

The Standing Commission on The Church in Small Communities

MEMBERSHIP

The Rt. Rev. William H. Wolfrum, *Chair*, Denver, Colorado (1988)
The Rt. Rev. Harold Hopkins, Jr., Fargo, North Dakota (1991)
The Rt. Rev. Donald Davis, Erie, Pennsylvania (1988), resigned, replaced by the
Rt. Rev. B. Sidney Sanders, Kinston, North Carolina
The Ven. Ben E. Helmer, *Secretary*, McPherson, Kansas (1991)
The Rev. Anna Frank, Fairbanks, Alaska (1991)
The Rev. Frederick F. Johnson, Spring Valley, New York (1988)
Mrs. Vivian Winter Chaser, Tempe, Arizona (1988), resigned
Mrs. Veronica Flowers, La Ceiba, Honduras (1988)
Mr. Clarence Pierce, *Vice Chair*, Jackson, Mississippi (1988)
Mrs. Lelia B. White, Denmark, South Carolina (1988)
Richard Graybill, Esq., Ishpeming, Michigan (1991)
Dr. Wallace Rehberg, Pullman, Washington (1991)

Executive Staff Officer:

The Rev. Richard Gary, New York, New York

Representatives of the Commission at General Convention

The Rt. Rev. William H. Wolfrum, House of Bishops, is authorized by the commission to receive non-substantive amendments to the report. The Ven. Ben Helmer, (Western Kansas), House of Deputies, is authorized by the commission to receive non-substantive amendments to the report.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK

The commission met four times during the triennium. In addition, a subcommittee met in Honduras to gain firsthand knowledge of the needs of small congregations in a Province IX diocese and what the church there has to offer to the larger Church.

In 1985 the General Convention requested the creation of the position of a Staff Officer for Rural and Small Town Ministries. At the request of the Presiding Bishop one of the first tasks of this commission was to prepare a job description for that staff officer. That description was prepared by the commission and is included in the report as a resolution to General Convention. The Rev. Richard Gary has been appointed Staff Officer for Rural and Small Town Ministries. A subcommittee of the commission was formed to act as an Advisory Committee to the Staff Officer.

In spite of the fact that a majority of the congregations of the Episcopal Church are rural or small town, the funding of the staff office for that area of church life continues to be much less than any other program office. We have requested greater equity in funding and endorse and support plans for a second staff field position.

The farm and rural economic crisis continues to be a major factor in the life of rural and small town congregations. The commission sponsored an Ag Crisis Forum during the last triennium and in this triennium provided \$15,000 for completion of the work of that forum and shared in production and distribution of the video production,

“From This Valley.” There is a continuing need for communication of the rural situation to the general Church. In response to that need the commission plans to produce a video on rural sociology during the next triennium.

A major concern of the commission during the triennium has been to review the concerns of small dioceses and small and rural congregations, including those outside the U.S.A., and to hear from these churches their perceptions of unique needs, problems, and potential contributions to the Church. In pursuit of these objectives, one meeting was devoted to listening to reports of individuals and groups involved in a wide variety of ministries in rural and small town environments. Another meeting was held in Alaska, where visits were made to Eskimo and Indian villages and congregations. A subcommittee of the commission visited a variety of small congregations and communities in Honduras. The commission affirms the diversity and uniqueness in the several dioceses of Province IX. We encourage the Church to continue to participate in their growth and maturing toward self-determination and responsibility for their own mission and ministry. We ask that the Church support the development of partnerships with these dioceses which will enrich the effort of the whole Church in proclaiming the Gospel in rural and small communities.

It has been increasingly obvious to the members of the commission that several intentional agendas of the Church in recent years have worked against the life of the Church in rural and small places.

Our teaching regarding worship in recent years has led to greater emphasis on the Eucharist as the norm of Sunday worship. Our present Prayer Book has encouraged that conviction and practice. During the same period there has been great progress in bringing clergy stipends to higher levels. The combined result, added to a declining agricultural and rural economy, has been a situation where as a church we are telling people that they must have the Eucharist for good and valid worship, that a priest is required to have the Eucharist, and that the cost of having a priest is in excess of \$30,000 per year.

