

The Standing Commission on The Church in Small Communities

A. MEMBERSHIP

The Rt. Rev. Charles F. Duvall, Pensacola, Florida (1994)
The Rt. Rev. John H. Smith, Charleston, West Virginia (1997)
The Rt. Rev. John S. Thornton, Boise, Idaho (1997)
The Rev. Roger S. Smith, *Chair*, Manchester, Maine (1994)
The Rev. Phebe L. Coe, Sherwood Forest, Maryland (1997)
The Rev. David Mihalyi, Waterloo, New York (1997)
Mrs. Kathleen Bates, Cedartown, Georgia (1994)
Ms. Veronica B. Flowers, Dorchester, Massachusetts (1994)
Ms. Mary Hassell, Faribault, Minnesota (1994)
Mr. Harry Denman, *Executive Council Liaison*, Coffeyville, Kansas (1997)
Mr. John Jackson, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1997)
Mrs. Blanche Powless, *Vice-Chair*, Green Bay, Wisconsin (1997)

Executive Staff Officer:

The Rev. Allen Brown, Jr., Rural/Small Community Ministries Officer

B. INTRODUCTION

The Episcopal Church is a denomination of small churches. The Annual Parochial Reports indicate:

- (1) 35% of Episcopal congregations have less than 50 people in average Sunday attendance.
- (2) 70% of Episcopal congregations have 150 people or less in average Sunday attendance.

More than a third of Episcopal Churches involve 50 or fewer people in attendance on Sunday mornings. This fact should play an important role in the development of mission strategy, evangelism and programs for education and spiritual development. The small church, or the family and pastoral size congregation, is, in general, more relational in its life and work than a larger congregation. It tends to deal with projects rather than program. The small church is, therefore, different from the large church, but not weaker.

C. SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK

The Commission met four times during the triennium, in the dioceses of Montana, West Virginia, Fond du Lac, and the Central Gulf Coast. We continued our policy of meeting in dioceses with large numbers of small churches and churches in small communities, and where dioceses are involved in some creative forms of ministry in these settings. At each meeting we spent one full day visiting small congregations to learn first-hand of both the issues facing

THE BLUE BOOK

these congregations and the innovative approaches to ministry developing in these congregations. These visits included the opportunity of sharing in the life of Native American congregations, congregations in Appalachia in which innovative forms of Cluster Ministry are being developed, and in small communities of the Gulf Coast where population growth is presenting issues of growth and ministry to these congregations. All of these involved issues of new forms of leadership.

Two members of the Commission participated in the international conference "Christian Response to Rural Change," sponsored by the Arthur Rank Centre in Stoneleigh, England. This ecumenical conference included representatives from several Eastern Bloc countries, Africa, Ireland, England, Australia, Canada and the United States, and was extremely informative. Through a process of consultation and dialogue, the conference focused on:

- "(1). Our first-hand experiences facing persons in rural communities. We sought a Christian response to rural change in the light of our understanding of the Kingdom of God.
- (2). Our attempts to grapple with the demands and challenges facing the Church's own weakness in its ministry and structures.
- (3). Our knowledge of GATT, CAP, and Nafta that affect the world."

The conference reached a consensus in reaffirming that God is moving history towards God's appointed end, and we envision a society in which:

- "(1). The people affected by decisions have a share in the decision making.
- (2). All human beings exercise their stewardship for the rest of creation particularly in responsibility for the natural environment and other human beings.
- (3). All primary producers and rural workers receive a fair remuneration for their labor."

Recommendations from this conference were:

"The churches make a greater commitment to the rural population and institutions by developing mission in rural areas with particular attention to such topics as:

- (1). Social and economic structure in rural areas;
- (2). Hunger and abundance;
- (3). The implications of technology on the environment;
- (4). Pricing policies, systems, production, processing, trading and the role of the consumer;
- (5). The impact of policies on rural people and their institutions."

