

Rural Churches

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# THE RURAL CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY

The Rural Church  
*and the*  
Community



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# The Rural Church *and the* Community

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## FOREWORD

The rural church is a part of the community. It makes no difference whether it is located in the open country, or whether it is located in a village or a town. Its program centers around the worship of God which is a part of community living. The worship service makes the Christian community possible.

While the basic responsibility of the church centers around the worship service, the church is concerned with the total life of man. This gives it a responsibility beyond its churchly function. How the church can measure up to its community responsibility without losing sight of its basic responsibility has long been a concern of many pastors.

Pastor Virgil C. Hougen in consultation with Pastor Andrew P. Staby prepared this pamphlet for the Sub-committee of the Rural Church Program. He has rendered a real service to pastors and laymen who are interested in having the Lutheran Church measure up to its responsibility of helping to build the Christian community.

Pastor Hougen graciously consented to have the Sub-committee submit his original draft to interested persons—rural pastors, rural church leaders, and rural sociologists. Many valuable suggestions were received from them. These suggestions were incorporated into the final draft of the pamphlet when it was edited in our office.

The Rural Church Program of the National Lutheran Council is grateful to Pastor Hougen for this pamphlet and is happy for the opportunity to publish it.

—E. W. MUELLER

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## The Rural Church and the Community

A gray stone church with a towering steeple located on a gravel road seven miles from a one-train-a-day town in northeastern Iowa—this is the Washington Prairie Evangelical Lutheran Church, which in 1951 was honored by the *Christian Century* as one of America's Great Churches.

Washington Prairie's success story is the story of a rural church which has made an impact on the surrounding community without surrendering its own character as a divine institution.



The Church, a divine institution that has received a message from God—the Church, a social institution that has been called into being in a community to deliver the divine message to that community. Thus, the word “church” is used in a double sense.

The Augsburg Confession which defined the Church as “the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered” is the same Lutheran confession which realistically concedes that “in this life there are many hypocrites and evil persons mingled with it.”

The founding fathers of our Lutheran Church here set side by side in definition the Church as a spiritual reality and the Church as a social entity.

The Lutheran Church in America has been hesitant to assume its fair share of the responsibility for the building of the total community. This is in part due to its European background. In its European homeland, the church parish and the community covered the same geographical area, and usually the people were all of the same faith. This meant that the parish and community were synonymous.

When the Lutheran Church was transplanted to American soil, it shared the same communities with many faiths. Instead of being *the* church in a community it was *one of* the churches. Because of this fact—and because Lutheran services were conducted in the German, Finnish, Norwegian, Danish, or Swedish language—there was a tendency to withdraw from community life and build the church at the expense of the community. The Lutheran Church failed to assume stewardship for community life.

Yet, the community is the social soil in which the congregation grows. You seldom find a thriving congregation in a dying community. Pastors have sensed this and there is a renewed interest in the Lutheran Church toward building the community.

That is all to the good, of course. It should always be remembered, however, that the church's interest must be what is distinctively the *church's* interest in the community—the spreading of the Gospel. The Gospel truth must be brought to bear upon the individual and upon the social group. That is the church's task.

It was a homogeneous group which founded the Washington Prairie Church—a group of Norwegian Lutheran farmers. Members of the congregation have not been content to remain “hyphenated Americans,” however. The church has been Americanized as the community became Americanized because the focus of concern has always been to bring the Gospel message to the entire community.

Those of non-Scandinavian backgrounds have been drawn naturally into the fellowship because the congregation has kept its sights firmly on its spiritual mission and has not made Norwegian tradition its central concern.

The *Christian Century* writer noted, in his study of the parish: “The church is not a recreation center. It is not a civic club. Not that it is unconcerned about the problems of its community. It is. But primarily Washington Prairie is the *church*.”<sup>1</sup>

Its strength is derived from such unspectacular elements as the “family pew,” a program for disciplined education for every age group, and the opening of the parish hall for meetings of community groups such as 4-H Clubs and Co-operatives.

Washington Prairie sets an example to other churches that witnessing is the church's main task. The church's Gospel must be urged upon people continuously. There is no other reason why the church as the church should be interested in the community. But for that reason it *must* be interested in the community.

### Let the Church Bear Witness

The church's first approach to people is always directed to the individual soul through the Gospel of Christ. The task of the church is the personal redemption of man, and his sanctification. This is and must always remain basic. The moment the church loses sight of this primary purpose, it has missed its God-given calling.

