

# Cry from the Heart

IRCA Conference

Brandon, July 2007

## **Part 2**

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# 1. Keynotes and Bible Studies

## **Deshaming Rural Bankruptcy International Rural Church Association Conference Dr. Cameron Harder**

### **- Introduction:**

- *How many live in, or have lived in rural areas?*
- *How many know someone who has lost a farm or rural business? How did it affect them?*
- My history—family farm bankruptcies, bankruptcies in this community where I was pastor. They divided families, sent people away from the church, left much pain behind. I decided to do doctoral research. Did formal interviews with twenty-nine farmers who were or had been in a process of bankruptcy or foreclosure and another thirty-five interviews with solvent farmers, lenders, input dealers, politicians and others involved in the changes occurring in agriculture. Most were from the prairie provinces.

### **- Lowrey Song**

#### **Slipping Through My Hands**

Hush now, baby, your mommy might awake.  
It broke her heart today as they gave our life away  
In pieces sold off cheap by a stranger's hand.  
I held her while she cried,  
And helplessly stood by.  
Your daddy never felt less like a man

Baby, my baby, the snow is on the ground.  
Come dawn we move to town  
Leaving all our hopes and dreams  
Like autumn leaves scattered by the wind.  
So go to sleep my little one  
This night before our home  
Is just another empty house on a country road.

When that cold wind moans I feel so all alone.  
Your granddaddy always trusted me  
To take care of this land.  
I'm so ashamed—it's slipping through my hands,  
A way of life slipping through my hands.

Baby, my baby, the snow is soft and deep.  
The world seems so at peace, it whispers to me "*sleep.*"  
But then I feel your small hand move in mine,  
And I know I can't let go;  
Spring will come I know  
And push those tiny flowers through the snow.

*Rob and John Lowrey – used by permission.*

## - Effects of Farm Crisis

- Lowrey song expresses several important elements of the pain that is felt:

### 1) Grief

- ❖ Lowrey --“It broke her heart today ... I held her while she cried.”
- ❖ Michael– “connected to land like living body” Brenda “roots of land in us”
- ❖ Something is being ripped out.
- ❖ Connie: “It’s like a real death. It’s every bit as stressful as a spouse dying.”

### 2) Loss of Hope

- ❖ Lowrey--“Leaving all our hopes and dreams like autumn leaves scattered by the wind.”
- ❖ **loss of *personal* future:**
  - “love farming, nothing else can satisfy. What else can I do?”
  - “farm is my pension. Now equity and NISA accounts drained to pay off debts.”  
Poverty in old age?
- ❖ **loss of *family’s* future:**
  - Lowrey: Your granddaddy always trusted me to take care of this land... A way of life slipping through my hands.”
  - Wayne: “My kids won’t have any opportunity to be on the land. We’re the ones that broke the chain, passing the farm from generation to generation.” The family’s heritage has been lost.
- ❖ **loss of *community’s* future:**
  - kids don’t have friends their age, recreational and medical facilities, off-farm jobs.
  - kids don’t have capital to get into farming. Those that do invest in something with better returns.
  - Manitoba youth video: “If we don’t get something good to do here—if we can’t make a decent living—if we’ve got no place to go and no one to turn to, then our only choice is to go to the city or keep running into the bush [that is, escape into drinking]. Either way a lot of us are never going to come back.”

### 3) Depression

- ❖ Lowrey: “The world seems so at peace, it whispers to me ‘sleep.’ But then I feel your small hand move in mine, And I know I can’t let go.” He wants to *die*.
- ❖ *American studies*–100% of insolvent farmers showed significant signs of depression. Suicides disguised–pays off debts, leaves children with farm.
- ❖ *Diane*: told how a deadening sense of hopelessness had settled into her life: “I’ve gone from being terrified to ‘I don’t care anymore.’”
- ❖ *Nora* spoke of the difficulty of simply getting up in the morning to face another day of anxiety and loss. “You’re just drained emotionally, physically and mentally.”
- ❖ *Doreen*: “I felt like the lowest thing on earth. We had completely blocked the sale out of our minds. We didn’t do anything to get ready for that sale.”
- ❖ The depression can be so *paralysing* that the preparations necessary to fight for a good settlement or to prepare for an auction and a move simply cannot happen.

### 4) Anger

Lowrey sings, “they gave our life away in pieces sold off cheap by a stranger’s hand.” There is some deep anger beneath those words. Farmers who saw their neighbours benefit from their foreclosure

felt angry and betrayed. Al felt that some farmers were “waiting for their neighbours to go broke so they can gobble up their land.” Rod said, “The perception out there is, ‘I wait for you to drop then I’ll pull in and I’ll pick up the left-overs, and get bigger.’” Some noted that when the farm economy is depressed it is often machinery bought at cheap farm auction prices that allows neighbouring farmers to stay viable (though machinery dealers in the community still lose out). To Bob, watching neighbours purchase his equipment was like watching “the vultures come in for the kill.” Bill called it “cannibalism.”

This sense of betrayal of trust comes through especially in relation to lenders. Frequently foreclosures involve a lender and farmer from the same community, even members of the same church. The anger generated in the farmer is deeply personal and difficult to contain. It may express itself in threats or acts of violence towards lenders, family members or self. In the Heffernan’s research half of the men and 1/3 of the women reported they became more physically aggressive in the process of leaving the farm.

Harold said that he had to stop attending church because the lender who oversaw his foreclosure was also a member of that congregation. He said, “I’m sure if I had kept coming I would have nailed somebody in the head and knocked them out. I was tight like a rattlesnake—ready to strike!” A farm debt review mediator spoke of being greeted at the door of a farmhouse by a farmer holding a loaded shotgun. The farmer was not sure whether he was going to use it on himself or someone else. Lance spoke of visiting neighbours who had large armament caches and Connie told of instances in which farmers she knew had shot at bankers. Ryan commented, “I always thought that if I could have shot a Farm Credit guy it would have done me a lot of good.” Rod tells of an older “teddy-bear sort of fellow” standing up at a farmers’ meeting and saying that he if he had a bomb right then he would be going over to the bank manager’s office to blow him up. Harry, a Minnesota banker describes his experience:

I went through the 1980s. I had my bank taken over by the American Farm Movement. I lived through six months of death threats called into my house during the middle of the night against me and my family and my fellow employees. I carried a pistol for a year and, by the way, with law enforcement approval. I don't want to see anything like that happen again and will leave my occupation, which I thoroughly enjoy, if it ever happens again.

Gary, a loans officer, admitted that the training of loans officers in his institution includes instruction in dealing with physical violence. He said secretaries are taught to listen for loud voices or noises from the officers’ rooms and to knock on the door or ring the telephone to defuse the intensity of the situation. He watched one of his officers deal with four aggressive situations in one day and noted that it took a tremendous toll on the person.

While it is difficult to assess the rate at which these violent feelings express themselves in action, they do reflect the way in which some farmers view the threat of removal from the land. They see themselves at war, their homestead (castle) under siege by their own community with their family’s very survival at stake.

## **5) Shame**

Lowrey: “ helplessly stood by. Your daddy never felt less like a man.” “I’m so ashamed—it’s slippin’ through my hands.” He’s a man. He should be able to look after the family, carry on the heritage. But he can’t.

Those in bankruptcy, foreclosure or debt review proceedings told me they felt “disgraced,” “ashamed,” that they had “let my family and myself down,” and “betrayed my folks and my neighbours.”

This is the most destructive element in farm crisis. It results in...

### ***Silence***

- *Ron*: brother who lived close by lost farm, committed suicide. “We didn’t know any of this until they had signed everything over to the bank. . . . It really hurts us that he went through this and felt that he couldn’t come and talk to us.” However Ron went through a bankruptcy too—and he didn’t tell anyone.

- *Dorothy*: “to talk about her farm’s finances would feel like stripping naked. *Randy*: “bad manners, unthinkable to ask about a person’s financial situation.”

### ***Isolation***

- *Self-imposed*--Adam: “You pull into yourself. You don’t want to talk to people. You don’t want to talk to your landlord. You don’t want to see your banker.”

- If the community finds out about their financial situation, some farmers fear that all the creditors will want their debts repaid at once, or will take the farmer to court, or will damage the farmer’s reputation so that no one will want to do business with him or her anymore.

- Others simply cannot hold up their heads in the community. They withdraw from leadership positions, quit favourite sports, avoid neighbours in the town stores, drop out of church.

- *Community-imposed*--Perry: “People look at you from a distance; they ignore you; they don’t ask how you’re doing anymore.”

- Marvin: “It’s like you’ve got leprosy now.”

- News reporter--farmer’s children shunned, family ostracized.

- *Effect*: very painful. Mary Van Hook: “Silence was invariably interpreted as judgment or lack of interest.” Even though they wanted to hide, to be allowed to hide, to not be noticed or cared for, increased the shame. It wasn’t so much physical/financial help as a caring, listening, respectful presence.

- *Reasons* for isolation: don’t know how to help, not comfortable with fears--contagious? Embarrass the other--charity. No rituals (like casserole for deaths).

## **- Honour and Shame in Rural Culture**

- “Farm pride” – cluster of historically-rooted self-perceptions--of farmers as independent, self-made, hard-working risk-takers, suppliers of the world’s food, caretakers of the land.

- This identity is *constructed socially*. In all agrarian societies the *self* is a gift of the community. *Not portable*. You are what others see you to be. If that image is positive--you are honoured. If negative, you are shamed.

-In most small societies there is *competition* for honour--there are only a few places at the top of the status ladder.

- In Canadian rural society today, the tendency is to compete on the basis of a farm's *prosperity*—cleanest fields, biggest barns and equipment, most land. Such people contribute to community, spend a good deal in town, give to church. Much respected.
- *loss of farm*—person must have been *irresponsible*. Owes money to town suppliers (whose livelihood is now endangered). Not a good model for children, not a good source of advice.
- *Shame* is experienced as vulnerability. Like modesty. One's wounds ought not to be put on display.
- *Men* are primarily responsible for maintaining the family's honour. They tend to be the most silent about financial problems. They may buy a pick-up when things are going bad to signal to community that it's okay.

## **- Church's Role:**

### ***In Reinforcing the Problem:***

- Reformation— secular (not just clerical) work is holy. Must be done to glory of God. Is a sign of one's commitment to Christ—even salvation. If done poorly—let down family, church (poor witness) and God. God will bless those who work hard.
- When we have much, we say, "I've been blessed by God." When we lose what we have the assumption is that God has cursed or abandoned us. God must not be pleased. What have we done?
- Wealth becomes a sign of righteousness. *Problem: Jesus* doesn't measure up. Leaves good job, women's welfare, in trouble with authorities, executed for treason and blasphemy. Dies shameful death on cross. Unrighteous? No. Raised from dead. How can this be?

Jesus is a sign that the worth of our self, our righteousness, our honour, is not something we earn by keeping the standards of our society. It is a gift of *God. God alone* determines what we are worth. And God has decided to bestow honour *indiscriminately*—as Jesus' *indiscriminate table fellowship* demonstrates.

### ***In Addressing the Problem:***

#### *Accompaniment*

- Pat: what she wanted from the church was "just to know that you're there, that you care, that you'll lend an ear to listen—that you don't judge us—that we're a part of the church just like you. We need all of you. Don't run away."
- Pastor—who accompanied his parishioners through the debt review system. Helped to make sure that they were being treated fairly.
- Standing With (public symbolic solidarity) at auctions, courts, when goods are seized. Church is sign of God's (affirming!) presence.

### *Connection*

- Connect folks who are going through the same thing with each other (perhaps from different towns). -> Support Groups.
- Build caring connections within the congregation (eg. Stephen Ministries) so that people have others they can trust with shameful things.
- Develop a list of resources/contacts and connect folks who are struggling with people who can help.

### *Convening*

- get some key people together who care about the community and talk about what can be done to strengthen the economy of the community and support those who are struggling.

### *Giving Sanctuary*

- providing a safe place/person to talk to about things that are shameful.

### *Blessing*

- helping the community to publicly face its pain, but recognize at the same time the presence and power of God.
- *laments* in worship.
- rituals of leaving the farm, prayer of relinquishment. Not failure but change.

### *Prayer*

- prayers that acknowledge the suffering of community members and affirm their value to the community and to God.
- litanies that adopt a posture of refusal towards destructive ideologies: Eg. Isaiah 5:8 “Alas, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land!” The Bible certainly doesn’t assume that an empty landscape owned by a few lonely “wheat kings” is our best or inevitable future.

### *Reframing and Story-telling*

- exposing the lie that communities get stronger when the weak ones are weeded out.
- telling the story of our weak Savior, of God’s choosing the weak so that God’s own power will be given credit and not our own.
- challenging the myth of inevitable rural depopulation and decline. [“Farms must get bigger and bigger to survive. Soon there will be no one left.”] God is greater!
- *Preaching* can explore the ambiguities of owning land—as a *gift* of God (the true owner) that gives us a *place* in the community. It is given not on the basis of successful management but out of God’s grace—to all. As a source of *security* that keeps us from trusting God, that bolsters our honour in the community, that makes us want to cannibalize our neighbor’s land in order to get more and more for ourselves.
- Preaching can explore the role of debt in our society. Who should share the risks involved in farming (or any other business)? Only the farmer? Isn’t it true that we all benefit when things go well—shouldn’t we all share the suffering when it doesn’t? (In fact we do—we pay for unrepayable debt—so why not take some of the shame out of it—see it as a way of being community. That’s what *Jubilee was all about*.)

- Preaching and prayers remind people that economic systems are human constructs. It costs more and more to farm because the government in the early part of the century poured its support into mechanization of farms—which requires oil, costly machinery, etc. instead of the solar power (from plant food) used by horses and human labor. Our government has poured its money into large farms and withheld it from small ones. It sees large farms as the future of Canadian agriculture and so it makes it happen. It's not inevitable. It is not a fixed "order of creation." It has been constructed: certain people benefit, others are disadvantaged.

- Shame gets its power from the idea that what *is*, *ought* to be. We have tended to give religious legitimation to the way things are. Walter Brueggemann says that *liberating liturgy* adopts a "posture of refusal" indicating that God's people will not submit to these social contrivances as if they were divinely-ordained.

- *Banners, stained glass, art, and sculpture* (even children's worship projects) can become vehicles for the expression of symbols of suffering, protest and hope that are drawn out of the lived experience of rural families. Eg. the grain elevators have become such a symbol.

#### *Arousing Hope*

- encouraging the exercise of a "rebellious imagination." Helping them imagine and work toward a better future. It can draw on biblical images to imagine new ways of living together—of caring for the land, of working cooperatively in community, of distributing honour, of distributing food. (See handout—texts for preaching). Positive images from the "new creation"— can help to motivate us to try things that haven't been tried before. To begin to talk together about how to be a sustainable community. To see ourselves less in competition and more in cooperation with each other.

- doing an appreciative inquiry or asset-mapping. Helping people discover the activity and gifts of God in the midst of painful circumstances.

### **Closing Litany** **Adapted from "A Rite for Leaving the Land"** **by Marlys Moen**

Leader: God of the future,  
bring hope to those who are facing hardship and loss  
in the rural community.

Men: To those whose land has been severely affected  
by drought, flood, hail, cold, wind or fire.

