

The Standing Commission on The Church in Small Communities

MEMBERSHIP

The Rt. Rev. John H. Smith (West Virginia) *1997, Chair*
The Rt. Rev. John S. Thornton (Idaho) *1997*
The Rt. Rev. Martin G. Townsend (Easton) *2000*
The Rev. Phebe L. Coe (Maryland) *1997*
The Rev. Carolyn Keil (Montana) *2000*
The Rev. David Mihalyi (Central New York) *1997*
Mrs. Roberta Fairfield (New Hampshire) *2000*
Mr. Harry Denman (Kansas) *1997, Executive Council Liaison*
Mr. John Jackson (Michigan) *1997, Vice Chair*
Mrs. Blanche Powless (Fond du Lac) *1997*
Mr. Lee Davis Thames (Mississippi) *2000*
Mr. Edward Thielen (Alaska) *2000*
The Rev. Allen Brown *1996, ECC Staff Liaison*

SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK

Introduction

The small churches of the Episcopal Church are on the cutting edge of mission. After visiting four dioceses, we are excited at the variety of creative ways in which ministry and mission is being expressed in small communities. In this Decade of Evangelism the relational quality of small church ministry has proven to be a resource for the church in proclaiming the Gospel.

Summary

The Commission met four times during the triennium. We met in the dioceses of Northwest Texas, Idaho, Mississippi, and Nevada. The ministries we experienced in each of these dioceses were adapted to their local situation. No one model for mission and ministry is equally appropriate for all situations. One common thread we affirm in what we have seen and experienced is the collaborative quality of ministry among congregations, among clergy and laity, within the diocese. Collaboration and coordination of gifts and talents is central to the church's mission in small communities.

We continued our policy of meeting in dioceses with large numbers of small congregations and churches in small communities, and where dioceses are involved in some creative forms of ministry in these settings. We visited small congregations to learn first-hand the issues facing these congregations and the innovative approaches for ministry developing in these congregations. We have seen the necessity for strong diocesan leadership and involvement which empowers local imagination and effectiveness. We noted where collaborative ministry has taken hold and demonstrated the ability to learn from mistakes and to build on those for mission. We have been excited about the innovative use of local clergy for mission. Many of the congregations where

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local canon clergy are exercising sacramental and diaconal leadership are thriving as communities of faith. In keeping with our understanding that no one strategy is equally appropriate in all situations, we observed that new models for ministry were most vital where their development allowed for a variety of models, including the more traditional patterns. In every case the focus on mission is at the heart of these cutting edges for mission. Congregations are vital and mission-oriented when they share leadership and recover the centrality of the Baptismal Covenant.

The Chair of the Commission and the Officer for Rural and Small Community Ministries attended the Transtasmanian Conference on Small, Rural Church Ministry sponsored by the Uniting Church of Australia in Australia. Conference topics included: use of cluster ministry; use of non-stipend ministry; focus on mission and justice; excitement about total ministry in New Zealand; and frustration with the traditional approaches to ministry in a changing world.

The conference affirmed the experiences and insights of this commission.

Kansas City

In June, 1996, the chairs of organizations involved with the Standing Commission met in Kansas City, Missouri, in an attempt to better coordinate the church's work in small communities. Participants included representatives from the Rural Workers Fellowship, Episcopal Appalachian Ministries, Synagogy, Episcopal Migrant Network, New Directions Ministries, Episcopal Health Ministries Network, The Living Stones, Province V and VII Small Church networks, and the Congregational Ministries Cluster from the Church Center. Coalition 14 provided input to the meeting by phone due to another commitment.

