pines central office is located at Cumberland, which is approximately fifteen

miles away from the home office of the Northwest Synod in Rice Lake. A number of outlying offices provide services throughout the area also covered by the synod. Members of the synod task force, in their work with support groups and peer listening training, realized that they needed professional help in making referrals and in providing consultation. At the same time, they discovered that rural people often do not seek counseling from a mental health agency. What kind of links could be made to pool the resources of the two groups?

Austin Belschner, chair of the task force and a veterinarian in Cumberland, saw the importance for the task force to initiate conversations with personnel at Northern Pines. By drawing on personal contacts, he managed to set up a meeting between the board at Northern Pines and members of the task force. Belschner explained, "Northern Pines was not reaching a significant percentage of the people in their service area because they were not attuned to the unique dynamics going on with those caught up in the rural crisis. We offered to help them to become more sensitive to these people. At the same time, we told them that we needed assistance in those areas of crisis intervention when we had to refer people for professional help. Some cases are beyond our abilities." Belschner commented that part of the success in carrying on this dialogue came in being straightforward about the mutual benefit each could receive without berating them for not having done the job.

James Sjolie, pastor at First Lutheran in Barron and a member of the Northern Pines board, was very impressed with Belschner. "I was absolutely captivated with the presentation by Belschner and very proud of our synod staff. His proposal was more important than anything else on the agenda, so we canceled the rest of the agenda and listened to him. People in the mental health field have often given up on the church, because they don't think the church does anything. Now they can actually see the church doing something. I don't suppose I have ever felt more appreciative of being a part of the ELCA."

Members of the task force maintained that effective intervention is enhanced when those people having daily contact know the symptoms of stress, are knowledgeable about community resources, and are able to offer some form of tangible help. Out of these conversations came the decision for a coordinated effort by the Rural Resource Task Force of Northern Wisconsin, Northern Pines USC, and the Division of Community Services to offer two face-to-face trainings for frontline caregivers, such as milk haulers, feed dealers, mail carriers, pastors, and loan officers. The training sessions provided these persons with the knowledge and support they needed as they came in contact each day with farmers and their families who are experiencing severe stress. Specific objectives included: provide participants information regarding the symptoms of severe stress as well as information on resources available to these families; and to enhance the coping skills of the caregivers.

Operation Jonah Brings People Into The Church

In a rare joint effort, congregations in the New Auburn area combined their time and talents this past year to undertake an ecumenical community search-survey, titled Operation Jonah. The goals were to invite people to attend the churches and to identify needs that were discovered by contacting more than 340 people. Pastor Ron Gerl, a member of the synod task force and a New Auburn clergy, helped to spearhead the effort. He told how a group of pastors and people simply went through the phone book to determine the people who did not have a church affiliation. Then they sent a mailing to these people extending a welcome from the area churches. "We wanted to canvas the community, yet do it in a way that was not threatening to the people," Gerl stated.

As a result, participating churches reported some 60 visit requests, resulting in a 17% interest response. The congregations followed up with visits to each family who requested

one. In a review by these churches, search-survey participants felt that they created a positive atmosphere for working together as a Christian community, made new friends with people in other churches, and shared leadership and resources. Gerl put together a booklet to provide a detailed explanation of Operation Jonah, which has stimulated other communities to undertake similar efforts.

Operation Jonah has yielded new requests for baptisms, higher attendance by new families, greater sharing of information about the churches to the community-at-large, and more sensitivity to the need to welcome and greet members within participating congregations. Evaluators noted that preaching by area clergy has come to focus on the need for fellowship among believers in addition to one's own relationship with Christ. This emphasis arose in response to the popular "do-it-myself" faith that was clearly indicated in survey results. Gerl is convinced that this outreach is one way churches in rural communities can work together to carry out evangelism.

Keeping Going Over The Long Haul

How do we keep going over the long haul? This is a question members of the synod task force have asked time and again. Bishop Gerhard Knutson gave a theological perspective to church leaders with a piece he wrote called *The Tyranny Of Ought, Should, And Must And The Promise Of Living By Grace*, while Bev Haverly and Sue Jungerberg from Lutheran Social Services of Rice Lake gave a psychological interpretation on *How To Take Care Of Oneself.*

The Tyranny Of Ought, Should, And Must And The Promise Of Living By God's Grace

There is a tyrant inside of us that drives us to want to succeed, to control, to be heroic leaders. In Greek mythology the hero was a courageous, vigorous, strong person of stamina idolized by the community. All society loves heroes. The Biblical call was one to live by grace — the grace of God and the grace of Christ.

There is an interesting story in the Old Testament about Moses, Exodus 19:13-27. Read it. Moses saw himself as heroic and the people as inept, and he as a prophet had a kind of do-it-all mentality, like a parent nurturing helpless children. But Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, observed his son-in-law Moses as overburdened, stressed, and strained. He recommended wisely to Moses that people be appointed to assist in the work rather than standing around in a helpless manner. It was a new discovery for Moses to be transformed from heroic leader to a more delegated, shared role of working in a community of believers.

The heroic leader syndrome is common in our society. It is not uncommon among pastors, which leads to frustration and burnout on the part of the leader, with a sense of helplessness and noninvolvement on the part of the community.

The biblical promise of the grace of God is a real gift. We do not have to prove our goodness to each other or to God, but it is graciously given in forgiveness for the mistakes of the past and empowerment of the present and hopefulness for the future. God's love is sufficient, and it is freeing rather than binding.

But God gives to each community of believers enough and even abundantly that which is needed to accomplish its mission and goal if we but trust in God, as God, and follow God's leading in our midst. We offer ourselves to him and to each other graciously and lovingly as He has so graciously given himself and Christ.

A great book that has been helpful to me is Bill Hordern's book called **Living By Grace**. Even though we are as Luther said 'curved in on ourselves, shut up in our own self-interest,' God loves us and accepts us. And God's command is never just another ought or duty placed upon us, but rather a promise that tells us 'You shall be.' Karl Barth tells us "All other claims and commands bind us, but God's commands set us free."

How To Take Care Of Oneself

In the midst of the work of the task force, members expressed the desire to take a break from monthly meetings to have a fall retreat together. During a weekend spent at Luther Park Bible Camp near Chetek, Bev Haverly and Sue Jungerberg, counselors from Lutheran Social Services, spoke to the group on self care issues. To begin with, they identified several characteristics of people whom they called *over-responsible*.

These traits include the following: think and feel responsible for other people's feelings, thoughts, actions, choices, wants, needs, well-being, lack of well-being, and ultimate destiny; feel anxiety, pity, and guilt when other people have a problem; feel compelled — almost forced — to help that person solve the problem, such as offering unwanted advice, giving a rapid-fire series of suggestions, or fixing feeling; feel angry when their help isn't effective; anticipate other people's needs; wonder why others don't do the same for them; find themselves saying 'yes' when they mean 'no,' doing things they don't really want to be doing, and doing things other people are capable of doing for themselves; try to please others instead of themselves.

Other traits include: not know what they want and need or, if they do, tell themselves what they want and need is not important; find it easier to feel and express anger about injustices done to others, rather than injustices done to themselves; feel safest when giving; feel insecure and guilty when somebody gives to them; feel sad because they spend their whole lives giving to other people and nobody gives to them; find themselves attracted to needy people; feel bored, empty, and worthless if they don't have a crisis in their lives, a problem to solve, or someone to help; overcommit themselves; feel harried and pressured; believe deep inside other people are somehow responsible for them; blame others for the spot they are in; say other people make them feel the way they do; believe other people are making them crazy; feel angry, victimized, unappreciated, and used; find other people become impatient or angry with them.

Haverly proceeded by saying, "Losing our sense of peace and serenity is probably the strongest indication that you are caught up in some sort of reaction." Then Jungerberg advised, "Learn to recognize when you are reacting, when you are allowing someone or something to yank your string. Usually when you start to feel anxious, afraid, indignant, outraged, rejected, sorry for yourself, ashamed, worried, or confused, something in your environment has snagged you. Make yourself comfortable. Do something safe that will help restore your balance. Figure out what you need to do to take care of yourself. Make your decisions based on reality."

To conclude the presentation, Haverly urged the participants to set their own goals. "Turn everything into a goal. Omit the *shoulds*. Don't limit yourself. Write goals on paper. Commit written goals to God. Let go. Do what you can, one day at a time. Set goals regularly and as needed. Check off the goals reached. Be patient. Trust in God's timing," she emphasized.

6

Workshops Help Pastors And Seminarians Gain Understanding

As the Task Force On Town And Country Ministries sought to assess the rural situation, the task force worked through a process of transition from a primarily crisis orientation to taking on the significant questions related to the strengthening of ministry in town and country settings and issues related to community development. This chapter shares the work in the first area with the account of a Rural Awareness Seminar for pastors new to the rural setting and of a Rural Plunge for seminary students.

Rural Awareness Seminar Gives Added Perspective

When the task force sat down to plan for a Rural Awareness Seminar for clergy and spouses, Pastor Dick Bruesehoff pointed out, "We don't need to worry about bringing in the experts from far away. We have experts right here in our area who can help our pastors learn how to minister more effectively." With that perspective, Bruesehoff and the rest of the task force set about to organize an event that was to be practical and people oriented. Presenters were to include farm families, rural pastors, as well as the bishops from two synods. Invited participants were to be pastors and their spouses new to rural settings.

People Are Looking For Sensitivity From Their Pastors

What are rural people looking for from their pastors? In one session, pastors and their spouses had a chance to hear firsthand from a farm couple. Bob and Judy Utphall told their story in such a way that there were few dry eyes by the time they finished. Bob began by saying, "Judy and I were married at sixteen and eighteen. The church refused to marry us. So I had a disregard for the church since that time." He went on to tell that they started farming in 1972 with a high debt load. When the hard times came in the 1980s, life on the farm became tougher. "I turned to drinking and gambling. After threatening to do so several times, Judy left with the kids and went to stay with her mother. Finally, I realized I had to sell the cows, because I could not keep up the farm on my own," Bob stated.

Judy added her side of the story by saying, "We started in farming by believing it was a great place to raise our kids. But the pressure increased to the point where now I would not want them to go into farming. Life is so difficult on the farm. I can look back and see trouble signs. I used to be assistant Sunday School superintendent, but gradually withdrew from the church." She went on to explain that sometimes farm people do not come to church because they are embarrassed when they do not have a dollar to put in the offering plate. In situations like this, pastors and concerned church members have to go the extra step by asking a second time, "How are you?," she counseled. Judy became depressed, and communications with Bob deteriorated. When she could not take it any longer, she left.

Then something happened that changed their lives. "My mother told about a Sandra Simonson who was coming to speak at a church women's group. Would I be interested in coming? I said I would and asked Bob to come along. To my amazement he agreed. That night I saw God at work." When Judy had difficulty continuing, Sandra shared, "Many of the women did not know what to make of this couple being at the meeting and seeking help. I told them, 'Here is a man for whom the church has had no meaning. This is your opportunity to do outreach.' Fortunately the pastor reached out to Bob and talked with him. He was willing to become human to Bob." At that point in the presentation, Judy looked to Bob and said, "I waited for twenty years for this to happen to my husband."

Caregivers Reach Out To Form Support Networks

How can pastors and church members respond to people in need? Pastor Tim Diemer told how he helped to start a small informal group of farmers. In the second year, they began to study food and justice as well as land stewardship issues. Later on, they took peer listening training and formed a support group. "The church needs to be in front and let people know that it is concerned for farm people," Diemer emphasized. He has been involved in interventions of domestic abuse cases related to the rural crisis. One instance involved a mother abusing her children; the other a woman being abused by her husband.

Sandra Simonson gave further insight to those seeking to be effective caregivers. "There are all kinds of needs out there; at the same time many resources are available. We have the chance to be wonderful connectors between these two groups," she said. Among the formal programs with whom she has contact, Simonson told of a Dislocated Worker Program, the Private Industry Council, and a Community Action Program. Other efforts are more informal in nature. In her work with Lutheran Social Services, she has helped to train over 300 people in peer listening. This training has been effective in responding quickly to crisis situations. "When a phone call came to me from an attempted suicide attempt at a location some distance away, I was able to call a peer listener in the area and get them to the farm within two hours after the original contact," Simonson explained.

Bishops Address The Reality Of Rural Parish Ministry

Bishop Robert Herder of the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, related his experience of placing pastors. "The most difficult spots to fill are the rural ministry positions. Thank you for serving there," he began. Then he told of how one farm family had related to him that their pastor did not know much about farm economics, but the pastor stood with the family through bankruptcy proceedings, and they were grateful for that ministry. Part of the problem in placing pastors comes now in that 80% of the seminary graduates come from urban settings, whereas over 50% of the congregations are in rural settings, Herder stated.

Other significant factors he hears from pastors include generally lower salaries, a sense of isolation, lack of suitable employment for the spouse, and inferior public education for the children. Herder proposed that the synod subsidize those congregations which cannot meet a certain level of salary guidelines. In addition, he suggested that pastors over the age of fifty-five whose obligations to family are not as great could agree to accept rural positions. Finally, Herder contended that history may force the church to adopt area wide strategies. In the end he challenged pastors, "Are you involving yourself as a servant of Jesus Christ willing to go where the church calls you? Sometimes we need to instill in each other that we are a serving people. We cannot get spoiled by needs, wants, and demands."

Herder's counterpart in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, Bishop Gerhard Knutson, focused on cultural values in his presentation. Oftentimes, he contended, the dominant culture values a *bigger is better* approach. As a result, some small churches suffer from an image problem. In addition some pastors new to rural suffer from a culture shock. In contrast to this cultural value of *bigger is better*, the Bible witnesses to how God chooses the smallest of peoples to carry out God's work, Knutson maintained.

"Faithfulness, not numbers, is the issue," he contended. "The biblical call is to mission." In seeking to shed insight on the nature of the small church, Knutson spoke of a sense of family, history, and identity, which needs to be affirmed. The organization of a small church is simple, and most decisions are made informally. Because of this characteristic, the pastor should engage in conversation and listening, Knutson counseled.

The church must also battle against certain cultural values as to the use of land, Bishop Knutson told those gathered. Many Europeans saw land as something to be captured and possessed; commercially, they viewed land as a way to make money. The land as well as its original inhabitants, the Native Americans, suffered from this European onslaught, Knutson contended. In contrast, farm people are called by the biblical witness to believe that the land comes as a gift. "Hard work on the land involves the stewards in a task bigger than themselves," he stated. "Life on the land brings forth awesome worship."

Rural Church Faces Challenges And Opportunities

In one of the most thought-provoking parts of the seminar, Pastor Dick Bruesehoff, posed a number of challenges and opportunities facing the rural church. According to Bruesehoff, the population of the Midwest by the year 2000 will be older, more highly educated, more urban focused, more racially diverse, less family oriented, experiencing greater gaps between upper income and lower income groups, and growing very slowly.

In addition to the demographic trends shaping the Midwest, Bruesehoff pointed out a number of other forces affecting rural America. These include the dominance of urban America in the political scene; development of a global economy; changing transportation patterns; biotechnology; current government policies; movement from the Post-Industrial Age into the Information Age; and a deeply felt desire to experience community with others. "In order to practice ministry in the context of these forces and trends, it is important to affirm a basic life premise: 'We are living in a changing world.' The changes precipitated by current trends and forces present us with both challenges and opportunities," Bruesehoff stated. He singled out the following for special consideration:

- The most critical question is one of identification. As population changes, with whom will we identify? As the middle class shrinks, will we be a church of the lower or upper class?
- How will we respond to the deeply felt need to belong, to experience community, which is being expressed throughout our society?
- How will we support congregations during times of emotional and financial stress?
- How will we advocate for rural communities and small towns where there are great needs for quality day care facilities, sensitive mental health workers, accessible health care facilities, quality housing, economic development, and employment opportunities?
- How will we promote increased yoking and/or cooperation among congregations, schools, health care providers, and government agencies?
- How will we explore alternative patterns of staffing for rural and small town congregations such as multiple staff in multiple parish congregations, dual vocation persons, ecumenical congregations, lay preachers, deacons, and deaconesses?
- How will we address the salary inequities (and, as a result, the pension inequities) often facing those in the practice of rural ministry?
- How will we provide accessible continuing education opportunities for those practicing ministry in rural and small town ministries?
- How will we advocate for a more community based model of ministry that attempts to minister to and in the whole community?
- How will we encourage and assist pastors to serve in rural communities and small towns for periods of five years or more?

Bruesehoff concluded, "Recognizing trends, analyzing forces, and responding to challenges and opportunities of this changing world are all part of a process that may actually offer the occasion to strengthen rural life. But it won't happen unless efforts are expended to make sure it happens. Those who will bring hope must help people find a focus, evoke unique gifts, affirm what is good, and encourage a search for new opportunities."

Seminary Students Participate In A Rural Plunge

Ten students from Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago participated in a Rural Plunge in the Chequamegon Conference of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin. The event, planned by the synod Task Force On Town And Country Ministries, involved eight congregations and their pastors. According to Pastor Dick Bruesehoff, the purpose was to acquaint the students with the type of ministry many will be called to practice in their first call. As a part of an elective class on rural ministry offered by Professor Norris Neidenthal and Marvin Anderson, the students spent the weekend with farm families and rural pastors.

A high point of the weekend for many of the students was a panel discussion made up of people representing various aspects of rural communities. These participants included: Dennis Kuehling, a member of the task force and an operator of a successful dairy farm in the family for over a century; Don and Ruby Thompson, farmers who went through bankruptcy proceedings and who belonged to a farmer support group; Francis Stiener, a retired vocational agricultural teacher; Art Feldman, an elementary school principal; and Betty Hull, a village mayor and chair of the county board. Kuehling, who had hosted the group in a tour of his farm the day before, provided a background of the work of the task force, while the others gave an in-depth look at their involvement in rural communities.

Don and Judy Thompson recounted how they went from being named Outstanding Young Farmers in 1973 to battling for their financial life in the middle to late 1980s. Judy began by telling that they came from Iowa in 1963 and started up a grain and hog operation. During the 1970s they expanded. "We fell into a tremendous crisis. It was excruciating and very difficult to put into words what we felt. It was as if 25 to 28 years of working vanished in front of our eyes," she stated. "We do not know how we could have coped without the church. At the same time, getting up and going to church on Sunday was the most difficult task of the week. It seemed as if 200 people looked at us as failures.

"But our pastor was qualified to deal with our complex situation and seemed to understand our financial and marriage problems. Through all of this we have gotten back to ground zero and realized that we are not in control. We had placed too much emphasis on the material; we now see God in control. God forgives us and accepts us for what we are and we go on," she stated. When a seminary student asked how a pastor could be most effective in relating to hurting people, Judy suggested, "A pastor can respond by being a listener and being supportive, as well as giving the assurance, 'You are a child of God.'"

Another seminary student responded with a probing question, "We saw a video before coming here of a farm family in a similar situation in which the man broke down and cried saying that he had lost his farm because he had forgotten God. He blamed himself for losing the farm. Is that a common faith experience?" Don answered, "I would like to set the record straight. We had a lot of land we put into grain and then fed to our hogs. In the spring of 1985 our operation was valued at $480,000; in the fall of 1985 it was valued at less than $30,000. In our case land values went from $1,200 an acre to $250 an acre."

He went on to explain that his first reaction was to blame himself because he must have done something wrong. Later he realized that he did not do anything differently from what his father had done; he only did it at a different time. Because Don and Judy wanted a son to come into farming with them, they bought a second farm. When they later asked their son if he would like to join them in farming, their son said he still liked farming and enjoyed helping out but did not want to go through what his parents suffered. The rural community also endured much of the same pain, as machinery dealers, other farm-related businesses, and the rural economy suffered the effects, Don pointed out.

