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Stephen Nickodemus
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_nickodemuss@csl.edu

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PASTORAL CARE IN LUTHERAN RURAL AMERICA:

ITS UNIQUENESS AND CHALLENGE

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A Research Paper Presented to the
Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for elective P-200

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by

Stephen E. Nickodemus
January, 1982

Stephen E. Nickodemus

Dale A. Meyer
Advisor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The subject of this research paper deals with the topic, Pastoral Care in Lutheran Rural America: Its Uniqueness and Challenge. The paper will be divided into four chapters as follows: (1) Pastoral Care in general, a Lutheran definition and what this entails for the Lutheran pastor; (2) Rural America, the unique American sub-culture: what it is and how it is changing; (3) Lutheran Rural America, a definition and how it is changing; and (4) Pastoral Care in Lutheran Rural America, its uniqueness and its challenge to the Lutheran Pastor. Each of these chapters might involve an entire research paper, but this author will attempt to give general background information in the first three chapters and use the last chapter as a synthesis of the problems and special emphases pastoral care takes for the Lutheran pastor in rural America.

This topic was chosen by the author for several reasons. The first is that the subject of rural churches, having received widespread attention in the 40's and 50's, has been largely ignored until the 1980's when the Synod appointed a rural task force to study this issue. Second, the author's own background and future are caught up in Lutheran rural America, the author having been raised on a farm and in a rural church, and looking forward toward a ministry in the rural church. Third, there is still a serious gap between rural church vacancies and the number of rural-raised LCMS pastors, especially candidates, who often go through "culture shock" in entering rural parishes. These three reasons necessitate a paper such as this one in an attempt to aid Lutheran pastors in rural churches in caring for their people.

CHAPTER 1: Pastoral Care

A. A Lutheran Definition

Many definitions of "pastoral care" have been offered over the years. Here are a few:

"Pastoral care is a term denoting what a Christian pastor does when he takes care of people. What pastoral care offers people and how the pastor takes care of himself to how he serves the needs of the ill, the bereaved, the shut-in, the narcotic, the alcoholic, etc. The range is wide."[1]

"It means the cure and care of souls. Souls are sick, sin-sick. They need to be cured and cared for. This is what a pastor is for. He is a seelsorger (curer of souls). What an honor! What a privilege! What a responsibility!"[2]

"The pastor has the responsibility to minister not only to the congregation as such, but also teach individual members of his flock in particular as the need for such ministration arises. This is the area of the ministry to the individual, the care of souls, Privateseelsorge. What he does in performing this function is not essentially different from what every Christian ought to do for a fellow believer in the exercise of his spiritual priesthood. In the case of a pastor, however, the performing of these functions is assigned to him either explicitly or implicitly in his call. His very title as pastor implies as much, for a good shepherd is concerned not only about the well-being of his flock as such, but also about that of each individual sheep in his flock according to its needs."[3]

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[1]Harry Coiner, "An Overview of Pastoral Care," Concordia Theological Monthly, 37 (1966), 583.

[2]G. H. Gerberding, The Lutheran Pastor (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902), 372.

[3]Armin W. Schuetze and Irwin J. Habede, The Shepherd Under Christ: A Textbook for Pastoral Theology (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1974), 137.

"The German expression (Seelsorge) speaks of the deep concern which the pastor shows for the needs of the souls entrusted to his care. It speaks of the healing comfort and strength from God's Word of grace that the pastor applies to souls in their need."[4]

"The minister of the Gospel is eminently a Seelsorger, a bishop (overseer), a pastor (shepherd), a watchman, a man who by God has been entrusted with the cure (cura) of souls..."[5]

What is then, pastoral care? In a wide sense it involves everything the pastor as shepherd of his flock does including preaching, teaching, administration, public worship, daily study, etc. But in the narrower sense of private seelsorge, it is the responsibility of the called pastor to the individuals in his congregation to bring spiritual healing by means of the Scripture, i.e. the Law and Gospel, confession and absolution, etc. The pastor serves in this role as a spiritual physician who diagnoses and brings healing remedy to individual sin-sick souls.

B. What Pastoral Care Entails

Pastoral care within the preceeding narrow definition can be divided into four areas, a history of Lutheran pastoral care, pastoral visiting, pastoral counseling, and pastoral care of the pastor's own personal life.