The gathering allowed those present to outline their organizations' goals and visions as well as to allow all to see where duplication was occurring. Several items of concern emerged: (1) the immediate filling of the staff officer's position upon his retirement; (2) the continuation of funding for CORA, and (3) the need to keep connection between the rural/small church ministry east and west of the Mississippi. The latter emphasized the continuing need for networking. Other items of interest included the concern that the Roanridge Trust was not placed in the national operating budget, and that *Selected Sermons* should be available six to eight weeks in advance and prepared by persons involved in small church ministry. The sharing of resources and long-distance learning opportunities for laity and clergy were topics of concern to be addressed at the next gathering.

The Commission affirmed the ministry of the laity and ordained through New Directions, Berea and Synagogy. We applaud and encourage, on behalf of the church, the experimental and creative ministries we experienced in our visits to congregations and dioceses. We note that theological education and formation for mission is being accomplished in the diocesan setting. We hope that seminaries will be innovative in their own education and formation of the church's emerging leadership, both lay and ordained, for small church ministry and mission.

We note that in new models for ministry individuals are recruited for particular responsibilities within and by their faith community. This process of recruitment for ministry is in marked contrast to the practice of "self-identification" for ordained ministry as the church has known it in

recent years. We hope that dioceses will increasingly see the value of recruitment rooted in community discernment for ministry development.

The Diocese of Nevada demonstrates a clear focus on the shared ministry of the laity and the ordained. Development of shared ministry takes time, often two to four generations. One cannot “rush the Spirit.” Nevada, among the dioceses visited, is an example in which development of new forms for ministry has been in process for over twenty years. The West Virginia experiment, using cluster ministry and ministry teams of Local Canon Clergy, lay people and seminary educated clergy, has identified the nature of this being a process of responding to the movement of the Spirit. Though each began from a different place, based on their local settings, they have come to very common understandings of shared ministry and leadership. With the clear goal of developing the sacramental life of its congregations, the Diocese of Idaho has developed a distinct discipline for the formation of local clergy. From our visits the Commission recognizes that it is essential for local canon clergy to have oversight, support, Episcopal direction, and mutual encouragement from a team in order to remain effective for mission. Our visit to the Diocese of Mississippi provided an opportunity, by invitation, to encourage the development of new expressions of ministry in small communities. From all of the creative work we have observed, we are increasingly convinced of the truth of Bishop Wesley Frensdorff’s vision that the church be “not a community gathered around the ministry, but a ministering community.”

The Commission’s sub-committee to implement the General Convention’s resolution on the year of the small church developed ways in which to affirm small church ministry. We identified resources for small church development and advocated for diocesan workshops and festivals celebrating small church life.

We are grateful to the *Anglican Theological Review* special edition in the fall of 1996, which focuses on rural and small church ministry. We also applaud the Rural Worker’s Fellowship for its publication of *Visitation Fulfilling and update of Town and Country Ministry in the Episcopal Church*.

Through news stories, posters, brochures and a General Convention video production, we have sustained a theme: We believe that small church ministry is on “the cutting edge” of restoring “all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” [BCP 855]

The Commission engaged in a cooperative effort with the Standing Commission on Church Music to develop appropriate music for use in small congregations. We are grateful to the Standing Commission on Church Music and those congregations who participated in the experiment. The pilot project proved not useful, in that small congregations are already discovering music that meets their liturgical and geographical needs. We commend to the small church the “Simplified Accompaniments” published by the Church Hymnal Corporation.

We sadly confess the church’s continuing inability to effectively confront the sin of racism. That not withstanding, we celebrate and affirm the faithful ministries carried on with and by people of diverse ethnic backgrounds in small communities throughout the church.

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Episcopal Migrant Ministry Committee

The Episcopal Migrant Ministry Committee met during the triennium in the dioceses of Eastern Oregon, North Carolina, West Texas, San Diego, and New York. This is a continuation of the committee's policy of meeting in dioceses where there is a substantial opportunity for ministry with migrants. The Rev. Christopher David has provided the impetus behind the growth and networking of the organization with the assistance of the Rt. Rev. William Folwell. Bishop Folwell and the Rev. Tim Hoyt has been involved in the network development and the statewide coordinated effort of the three North Carolina dioceses resulting in the North Carolina Farmworker Ministry, an ecumenical organization that could well serve as a model for other dioceses and states.