This exchange prompted still another seminary student to tell about her experience of the farm family with whom she was staying. "The farmer seems to be apologizing for not being available to his children with all that he has to do. Because of the farmer's labor, the rest of us can live in a manner to which we are accustomed. If it were not for the farmer, we would not be able to survive. The attitudes of farmers have to change so that they feel worthy," she asserted. "As farmers you work very hard. I had no idea of the amount of time spent; I got up at 4:00 a.m. and went out to the barn. When I hear farmers saying, 'We have not done enough,' I say, 'But, you have done enough.'"

Dennis Kuehling then joined in by telling of his experience with new seminary graduates who come to the rural church in their first call. "Sem grads come out as preachers, and we make pastors out of them. I like to see pastors come out and visit and ask how things are going. But a pastor has to learn always to ask three times, because the first two times the farmer says that things are going just fine, whereas on the third time, the farmer begins to tell how things really are going. I like pastors to engage in a hands on process."

Francis Stiener, the retired vocational agriculture teacher, recounted how, when he worked with student teachers, he would tell them to get down to the level of the kids. With this background, he went on to give some practical advice for the student pastors:

- Don't be afraid to get out and learn what your people do and get manure on your shoes. Don't ever say it stinks; you won't last two days. What stinks is smog in Chicago. Our air is fresh. If a farmer asks if you would like to see the cows, take an interest in the animals.
- Get out of your study and make some calls. Go to the community events and get to know the people on a one-to-one basis.
- Read some farm magazines. Learn the price of an acre of land, that a cow has four teats, that 94% of the cows in Wisconsin are holstiens, and a stalk of corn usually has one ear.

Art Feldman, the elementary school principal and proponent of rural education, believes good things are happening in the rural setting. "We offer a good education in the basics. A smaller school in a rural setting also offers personal attention for each child. An average of 75% of the students in high school participate in cocurricular activities. This kind of participation is one of the biggest indicators of success later in life. It is impossible for students to fall through the cracks. Somebody will take an interest," he stated. "One of the disadvantages of small schools, though, is that it is hard to offer all the special programs."

Betty Hull, the village mayor and chair of the county board, gave a presentation on the ins and outs of rural political life. When one of the seminary students asked what Hull thought the role of a pastor should be in a rural community, she replied by telling of a former pastor who was elected to the school board and served as its president. "I definitely think pastors should become involved in the rural communities," she responded. One of the host pastors, Richard Sorenson of Greenwood, followed up by telling of his involvement in community affairs. "My experience as a firefighter and a licensed ambulance attendant has been one of a gracious response that brings affirmation to the pastor. People expect us to use special gifts for the community. So accepting has been my community involvement that, if parishioners suggested to me that it is time to move on, I would just mention it to people in the community and they would say how much I am needed. I have been in the present location six years and plan to be there a lot longer," he stated.

How do events happen in rural communities? Pastor Paul Peterson offered concluding remarks by saying, "I am often asked, 'What *do you do* in small towns?' We plan an event, sell the tickets, set up the chairs, then buy the tickets, do the activity, serve the coffee, and clean up. Afterwards, we figure out how much we made and then give it to a community project. We are more involved and have less time to watch TV. I have served four different parishes, all in rural settings and have no desire to be somewhere else."

7

Wisconsin Housing Ministry Partnership Is Formed

Shelter is only surpassed by food and clothing as a basic human need. The lack of decent, affordable housing has reached a crisis situation. The rising costs of land, materials, labor, maintenance, and fuel have contributed to forcing people to pay an increasingly higher percentage of their income for suitable shelter. The affordable housing crisis crosses all social and economic boundaries: metropolitan, small town and rural; home owner and renter; middle-income and low-income; elderly persons and young families; two and single parent families; as well as handicapped persons and those in need of assisted living.

The high costs of maintenance, fuel, and property taxes require many elderly persons, on a fixed income, to spend much more than they can afford to maintain their homes, or to live in deteriorating housing. These same costs affect the housing rental industry by forcing rents up and increasing the frequency of substandard housing. High construction costs and mortgage requirements contribute to the unavailability of housing for prospective middle-income buyers. Housing is also an economic development issue. The lack of decent, affordable housing in communities often forces people to leave, which erodes the economic base as there is less need for goods and services, as well as diminishing the available workforce. People unable to find suitable housing in a community and unable to afford to commute will often not take jobs in that community.

Communities have been passed up by companies looking at economic development because there was not enough housing available for the people in the jobs that would be created. Affordable housing for lower income people is particularly critical, especially in rural areas. Over 15% of rural people live below the poverty level, twice the urban percentage. One in every three low-income home owners pay over 70% of their income for home expenses. One in every four low-income renters pay over 70% of their income for housing expenses, while over half pay more than 50%. In 1985, over 25% of low-income rural residents lived in substandard housing.

These housing needs in communities throughout Wisconsin are being tackled by a partnership of religious organizations and a nonprofit development corporation. The Wisconsin Conference of Churches (WCC), The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin ELCA, and Impact Seven have teamed to form the Wisconsin Housing Ministry Partnership (WHMP). The partnership, funded in part by an endowment from the Lilly Endowment, was formed to train religious organizations in housing issues and development process, and then to develop housing that meets community needs.

According to John Fischer, Wisconsin Conference of Churches Executive Director, "The reason for the grant was to stimulate greater direct involvement of religious institutions in community revitalization, strengthen community ministries, and attract new sources of support and funding for such initiatives." Fischer further explained, "What the Partnership proposed was to work with interested local congregations to ascertain needs and educate local congregational leaders on low-income housing development. The Partnership received a planning grant to identify local congregations interested in working on the project, hold workshops, and then to survey in order to identify the need for housing throughout Wisconsin."

Fischer explained the theory behind the practice by stating, "The concept of partnership in a variety of outreach ministries has been rapidly growing in recent years. The concept embodies sharing in ministry within a faith tradition, between various denominational groups, and between church organizations and community service and development agencies. The Wisconsin Conference of Churches has been very much involved in the development and implementation of the partnership concept, particularly in partnerships between church organizations and community service and development agencies."

Impact Seven, located in Turtle Lake, Wisconsin, brings to the partnership a long history of work in the field of housing. Impact Seven has built over $30,000,000 worth of housing and currently manages 190 units of housing, 110 of which it owns and 80 of which it manages for other organizations. William Bay, President of Impact Seven, headed the group that hired a staff person with expertise in the areas of organization, identifying needs, and packaging applications to federal, state, and private funding sources. Pastor Dick Bruesehoff, representing the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin on the search committee, emphasized the importance of having a person who was sensitive to the dynamics of small towns.

The Wisconsin Housing Ministry Partnership Board consists of two members from each of the three partners. A Technical Advisory Committee, consisting of people involved in housing all over Wisconsin, will provide expertise to the partnership. In order to assist local church organizations to be closely involved with issues in their communities, the first function of the Wisconsin Housing Ministry Partnership was to organize workshops for religious and lay church leaders, volunteers, and other interested persons.

William Taylor, housing developer selected to head the project, identified the objectives of the workshops. These included the following: to help church leaders by designing surveys to ascertain needs and identify and mobilize resources; to teach community organization and the identification of local leadership skills and instruction as to how to involve low-income community residents and volunteers in the process; to teach community service techniques that can be replicated and leveraged; and to show how to secure financing to build and rehabilitate low-income housing in areas of need.

During the planning period, the Partnership hopes to attain specific accomplishments. Taylor stated, "We seek to survey all religious organizations in the impact area to introduce them to the concept and ascertain interest as well as to gain a significant expansion of affiliated religious organizations. Then we plan to identify six religious groups who are interested in organizing to explore new ways of providing low-income housing and to identify and begin work on six rural housing projects."

"Church and church groups, clergy and laity, who wish to be of service," Taylor pointed out, "have found a housing ministry to be a very significant way to contribute to the stability of their communities and congregations." Taylor offered the following courses of action that concerned church people can take:

- Find out how the crisis in affordable housing is affecting both the community and the congregation.
- Support initiatives and legislation that address affordable housing issues.
- Join together in intercommunity, intercongregational, and interfaith groups to deal with the shelter crisis.
- Improve the situation of the individuals that are affected by developing programming to assist them.
- Draw developers' attention to the community.
- Construct or rehabilitate housing that meets a particular need in the community.

Part IV

The Rural Church Is Called To Bring The Message Of Hope

"The church is expected to be many things in the rural community. In certain ways, we may appear to be little different from other organizations working to improve life in rural communities. But there is one way in which we are very unique. We are the people of the Christian faith. We believe and confess that God is merciful and just and that God has come to us in the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we are asked why we do what we do, it must always be in reference to this good news.

"If hope is the single greatest need in our rural communities, then our churches have a role to play that no other institution that I know of can do. Our gift is to be a community of hope. We may be tempted to give up and give in, but I say that rural communities are worth fighting for."

—Bishop Herbert Chilstrom, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, speaking at the **1990 National Conference of Rural Ministry** in Dubuque, Iowa.

8

The Rural Church Seeks To Meet The Challenges Of The 1990s

As we move from the decade of the 1980s into the decade of the 1990s, what challenges will the church face? How will the church face up to the challenges? This chapter seeks to address these questions. I have drawn on the presentations of four persons who are exercising important leadership roles with church people. Dave Ostendorf is a United Church of Christ minister who is involved in rural organizing efforts out of DesMoines, Iowa; he speaks of possible responses of the community of faith.

Shanon Jung is a professor at a Presbyterian seminary and Lutheran seminary in Dubuque, Iowa; he provides a constructive approach to the matter of life and death in rural communities. Herbert Chilstrom is the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) with headquarters in Chicago, Illinois; he outlines four key areas for the rural church. Marty Strange is Director of the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, Nebraska; he addresses the moral values in the rural arena.

Possible Responses Of The Community Of Faith: The Corner We Are Turning

Dave Ostendorf gave an insightful look at where the church is as the decade of the 1980s came to an end and the decade of the 1990s began. Ostendorf, Director of Prairie Fire Rural Action of DesMoines, Iowa, made his remarks at the **Rural Communities in the 1990s: Vision and Response By the People of Faith** event in Omaha, Nebraska in September 1989. According to Ostendorf, the church historically has either ignored or followed rather than led social movements in the countryside during the past one hundred years. The Populist Revolt in the late 19th century, for instance, was characterized for its glaring lack of church involvement, Ostendorf cited.

The Town and Country Movement in the early part of the 20th century grew out of the Rural Life Movement that was rooted in Theodore Roosevelt's Rural Life Commission. Its followers, Ostendorf contended, sought to use the church in its effort to modernize farming and they engaged pastors and lay leaders across the country to bring about the industrialization of agriculture. By the middle of the century most churches, driven by the urbanizing principle, sought to dismantle the town and country departments that had sprung up by the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1960s and 1970s staff people assigned to address rural concerns were relegated to the periphery of programs and budgets in the national, regional, and local judicatories and ecumenical agencies, he stated.

In turning to the 1980s, Ostendorf credited the churches with playing a central role in shaping, legitimating, and undergirding the reform movement in rural America, and many of the victories would not have been won without the involvement of the church. "That is something we need to celebrate as we look toward the future," Ostendorf said. "But as you know the church's participation was never easy or natural. The church was often dragged kicking and screaming into the fray." From 1982 to 1984 the church was quietly stirring with the winds of change, Ostendorf observed.

In 1984 to 1986 the rural scene exploded on the national scene; the church began to legitimate the language of crisis, to put its stamp of approval on the movement, and to force people in the countryside and throughout the nation to take seriously the rural crisis, he

pointed out. By 1987, Ostendorf noted, the church began to see its own self-interest at stake and was heavily threatened; at the same time, retrenchment came in the church. At the end of the decade, he summarized, the church began to mirror society and accept the premise that the crisis had passed.

The new decade brings an even more critical economic situation, Ostendorf contended. "The economic stratification of the 1980s will be entrenched in the 1990s. The poorest 20% have gone down in mean income, while the richest 20% went up. Power has been redistributed with the control of capital being concentrated at a tremendous cost. The market economy is an illusion of democracy. We are witnessing the contract feeding of livestock and the concentration of meat packing. Biotechnology is sweeping in, and land control will be a most serious issue," Ostendorf stated.

As the decade of the 1990s comes upon us, Ostendorf appealed, "The church must move from coping to poking. It must prod people into developing their abilities. Until and unless the church provides vision and leadership, social and economic transformation will not take place." With that call, he put forth possible responses of the community of faith:

• The church must claim its heritage and develop a language born of faith and the people of the land based on distributive justice and rooted in those who live in the margins and on the peripheries. Its style should be that of participation and action and taken from the Mosaic tradition and not the royal Davidic tradition. See — judge — act becomes the way to carry out consciousness raising. Reflection leads to action. Action leads to celebration.

• The church must move with the people to economic awareness in organizing an assault on the ideology of power. In teaching and learning with the people, the church carves out new possibilities for the future.

• People of faith are called to do historical analysis. "What worked before? What can be made to work now?"

• A new openness to communities of faith on the margins is needed; new models of ecumenism are possible.

• New visions of hope and community are called for. Some of these include: church acting as regions because the church is the one institution to play a pivotal role; discover new ways of working together, such as cooperatives; keeping people on the land through land trusts; resettling people on the land; rebuilding just economic activity; exploring issues of rural women and youth; looking at new models of ecumenical cooperation for training pastors; making coalitions with people's groups; and addressing regional public policy.

These Bones Will Rise Again: The Rural Church In The '90s

Shanon Jung gave a helpful metaphor for the rural church while speaking as a part of a **Sustaining The Land, Sustaining Ourselves** event at the Churches' Center for Land and People in Sinsenawa, Wisconsin in November 1989. Jung, director of the Rural Ministry Program/Center for Theology and Land at Wartburg and University of Dubuque Seminaries in Dubuque, Iowa, compared the rural church to a person with kidney failure.

When a person needs a cleansing of the blood with dialysis, Jung commented, certain things happen. First of all, their lives cannot be taken for granted anymore. They are not assured or secured. Second, the person is dependent upon barely understood machines or people they may or may not know. Third, the disease and treatment is experienced as belittling a person; the person feels out of control. Fate cannot change the circumstances.

With this condition, the person is faced with two distinct responses, Jung pointed out. On the one hand, the person with a kidney condition may become bitter and angry. In resignation the person may ask, "Why did this happen to me?" and state, "I didn't do anything to deserve this." The person is crushed by what is perceived to be a chance event. Together with this, the person makes life miserable for others. Such a response results in a shorter life expectancy. On the other hand, the person with a kidney condition may respond with gratitude and see life as an opportunity. Such a person becomes indebted to those who made the treatment possible and shows appreciation to others. Life is lived with courage. Such a response results in a longer life expectancy.

In making the comparison, Jung stated that the rural church is faced with a decision similar to that of the person with a kidney condition on dialysis. The rural church may respond, on the one hand, with inferiority and angry resignation. Such feelings are reflected by statements like, "We will go down with the ship. We cannot do anymore." The rural church may respond, on the other hand, with a collaborative and communal stance. Such sentiments are indicated by statements like, "We need to deal with the fact of being in this situation. How can we act in a creative and faithful manner?"

Jung acknowledged that he used to state a message that he now believes is dangerously flawed. This message took the form of calling for an attitudinal change from the negative to the affirmative in which people would build on their strengths and take on attainable projects. Along with this, he would say that the church must act on its corporate call and build an inclusive church that would involve new people, particularly those different from the majority. "Now I see that the condition of the rural church must be framed in the context of pain and grief. We need to face the reality of loss. If we do not face it, that says we do not have the resources to deal with the situation," Jung asserted.

"Suffering, grief, and loss is part of what it means to be finite human beings. To be in solidarity with others is to experience corporate grief. We need to recognize our dependency," Jung offered. "In addition, we acknowledge our complicity in the problem. Together with this, we ask what does the presence of God mean in these patients because we are all like kidney patients whose blood is being cleansed by dialysis."

Jung seeks to carry out his metaphor in concrete ways through the Rural Ministry Program/Center for Theology and Land at the two seminaries. Since its establishment with his coming in 1987, the Rural Ministry Program has focused on making the rural, small church visible in Presbyterian and Lutheran denominations. It has initiated rural discovery trips to small town and country churches, sponsored pastors' workshops, worked with denominational officials representing five denominations, and is moving into community revitalization efforts. The conversation between Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, and Roman Catholic officials and the Rural Ministry Program has been an ongoing resource for both parties in organizing and facilitating the revitalization of rural churches and communities.

In the fall of 1989 the Rural Ministry Program initiated a special Rural Semester for Seminarians that brought seminary students to Dubuque from around the Midwest and other seminaries nationwide. Participants gained an experiential understanding of rural church and community life through field trips and participation in rural churches. The overarching purpose of the Rural Ministry Program is to strengthen rural churches and communities. Since the majority of seminarians in Iowa and the upper Midwest are likely to be called to rural congregations, the Rural Ministry Program seeks to alleviate the notion of the rural call as a stepping stone to larger congregations. The program strives to serve the educational and facilitative needs of rural pastors, laypeople, and seminarians through the academic studies of the seminary as well as extracurricular projects.

Bishop Raises Four Areas Of Special Concern

In his talk entitled, *The Church In Rural Ministry*, Bishop Herbert Chilstrom raised four areas of special concern before the **1990 National Conference on Rural Ministry** at Dubuque, Iowa. Chilstrom pointed to evangelism, planning strategy for effective ministry, advocacy, and the care of the earth as key agenda items for the rural church in this decade.

Ninety million people are unchurched in the U.S., Chilstrom began by saying, and the number of unchurched in town and country settings is increasing. Whereas immigrants needed a community to gain their bearings, he noted, community people need to guard against becoming insulated today. "Too many communities give the message that others are not welcome," Chilstrom stated. "Most rural churches need not look very far to find people different from themselves. Church people need confidence to press on." The bishop spoke of the persistence of missionaries and lay leaders in foreign mission fields as that which is needed to reach out to bring people into the life of the church.

To carry out effective ministry, Chilstrom urged church people to plan strategy. Even as farmers are going out of business, other people are moving into the countryside. A new awareness of the rural scene is called for, he observed. "As times have changed, strategies of cooperation are needed," Chilstrom argued. Some churches —including those of different denominations — may want to share facilities, while in other situations a larger church may work with a smaller one. Some congregations may link to form a joint parish. Internships in special settings may help some churches stay open, while other congregations may need financial assistance to maintain pastoral ministry. Clergy who choose to serve in rural ministry may need subsidies for their pension in order not to be unduly penalized in retirement for serving in lower paying churches. "We need to move beyond survival mentality," Chilstrom asserted. "We need to focus on what can be."

Chilstrom went on to call for advocacy for rural causes. "Rural areas are no longer islands of peace and tranquility. In back of the facade is minimal health care, domestic violence, and substandard housing. On the one hand, community pride refuses to admit the problems. So often, on the other hand, state governments overlook the rural plight," he said. The bishop stated his conviction that the rural church must look at the justice issues of economic independence in order that rural people might experience a right to a job, education, housing, self-respect, and safety.

Care of the earth, Chilstrom said, must be an area of concern as well. "The fundamental question is how the next generation will live. A rising chorus of voices is saying that we must use our resources wisely or lose the future," he noted. "Sustainability must be embraced everywhere. As a theological issue, we must strive for a sustainable way of life. We must not use more than we replace." In conclusion, Chilstrom quoted the biblical judge Joshua who said, "We have not passed this way before. But God will be with us."

Rural Life And Values In The Midwest Into The 1990s

In his presentation — entitled *Rural Life And Values In The Midwest Into The 1990s* at the same **1990 National Conference on Rural Ministry** — Marty Strange outlined the problems of rural communites now and then gave five areas in which people of faith can seize the opportunities for improving life in rural communities. Strange posited that rural communities stand between the second and third stages of the rural crisis. The first stage he identified as the boom with high inflation, increasing land values, and unrealistic

expectations. Much money was lent for borrowing on land. The second stage was the bust with declining land values, farmers going out of business, and rural communities suffering. People in this stage experienced embarrassment, acrimony, and even violence. This too was an unrealistic stage. The third stage is the opportunity for a new agriculture.