The church must present positively the central testimony concerning Jesus Christ, God's Son, as man's only Saviour.

The church's witness must be evident in the life of its own membership. The church, through the ministration of the Word and the Sacraments, affects the moral and ethical aspects of the lives of its members.

Every church member is a witness to the non-member and the unchurched, whether or not he wishes to be. The witness of the Christian must be vigorous and appealing, representative of the Lord of the Church whom he serves.

It is important that there be an attitude of understanding toward members of other churches in the same territory. Perhaps, the stronger church in the community fails at this point more than the weaker church because of its dominant position. We believe there can be co-operation in every area where neither doctrine nor life is compromised.

“The church is the one institution which is responsible for setting the moral tone of the community.”<sup>2</sup>

Christ's church should be the leaven in the community where it is located. Leaven permeates the whole loaf, and is not confined to one part of the mass. The Christian influence should be felt in the various community institutions.

In order to set the “moral tone” and serve as the “conscience of the community,” the church sometimes finds it necessary to protest evil, even as the Master used the whip to drive the money-changers from the Temple. God in His commandments protests against evil with strong “Thou shalt nots.”

A protest is always most effective when made by the members who as individuals or as families assert themselves in their Christian witness as opposed to all evil. Occasionally, it may be necessary for the congregation to challenge a specific evil in the community by concerted action.

For example, a congregation may join in a community protest against the sale of liquor to minors, gambling concessions at the county fair, or an extravagant display of obscene literature.

Before lodging a united protest, the local church must examine its position to make very sure that a clear-cut moral issue is involved, and not merely the political convictions or the traditions of its members. The Lutheran Church must be on guard against a legalistic approach to community ethics.

In its witness, the church should examine ethical assumptions of its people's activities in the community. A farm organization such as the Grange, Farm Bureau, Farmers' Union, or Co-operative may be commended by the church for practices which are virtuous. At another time, however, the same organization may need to be warned against policies which are unethical from the Christian point of view.

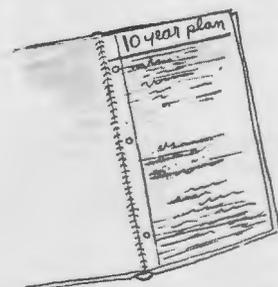
The church bears witness to the *truth*. No other has the key to spiritual living, nor its roots sunk in the soil of faith, nor the commendation of the eternal.

### The Rural Church Needs A Dynamic Program

If the church is weak or ineffective, it cannot hope to be of any consequence in the community. Each parish must have a long-range



program which is more than a weekly schedule of "preaching services" and organizational meetings.



It has been said, "To run a church without a schedule is like trying to run a train without a timetable." . . . Christian leaders and workers realize that the Spirit is not subject to seasons, nor the Eternal to a calendar of 365 days, but man lives in a time cycle and needs to take note of the hour.

The rural church needs to plan a year's program in advance. Five years is not too long, nor even ten. Possibly 50 years would be more practical. Longview parish planning is imperative in this generation of shifting population. The alert congregation will make its plans, taking into account the trend toward city life, the decrease in rural population, and the tendency for community life to center in the larger village or the county seat.

Allowance must be made for every type of parish and synodical background. There is no reason to presume that because a congregation is rural that it must take the same form as every other rural congregation, as if the ingredients could be put into a master plan and squeezed out like doughnuts, each exactly like all the others. The suggested program which follows is necessarily illustrative. Each congregation must develop its own program.

## WORSHIP

### *Worship services every Sunday!*

Until this primary goal has been reached, a parish cannot begin to have a dynamic program nor a strong church. This will require a more intensive ministry than under present arrangements. Most synodical groups are now aiming toward a pastor for every rural congregation.

Churchmen are also giving increased attention to the possibility of cooperation among the synods to avoid "manpower waste" because of needless intersynodical competition among small, struggling Lutheran congregations. Cutting out duplication would free pastors so that each parish might have its own resident pastor. It is important that a pastor lives with his people.

The goal of a worship service every Sunday must be given top priority. We have no right to rewrite the commandment to read, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy—every other Sunday."