That combination continues to create an impossible situation in many small and isolated places. If we, as a church, intend to “plan for new directions for Churches in Small Communities” (Canon 1.1.2[n]), we must address this issue. We urge the Church to continue to create and offer alternative ways of allowing for a fullness of sacramental life in places where it is not possible to provide resident, paid priests. To that end, the commission has established liaison with and membership in the Council for the Development of Ministry and commends to the Convention that body’s work in rewriting Title III and particularly Canon 11.

One alternative we endorse is that of cross-denominational eucharistic sharing. A survey of ten bishops of small rural dioceses did not, however, encourage the commission to pursue the matter further at this time. The question remains of interest and concern. The commission suggests that further ecumenical dialogue to address these matters on a much broader basis may in the long run prove the most productive route.

Our visiting and listening have made us even more aware of two things: First, the Episcopal Church is more diverse in people, culture and background than ever before. We have to become more tolerant and understanding of that diversity. Second, we have heard the Presiding Bishop call for a relevant servant model for this Church; we support his call for the Church to become that model of servanthood. In order to do this, we believe that the Church must constantly empower the variety of the gifts of the Spirit and encourage creative and alternative forms of all ministries with confidence and boldness.

A Tiny Church Conference was held in North Dakota, where representatives from

churches with an average Sunday attendance of 50 or less were invited. The participants affirmed the stability of the tiny church and its indigenous ministry. Building on these attributes, the commission proposed a conference on women in rural ministries but decided to increase the scope around the theme, "Isolated But Not Alone." The groundwork has been laid for the conference, centering on the changing patterns of small church leadership, including the increasing role of women and nonordained leadership in small churches. The conference is to be held during the next triennium.

FINANCIAL REPORT

	1986	1987	1988
<i>Income</i>	\$29,250.	\$26,846.	\$13,150.
<i>Expenses</i>			
Meetings	12,017.	15,945.	10,400.
Advisory committee		2,000.	
Blue Book expense			2,000.
Ag Crisis consultation and video	15,000.		
Telephone and postage	29.	50.	750.
Total expense	\$27,046	\$17,995	\$13,150

RESOLUTIONS OF THE COMMISSION

Resolution #A153

Staff position for Rural and Small Town Ministry

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the staff position for Rural and Small Town Ministry be made a permanent position, with responsibility to encourage, develop and coordinate services to lay and clerical ministries in rural areas and small towns; and be it further

Resolved, That the activities of this office include the responsibility:

1. To affirm and encourage the leadership of rural and small dioceses and their congregations;
2. To provide resources to diocesan, congregational and individual leadership of rural and small town ministry;
3. To develop programs for rural and small town ministries and to train persons for such ministries with the continued assistance of a Rural Program Team made up of leaders of a variety of rural ministry programs;
4. To provide staff support for programs funded by the Church and other agencies, such as New Directions Ministry, Resource Center for Small Churches, Coalition 14, Appalachian Peoples Service Organization, and agencies such as Taucross Farm, the East Coast Migrant Network, and the Rural Workers Fellowship;
5. To provide for the preservation of the story of rural work in the Church, to be knowledgeable about the development of rural work, and to share the story of rural work with the whole Church;

6. To be an advocate for specialized rural ministries, such as seasonal and resort ministries, minority ministries and indigenous ministries, and to assist the Church in responding to economic and cultural crises affecting the life of small town and rural people;

7. To be the staff support to the Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities, the Advisory Committee to the Office of Rural and Small Town Ministries, and other committees as assigned.

Whenever possible each of these concerns will be addressed through ecumenical cooperation and in close cooperation with the ethnic and metropolitan ministries offices.