Women: To those facing big changes on their farms and in their lifestyles,  
Or the prospect of having to move off the land  
And the challenge of finding new employment.

Men: To those whose marriages are under enormous strain  
through personal or financial stress



- Women: To the communities which have lost children and friends, rural amenities, commercial services and farm labour because of the rural economic recession, and to those trying to absorb new settlers and life-stylers unfamiliar with rural ways.
- Leader: To all of these bring hope, O God. We pray trusting that your grace, God of hope, is sufficient for each day's challenges, through the strength of the Holy Spirit.
- People: Amen.

**SAVING GOD'S CREATION BY SAVING OF ENERGY  
AND RENEWABLE ENERGY UTILISATION:  
CONTEMPORARY ENERGY CHALLENGES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES  
Roman Juriga**

**FOREWORD**

First of all I would like to thank you for the invitation from IRCA and for the opportunity to speak about the issue of energy which is still seen by many as very distant from our theology. It is also the issue which at the first glance is not very much connected with our rural situations all over the world.

The truth however is that energy – its resources, production and impacts are becoming dominant factors in the international and internal policy of many countries and that the energy issue – its availability and price – plays more and more important role in the lives of millions of people.

The environment, which we can define for human beings and also for all the other creatures as breathable air, appropriate climate, enough clean water and the living space which is not poisoned by the wastes, is today, in many places and globally, seriously endangered.

As people believing in God we are called in this situation to protect the gift of life – God's creation, which is (not only) by the Christian tradition understood as the revelation of the endless goodness, wisdom and love of the loving God. Therefore our responsible relationship towards the world which surrounds us should be an expression of our honour for God who is its Creator, its Keeper and its Ruler.

As Christians we are called by our Saviour to carry the burdens of one another and to bring God's peace into the relations among the people and nations and also into the relationship between the man and the created world. It is clear especially that this relationship is today marked by exploitation and violence from the side of the humankind which does not want to realise the impacts and results of its behaviour, which is so often motivated by self-interest, purely materialistic profit, consumerism and the accumulating of things.

In the Old Testament, Psalm 104, we however read: "Lord's is the Earth and everything what is in it". Are we ready to accept these words and to behave according to them? As Christians today we should be aware of the fact that God's creation has its value not only for us and not only as a part of the threatened ecosystem of the Earth, but has its value also - and mainly - for its Creator. Also for this reason we should not destroy the created world nor should we allow this destruction to the others.

From our understanding of the fact that we are only temporary guests on this Earth, and from our honour for the real Owner of everything, should originate our effort to save the gift of creation in all its aspects and forms, which are here not only for us but for people of all generations.

Each Christian institution, each Christian family and each individual Christian - and of course each person of good will, who realises his or her responsibility for life on the planet Earth, can one way or another contribute toward reduction in greenhouse gases and toward saving resources for future generations.

In the Orthodox Academy, Vilemov, we have in the past realise several environmental projects. These projects had as its aim protection of God's creation and promotion of the clean energy resources.

### **AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?**

Several times I have been asked to make theology more understandable or, if you will, make more clear the theoretical origins of the work, which we try to do with God's help within the Orthodox Academy, within the Orthodox Church and ecumenically in the area of promotion of renewable energy resources and their utilisation.

So, which aspects of our work are quite new in the Church environment? Why should Christians accept the environmental vocation and, specifically, why accept renewable energy utilisation as a vocation?

Many times we hear from the mouths of contemporaries of our Lord Jesus Christ, and from the Gospel, a fundamental question: And who is my neighbour? This question and the answer of our Lord and Saviour are certainly very up to date. It is especially up to date for those who ask us today about the meaning and importance of utilisation of renewable energy resources and energy savings in the Churches and Church related organisations.

The answer of our Saviour is surprising. Our Lord says (although we do not always like it) that our neighbour is really every human being – it means not only a man of our belief and not only a man of our tribe and not only a man of our race or nation. Our Lord says that it is everybody, each human being who – as we believe – was created according to God's image and likeness, is loved by God and is called by Christ and through Christ to achieve complete dignity and perfection.

Another important and real content, which is brought by the Gospel of Christ to us, is that our salvation is not possible without our care for our neighbour and our interest in the life which they live and will live. How one can love God which one doesn't see and hate a neighbour whom he sees? We can read more about it e.g. in Mathew 24,25

Today's science says very similar things about the global ecosystem. Life of people on the other end of the world, according to the contemporary knowledge, in many aspects depends on how we live and what we do, use and consume here.

It also becomes more and more obvious today that on what and how much we consume (and of course with what and how we would share) depends not only the life of the people, but the life of many other living creatures. These creatures - God's creation – are, as we believe, created from the endless God's goodness and they are for us also the partial revelation of his endless wisdom and love. If we as Christians take our care for God's creation seriously, we must be able to help God's creation when it is endangered and to protect it.

In the light of the news about climate change we learn today that in the mystery of life we are not only interconnected mysteriously and mystically, but also really and "in fact" interconnected with all the other people and with all the other life which, according to the words of Scripture, looks on us as we look

on God and expects from us love and mercy. It means that the creation expects from us exactly the same things which we expect from God.

To sum up at this point, in our era it is more and more clear that what the Lord says about our neighbours, who are all the people, is true also in the light of today's science. His words are "modern" and, in connection with the continuing pollution of the living environment, very actual. Increase of greenhouse gases emissions with all their negative impacts on the global ecosystem makes these words unfortunately very true not only in a spiritual but also in a physical and real sense.

The utilisation of renewable, emission-neutral energy, however, is today connected not only with the rising of the global environmental awareness of Christians and their interconnectedness with other people and the world, but also with their vocation to be the peace makers.

Like it or not, more than anything, peace in today's world is threatened by the unfeeling thirst of the industrial world for non-renewable fossil energy resources. It is obvious that utilisation of these resources is continuously poisoning and destroying the global ecosystem and health and life of people and all the other creatures. A comparison of the today's industrial world's dependency on non-renewable resources of energy to a drug addict, who for any price wants more of a drug which can kill him, is very appropriate in our situation.

Let us remember the places of today's unrest and conflicts and potential or possible wars – Iran and Iraq, Chechnya and Sudan. Let us remember the plans to transport the Uzbek oil through Afghanistan. It is not by chance that these areas of conflict and tension more or less copy the maps of globally important resources of oil and gas. It is so even though the majority of the media try to persuade public of the opposite and hide purely the economic interest of extremely powerful oil and energy companies behind noble aims.

In the middle of shining commercials on new cars and other achievements of contemporary civilisation we easily forget that Saudi Arabia – the biggest provider of oil for USA – is also the biggest importer of weapons in the world. It is somehow very inappropriate to mention that Saudi Arabia is the mother country of majority of man from 11 September and journalists in today's world behave as if a connection between these sad facts never existed. Journalists also are usually not very interested in the state of human rights in Saudi Arabia, where carrying the cross on your neck, or possession of the Bible, can mean also death ...So the issue of energy here (and not only here but for example also in Nigeria and Chechnya) is clearly connected also with the issue of Human Rights for which we as Christians must strive.

Is the solution for today's energy situation in humankind's utilising of nuclear energy? As the situation shows today, yesterday's hope which humankind put into nuclear technology got into serious problems when it became clear that its spreading into politically and militarily unstable regions is putting safety at risks, especially as these regions have a growing thirst for energy resources.

Despite the promises from the side of the nuclear industry, and many billions of dollars and billions of euro invested into the research, the problem of nuclear waste is still not resolved on a satisfying level.

Prices of uranium (the stock of which is now assessed as only several decades) have increased 700% only in the last two years...

As an answer to a series of uneasy questions which my speech possibly provokes I can add only two more:

**Who else but Christians has to try to show the alternative which would protect the gift of life and the gift of creation and by this celebrate the Creator Himself?**

**Who else but Christians has to try to realise an example, which would respect right of people and nations for the life in peace and without “blood for oil”?**

**And why we should use renewable energy as Christians?**

1. Because there are not enough fossil resources (oil, coal, earth gas) for future generations.
2. Because if we burn more and more oil, coal and earth gas, the change of climate would become irreversible and this could have a destructive impact on the fragile ecosystem of the earth
3. Because further spreading of nuclear technologies and depositing of nuclear waste is connected with many security risks.
4. Because Christians, Churches and Church organisations want to protect the gift of creation in all its aspects and forms.

**PROTECTING GOD’S CREATION BY SAVING OF ENERGY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY PRODUCTION – SOME EXAMPLES FROM EUROPE:**

In the year 1997 the 2nd all-European meeting of Christians with participation of several thousand believers from all over Europe took place in Graz, Austria. This gathering was organised by the Conference of European Churches representing and by the European Roman Catholic Bishop’s Conference.

One of the six main themes was protection of God’s creation and related issues of sustainability and environmental responsibility of Christians for the world, in which they live.

One of the results of the all-European meeting of Christians in 1997 in Austria was the establishment of the European Christian Environmental Network one year later in Vilemov, Czech Republic. On the establishment of the ECEN more than 60 Christians - representatives of various Churches and Church related organisations from 21 countries of Europe participated.

European Christian Environmental Network ([www.ecen.org](http://www.ecen.org)) since then has concentrated on many themes related to protection of Environment and on informing and exchanging experience among Churches and Church related organisations which are, in one or another way, involved or interested in environmental issues.

The theme of energy became central already for two general assemblies of ECEN. It was in Raubichi in Belarus in 2001 and in Flamslatt in Sweden in 2006.

Both of these assemblies of ECEN, at which important Church representatives and Church workers met, were mainly focused on saving energy and on the utilisation of clean energy resources, that is, on issues which are closely related to sufficiency and availability of energy for future generations.

Documents and calls of the general assemblies of ECEN from 2001 and 2006 revolve mainly around Churches, Christians and all people of good will in Europe and in the world, with a word of warning about the serious impact of wasting energy, the scarcity of non-renewable energy resources, the impact of the use of non-renewable resources without considering future generations and the fragility of the global ecosystem.

ECEN proposes especially to Churches, and other Christian institutions and organisations, that they realise energy saving in their buildings: churches, parish buildings, offices and charity institutions and use renewable energy resources which do not destroy environment. In this respect Churches are called to be an example for others.

My own institution - the Orthodox Academy in the years 1996-1997 organised a series of seminars under the title "Ecology and Spirituality". In the framework of these seminars it became clear that the Christian tradition generally, and the Orthodox tradition in particular, offers a whole range of motivation for the improvement of people's relationship towards the created world, that is, motivation for protection of the environment and protection of all living creatures which, together with us, inhabit the planet Earth and their environment.

The first seminars some ten years ago show however that there was very little done in the Churches for the protection of God's creation. They have also shown that in many Churches exactly nothing is being done so it became clear that we have many good and serious spiritual and theological reasons to be concerned with environmental and energy issues, even if our everyday practice is often very far from our conscious and understanding of these issues. As a response to these findings a series of environmental and renewable energy projects were Instituted by the Orthodox academy Vilemov. They were namely:

1. Establishment of ECEN in Vilemov in 1998
2. Organising of international ecumenical courses for Church workers from Eastern and Central Europe in 2000, 2001 and 2002
3. Establishment of the Centre for application of Renewable Energy Resources the centre organises educational courses and provides consultancy and it includes demonstration technologies consequently built by the Academy:
  - Two solar thermal systems 500 and 1000 l, 12 collectors
  - Two photovoltaic systems 1200 and 115 W
  - Biomass heating system using wooden pallets 25kW
  - Wind power station of St. Elias 100 kW
  - Water power plant of the Holy Apostles 40kW
4. National and ecumenical Churches Solar Roofs project which concentrates on promotion and utilisation of solar energy in the Churches. The project today includes 23 solar thermal systems realised with 15 institutions of various Churches.
5. Energy for the third millennium programme for basic and secondary schools pupils and students. Programme includes presentations, workshops and live presentation of the clean energy technologies.

## **RENEWABLE ENERGY CHALLENGES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES**

It can still seem that the energy issue is predominantly an issue for urban or industrial communities and that it is only marginally touching the rural community e.g. by every year prices of oil and petrol for agricultural machinery and cars increasing, or the every year prices for electricity and natural gas increasing which urban and rural people alike use to satisfy their everyday energy needs.

But the energy issue and production of energy is very closely linked with climate change. Even though many people still want to wait for 99% or 100% consensus of the scientific community and another IPCC report, we must say that climate change is simply here and, like it or not, we have very probably only the last 10 years or less to try to do something with this phenomena. No matter that fossil energy monopolies, and politicians who often obey them, want to see and hear something else. The phenomena of climate change itself was described already 100 years ago and the consensus of the

scientific community on it has only increased during the last 20 years despite the enormous effort of the powerful fossil energy lobby to prove that climate change has nothing to do with our energy production and utilisation patterns.

Threatened and unstable climate, the increasing number of extreme and catastrophic climatic events - especially during the last fifteen years - shows that earlier very moderate warnings of the scientific community regarding CO<sup>2</sup> and other greenhouse gas emissions and their impacts was not and is not mere alarmism, or the so called green extremism, or a mere fantasy, as politicians - often representing the interests of the rich oil companies and energy monopolies - like to put it.

The indisputable facts show today that the impacts of climate change are here, and that they are felt mainly and especially by people in the rural landscape all over the world. That is, by those whose life and income generally depends very directly on climatic conditions and weather. People living in rural areas are also more than anybody else affected by the lack of water and by floods, and the impact of changing weather can be, and is already now, catastrophic for many areas of Africa and Asia.

Of course, rural people are often less willing to accept the change and to accommodate to it. This resistance is obvious and conditioned by the historical experience of people who live and depend directly on the natural environment. The issue of climate change connected with the utilisation of energy resources, however, is not a purely political or economic issue, although it can have political or economic implications. It is an issue of a fundamental character – a matter of the life and death for many.

In this new situation it would be the rural community which will have a decisive impact on future developments in the energy sector, since it is the rural community which is living close to life-giving natural energy resources, often owning them and deciding about them.

In this respect I would also see a new perspective for the rural community worldwide since it is agricultural people who are e.g. the only ones who are almost immediately able to produce and provide subsidiary liquid bio-fuels. The fossil energy supply is running out worldwide and it is imported to us mostly from politically and economically unstable regions. In many places of the world it will be rural people who would have the last word regarding building the new wind power stations and wind parks, which can provide a lot of clean energy, but which would certainly change the countryside.

Last but not least, it will be rural people worldwide who would have to accept or accommodate the new plans for small but also big dams in many valleys all over the world, or to refuse them. These will be built in the next ten years in many countries and regions to protect people from drought and floods and naturally also to produce the clean energy.

In many countries it will be rural people who will have to accept or refuse new uranium mines in their neighbourhood, as well as new nuclear power stations or nuclear waste disposals which would be built close to them.

It will be rural people in many countries who will soon get the opportunity to install photovoltaic cells and solar collectors on the roofs of their houses, stables and barns. Will they accept this challenge globally as they accepted it in Germany or Austria?

Finally, it will be rural and agricultural communities in many industrial countries which would be able to produce biogas and energetic biomass as a subsidy for quickly diminishing resources of natural gas.

Rural areas can certainly become the first example of energetic self- sufficiency and self-reliance for the rest of the world.