In between the second and third stages is a period of uncertainty, according to Strange. Economically, he stated, life is very tenuous in that many people continue to live on the brink. With the tremendous debt, farmers must liquidate, pay off the debt, or have the debt written off. "Those debts are not going to be paid. The debt must be restructured. The losses have to be shared," Strange asserted. He went on to say that there should not be a concentration of wealth, and that this country needed to practice distributive justice.

In order to move on to the stage of opportunity, Strange argued that people of faith must address a number of values at risk. One of these values is that of *stewardship*. "American agriculture has a bad record for stewardship. Groundwater pollution is the number one problem. We need to stop denying and apologizing and start doing something about it," Strange maintained. He also pointed to the lack of earnestness in regards to small communities. Times used to be when people knew when you were sick and cared when you died, he said, but there is a meaner spirit now in that more good people do not stand up and take care of each other. "We do not treat our small towns very well," he criticized.

Another value is that of the *integrity of communities*. In early New England, Strange pointed out, people lived in covenantal communities in which people were given land on the basis of their worthiness to contribute to the community. As population increased and the availability of land became tighter, this criteria shifted to whether or not a person was financially worth enough to pay for the land. According to Strange, farmers engaged in a Faustin bargain between 1945 and 1980 in which they bought into a new technology based on petroleum in order to increase production. This social contract came at the expense of rural communities because the money became siphoned out and into the industrial economy. When rural people become fully integrated into an industrial economy, that economy shows no mercy as farmers go out of business, the land becomes more poorly distributed, and the businesses in small towns close down.

Strange pointed to *competence* as the third value in question. At one time, farmers took a great deal of pride in a well-run farm. Now a common complaint is "We can't afford to do the job well." Strange characterized the current practice as the "mechanical application of formulated technologies" with instructions of "read the label stupid." He argued for a renewal of skills that rely upon savvy and shrewdness by the farmer. Actually, he said, sustainable agriculture will require a much higher level of management skills than that required by industrial agriculture. In addition, Strange appealed for rural people to practice *cooperation* as a value in community life. Too often rural people, he claimed, have succumbed to the societal standard of competitiveness only to have erosion of community.

For the fifth value, Strange brought up *sustainable* development as the key to effective rural life. Permanence is the goal in producing food and fiber in a way that does not jeopardize the ability of future generations to do the same. Farm people are demonstrating an excitement in exploring ways to cut costs and be more environmentally sound. They are eager and thoughtful as they live and work on the cutting edge.

Marty Strange concluded by saying that the church has different roles during the varying stages of a farm crisis. In the boom stage, the church must be prophetic in warning of dangers, while in the bust stage the church must be reconciling, loving, and nurturing. As people are preparing to enter the third stage of opportunity, Strange urged church people to be visionary in talking about the tough issues and exploring the possibilities.

9

Opportunities For Rural Congregations

The decade of the 1990s poses a host of opportunities for rural congregations. In this chapter you will hear from four knowledgeable persons who spoke of these opportunities in a concrete way. William Cotton and Carl Dudley, in presentations given at the **1990 National Conference on Rural Ministry** in Dubuque, Iowa, each made a thought-provoking case for greater involvement of the church in the local communities. In two other events, Jon Evert spoke of the uniqueness of the small membership congregation and what it has going for it, while Roy Oswald related his findings on effective long-term ministry.

Evangelism And The Rural Church: The Leadership Factor

William Cotton drew upon extensive experience with rural congregations from his service as Superintendent of the Creston District of the Iowa Conference in the United Methodist Church when he gave his presentation. In a message entitled, *Evangelism And The Rural Church: The Leadership Factor*, he looked at the hard realities of rural congregations and lifted up the opportunities presented in rural communities.

To begin with, Cotton asked three questions and made a response to each of them:
• Will the rural church survive? — "Yes, but it will be changed. We have all been changed. The future is very blurred and does not yet appear what we will be."
• What will the future of the rural community look like? — "It will depend on the vision of the leadership. Those who plan will have a future. Not to decide is to decide."
• What will the role of the church play? — "The role of the church is crucial as a social pioneer. Have you ever felt more in the right place and at the right time in all your life? In many communities, the church is the best building in the area. Sometimes, a clergy is in mothballs ready to take the wraps off. Leadership can mobilize people."

After introducing his presentation with the use of these questions, Cotton called attention to five important areas in order for the rural church to carry out the task of evangelism:

1.) Leadership — "We must create the signs and signals of new life. We need to set the image for ourselves. God has brought the new creation into our midst. Go out and preach hope. Preach faith until you have it. Then when you have it, preach hope. Small membership congregations have the courage to be. They have come eyeball to eyeball with extinction and did not blink. They will endure and will prevail."

2.) Windows Of Opportunity — "The church people in Thayer, Iowa said that it is true that our town is dead. But I asked three questions: 'Why would you continue to live here? What are your needs? What would you like to see happen?' The people in that town formed a 2000 Club to see what they could make happen. They decided to take on rural evangelism and identified health care as the most pressing social concern. The lay people became involved. The Thayer church has now doubled in size. If you plan, you can make things happen. The Spirit makes things happen. People can map out their future."

3.) Movements start when pastors and laity engage in a visionary process. — "I encourage you to go home and form a golden circle. Gather eight people from an ecumenical setting who are broad-minded and open. You need three visionaries who know how to come up with new ideas, three process people who know how to take the ideas and go with

them, and two bureaucrats who know how to find the resources. In this way you image, order, and resource. In one small community, people put together a Neighbor Helping Neighbor effort after the bank closed down and raised $300,000 for people in need."

4.) The process of future making is the solution for staff planning. — "I found that most clergy felt underemployed and overworked. Their needs can best be expressed, 'I need to feel supported and to know that someone pays attention to me; I need to have my story told and to be connected with the rest of the world.' As superintendent I went looking for pastors willing to take risks. I spent 60% of my time helping pastors and churches. We did not have lone rangers. When pastors feel supported, they can do good work."

5.) Staff planning must include laity. — "Lay people can serve in their own community of faith. They do not need to be ordained any further. In one congregation, a lay leader kept calling me up saying, 'We need you to come down to the church next Sunday.' I would ask, 'Why?' He would say, 'We have some more people we need you to baptize.' In our district, we called two part-time pastors to organize teachers and Sunday Schools. They worked ecumenically. We can make this thing work."

William Cotton concluded his address with an inspiring word: "The future of the rural church is not optimistic, but it is hopeful. We can live without optimism, but not without hope. We are seers; hope begins where optimism stops smiling. We live between Good Friday and Easter. On Friday, the answer is that the forces of evil will always win, and there is nothing you can do about it. On Saturday there is a long silence. On Sunday, all power is given to the risen Lord. Go and tell the world there is hope. In Ezekiel we hear the story of the valley of dry bones. We could say this valley extends all the way through the Heartland of this country. And God said, 'Speak to the dry bones that they may come alive.' And they were filled with new life. Let all God's people say Amen. 'Rx: Amen.'"

Social Ministry And Evangelism: Findings From Congregational Studies

In his presentation, *Social Ministry And Evangelism: Findings From Congregational Studies*, Carl Dudley spoke of challenges to living the gospel as well as affirmations of congregational activity. Dudley, a professor of church and community at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois, based his findings on a study of forty churches in Illinois and Indiana that represented eighteen denominations.

Challenges To Living The Gospel

1.) Church Family — Dudley and his associates found that rural congregations who see themselves as a church family care about each other in an intimate way. This is their backbone. At the same time, this very strength can be a barrier to growth. In addition, such a perspective frequently yields a social analysis only of hurting individuals rather than systems to be changed. "The church needs to do more than simply bandage people at the bottom of the cliff. They must climb to the top and see why people are jumping," he challenged. "We need to ask them to dream and to imagine the world differently."

2.) Pastoral Role — Pastors, Dudley contended, can be one of the biggest barriers to evangelism and social ministry. They often misunderstand parishioners in overestimating the enthusiasm for evangelism and underestimated the interest in social ministry. Dudley advised pastors to help lay people assume leadership and maintain momentum. "It is better to act out a new way of thinking, rather than thinking out a new way of acting," he offered.

3.) Impotence/Empowerment — The lack of resources can overwhelm even the strongest people, Dudley began, leading to impotence. At the same time, empowerment is related to vision. "Remarkable things can happen when people believe in themselves," he pointed out. Dudley then told about a small town that became mobilized and prevented toxic wastes from being dumped in their locale. In addition, Dudley spoke of the need for raising money. "Communities will not be transformed by freewill offerings. We need to imagine new ways of raising funds," Dudley remarked.

4.) Personal/Community Evangelism — So often, Dudley observed, personal evangelism focuses on the individual rather than the gathered community. The faith community then feels self-righteous towards the larger community. "When people care for each other, something unpredictable happens. As people reach out to touch others, then lives are transformed," Dudley commented.

5.) Organizational Mechanical Notions Of Change — "Part of our crisis is the messianic mindset of pastors," Dudley said. "The issue is not the great leader, management by objective, or conflict management. These only alienate people from the sources of strength." Instead, Dudley pointed to the cultural identity, covenant, and commitment that holds people together and releases energy. "People and events of the past that shaped the congregation provide the heritage to take on the activity of the present," he asserted.

Affirmations Of Congregational Life

Congregations gain strength for their work and respond to challenges in different ways. By the way in which people tell their stories, they reveal their congregational identity. Dudley elaborated on the different types of congregational behaviors.

1.) Crisis — People who lurch from crisis to crisis can be compared to Indiana Jones. They are the survivors who live on the edge and are determined to hang on.

2.) Crusader — Those who go looking for causes are fiercely independent. They look to the pastor as a spokesperson.

3.) Pillar — Certain churches see themselves as supporting the whole community and are thought of by the community as essential.

4.) Pilgrim — Church people reach out with friendship to those in the community who are in need. The pastor is considered a parental figure.

5.) Servant — Most churches are in this mode. They want to help people with mutual support; they are good for caring but not for social justice.

In conclusion, Dudley argued that congregations are too small to carry on social ministry and evangelism by themselves. Churches can best carry out this work through ecumenical efforts. In addition, he asserted that churches grow fastest when they feel the toughest challenge. "We live in a competitive world. We will lose them if we do not offer a challenge," Dudley maintained.

What Small Congregations Can Do That Big Ones Can't

What do small membership congregations have going for them? Many times members of such churches regard themselves as inferior to the large membership congregations who seem to have more of everything. How can the small church recover a sense of confidence in living out its uniqueness? Jon Evert addressed these questions as a part of a January 1990 **KAIROS** learning event at Luther-Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Evert combines his work on the family farm in northern Minnesota with his position as staff person in Region Three, (Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota), of the ELCA. In drawing upon an article by Art Jaggert in *The Five Stones Newsletter*, he contrasted the industrial and agrarian cultures to show how the small membership congregations differ from many of their counterparts with large memberships.

Industrial	**Agrarian**
Rationalism: It has to make sense.	Theism: God as Father and Mother Earth.
Membership: Determined by creed.	Membership: Adoptive, belonging to family.
Program oriented ministry.	Relational oriented ministry.
Private worship that is entertaining.	Sanctuary worship as part of larger whole.
Dynamism: Future planning for change.	Tradition: Historical response to need.
Time management for accelerated change.	Unhurried: Change takes time.
Society worth more than individual.	Individual worth more than society.
More passive laity in worship.	More active involvement in worship.
Career oriented where work is central.	Family oriented where relationships are key.
Formal organizational power structure.	Informal power structure.
Management by objective.	Management by consensus.
Specialized clergy.	Generalists as clergy.

Evert argued that pastors and members of small congregations need to claim the strengths of their setting and act upon those unique characteristics. The church has something to offer in the midst of the life and death in rural communities. With that background, he offered the following trends he sees and what the church can do:

• While the rapid and uncontrolled change of the rural crisis continues, the support systems are in place. This was not true even ten years ago.
• While people are leaving the rural areas in record numbers, others are discovering the values of rural life and some are returning to the countryside.
• While a very capitalistic and highly leveraged agriculture is being practiced, a growing interest is being expressed in sustainable agriculture.
• While much of agriculture is addicted to petroleum, many are starting to name the disease.
• While schools, hospitals, and churches are struggling, new models are emerging for living in rural areas.
• While a sense of hopelessness is being experienced, there is a sense of hope being spoken. The church can be the primary carrier of that hope.

New Visions For The Long Pastorate

The parish pastor acts as a key player in involving the rural congregation in the sphere of community building. In order to do this, the pastor must have knowledge of the community as well as credibility in the community. Oftentimes this experience comes only after having been in the same place for an extended period of time. Unfortunately small congregations are seen by many seminary graduates and parish pastors as stepping stones to something bigger. This section of the chapter addresses the unique characteristics of the long pastorate as presented by Roy Oswald of the Alban Institute at a continuing education event for clergy at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota during June of 1989. It was open to pastors who had been in the same parish for eight years or longer. While the learnings presented here come from the realm of pastoral leadership, I believe the insights also can be valuable to other people with leadership responsibilities in rural communities.

Advantages And Disadvantages Of A Long Pastorate

Roy Oswald recounted how he and his associates had been asked by denominational executives to study long pastorates. To begin with, he acknowledged that they held certain negative biases. All of them were familiar with pastors who had overstayed their tenure and who felt locked in a situation that neither they nor the parishioners wanted. This attitude was reinforced by the denominational executives who viewed these pastors as problem cases and wanted help in knowing how to move them.

In addition, Oswald admitted that they came with an unexamined attitude that those in a long pastorate must have a defect that prevented them from advancing in their vocation. To his surprise Oswald found that many of those in long pastorates reported a high level of effectiveness and satisfaction. These findings caused him to take a new look at long pastorates.

Oswald asserted that long pastorates hold a number of advantages for the pastor and the parish. These advantages include the following:
• A long pastorate makes possible greater indepth knowledge and relationships between the pastor and individual church members as well as between clergy and the congregation as a whole. This brings an economy of ministry in which the pastor learns the ropes in the early going and does not have to use as much time in making an intervention.
• A long pastorate makes possible cumulative developing knowledge and experience of each other as both pastor and parish see and participate in each other's growth over time. For instance the pastor gets to know the talents for greater involvement of lay people.
• Greater continuity and stability of leadership makes possible events not possible during a short tenure. The pastor becomes one of the few remaining symbols of stability. Pastor and parish can make long-range plans and follow projects to completion.
• A long pastorate opens up possibilities of greater personal and spiritual growth for both clergy and congregation. For instance pastor and people can develop a staying power — commitment through thick and thin.
• A long pastorate can make possible greater, deeper knowledge of and participation by the pastor in the community outside the parish. In this way the parish pastor can become a community chaplain as one who is well known by the community and someone they know to call on. The pastor can then become more involved in public and community affairs.
• A long pastorate may have special benefits for the pastor and family in putting down roots and growing up in a community.

Oswald brought up potential disadvantages, whose influences may be minimized or aggravated by the quality of the particular ministry. These include the following:
• A long tenure under a single pastor limits the congregation's exposure to and experience of ministry. Here Oswald advised coming to terms with blind spots and addressing them.
• A long tenure may lead to overidentification between a pastor and parishioners. In this regard, Oswald stated, "Do not go native. A pastor needs to continually challenge the congregation, to put people to the grindstone even if they do not particularly like it."
• In a long pastorate, a gap may develop between the pastor and a growing number of parishioners. Oswald countered that the pastor should struggle to keep democracy alive.
• In a long pastorate, there is the danger of going rusty and stale. In order to keep this from happening, Oswald urged pastors to keep one step ahead of the parish with ideas.
• Those in a long pastorate face a great danger of experiencing burnout. Oswald spoke at length of keeping spiritually alive.
• As negative influences mount and begin to outweigh positive influences, a downward spiral may develop. Role negotiation is needed to continue the relationship, he advised.
• Where things are not going well, a long pastorate can ultimately lead both pastor and parish to feel that they are helplessly stuck with each other. Here Oswald suggested that pastors must look at where they are at along the stay-leave continuum.

Oswald made a case that the long pastorate can be a gift to congregation and community. "The system of constantly moving clergy around brings stress to both pastors and to the parishes and results in great inefficiency when taking into consideration the phase-out time, a period of vacancy, and start-up time for the new pastor. Stay where you are if at all possible. If you stay healthy in five key areas, you can remain for a long pastorate."

Support Pillars Of Healthy Long Pastorates

Oswald proceeded to spell out the five key areas in order to maintain healthy long pastorates. The first has to do with *monitoring the gap* between individual trust and corporate trust. Over the course of time, a gap can develop between the people's individual trust in a pastor, who ministers to them in crisis situations and who becomes available in the community as a dependable caregiver, and the people's corporate trust in a pastor, who is expected to lead the congregation in a pattern of dynamic activty. "At the very point that the pastor senses a good personal relationship with the people, members are circulating a petition to ask for the pastor to seek another call," Oswald told.

Oswald recommended that the pastor be vigilant in monitoring the gap. One possibility is getting a group of lay people to work with the pastor in seeking creative ways to address the gap. For instance a pastor/parish relations committee could be formed. In certain circumstances, a denomination official could be asked to become part of the process. Also peers in the ministry can be supportive in discussing this phenomena. "Can you get out in front and lead the people to bigger and better things?," Oswald asked.

Those in a long pastorate also need to *sustain one's personal, professional, and spiritual growing edge*, Oswald asserted. Here a pastor needs to engage in a spiritual discipline on a regular basis in order to gain the resources important to lead people on the journey. Those spiritual disciplines, which Oswald suggested have been helpful to others, include meditation, journal keeping, fasting, tracking one's dreams, retreats/days of silence, yoga, and spiritual friend/mentor contract. According to Oswald, different disciplines work for different people depending on their metabolism, personality type, and lifestyle.

A third pillar of a healthy long pastorate is *maintaining and soliciting quality feedback*. One of the dangers of a long pastorate is that people will withhold quality feedback. When a pastor has become individually involved with each family on a pastoral care matter, they become more reluctant to state what could be painful to the pastor. In order to counter this pitfall, Oswald urged that pastors actively seek out the feedback needed to sustain the ministry. Especially important is to focus on roles and psychological contracts. Oswald stated that negotiation of expectations is important to keeping up the relationships. "I am aware that there are some ways I am not meeting your expectations," Oswald offered as a statement by way of introducing conversation in looking at what is possible and what is not.

Fourth, Oswald argued for *coping with burnout*. Burnout is a religious disease of the overcommitted. Moses was frustrated and exasperated, Oswald pointed out. Finally Jethro told Moses, "You will destroy yourself and your people." Moses learned to delegate by designating other judges to decide the cases brought by the people. Burnout, then, can actually be the refiner's fire that helps a person move to a new level of maturity. Oswald recommended a number of strategies for coping with burnout: thirty minutes a day of spiritual discipline, limiting the work week to five ten-hour days, using yearly vacation time, taking a three-month sabbatical every four years, and physical exercise.

Last, a pastor must give attention to *maintaining the parish representative/democratic process*. In a long pastorate, people in positions of power and responsibility in the congregation often become more homogenous. Twenty per cent of the people give 80% of the budget and provide 80% of the leadership, while 80% remain on the periphery. Some of the latter become disenfranchised. Powerlessness corrupts, Oswald asserted, and those who do not have power will corrupt and sabotage. "When decision making becomes too easy, then trouble sets in," Oswald stated. "It is better to have enemies in the open where you can deal with them. You have to differentiate between the faithful opposition and the chronic complainers." Oswald urged that all groups be represented in decision making.