Members of the Commission also participated in a consultation sponsored by the Bangor Theological Seminary in Bangor, Maine, on leadership. In order to provide communication in other areas affecting the work of the Commission, representatives of the Commission also attended a meeting of the Task Force on Women and Violence and a meeting of the Environmental Stewardship Team. Two members of the Commission served as liaison with the Committee on Congregational Development. A member of the Standing Commission on Church Music was also invited to one of our meetings to help the Commission explore the matter of appropriate music in small congregations. Members also shared in the following ecumenical conferences:

- (1). *Religion and Rural Life: Ministry in the Heartland*, an ecumenical event sponsored by Rural Church Network of United States and Canada;
- (2). *Conference on Licensed Lay Ministry*, another ecumenical event sponsored by the Missouri School of Religion;
- (3). *Symposium on Cross-cultural and Multi-cultural Liturgical Explorations*;
- (4). *Synagogy II*, teams of lay and clergy leaders who are directly involved with Episcopal small congregations, co-sponsored by the Commission. (A progress report is available from the Rural and Small Community Ministries Office at the Episcopal Church Center.)

At its second meeting, in West Virginia, the Commission adopted the following goals for its work during the triennium:

GOAL I:

Focus the Church on the awareness and use of the baptized ministry of our Church in small communities:

- (a). Identify, prepare and support ordained leaders for small church ministry.
- (b). Identify, prepare and support lay leaders for churches in small communities.
- (c). Encourage models of ministry which promote partnership of lay/ordained ministry.
- (d). Engage dioceses and seminaries in development of leadership programs in/for churches in small communities.
- (e). Call on General Convention to designate 1997 as a year of celebration of the church's ministry in small communities.

GOAL II:

In cooperation with the Environmental Stewardship Team, we will seek ways to address the issues of economic development, appropriate use of resources, the disposal of waste and other environmental issues as they affect the Church's ministry in small communities:

- (a). Appoint a liaison to the Environmental Stewardship Team.
- (b). A sub-committee of this Commission to take chapters one and two of the ACORA report, digest and publish it for the Church.

- (c). Assure an ongoing input to the Environmental Stewardship Team from the perspective of the churches in small communities.
- (d). Communicate to the churches in small communities appropriate information, including the theology and concerns of the Environmental Stewardship Team.

The 1991 General Convention referred the following resolutions to this Commission, and we have addressed them as follows:

(1). *Resolution A172a*, support rural and small town ministries, and seek ways to address issues of economic development, disposal of waste, and matters arising from the continuing crisis in non-metropolitan and rural areas. In consultation with the Environmental Stewardship Team, we felt that a church-sponsored resource center for people living in rural areas be established to provide materials to enable people to take effective local action. We explored issues of economic development, justice issues, and land use in the small communities during our visitations in congregations in Appalachia and among Native Americans.

(2). *Resolution A085a*, concerning racism, sexism review by interim bodies. We noted that we have a broad representation on the Commission. We explored "what it means to be marginalized and that this Commission is called on to model wholeness and hope." We also noted particular areas that would be reflective in the Church's ministry in small communities. These two areas were a frequent part of our discussion, particularly as they impact small communities. We also noted in almost every small community visited during the triennium evidence of racism, economic discrimination and class differences.

(3). *Resolution D196a*, concerning mission and ministry in the small congregation. New Orleans General Convention Resolution A108a also called on the seminaries to identify faculty as resource persons for small church life and ministry. Please refer to the section of this report titled "Work of the Commission."

(4). In response to action by the Executive Council on migrant farmworkers, we requested the Staff Officer to follow up and report back to Executive Council through the Commission. The Staff Officer has served as the advisor for the Migrant Ministry Task force. We support the recommendations set forth by the Migrant Ministry Task Force:

- (a). That the Episcopal Migrant Ministry network continue to be developed with the support and encouragement of the wider Church.
- (b). That a resource center for this ministry be developed in cooperation with other denominations and secular agencies.

- (c). That a survey be undertaken to determine the extent of diocesan and local church involvement in this ministry.
- (d). That adequate funding be budgeted during the next triennium to support this work.

D. WORK OF THE COMMISSION DURING THE TRIENNium

In response to GOAL I the Commission engaged in the following actions:

1. Several members of the Commission and the Staff Officer are exploring training and support for ministry in small communities with several of the seminaries. At least one of the seminaries is now engaged in providing continuing education in the area of small church ministry, as well as providing support for Local Priests and Deacons, who have proven to be an important factor in the development of team ministry for rural communities. We encourage dioceses to strongly consider the use of Local Priests and Deacons for ministry in small communities, urging that the norms of regular continuing education and participation in a team approach ministry be a part of this ministry.