In the first part of my speech I tried to describe why we as Christians should be interested in the energy which we use, its saving, production and origin. I also tried to describe today's level of debate

about climate change and the energy issue among Christians in Europe, at the level of ECEN and also to introduce some examples from my work, and my colleagues' work, related to this theme. In the last part of my presentation I tried to describe the main challenges which the rural community will face in coming years and which are, or would be soon, connected with the issue of energy and clean energy production.

I would be very happy if my speech would open a ground for discussion and for your questions.

**The Bible and the Rural Economy**  
**International Rural Church Association Conference**  
**Dr. Cameron Harder**

Last time I talked about some of the gifts that churches can bring to rural communities. There are many. They have buildings, denominational support, fund-raising and volunteer systems for community-building projects. Churches can accompany people through painful transitions and through frustrating social systems. They connect folks to each other and to the resources they need to have healthy lives. They draw community members together to talk about the future of the community. They provide a safe space to talk for those who feel ashamed. They provide the rituals that allow us to move onto the farm or off of it with dignity, into parenthood, or the church, or marriage, or eternal life with hope. They reframe the meaning of our lives inside the great story of Israel, Jesus and the Church and help us to remember that economies are meant to serve people—not the other way around. People aren't disposable. They bless communities in the face of adversity. They pray and connect us to one who is greater than all of our struggles. They give hope.

When they are doing the job God gave them, they do these things outside the church, in public, for the community, as well as inside, out of sight.

Unfortunately our Canadian churches have not always been ready to do the public side of their mission. We have often acted as though our faith had no implications for real life—as if the Bible's view of human beings and human community had no implications for the way that we organize our economic and social structures. But of course it does. If God honours the weak, if communities are more important than profit—then we organize our communities to take that into account.

Those who make the rules in our society—governments, large corporations, they have a very definite worldview—a philosophy of life—on which they base their decisions. Often it's a "survival of the fittest" philosophy. That worldview is loaded with values. It says that life is best served by competition, not cooperation. It says that people should be judged by their productivity and efficiency—their ability to make money. It says that those with power ought to succeed and that those without it ought to fail. It says that the ultimate goal of human life is the development of the "ubermensch"—the superhuman who beats out all the other competitors. Of course, unfortunately, it's also a recipe for extinction. If only the fittest survives, then in the end only *one* remains. Communities, species, ultimately die when *only* the fittest survives.

Churches have a vital role in exposing and critiquing the worldviews that underlie our public structures and policies. It's not about bringing religion into the marketplace. Religion is already there, in a secular form. We worship profit, we believe that humanity will be saved by weeding out the weak and that heaven will come on earth through technological progress.

The church offers a place where our society's dominant worldview can be critiqued. Those who live on the margins are particularly good critics because they usually don't benefit from that worldview. They are on the outside precisely because the popular philosophy has failed them. The church gives voice to that failure.

The church offers an alternative vision of human life. It talks about a world in which God meets us in unlikely forms—in broken bread and poured out wine—and in broken, crucified, shamed people. Out of the Bible, the church has the power to generate a rebellious imagination that refuses to accept that the way things are is the way they must be. It imagines a world where communities aren't disposable, where economies are designed to keep rural communities together, where everyone is valued, where those who don't speak French, who don't have a university degree, who don't have money or health, still have full access to community services and support.

The Bible doesn't measure the value of a person by her productivity or efficiency. That's how you measure machines. Human relationships are never efficient. It's not efficient to consult everyone in the community about an important decision. But it's a very effective way to make good decisions. We call it democracy.

I've seen churches that took their public role seriously. Out on the prairies it was our rural churches that began the cooperative movement that eventually led to national medicare. I've watched pastors in prairie churches standing by their people at farm auctions, making it clear that God had not abandoned these folks. I've heard them raising farm issues in their sermons and prayers and liturgies. I've seen several clergy in a rural town get together and create forums to discuss their community's problems. Often out of those forums some revolutionary things develop—support groups, machinery co-ops, a community pelleting plant, land-trusts, hay-sharing, and so on.

Churches that take their faith seriously know that the Bible offers more than just hope for their souls. It offers hope for those communities that are being edged out by large corporations and by governments that have given up on them. Those churches aren't afraid to break the suffocating silence that blankets the sufferers. They offer a place where the community's stories can be told and woven into a fabric of memory and insight that will sustain that community's spirit. They point to the hidden resources, the gifts of the weak, that the community has forgotten. And they stimulate new imagination. They give communities the courage to take their future out of the hands of multinational giants—the courage to choose a future of their own under God's guidance. It won't be perfect, always contested, but it will be theirs.

So: Let's look at the Bible together. Since many rural communities are organized around the production and processing of food, let's see what the Bible has to say about food.

In the Bible there seems to be a lot of talk about "good food" and "bad food." *Can you think of some examples of "bad" food?*

The first and most obvious kind is food that simply is not good for human health. A number of the levitical laws go to this sort of concern. Food that is spoiled is poisonous. Certain plants, animals are toxic, etc. Labelling these as bad food is easy to understand.



There is a second kind of bad food that is more difficult to understand. One might call it “forbidden food.” It starts in the Garden of Eden. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is forbidden. Then Cain’s gift is determined to be unacceptable because God had asked for animal sacrifice, not for grain. Noah is asked to bring animals on the ark—7 kinds of clean and “unclean” animals? Unclean animals aren’t defined but we come to understand them to be animals we are forbidden to eat. The levitical laws go to great lengths to describe food which is out of bounds—much of which we eat today with no scruples—pork for example. (Tell about dogs at Chinese shop in Toronto). Even Jesus copes with good food and forbidden food in the desert. He is fasting and Satan invites him to turn stones into bread. Well if Jesus couldn’t do it then his response “Humans shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” is just an excuse. But we suspect that he could do it. Why doesn’t he?

In all of these there seems to be a certain element of the arbitrary. God holds us back from eating *what it would be possible to eat*. The Spirit even drives *Jesus* into the wilderness to abstain from eating. **Why do you think that is?**

I suspect it is because God wants us to remember that God is the source of our life. God gives it and withholds it. We are not allowed to grasp it, hold it, keep it, apart from our relationship to God. And so the forbidding of food, and the voluntary fasting, is a way of remembering where food comes from—remembering that it is ultimately God, and only penultimately food, that is the source of our life.

There is, however, another kind of bad food and that is the **food of empire**. This is food that is that is derived from, dependent on, the power of empire—that is not a gift of God. **In Daniel 1** (*SHOW OVERHEAD/CD FILE*), Daniel refuses to eat the empire’s food—not because he was a vegetarian, or because he thought it would necessarily be bad for him—although it wasn’t the best nutrition, it seems. He refuses to eat it because it is the diet that the empire *wants* him to eat. He senses that his eating, and therefore his life, is about to be controlled by the empire. He wants some freedom from the empire so that he can be responsive to God.

**Look at Mark 11:12-20** (*PUT UP OVERHEAD/CD FILE*). **Why do you think Jesus curses the fig tree? Where is the tree located? Notice that the fig tree story brackets another story that is contained within it; what is that inner story about? What is the connection between the two stories?**

I think Jesus curses the fig tree because it is in front of the temple. It draws for its life on the soil of the temple. And in Jesus’ eyes the temple was sucking the life out of his people (*tell about Herod’s scheme to gain money from the temple by defining some as unclean and having them pay their way out*). Jesus’ curse does not kill so much as it reveals. It shows that the temple soil ultimately does not bring life but death. His words in the temple reveal. “This is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.” It is robbing Israel of its life.

**Look at Mark 5:1-20** At first glance it may seem to have little to do with food. But for me it illustrates the way in which food is tied into empire and into the whole of life—political, emotional, economic and spiritual.

To begin, you need to know the story of this place to which Jesus and his disciples are going. Its near Gerasa. The historian Josephus tells the story of that place. This was an ancient town with a long history of quiet commerce, peasant farming and fishing. That peace was shattered one morning when the people of the land woke to see the surrounding hills covered with a legion of the Roman army, sent by Emperor Vespasian. The rising sun glinted off the armor of 6000 Roman cavalry and foot soldiers. They had already overrun the small farms in their path and within a few hours had attacked and destroyed the town. More than a thousand young men died as they rushed out to defend their homes. The Romans bound the

remaining men and women as slaves, slaughtered the children, the sick and the elderly, plundered the property and burned what was left to the ground. Only a handful of people escaped.

Now, with that background in mind, look at a couple of interesting details about this demoniac from Gerasa—I'm grateful to Ched Myers' commentary on Mark (*Binding the Strongman*) for some help in this analysis:

- First of all the *names*: In vs.7—the demon addresses Jesus as “Son of the Most High God”. That’s a Roman title. The Romans had many gods. “Most high” implies that Jesus is the most notable among these gods.
- Then the *name of the demon*—vs.9: “My name is ‘Legion’” it says. Well, the word legion had only one reference in Gerasa, or in all of Palestine for that matter. “Legion” meant the Roman army.
- Then the *demons beg not to be sent out of the country*. These demons apparently have some very clear geographical and political connections.
- Now look at *where the demons ask to be sent instead*. They beg to be sent into pigs. Pig-raising is a Roman occupation. Jews regarded pigs as unclean, and wouldn't keep them. The implication again, is that these demons are somehow aligned with the Romans. More than that, they are aligned with the Roman military. Because the pigs are referred to as being in an “(X)80.” The word is translated “herd” but that’s not a good translation. For one thing, pigs don't travel in herds. “(X)80” really means “band”. It’s a military word used to refer to a band of military recruits. For Mark, the *pigs in some way represent the Roman army*. More than that—these pigs *are* the Roman occupying force in Gerasa.
- Notice their numbers—*two thousand* pigs! How big a pig operation are we talking about here? (Ask one of the farmers). Huge. This is *factory farming*. And what do you think those pigs were being used for? The surrounding villages weren't eating that much meat—especially not the Jews. Pigs weren't even native to the area since Jews don't eat that sort of food (just like sugar cane wasn't native to Cuba, yet the Cuban plantation workers were forced to grow it). The pigs were obviously for export—probably to supply the needs of the occupying Roman forces, or the insatiable hungers of the city folks in Rome.

Do you see what has happened here? The empire has invaded Gerasa, depopulated the town, and replaced it with corporate farming of what is unholy food (from a Jewish perspective) on an enormous scale. Nettie spoke about “colonial” farming. This is an excellent example of it. Once the empire has conquered, it solidifies its hold over its colonies by gaining control of their food systems—their life. It strips them of their peasants, or enslaves them, and puts them to work producing food—not good food usually—in large quantities for export to feed its insatiable hungers. If you control a people's food you control their life.

Lappé talks about waging war with food. That's exactly what happens here. The man whom Jesus meets in the tombs is one of the victims of that war. He appears to have been a survivor of the massacre. Deeply wounded by the experience, he is one of the walking dead. He has been enslaved in several ways by his conquerors:

Politically, he no longer has a voice in his community and his community no longer has the right to self-determination.

Economically, he no longer has access to the means of making a living, or even to healthy food. He can eat the food of his conquerors, if he can find the money. But of course he can't get a job.

Because he is also enslaved spiritually by the demonic powers that are aligned with that military invasion.

It's war, and the Gerasene demoniac is the most pathetic of its casualties. But this time the war doesn't go as the empire had intended. Because Jesus is there. The reign of *God* is at hand. And Jesus is not in a meek and mild mood. Look at what he does to this symbolic army of hogs that has colonized

Gerasa. Jesus “dismisses them”—again a military word is used, and they “charge” (ὄδ:0Fg<)—another military word—down into the lake, like troops retreating from a battle they have lost.

Jesus challenges the empire and the demonic power behind it that has been destroying the life of that people. With absolute authority, Jesus dismisses them—and they charge straight down the hill to their doom.

Jesus does a lot more here than free one man from unclean spirits. He makes it clear that it is not the overlords of the empire who are in charge of life in Gerasa. Nor is it the demonic powers that inspire them. It is Jesus himself, the Word of God, the commander of heaven’s armies, who holds the field. It is Christ who is the Lord of life. All the powers—political, economic and spiritual—answer to him.

No one—not Jesus’ disciples or the crowd that came to watch—could miss that. That’s why the crowd is frightened and asks Jesus to leave. Jesus has stood up to the Romans—even to the Roman spiritual powers. The people are afraid that the Romans will retaliate. They don’t know Jesus. But they do know the Romans’ reputation for viciously squelching any sign of rebellion. They’re afraid they’ll feel the wrath of Rome. Already, so early in Mark, the cross is looming clearer on the horizon.

Let’s look at Mark 12. Mark 12 is an interesting passage because it talks about ownership. A lot of agriculture is about ownership. Who owns the right to the genes in the round-up ready wheat? Who owns the right to market our wheat?

Jesus addresses the question of ownership in Mark 12

13 Then they sent to Jesus some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. 14 And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? 15 Should we pay them, or should we not?” But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.” 16 And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” 17 Jesus said to them, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him.

### *The Trap*

According to scholars such as Bruce Malina and Douglas Oakman (studying the works of ancient historians Josephus and Tacitus), taxation in Israel had reached crisis proportions. The taxes paid to Rome by Israel were a humiliation a constant reminder of Israel’s status as a vassal state. On top of the money sent to Rome, Oakman notes that taxes were also collected from the peasants by the Jewish priests and the new aristocracy (Herodians). Finally, the Roman officials (procurators) in Palestine also collected taxes from the people for their own living (these taxes are called “prebends”).

Taxation forced thousands of peasant families into deep debt. Many lost their land. Many were put in prison for their debts. So much anger, in fact, built up over taxation that the Jewish revolt in 70 A.D., which led to the Roman retaliation and the destruction of Jerusalem, is largely attributed to that anger over taxes.

Now imagine the spot that this puts Jesus in. If he says, “yes, pay the taxes”—he will alienate the peasants. It is his popularity with the peasants that has been protecting him from the Jewish authorities. On the other hand, if he says “no, don’t pay the taxes” the peasants will be happy, but the Roman authorities will jump on him. Either way, he is in hot water.

What does Jesus do? First of all, he addresses the challenge to his honor (see Malina, p.256) by asking his questioners whether they have a Roman coin on them. These coins have not only the image of

Caesar, but these words “Tiberius Ceasar, Augustus, son of Divine Augustus”. For Jews to possess and use such coins though it was common was essentially blasphemous. By forcing them to read the inscription Jesus is pointing this out.

Then Jesus turns the question back on his adversaries. He asks them to decide what belonged to God and what belonged to Caesar. ***Those folks were rural people. What do you think they decided?***

That might be a tough question in our day because we do separate these two things. But in ancient Israel, there was no debate. Religion was embedded in politics and family life. Religion was the overarching ideology which embraced all of life and was sustained by political and kinship structures. The idea of a “secular” realm in which God had no part would never have occurred to ancient people.

They knew the truth of Psalm 24:

- 1 The earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it,  
the world, and those who live in it;
- 2 for he has founded it on the seas,  
and established it on the rivers.

By phrasing the question in that way, Jesus forced his questioners into giving their own answer: that is, that there is nothing that does not belong to God no realm outside of his control. If we render to God what is God’s, there is nothing left over for Caesar, nothing to which he can claim an inalienable right.