10

Addressing The Health Care Issue In Rural Communities

Health care is one of the most pressing issues facing rural communities. Such areas are experiencing a decrease in the number of hospitals and doctors. Physicians, who are retiring or moving on to large population areas, are not being replaced. Many medical schools are emphasizing specialists for the urban clinics and hospitals rather than generalists for the small town practices. A general feeling is that small town doctors are not as good.

In the midst of this decline of quality health care in rural areas, a new approach involving the church is developing. As a part of the **1989 National Conference on Rural Ministry** in Dubuque, Iowa, the new parish health ministry approach was shared with the participants. Charlotte Halverson, who works with the parish nurse program and the rural health care delivery system out of Mercy Hospital in Dubuque, explained the role of the church:

> In today's society, the churches play an influential role in the community. For many years, it has been expected that the local church will serve as a centering and focal point in the community and act as advocate for social justice and human needs. Basic to the philosophy of the church throughout history is a commitment to the whole person, addressing the physical and emotional needs, as well as the spiritual. Through parish health ministry and parish nurse programs, churches are acknowledging and making visible this wholistic commitment and providing a community alliance with the health care institutions.

The premise of the program is that many small communities have lost health care facilities and services, yet most of these communities still have at least one church.

In order to understand wholistic health ministry, Halverson told how many diseases are related to lifestyle. According to the National Institute of Health, 1.2 million men suffered a heart attack in 1987, while 800,000 of these could have been prevented. A healthy sense of spirituality and self-direction could influence lifestyles. Also, loneliness is one of the top-ranked killers in America today. "Many people have nobody to talk to. They do not cook right and do not go to their doctor," Halverson stated.

At the same time, she cited a recent Gallup poll that reported 7 out of 10 troubled Americans turn to their pastor for help. In addition, studies at the Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development at Duke Medical Center indicate religion as the most frequently mentioned way of coping with stressful events. But there are frequent false assumptions, she contended. These include the following: The pastor knows all the church members who are ill or suffering; the sick have family members able to help with caregiving and emotional support; the medical facility offers all the services and follow-up care the patient and family will need; everything is okay because the person is able to attend services on Sunday; and all pastors are equally familiar with available health care services.

The Parish Health Ministry, which Halverson coordinates, functions as a referral and resource service within the church community. Wholistic wellness is the primary goal of this ministry. The role of the local church is to *promote* health care, not *provide* it. Parish Health Ministry is a visible means of identifying God's love within the community.

What does a parish health minister do? Halverson gave some examples of Parish Health Ministry:

- Conduct a health needs assessment within the church community.
- Blood pressure screening at church festivals and bazaars.
- Offer smoke stoppers programs.
- Arrange transportation to and from medical and dental visits for the elderly and/or those with handicaps.
- Develop grief support groups.
- Carry out health education in Sunday School, such as dental care and handwashing.
- Develop and conduct exercise programs.
- Service days.
- Visit those who are ill, recently discharged from hospitals and/or shut-in.
- Make referrals to appropriate health care/social service agencies.
- Arrange diabetic teaching programs.
- Practice active listening.

While the parish health minister does the above mentioned practices, the parish health minister does not practice direct or hands-on health care in the church community, dispense or administer medication, do blood tests and other invasive procedures, or take the place of or compete with community health programs/agencies.

A parish health minister participates as a member of the congregational or parish staff and serves as a resource and referral person for health information to individuals, groups, and church committees. In doing this particular ministry, the person provides health education and wellness programs on an individual and church community level as well as develops support groups in areas related to physical, spiritual, and emotional health.

Halverson stressed that a parish health minister must possess certain qualifications — an awareness of personal spirituality and commitment; active license to practice as a registered nurse in the appropriate state; three years of nursing experience; excellent verbal and written communication skills; good nursing assessment skills; ability to understand and communicate the interrelatedness of body, mind, and spirit to health and wellness; awareness of available services within the community and how to network them; ability to maintain a good relationship with the pastor; and completion of parish health minister training program.

A parish health ministry may take a variety of operational modes, Halverson suggested. For instance, a local program may be operated as a stipend program in which a parish health minister is allotted a specific amount of money to cover mileage, babysitting, telephone, and other expenses. Also a local program may be operated as a cooperative effort between churches and a local health care facility or operated by a church paying a nurse a full- or part-time salary. In addition the program may be operated through a hospital or other health care facility funding part-time nurses in community churches or operated as a strictly volunteer program in which a nurse donates time and effort.

Halverson concluded by saying that, as a three-year pilot program, Mercy Health Center has chosen a combination of the first two options. Nurses meeting the parish health ministry criteria who are selected and approved by a church governing body will participate in a parish health ministry training seminar. Mercy Health Center will provide this education and continuing education units free of charge for participating nurses. The hospital, through the rural outreach department and hospital library, will serve as a resource and referral center for church communities involved in the parish health ministry program.

Part V

Revitalizing Rural Community In The Hay River Valley

The purpose of the *Hay River Review* monthly, community newspaper is to revitalize our rural communities. By rural communities we mean primarily the Prairie Farm and Ridgeland area. In addition we intend to provide limited coverage to the extent of our resources, in the Reeve-Connorsville area and the Dallas-Hillsdale-Sand Creek area.

We consider the following to be those major thrusts our paper must address in order to be representative of rural community life. The first tier focuses more on institutions of rural community life, while the second tier focuses more on themes within rural community life.

Schools in the rural areas are central to the life of the community. A sense of pride and identity are tied up in the schools.

Business, which is supported by local people, enables the cash flow to stay within the community. Revitalization, as the goal of community economics, has as much to do with the human spirit as well as material resources.

Local government has to be responsive to the needs of the citizens while at the same time imaginative in regard to future considerations.

Volunteer organizations, including civic and religious groups, enable people to weave a fabric of social concern within the community.

Agriculture is the economic base for the rural area. As farming goes, so goes the community. Practicing a way of farming, which sustains rural communities, is crucial.

A sense of history and identity conveys a connection between the present and the past. In so doing, people can look forward to the future with greater confidence.

Neighboring and cooperation can help to integrate individuals into positive relationships rather than isolating people from each other.

Individual people, in their unique and interesting circumstances as well as the ordinary events of life, are worthy of attention.

Balancing personal agendas with the common good enables people to discover that, in becoming concerned with the whole, individual parts are given meaning and significance.

A social justice context shows that rural communities do not live in isolation from the rest of the world. The principle of social justice is the connecting force so that all might live in harmony.

The *Hay River Review* seeks to combine the dynamics of a volunteer organization with sound business practices and high journalistic standards in order to put out a publication of which the community can be proud.

—Statement of purpose for *Hay River Review* community newspaper.

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Schools Seek To Plan For The Future

Rural communities want to hold on to their schools. This is true throughout rural America; this is the case in Ridgeland and Prairie Farm, Wisconsin. Our community newspaper, the *Hay River Review*, sought to provide coverage of the schools in both communities. In this way we wanted to keep the people informed of what was going on in order that they could participate in the planning for the future of their schools. The first part of this chapter focuses on the elementary school in Ridgeland, while the second half concentrates on Prairie Farm K-12 school.

Ridgeland Contemplates Leaving Barron School District To Join With Prairie Farm

Ridgeland and Prairie Farm are two small villages of approximately the same size located six miles apart. The communities have much in common, and many of the people from the two are related to each other. Ridgeland had been part of a large school district along with the other small villages of Almena, Hillsdale, and Dallas together with the much larger town of Barron. Some of the people in Ridgeland and Prairie Farm started talking back and forth about the possibility of Ridgeland breaking away from the Barron school district and joining the Prairie Farm school district. The following stories chronicle the development until its resolution. Lisa Hinde wrote the initial article about a proposed realignment, while Pam Saunders filed a report on a meeting to discuss it. Connie Bilse gave a background history, and Nancy Drake covered the gathering that resolved the issue.

Sinclair Proposes Realignment So That Ridgeland Could Go In With The Prairie Farm School District

Many area school districts are grappling with the issues of aging and inadequate buildings in addition to decreasing state aids for increased required programs. Allen Sinclair is a member of the Barron school board and an independent milk hauler for Twin Town Cheese Factory. Sinclair has developed some innovative ideas that he emphasizes are his own positions, not those of the school board. Sinclair proposes that the residents of the Ridgeland area consider a realignment of school district boundaries with Prairie Farm. Realignment is a different issue than consolidation in which entire districts are absorbed by larger districts. He thinks Prairie Farm is a target for consolidation due to its size.

Both Barron and Prairie Farm could benefit from such an arrangement, he contends. Barron has significant transportation costs, despite a lower per-mile cost due to the large number of miles covered. In addition, young elementary students spend considerable hours being transported. Prairie Farm could also gain valuable tax base. Sinclair thinks that the property tax funding is unfair to farmers who use their land as a means of producing an income, since the land itself is not income. Therefore, a larger percentage of the farmer's income goes toward property tax than a city resident with a higher income.

Both Barron and Prairie Farm are developing long-range plans for building additional classrooms or replacing outdated classrooms. Residents in the Barron school district must decide where new classrooms are to be built. Sinclair does not believe there is enough elementary-age population in the southern portion of the district to justify two elementary buildings. He believes the Ridgeland community could share the kindergarten through grade two population with Prairie Farm and equalize class loads.

Some questions remain: whether Ridgeland residents would favor such a realignment as it would be their choice; whether the Ridgeland village is committed to invest financially in educational space; whether the school buildings could be used for longer hours and varied functions such as day care or community activities; how high tech solutions such as two way satellite transmission will affect classroom services.

Karl Tireman echoes many of Sinclair's thoughts. He sees the kindergarten through grade four student population dwindling, forcing the boundaries closer to Barron in order to fill the Dallas/Ridgeland elementary classrooms. He is concerned about increasing costs for transportation, special education staff, as well as the fact that costs to run the district are increasing twice as fast as state aids. He does not know how strong a position outlying residents will take. He does not want to close local schools that people want. People have not forgotten that, after the Hillsdale school was closed, the district needed a referendum for more space. He thinks that the people have to make the choice about tearing down old buildings and either building new in the villages or under one roof.

Chuck Howe thinks the local elementary schools add to the social mix of the community and the longer they can remain open, the better for the community. People made decisions thirty years ago about the district boundaries, and he does not see much desire among residents to change. Studies are being done to determine the maintenance costs for five and twenty-five year plans, and he thinks people will pay the costs for local lower elementary classrooms up to a point. The most recent code violations were resolved for $18,000.

Ridgeland Citizens Consider Move To The Prairie Farm School District

A group of Ridgeland citizens gathered in an initial planning meeting on September 26, (1989) to look at the future of schooling in their community, especially as it would be affected by the possibility of leaving the Barron district and joining the Prairie Farm school district. Peter Edstrom is one of the individuals who called people to come to Ridgeland to begin the discussion. Participants at the planning meeting agreed that there were several primary concerns in discussing the issue: quality education, tax impact, transportation, and potential for better and/or longer use of Ridgeland's building.

It was noted at the meeting that both the Barron and Prairie Farm districts are currently planning for present and future space needs. Those present decided to form a citizens' committee to work on the issues. To that end, an organizational meeting is planned for October 5 at 8:15 p.m. at the Ridgeland school. The purpose of this meeting is to determine if there is enough interest to pursue the matter. If so, a committee could be formed to gather information and to begin dialogue with the respective boards. It was emphasized that this would not be an informational meeting, but one to form a committee to gather information.

Ridgeland And Dallas Initiated Plans For A School Consolidation With Barron In 1954

An education or "schooling" has always been an essential part of life in our country. As new communities were settled, the school was one of the first requirements. High schools appeared in the larger towns and young people who were fortunate enough to attend one, pretty much could choose the one that appealed to them or that was the easiest to reach. Once school buses came into existence, students took the one that came closest to their home. If buses from two schools were handy, they had a choice. But 1952 was to bring a change in this prerogative when the state government passed a law stating that the state was to be divided into high school districts. This would be achieved locally but, if this did not happen, the state would do it.

This problem did not reach the area until November 11, 1954 when petitions were circulated for a referendum election to combine school districts Barron, Dallas, and Ridgeland, which included townships of Wilson, Sheridan, Joint School District No. 6 of the village of Dallas, townships of Dallas, Sioux Creek, Maple Grove, and the city and township of Barron located in Barron and Dunn Counties. This move for consolidation originated in the Dallas and Ridgeland districts where fears of being attached to another high school district by the state were prevalent. At informational meetings on October 27 and November 5, 1954, Archie Shaefer, Dunn County Superintendent of Schools explained school legislation and consolidation procedure. Ralph Peterson, Ridgeland banker and chair of the meeting, explained population trends and school costs. Superintendent Rohde of Barron explained how Ridgeland would save money if it joined Barron school district.

The Barron school board stated that no added facilities would be needed and no foreseeable school buildings would be added. Elementary school students would remain in their own schools. Parents with junior or senior students attending other high schools were assured that state law said they could finish school where they were attending. Superintendent Rohde also informed those present that, if the communities would consolidate with other high schools, Barron stood to lose 50 students and $12,500 tuition aid, with an increase in local taxes and decrease in school services. Strong sentiment for joining the Barron school district was expressed at Ridgeland and Dallas meetings. Attorneys were hired to draw up the agreement to be voted on, and election dates set with a majority vote to effect consolidation. Dallas voted 154-108 in favor, and Ridgeland voted 118-26 in favor.

Opposition to these proceedings existed especially among families who lived on the fringes of these districts and who had established loyalties to neighboring high schools and also among those who felt their right to send their children to the school of their choice was being erased. Also at that time, areas where buses of two different schools traveled the same roads for short distances gave students a choice. Many could see possibilities of changes of elementary school procedures in the future and did not want their children traveling long distances on the bus. These differences of opinion in several areas caused disagreement between neighbors and even relatives that would continue for many years.

In February 1955, parents of the Bilse school located in the townships of Sheridan and Wilson, who feared consolidation with Barron, requested a referendum on consolidation with the Prairie Farm high school district. This election resulted in a vote of 26-21 in favor. At the same time, Washburn Farm School, the next district south of Bilse school district, explored possibilities with the Dunn county school committee of merging with Prairie Farm instead of Boyceville. This eventually was resolved by some going to each district. The Prairie Farm school district also began serving a small area east of Ridgeland. In Evergreen school district, the Barron bus did not reach, and the people chose to attend Prairie Farm and to this day are a part of the Prairie Farm district. This goes to show how one law and many people's demands changed the structure of the local schools.

Ridgeland Residents Decide Not To Explore Redistricting With Prairie Farm

In a meeting that lasted only fifteen minutes on October 5, Ridgeland residents of the Barron area school district decided against looking into redistricting with the neighboring school district of Prairie Farm. After opening remarks by Peter Edstrom, who said a few people were interested in checking out this option, Bill Link agreed to chair the meeting. On taking the podium, Link asked for a show of hands as to how many were interested in pursuing this option. Someone in the audience called for ballots. When counted, a vote of 6 'yes' and 33 'no' showed those present to be against considering redistricting.

Prairie Farm School Tries To Figure Out Whether Or Not To Build

After the Ridgeland people made their decision not to pursue a course of action leading to a combined school district with Prairie Farm, the people of Prairie Farm needed to decide what to do about crowded classrooms. In this first piece, our newspaper published the report of an ad hoc committee, which provided building options. Nancy Drake, who covered the Prairie Farm school board, filed the next two reports on what the board did with those recommendations. In the next piece, community resident Sheila Olson expressed her dismay with the stalemate on the school board over the building issue. The chapter concludes with an article by Drake on a board decision.

Ad Hoc Committee Seeks To Formulate Options For Meeting Space Needs At The Prairie Farm School

In August 1989, the Prairie Farm school board appointed a committee of twenty-four to study the present facilities of the school system. If the committee found serious deficiencies, they were to identify them and make recommendations to the board of the most satisfactory solution by January of 1990. These recommendations would be advisory and nonbinding on the board. At the first meeting, two *ex officio* members from the board, Jeff Roemhild and Allen Salsbury, further explained the purpose and emphasized the need to examine the situation for a long range solution — twenty years into the future if possible.

The ad hoc committee became convinced that there are some serious building facility shortages already this year in that there is overcrowding and space deficiencies, which may be making a negative impact on quality education. To the committee, it looks like these problems will worsen each year to the point that by 1995-96, the present building will not be adequate, no matter how creative the administration is with schedules and room dividers. In 1995-96, the administration is projecting that the number of students in the junior/senior high school will be almost double the number the building was designed to handle.

The space shortages that the school system is now facing seems to have three factors impinging on it. First, and most obvious, is the number of students. The second factor revolves around the twenty standards that the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has mandated in recent years. These standards have to do with the minimum requirements that Wisconsin school systems must meet. In the 1960s, requirements were mandated primarily to help disabled and handicapped students. Later these evolved to thirteen standards, and in the past couple years have expanded to twenty. Some of these relate to at risk students, gifted and talented student programs, and employable skills training.

As school systems move to implement these required programs, it results in either additional space and staff or contracting with another school system outside the district. It is now in the Wisconsin statutes that all districts shall comply and is encouraged by the department as a benefit to the school. If the district fails to meet these standards, or at least be moving in the direction of providing them, the DPI has the enforcement power because it controls the state aid that presently accounts for about 64% of the annual budget.

The third factor affecting the space needs at this time revolves around the building code that is enforced by the Department of Health, Industry, Labor, and Human Relations. Early on, the committee was advised that, if the school invested more money into the present elementary school facility, it would trigger a requirement that the school bring the entire building up to 1989 code — a costly project considering the structural and ventilation needs of that complex of buildings. Now the committee has been advised that, even with no

additional building or remodeling in the elementary school structure, the school will most likely be found in violation of some code deficiencies in the upcoming evaluation.

At this time, the committee believes they have adequately analyzed the problem and are starting to discuss four possible options. The first option would be to do nothing. For the present time, that approach would be the most inexpensive, but would leave the administration with an impossible task. In time, the building could be condemned and fines levied against the district. The second option would be to consider implementation of a phased consolidation. In such a procedure, the committee would seek to find a neighboring district that would be able to contract the needs the school is unable to meet, and the school would bus students to their facilities. The committee is not sure such a neighboring school district exists, nor is the committee certain that it would prove feasible if the school could find such a district. The rationale behind such a consolidation would be that there is more efficiency in a system larger than Prairie Farm.

The third option would be to upgrade the present facilities as the needs dictate. This type of wait-and-see approach would attempt to struggle with the present system as long as possible. It would require providing more attached space to both schools with the hope that the school could provide a quality program and stay ahead of the code violations. The fourth option would be to develop a long-range master plan that would entail an immediate building project. At this point the ad hoc committee is mulling over these four options and trying to predict the ramifications of each. Within the next two and one-half months, the committee is seeking to shape a consensus out of these options and formulate a recommendation to be sent to the school board for their consideration.

Prairie Farm School Board Argues Over Task Force Recommendations

At a special session devoted solely to discussion of the Building Task Force final report, held February 5, (1990) the Prairie Farm school board decided to talk to a financial planning firm before acting on the task force's recommendations. Pressing the board to make a decision whether to accept the task force proposals or not, board president Roger Klefstad polled each board member for their opinion as to what the district should do.

Board members Claire Kurschner, Jeff Roemhild, Allen Salsbury, and Gary Kahl along with Klefstad agreed in principle with the recommendation of the task force to build new elementary facilities in stages at the junior/senior high school while doing as little as possible to the current elementary building. While Kurschner said he personally favored the idea of building a full-size gym with any building, he agreed with the others that building a multipurpose room in the initial phase of the building would best suit the school district's needs.