### *The Worship Service must be Christ-centered!*

It may sound almost trite to remind members of the Lutheran Church of a fact which is so basic, but it is possible in the heat of a new fervor

for "community-mindedness" and "social consciousness" to forget that Christianity is much more than a system of ethics. A Lutheran service is incomplete without the confession of sins and the absolution, and a congregation's worship life is a flimsy one unless it is built on the Word of God and the Sacraments. Community awareness and social consciousness are fruits of fellowship with God, and are not the source of that love.

The church year offers a pattern which can be a blessing to those churches which use it as a guide. And, perhaps, nowhere is the seasonal emphasis so natural as in a rural parish, where weather is not only the topic for conversation but truly vital to the welfare of its parishioners.

"The Sunday worship service should bring to the worshippers a consciousness of the divine presence and nearness. It ought to be a spiritual mountain-top experience for all desiring a closer fellowship and walk with God."<sup>8</sup>

### *The Service Beautiful!*

There is a tendency to minimize the importance of beauty in the rural church, especially if the church is small. There are no hard and fast rules for the type of liturgy, altar appointments, or other decorative elements in the church building or its order of worship; but that fact should not be made an excuse for the neglect of simple beauty.

Sometimes the very smallness of the church can create a warmer, more personal atmosphere for worship, bringing a closer sense of communion than in more imposing sanctuaries. Even where a simple service is used, there are opportunities for making it attractive, reverent, and appealing. Going to church should be an enriching experience.

## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

### *The plans should include:*

1. Every child in Sunday School (or in the educational program found most suitable for the parish).
2. A parish education board.
3. Regular teachers' meetings.
4. Vacation Bible School every summer (except where adequate week-day instruction is provided).
5. "Released Time" education where the opportunity exists.
6. Adequate facilities for Christian training including classrooms, equipment, and supplies.
7. Two-year confirmation instruction by the pastor.



8. Bible study. Bible study should be included in the program of various organizations and not merely for the devotional period or opening prayer. Whether it is included in a worship service or in the church school setup, it must be a part of the Christian education program of every parish. Mid-week Bible study is reported to be on the increase in many rural areas. From these study groups many lay leaders are being recruited.

9. Vocational guidance for rural youth. Christian youth should be encouraged to consider service in a rural setting. All college students will not, and should not, return to serve their home communities; but the challenge of service in the rural areas should not be ignored by rural Christian youth. Church leaders can make sure that rural vocations are presented with as much challenge as are other vocations.

10. Educational materials selected with care. Books used should be doctrinally sound, attractively printed, up-to-date in approach, and oriented to rural use.

## EVANGELISM

The church must continue to emphasize the importance of bringing the Gospel into the lives of people. Both the intensive work in the parish and special preaching missions should be included in the Lutheran evangelism program.

Neighborhood missionaries are those active members who are organized to call on lax members or unchurched persons in the community, inviting them and encouraging them to seek and to serve Christ in His Church.

The church must seek to know well the community which it is to evangelize and serve: Provision must be made for survey and systematic inquiry. It is recommended that a congregation divide its area of responsibility into geographical sub-divisions of such size that a single family can know the people within it, report changes in residence or farm ownership, and invite the new arrivals to attend church.

Parish evangelism should be regarded as perennially important, and the activity should not be confined to brief energetic bursts of effort during special "crusades."

A farmer is usually reluctant to pay an evangelistic visit on a neighbor who has been on the next farm for 20 years. Showing a sudden concern for the neighbor's spiritual life after such a long friendship is apt to create an awkward situation. It is important that the church shows its interest in a family while it is still new in the community.

## YOUTH PROGRAM

Keep the youth *actively* interested in the church. Develop a team of good advisors who can offer mature leadership but remain youthful in

spirit. A church's counselor system can be an important factor in keeping youth activity alive. Leadership must be developed among the youth themselves. We need young men and women who are willing to work with the pastor within the framework of the established congregation.

Every youth program should include a recreation program, of course. Church athletic programs, dramatics, musical activities, picnics, hayrides, skating parties—all are legitimate activities in a church youth program.



But parties and play are only *one* aid to Christian growth. An imaginative youth program will consider *all* the requirements for a well-rounded Christian personality. Learning and service must also be included. Bible study, discussion sessions, the opportunity for artistic expression, work projects for the church and the community—these will add richness to youth's experience.

Youth should also be reminded of the Christian attitude toward vocation. It is through youth activities that many young people experience a "call" into the holy ministry, the various missions of the church, or the diaconate. But the Lutheran Church teaches that any useful work has a sacramental quality if it is done in a spirit of love, to the Glory of God. A Christian carpenter's mission can be just as sacred as the work of a Christian pastor.