So—there is no realm outside God’s control, yet here is Caesar claiming to be God, forcing us to use these blasphemous coins and imposing terrible taxes on us. Jesus makes his listeners do some heavy political and economic critique.

***What does this mean for our understanding of genetically modified food/organisms (GMO’s)? Discuss***

In December the Canadian Supreme Court decided not to patent Harvard’s “Oncomouse.” This is a genetically engineered mouse that develops tumours rapidly. It’s used for cancer research. The court decided that Harvard could own the *process* used to create the mice and charge royalties to those who use it. However it could not claim exclusive ownership of the mice themselves. So they can reproduce naturally without having to pay Harvard for the pleasure.

The whole thing may seem a bit trivial. Most of us are not into raising cancer-prone mice. But the decision has huge implications for agriculture and medicine. Our court has taken a position completely opposite to those adopted by US and European courts. There the patenting not only of processes, but also of genes—the blueprints of life—and even of the living things produced from them has been permitted.

I have to admit that the Canadian hold-out only applies to “higher life forms.” We have sided with the Americans and Europeans on *plant* life. For example, Monsanto and Aventis are able to own both a patent on the process of creating GM (genetically-modified) canola and on the plants produced by it. So no farmer can legally use the seed from a crop of GM canola to plant next year’s crop. He or she must buy new seed from the company each year. And no farmer can harbor a GM plant on their land if they haven’t paid the company for it.

What is at issue here is not the safety of GM foods or their effect on third world economies or potential ecological pollution, although these are serious concerns. At the root, the question that must be asked before any others is whether we have the right to assign *ownership* of the stuff of life to *corporations* for *profit*.

No one wants to deny companies the ability to make money. But genetic modification is expensive. No company wants to spend millions on developing (for example) a potato with an e-coli vaccine in it if they can't patent its gene sequence. They make their money back by controlling the production and reproduction of that potato.

There are several serious problems here. At the root is the question of ownership. The Genesis story tells us a couple of important things: first, it recognizes that human beings will have power over creation. We're smart, we can talk, we've got opposable thumbs, we make powerful tools. So, in fact, we exercise a significant dominion over the earth. As we saw in Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees, that power is to be exercised according to God's will and not our personal whims. Why? That's the second important thing: because dominion does not mean ownership. God makes that very clear by putting a tree in the garden whose fruit was not to be eaten. Just because humans are at the *top* of the food chain does not mean that they *own* it. So God sets an arbitrary boundary: "Don't eat that fruit!" It reminds the humans that this is in fact *God's* world—and they come and go and exercise power on it, only with God's permission.

So we don't have any absolute property rights. We don't own anything in fact. Especially not each other. That recognition, in part, led to the outlawing of slavery. Our society has come to believe that human beings are not commodities to be bought and sold.

That is why the patenting of genes is so offensive. Because, as a society, we are granting individuals and corporations the right to own a piece of us. As if it were ours to give away. As if it were the corporation's to own. We belong to God—genes and all.

Now I realize that in Canada the genes of higher life forms are not yet patentable. However we share a great number of genes with plants. For example, the chlorophyll molecule that carries oxygen in plants is almost identical to the hemoglobin that carries oxygen in our blood. A patent on genes or partial gene sequences that produce chlorophyll could have implications for us as well as plants. In any case, the genes of both plants and humans are not ours to sell.

A second problem has to do with corporate control. Corporations are unelected and by definition interested in their own good, not necessarily the public's. To give them exclusive title to the basic building blocks of life is astonishing. It means for example that Myriad, which has a patent on a human breast cancer gene in the US, can prevent or profit from any research done on that gene and any tests designed to look for it. Myriad charges \$2580 US in royalties to women who need the test. This is a measure of control that in my (Lutheran Christian) faith tradition even God does not seem to lust after. God gives living things freedom to reproduce, to determine their own lives in dynamic tension with the community to which they belong.

Patenting of life forms also requires a god-like level of responsibility for the harm those life forms might cause. Since GM canola was introduced into western Canada, for example, it has cross-pollinated with non-GM canola in such a way that few if any canola-growers can any longer certify their products as organic (i.e. GM-free). The loss of revenue to organic growers has been staggering. A class action suit against Monsanto and Aventis is presently before the courts in Saskatchewan. Such corporations may find that in patenting life they have bit off far more than they can chew.

A final problem is the profit motive that drives corporate research. Humans have always been inventive. We reflect some of God's own creativity. But we have also recognized that we are not in fact gods. We can't trace every thread of cause and effect. So traditionally we've tended to experiment carefully, cautiously, often taking generations to observe the impact of major changes and incorporate them properly into our common life. Corporations, whose existence depends on a good quarterly profit, have

no time for caution. The gap between research costs and productive profit must be measured in months, not generations. So GM products are forced onto the market in mass quantity with no way of assessing their long-term effects. We've become unwitting guinea pigs in world-scale corporate experiments.

All-in-all I don't want corporations owning the pattern for my genes and the genes of my food. I don't want to be ultimately accountable to them nor have them ultimately responsible for me. If there is to be research done on the stuff of life, at the very least it ought to be publicly funded and democratically controlled. My genes are not for sale.

### **If Time: Get into this discussion "What Then Is Our Relationship to Other Forms of Life?"**

In *Something's Wrong Somewhere* Chris Lind suggests the metaphor of "friendship" The problem is that nature is "red and tooth and claw" as someone has said. In most cases some life must die in order for other forms to live. Humans are constantly under attack by various microbes which, if we didn't mass armies of white blood cells against them, would invade our cells and kill us.

Creation appears to be a site of conflict rather than friendship. The Bible however does look forward to the time when "the wolf will lay down with the lamb." However that time is obviously not one that is going to be brought in by human efforts. It will be God's eschatological gift. So the "friendship" motif is a gift that we hope for ultimately. But penultimately, in this present creation, we are "prey" to one another to some extent. And there are severe imbalances of power that cannot be ignored. What is the role of humans in this creation?

North American theologians coined the term "stewardship." I would like to explore again some of its features. It certainly has limitations and I trust you will identify some of those. I would also like you to brainstorm some other metaphors that might work.

The Steward is the "oikonomos"—the one who is over a house (oikia). This, in itself, suggests that the role of humans is not one of ruling over empire, extending our influence over every living thing, but rather restricting our influence to a smaller circle, taking responsible leadership within the circle of our own "home." We don't have to steward the lives of hawks. We do have to be stewards of the lives of the cattle we raise for food. Steward suggests the close attention to ordering of life that one does in small communities, in the family, or on a farm small enough for one to have close supervision over it. It is a single level of authority rather than the multi-levels suggested by management models and by hierarchies (which distance the decision-makers from those affected by the decisions and prevent listening and feedback).

Secondly, the steward is *accountable, collegial and responsible*. The steward must pay close attention to God, to the other stewards (humans) and to the other creatures with which we share this home, the earth.

*(Discuss these three characteristics—how do they apply to GMO's?)*

The steward's relationship to God is one of *accountability*. We have to answer to God. We're not free to do as we please. Take an airline steward as an example. The steward doesn't own the aircraft. So the steward cannot do what she wants with it. The steward cannot play shuffleboard in the aisles, or use the plane for her private trips to Hawaii. She can't throw passengers out if they get obnoxious. The steward is accountable to the owner and must do as the owner says.

Similarly, we are not free to use life-forms and resources as we please. They don't belong to us. We relate to them according to God's intent and purposes. Of course the question is, what are those purposes? I think it is fairly safe to say that the biblical witness supports the idea that God intends us to stay in close touch with the land (we are "adam" from "adamah" and humans from "humus") and that God intends us to live in openness to our neighbor ("Love your neighbor as yourself"), building community, not just one's own nest egg. God also seems to enjoy variety (so GMO's might be God's sort

of thing if they didn't end up replacing or harming many other varieties). God seems to like created forms for their own sake. They don't need to be useful for human beings.

The steward's relationship to other stewards is one of *collegiality or democracy*. Airline stewards must coordinate their efforts so that they don't feed some passengers two meals and others none, so that passengers who are supposed to be on board and aren't don't get missed and so.

So on the GMO issue, it is not good enough that some people make the decisions for all. The voices of all the stewards must be heard—farmers, retailers, consumers, etc.—not just large corporate elites.

The steward's relationship to animals, plants and the earth is one of *responsibility*. Like an airline steward she has been given a task by the owner and the means to carry it out, She therefore has responsibility. When she says "fasten your seatbelts" or "butt out that cigarette"—we do. We know that she is there for our welfare. She represents the owner and her service to us on the owner's behalf gives her some of the owner's authority. However there is also a "call steward" button. She is there, at the owner's behest to meet our needs and must listen to us, be patient with us, and work toward our welfare even when she would rather not. If there is an accident, she is the last to go off.

In relation to GMO's humans do have the power to breed life-forms and change them. However, our responsibility is not to shape life to our personal comfort, but to order life in *its own best interests, for its own welfare*. Is the diversity of plant species well served by creating GMO varieties? Are the animals and insects that feed on them well-served? Are the humans who eat them well-served?

Thus stewardship, as the fundamental calling of human beings, puts us into a different relationship with creation than we have had in the last few centuries. Stewardship focuses on conservation of and respect for the natural workings of God's order. It emphasizes maintenance rather than progress, nurturing rather than engineering, caring for rather than owning

*Stewardship also* acknowledges biological limits to both production and consumption; it looks for balanced distribution of resources in the "household". It conserves rather than exploits. It is concerned for wholeness and balance. Stewardship restores a certain humility to our place in creation. It aims, not for mastery of the world, but for service to one's own area of responsibility.

Note: Stewardship does *not* mean that humans have to manage all of creation. That's a ridiculous idea anyway—we live on one tiny planet in the midst of hundreds of billions of galaxies each with hundreds of billions of stars and countless planets. And creation, it appears, is about 15 billion years old. It has done quite well without us for 99.999999% of that time. Even this planet's biosphere is far too big and complex for us to manage. That's God's job. Ours is to manage our own "households"—to keep our footprint small so that it doesn't intrude on our human or non-human neighbour's household. We are good stewards when we keep our ambitions, our consumption, our intrusions modest, when we care for that life and those resources that are immediately within our responsibility, and we leave the rest to God.

**BRAINSTORM—WHAT ARE SOME OTHER METAPHORS FOR OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD THAT YOU THINK ARE IN TUNE WITH THE BIBLICAL WITNESS?**

## 2. From the Four Winds

Participants came from 13 countries and were all given opportunities to make presentations about their countries. We summarise these as follows:

### - Australia

Australia has 21 million people, 85 percent of whom are urban and 15 percent rural. Forty percent of the population was born overseas. Population changes are affecting ministry styles and methods with coastal ministries, regional cities, towns and villages, and remote settings.

Conditions driving population shifts are:

- ❖ Social capital values associated with various areas (climate and facilities)
- ❖ Baby boomer retirees
- ❖ Technology and communication improvements allowing people to trade nationally and internationally; globalization
- ❖ Fifty percent of the farmers have left in the last 20 years, and another 50 percent are expected to leave in the next 10 years
- ❖ Changed farming practice groups have to battle “the system” ...
- ❖ Water in Australia is being rationed and taken from farmers who have to compete with towns, industry and environmental wetlands
- ❖ Climate change is altering farming practices

The Uniting Church has many small congregations with 50 percent having less than 31 attendees, 30 percent of whom are 70 years or older. The Church is investigating; trying out different ways of being Church in this rapidly changing rural environment. We are rearranging congregations, specializing or changing ministry roles, changing worship styles and methods. We are developing a theology of rural sustainability with methods in response to corporate farming and mining in various communities. We continue having national gatherings where discussions about how to redefine the rural church take place.

The aboriginal ministry in Australia is being led and administered by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

### - Canada

In 2005 the Canadian Rural Church Network was established to:

- ❖ connect Canadian Christians who live in, work in and love the rural community
- ❖ be an advocate for rural communities with church structures and Canadian governments

Our web site is: [www.canadianruralchurch.net](http://www.canadianruralchurch.net). A booklet titled *Glimmers of Hope in the Rural Landscape* has been published for ecumenical and national distribution, especially for those persons who do not have access to the website.

The establishment of a Rural Pastoral Institute in Saskatoon will be a major step for rural ministry. Queen’s University, Kingston, and the Saskatoon Theological Union particularly prepare divinity students for rural ministry.

First Nations folk in Canada live in a precarious state. The majority live on reserves in substandard housing, have health problems and are under or unemployed. Churches and the government have made official apologies for former policies of assimilation and loss of language and culture, and the churches



are starting to focus actions on work of reconciliation between peoples. As rural folk to rural folk, we continue to be part of this process.

### **- England**

England is a historical country with small scale landscapes and changing countryside. Often, there is conflict between our heritage and food production. Other issues which confront us are: vandalism, littering; villages losing vital facilities; poor roads; unaffordable housing clergy shortages and migrants.

Churches often are the heart of our rural communities ... shows. They provide leadership in environmentally related issues, often joining together for various purposes in rural areas.

The Arthur Rank Centre provides guidance for rural church in numerous ways: agricultural chaplains, a program supporting migrant workers, a newspaper which can lobby government, coordinates rural affairs from main denominational leaders, provides various publications/booklets dealing with items such as "being a church without a minister;" the Addington fund which can buy or find land/property for farmers; LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming); education for rural ministers; and the Rural Evangelism Association.

The Rural Theology Association ecumenically develops a theology for rural settings for laity and clergy; holds conferences, and two times each year publishes a journal, *Rural Theology*.

### **- Germany, Rumania and the Czech Republic**

The geographical centre of Europe is in Ukraine. There now has been 60 years of peace in Europe. Strange as it may seem to be, the European Union is more important than the individual countries of German, Rumania and Czech Republic. At this time there are 27 member countries with other countries wanting to join. This, however, will be difficult since there is something of a "fortress mentality."

The European Rural Church Network was organised in 1957. It has formed an SOS telephone system; a family help network; organised rural conferences such as the Baltic Rural Conference *Hope for the Villages* in 2005 and the European Rural Conference on *Facing Change* in 2008; and has provided representation on a number of international organisations.

Forty-five percent of Rumania's people work in agriculture and actually are moving from cities to rural areas where they can own their own houses and grow their own food. Do a Google search on The European Rural Network.

The Czech Republic has 10 million people with only 3 percent employed in agriculture. The Republic is undergoing economic transformation at this time. There is an inequality between the "old" EU and the "new" EU in gaining access to subsidies. The "new" EU's regulations have reduced crops such as sugar and sugar beets. Bird flu has influenced some in the South.

### **- India**

The flag of India is red and white, with white representing peace in a country that historically has been involved with many wars, the red in the flag. The green in the flag stands for the rural nature of the land. There are more than 200 languages. India is a land of numerous religious cultures. Four percent of India's 40 million population are Christians (98% are Dalits). Ninety-nine percent of Christians live in rural areas, many of which are labourers and Dalits. The caste system in India is dominant, with Dalits

being lowest as outcasts. The ministry of the Church includes helping people come out of the bonded labour system of landlords.

In East India there are multiple tribal communities. The North-eastern part of the nation largely is rural, with 90 percent being Christian. In South India Hindus worship many gods, but there are many Christian sects/churches. A monthly magazine is published. A TV presentation of the Gospel on commercial TV receives many responses. Attention is given by Dalits to singing after which there is preaching, and often there is fasting with prayers.