Herb Seeger and Larry Lehman refused to endorse this plan until finding out the financial impact of a building project on the district. Klefstad pointed out that, until the board decided what they wanted to build, there was no way to determine the financial impact. An estimate of $50 per square foot was used by the task force as a rough guide to completed, furnished costs of construction at this time. Consultant Premal Sheth defended this seemingly high figure saying that buildings could be designed at $40 to $45 per square foot but that at this stage of planning there is no point in making a low estimate. Current construction of the new school in Boyceville is running at $43 per square foot.

As proposed by the task force, to build an addition to house grades five through eight with a new library, computer room, music and art rooms, together with a remodeling of the home economics and science rooms, would cost approximately $1.66 million. To include a

multipurpose room for gym, cafeteria, and other miscellaneous use would bring the total to $2.05 million. Lehman was adamant in his stance that the district could not afford such a building project and that the district should consider raising the tax levy to the point where several classrooms could be added every year or so as the district could pay for them. Sheth countered that such an approach to building costs more in the long run than paying interest on a big loan because of added building costs each time building is done.

The board did agree with Lehman that a contingency plan should be developed to deal with the immediate classroom shortage in the event that whatever the board proposed for building is turned down by the electorate. Lehman suggested consideration of a plan proposed by former administrator Howard Hanson in 1988 to add three classrooms to the high school by squaring off the southeast corner of the building. While this would provide enough space to move the sixth grade out of the elementary, it does nothing to improve the crowded conditions at the high school and puts further strain on the cafeteria, gym, and other specials rooms.

Acting administrator Gary Swanstrom said, "This plan doesn't improve our program needs at all." He added, "We're at the maximum use of our facility; we're not going to have rooms for the kids in 9-12. We're looking at basic quality needs and the facilities to house them. A short-term fix doesn't meet program needs." The board did agree with the committee that doing nothing, considering consolidating with other districts, or remodeling the current facilities were not viable options. Roemhild pointed out the elementary school is fifty-five years old and said, "It'll keep bleeding us; we have to replace it sooner or later."

Klefstad and Salsbury both urged the board to come to an agreement about a plan with Roemhild saying, "We should present a long-range plan; the voters can tell us they don't want it then." Lehman said, "I don't think this district will swallow $1 million to $1.5 million." Salsbury replied, "I don't know who you're talking to, but people tell me they don't want a Band-Aid solution." Toward the end of the discussions, Klefstad asked the board if they could come up with a consensus. Roemhild said the plan proposed by the task force "isn't bad; maybe we need to pare it down, look at spending $1 million to $1.3 million." Klefstad then stated, "Give me direction," to which no one on the school board answered.

Prairie Farm School Board Starts Over With New Building Consultant

Searching for alternatives, the Prairie Farm school board voted to hire a new consultant to conduct another building inspection and needs assessment. The board is looking for a fresh perspective from another architect. Stubenrauch, of Milwaukee and Hayward, was chosen after a presentation by Bill Turner of the Hayward office at a March 5 special session. Just a year ago, the board chose Professional Management Services Inc. (PMSI) of Eau Claire over Stubenrauch. PMSI consultant Primal Sheth completed a needs assessment, outlined several options for the district, and worked with the community task force to choose a building option.

"The change in consultants became necessary if the board is to move forward at this time," said acting administrator Gary Swanstrom during a late night discussion of the building plan at a March 22 special session. "It became apparent some board members had lost trust in PMSI and that the board could not work in a cooperative manner with Sheth." Swanstrom added that the board is looking for a scaled back alternative to one formulated by Sheth and the task force and is hoping a different firm will see different options.

Swanstrom prodded the board to make a decision about what they want to see done declaring, "I don't want to sound like a broken record, but we need to be able to tell the ar-

chitect what we need. Until the board can identify what they want the architect to look at, his hands are tied." Turner has done some of the building inspection and plans to return the district this month as well as review the work done by PMSI. In his presentation on March 5, Turner said he would really need to do the whole thing over as he could only base his recommendations on his own assessment. Stubenrauch will be paid $2,500 for this study, part of which will be refunded if the firm is hired to serve as architect on a building. The district has paid $6,021 to PMSI for their initial assessment, time spent on meetings with the board and task force, and plans developed by Sheth.

The discussion at the March 22 meeting was scheduled for the board to try and come to an agreement about what the board should do next. Board president Roger Klefstad had asked the members to come up with their own alternatives to consider along with task force recommendations. Jeff Roemhild and Larry Lehman both came with rough proposals for adding to the junior/senior high school but in three phases rather than two as suggested by the task force, and with only classrooms and a multipurpose room, using limited remodeling to upgrade the science, home economics rooms, and the library.

Community Resident Wants Prairie Farm School Board To Take Action on Building

During the past several months, I've been watching for positive steps toward the solution of the space and program problems of the Prairie Farm school district. I've become very frustrated in this watch, because it appears that the ground work that had been done, has been abandoned. Are we starting this trek all over again?

Last fall, I served on an advisory committee along with twenty other people from our district. This was not a hand picked committee. It was a cross section of people with many different ideas and opinions. These ideas were expressed openly and thoughtfully. We did not agree on every issue. We discussed and rediscussed everything from dividing the district and consolidating with other schools, to the other extreme of building an entirely new elementary school. What we had in common was that we were all interested in our school, and seeing that good, positive programs and facilities were being provided.

After hours of study and discussion, we came up with a list of priorities. We passed these on to the board, and made clear the ones we felt must be attended to immediately. Other items were listed that needed attention, once the more urgent ones were met. What has happened to these priorities? It seems that they have been thrown out of the window and another assessment is being done. How many assessments must be done before there is action? The problems are clear — overcrowding and inadequate facilities for programs being taught. At the elementary, we have classrooms with too many students for the size of the room. Next year, because of larger class sizes, we won't have enough classrooms.

I graduated from this high school in 1967. Last fall, the advisory committee was taken on a tour of both facilities. When I walked into the science room, it could have been 1967. There was virtually no change in the last twenty-three years. There are those people who say it was good enough then, and it is good enough now. To them I pose the question, "Do you live in exactly the same way as you did twenty-three years ago?" In other words, you are driving the same vehicles, watching the same television, farming with the same machinery, using the same amount of electricity, cooling your milk the same way, and being treated by your doctor with the medical technology of the 1960s. I guess you aren't. We take advantage of new ideas and technology to improve our world. It is called progress.

We need improved science facilities at our high school. What we have are computers that sit in the English room. They are accessible to students only when other classes are not

going on in that room, which is almost never. We have the computers; what we need is a place to put them so that students can use them. I realize there are some adults who dislike computers, but you can't bury your head in the sand forever. Computers are a part of the everyday world. They are in grocery stores, lumber yards, machinery dealerships, banks, clinics, and farms. The list could go on forever. Our children need to be experienced in the use of a computer in order to function in today's world.

There are no sugar-coated inexpensive answers. I wish there were. All of the members of the advisory committee are taxpayers. None of us like the idea of paying higher taxes, but if we hope to find a long-term solution to this problem, we are going to have to do just that. I want to make very clear that the committee did not bring to the board a plan for a Cadillac of schools. However, we also did not ask for a rusted-out 1968 Volkswagon. We tried to find a sensible middle ground that would meet our needs, not only for the next five or six years, but in the long-range future as well. It's time to stop trying to put a Band-Aid on something that needs major surgery. Our patient is going to die if we continue that way.

I realize this is a difficult step, but I firmly believe that the people of this community are hard working, down-to-earth people who want a good sensible plan for our school. I also believe that we are an optimistic community that looks to the future, and wants to keep our school here and competitive. By working together, we can do just that. I would urge you to talk to a lot of people concerning this issue. Become informed. Then talk to your school board members and urge them to act on this issue. We need to act now!

Prairie Farm School Board Faces Choice Of Build Now Or Face Redistricting In The Future

In two special sessions, the Prairie Farm school board struggled to come up with a plan to meet the district's current and future space needs. At the end of the second meeting on May 30, the board came to the conclusion that nothing short of constructing a middle school would solve the district's needs and that the time had come to put the issue to the voters. On a unanimous roll call vote, the board voted to enter into a contract with Stubenrauch Associates of Hayward to develop plans for a middle school, the first step towards a voter referendum to pay for such construction.

The rough cost of a middle school is $1.5 million. The district would receive some help from the state on those costs, as recently passed legislation provides state aid reimbursement for construction at a district's aid level, depending on the district's debt load. The board was optimistic during the first meeting with consultant Bill Turner on May 24 that most of the cost of a middle school and needed remodeling on the existing structures would be reimbursed.

A somber mood fell over the board at the second meeting, however when acting administrator Gary Swanstrom said this was not the case. Having consulted the Department of Public Instruction and the district's consultant, roughly half the cost would be aided, leaving the district with an increased mil rate and higher property taxes. The decision was made after discussion of the district's needs based on consultant Bill Turner's recommendation that the district adopt a two classroom per grade plan. Board members Larry Lehman and Jeff Roemhild questioned if that much space was needed, to which Swanstrom made a strongly worded statement saying that "building any less in my opinion would not be a viable option." Swanstrom went on to say, "We bite the bullet and build or look at reorganization or redistricting down the line; that's the handwriting on the wall."

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Businesses Live On The Edge

Businesses in small towns and rural areas frequently live on the edge. Our community newspaper, the *Hay River Review*, sought to chronicle the fortunes of local businesses. In this chapter, you will hear in an article by the author how one restaurant closed in Prairie Farm, while, in an account written by Goldeen Goodfellow, another restaurant opened up. You will also read in a story by Linda Kurschner how the local grocery store expanded, and in a feature by Pam Saunders how one service station continues in the family.

Cathy's Kitchen Cooks Last Meal For Customers

Dreams die hard. For Cathy Nedland, the dream of owning and operating her own family restaurant has died. On November 20, (1987) Cathy closed the doors of her restaurant. "If hearts could break, mine would be split in half," Cathy explained. "What started out as a dream has become a burden. I am exhausted. I cannot keep my doors open any longer." Business started out fine in April 1983 when Cathy and Clark Nedland took over the cafe. But at the end of 1986, Cathy began to see that the restaurant was not making a profit. According to her books, she did $20,000 less in total business than in 1985.

The only thing that kept her going through the last couple of years was her customers. "I care for people very much," Cathy said. A variety of management decisions have not been enough to keep the business going. "We have tried just about everything," Clark stated. "We had different kinds of food specials. We had videos for awhile, medical supplies, and a game room for kids. When these did not work out, we kept trying something else. But these measures were not enough."

When they first bought the business, Clark worked at the restaurant too. Then in 1985 he went to work at Midwest Ducts. Much of his earnings went into keeping the restaurant going. Recently Clark and Cathy saw that they might have to borrow money just to meet operating expenses. Then they knew it was time to quit while they were still ahead. In addition, expenses kept going up including insurance, repairs, and remodeling. They would have had to upgrade their establishment in order to meet various state codes. Together with this, they found it necessary to cut back on their hours.

The Nedlands see what has happened to their restaurant to be part of a larger deterioration of small rural communities. "In talking with salespeople, we hear that other businesses are having this same problem," Cathy offered. "Someday, home cooked meals at a family restaurant will be only table talk for people remembering how it used to be. Home cooking will be gone, and only mass produced food will be available."

One Sunday afternoon, Cathy watched a pop can slowly being blown down the street. It made an eerie sound, as she could see nobody else around. The scene reminded her of an old ghost town. "Prairie Farm is dying a slow death," Cathy commented. "I think it is important for village people to be a little bit more considerate of small businesses. Only by people supporting their home town establishments can they expect them to stay in operation." Clark added, "Instead of people scattering in all different directions, people need to come together."

Cathy and Clark will miss the restaurant business. "I love my customers very much. They have kept me going. They saw me when I was up and when I was down. Sometimes

Cathy Nedland, her husband, Clark, (right) and son, Mason, have decided to close their family restaurant.

they could really lift my spirits and keep me going," Cathy explained. Clark offered, "We have met a lot of interesting people and made a lot of friends." People have come out of their way to stop and eat home cooked food. Others have hired Cathy to cater their special events. These customers have convinced her that she served excellent food.

Even mistakes have brought a lightheartedness to her work. One time a waitress mistakenly put a flour and oil gravy mixture on the doughnuts and saved the frosting for mashed potatoes. Only later did she realize what had happened when a customer remarked that the doughnuts tasted different than usual. The most touching moment came when an older woman sent a letter with a quarter taped to it with a message that read as follows:

> We were in your cafe yesterday and had lunch and paid for a cup of coffee and a doughnut, and a small glass of 7-Up and forgot to pay for the cookie the other lady had. When I got home, I thought of it, and felt real mean about it, so am sending it now. Sorry about what happened. Thank you.

Cathy and Clark plan to hang onto these and other memories now that they have closed the doors of their restaurant and have made plans to covert the room into living space.

Prairie Cafe Opens In One Of Village's Oldest Buildings

The building on the northwest corner of Parker and River Streets is one of the oldest in Prairie Farm, and has, until recently, been a general mercantile store. It has been empty for the last couple of years, but is now coming to life again; this time as a restaurant, the Prairie Cafe. The Prairie Cafe opened on March 25, (1988) after all the necessary remodeling and repairs had been completed. It is operated by Cindy and Donald Wangen. They are optimistic about their new venture. "The comments from the people we talk to are positive. They are looking forward to our being open," Cindy stated.

They will also have a bakery along with the restaurant. Present plans are to be open Monday through Thursday from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner. On Friday, the Wangens will keep the cafe open until 10:00 p.m. with their fish fry and on Saturday they will close on 2:00 p.m. "However, we'll play it by ear. If we find there is enough need and desire, we'll adjust our hours and days of service," Cindy said.

The building has a long history as far as ownership is concerned. The exact date of construction is unknown, but it was operated in 1884 by Charlie Christenson with the help of his cousin, Conrad, and was known as the Christenson Firm. It was the third store to open in Prairie Farm. In 1901 Christenson sold the store to the Lien Teigen Firm. A. O. Lien operated the general mercantile store, in the south half of the building, which was built in 1889, while Hans Teigen ran the shoe repair and harness shop in the north section.

The Farmer's Store Company from Bloomer bought out Lien and Teigen and operated the business until 1915 when the company sold the building to the Prairie Farm Cooperative Association. A. B. Carmon was manager of the store. Heine Jorstad, from Ridgeland, next owned the store by buying out the cooperative in 1932. In 1939 he sold the store to Eber Borken who operated it for twenty years. When Borken retired in 1959, he sold it to Adolph Lien, a grandson of the second owner of the building. Lien operated the store until 1979 when he sold it to Randy and Janice Roemhild. Janice, nee Lien, is his niece. After the Roemhilds operated the store for a few years, the business was closed, and the building stood empty. Cliff and Barbara Harland bought the building in 1985 and rented it to Gary and Gloria Rhoor-Hyzer, who again ran a grocery store for two years.

Sheri's Shop 'N' Save Doubles In Size

Sheri's Shop 'N' Save has more than doubled in size with 1,040 square feet of floor space being added. New grocery products, more stock on the shelves, more freezers, an ice machine, and wider aisle space have been included. Sheri explained, "My husband, Brad, and I had hoped and planned to expand from the time we bought the store almost seven years ago. With the good business this year, we thought this was the year."

Brad designed the addition and the new sidewalk in front of the store for handicap accessibility. The building will contain high-efficiency heating and air conditioning systems. Ray Wold started construction on May 15, (1989) with major work expected to be finished by July 1. Many more smaller changes will be made over the next year. Sheri expects to have a grand opening in the fall.

Both Sheri and Brad agree that it was "just guts" that got them to buy their own grocery store. With Brad working full time as manager of the Ridgeland Lampert Home Center, Sheri runs the store. Their son, Jeremy, helps her, and the family has spent many late nights working in the store. Sheri credits the "excellent help" they have had over the years and especially now during construction as making it possible to continue the business. Brad and Sheri commented on how patient the customers have been during the building and remodeling, making it possible to stay open. Brad and Sheri Miller hope the people of the community will continue to support them in their business as they have done in the past.

Amundson's Service Enters Its Second Fifty Years As A Family Business

It was fifty years ago in May of 1939 that Otto Amundson started a business that was to prove to be a lasting one in Prairie Farm. Taking advantage of his farm's proximity to the village, Otto began construction of a Standard station on the southwest corner of his farm

in order to bring in supplemental income. His sons, Vern and Gerald, 11 and 13 years old respectively at the time, along with Lyle Broten had to stand on a step ladder to drive a well so that there would be water for the cement work of the foundation.

A team and a scraper were used to move dirt from a high spot to level the site where the station now stands. Blacktop was unavailable in those days, and Gerald Amundson remembers the mud and sink holes that had to be contended with in the spring. Otto would have to take out his team and haul the trucks in to get gas. Cars were greased outside on a grease rack.

The business climate of Prairie Farm in the early 1940s could be described as thriving and competitive. The Co-op Creamery was located on the north of the site, and all the trucks hauling into the creamery bought their gas from Amundson. Oscar Broten's feed mill was to the south of the station. A restaurant was located across the street.

There were no fewer than seven other gas stations in those days, including Skelly, Mobile, Harry Broten, Farmers Union, Archie Kurschner, and Ostrom's machinery dealer. "And we all made a living!," remembers Gerald Amundson, who is now the sole survivor in the business of pumping gas and one of two automobile repair shops.

He is not particularly happy about the lack of competition. He recalls that those in the business were able to work together, sending people down the street if they could not provide a part or service. He also recounts staying open from 7 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., Sundays included. The price of gasoline in those days was six gallons of regular or five gallons of unleaded for $1.00. The tax on gas was $.01, compared to $.33 today.

Times changed, the community changed, and so did Amundson's Station. When Gerald returned from the Navy in 1946, he and his brother Vern bought out Otto, built a two-stall garage on the south of the 12' X 24' building and began doing mechanic work. In 1951 they built on to the north. In 1952 Vern returned from his time in the armed services, and that same year the garage burned down.

They rebuilt and went into car sales in 1953. Josie, Gerald's wife, joined the family business in 1968 helping out with secretarial and bookkeeping work. In 1970, Gerald bought out Vern, built on to the north again, and began the appliance business. Gerald's son, Steve, finished high school about that time and went into partnership with his dad.

Gerald remembers the 1940s as being the best years. Because of the war, no new cars were available. Amundson's employed five people and put in seven or eight new engines a week. Business was going well. He regards the fire in 1952 as a real setback, leading to the toughest years. He notes that today's frustrations include burdensome paperwork and working with parts that are not the quality they should be. The public he deals with, though, are still "99.9% good people."

Amundson's Service enters its second fifty years as a strong family business, with Steve's wife, Cindy, working at the station and their son, Aaron, showing a strong interest in being the fourth generation. "I think we have an advantage in being a family working together," Gerald claims. "Nobody hesitates to put in those extra hours to make things go." He also gives credit to Mark Olson and Corey Mickelson, employees who are "just like family." Gerald finds reason to be optimistic about the future of both the family business and the community siting a renewed interest in smaller communities. "People want to know their neighbors, their schools, and where their kids are. We've got that here, and I think we're on the right track."

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A Farm Activist Speaks Of Creating Pockets Of Sanity

Tom Saunders, of Prairie Farm, Wisconsin, was an untiring activist on behalf of the family farm and working people. He helped found the National Save The Family Farm Coalition and draft important national farm policy review legislation. He worked with others to organize the Farm Aid concerts. In addition, he made farm issues an important part of Reverend Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition movement. In northwest Wisconsin, he played a major role in starting Wisconsin Farm Unity Alliance and later the Wisconsin Farmland Conservancy. He expressed his vision of caring for the land on a small dairy farm he operated near Prairie Farm with his wife, Pam, and their children, Molly, Luke, Ivy, and Nell. The following piece is a compilation of excerpts from an interview between the author and Saunders in October of 1987 in which Saunders reflects on the limits of farm activism and the importance of community building.