## STEWARDSHIP

Use of the time, talents, and possessions which belong to God must be guided in the rural church as well as in the city church. In some ways problems in rural stewardship are unique and cannot be solved by using the urban formulae.

Systematic stewardship of finances has lagged in many rural churches. Special factors in rural life which have made the situation difficult are the hesitancy of rural people to try new methods and the unpredictability of farm income.

The goal of the rural church must be a good financial program with a planned budget. This presupposes a local program with all the members participating; it assumes that there will be adequate support for all synod-sponsored benevolences, plus support for special projects after local and synodical goals have been reached. This planned budget means that the parish church must receive pledges indicating how much money may be expected every month, so that the bills may be paid.

Often a system of pledges does not set well with the conservative farmer who says, "If the old system was good enough for grandfather who built this church, it should be good enough for us."

Agricultural income has always varied with the weather, the markets,

and other unpredictable factors. Thus, the farmer has never enjoyed the same financial stability as has his city cousin who works for a specified wage or salary. A farmer would like to give to the church at the end of the year, when he is certain of his year's income, but the church's bills must be paid all during the year.

Tithing—setting aside one-tenth of the family's income for the church—has proved a spiritual blessing to many city-dwellers. It becomes legalistic when the 10% figure is arbitrarily prescribed as the ideal gift for every member in every situation, but the concept has proved to be a good guide to encourage proportionate giving. A true steward is, of course, also careful to use the other nine-tenths of his income to the glory of God.

Tithing, however, can be geared to the unpredictable agricultural income only with difficulty. The rural pastor who encourages tithing will do well to have a good understanding of rural economics and financing as it applies to mechanized agriculture. This will aid him in giving practical advice for computing the tithe.

Some rural churches are seeking other methods for proportionate giving which fit more naturally into the rural scene.

The most successful plan devised thus far is the "Lord's Acre" idea, now being used by many rural churches of a number of denominations. At the beginning of each year, church members sign pledges that they will conduct farm projects, with the income from the projects to be given to the church.

Each member may set aside a small field of flax, oats, corn, or potatoes. A woman in the household may give the church all the money from "Sunday eggs." One pig or one cow or a certain number of chickens may be chosen for the project.

It is suggested that the Lord's Acre money be used for special needs in the church rather than for the routine expenses of the congregation and the synod.

Planning should begin early, with a committee appointed to visit each home and distribute record cards on which to list the projects undertaken by the family. Cards may be returned to the church at a spring "Dedication Day."

A definite goal should be selected by the congregation for each season's money—for example, the redecorating of the church or the sponsorship of a missionary may be financed with Lord's Acre earnings.

Readable signs should be erected to mark the chosen fields. A Lord's Acre Day in the fall may climax the effort, with all the gifts brought to the altar at a special service.



Other projects besides the Lord's Acre idea have been tried with success. An Augustana Lutheran congregation in Kansas seeds a field cooperatively and harvests it cooperatively. Other rural churches have a Thanksgiving Festival to which the farmers bring gifts in kind. As they bring the actual fruits of their own labors, they have a rich sense of association with the land which belongs to God.

In the country, the work rhythms of the various seasons must be recognized by the pastor so that the members may be led most effectively to give of their time to God's Kingdom. A farmer who, during the busy planting or harvesting season, may have little time to devote to church work may, during the other months, welcome an opportunity to help with special projects. During these seasons, repairs may be made on the building, trees planted in the cemetery, or paint jobs completed.

The women, too, will wish to spend the less busy seasons in sewing choir robes, embroidering altar paraments, or similar projects.

In the city *and* in the country, stewardship means giving of the entire self to God.

## THE RURAL FAMILY

Just as there are differences in financial affairs between city and country, there are also some traits of family living which are distinctive in the rural setting. As Sociologists Kolb and Brunner point out in *A Study of Rural Society*—"the farm family is the working unit as well as the living unit . . . It lives in the midst of its occupation."<sup>4</sup>

The close association which is brought about by this situation gives an opportunity for richer family relationships, but it may also be the cause of greater family friction. To a certain extent this family intimacy is lost as the rural places become "urbanized"—but it is still a very real part of the picture.

Where members of a family work and live and eat together, their interests and efforts are shared as a group. The increase in the number of "Father and Son" agreements on land ownership indicates that the patriarchal system of land control is giving way to a more democratic setup.