## **- Iceland**

God's-land, rather than Ice-land, is about 300 kilometres from both Greenland and Norway. It is drifting apart, apparently due to global warming. With 270,000 people, it is the smallest nation of Europe. Iceland has no armed forces and has never fought in a war. It has the finest pension system and school/health/welfare systems in the world.

In 1000 AD, Iceland's chief united the people and declared that everyone would be Christian. Today 90 percent are Evangelical Lutheran, with 90 percent being confirmed. A tradition on the day young people are confirmed is to hold a "feast." Each year \$100 US is given by every person to the Church. Worship services often are held in the outdoors and often are held for new constructions. In 1996 the web for the Church was initiated.

In a sense, Icelanders don't "know where they're going." They are, however, concerned about the exploitation of their rivers, with "colonizing" being done in rural areas by companies ... particularly for aluminium. An important role for the church is to challenge this activity.

## **- Indonesia**

Indonesia has a population of 250,000,000 of which 40,000,000 are unemployed. Sixty percent of the population are farmers or engaged in agriculturally related enterprises. Forty percent of all students drop out of school or are not able to continue their studies because of economic conditions of their families.

Many churches and the homes of Christians have been burned ... it is very difficult for Christians to get permits from the government to build a church building.

Toraja Church is located in South Sulawesi, about 350 kilometres from the capitol city of Makassar, or 8 hours by bus. There are 922 local congregations (500,000 members) and 142 worship places which eventually expect to become congregations. There are 600 pastors, 40 percent of whom serve in cities, 40 percent in rural areas, and 20 percent in remote areas. The average income per persons for people in the rural and remote areas is \$1 to \$2/day.

The vision/needs of the Toraja Church Extended includes:

- ❖ An orphanage in which 80 persons can be housed due to lack of space and funds
- ❖ 250 disabled children
- ❖ Practical programs/training in various skills for women who drop out of school
- ❖ Small scale economical education and empowering programs for farmers
- ❖ A hospital
- ❖ A credit union .... additional capital is needed
- ❖ Schools from primary to high school
- ❖ A university, a theological seminary, and an institute of theology
- ❖ A training centre for reconciliation

❖ Homes and care for those with leprosy

Our Dreams:

To develop our school, college and other educational institutions, to equip our hospital and to develop farmers' skills and to procure tools and equipment for improved irrigation

**- South Korea**

Chairman of the International Rural Church Association of Korea, Rev. Young-Hwa Oh, comes from an area that has some of the oldest original Korean inhabitants. The area has been influenced by 500 years of Buddhism and also of Chinese Confucianism, but only 100 years of Christianity. At this time the area is 99 percent Buddhist. How does one minister in this isolated rural area of 3,000 persons?

A life-long learning center has been started which operates a nursery with 30 children and an after school program for 70 students up to high school. There is a woman's program for 1500 women, a farming program for 500 men, an elderly program for 100 persons, and a nature school for 50 persons. Diploma programs up to the bachelor degree is offered.

Run by Rev. Young-Hwa Oh, 20 elders and 17 staff, 50 percent of the Center's budget is paid by the government, with the remainder being provided by various "sponsors." For more information, contact Rev. Young-Hwa Oh: 082-863-636-1009; email: [holyland22@hanmail.net](mailto:holyland22@hanmail.net) or [www.irca-korea.org](http://www.irca-korea.org); cell: 016-655-1838.

**- New Zealand**

New Zealand is a country of two islands whose geography, climate and farming types change every 100 kilometres. There are ocean beaches, tropical bush, thermal geysers, volcanoes, snow capped mountains, barren mountains, fjords, rolling hills and plains.

In the far North. Maori values and issues dominate, and many churches have been without paid clergy for up to twenty years. Yet the people maintain the mission and life of the church. In the South, a transition from dairy to others forms of farming is taking place with the result that a reduction of the rural population means the rural churches and their communities are struggling to cope with depopulation. The profile of the church in many communities still is strong with programs such as Midway in Northland, day services (MINDS) for the disabled, day camps, Easter processions and services.

**- Tonga**

Tonga is composed of 360 island, the largest of which is 50 by 15 kilometres; most of the islands do not have anyone living on them. The population is about 100,000 living on the islands and another 100,000 living overseas. Previously, the Tongan government was a kingdom in which the king made laws and settled disputes. At this time, a new political movement is taking place challenging our laws which are based on the Bible.

Tonga is not agriculturally viable, and fishing for export is restricted by lack of equipment. Tonga's greatest export is its people with Tongans in the different places where they live supporting their families back in homeland Tonga.

The group from Tonga present at this IRCA meeting were met and accommodated by Tongans in Los Angeles and Calgary. Tongans learn to live by the quality of their relationships with other Tongans and

friends. A youth partnership project in Tonga enables young people to participate in international events. Exposing them to a variety of world views and to current world events has been very valuable to them. Recently, they have received some sewing machines and a tractor and farm equipment for a farm project.

## **- United States of America**

There is some good news about Rural Ministry Education in the U. S. There seems to be renewed interest at some seminaries in preparing people to serve in rural contexts. Examples: alternatives to traditional programs of preparing persons for ordination; lay licensing; and varieties of pastoral supply. And there are emphases on “continuing education” opportunities for clergy and laity.

The Rural Chaplains Association, which is ecumenical and available for both laity and clergy is being helpful in many situations.

There is good news regarding a variety of models for ministry such as cooperative ministries/team ministries, which in many instances are ecumenical.

Good news also can be seen in the continuing good work of the Rural Church Network of the United States and Canada which meets two times each year and includes a wide range of national denominational leaders, seminary professors and others concerned with rural ministry. Further indication of networking is the Texas Rural Church Network which recently was folded into the Texas Conference of Churches-Church and Society Commission

But, There Are Challenges! For instance, the location of industries utilizing low wage labor in rural communities ... particularly meat packing workers from non-European/non-white roots/ Hispanic immigrants ... are resulting in rapid rural community changes along with the political challenges/upheavals which take place in many rural communities. These do not fit into traditional US denominations ... in some communities they may be excluded and at best tolerated.

We face another challenge, that of the use of agricultural products which traditionally produce food versus the production of products for use as fuels ... as with corn for ethanol production. There is an “ethics of resource use” implicit in this reality

And, as always, we content with the appropriate/non-appropriate use of government subsidies. Then, there are the problems of competition between the use of water for urban and commercial enterprises contrasted with rural needs for irrigation, pollution and genetically-modified seeds.

In the U. S. the *Farm Bill* still is in process of being written ... once every three years. Several denominations have a “presence” in Washington to, hopefully, guide its completion toward real and needed rural concerns.

### **3. Conference Scattered Reports**

The 2007 IRCA Conference was planned in two parts; Conference Scattered and Conference Gathered. For the Conference Scattered portion, participants were hosted in rural communities across the country for up to a week, to give them a first-hand experience of rural life in the host culture. In addition, the hope was that this would help to raise the profile of IRCA in rural Canada.

A total of 27 conference participants took advantage of the Conference Scattered option, and were hosted in locations across Canada (including one placement in South Dakota). A few more anticipate having their Conference Scattered experience post-Conference. The following is a collection of participant's brief reports on their Conference Scattered experiences, ordered by location from west to east:

#### **- Lillooet, British Columbia.**

Lillooet has the population of a largish English village, but we were very impressed by the number and range of facilities it offers (in comparison). The town was Mile – 0 of the Caribou Road and grew at the time of the gold rush. Lumber, tourism and service industries provide most employment now. The community lost younger wage-earners as a result of forestry and government policies and cut backs, and these have been replaced to some extent by retired people moving in because of the climate and beauty of the area. About half the population is First Nations.

We stayed in the St. Andrews United Church Manse, and Leo and Jeanette arranged for us to meet as many people as possible during our visit – we went on picnics and to restaurants, and shared meals with church members. The church is friendly and welcoming, it has excellent facilities which are well used by the community (food bank, Al-anon, drugs group etc.) as well as for church activities. It sees itself as a family church, but has no children there for Sunday worship most weeks. Integration of First Nations people is also hard to achieve. Relationships with other churches in the town seem to be friendly and valued, and members of St. Andrews are integrated into the wider community.

It was a great privilege to visit Lillooet and share briefly in the life of the church there as well as in their Sunday worship. Thank you for providing us with this opportunity.

- Dave and Ann Wright (England)

#### **- Sechelt, British Columbia,**

Sechelt is a bedroom community, a 40 minute ferry trip north of Vancouver. In many ways, an urban centre growing steadily as retirees move to the sunshine coast.

A significant event in the life of the Sechelt community was the participation in a supper hosted by the First Nations people at their Longhouse. I had the privilege to meet Tony the master carver of the Sechelt Band. A bridge is gradually being formed between the white and indigenous peoples. The catalyst for reconciliation was the acknowledgement of the pain caused to the First Nations Peoples by the incarceration of the children in residential schools.

Environmental issues were supported strongly by some members of the congregation with participation in a blockade against logging in the watershed. Magnificent trees, witnessing to the Creator, water – fresh and saline meeting at the tide changes, soaring bald eagles, and beautiful flowered gardens mask the issues of the First Nations People and the unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse and boredom of youth.

How similar our communities are. Friendliness, hospitality, generosity, and graciousness were blessings from Pastor Janice Young and the congregation. My time at Sechelt brought great blessings as Janice and

I shared the journeys our churches have made, and the challenges that lie ahead as we witness to and live to the Glory of God.

- Denice Naish (Australia)

### **- Okotoks, Alberta**

We were hosted by four couples in the Okotoks area of southwest Alberta.

Highlights of our time were the visit we made to Head-Smashed-in Buffalo Jump where we learned about the life and activities of the Crowfoot Nation; and the day we spent visiting farms and local residents around Arrowwood. This helped us understand more about issues of farming and community on the Prairies.

Chris preached at de Winton and Okotoks on 24 June and Arrowwood on July 1.

- Chris and Sue Bedford (New Zealand)

### **- Provost, Alberta**

For those who came from different natural, environmental, cultural/historical, and social/political backgrounds, the “conference scattered” provided much information and understanding about rural lifestyle as well as diverse agricultural practices. It played an important role in bridging the gap between the people from the east and those from the west, through intimate daily contacts and growing affection.

The host families were very warm and kind; full of Christian faith, love and hospitality; and very resourceful in introducing their respective communities. We appreciated their warm hospitality and nice homes, foods, conveniences and the program that they had planned for us and guided us through.

The whole experience of the conference scattered, provided by the host family was remarkable. Without their help it would have been very difficult for many of us to take part in these programs and the important objectives could have been diminished.

- Chija Kim Cheong ,Ji Woong Cheong, (South Korea), Hwa Young Oh, and daughter Grace, (South Korea)

### **- Mossbank, Saskatchewan**

Wendy Gibson, the Lay Pastoral Minister in Training with the United Church of Canada in Mossbank and her husband Dave collected me from the Regina airport and delivered me to Judith and Glenn Annend, who were gracious and generous hosts.

Sunday 24 June, Mossbank joined with neighboring churches in an outdoor service in the Shamrock Regional Park. This was followed by a potluck lunch at which I met most of the members of the Mossbank community. Each day a different person or couple took me to see the district. I visited towns - large (like Moose Jaw) and small (virtually extinct). I inspected museums of all descriptions – collections of vintage cars and farm equipment; the historic tunnels of Moose Jaw; the local museum at Mossbank; the historic Mountie Fort at Wood Mountain; the Teepee Circles in the hills above Mitchellton. I toured farms and compared crops and farming techniques to those in Southern Australia. I even managed an evening golf tournament.

But most of all I remember the people and their generosity whether taking me out to places or hosting me in their homes. We ate much (too much), drank a little, talked about life and rural issues and theology and church issues. And we laughed a lot together as we formed bonds of friendship that will be my lasting memory of my time in Mossbank.

- Rob Stoner (Australia)

**- Faulkton, South Dakota, U.S.A.**

The 125<sup>th</sup> celebration of the “carousel city”- Faulkton, South Dakota was a great time to visit the United Methodist Church as guest of Rev. and Mrs. Michael Ward. It was a short visit but I participated in the ecumenical service held on a main street - 10 minutes to share New Zealand, my life, farming and ministry! It was the opening to many conversations over coffee and home made buns – 300 made!

Michael took me on tour of the hospital and we were given a detailed tour of the new super modern 12 bed hospital to be opened the next day. It has 12 beds and many high tech diagnostic and treatment facilities yet tastefully decorated and comfortable. It connects with the out patients and senior care facilities.

We broke our journey to Brandon in Wimbeldon, North Dakota, staying with lovely Christian folk who’ve made a radical change from a large hog operation towards self-sufficiency on their farm. They raise highland cows, sheep and chicken for meat, chicken and goats and a cow for eggs and milk products. They grow grain, plums, apples and all year round vegetables in raised outdoor gardens and hot house, heated for the winter. They have an old school house where they home schooled their 10 children and they have a peaceful church and several guest houses. It was a good introduction to the conference discussion on sustainable life and fits the Josephite philosophy of “live simply that others may simply live!”

- Christina Morunga (New Zealand)

**- Russell, Manitoba**

The hospitality, warmth, openness and willingness to go the extra mile was wonderfully evident with our host, Rose, and the Kieper family boys, Richard and Tom and families. We were met at Winnipeg and hosted overnight by son Richard. Richard works for CARGILL and so we learned a lot about the research, marketing and machinery side of farming. The meeting of the two rivers at Winnipeg, the affects of flooding, the impact of housing construction, were all part of our tour before we began the four hour drive to Russell and then to their farms 10K further on.

It was wonderful to be accepted and become part of the farm life for a few days. We helped feed a poddy calf, picked up Tom when he moved from paddock to paddock spraying canola, mowed the grass around the house, supervised the hay and manure removal by a team of contactors from the winter cattle holding pens, and enjoyed discussing crops, pastures, stock, costs, and lack of income and services for farmers with a fellow farmer.

It is sad to be able to identify with the closure of grain elevators, railway lines and the sale of properties and the change of the farm enterprises to try and find a more economic enterprise. But at the same time, we were impressed with the towns and churches. They strike you immediately as community proud people. The lawns, gardens, houses and churches are all so well cared for and fresh looking.

We had an enchanting, pleasant, relaxing and stimulating introduction to Canada and we felt prepared for the IRCA conference. The hospitality, warmth, friendliness and generosity of the Canadian people is really impressive.

- Ross and Margaret Neville (Australia)

**- Brandon, Manitoba**

I was hosted by Randy and Heather Stanton in Brandon, just 15minutes walk from the University, from Tuesday 26 June until Monday 2 July. Prior to our pre-conference planning meetings I spent two days tasting local church life in a provincial city. Randy is pastor of the 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church and I joined him at a Grade 8 ceremony hosted by the church for the school across the road. We visited a farmer parishioner

with 1600 acres in barley (10 out of the 11 quarters that supports his family and his parents) and had time to share ideas on coping with the stresses of parish ministry.

- Robyn McPhail (New Zealand)

### **- Brandon, Manitoba**

John and Carol Mackenzie were extremely generous hosts. Together we shared a rich and welcoming fellowship. We attended mass on several occasions with them, and shared in an early morning prayer meeting with the Ministerial.