2. The Commission continues to sponsor and support both lay and clerical leadership training through New Directions Ministries, in particular, the Leadership Academy for New Directions (LAND) and the Appalachian Ministries Educational Resource Center (AMERC) in Berea, Kentucky, and to support programs such as EMF and Rural Social Science by Extension. Through a newly developed communication called *Jottings* we have sought to enable dioceses to take advantage of these resources through a network of diocesan rural ministry officers who are in touch with the Staff Officer. Through *Jottings* we have raised the consciousness of such programs as EMF for the development of lay leadership. We have also encouraged dioceses to submit models of ministry for publication and networking.

3. During 1993 the Commission sponsored a week-long training program at Berea, Kentucky, on ministry in small communities for newly ordained deacons assigned to small communities, in which nine dioceses participated. This was done in cooperation with AMERC. We expect to repeat this course in the future. We believe it is vitally important for newly ordained persons entering leadership positions in the Church in small communities to enter that ministry with some initial training.

4. In several dioceses we experienced the development of a team ministry approach, using a combination of seminary-trained clergy, Local Priests and Deacons, and lay persons, which is proving very effective in those circumstances. This may provide an important model for the identification, preparation and support of laity and clergy for ministry. Those places using this approach to ministry have found that it strengthens the concepts and practice of the ministry of the baptized. One interesting note in this respect is that at the Rank Centre Conference in England in June 1993 we learned that the Presbyterian Church in rural Australia has developed a nearly identical approach to ministry. This underlines our awareness that the Church is facing widespread change, and that we have much to learn from one another as we experiment with models for ministry. Many of the small churches of rural England are exploring this approach to ministry. It is exciting to see a model for ministry such as this one developing independently in several corners of the earth in response to worldwide changing economic and social patterns.

THE BLUE BOOK

5. With regard to the proposed year of celebration of the Church's ministry in small communities, the Commission has submitted, in response to 1991 Resolution A174s, calling on the Commission to set a year for this celebration, a resolution to the 1994 General Convention designating 1997 as the "Year of Celebration."

6. Through consultation with the Standing Commission on Music and the Standing Liturgical Commission, the Commission has begun to explore the development of leaders in music and liturgy in small communities, particularly with regard to ministry among Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanics, and in Appalachia. We encourage small churches to use *Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, which is an excellent music resource for small congregations.

7. In cooperation with the Standing Commission on Music, we are exploring the need for appropriate music for small congregations, taking into account social and cultural factors. This would be in keeping with Resolution A140a of the 1991 General Convention and would recognize the diversity of musical style in sharing the Good News in the contemporary church.

In response to GOAL II the Commission engaged in the following actions:

1. A member of the Environmental Stewardship Team met with this Commission at its meeting in West Virginia, and a member of the Commission attended a meeting of the Environmental Stewardship Team in December 1994. At the latter meeting, we reported on our discussions with regard to proposed 1991 Resolution A107 and found ourselves in agreement with the Team in seeking to develop a resource center for churches in small communities where local people can obtain resources to respond to these issues as they arise and seek alternate solutions.

2. In working with the Environmental Stewardship Team, we recognized that matters raised by the ACORA Report are being dealt with by that Team, and we therefore referred the ACORA Report to the Team for their further consideration. We have been assured of the opportunity for ongoing input for the work of the Stewardship Team. As a result of our dialogue with the Stewardship Team, we commend to the Church the "Caring for Eden" document, which is a short course exploring the spiritual dimension of the environmental crisis.

Other matters included in the work of the Commission are:

1. The serious issue of health insurance costs to small congregations. Our concern about this matter has been communicated to the Church Insurance Corporation.

2. The current reporting forms of the Church and the Church Pension Fund for reporting clergy stipends and benefits do not take into account developing models of ministry, such as cluster or geographical ministries. This results in inaccurate figures being reported in many places. The Church Pension Fund has acknowledged our request to investigate this and is working on the matter.

3. As reported above, *Jottings* is a new publication sponsored by the Commission and the Staff Officer to network and share important information with regard to ministry in small communities.

SMALL COMMUNITIES

4. We acknowledge the urgent need for and urge the General Convention to support the creation of an Assistant Rural and Small Community Ministries Field Officer, to work closely with the Staff Officer.