A rural church can foster good family relationships by making provision in its program for family activities.

*The family pew* is still a good idea. Families should be encouraged to attend church as a worship unit.

*The family altar* should be a "natural" in a family which enjoys so many activities together, but the rushed tempo in which our generation lives has infected country life as well as city life. The leaders of the church should convince rural



families that time spent in joint devotion is time well spent.

*Family night* in one of its variety of forms should have a place in parish planning. Activities should be planned definitely for every age group in the family—the smaller children in the nursery, the elementary children in the Lutheran Children of the Reformation (or a similar group), the high school young people in the Luther League, and the adults together in a Bible study directed by the pastor or studying in separate groups led by officers of the Brotherhood or the Ladies Aid.

At a given time all may gather for a common lunch period. Following lunch there should be recreation for all ages together. Hymn singing, religious movies, and many games can be enjoyed by a group made up of all age levels.

*Appreciation for farm living* is important so that farm families will approach their daily tasks with a sense of dignity. Church leaders will do well to point out some genuine advantages in rural living and to instill in church members a concern for the land. Help may also be given in encouraging father and son ownership agreements, by which the family farmstead may be passed on from one generation to the next.

### Integrating the Program Into the Community

“The presence of church buildings in a rural area . . . has not sufficed to prevent the disintegration of home life, the increase of delinquency, and the growing secularization of life, for which religion has no relevancy.”<sup>5</sup>

These danger signals on the rural scene should serve as a warning to country churches that their work with rural people should be reflected in the everyday lives of the members, in their conduct in the community.

“A social institution with a mandate covering the whole of life is the only one capable of playing the role of *the reconciling agent*. Only the church has this mandate.”<sup>6</sup>

How better could it be stated—this correlating, integrating feature of the church to the community—than to call the church the “reconciling agent”?

If we could stand on some American Mt. Nebo and look across rural America with its amber fields of waving grain, we would first see villages and towns; then, scanning more carefully, communities of homes; then, the roads tying the picture together. Our first thought would be that all roads lead to town; but on further contemplation, we conclude that all roads lead to homes. The home is the center of life in rural America.

The church, too, breaks down into its working unit, the local congregation; but the most basic unit of the congregation is the family. This, then, is our focal point—*the rural family*. This is the point of integration and

correlation. It is not found in the organization, in the town hall, in the schoolhouse, nor even in the church. It is centered in the home.

Morris S. Greth writes in *The Lutheran Quarterly*: “It (the family) is the social unit out of which communities are built.

“Without Christian families there can be no Christian community.”<sup>7</sup>

The same writer observes that to take a family out of its community is a distortion, even as it is a distortion to take a text of Scripture from its context or setting. He points out that without the family the church has no way of putting her message into the community stream.

Thus, we sense our program—we must work with the natural unit of both church and community, the family. The church, instead of attempting to become a little Farm Bureau, another Grange, or a Farmers Union local, must reach through by furnishing good leaders and members for these organizations, members who are motivated by Christian principles.

This also means that we are interested in all of the organizations that build family life. Rural Lutherans should get behind the organizations which aid the development of youth—such groups as the 4-H Clubs, Future Farmers of America, and Future Homemakers of America.

There are certain areas of interest in which the local church as an institution serves the community in which it is located. The question is sometimes asked—Should the church serve the community? Is that not belittling the dignity of the church?

Think of Jesus in the presence of crowds, looking out on fields white unto harvest, on sheep without a shepherd, on thousands of hungry people—a mixed group with mixed motives, no doubt, but He loved and served them all.

“It behooves the church to serve the community if the church would be great.”<sup>8</sup>

How can the church relate itself to the community? More specifically, how can the congregation share its virtues with the community through its individual members and families?

There are at least four areas in which the church can relate itself directly with the community.

### EDUCATION

The rural congregation should be concerned about the grade school and high school education in its community. Higher education is also



important to the rural church, but in most cases the college is not an educational agency within the rural community. The average rural church is not concerned with a parochial school system, so this setup will not be considered here.



One possible source of conflict between the local church and the local school is the appeal for *time*. The church, depending on wholly voluntary participation, finds it difficult to meet the competition of school athletics, dramatics, music, and other extra-curricular activities. These are supposedly on a voluntary basis, but practically speaking, are not so.