John and Carol ensured that we saw some tourist attractions – the commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum in Brandon, the Swinging Bridge at Souris, buffalo at Minnedosa and the Margaret Lawrence museum at Neepawa. In Neepawa we also had significant conversation with a Hutterite lady.

Arrangements were made for us to visit two farms – a dairy farm and a cropping farm. In both places we were made welcome and learned from the experience of Canadian farmers as we made comparisons with farming practice in our own countries. It was a joy to share the enthusiasm of people who are living day by day the many blessings of God's creation.

We are grateful that two Canadian Roman Catholics, a New Zealand Methodist in a co-operating Parish and a Uniting Church minister from Australia found such rich fellowship through their common faith in Jesus Christ.

- Lloyd Vidler (Australia) & Noel Dalley (New Zealand)

### **- Morris, Manitoba**

We arrived at the tail end of a weekend of Tornados and thunder storms and were immediately welcomed with great hospitality by the Jorgenson family near Morris in the area of Manitoba south of Winnipeg.

During the week we were taken out each day by members of the family and friends and members of the United Church in Morris. We began with a visit to the Mennonite Heritage Village at Steinbach. Our next visit was to a living community of Hutterites where we were shown around the community, its new kitchens and its manufacturing activities, and shared lunch with them. The following day we spent in Winnipeg, where we were shown the Legislative building, the city museum and we were taken on a Splash Dash water tour of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers which meet at the Forks in the city. On the Sunday we shared in the morning worship in Morris and lunch locally and finished the day with a celebration firework display at the Morris Stampede Stadium for Canada Day. As this took place at the same time as a nearby thunder storm it was sometime difficult to tell whether distant flashes were fireworks or lightening.

We are grateful to everyone who showed us such great friendship and hospitality and made our stay in the valley of the overflowing Red River so enjoyable.

- Robert and Rosemary Stapleton (England) and Janice Purdy (New Zealand)

### **- Steinbach, Manitoba**

We were home hosted by Ken and Gay Boese who are actively involved in the United Church of Canada in Steinbach. In Gay's enthusiastic, capable hands we visited an intensive piggery; a U-pick strawberry farm in conjunction with an egg production business which was highly automated. Visits to 3 intensive dairies – it was milking time at two of the dairies – they were very large! Conversations with farmers were valuable – especially with former South African and Dutch farmers.



Sunday – 10:30 United Church of Canada Service, lunch at the Mennonite Heritage Village- traditional Mennonite meal and guided by Roland explaining history of churches and homes and school. It was a memorable, very satisfying week.

In conversations with farmers and with our hosts, we found many similarities existing between Canadians and Australians and our rural churches. Another attendee, Rudi Job from Germany, was hosted (for 3 nights) with us at the Boese home, and thought provoking conversations happened, between the 5 of us. We hope Conference Scattered was as satisfying for our Steinbach hosts as it was for us.

- Kevin and Sandra Harper (Australia) and Rudi Job (Germany)

### **- Oxford County, Ontario**

We visited family farms where farmers were showing initiative in adding value to their products: a husband and wife who had moved from rearing pigs to selling pork products and other items to attract tourists; an apple growing family by-passing the multi-nationals and selling direct to the public at the farm or to nearby small outlets; a farmer processing maple syrup in premises beside his maple woodlands, selling product and offering education about it to visiting groups. There were other families who have invested heavily in the gradual change of use of land in this region, now successfully growing vines and making table and ice wines on what was formerly soft fruit growing land; and growing ginseng in former tobacco fields. Another couple coming up to retirement had moved from dairy to beef to make less work for themselves. In all of this we saw signs of adaptability and hope.

We spent time amongst Mennonite farmers who live with as little technology as they can, whilst needing to meet modern requirements and standards for their produce. Their faith informs their hard-working, family orientated lifestyle and for the most part, ensures they are good farmers who enjoy a simple life as part of God's creation.

Everywhere there was a sense of the dignity of both the landscape and the people who care for it, in contrast to the farmers of rural India.

In many of these family situations we were made aware of how difficult it can be for families to hand on successfully to the next generation to ensure security for both generations. Part of these conversations was the continuing process of land settlement for the First Nation peoples. We heard about the reliance on seasonal migrant workers from Mexico and the Caribbean, and of the tensions that can arise over change of land use, for example from cropping to development, farming to tourism. We saw crops thirsty for rain.

We were interested to hear about research going on at the University of Guelph into changes taking place in the rural scene and the sociological consequences; and to visit the Five Oaks Centre, a beautifully situated retreat, training and resource centre where lay people are being supported, encouraged and equipped for a range of ministry in the churches. At the academic level, and the local church level, there is an awareness of the needs of the rural people and a willingness to support them through periods of challenge and development.

For our group, a key moment was learning that the five great lakes contain 20% of the world's fresh water supply. We had many conversations about the use and misuse of natural resources and the leading role the churches are taking in addressing this. Prasad put this into perspective when he told us quietly that in his municipality, the authorities turn on the water supply every third day.

The party would like to thank Peter McKellar, our most generous hosts and everyone who made these experiences so memorable.

- Roger Greene (UK), Heather Walker (UK), Prasad Rao (India) and Solomon Ubbarapu (India)

**- Ontario, Canada**

We are most grateful to Catherine Christie and Peter McKeller for making it possible for us to experience our Conference Scattered **after** Conference in order to fit with our itinerary. For 3 days we will travel with Peter on the Trans-Canadian highway into Ontario staying at B & B's and to his home for a night. He will put us on the train the next day to Welcome where we are met by our hosts and we look forward to experiencing life on a Canadian farm for 3 days before we go on to Beverley's brother in Peterborough. We give thanks for this opportunity to see more of this vast country and meet more people. 'He tangata, he tangata, he tangata' Maori for:- 'it is the people, the people, the people'.

- Michael and Beverley Deverell (New Zealand)

**- Glenholm, Nova Scotia**

"Conference Scattered" took me to the Maritimes: the provinces of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. Host Lester Settle was kind, generous and thoughtful. Together we explored Londonderry pastoral charge and the farmlands, fisheries, forests and First Nations places. Canada Day I preached to the congregations at Glenholm, Sackville and Debert.

My specific interest was First Nations. My host Lester took me to the Mi'kmaq Commercial Estate/Cultural Centre astride the four lane highway at Truro.

I have memories of green pastures, green farms, green forests and warm friendly people.

Well done, Canadian Rural Church Network, for planning and organizing "Conference Scattered"

- Garth Cant (New Zealand)

## 4. The IRCA Conference at Brandon Unfolds

On Tuesday 3 July, 80 participants from 13 different nations descended on Brandon, Manitoba for the fourth IRCA gathering. Most people arrived during the afternoon registration period, though some were delayed with the Tongan group not arriving until the small hours of Wednesday morning. Our home for the week was McMaster Hall at Brandon University. The conference was officially opened at Knox United Church by Chairperson Robin McPhail with welcoming speeches by Catherine Christie, (conference convener) a representative of the local government and the chair of the local Ministers. Worship was led by Peter Bush and Christine O'Reilly who would continue as worship conveners for the whole conference.

Wednesday was our first full day of working sessions. After gathering in Theatre B, the location for all plenary sessions for the week, we moved into small groups to share introductions, expectations, and to name our issues and concerns. The common themes of these would become the substance for working groups later in the week. Following worship, we were led in Bible Study by Davis Webber on the theme Yahweh Yir'eh (Gen 22: 1-19). Following lunch, our first keynote address was provided by Dr John Ikerd who spoke passionately about "The Role of the Rural Church in Sustaining Rural Communities" (the text of which is presented elsewhere in these papers). The afternoon closed with an outline of the coming week. The evening session was the first installment of "Stories from Around", with delegates from each country briefing the conference about the issues and factors affecting the rural situation and the rural church in their area. In this first session, we heard from Canada, Romania and Germany (and Europe as a whole), Australia, South Korea, and New Zealand.

Thursday morning was spent in plenary session, firstly with a Bible Study from Dr Cameron Harder from the Rural Pastoral Institute in Saskatoon. More of an address than direct Bible study, the topic was "Rural Church's Response to (Economic) Stress". This was followed by the second round of "Stories from Around" featuring England, Tonga, Iceland, USA, and India. The afternoon was trip to the International Peace Gardens on the border of Canada and the USA (see separate reflection) followed by supper and singing around the campfire at Camp Koinonia.

Friday was Field Trip Day. Participants headed off for the day on their choice of 3 different Field Trips:

- ❖ First Nations Finding Hope
- ❖ Food Justice – Canadian Food Grains Bank
- ❖ Hope for Families "Walk with us"

Descriptions of, and reflection on, each Field Trip are provided separately in these papers.

Saturday saw a return to working sessions with a second Bible Study from David Webber on the theme "God is not finished yet" (Gen 25: 5-11, Heb 11: 8-16). This was followed by our final episode of "Stories from Around" with a presentation from South Sulawesi (Indonesia). Time was then given in our small groups for reflection on our experiences on yesterday's Field Trips. Following lunch, a second keynote address was presented by Dr Roman Juriga from the Orthodox Academy Vilimov in the Czech Republic on "Saving God's Creation by Saving Energy and Renewable Energy Production". (see text elsewhere in these papers). This was followed by the first stage of the IRCA meeting with reports from Secretary, Dave Ruesink, and Conference Coordinator, Catherine Christie, and an outline of the discernment process to be used to raise up the next Chairperson and Secretary for IRCA. In the evening, a cultural presentation was offered at Knox United Church featuring singer Paul Rumboldt, supported by Peter Letkeman and Adele Harder.

Sunday provided the opportunity to worship in local churches and delegates went in groups to a variety of worship experiences. The early afternoon was free time except for those who committed to participating in three task groups:

- ❖ Preparation of a Conference Statement

- ❖ Vision for IRCA
- ❖ Preparation of Closing Worship

Late afternoon saw a resumption of the IRCA meeting, with time given to the process of discernment for its continuing leadership. In the evening, a Variety Night gave delegates the opportunity to present items reflecting the culture of their country. People sang, danced, told stories, acted out skits – some serious, some humorous. We sang along, we laughed, we enjoyed the gift that was in each presentation.

Monday was the last day for the gathered conference and at breakfast we were greeted with the news that Lothar Schullerus was to be the new Chairperson of ICRA and Garry Hardingham its new Secretary We were then treated to a second Bible Study from Cam Harder which focused on the story we have to tell which challenges the “power of empire”. Delegates then moved into their choice of workshops based around themes discerned from sharing of issues earlier in the week. The choice of workshops was:

- ❖ Water and land sustainability
- ❖ Devaluation and values in rural life
- ❖ Leadership – passengers into crew
- ❖ Sustainable faith for the church

Brief reflections from each of these workshops are included in these papers but it is expected that some of these may be the basis for ongoing work amongst IRCA members. Presentations from task group workshops and the conference statement concluded the afternoon. In the evening, the final phase of the IRCA meeting was held, followed by closing worship and celebration.

On Tuesday 10 July, the conference members headed out, in different directions, eventually to their home soil and the continuing work of being church in the rural context where we each live.

### **- International Peace Garden**

Thursday afternoon was an important change of pace. We packed our passports and boarded two buses to travel south to the International Peace Gardens ([www.peacegarden.com](http://www.peacegarden.com)), located very strategically on the border between the USA and Canada. The International Peace Garden was set up in 1932 in the wake of World War 1 and in the midst of economic depression. The vision came from Henry J Moore an American graduate of Kew Garden and the project for peace was supported by many nations. The site here between North Dakota and Manitoba is at Turtle Mountains in the heart of Turtle Island (the first Nations name for the North American Continent). Horticulturalists from both nations have planted the 400 acre site with gardens and trees. Music groups, sports, groups, nursing groups, and environmental groups such as “Ducks Unlimited” have added facilities.

We checked in at the gates and our guide took us on foot and by bus from site to site within the peace garden. We were able to stand with one foot in Canada and one foot in the USA and we were told that this was a favourite spot for weddings. We walked the length of the formal gardens to stand at the foot of the peace tower. We were moved on entering the Peace Chapel, the only building which straddles the border. Etched into the walls are quotations from people of peace from many nations and different faiths.

We left the Peace Gardens through the passport checkpoint and re-entered Canadian soil. Peace was etched into our hearts and our fellowship was made complete by a meal and singing at the Koinonia Camp on the Manitoba side of the border. It was a moving and memorable visit.  
Garth Cant.

## Field Trips:

### 1. Food/Justice – Canadian Food Grain Banks

Our hosts for the day were Dan Wiens and Megan Peasgood from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB [www.foodgrainsbank.ca](http://www.foodgrainsbank.ca)). The CFGB is made up of 15 member Canadian churches collect money from the sale of crops planted by local growing projects which in turn feeds the hungry of the world. Our driver was Ray Baloun from Ag-Pro Grain Elevators.

Each denomination has its own bank account that its members can deposit into and access later to support food projects throughout the world. Many of the projects are supported collectively. For each dollar the churches contribute the Canadian government matches 4 to 1 to a 20 million Canadian dollar cap per year. So the CFGB through its partners coordinate the purchase to best facilitate the delivery of food to the project area. (They may purchase in the north end of a country where crops have been good for delivery to the south where people are hungry.)

Our first stop was at Dan and Evelyn Lepp's farm. Dan is the son of a Russian immigrant. With his wife and three daughters they work the farm which is quite diversified with 600 acres of hay, 900 acres of cash crops- canola, wheat etc. and a one hundred cow/calf operation. They live in a tight knit community of Christian and non-Christian neighbours and work together to help each other out. They are members of the Brandon Baptist Church. Dan and Evelyn have had struggles and have worked through them. Their acreage in hay is now sold in the local Brandon market no longer needing to export and eliminating the middle man. In fact a large part of his business is to the local professional 'acreage farmers' – horse owners.

The farm is set up with 6-700 cattle feed lot which has been empty because it was not profitable even before the BSE crisis (mad cow). They use their own manure to fertilise their hay fields- stewardship and use of resources reflects their connection of faith to farming. In response to the question of how is farming an expression of your faith they responded: it offers solid family values; give and take; the strength and perseverance have all been important aspects of enriching their lives. The farming life style promotes courage and strength. He identified the connection of Biblical images to farming . Seeking God's will was crucial to their decision making in all aspects of their life. They belong to the Fellowship of Christian Farmers.

Abe and Esther Krahn's Grain Farm was next Abe's father was a Ukrainian immigrant. The family are members of the local Mennonite Congregation. For the last eight years Abe has held a pastoral position in a Mennonite church 135 miles away. Abe brings his two sons into the 'family farm' partnership all having an equal vote in decision making. During the past generation Abe has increased land mass to 4000 acres and diversified into several cash crops using the same planting and harvesting equipment. Not only does this minimises the fixed financial costs of extra equipment but also stretches the harvesting season from two weeks to two months.

In response to the question of how is farming an expression of your faith Abe responded that farming is worship especially the planting and harvesting seasons. He also mentioned soil and environmental stewardship: no tilling has proved important in addressing the salinity issue and care of the soil. Chemical use is minimized after Abe's experience with lymphoma.