Lowell Bolstad: "As a farm activist, what do you see as important for people who are experiencing hurt in the rural areas to be able to work together to solve their problems?"

Tom Saunders: "Well, I think that one of the things that is really different about this time from other times when rural communities have been under the same pressures is that people are less used to spending time with one another, less comfortable with going to each other for help, more separate. I think that has been a real problem for people trying to deal with the farm crisis in the 1980s to try to counteract that individualism, but also that sense that they are in it alone and that no one should know about what their trouble is. I think this is a really formidable organizing problem."

Bolstad: "Is this situation one where people almost need to relearn certain social skills in order to turn to each other?"

Saunders: "Oh, I think so. When you think about it, people need to be comfortable with things in order to do them. When you had more shared work, and people were comfortable talking with each other about their problems. Now we are in a situation where people's understanding of their neighbor's problem is gossip and gossip only. If you are never on your neighbor's place, working with your neighbor, you lack a certain bunch of information that our forefathers had. There is less shared knowledge about where we all are and how we are all in it and it can't be otherwise. We spend so much time alone.

"This is really difficult to overcome. It didn't used to be the case that people were that much different. Everybody was basically doing the same thing. Everybody was filling silo at the same time in the same way and with the same methods. Now we have this whole multiplicity of stuff. We have people who do things with the newest technology possible. At the same time, we have people doing things in certain old ways. Some people aren't even doing the same practices. They don't put up any corn silage; they don't put up any haylage. It is a real problem in having a common understanding."

Bolstad: "Could you say something about what you see as the future of the movement to save the family farm?"

Saunders: "In trying to save the family farm, maybe we have too large a task. I think we are going to lose it before we save it. We may lose the family farm in the sense of

which the family farm is the institution by which we farm. There will be family farmers. There will probably be rural communities. But in terms of family farming being the institution of agriculture in America, we are going to lose that. But I think we are going to retain enough of it so that, when people start asking for solutions to the incredible problems that are going to come, then we are going to say 'You guys threw away what would take to solve this problem and this is what it looks like and here's how you recreate it.'"

Bolstad: "Explain to me how what you are saying differs from those who would say that the loss of the family farm is inevitable."

Saunders: "When they say it, what they are saying is that the loss of the family farm is an inevitable thing. It's an act of God. That's pretty incredible. It's not a divine force. It's entirely a man made force. An act of God saves farmers and families. What I am saying is that men are out of control with respect to their disrespect for Mother Earth, and they are going to destroy a large portion of the people who live on the land as well as the infrastructure in their greed.

Tom Saunders speaks out.

"I think people are in different stages in their understanding of the problem. To complete this whole thought, I don't think everyone should say, 'The struggle over legislation to raise the prices is lost, and we shouldn't do anything about it.' Or, 'We shouldn't try to get the best credit program we should.' 'We shouldn't try to save the family farm. Or we shouldn't try to organize farmers.' That's not what I would say, which what others are saying. We need to understand that, no matter how good a job we do, and we have to do what's right.

"It's like, tomorrow morning, I am going to get up and milk my cows even though it does not make any sense. But I have to milk those cows, because, if I want to milk them when it does make sense, I have to milk them now. The same with organizing farmers and advocacy work, we have to do it.

"But the perspective, which says that we are going to lose a lot of these struggles, says that, while we are doing what we have to do, we need to be preparing for the future that is to come, which is inevitable. We have to think about creating pockets of sanity, to build community, in whatever small ways we can, while we carry on that larger struggle. I think personally, for four or five years, I made a military decision, which was we are not going to insure resupply here. We are not going to make sure our supply lines are all connected, and that everything makes sense. We are not going to be in a long campaign. We are going for a knockout punch. We are going right at this problem and bust right through it.

"And, I'm not saying that was the wrong thing to say at that time. But we have done four years of that work, and now we can say, 'Well, maybe, this is going to be a little more long term than that. I'm tired but I'm going to have to start preparing for some more building kinds of things.' I think that the difference is between organizing focused on mobilization and activating people and organizing that has a larger educational component and more demonstrational kind of thing. We need to demonstrate that community works.

"Even under this kind of economic pressure, that things like the *Hay River Review* can stimulate a community to respond to this situation in a way that makes it more viable than in communities that don't make that response. And then we need to point to that; we need to articulate that, and we need to talk about the difference and get people to see that."

Bolstad: "You speak of pockets of sanity. How would you define sanity?"

Saunders: "Places where the community, whatever it is, however it is, the people who are the active citizens, the people who are participating in making change, or protecting the community from outside forces have a realistic view of what is possible and are actively working to better their community, to make change, realizing that it is a long-term struggle and that change is going to be small. Making significant change so that there are successes.

"I think that the *Hay River Review* is a success at this point. Now, if that paper exists in four years as a community paper on a sound financial footing, that would be a success. If that were to be true, I would think that there might be the same number of businesses or more in these two communities. There might be some rational response to the problem of school consolidation in these two communities. There might be more energy spent on community projects, like things for the kids. You would be able to measure the quality of life either not falling like it is going to fall in other communities or improving."

Bolstad: "In other words, urban areas have a measure of quality of life. You are saying that rural areas ought to be able to measure the quality of life in identifiable ways also?"

Saunders: "What I am saying — it sounds like a lot of words, and I'm talking off the top of my head, it's all there, I have been sorting it all out — is that we were putting all our energy into trying to write a piece of legislation, which would enable this process, would fertilize the process. We were trying to plow the ground and going to go out and get in some more organic matter and bring it in. Now all that stuff has broken down. It's getting late, it's getting time to plant the seeds. We just have to go out there and get them in the ground and do the best thing that we can. Because we have to get a crop going."

Bolstad: "Do you think that, if the farm bill was passed, farmers would still be as independent as ever?"

Saunders: "I don't know if the bill would deal with that. That's an interesting question. I never saw the legislation we were working on as something that would bring farmers together. Community building would still be there. As a matter of fact, I think that we probably have become so out of touch with the real work of building and maintaining community that we need to be shocked into getting back to work. It may be the best thing for us that we are going to lose some of these things.

"In a certain sense, that is my analysis of what happened when the farmers won that legislation in the 1940s. They won it in kind of an easy way. The struggle was interrupted. There were other things about that, too. There was the war. It was a sort of a tragic set of events, because America was ready to experience a new understanding of how countries and economies can be organized. And it was short-circuited by the war."

Bolstad: "What was this country on the verge of?"

Saunders: "You had working people and farmers really ready to take on corporate power on all levels, and winning, becoming politically active, learning about power, getting involved in politics, trying to push on certain things, and all that going on. Then, after

some successes, there was this war effort, which unified the whole country, brought everybody together, and identified an enemy outside of the country.

"It was a successful effort, so that everybody began to talk about the nation in a way that was only surface stuff. The rural communities hadn't been put back together. As a matter of fact, communities were being torn apart by the lure of materialism. Because that was the other thing going on. There was this incredible technological revolution going on in agriculture. And people were leaving in droves because of the drudgery of farming before that happened. What would people have done if? — I mean this is a hypothetical question; I am farming the way people were farming in the 1940s except that I have corn that will produce a 100 bushels to the acre and get ripe and alfalfa that will catch up here and maintain a stand for four years without putting anything on it. They didn't have those things. I've got cattle and artificial insemination. There is no reason why I couldn't have a 12,000 to 13,000 pound herd average with Jerseys, and their's was probably 6,000.

"All these small technological things, which are not disruptive, which are democratic technological advances, had people had those, and seen that, would they have left the farm? You see, they left the farm because there was opportunity in the city, and because there was so much work on the farm. But, now we can go back and create a whole different scenario. But it happened. There was this positive pressure from public policy. All of these forces were working at the same time. This isn't a repeatable business. What we have experienced in agriculture in the last one hundred years is unique. It's not something that has happened before. I don't think that any legislation can build community. It can enable community to be built, it can make it possible."

Bolstad: "So your analysis is that there was the lure of the cities, the forty-hour work week, there was not the prospect in the rural areas?"

Saunders: "A lot of people got spoiled in the depression. No amount of money could make them go back to the farm because it was such drudgery and hard work. Farm kids get overworked. You couldn't get them behind a shovel for all the money in the world."

Bolstad: "You think there is a real separation between urban and rural?"

Saunders: "I think there is a real large separation between urban and rural. Just start talking about work and work as pleasure. You will find that people from urban areas have a harder time understanding how that can be. I think rural people understand that more. I've experienced that. The differences aren't as great as they used to be."

Bolstad: "What are ways you envision rural people to improve the quality of life?"

Saunders: "I think we are going to see new experiments in marketing that aren't cooperatives, if people are building community. And, if they don't build community, we won't see it; we will see what everybody tells us is coming down the road — fewer cheese plants and fewer places to send your milk. I think that, if people realize what they are losing and do something about it, we are going to see some small cheese plants and some small processing plants. We are going to see some experiments at economic development in rural areas that don't come from outside the community, but from inside the community."

"Have you seen this stuff about a local computer bank that serves as a trading service. People in the community can go to this computer bank and say, 'This is John-so-and-so. I have four hours of electrical work to trade.' And someone else calls up and says, 'I need such and such.' And what happens is that labor is traded. This is not direct because you don't have to find somebody who needs what you've got in order to get what you want.

Let's say you got what I want, but you don't want what I've got. I can get what you want. You can get credit. You can get what you want from somebody else. Somebody else gets what I've got to give.

"See, so it's not parity, it is a different concept about money working on a local level. People are talking about those experiments. The thing about parity is, this is the problem with parity, parity is not that, parity is about national currency. The concept of valuing things what they are really worth and not what this government is creating their value to be. You can do it on a local level, but it is not the same as parity, which is a concept about national currency.

"But, see the problem with the farm movement right now is that they're not making the shift from a time when there were just enough people who understood because of their experience what it meant to ask for higher prices. In the 1930s, when the struggle happened the last time, there was a whole vast population of people who understood in their bones why it was correct to pay for farm production. Now, that mass of population does not understand in their bones. So that idea needs to be articulated in a way that they understand.

"The mass of people are not farm people. See, you understand that you are not getting paid enough for what you do if you farm. Because you work your hind end off and see somebody who isn't and you don't have any money. But when you aren't farming, you don't get it in the same way. And the movement hasn't made the transition. It hasn't realized that you have to make demonstration projects, which talk about what parity is and that really work and that you can point to. And talk about the idea as a national concept. Focus on that idea. You have to keep struggling to win these pieces of legislation. You can't stop doing that. But you have to do these other things as well."

Bolstad: "What do you think it will take for the movement to be able to see that?"

Saunders: "It will take losing more."

Bolstad: "Do you know how much more?"

Saunders: "I don't know at what point, but they haven't lost enough. (Laughter) That is what I was saying before. The movement seems to be kind of hard headed. The thing that is missing from the movement is there's no mass mobilization, so that is not a movement. The mass mobilization has sputtered and sputtered and sputtered. If it sputters again, I'll be surprised. There is no mass mobilization, so there is no democratic activity that keeps their direction vibrant. Because, we had a mass mobilization, we had people struggling over what to do next.

"That's where the democracy happens then. And it happens around, 'What's our next political move?' That's still going on with a small group of people, but it is not going on with a large enough group of people that people are excited about democracy, excited about what is going on. They are not excited by the movement. The movement is not happening. Again that goes back to what we were talking about before. Those things need to happen some place, so that there are some people who say, 'I'm experiencing democracy. I'm participating in democracy. These people are, too. And we know we are. We see how good it is, and you can't take it away from us.' That's what has got to happen. Given the situation we are in now, I think that has to happen locally — as locally as it can be made to happen. If you can't do it statewide, then you got to do it in a smaller group. If you can't do it county wide, you have to do it in your own community. If you can't do it anywhere but in your own family, then you need to do it there. But you need to make it happen!"

Part VI

Memories Of Those Who Have Died Inspire The Living

A Praise

His memories lived in the place
like fingers locked in the rock ledges
like roots. When he died
and his influence entered the air
I said, Let my mind be the earth
of his thought, let his kindness
go ahead of me. Though I do not escape
the history barbed in my flesh,
certain wise movements of his hands,
the turns of his speech
keep with me. His hope of peace
keeps with me in harsh days,
the shell of his breath dimming away
three summers in the earth.

—**Farming: A Hand Book.** By Wendell Berry. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. New York. 1970. page 26.

14

Graytown — Gone, But Not Forgotten

(Author's note: Associate editor Pam Saunders wrote the following feature story for the *Hay River Review* with information gathered in interviews with Wilmer and Flora Amundson, Wylie Van Blaricom, Lester Thatcher, and Lester's son, Chester Thatcher. Saunders relied heavily upon the memoirs of Chester B. Thatcher, 1866-1953. Some of the dates are approximate or are recalled slightly differently by different memories.)

Graytown — we know it existed, though few traces of it remain. Somewhere along Highway K, south of the Dunn-Barron county line, and north of Connorsville, Graytown once stood. We know it existed because we can see it on the old Town of New Haven maps, a crosshatched area running along the south fork of the Hay River in section five. Some of the elders know it existed because they remember the small settlement that was, in the early part of the century, home to those who worked in the woods, operated the sawmill, ran the cheese factory, tended the store, and communicated with the rest of the world through the little post office. They remember the town-that-might-have-been, which supplied the hearty souls who transformed the mighty forests into the patchwork of fields and pastures and woods and dotted them with farmsteads.

Graytown came into existence at the time when railroads were the only roads penetrating the forests. The Glenwood Lumber Company owned many acres of timber land in that area, and in 1892 built a fifteen-mile stretch of standard gauge logging road north from Glenwood City. The settlement at the end of that stretch was called Graytown, after an early settler named Arron Gray. Each year, millions of feet of logs, mostly hardwoods, were shipped by rail from forests around Graytown to be milled at Glenwood City.

In the spring of 1901, Chester B. Thatcher and Bill Gray built a sawmill at Graytown. Even though the pines were long gone and the oak mostly gone, they could see the market changing and could make use of the elm and hard maple that still stood in the forests. Furthermore, the farmers were beginning to build big dairy barns as the land was cleared and settled, so there was a demand for rough building material.

Thatcher grew up near Clear Lake and spent several years of his youth working in lumber camps and in the mills near New Richmond, as well as helping with the log drives in the spring. The logs, which had been skidded to the banks of the river during the winter, would be floated downstream on high water. By the turn of the century, though, Thatcher had a wife and family and settled in section five of the Town of New Haven. In 1903, he bought out Gray's share in the sawmill and operated it until 1927, rebuilding twice after fires in 1914 and 1919. Sawmills were numerous in this part of the country, processing the harvest of the forests, clearing the land, and helping to build farms and towns.

Thatcher saw the lumber business as a somewhat transitory industry, and so acquired land and built a nice farmstead during this time. In 1910 he purchased a purebred heifer and a bull calf from George Scott in Prairie Farm, paying $125 each, and built up a fine herd of registered Guernsey cows from them. Lester Thatcher, Chester's son, remembers driving those animals from Prairie Farm to Graytown on foot when he was about ten years old. Chester's memoirs show that he thought way ahead of his time when he commented that some of the high-producing milk cows really ought to be milked three times a day.

A sawmill crew in 1916 poses for a picture near a shed. These men worked for Chester B. Thatcher in the Graytown sawmill.

Chester B. Thatcher was known to be sharp in business and compassionate in employment. Wilmer Amundson, who worked on John Dale's farm, just south of Graytown, remembers how the sawmill "kept a lot of people working. Farmers would work there whenever they could. You had to keep alive." A farmer and his team might be hired to skid logs for the winter, for example. At times the mill employed as many as thirty people in the operation, including woods crews, mill workers, farm workers, and cooks.

Flora Amundson, wife of Wilmer Amundson, worked as cook for the lumber crews from 1928 to 1936 while living in the cook shack. She remembers Chester B. Thatcher with fondness and respect, recalling that she and her husband got their first bull calf from him, giving them a start in farming. She recalls the hearty eaters who came to her table. She baked ten big loaves of bread a week, as well as coffee cake and pancakes.

The work was seasonal. Trees were typically cut in the fall by two-man teams with a crosscut saw. "Not so bad if your saw was sharp. Had to sharpen the saw every night," Lester Thatcher commented. The trees would be cut into lengths and skidded out to a trail by a team of horses and left until winter, when they could be skidded more easily over snow trails and then hauled on sleds into the mill. With no hydraulic loading equipment to pile the logs, the yard surrounding the mill would be a sea of logs, waiting for spring.

In March, the logs were thawed out enough to begin sawing them into lumber. The overhead mill at Graytown ran off a large slabwood-fired steam engine that was housed in the lower story of the mill building. The saw, edgers, and conveyors were run off of belts. The logs were skidded up to the mill with a team, and the logs were winched up a chute and sent through the rotary saw. The slabs and edgings then came out the side, and the lumber came out the other end to be piled to air dry with wood strips in between. Then the lumber was hauled to Clear Lake on wagons over rough roads to await shipment by rail.

Not all the lumber was shipped out. Many of the area barns and houses, which stand today, were built from lumber out of the Graytown mill. In later years, Thatcher set up a retail lumber yard, making available other building supplies. Often a farmer would haul in a

load of logs to have them milled and haul home lumber with which to build. The mill provided an opportunity to make money for those farmers by buying the logs they brought in.

Lester Thatcher remembers that his father owned a couple of teams as well as hiring horses to work. Draft horses were from about 1,400 pounds and up, generally not as big as they are today. "But some of the little ones were just as good, or better," he recalled. Working in the woods produced some fine teamsters. Wylie Van Blaricom, whose home place was a half-mile up the river from Graytown, recalls driving four horses on a logging sled beginning when he was sixteen. He later worked in the box factory. He and his father, George, would haul cheese from the cheese factory the twelve miles into Clear Lake and haul groceries back for the store, a trip that would take all the daylight and more.

What was life like in the logging camps? The men worked ten or eleven hours per day, six days per week, and stayed in the sleeping shanty during the busy times, as it would be too far to go home. Sometimes camps would be set up further away from the mill. Lester Thatcher remembers that the crews would be too tired at night to get too rowdy, and mostly played cards before retiring. Sometimes they did not get paid until spring, so could not go to town to live it up, even if they wanted to.

There was not a lot of margin for profit in the lumber business at that time, and the going price for a farmer's logs might be $3.25 per thousand, compared with about a hundred times that today. There was no such thing as veneer grade, only number one, two, and three. As for wages, a worker in the woods might expect to be paid $1.25 per thousand board feet of lumber for cutting, and the same for skidding. In 1918, Thatcher added a planing mill and a box factory, in which he could utilize the basswood and butternut lumber to make cheese boxes. He supplied thirteen cheese factories with boxes during the 1920s. When the mill shut down in 1927, the box factory continued to operate until the early 1930s with lumber that was brought in from elsewhere until the demand for wooden cheese boxes gave way to paper, and the area's agricultural base was firmly established.

But during those three decades, there was a community at Graytown. A school was located two miles away, although children had to go away for the later grades. There was a hall, where Lester Thatcher remembers Saturday night dances and church on Sunday with an occasional visiting minister. The Glenwood Lumber Company operated a store while the railroad operated, and after that several families successively owned and operated a general store: Tom Thone, Tom Jones, Joe Conrath, Harry Holland, Fred Tariten, and finally Bert Goodspeed. The store closed in 1941, the building gone in 1948. A post office was housed in three different locations over the years, first in the company store.

There was a blacksmith shop, which was a necessity in the shoeing of horses used in the woods and also in the repair of lumbering and sawmill equipment. The blacksmith also supported the work of the farmers by sharpening plow lays and keeping other equipment in operating condition. The cheese factory was another source of employment in Graytown, and the building can still be seen on the west side of Highway K, less than a mile south of the county line. Jacob Blatt, a Swiss immigrant cheesemaker, built it in 1918, and it was operated into the 1950s. The cheese factory used the boxes manufactured right up the road.