If a student chooses to spend his time on any activity, including church work, which conflicts with a school activity, he is subjected to powerful pressures. He is dropped from the athletic team, left behind on the band's next tour, or threatened with other forms of penalty.

If the church and the school could only agree—These are our children; we want to do the best we can for them, and we want to do it together.

Neither the local church nor the public school is equipped to tackle the job of education alone. The institution which teaches a child to read or write, to add and subtract, and the institution which teaches him about the Divine Power which moves the Universe must work together in building lives.

There may be school administrators, jealous of their authority, who leave no room for other community activities; but the majority of educators will recognize the importance of religious training and will willingly cooperate if approached in a spirit of good will.

There are communities in which the pastors and school administrators meet at the beginning of each school year to discuss scheduling problems. Certain nights are set aside as "church nights," during which all the community's churches schedule their choir rehearsals and other activities involving students or teachers.

Potentially one of the most effective integrating forces in any community is the Parent-Teachers Associations. However, experience reveals that in too many communities the P.T.A. has not measured up to what it might become.

Too often P.T.A. groups have become "mothers' clubs," where the men have felt unwanted. In other instances the leadership has been dominated by the school, and the P.T.A. has been unable to come to grips with the real issues.

A church should educate its members to civic responsibility, producing both men and women who will join P.T.A. groups and exert genuine Christian leadership. Where Christian citizens live in a vital relationship to their public schools, they can be a strong influence for good in the community.

## RECREATION

In a day of high-powered cars, speed on the highways, and drinking in roadhouses and taverns, the recreational patterns of young people constitute a "life and death" problem. In many cases law enforcement agencies cannot be counted on to police properly the roadhouses and highways. Even where the police do a good job, however, this is merely the negative part of the solution. Danger to life and morals serves as a potent stimulus for community action on recreation, but recreation in itself is necessary to community health and happiness.



The question arises: Shall the church launch and sponsor a program of its own, or shall it join a community program? Ideally, the answer would be *both*. A strong rural church recognizes the human desire for fun and makes provision for it in its regular program. The Luther League, Ladies Aid, Brotherhood, and children's clubs, all have recreational activities. Some parish programs are even more ambitious, providing special recreational facilities in a parish house or church gymnasium for members and others in the community. A congregation should be wary, however, lest it lose its identity as a divine institution in becoming a "recreation center."

Community-wide recreation efforts have come into vogue during the past few years and have been tried with varying degrees of success. Church members should join efforts toward setting up a community program which will benefit the lives of the people, and should be willing to work to make it the right sort of program.

Where citizens have merely appropriated money for a youth center and expected the project to run itself without supervision, the program has met with failure. The center becomes just another "hang-out" like the corner drugstore or lunch shop, where the youngsters go to "pass their time." A planned program is essential. An elaborate building is not essential, but planned activities are.

The church must insist that it be heard when the program is being outlined. When a worthwhile project is proposed, the church should be the first to get behind it. For example, if the need is for a lighted ball diamond, the church could well offer the help of its members, men with tractors, shovels, and enthusiasm to level earth and build seats and equipment. The church should form teams to enter the league; and organizations from the church might serve refreshments.

In every way possible let the church be there "first with the most." Then it will not be necessary to force its way in later, nor to stand aloof and criticize. If church members are in on the beginning of the program, they will have a hand in controlling policy.

## HEALTH

Health is so vital to the welfare of the whole person that a church must never shut community health programs out of its circle of concern.

At a Lutheran conference on "The Rural Congregation and Community Health" held in Dubuque, Iowa, in 1952, that circle of concern was expressed:

"The local Lutheran congregation which is anxious to fulfill its responsibilities for the health of everyone in the community endeavors to do so through democratic processes. Furthermore, these basic processes best serve the interests and concerns of people.

"The church asserts her faith that what is in the heart of man determines his attitudes. Thus, in terms of your community's health, the attitudes of the people are a fundamental factor in determining the level of health which they can achieve.

"The church helps to develop attitudes. The Christian outlook on life undergirds a true concern for health and is, in fact, its source. As Christians we view man's life in totality in its relationship to God and to other men. Man is dependent on God for life and for health since God is its giver and source. We, as children of God and redeemed by Him, are mutually responsible for each other.

"The Christian congregation which sees its life in this framework of vertical and horizontal relationships possesses attitudes basic to good health. Other attitudes specifically concerned with health will issue from it. A congregation may develop a desire to raise the level of health in the community.