On- farm storage facility for all their crops enables them to secure best pricing and top quality assurance. They mentioned the rhythm and harmony between themselves, the land and the community. They looked for ways to help others: they do not bid against neighbours, they employ local youth and served our noon day meal of Manitoba grown produce at no cost.

It is interesting to note that both farmers spoke sincerely of God's blessings upon them and their families. Community and church relationships were very important to both farming families.

#### **- Canadian Food Grains Bank Project**

The tour stopped at the local grain growing project (CFGB) called 'Acres of Hope.' We prayed over the crop with the 140 acres of canola behind us and talked about how the CFGB works. In the fall 15 combines converged on the field to harvest the full crop succeeding in 50 minutes. This was a time of celebration with ice cream and donuts. The local school children came to learn about food security issues.

#### **- AG-PRO Grain**

This is a new grain storage facility with 53 elevators built in 1999. This is a computerised facility replacing up to 30 smaller area elevators. It is beside the CN rail line and can load up to 100 rail cars at a time. They have added value products such as augers and steel grain storage bins which they sell along with seeds, chemicals and nutrients. This is a company where Ray Baloun (our driver) works and when asked how he felt when he could only offer farmers below cost returns his response was that he always tried to be fair.

#### **- Farm Crisis Help Line**

We were hosted by Jan McInyre, a farmer who was involved in initiating the project through her local congregation. She sits on the board of Directors. This line is funded by Manitoba Health and provides emergency telephone counselling service to handle all kinds of farm and rural stress. It was mentioned that males usually call for concerns about farm stress where as women inquire about rural stress. They also provide an email service and made referrals to local professionals when necessary. The centre relies on 5 operators and one supervisor. They all must have a farming background. It was important for the office to be located in a rural location hence Brandon was chosen. They help make the public aware of this service by being a public witness at local Fairs and other local events. When times get tough many farmers have to work at an off farm job which greatly increases their stress. Farmers are twice more likely to commit suicide. Jan responded to the faith question her response was "We are all loved by God."

#### **- Final Reflections**

In sharing our stories the IRCA participants quickly realised that first world farmers cannot make ends meet. We recognised that the problems and concerns of rural communities are universal. This begs the question that if we cannot, how on earth can third world farmers survive.

- Eric Skillings and Denise Naish

## **2. Walk with us – Hope for Families**

We did walk, we did explore hope for families and through this we found hope for ourselves. Marcia Hamm Wiebe, assisted by Betty- Ann, Shirley and Barb, led us through this journey.

Samaritan House Training Centre was our first call. We were introduced to the services offered by Samaritan House, both here and at their other premises. Vegetable gardens on land donated by the city, in raised beds, planted and cared for by volunteers and used by the Food Bank. Seeds are donated by McKenzie Seed Co., one of three seed companies in Brandon.

### **- Food Bank**

This building was gifted by the Federal Govt. Indicating the wider communities involvement as they work together to serve those in need. Inmates from the Correctional facility also assist. Aware that poverty in a growth industry, Churches have become ecumenically involved. We were shown the distribution area from which 40 – 50 boxes go out each day and each now include 1 litre of milk for every home. The storage area includes food, clothing, children's toys, household goods and whatever is donated. Prayer, prior to each day's distribution, both for those giving and receiving, is important. The Christian Weekly paper is also distributed.

### **- The Soup Kitchen**

This is where we were treated to lunch. It provides 41,000 meals per year(6,000 for children), with 150-200 per day. Notice on the wall read: 3403 meals served last month – 729 volunteer hours. The kitchen is manned by volunteers.

### **- YWCA – Meredith Place**

This house of residence provides transitional accommodation for a wide range of needs – short to medium term residency in rooms with meals supplied. A place to be listened to and referrals given as necessary. This is non-profit with grants being applied for and people are expected to pay only as they are able. The renovated basement provides temporary family accommodation for those looking for somewhere to live. They will be assisted in their search for both home and work. As well as this, there is a 'Safe House' for those needing to escape from violent situations.

### **- 7<sup>th</sup> Street Health Access Centre**

Some of the huge range of services/ facilities available from here are:-

- Public phone/Voice mail boxes
- Free computer/internet use
- Free income tax program
- Free laundry/showers
- Community Mental Health
- Child and Family Services
- Two Community Health Nurses
- Addictions Foundation of Manitoba
- Housing Resource Worker

### **- The Manitoba Toll Free Farm and Rural Stress Line**

Provides free, confidential support, counselling, and information to farm and rural families. Rural stress is a community issue – 'Remember: you're not alone. We're just a phone call away.'

There is strength in the inter-connectedness and communication between all these services agencies. Right relationships between the agencies and the people they are helping, are the keys to the Kingdom of God.

### **- Afternoon program: HOPE/HOPELESSNESS**

- Part 1** To explore five things that give us hope and what it feels like to give up one or more of our sources of hope
- Part 2** In groups, to identify areas of hopelessness on 'red bricks' from which a brick wall was built.

**Part 3** How will HOPE break down this wall? By adding windows of HOPE over the bricks of HOPELESSNESS – which now becomes light.

### **- Role play**

We listened to a person in need telephoning the Rural Stress Line and heard the understanding response of the counsellor. This was an interactive exercise when we were invited to take the place of either the counsellor or the troubled person. Thank you, Rob, for responding to this challenge and adding a further dimension to this realistic situation.

Walking helped us to 'see' in more ways than one. The 'talk as we walked', gave us some new insights with quotations as starters. eg:-

Practice hope. As hopefulness becomes a habit, you can achieve a permanently happy spirit

*Norman Vincent Peale*

When you do nothing, you feel overwhelmed and powerless. But when you get involved, you feel the sense of hope and accomplishment that comes that comes from knowing you are working to make things better.

*Pauline R. Kezer*

### **- The closing prayer for the day:**

Open my eyes that I may see the needs of others;  
Open my ears that I may hear their cries;  
Open my heart so that they need not be without comfort;  
Let me not be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong,  
Not afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich

Show me where love and hope and faith are needed  
And use me to bring me to bring them to these places.

And so open my eyes and ears that I may, this coming day,  
Be able to do some work of peace and hope for you.  
AMEN

## **3. First nations – finding hope**

The day began at the site of the Brandon Residential School. Bernice Salteaux led the group to the demolished ruins of the school her mother once attended, where hundreds of First Nations children spent much of their childhood. Hunger and abuse were common in many residential schools although her mother and some other students had positive experiences. After a brief explanation from Bernice she offered up a prayer which was followed by one Robyn offered in the traditional Maori language. Many children lost their lives here over the years and many have suffered from their abuse for all the years since.

We next visited the Sioux Valley Dakota First Nations Reserve. Our first stop there was the Band Office which housed the administrative offices as well as the medical centre, office of the dental therapist, the Home Care co-ordinator, diabetes education and others. We met some of the staff and one of our Tongan delegates even got a tooth pulled! On one wall was an array of paper eagle feathers with names on them. This is a unique fundraising effort to support one of the people who needs to go to the Mayo Clinic. Beyond the Police Station an Activity Centre houses a games area, an exercise room, a kitchen and meeting rooms.



Our welcome included elders and young girls who danced for us to the beat of the drum group. The beat of the drum represents the beat of the human heart and the drummers meet every occasion – from special dances, to feasting and mourning. The elder also explained that the sound of the drum and the sight of the young people dancing has a healing effect on those who are hurting or grieving. He told a very poignant story of how he had been helped following the death of his son. A senior's lodge which houses 22 residents in the 26 bed facility. One bed is kept for palliative care and one for respite. Although the facility is 25 years old, it is well maintained and has a very homey atmosphere. The staff is mostly from the local area. We shared a few songs with residents in the common room. We visited the local FM radio station up the hill from the band office. One woman was on duty as DJ and our guide filled her in on our visit as music played and then she invited Robyn and Christina to say a few words of explanation on air. Robyn also offered words in the Maori language and the delegates from New Zealand and Tonga sang a short song.

The school on the Reserve caters for 350 children – all First Nations – but all closed for the vacation.

In the Activity Centre we had the privilege of spending time with Bernice and hear more of her story and about life on First Nations reserves and ministry among the people there. Bernice shared the story of her path to ministry and everyone appreciated her openness and wisdom. She also spoke of the land claims being made by her people in Saskatchewan and in other places and about the apology from the United Church of Canada to the First Nations people in 1986. Bernice's quiet faith and her sharing were an inspiration.

The day ended with a wonderful beef supper prepared and served in the activity centre. It was a day of learning and sharing that we will all take back with us, no matter where we live. It was encouraging to see the positive things that were happening on this particular reserve while learning that there is much to be done for justice to be achieved for our First Nations people.

- Wendy Gibson

After the field trip to the Sioux Valley, I asked myself, "what kind of hope are we speaking about?" Bernice told me that First Nation people just hope to have the same rights as the other Canadian citizens. But there was more. I felt that hope for the First Nations seem to be finding their way back to their roots, finding their identity. Hope for First Nations seemed to be hope for living their traditions, hope to be recognised as part of the local culture. It seemed to be that being linked to spiritual existence is to be linked to the spirits in the air. This way hope for the First Nations seemed to be walking from history into the future. It seemed to be the search for a link to the modern society; you don't know who you are if you don't know from where you have come.

But, which way to choose for this future? It's much more important to know where you are going than where from you have come from. History may be beautiful or sad, but it has gone anyway and we cannot change history. But, to know where you are expecting to go gives you power to progress. Bernice was right; the same rights to all, access to education on all levels will change the presence and will give hope to the future.

Bernice, you need at least three generations. You need at least 100 years for this real change. You won't then be living with your people in this land, but if you start today, you will be one day closer to achieving your goal, than if you start tomorrow. Good luck and God bless your way.

- Rev Lothar Schullerus

A big thank you to Bernice for leading a tour of Sioux Valley Reservation and sharing the pain of lost sacred lands, places of physical abuse, the loss of language, culture and sometimes life suffered by your people. We thank you for sharing of the healing taking place as you reclaim your traditional spirituality, and also of the positive things that came from the residential schools, it speaks of hope for the future.

I saw signs of hope and opportunities for the future. Apologies have been made by the churches. Claims, both personal and tribal, have been brought and settlement negotiated. We saw the renaissance of traditional culture and spirituality, language being reclaimed, significant steps towards the holistic health of the people and the nation. The local radio station is a positive agent for change, able to share issues, raise possibilities for development, to build community and pride in one's race.

The title of the conference "The Cry Of The Heart" was so relevant to me as Bernice took us to the Reservation, my heart was crying at the abuse of the children who went to the residential school, often without their parents consent, and the abuse of the parents and whole tribes as their future was being violated by institutional racism and massacre, with the removal of language and customs. It resonated with the abuse of "The Treaty Of Waitangi" in NZ with planned assimilation of Maori into Western culture. The Maori are still seeking protection for their sacred burial grounds and other sites.

With prayer and consistent prayer and work, the first Nations People of North America will find their way to a more positive future.

-Christina Morunga

## **- International Issues Workshops**

### **Workshop 1 - Devaluation and Values: Visions for the Future**

Our Task Group identified many ways in which rural churches/ communities are devalued:

#### **Through the manipulation of language that minimizes meaning.**

Powerful bodies often use "soft language" in order to distort meaning and influence outcomes. An example of this springs from the understanding of what is acceptable water. In the urban context, "potable" water means "municipally treated" water.

#### **Through the devaluing of community norms that underpin healthy communities**

Healthy rural communities work cooperatively, practice hospitality, and are open and welcoming to newcomers and strangers. The culture of fear present in many urban settings degrades much of what makes rural communities vibrant and healthy.

**Rural communities absorb negative images of themselves, especially from powerful bodies –**  
Government, Church, Media.

#### **Through the belief that "Big" equals "Good"**

We see this manifest in churches, retail stores, farms, and the valuation of work  
Small bodies can in fact, be strong, creative and adaptive to change, in ways that larger bodies are not.

#### **Where is the "Cry of the Heart" in the devaluation of rural communities?**

#### **We lament:**

The loss of young people to urban centres for employment and education

The loss of control over local decision making – economic, political, religious

When urban values supplant values that make rural communities strong

When rural economies are manipulated to serve short-term profit to the detriment of community values.

Rural services are taken away in the name of efficiency.

**We affirm that:**

Rural communities/ churches are valuable, integral parts of the social fabric

Rural communities & churches hold distinct values that speak to the purpose of life

Newcomers are valued, bringing fresh spirit and new ideas.

**We long for:**

Rural communities to claim their identity and establish control of their destiny

The voices of those who have been silenced to be heard

To engage newcomers in the life and work of the community

A clear vision that helps us to see our way forward

**Rural communities/ churches are rich in expertise and resources:**

Think creatively about the common good

Strong skills for critique and analysis

Deep memory and community knowledge

Know how to value relationships

Have the capacity to strengthen connections through dialogue

Have many skilled retired people with a commitment to enhancing community life

Dedicated volunteers who care

**We believe that rural communities have the potential to model an alternative vision:**

**Working cooperatively for peace, seeking justice for all, and demonstrating sustainable and healthy community.**

**Workshop 2 - Land and Water – Ethics and Sustainability.**

**Participant Experience:**

Water issues were focused on in the group as it impacts on the Land dramatically. The following were discussed: - Flash floods, rivers flowing out of the country leaving deficit, drought, deforestation, pollution of water ways and natural and constructed water storage systems, the conflict of water use between farming, urban and industrial sectors, and the increasing water level of the Pacific Ocean causing loss of whole Islands and decreasing the size of others. In other places Glaciers are melting.

**The Cry of our Hearts:**

The cry of the heart is that the God given gift of water should not be the property of multinational companies, government's not encouraging adequate individual and collective storage systems for the times of abundance of water to be used in time of drought. So called "Progress" uses and wastes large volumes of water! Urban sprawl over fertile land, pushing farming inland, where water is less available for crops.

**Expertise:**

The Indonesian Engineers who reticulate water over many Paddy Fields.  
EU Water Conventions, providing international discussions. The development of small and micro dams for local areas.

**Request:**

For finance for Tanzanian small farmers to grow hydroponic vegetables.

**Forward Directions:**

Building tanks for water, two tier water gathering to reduce waste. Air polluted water for toilets and garden, filtered water for drinking and personal hygiene.  
Encourage Christians to connect their faith and decision making in positions of Community responsibility for use of resources, especially water.  
Lobby Governments for better water conservation and use.

**Recommendations:**

That we network information – inform IRCA community when things going wrong.  
Build from successful projects developed in other area's.  
Promote WCC policy of "Water for Life"  
Find creative ways to get the message of "Equitable" use of water to Governments and large Corporations.  
Protect natural water sources and systems for habitat  
Local guardianship of water resources and supply systems. Utilisation of storm water.

**Dreams:**

To save Tongan islands from sinking, set up desalination processor and export the water!

**Workshop 3 - Leadership: Passengers Becoming Crew**

We came from a diversity of ministry and congregational situations across a dozen nations.

**1 We are enthusiastic about shared and enabling leadership:**

- \* We believe in a shared gospel of leadership: everyone is a leader, everyone is led.
- \* We work to involve all of our members as leaders. Prasad told us about groups and cells in India.
- \* Leadership comes in many shapes and forms. The challenge is to help each other to discover our leadership gifts.
- \* Canadians have a model of "clergy as coach"
- \* We can use strategies of "enlisting" or "enrolling" to bring out leadership gifts in others in congregation and community.