This relatively short history of Graytown gives an insight into the early history of the area, and the progression from a timber based economy to an agricultural economy. The wooden buildings still being used in the surrounding countryside stand as reminders of Graytown. Memories of the people who lived and worked around Graytown serve as a legacy as they help us to understand where we have come from.

15

Karen Olson: Midwife To A Thousand Babies

(Author's note: Associate editor Pam Saunders wrote this feature for the *Hay River Review*. Saunders gained most of the material from interviews with Lillian Moe Kahl, who was born in 1924 under the care of Karen Olson. Kahl was the first of many babies born in Olson's home without the aid of a doctor. Since Kahl's mother suffered complications and required medical care in Menomonie for several weeks after delivery, Kahl was cared for by Olson. This was the beginning of a deep and lasting attachment between them.)

Karen Olson is remembered by several generations of Prairie Farm area residents, the younger ones remembering the stern, old woman who lived in the trailer by the burned-out house in the middle of town. Others remember the competent, cheerful woman who attended them as they brought their children into this world, and cared for them in the days following. Still others can remember the interested, interesting, self-sufficient neighbor and friend whom they miss for the good conversation, the twinkle in her eye, and the ever-ready coffee pot. Those who remember her are eager to share their memories of Karen Olson, because she truly touched the lives of those around her.

Karen Lomstadt was born in Kvam, Norway in 1885 to a farming family. Matt Olson came from that region also and emigrated to the United States, as many young people did at that time. He returned to Norway and proposed marriage to Karen. It was not a decision to be made lightly, for a young woman to leave her home and family, perhaps never to return. Matt had a dime, which he cut in two, giving her half and keeping the other half. "When you make up your mind to come to America to marry me," he said, "we will join this dime." She wore that joined dime on a chain for many years after she joined him in 1903, and her father back in Norway lost his "his little song bird," for Karen Olson loved to sing.

Matt Olson was already settled in the Prairie Farm area, and the wedding was a large affair attended by three hundred people. Matt was employed as a blacksmith with Ole Tollefson, a relative, in the blacksmith shop in town. Later he established his own business, for there was plenty of that work to do. He built a fine house on the southwest corner of Bluff Avenue and Brewster Street, and they lived there with their growing family until Matt was elected county sheriff. They moved to a residence provided for the sheriff next to the jail, and Karen cooked for the prisoners. The tragedy of Matt Olson's death in 1916 became a well-known story in the community. In carrying out his duties as a sheriff, Matt went to arrest a man who had stolen a horse. He stepped into the barn and was warned by the man not to come any further. As Matt advanced, the man shot him dead. When they came to tell Karen, they brought his coat, which hung in the closet for many years.

So Karen Olson was left a young widow with three children, Inga, Olaf, and young Trigve, who died soon after of one of the many diseases that claimed the lives of children in those days. She moved her family back to their home in Prairie Farm with very few other resources, most likely not even a pension. There was no aid for dependent children or welfare to help a person in her position. In order to help make ends meet, she rented out the second floor of her home. Olson is remembered by many as a physically strong woman who knew how to take care of herself and her family.

Dr. Natwig, the community physician, happened to live in the house behind hers. They apparently became good friends, he respecting her intelligence and detecting her interest in nursing. She had, in fact, always been interested in nursing, being the one to successfully treat sick calves, for example, as a young girl. But the nursing field was not the highly

trained and licensed field it is today, and Natwig had a need for help in his rural practice. No one knows exactly how or when Natwig and Olson began to work together, but perhaps he had a difficult "baby case," as they called them, and asked his neighbor to come along to the country to help him. He would have soon discovered that she possessed an aptitude and could be trusted with some of the care of his patients. It was in this natural way, then, that Karen Olson "fell into" the nursing and midwife career that occupied her for many years.

Karen Olson delivered a thousand babies.

Many women of that day and earlier were known as midwives. A certain woman in the neighborhood would assist with the labor and delivery and stay on to help the new mother. Christina Miller Tollefson, who lives in Prairie Farm today, recalls that her mother, Anna Miller, filled that role in the 1920s, as did Josie Amundson's mother, Anna Carlsrud. Mae Doe was also known as a midwife during the 1930s.

Olson opened up a room in her house to care for mothers and babies before, during, and after delivery. From time to time she also cared for others in her home who were ill. Palmer Lillevold remembers, as a boy, staying at her house and being nursed back to health after a bout with rheumatic fever. Natwig was called in to attend to the actual deliveries, but in the course of normal events, sometimes did not make it, either because he was out on another call or because weather prevented him from getting back in time. Lillian Kahl was perhaps the first of those babies to be attended by Olson without Natwig, and she spent later parts of her life living with "Ma," as she called her, and helping with the patients.

It is said that Karen Olson assisted with close to a thousand births. The years between 1935 and 1950 were the busiest, but she also attended to patients into the middle and late 1950s. According to Lillian Kahl, she lost few babies and no mothers. Records of births were listed in a little black book that was kept in the sewing machine. The little book, which chronicled the births of many of the people in this area, was apparently destroyed in the fire that gutted the Olson house in 1968.

How did a typical labor, delivery, and recovery go under Olson's care? There was little formal prenatal care in those days. That area was covered by a woman's friends and relatives in their advice, gleaned from their own and other's experiences. But Olson would know who was close to her "time" to deliver. She had the practice of "walking out" in the evenings when she had no patients, to visit friends down the street, like Mrs. Helland,

Mrs. Fladten, or Mrs. Lillevold. She braced a yellow broom against the door as a signal she was out visiting. Olson had no telephone during the years she was a midwife and had to be fetched by the husband if no one was home when a woman in labor arrived. If they could not wait to get into the house, it was common knowledge that the key was on top of one of the porch pillars, and that the husband should climb up and get it.

The doctor would be called for the delivery, and the husband sent out to the porch, especially if he smoked, to "stay out of the way." The bed would be readied with spotless sheets, and there was plenty of hot water heated on the stove and clean cloths readied for the delivery. Since women tended to have several children, she knew what to expect from many of them. "This will be a long night, girl," Karen might say to Lillian if she guessed that a woman would have difficulty. Others, she knew, would sail through with no difficulty. The doctor was equipped for emergency cesarean deliveries, but these were rare. The majority of the deliveries were accomplished without episiotomies, stitches, forceps, or drugs, whether the doctor was attending or not. The newborn was not washed with water, but with a mineral oil for a few days to keep the skin soft. When an incubator was needed for a small or premature baby, a box on the door of the cookstove or hot water bottles or just a warm pair of human arms would have to do. Many infants were saved this way.

A woman's "confinement" never lasted less than ten days, for it was Karen Olson's firm belief that it took that long to get a woman rested and well fed and ready to go back to the hard work that she usually faced at home. The families of the mothers, including children, could visit, usually in the evening. Sometimes there were two patients at a time, one occupying the front room and another displacing Olson from her bedroom. She was not only the nurse for mother and baby, she was also cook, custodian, and laundress. Patients were fed well on home canned meats as well as the vegetables and preserves from her own garden. She did not use sanitary products, but laundered cotton padding for the postpartum mother as well as diapers for the baby. All this was done without the aid of indoor plumbing. Lillian Kahl remembers pumping buckets of water on the porch to be heated on the wood stove for the cooking, cleaning, and laundry chores.

Karen Olson called her patients "my ladies," and prided herself on taking good care of them. This included keeping their spirits up while she kept them in bed. Many of "her ladies" remember with fondness their relaxing stays at her house. Olson could always find a spare minute to sit and tell a story or joke and sing a Norwegian song.

Olson considered it part of her job to see to it that a woman did not come back for a stay at her house again in ten months time. However, she was not equipped with much in the way of help for this problem. Her advice to the mother might be, "Now you keep that beast where he belongs. You sleep in one room, and he can sleep in the barn." As the father came to pick up his wife and their newborn, she would say, "Now you behave yourself."

The cost of the ten-day confinement with nursing care, room, and board was $10, ranging up to $30 in the later years. The pay often came in the form of farm produce, such as milk, eggs, butter, or meat. Olson was assisted with all the work there was to be done at different times by her daughter Inga, son Olaf, and Lillian Kahl. She obtained a special license from the state to keep patients in her home, of which she was proud. Sometimes Karen Olson would go out to a farm to assist Natwig with a home delivery and often stay a few days in order to nurse the mother and child and help with the family during the recovery. Some families chose this alternative because during hard times it was cheaper than staying at Olson's home. Others in the village could choose to have Natwig come for the delivery for $35 with Olson attending for $15. She would then stop in the morning and evening for several days to visit, bringing a kettle of hot soup and making sure everything was alright.

A fire in 1968 made her house unlivable, and she had a mobile home pulled onto her lot, where she had all the modern conveniences. Olson, her midwife practice having been replaced by hospital obstetrics, would spend many hours going through items that had not been destroyed by the fire, salvaging what she wanted. On one of her visits back to Prairie Farm, Lillian Kahl was told by certain residents that the decaying house was not not an especially pretty sight in a village where new homes were being built and people taking pride in keeping up their appearance. Kahl was asked to approach Olson about having the house torn down, and one day she did so over coffee. "Well, girl," Karen began calmly in her lingering Norwegian accent, "I'm going to tell you something. You know, I've seen the hind ends of most of the people in this town, and they weren't such a pretty sight either! So they can just leave my house alone." Her house stood until after her death in 1979, and no one bothered her again about removing it.

Karen Olson held to strict moral standards of her day and had high expectations for those around her. She did not approve of drinking, staying out late, and make-up. She did, however, have a sense of humor. Lillian Kahl tells of the time she was back visiting "Ma," as an adult, and stayed out late with her fiance, Roland Kahl, who was on leave from the army. "What in the world were you doing out so late, girl?," Ma asked. "Well, Ma, we were talking about our future," Lillian replied. The next night, while trying to sleep over the noise of the cats outside, Lillian asked, "What in the world are those cats out there yowling about, Ma?" "Well, girl," chuckled Ma, "they're talking about their future."

Though her convictions led her to strongly condemn premarital sex, her heart opened wide to the few young women who came to the door without a husband. In fact, she formed especially strong and lasting attachments to these particular babies and gave their mothers much needed support. She expressed some strong opinions and original names for people. When once approaching someone on the street of whom she did not think too much, she said, "Well, here comes so-and-so. He sure is a 'chronotype.'" "A 'chronotype,' Ma," Lillian asked, "what in the world is a 'chronotype?'" "Well, you know, that Rice Lake paper never was worth a darn," Karen replied.

Karen Olson lived to the age of 94 and stayed active and alert for all those years. She gardened up until the time when she entered a Chippewa Falls nursing home in 1976 in order to be near her son-in-law, Harry Rassbach, and her grandsons. Although she never drove a car, she remarked upon needing a wheel chair, "Well, I finally got my wheels!"

If Olson had any regret, it was that she never gained formal nursing training. She used the strength of her character and her influence to encourage others to further their education. She was well-read and had a lifelong practice of reading the Norwegian language paper, the *Decorah Post*. She held education to be of utmost importance. She never failed to take advantage of her privilege to vote, although she had no illusions about the purity of politicians. At the same time, she maintained a loyalty to the Norwegian crown and was deeply bothered by the Nazi collaboration in Norway during WWII.

While not a regular church goer in her later years, Karen Olson thanked Jesus at the beginning and the end of each day without fail. Ladies Aid was an important part of her life, and, even if her patients prevented her from being there every time, she sent her 25¢ dues with her neighbor, Annie Lien. She was well known for the huge amounts of lefse she baked on the wood cookstove for the church lutefisk and lefse suppers.

Karen Olson was a product of her time and circumstance, filling an important niche in the community. She cared for her family and attended to the needs of neighbors, working hard, always giving. What she saw each time she witnessed the birth of a child, though, was a miracle to her, a gift and a privilege that repaid her many fold for what she gave.

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Community Feels The Loss Of Tom Saunders And Dan Yurista

In the course of four months in 1989, the Prairie Farm community lived through the deaths of Tom Saunders and Dan Yurista. Both men and their families had been involved in farm activism and community building. The following articles tell the accounts of their deaths and the impact on the community. Kate Hearth writes how Tom Saunders died in a logging accident. Her piece is followed with A Hay River Notebook by Char Radintz describing Saunders as a warrior in our midst. Nancy Drake tells how Dan Yurista was returning from Nicaragua when his plane went down over Honduras. Her account is followed by another A Hay River Notebook by Char Radintz recounting Yurista as a man of kindness and generosity. These stories originally appeared in the *Hay River Review*.

Tom Saunders Dies In A Logging Accident

Tom Saunders — farmer, logger, father, husband, friend to many — was killed while working in the woods near Dallas on Thursday, June 22. A memorial service was held at United Lutheran Church in Prairie Farm on June 26. A procession of horsedrawn buggies and wagons went from the church to the Saunders' farm where the burial took place.

The entire staff and organization of the *Hay River Review* feels an acute loss in Tom's passing, as he was instrumental in the development of this paper in its earliest stages, as well as being a contributor of ideas for articles to the paper. In conversations with people about Tom, it becomes apparent that everyone knew Tom in a little different way, and that in his integrity and directness he affected people deeply. So this article seeks to share with the reader the memories of several people who knew him in different capacities.

Bob Albee explained how he and Tom got an idea for a community newspaper. "Tom was instrumental in the brainstorming stage of the *Hay River Review*. We were just sitting around at one of those many after chores, late night get-togethers, and we were talking about communications, and what is viable in a small town. Gayle and I were new in the area, but we had the equipment from working on the *LCO Journal*. Tom was picking my brain, and we were kicking around ideas. Through the farm movement, there was an awareness of how helpful regular communications are. So we began to talk about a community newspaper. And Tom was a tremendous springboard for this idea. He was much better known than I in the community.

"He had a great ability to say 'Hey folks, look at this. This is important.' But I should also say that Pam's thoughts and ideas were as instrumental as his were in the initial stages. If it had not been for her enthusiasm, the ideas might not have stayed with him as they did. And the ideas had to do with community. How can you have a community that doesn't communicate with itself? And so it all kind of converged. It was to be a newspaper of record and then from that introduced farm issues and other ideas. But he really wanted it to reflect *this* community."

Peter Edstrom remembered Tom Saunders for his farm activism and for farm work. "I worked with Tom on activist projects around the 1985 Farm Bill. But the thing that I remember most is how our families worked together — thrashing especially. That was the time that we got the crews together, ate the big meals together. That type of work, that type of relationship we had was what we fought for in our political work. That sharing of work,

sharing of joy, and respect for the land. Tom always said, 'This land is something we get to use for a spell; it really doesn't belong to us.' The idea was that land was a legacy and not a commodity. But you should hear from Judy, too. Pam and Judy have that quiet strength inside that has allowed us to do what we've done." Judy Edstrom remarked, "I enjoyed Tom because he lived life to the fullest. We worked together. And he enjoyed every bit of sweat and hard work. And our families just clicked, got along so well; the kids got along so well together."

Peter Edstrom continued by saying, "Our son Danny and Luke Saunders worked with Tom and me. And we understood the urge of a young boy to grow into manhood bit by bit, working with his father. Tom said, 'It's real important that we have farms out here where kids can learn to work, to create. A push button operation doesn't allow kids to learn about work. It's important that kids can see a job followed through to completion and to develop the possibility in themselves to do the same.' The boys would ask, 'How are we going to do that?' And Tom would say, 'We'll just do it!'"

Muriel Nedland recalled working with Tom on farm issues. "Tom was probably one of the people who frustrated me and interested me more than most people. He was an activist, and this is something my parents taught me since childhood — that if you're not an activist, you're dead. I may not have always agreed with him, but he was the kind of leader we need. His intentions were above reproach."

Cindy Theorin was a close friend of Tom's. "Tom and I spent a lot of time talking about what it means to build community intentionally, and we said, 'Well, this year let's do something, let's farm together.' And I'm glad we had a little opportunity to do that. Tom loved to work. If anyone complained about the hard work of farming, he'd always say, 'Just look where we live — look at our quality of life. It's worth it; we've got to pay for it!' His satisfaction with his way of life really impressed me."

Ron Pfiffner, a friend, had this to say about Tom. "Tom and I go back to the beginnings of a new life, for both our families — the move to Wisconsin. We moved here to begin an organic life with the land and the forests. We learned to be fathers, teachers, farmers, loggers, builders, and many other things together. We have shared our lives and ideals through many seasons, passed the peace pipe of hope for all people of all nations. His spirit will always be with us."

Saunders Characterized As A Warrior In Our Midst

I had heard much about Tom Saunders before I actually met him, so perhaps that is why, four years later, I can still remember that meeting so vividly. I had been out with a county NFO president, a local dairy farmer, who had finally convinced Ray and me to ship our milk with his organization. We were stopping at some local farms in an attempt to drum up more support for NFO and their milk marketing plan. At one of our stops, that Craig had said was a pretty "hot prospect," we learned that Tom had somehow convinced these folks that collective bargaining was not the solution to poor farm prices.

Needless to say, this upset my stumping partner considerably and since we happened to be in Saunder's neighborhood, Craig decided to pay a call and confront Tom. At this point I was simply tagging along, but felt some genuine curiosity about Tom Saunders and the outcome of such a confrontation. We found Tom home, busy working on the foundation of his new house. We stood on planks above, while he worked about eight feet below us. In all fairness to Tom, he made several attempts to cool the situation some, but it became increasingly clear to him that being the better debater was not going to convince Craig that

he wasn't out to *trash* NFO. I remember at one point he asked us to hand him down a ladder so that he wasn't in a position of having to keep looking up at us, a position he felt that put him at a distinct disadvantage.

After about five minutes of this angry exchange, I became more and more disgusted. I finally screwed up my courage to speak, and what I said essentially, was that it was disappointing and a bit disgusting to me to see two people who basically wanted the same thing for farmers, unable to talk to each other with any reasonableness or tolerance. I then turned on my heel and headed for the car, hoping that Craig would at least give me a ride home. I think he saw me as a traitor since I wouldn't take his side. It was too clear to me that, if people in the farm movement could not get together and resolve their differences, there wasn't any chance of making significant changes.

I don't remember much about the ride home that afternoon, but I do know that I wasn't asked again to go stumping for NFO. However the next time I saw Tom Saunders, a few months later, he and Craig had somehow joined forces to organize the first in a series of town meetings to talk about the farm crisis and what ought to be done to address it. Ray and I attended that meeting in Ridgeland.

I am not trying to take credit for this transformation. What it did show me was that Tom was a true leader, not because he was the strongest and most articulate voice in the farm movement in this area, but because he was wise enough to learn from his mistakes and to make changes that helped build strong coalitions.

I never got to know Tom very well socially, although I came to know and become friends with many of his friends. Tom's and my path seldom crossed unless it was at some meeting or political function. But over the past four years, I watched him soften. His style around people like myself became less confrontational. I guess he must have learned to switch gears. After all, what worked in FmHA field offices and local PCAs just wasn't very effective when dealing with farmers who knew something was wrong, but weren't sure how far they were willing to put themselves on the line to make changes.

At a meeting about a year ago, I remember telling Tom that what I felt was most meaningful for Ray and me, was to be the best possible neighbors we could be to the other farmers that we had come to know. I explained that neither of us was particularly comfortable with, or convinced of the effectiveness of confrontation, even though we knew that it probably was a necessary part of making change. Tom listened to me with his full attention. He then said something to the effect that maybe that was really what he was fighting for all along. That those community bonds were what were being threatened, and that was why he spent so much energy fighting to save family farms.

Tom Saunders was the warrior in our midst. He risked alienating people by speaking his mind even when his views had only minimal popular support. He had absolute confidence in his vision, and it was that confidence and the courage of his convictions that won them the respect not only of his friends, but of his adversaries as well.