"*Evangelism is your primary tool.* Through evangelism you and your congregation share Christ with others. As people learn to know God, as revealed in Christ Jesus, they take a Christian attitude toward the needs of their fellow men and become responsible people in their community."<sup>9</sup>

The congregation should furnish leaders in community health endeavors, not to make them "congregational" but to keep them Christian. Church members should serve on committees planning new hospitals or clinics and should join hospital auxiliaries which perform special services at community hospitals. A church in the country can offer its facilities for committee meetings, special immunization clinics, mass X-ray projects, brucellosis demonstrations, and the like.

Youth in the church may be encouraged to enter professions which contribute directly to community health, such professions as nursing, medicine, or pharmacy.

## ECONOMICS

Man does not live by bread alone, but man needs bread to live. Life has an economic side to it. The economic base for the community is

important and very essential. Anything that is done to improve the economic base of the community makes possible better community institutions. Economically impoverished communities generally mean poorly-equipped schools, lack of medical facilities, and neglected churches.

The Christian people of a community need to be motivated to be good stewards of their talents and time. They need to be taught that thrift is a Christian virtue. Young people need to be encouraged to acquire capital so that they can become a part of the stable element in tomorrow's community—not money for the sake of money. The acquiring of capital as a means to the end of being of greater service to the community is noble. It makes for good healthy community life.

The rural community is in need of good, successful farmers and good, successful businessmen. Church members should be challenged to become successful farmers and businessmen. The church should also have a proper concern for their success. The community that is blessed with sound businesses and good farms will be able to support the professional men whose services are essential to the community.

*Soil conservation is not the task of the church, but should be a major concern of the church in the community.*

Association with the land takes us directly to God and His Creation. The soil points us to God as the sustainer of the universe and the provider for all of the life in it. Christians need only begin with Genesis to acknowledge God as the owner and man as the trustee. Thus, *soil conservation* becomes a matter of Christian stewardship.

The conservation of natural resources is always an economic gain in long-range planning. It is basic to our economy; it is necessary to life; it is important for the support of the church, particularly, the rural church. The land base of a rural congregation is important in order that that congregation may thrive and carry on the program of Kingdom extension elsewhere in the world.

Soil is a godly heritage and needs to be treated as such. It is Christian to "keep it." The church can easily relate itself to this community program through the family because the rural family needs to sense its stewardship program:

. . . Responsibility to God as Creator and owner who has entrusted His creation to man.

. . . Responsibility to the world in need of food. The farmer controls the food supply. He is God's helper in supplying food and fibre for human need.

. . . Responsibility to one's neighbor. Unfaithfulness with natural resources may well destroy a neighbor's property and well-being.

. . . Love for one's children and future generations. Whether they

will live on better land or on depleted soil depends upon present soil practices.

The good farmer will strive to prove himself a workman that "needeth not to be ashamed." He will gladly seek the services of soil technicians to improve his farming practices. He will cooperate with soil conservation districts, which are a democratic approach to conserve the nation's basic resources of soil and water.

*Farm cooperatives* are a part of the economic life of the rural community. There is need for understanding their place in rural economy. They have a definite contribution to make to the economic stability of rural life. They are called into being to be of service to members and to the entire community. They must never lose sight of this objective. Members must have a higher motive than financial gain. Nor should their motive ever be to supplant private business.

The church ministers to all people and does not show any favoritism. It teaches all to be fair and honest in their business dealings and constantly to strive to serve the best interests of fellow men. All men are called by God to help meet the needs of their neighbor. The method of business is not important so long as the business contributes to human welfare and strengthens the economic life of the community.

## The Community Council

We have seen the needs and pointed to some of the aims and goals of the church in the rural community. There is an element of idealism in this outline, but we must aim at the stars in order to get over the tree-tops. More and more the leaders in a community sense the need for closer cooperation in a total relationship, but they grope for means and methods.

There seem to be no handles—each group goes its own way, planning its own program with no regard for a larger interest, omitting vital factors in some instances and duplicating efforts in others. They seem to have no common meeting ground.

A coordinating agency for all of these is needed, and we suggest the Community Council. The Community Council is not an organization that comes to an area ready-made with a model constitution and all of the bylaws ready for adoption. It isn't as easy as that. It grows out of the community in which it is to be planted, and functions as a service in and for that specific area.