**2 We named some of the issues which hinder shared leadership:**

- ❖ Many clergy have not been trained or equipped to share and encourage lay leadership.
- ❖ Lay leaders can exercise and hold onto power in ways that prevent clergy from sharing power and hinder the leadership of other people.
- ❖ Many seminaries do not see rural ministry as a specialist, front-line ministry.
- ❖ National denominations are slow to listen to rural initiatives and respond to rural training needs.

**3 We suggest some ways to share stories and resources to encourage shared leadership:  
IRCA can, over the next three years, use its website and its networks to share stories and resources:**

- \* stories of what congregations and parishes are doing (eg: Beverley, eg: Ross)
- \* resources being provided on the web, in books or on CDs (eg: Christine, eg: Prasad)
- \* Seminaries can share news of training models and training experience (eg: Tim, eg: Alvin)

**Workshop 4 - Sustainable Faith To Empower The Church In Its Healing And Community Building Roles**

We gathered as this group because we were interested in vital rural churches and vital rural communities.

**Some of the concerns we identified were:**

- ❖ Racial and ethnic prejudices of a lingering effects of colonisation- legal, social, moral, religious
- ❖ Rural decline with a ripple effect through rural churches and communities
- ❖ Where does the rural church turn for help?
- ❖ Getting our churches to think outside the walls
- ❖ Urban/rural divide
- ❖ Importance of growing in our faith
- ❖ Not using our size as an excuse to stop growing in our faith
- ❖ Danger of slipping into survival mode

**The direction forward was suggested by**

- ❖ Sharing our stories
- ❖ Developing a level of trust and recognising that developing trust takes time. Commitment for extended period- church, pastor, community
- ❖ Importance of being pastor of church and spiritual guide to the community
- ❖ Keeping an eye of for ways in which God is speaking to us along the journey
- ❖ Pockets of energy to inspire
- ❖ Importance and value of networking
- ❖ Hands on such as Conference Scattered and Field Trips in experiencing every aspect of church life in rural communities

**What expertise is found in the group?**

Eric Olfert presented a program done by the Saskatchewan Mennonite Churches titled VIBRANT RURAL CHURCHES. The program was designed to see congregations in light of their excitement, strengths and energy. This paper is available at: [www.mcsask.ca](http://www.mcsask.ca)

We are hoping some good links will be set up on the IRCA website leading to resources addressed to rural church issues, worship resources, liturgies to do with a variety of rural questions eg. Farewelling, burning of a church building.

Good bibliographies through available websites. eg Cameron Harder.

The importance of meeting together and maintaining a strong IRCA

## **5. Participants Respond**

We invited a set of participants, drawn from the four winds, to give their own reflection on the conference.

### **- South Korea**

We would like to express our personal reflections from at least four different points. First of all, the program which had been composed basically of two different parts (scattered and gathered conference) was very successful and meaningful for the Korean participants. For those who came from different backgrounds naturally, environmentally, cultural/historically, social/politically, the "conference scattered" provided us with much information and understandings about various rural life styles as well as diverse agricultural practices and it played a good role to bridging the gap between the people from East and people at the West through intimate daily contacts and emotional affections corresponded.

Second point is the selection of the host families which had been very warm and kind; full of Christian faith, love and hospitality; and very much resourceful for their respective communities economically, technically, and in human relationship matters. We could never forget their warm hospitality and programs that they planned and guided us through.

The third point is related to the "Conference Gathered Together" portion of this program. The one week period was felt not so long because the variety of actions that calls for active participation from the participants such as the worship and prayer, small group discussion and report sessions and field trip etc. Some of the minor difficulty that we faced was the comprehension of the New Zealand pronunciation of English.

Last and not the least with regard to this conference are some logistic points. The support of the scholarship was very helpful, and furthermore, the whole expenditures of the "conference scattered" covered by the host family was remarkable. Without their help it would have been very difficult for many of us to take part in these programs and the important objectives could have been diminished.

However, for the future IRCA activities, representation from more counties in Asia, Africa, South America, Middle East and Europe should be encouraged by all means.

On behalf of all Korean participants, we sincerely thank to the Canadian Rural Church Networks and IRCA Officers who had done such a wonderful job successfully. Thank you again.

- Revd Dr Young Hwo Ho and Chija Kim Cheong

### **- Iceland**

The rural church as a "koinonia" has a great deal to do with the life and in the hope in the rural area; much more than I thought.

The small talks in between sessions and the "12 minutes" national presentations were good to bind us together and to get very important reports of things back home. To get the information from living people (20-30 talks) about their situations back home, their worries and hopes and what they were doing about life and about them self. The people were open and giving; all doing important things for the Kingdom of God. It was also important to understand that God is using situations and writing his history.

The address of John Ikerd was inspiring: opening new ideas and focussing our thoughts. To be able to address and talk to him in these days was of great importance to me. I think his talk opened the fact that

the rural areas are of vital importance to society. The other speakers were also of great value, including the Saturday Bible Study reminding us that 'God is not finished yet'.

Separation of state and church is a bad thing, the church - meaning of life- is vital for the rural area and the rural area is the means of restoration of society. Lack of paid ministers is being supplemented by lay people and that breaks down domination. We need to be aware of those who want to grow bigger than Jesus!

The trip to the First Nation with Bernice was memorable. I learned much in a short time. God has much to do there!

The programme as a whole is valuable, and the number of delegates just right. Grassroots people talking together and going back home with new friends from all over the world; that is friends in the Kingdom of God on Earth!

I think IRCA is doing good work and on the right path.

- Axel Arneson

### **- United States of America**

There are two important learnings that I will take home. The first is that agriculture is in trouble throughout the world. Environmental concerns threaten the future of agriculture and indeed the whole earth. Farmers are not being fairly compensated for their effort. In some nations this has caused the demise of family farms and rural life. In others, farmers are not even able to feed themselves or their families.

Another far more difficult learning for me has been the role my nation, the USA, has played in corporate and economic colonisation. It is painful for me to see how other nations perceive us. I pray for the day when our nation collaborates with others rather than dominating them.

- Michael Ward

### **- England**

There have been so many good speakers and worthwhile events that it is difficult to choose just a few.

The talk given by Dr Cameron Harder on Thursday morning was a memorable occasion. I have done some study of 'Rural Stress' and many of the things he said tied in with my own experience and study. He talked about psychological stress and causes of stress amongst farming and other people living in rural areas. He was careful to mention some of the signs of damaging stress which we need to be aware of.

I very much enjoyed the visit to Camp Koinonia on the Thursday evening – not only for the food – but also for the fellowship and the singing around the campfire, even if it was not lit. The setting was ideal for the occasion and everyone seemed to have a good time.

The Friday trip is another highlight of the Conference. I went with the Food Justice workshop outing. We visited two farms and met the Lepp and Krahn families who made us feel very welcome. The mid-day meal at the second farm was a real treat. In the afternoon we saw the Ag-Pro Elevator and learnt about its work. We were again well fed at the Riverside Discovery Centre after a valuable address and discussion on Food Justice and the Farm and Rural Stress Line. During the day we heard about the Canadian Foodgrains Bank – which itself was a memorable event.

Perhaps the people from Tonga have themselves been memorable wherever they have gone. We will never forget their friendliness and smiling faces.

- Robert Stapleton

### **- Canada**

Lots of things tumble around in my mind at this conference. First we meet each other...various languages, various ways of speaking English, many of whom claim they have no accent...everybody else does of course! We know some of the people; have met a few. That's good; it keeps it from being totally strange. Everyone is friendly; everyone wants to connect with everyone. This is a great conference in that regard.

We begin to discover our similarities. Oh, but there are differences and those will be the tough parts to sort out. For example "rural" in Indonesia means something very different than "rural" in Canada and other "developed countries". What are we going to do about those differences? How are we going to make an International Rural Church Association be really meaningful to all of these parts?

I learned about Tonga at this conference. It's about time eh? I'm pleased that I was here to learn a little bit about this country and to meet some of its wonderful people. I grew up on choral music and four part singing, and I would love to hear a Tongan choir concert. The music we heard was so rich in the bass and tenor section. Wonderful!

A real Icelander was here. Have you heard that there is no army in Iceland? I wonder if Mennonites know that? I wonder if there would be a mass exodus of Mennonites to Iceland if they knew. (Mennonites are a "peace church" whose teachings include non involvement in war) On that subject, I heard a lot of what sounded like peace theology/ideas/ideals bantered around. I like that.

But, I personally am a "doer". I like to get to work and physically do something to (hopefully) make things better. It feels like we talked a lot of theory and good ideas but didn't change much.

I am always and was once again impressed with the way pastors can craft words and thoughts into an order that is so meaningful and inspiring. I enjoyed the worship sessions very much. I enjoyed the skilled guitar playing of Christine and the songs that we sang together. This has been another experience of worship which I imagine as a foretaste of heaven. (In heaven I want to stand next to the Tongans when we sing.)

- Verna Olfert

### **- Tonga**

This Conference is an eye opening experience for us. A move from familiar to unfamiliar; from daily experience of being surrounded by the vastness of blue skies and deep blue oceans to deep blue skies and endless masses of green land and pastures. An experience of growing up in a tiny island nation to walking around in the landscape of North America. An opportunity to expand our understanding of the world around us which is much bigger than previously thought.

We have an appreciation of being welcome, a real sense of belonging, the old welcoming the young, the educated welcome the uneducated; the rich and powerful welcome the poor and less privileged. A lot to be thankful for.

A particular highlight of the Conference was the field trip to First Nations Sioux Valley. We learned about those first people of the land and they shared stories of their past history and struggles.



We heard farmers talking about their struggles that sometimes brought disaster to families. People in rich countries do not always get to enjoy life despite being regarded as wealthy. The unfair system can sometimes bring disaster to many.

We can think of our Tongan culture and the importance of strong, healthy ties and relationships that can be very crucial to giving shape and meaning to who we are as people with limited time to tend and serve this land before we move on.

We would like to thank Catherine Christie, Dave Ruesink and Andy Jones and all who worked so hard to get us here: to the Synod of New South Wales for supporting us and enabling us to be here with financial support of family and friends and scholarships offered by IRCA.

We will never forget the warmth and friendly open heartedness of the participants. As one young man commented "I am saddened that the 3 meals a day will soon be over". However, beautiful memories of the Conference and the trip to Canada will live in our hearts for ever.

May God richly bless and uphold us all until next time we meet.

- Filimone Olivetti on behalf of the Tongan Representatives

#### **- Australia**

Majestic trees, sentinels witnessing to the glory of God stand isolated in the raped, logged watershed of British Columbia. Tony, the Master carver explains the totem of his First Nations People gently positive about the bridges being built between the churches at Sechelt and his people. Breath catches, tears well up in the eyes of the First Nations minister who respectfully retold the stories of abuse while in the residential units.

Farmers balancing the budget, seasons without income, depression becoming usual among farmers, frustrations with the lack of resourcing of ministers for rural ministry. A unified cry from across the world- Indonesia, Australia, Canada, India, Australia united in the changing perspective of the rural landscape.

Networking, laughter, shared stories, painful stories all held in the assurance of the hands of mother father God who continues to recreate the church through Time. Dave's bible study challenged the affluence of the western churches in the light of his proclamation: God is not finished yet.

Bridges have been built, understandings expanded, friendships begun and communications links established. The conference is a gift, loaded with opportunities for the conversations begun and struggles shared to be explored in the light of an ever-loving God of grace and mercy.

Thank you to those passionate enough to invest time, and energy in organizing this Conference. May God be glorified in the continuing stories as they ripple throughout the world as the Conference disperses.

- Denise Naish

## 6. Address Additions/Corrections

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## **7. Secretary Report, July 3, 2007**

### **Hosting the Conference**

Requests for proposals to be hosts were sent to countries that had expressed interest in the possibility of having the next IRCA Conference. These were obtained either from those who had attended previous IRCA conferences or had heard about the conference and wanted to be a part of one in the future. Responses were received from three countries: Canada, Indonesia, and South Korea. The IRCA Planning Committee decided on South Korea and worked up a memorandum of understanding to indicate what was expected to be done by the host country. A delegate from South Korea met with the Planning Committee, then returned to South Korea to work with a Korean Committee. After several months of meetings in South Korea including a visit by the IRCA Chairperson, it was decided that the Korean's needed more time to prepare to host the IRCA sometime.

Fortunately, Canada organized a Canadian Rural Church Network in 2005 and this Network took on the responsibility of organizing the Conference. They also went about raising considerable amounts of money for registration scholarships to enable participants from developing countries to attend. Brandon, Manitoba, Canada in July, 2007 is the result of the great work of this committee headed by the Chair of the Canadian Rural Church Network, Catherine Christie, the Minister of the United Church of Canada at Abbey, Saskatchewan.

### **Promoting the Conference**

E-mail was the primary means of contacting potential attendees. An address list of all Councils of Churches (or whatever they are called throughout the world) was obtained. A general letter went to each Council asking them to respond with the name of the person within their organization who was responsible for rural church work. Many responded that they did not have anyone, but provided a name of someone within their country or countries to contact about the forthcoming Conference. Others responded that they had no one and they did not have anyone to suggest for further contact within their country(s). A few did not respond at all even with two follow-up e-mails. From these contacts, a list of about 75 persons around the world received special invitations to be part of the Conference or to pass the information along to someone else who would be an appropriate attendee. It was emphasized that the conference was for anyone involved in rural church work, whether they were administrators, clergy, or laity. When someone indicated an interest, they were added to the weekly prayer list that Robyn McPhail, the IRCA Chair sent out. Another group of about two hundred names of folks within the USA received several notices about the Conference as it progressed and, again, there was a lot more interest expressed than were able to attend.

It should be noted that individuals from several countries responded positively about interest, but were unable to obtain visas to Canada. Others were interested but unable to clear their schedule of conflicts with their primary work.

### **Rural Church Movements**

Contact with this group indicates that, in some parts of the world, there is a growing interest in how rural church work can be strengthened. In other parts of the world, there appears to be a declining interest on the part of the national denominational leadership regarding rural church work. In some cases rural church work seems to be gaining a momentum moving of its own. It is propelled by such organizations as national rural church networks and the IRCA which will assist with this movement in the future.

## **Feedback Desired**

Some folks have questioned whether there is any overlap with other organizations interested in working with rural churches around the world. The Agricultural Missions, Inc. and Heifer International are two such organizations. It was hoped that at least one representative from each of these organizations would be present to observe what the IRCA Conference is like and whether parts of this could be folded into their annual meetings which are held in different parts of the world.

Nothing in the way the Conference is conducted is “sacred” or needs to remain the same whether in the past or present. Feedback is not only solicited, but sincerely desired about what the future of the IRCA should look like. For example:

- ❖ Should it meet more frequently or less frequently than once every four years?
- ❖ What kind of rotation - diversity among countries is appropriate?
- ❖ What should the organizational structure look like?
- ❖ How should invitations to be an IRCA Conference host be handled?

These are only some of the questions to be considered as you provide the current IRCA Planning Committee with feedback. We are very open to any and all points of view.

David Ruesink, IRCA Secretary