EXPLANATION: At the recommendation of the Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities, a staff position for Rural and Small Town Ministry has been a part of the National Mission in Church and Society Unit for the past two years. The commission is concerned to see that this staff position continue as an established part of our church's national mission strategy, cooperating with World Mission in Province IX.

Resolution #A154

Additional Field Officer for Rural and Small Town Ministries

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, **That funding for an additional field officer for Rural and Small Town Ministries be provided in this triennium to expand the support services provided by the Church for rural and small dioceses.**

EXPLANATION: The commission continues to be concerned about the minimal funding for the Office of Rural and Small Town Ministries and the inability of one officer to provide the services demanded by the various dioceses and programs for this ministry. We believe expansion of staff services is essential to the provision of support for the work of the rural and small town churches.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR NEXT TRIENNIUM

Ongoing Objectives:

1. To work on identifying and addressing those factors that may be helpful or detrimental to the ministry and life of the Church in small communities, in particular:
 - A. Liaison with the Council for the Development of Ministry and others relative to clergy training, deployment, education, and new models for lay and ordained ministry development;
 - B. Liaison with the Church Pension Fund in a continuing effort to address the significant inequities in the salaries and pensions of clergy who serve in small communities as compared with those involved in many other arenas of church life;
 - C. Support for an increasingly close liaison with the national Church staff persons responsible for the broad concerns for the Church's ministry in small communities;
 - D. Continuing liaison with and support for New Directions Ministries, Inc., and the Leadership Academy for New Directions, the Resource Center for Small Churches, Grassroots, Coalition 14, and other provincial and regional agencies concerned with small congregations, as appropriate.

New Objectives and Goals:

We assert our deep interest in understanding more fully the diverse and complex

needs and dynamics of small congregations across the continental United States, and in the dioceses of Province IX (Central and South America) in order that the whole Church may be more responsive to them. We see this concern not as an effort to foster or perpetuate unhealthy dependencies but as an ongoing mutual exchange, directed at the strengthening of interdependent relationships whereby we may serve and support each other in mission.

We heartily endorse our Presiding Bishop's call to us all to be a servant church, and we are dedicated to assisting our national structures and programs to reflect this servanthood, especially in relation to congregations in small communities. We are committed to the vision of the small church not only as a locus for pastoral support, but also as a center for outreach and mission.

The intention of this objective is:

To affirm and learn from the excellent ministry that is already taking place in many of our small communities and congregations;

To discover ways in which the national Church and this commission may be more directly supportive of those ministries in their richness and diversity;

To acknowledge that large segments of the Episcopal Church in small communities are of ethnic character and have needs and issues both similar to and different from congregations that are largely representative of the dominant population.

In order to continue representation and implementation of these objectives in the next triennium we shall:

1. Encourage the continued representation on the commission of members from Province IX and other ethnic minorities;
2. Continue the practice of holding meetings in areas of the Church where we may experience, observe, and listen to the Church at work in diverse small communities;
3. Investigate the possibility of informal linkage with other church entities whose concerns and interests parallel ours, including the Standing Commission on the Church in Metropolitan Areas;
4. Encourage and support the conducting of local conferences and meetings on small congregations, and assisting in publicizing any significant learnings from them;
5. Administer through the Advisory Committee for the Office for Rural and Small Town Ministries the designated income from the Roanridge/Cochel Trust according to policies and procedures established by the commission and approved by the Executive Council.

PROPOSED BUDGET FOR THE TRIENNium

	<i>1989</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>Total</i>
Meetings	\$15,300	\$17,400	\$ 8,420	
Subcommittee	6,620	5,250	6,070	
Project development	5,000	5,000		
Telephone, postage	300	300	300	
Reporting			1,700	
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	\$27,220	\$27,950	\$16,490	
				\$71,660

PROPOSED RESOLUTION FOR THE TRIENNIUM

Resolution #A155

1989-91 Budget request of the Standing Commission on Church in Small Communities

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, **That there be appropriated from the Assessment Budget of General Convention the sum of \$71,660 for the Triennium for the expenses of the Standing Commission on Church in Small Communities.**