In general, a Community Council comes because there are leaders with vision who have been impressed with certain needs and are convinced that there are solutions possible. It finds its roots and grows only when the public becomes informed of the need and wishes to cooperate.



Because Community Councils are few and are relatively new, we present a few simple ideas that have been garnered from communities which have used them effectively and from literature on the subject.

### *How to begin—*

There would probably be thousands of Community Councils in America if people knew where and how to begin. Even among Americans with a reputation for boldness there is a reluctance to come out front with a new idea for community improvement. The leader with vision hesitates because he may be classified as a visionary. He wonders if there will be any response; and if there is, he will almost certainly be held responsible for the results.

### *Who, then, shall begin?*

Someone in the church will have to be the "spark plug" if no one else is. Sometimes the pastor hesitates because of the uncertainty of his influence with the other institutions in the community or because he may be accused of ulterior motives in favor of his own congregation.

It may be better that one of his laymen, some person in a position of trust, should make the initial move. The pastor might propose it to the county agent, the vocational agriculture instructor, or some other natural community leader.

A few men and women may need to get together informally in order to form a mutual understanding and a sense of direction before calling together a larger group. These few will, perhaps, decide to invite a representative from each community-minded organization or institution to participate.

Those who have tried the plan report that there is very little difficulty in getting representation from the organized community groups, but that real effort has to be made in order to get representation from the unorganized elements in a community.

For example, youth above the 4-H age are often overlooked, and participation by that age group is vital to the community's welfare. Some of the poorer people and transient tenants who are unlikely to join formal organizations are also frequently forgotten. A successful Community Council must be truly *representative* of every element in the community.

### *Getting under way—*

It is essential that there be some focal point or the attempt will fail for lack of interest. "Just another organization" is bound to fail. Every community needs a grave-plot for its dead organizations—organizations formed with worthy motives but lacking a clearly defined purpose. A time when some special problem faces a community is the perfect time to set up a Community Council.

Somewhere along the line there must be mass meetings in order to

inform the public and enlist their support. They must have voice and vote, and must never be treated as onlookers. It is *their* Council.

Possibly one of the most important, yet the simplest, of all projects is the making of a community calendar. This simple process of setting dates and clearing time for meetings involves the entire community. This is especially true in a rural community, where all the people are interested in every event in the area.

Much of the friction between groups results from the bid for time. Smoother relationships are the result of a carefully-planned calendar. The whole discussion will give to each group a greater appreciation for the work of the others.

From the viewpoint of the church this is highly important, and citizens of the community usually wish to give the churches ample time for their activities. In a rural community the church is generally held in high regard, and community members are almost always church members themselves. With the various agencies working together, a satisfactory schedule can be arranged.

The church has an opportunity to bear witness for the truth it professes in the simple request for a Christian observance of Sunday, for an understanding with the school on the church's part in educating the community's children, and for adequate time in the community schedule for church activities.

There is also a need for parents of the community to agree on liberties to be granted teenagers. Through the Community Council, parents may adopt uniform practices on such things as the use of the family car, the number of nights out each week, and the time for coming in at night.

To carry on permanent interests certain committees will be appointed as they are needed. Those experienced in Community Council work warn against the creation of too many committees, making the organization top-heavy and unwieldy.

It is not the purpose of this pamphlet to discuss the details of organization or techniques for running a Community Council. It recommends the Community Council as having possibilities as a practical working unit if it can be properly formed and administered.

The church will have to be there right from the beginning to influence, if not to lead, in the formation of the Council; because it is the church's community in a possessive sense, and the congregation is concerned with the total area where it lives and functions.

## Conclusions

### To Sum Up:

1. The family is the focal point in the rural community, and thus

becomes the unit of integration into the life of that community, rather than the school, the church, or another organization.

2. The congregation must have a strong program of its own in order to bear witness to the community.

3. The church is concerned about the total welfare of man, and consequently of the whole community.

4. Together we must see the inter-relationship between the important units of society: the individual, the family, community institutions, the neighborhood, and the community.

5. The Community Council is presented as one of the best social techniques for integrating community life.

The church has to do with all avenues of life—its back streets and alleys, country roads and lanes, wherever our people live. The church must always lead in its one great program of bringing the Gospel to all mankind and express its concern for the total needs of man. The church must do this *in* the community where it lives; it must *permeate* the community with Christian love; and it must serve all the people within its area of responsibility.

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