5. Changing patterns of rural family life and the economic base of rural communities seem to have heightened the serious issues of violence against women and children in small communities. The church's awareness and willingness to respond to this problem becomes, therefore, an important aspect of the Church's ministry in small communities. We commend the publication *Breaking the Silence*, published by the Committee on the Status of Women of the Episcopal Church. We also commend the Church Pension Fund in its addressing this issue by requiring dioceses to engage in educational events around violence, child abuse, child sexual abuse and sexual harassment. We need to help church leaders recognize the presence of abuse within church households, when it is present.

E. FINANCIAL REPORT

<i>Income</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>Total</i>
Appropriated by Convention	\$18,355	\$22,815	\$ 5,000	\$ 46,170
<i>Expenses</i>				
Meetings	\$16,147	\$17,021		\$ 33,168
Subcommittee/Networking	799	3,158	646	4,603
Projects	1,409	2,636		4,045
Telephone, Postage				
Reporting			<u>1,700</u>	<u>1,700</u>
	<u>\$18,355</u>	<u>\$22,815</u>	<u>\$ 2,346</u>	<u>\$ 43,516</u>

F. RESOLUTION OF THE COMMISSION

Resolution #A113

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of ____ concurring, **That 1997 be designated as a year of celebration**
2 **of the small church, a year in which the ministries of these congregations are lifted up**
3 **and celebrated.**

EXPLANATION

This matter has been brought before the Convention and was adopted in 1991, as Resolution A174s. (See page 395 of the Journal of General Convention of that year.) The above resolution is an implementing resolution for that previously adopted.

G. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE NEXT TRIENNIUM:

Because of the nature of this work, the Commission has voted to continue the following goals and objectives for the work we have begun:

GOAL I:

Focus the Church on the awareness and use of the baptized ministry of our Church in small communities:

- (a). Identify, prepare and support ordained leaders for small church ministry. This would include advocating church policies which support and encourage clergy to do ministry in small communities.
- (b). Identify, prepare and support the ministry of the baptized.
- (c). Encourage models of ministry which promote partnership of lay/ordained ministry.
- (d). Engage dioceses and seminaries in development of leadership programs for the baptized in/for churches in small communities.
- (e). Implement the resolution on the year of celebration of the Church in small communities:
 - (1). Design and distribute appropriate supplemental liturgical material to use for the celebration.
 - (2). Incorporate those portions of Goal II needed for the year of celebration.
 - (3). Appoint a task force to implement the year of celebration.

GOAL II: Continue to pursue the production and distribution of an appropriate song book for the small church to be ready for distribution in connection with the year of celebration of the Church in small communities.

GOAL III: To continue to work in cooperation with the Environmental Stewardship Team and such other boards and agencies pertaining to the rural crisis.

- (a). We will seek ways to address the issues of economic development, appropriate use of resources, the disposal of waste and other environmental issues as they affect the Church's ministry in small communities.
- (b). Assure an ongoing input to the Environmental Stewardship Team from the perspective of the churches in small communities.
- (c). Continue the use of *Jottings* to network among congregations in small communities, and for improved communication around issues of the environment, economic development, and social justice issues in the small community.
- (d). Affirm the work of the Migrant Ministry Task Force to pursue their recommendations during the triennium.

SMALL COMMUNITIES**H. PROPOSED BUDGET FOR THE TRIENNIUM**

<i>Income</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>Total</i>
Appropriated by Convention	\$40,100	\$59,150	\$24,220	\$123,470
<i>Expenses</i>				
Meetings	\$29,280	\$30,000	\$15,360	\$74,640
Subcommittee/Networking	5,000	17,450	980	23,430
Task Force: Small Church Yr.	5,520	11,400	5,880	22,800
Telephone, Postage	300	300	300	900
Reporting			<u>1,700</u>	<u>1,700</u>
	<u>\$40,100</u>	<u>\$59,150</u>	<u>\$24,220</u>	<u>\$123,470</u>

I. PROPOSED BUDGET RESOLUTION FOR THE TRIENNIUM:**Resolution #A114**

1995-97 Budget Request

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, **That there be appropriated from the assessment**
- 2 **budget of the General Convention the sum of \$123,470 for the expenses of the Standing**
- 3 **Commission on the Church in Small Communities.**