The depth of my own grief at his death surprised me. Perhaps it had something to do with sharing the grief of others who loved him deeply, or perhaps it had to do with a personal sense of my own loss. I was beginning to know Tom better through our shared work on the BGH issue. What had for years been mostly admiration and respect, had begun the transformation to genuine affection. I grieve the lost potential of another friend who needs no explanation of why I love the life I live here on a dairy farm in the Heartland.

Dan Yurista Killed In Plane Crash In Mountains Of Honduras

The shock was felt in Barron County when the worst plane crash in Central American history occurred on October 21 in Honduras. Daniel Yurista, 37, a farmer from rural Prairie Farm, was one of the 11 Americans who died in the fiery crash that claimed 131 lives. Yurista was returning home after a five-week journey to Nicaragua, where he traveled by a converted school bus with other farm activists as part of the Farmer to Farmer dairy and friendship project.

Yurista had spent the final week of his trip near Matiguas, Nicaragua, where the Farmer to Farmer group is attempting to directly assist the Nicaraguan people in establishing a productive dairy cooperative. With Farmer to Farmer founders Craig Adams and Lucy Altemus, their three children Erin, Sam, and Louis, as well as Paul Webster of Emerald, who is fluent in Spanish, Yurista left Wisconsin on September 15. Driving a school bus, which had been converted to living spaces and loaded with dairy equipment, the group made their way slowly to Guatemala, where Adams, Altemus, and their children were left to take an intensive Spanish language course. Yurista and Webster drove on to Nicaragua to deliver the bus and supplies and to begin working with the people of the cooperative.

Delayed by a bus breakdown and a long detour in Mexico because of a bridge that was destroyed by Hurricane Hugo, the trip took longer than expected, and Yurista elected to delay his return, which put him on the doomed flight. "He called last Saturday to say he'd be staying another week," said his wife Kathy. A week later she got the call from the Citizen's Emergency Center in Washington confirming his place on the flight.

In an effort to make some sense of the tragedy, Kathy has been speaking to the media about the work Dan and the others were trying to do to help the people in that part of the world. "He just had this acute sense of how important it is for people around the world to get to know one another and be fair with one another," Kathy continued. "He went to Nicaragua because this was his chance to help a country that had been devastated by contra wars, revolutions, and natural disasters."

Yurista's specific mission was to help assess the possibility of using draft power for parts of the farming operation in Nicaragua. Peter Edstrom, a friend and member of Farmer to Farmer, pointed out that Dan was particularly suited for the role. "Dan was not a 'model farmer' in the usual sense of the word. But that's not what you need in a Third World country. You need someone who knows how to make use of what is available, using only the technologies that can be adapted to the conditions in a cost effective way. Dan practiced those principles at home. He wasted nothing, he made do, and he lived within his means.

"I watched him with horses. He could make horses work with him, not for him. It was the same with people. He was a team player, a pleasure to work with. He always grabbed the heavy end before you got the chance." Yurista's background as a skilled tradesman, his carpentry skills, and his practical working knowledge of dairying were other qualifications that made him a valuable part of the effort, according to Edstrom.

Working with mixed power, draft horses and tractors, Yurista used organic practices to raise his crops. Having sold his herd of Jerseys, Yurista put the construction work he did with Lee Theorin on hold to make the trip to Nicaragua.

With his wife, Kathy, Dan was active locally in Wisconsin Farm Unity Alliance, fighting with the use of nonviolent methods farm foreclosures, the use of bovine growth hormone, and destruction of the family farm due to low farm prices.

Dan Yurista, far right, stands in front of the converted bus he helped drive to Nicaragua. Also pictured, from left, are Craig Adams, Lucy Altemus, Erin, Sam, and Louis.

"You could always count on Dan being there," said friend Cindy Theorin. "We did many things as a community, like fundraising projects, or getting our own work done. It won't be the same without Dan." Kathy Yurista added, "Sometimes that was frustrating. He was always taking care of other people and helping out, and sometimes things didn't get done around here," referring to the sixty-acre dairy farm where the Yuristas have lived with their three children, Peter, 15, Marta, 10, and Sadie, 4, for the last eleven years.

Friends and neighbors use words like gentle, strong, kind, quiet, and patient when remembering Dan Yurista. Kate Hearth recounted watching him as a parent, "His love for kids was exposed by his quick smile and laugh." She also stood with him as a Witness of Peace at the spearfishing landings last spring in an effort to stem the violence there. "He had strongly held convictions that he lived out rather than just talking about them," Pam Saunders said. "It didn't matter much to Dan what other people might think. He listened to others, but he thought for himself. If he knew it was right, than that's what he did."

Yurista Remembered For His Kindness And Generosity

Some people we call friends because they mirror some part of ourselves that we love, others because they embody some quality we might lack and sorely wish that we had. Dan Yurista was both kinds of friend to me, and I will cherish always the time, brief though it was, that he was part of my life.

Were it not for our barn burning down two years ago, I probably would not have gotten to know Dan as I did. For five months Dan and another friend, Lee Theorin, built a new barn for us, and almost every day that they worked here they spent their lunch break in our kitchen. I have such fond and vivid memories of those relaxing times, when friendship blossomed on a chilly winter landscape. How quickly both Ray and I found ourselves looking forward to the lunchtime, because it meant cozy, comfortable conversations, and a lot of laughs; a spell that warmed us long after the work crew had returned to the task at hand. And how much a part of that warmth was Dan's quiet and affable presence, in my kitchen and in my life.

At first I thought that Dan was quiet because he was shy but, after getting to know him better, I realized that Dan was quiet because he was such a good listener. He listened so attentively that I, who tend to talk a lot, and often before I have taken time to think things out, found myself wanting to choose my words more carefully when talking with him. I realized that anyone who listened as well as he did would hear me with all my inconsistencies and contradictions, and might then conclude that I was quite a flake. I needn't have worried about such judgments from Dan. I soon learned that, if Dan judged people, he always kept his opinions to himself.

I never heard him say an unkind word about anyone in all the times we talked, and I heard this same characterization expressed by several of his friends. I don't think it really occurred to most of us how unusual he was until he was no longer here to teach us, by his example, what tolerance, generosity, and real acceptance is all about. I always came away from any time spent in Dan's presence feeling better than I had beforehand. He had a quality that is hard to name, that simply made one feel better — about oneself as well as others.

Dan's quietness did not mean that he lacked opinions or convictions about the conversations that took place around him. He was bright and articulate, when he did choose to speak. What he had to say was always fresh, always fair, and quite often exactly what was needed at the time. It wasn't that Dan was a Pollyanna who thought everything and everybody was wonderful. Rather, he leveled his criticism against institutions and policies, not against people.

And while I admired Dan for his inherent kindness and his ability to listen well, I loved him for his wonderful sense of humor. I never once heard Dan tell a joke. He wasn't a joke teller with me, but he appreciated a good one-liner when he heard it. Just as he felt no need to dominate in conversations, neither did he need to be in the limelight on the humor front. Rather he was often in the position of playing the straight man to my lines, while at the same time managing to make me laugh. I always felt a certain exhilaration when something I said elicited one of his characteristic sudden laughs that always sounded like they surprised him.

It was when we played cards that a special repartee would spring up between us, and I would sometimes be playing straight man to Dan's great lines. These are the times I will miss the most because they seemed to me times that we appreciated in each other something we both liked and appreciated about ourselves.

Like everyone else who loved him, I wish I'd had more time with Dan. He taught me so much and his was always a light touch. He would probably laugh to hear me call him a teacher, but teach me he did. I miss Dan very much, but there is a bittersweet truth in the words of Seneca: "The comfort of having a friend may be taken away, but not that of having had one."

Part VII

Life In The Midst Of Death

Psalm For Rural America

Lord, hear our cry, We are dying
We are in the midst of great change
The very land we were given life from dies before our eyes
No longer can the land sustain us
Our mother was taken from us
There is nothing stable in our lives
Our elders die, and few babies are born to replace them
Our youth move away, taking with them our dreams
Our neighbors lose everything they worked for and leave us
Whole towns dry up and blow away
Strangers gain control of our inheritance
Our experts are of no use
We are growing old and losing our strength

We have tried to stop the dying process, or at least ease the pain and fear
We've passed everything from proposals to potatoes
We've talked until we have bored ourselves to death

So we cry "What are we to do?"
And we really mean *we* (*We* meaning *us*, excluding *you*)
And there's our sin simple as that
O Lord, the land cries out
You speak to us on the land
You always have, and you always will
For you, the One Holy God are gracious
  and powerful enough to appear both in time and space.
You share life on the land, in, with, and through us
You choose to share the pain that separation and exile can bring
Only you can speak to our pain

We are in fear because we are no longer sure of our relationship to the land
We sense that great change is about to happen
Something new is about to be born
We are in hard labor
The land moves beneath our feet
The very land we stand upon is not stable
The land itself cries out in travail
Sometimes we fear birth more than death

O Lord, don't leave us alone in this travail
Comfort us — Tell us our time is near — Come to us — Comfort us
Breathe for us — Be our breath — Be our voice

—Pastor Charlotte Reif of United Methodist Church in Dexter, Iowa

17

Acknowledging The Grief

In this book, I seek to ask the question: "Rural communities — dying or being reborn?" In this last part, I point to life in the midst of death. To do this, I would like to suggest a two-fold response. The one side comes in acknowledging the grief. My sense of loss was felt acutely with the deaths of Tom Saunders and Dan Yurista. Their lives reflected much of the turbulence in the struggle for justice during the decade of the 1980s. Their deaths signalled that the course of events will never be quite the same again. I offer the following from the message I delivered at the memorial service for Tom Saunders based on John 11:28-36 and Micah 4:3-4, 6:8 as a way of giving expression to acknowledging the grief.

"And Jesus wept." God becomes involved in the human condition in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus cared deeply for Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. The two sisters have suffered the death of their brother. When Jesus hears of the death, he comes to be with them. The very poignant words are spoken, "And Jesus wept." God becomes human in the person of Jesus Christ. He is deeply moved at the death of his friend. In the midst of the death of Lazarus, Jesus comes to bring life. This event in his life points the way to his own death on a tree and to the path of new life.

"And Jesus wept." The last few days, you and I have been doing a lot of that. We have wept over the sudden and unexpected death of Tom Saunders. Now we come together to remember his life among us. In the midst of death we seek to affirm life. For to mourn deeply is to experience life at the depths. To be shaken to the very core is to come to terms with limits. To grieve is to experience what it means to be truly human.

Today we grieve for Tom. Tom was connected to the land and attached to the woods. He sought to be in tune with the creation, in harmony with nature, and at home with the order of the seasons. He spent his time farming the land and working in the woods, milking the cows and making the crops to grow.

One who seemed irrepressible speaks no more. One who was so strong no longer has the breath of life. One who was so full of energy can give no more. We grieve for one who could motivate, inspire, energize and inspire people; who made people believe in themselves; who lifted people up by the sheer force of his personality; who pushed and pulled, cajoled and convinced to make things happen; who was willing to see in other people the capacity for change and growth.

You grieve for Tom; I grieve for Tom. I recall first getting to know Tom. Tom and I were very different — about as different as people can be. In the face of his forceful personality, I was sometimes overwhelmed and even a little intimidated. He did not know quite what to make of me; I did not know quite what to make of him. But I was attracted to him even if at a distance. He slowly warmed up to me; I slowly warmed up to him. We worked together even if at very different roles.

One day after a long meeting in November of 1986, I gave him a ride home. I had dropped off somebody else. There was only a short distance to his house. Even with his seemingly inexhaustible supply of energy, he felt his reserves being depleted. His organizing work had taken him all over the state and the country. He had assumed a tremendous amount of work and he did not know if he could keep it up. He wondered about his role and whether or not it was best for so many people to be counting so

heavily on one person. He was concerned about how his activism had kept him away from his family and his farm for so long. He wanted to give more attention to home.

In a very brief moment, I told him that I thought he was right to make a change at that time. I said, "Tom, your family is special. You are right to want to be with them. And, if family farms in general are to be saved, family farms in particular have to be saved. Tom, if this country is to become more humane, our local communities have to be made more humane, I think there is a very important role for you to play on your farm and in the community." That time in the car only lasted a few minutes. He really did not say anything; for once he was at a loss for words. He looked me in the eye, put his hand on mine, and gripped hard. We understood each other. There was nothing more to say. From that time on there was a mutual respect.

Tom threw himself into various efforts. He completed the log house that was home to what he called the "Saunderosa" and worked with the family on the farm and in the woods. On Father's Day, he went canoeing down the Hay River with his family. Yes, he played a key part in starting a Community Land Trust, worked as a sparkplug to get a community newspaper going, and initiated an effort for a community recycling project. This kind of work never attracted as much attention as his earlier organizing work on the state and national levels, but in his mind the work was just as important.

There seemed to be the time for making connections with other people — speaking out on treaty rights for American Indians and being a witness for peace; giving advice to the Rev. Jesse Jackson of the Rainbow Coalition and helping to put together a gathering on Good Friday outside of Amery by the civil rights leader in April of 1988; testifying against the use of bovine growth hormone in dairy cattle; and helping environmentalists to see that their interests and the interests of farmers go hand in hand.

All too sudden his life and work have come to an end. So we also grieve for ourselves, for that big hole in our lives. An important piece is now missing. He was the person who made us think by constantly coming up with new ideas, exploring new avenues, and brainstorming. He would not let us give up on ourselves and on each other; he challenged us and pushed us even when we did not want to be pushed. Like Micah of old, he held up the vision of how we might beat the swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. We can no longer rely on his personal force to carry the day.

At the same time we admit how he was a walking paradox. The very characteristics that attracted so many people to him could also cause difficulties for those closest to him. That restless driving ambition could be both exciting and exacting. That uncompromising attitude could be both energizing and exasperating. Not to admit this complicated relationship would be less than honest, but having admitted it, we grieve.

He was also a character. He rushed around so fast that he sometimes had to slow down to catch up with himself. I remember one zany moment. In the midddle of a board meeting, I was taking minutes. Tom was expounding on what he thought the board should be doing. All of a sudden, when he had finished talking, he turned to somebody next to him and said, "I have to go to the bathroom." Only in his vernacular he did not use quite those words. He hopped out of his chair and ran out. It could not have been more than two minutes when he ran back into the room, sat down in his chair, and started expounding again. I dropped my mouth and said to myself, "The man is so busy he doesn't even have time to take a leisurely bowel movement."

In the following chapter, I would like to point you to the second part of the two-fold response — accepting the challenge. This piece is also taken from the memorial message.

18

Accepting The Challenge

We cannot allow grief to have the last word, we cannot allow death to have the last word. So today I wish for you the gift of the Spirit.

In the midst of grief, I wish for you the spirit of healing. To be consoled and to console. To be comforted and to comfort. That the burden will be lightened when it is shared.

In the midst of life experienced as fragile, I wish for you the spirit of being truly human. To acknowledge that life has limits. When the circumstances of life pushes us to our farthest reaches, to believe that strength comes out of weakness, and that growth comes out of pain.

In the midst of being shaken to the core, I wish for you the spirit of confidence. To believe that, if the cause is right and just, it is worth doing with conviction and determination. To believe that we are not simply objects on the stage of life, but that we are subjects capable of exercising individual and corporate decision making.

In the midst of darkness, I wish for you the spirit of light. The spirit to illumine the world, the structures of society, its injustices, and to light the way to make this world more humane so that each and every person may live with greater dignity. The spirit to hold on, not to give up. To articulate that vision and make it come to pass. To pursue social justice.

In the midst of adversity, I wish for you the spirit of perseverance. To take on the harness of responsibilities. To pull the load. To carry on the work. To keep on going because others are counting on you.

In the midst of sadness, I wish for you the spirit of joy. The spirit to take delight in each other's company. To savor each moment as precious. To energize each other and to be energized. To lift up those whose spirits are weak.

In the midst of death, I wish for you the spirit of life. Life comes as a gift. To affirm life, to celebrate life. To struggle mightily for life.

Discussion Questions

Part I Death In The Midst Of Life

1.) As you look back on the decade of the 1980s, how would you describe your personal experience? What has been the extent of your involvement in rural communities?
2.) The author contends that rural America is becoming like a Third World country and relates what is happening in Peru and Bolivia to the Heartland of North America. Do you agree or disagree? What kind of connections can you make?
3.) Many of the Aymara and Quechua Indians are calling attention to 1992 as the anniversary of the beginning of conquest, rather than the discovery, of the Americas? How does this perspective change the way you look at the settlement of North America? What new understanding can be gained for the experience of Native Americans in the U.S.?
4.) As you look ahead to the 1990s, what do you anticipate will happen in rural communities? What role do you think you can play in enhancing rural community life?

Part II Latin Americans Engage In Self-Determination

1.) Imagine yourself as an Aymara or Quechua Indian living in Peru or Bolivia. What shape would your struggle to live take?
2.) A practice of accompaniment is carefully defined so as not to create dependency relationships. How does this approach differ from other forms of "development?"
3.) The unique experience of the progressive church in Latin America has been called as "being in solidarity with the poor." What does this perspective say to North Americans?

Part III Synod Task Force Enhances Ministry In Town And Country

1.) If you were serving on a task force, what immediate needs do you see resulting from the rural crisis that you believe should be addressed? How would you respond?
2.) The task force is consciously moving from meeting crisis needs to that of strengthening rural churches and doing community development. Why do you think this transition is important? What efforts in these latter two areas do you see as needful?
3.) If you were to serve on a panel to speak to pastors new to rural or to seminary students anticipating a first call in a rural setting, what would you tell them?

Part IV The Rural Church Is Called To Bring The Message Of Hope

1.) Bishop Herbert Chilstrom argues that, among the many things the church is called to do, the witness of hope is the best gift the church has to offer? How does this affect the way you see your role as a person of faith in the midst of the rural community?
2.) Marty Strange critiques what happened in rural communities from 1945 to 1980 as a loss of the *integrity of community*. How do you think this value can be reclaimed?
3.) Carl Dudley outlines five forms of congregational behavior. Which model most closely fits your congregation? He contends that churches grow fastest when they feel the toughest challenge. How does that alter the way you do evangelism and social change?

Part V Revitalizing Rural Community In The Hay River Valley

1.) Small schools in rural settings are being compelled to respond to changing social conditions. For many, their very survival is at stake. What is the relationship of the school and the community in your locale? Do you think your school will be operating in 2000?
2.) The author reports that businesses live on the edge in the Hay River Valley. What has happened to businesses in your community during the 1980s? What can be done to keep family businesses? What can be done to help new businesses start?

Part VI Memories Of Those Who Have Died Inspire The Living

1.) What common threads do you see running through the stories of Chester B. Thatcher, Karen Olson, Tom Saunders, and Dan Yurista?
2.) Rural communities often gain strength for the future by telling stories of the past. What stories can you tell about people in your rural community who inspire you?

Part VII Life In The Midst Of Death

1.) Share the griefs you know in the loss of rural community. Tell of the challenges.
2.) What signs of life in the midst of death do you see in rural communities?

RURAL COMMUNITIES: DYING OR BEING REBORN?

"A transformation has taken place in rural America. It has become a land of extreme contrasts, painful choices, and people struggling to adapt. It is also a land filled with hope and joy. Lowell Bolstad has taken us into the heart of that land in this book. Using simple, but beautifully crafted stories of the people he has met, Bolstad sketches the stark contrasts that make rural areas what they are today. Facts and figures are side by side with vignettes that illustrate what modern life is about.

"It is one thing to read how many thousands of small businesses don't make it every year in rural areas, but another to experience it firsthand through the owner. Couple that with a description of a business that has just opened, and you begin to get a flavor of what this extraordinary book is all about.

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