National Episcopal Health Ministries

During the triennium it became especially apparent in the small community that a need existed for a coordinated health ministry effort that would provide resources and networking for the local congregation. In July, 1996, such a group came into existence at Loyola University (Chicago) and, under the leadership of Deacon Jean Denton, are in the process of developing a provincial network as well as publishing a booklet on "Health Ministry in the Local Congregation."

FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE 1995-97 TRIENNIUM

	1995	1996	1997	Total
<i>Income</i>				
Budget	\$18,333	\$23,390	\$18,333	\$60,056
<i>Expenses</i>				
Meetings	\$18,592	\$16,242		\$34,834
Subcommittee/Networking	8,588	7,222	5,000	20,810
Projects			5,000	5,000
Reporting			1,700	1,700
Administrative		378	300	678
<i>Total</i>	<u>\$27,180</u>	<u>\$23,842</u>	<u>\$12,000</u>	<u>\$63,022</u>

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE COMING TRIENNIUM

Goal I: Advocate creative church policies which support and encourage:

- A. the baptized, lay and ordained, in their ministries in small communities;
- B. congregations in the development of models of ministry grounded in the partnership of lay and ordained persons;
- C. dioceses in the recruitment and nurture of persons for ministry in small communities;
- D. seminaries to educate and train persons for ministry in small communities;
- E. the General Convention, in any organization of the church's structure, to recognize that over three-fourths of the congregations in this church are located in small communities and to place a high priority on supporting these congregations in mission and ministry.

Objectives:

1. identify and publicize creative models for ministry in small communities;
2. develop various options leading to ordination; and
3. affirm and publicize existing resources, such as New Directions Ministries, Livingston, "Tiny Bishops, Inc." for strengthening small church ministries.

Goal II: Recognize and encourage the work of the National Migrant Ministry Committee.

Objectives:

1. commit to a Migrant Ministry which is effective in certain small churches; and
2. meet with the Migrant Ministry Committee, during the next triennium, in a diocese in which small churches are actively involved in migrant ministries.

Goal III: Commit to overcoming the sin of racism in all our work.

Objectives:

1. Jesus Christ is made known to us through scripture, the Sacraments and the lives of the baptized; and
2. congregations exist to continue the Word of Jesus Christ.

Other Recommendations

We are represented on the Council for the Development of Ministry and worked with the Standing Commission on Church Music. Future collaboration with the Standing Commissions on the Church in Metropolitan Areas, Health, and Racism is essential.

We recommend that a national conference on small church ministry, sponsored by the Standing Commission, be held during the next triennium for the purpose of sharing experiences and resources for mission in small congregations. This conference needs to be ecumenical.

We recommend that this Standing Commission publish during the next triennium on effective models of shared ministry across the country.

We call for the General Convention to develop an annual parochial report which meets the needs of the church but which is simplified, concise, and provides flexibility for reporting by new forms of ministry.

BUDGET APPROPRIATION

	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Income</i>				
Budget	\$23,333	\$18,333	\$18,333	\$59,999
<i>Expenses</i>				
Meetings	\$17,033	\$13,533	\$13,333	\$43,899
Subcommittee/Networking	1,000	4,500	3,000	8,500
Task Force: Small Church Year	5,000			5,000
Administrative	300	300	2,000	2,600
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<i>Total</i>	\$23,333	\$18,333	\$18,333	\$59,999

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RESOLUTIONS

Resolution A125 Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities Budget Appropriation

1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the sum of \$59,999 be appropriated for the
2 work of the Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities for the 1998-2000 budget
3 years.

Resolution A126 Amend Canon III.9.1: On Calling Local Priests and Deacons

1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That Title III, Canon 9 (of the Ordination of Local
2 Priests and Deacons) be amended as follows:
3 Section 1(a). With regard to Dioceses with Congregations ~~or missionary opportunities in~~
4 ~~communities which are small, isolated, remote, or distinct in respect of ethnic composition,~~
5 ~~language, or culture~~ and which cannot be provided sufficiently with the sacraments and pastoral
6 ministrations of the Church through Clergy ordained under the provisions of Canon III.7, it shall
7 be permissible for the Bishop, with the advice and consent of the Standing Committee, or the
8 equivalent body in special jurisdictions, ~~and with the prior approval in principle of the House of~~
9 ~~Bishops of the Province~~, to establish procedures by which persons may be called by their
10 Congregations and the Bishop with the Standing Committee, to be ordained local Priests and
11 Deacons and licensed to serve the Congregations or communities out of which they were called.
12 Section 1(b). and following would remain unchanged.

Resolution A127 Continue Office of Rural/Small Community Ministries

1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the position of National Officer for
2 Rural/Small Community Ministries be filled as soon as practicable, and be it further
3 *Resolved*, That the funding for the field position for this office be continued and that this position
4 be staffed as soon as possible.

Resolution A128 Overcoming Racism

1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the Standing Commission on the Church in
2 Small Communities and the Church in Metropolitan Areas and the JPIC Anti-Racism Working
3 Group collaborate to achieve their mutual goal of overcoming racism in the Church and in society.

Resolution A129 Outreach to Migrant Workers

1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the 72nd General Convention charge the
2 dioceses and provinces of the Church with greater responsibility for sustaining and developing
3 ministries of advocacy and outreach among migrant and seasonal farm workers, especially in the
4 areas of health, education, family integrity, economic justice, the fight against "scapegoating," and
5 religious community building.

Explanation

Prior calls to action by the General Convention in 1985 (A137s), 1991 (Mind of the House of Bishops), and 1994 (D132s), have received a muted and uneven response from the church.

Migrant workers, "legal or not, and employed in agriculture or elsewhere, have been subject to abuse and exploitation even as they fulfill productive roles in the economy. This resolution does

not address the question of illegal immigration or the hypocrisy of the widespread hiring of undocumented workers, but rather the basic issues of justice and decency for the most powerless.

Recent documentation, such as the General Accounting Office report *Hired Farmworkers: Health and Well being at Risk*; the *Report to the Commission on Agricultural Workers* (both in 1992); the Helsinki Accords briefing paper *Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*; and the report of the Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality *HIV/AIDS: A Growing Crisis Among Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Families* (both in 1993) indicate that health, sanitation, inadequate housing, pesticide exposure and child labor, remain serious problems. Continued observation by advocacy groups and journalists indicate that existing regulations for the protection of farmworkers are often more honored in the breach than in enforcement.

Agribusiness groups have aggressively pushed for an increase in the use of temporary foreign labor through the H2A program to undercut attempts at empowerment and increased earning capability by resident farmworkers through unionization and collective bargaining. Proposals for a “sub-minimum” starter wage, arguably useful in other contexts, could be misused to employ youngsters in starter jobs with every new crop and depress the wages of older farmworkers.

The growth of the “single male” sector of the migrant worker population, spurred by poor housing and the refusal of many growers to permit families, is causing widespread separations and the breakdown of family life. In a cruel irony, legally resident farmworkers earn so little they are often not in a position to sponsor their own families for immigration.

Prejudice against, and misrepresentation of the Latino community are marks of society’s cultural and ethnic insensitivity. Indifferent to Native American and African American seasonal workers continues as a national tradition. The Gospel mandate surely calls for a prophetic voice to be raised on behalf of those who harvest the food for society’s common table.

This resolution is offered in the recognition that most growers, especially smaller family farmers, are decent and conscientious people who are facing intense competition, notable from the largest employers of migrant labor. It is also offered in repentance for this society’s overriding demand for cheap and plentiful food, even at the cost of great injustice.