1. History of Lutheran Pastoral care. John T. McNeill's monumental work[6] contains an extensive history of pastoral care but for the purposes of pastoral care four main topics will be briefly analyzed: the pastoral care of Jesus, Paul, Luther and most LCMS pastors until recent years.

Concerning our Lord's earthly ministry, McNeill states, "Most of his recorded teaching is addressed to small groups or imparted in conversation with individuals,"

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[4]Schuetze and Habeck, p. 179.

[5]John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology: A Handbook of Scriptural Principles (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), 184.

[6]John T. McNeill, A History of the Cure of Souls (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1951).

and "what men discovered in Him was exactly this: healer of souls."[7] What was Jesus' method? "The transformation of lives He achieves is instructive not in the exposure of error and content of thought, but in introducing repentance and committment to the kingdom of God."[8] Examples include Matthew 10:17-22 (the rich young man), Luke 19:1-10 (Zaccheus), Matthew 15:21-28 (the Syro-Phoenician woman), Matthew 9:2-7 (the paralytic), Matthew 9:20-22 (the hemorrhaging woman), Mark 10:46-52 (blind Bartimeus), John 3:1-10 (Nicodemus), John 4:7-42 (the Samaritan woman), and many other cases of Jesus' confrontation and healing to individuals. Christ individually cared about people as well as the multitudes and constantly confronted persons with Himself and His message.

"In his study of Paul as a missionary, Martin Schunk states that the greatness of the Apostle derives from the fact that: 1) he possessed the gift of the cure of souls (seelsorge) in outstanding measure and employed the art with wonderful mastery. Paul was very conscious of his responsibility for the rising Christian community (II Cor. 11:28)."[9]

In matters of prayer for the churches, in church discipline, in concern for Christian day to day living and especially in his personal intimacy with individual Christians, Paul's epistles fairly groan with his pastoral concern for the church. Even a quick reading of the first two chapters of II Corinthians will reveal the intensity with which Paul is concerned with each of the above areas. It is Paul who emphatically states, "I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some." (I Cor. 9:22).

Luther as Spiritual Advisor[10] offers many insights into Luther's warmth and deep personal love for fellow Christians. Private confession was especially

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[7]McNeill, p. 69-70.

[8]McNeill, p. 73.

[9]McNeill, p. 80.

[10]August Nebe, Luther As Spiritual Advisor, Trans. by Charles A. Hay and C. E. Hay (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1894), 25.

important to Luther as he wrote in the Babylonian Captivity (vol. 36 Luther's Works, p. 86),

> "As for the current practice of private confession, I am heartily in favor of it, even though it cannot be proved from the Scripture. It is useful, even necessary, and I would not have it abolished. Indeed, I rejoice that it exists in the church of Christ, for it is a care without equal for distressed consciences. For when we have laid bare our consciences to our brother and privately made known to him the evil that lurked within, we receive from our brother's lips the word of comfort spoken by God Himself."

McNeill writes of Luther, "He writes not as one conscious of superior attainment, or as the representative of a priestly caste, but as a sinful and tempted Christian who is glad to bring such spiritual remedies as he has learned from Scripture to the aid of those who ask or need his brotherly help."[11]

This emphasis on the private confession with the pastor (usually before communion) quickly became the main source of pastoral care in Lutheran churches, excluding, of course, calling on the sick and bereaved.[12] An early LCMS convention reveals this same practice.

> "Such house calls not only require a great amount of time by the pastor, but the people also are very often hindered in their work; consequently they are not in a proper frame of mind to give proper attention to such pastoral talks. There is very great danger that on the occasion of such visits only secular conversation is carried on. It also often happens (because of the presence of other members of the family or guests) that there is no suitable opportunity for examining the condition of an individual's soul or for discussing particular questions, such as perhaps the relation of one spouse to the other, or parent's love to their children, etc. The Synod deemed therefore that aside from special circumstances, inquiry at private confession or at the announcement for Holy Communion is the proper and chief means by which the pastor should obtain a knowledge of the spiritual condition of individuals."[13]

Fritz goes at some length to detail how this kind of exploratio might be done in private confession but by his time (the 1930's) pastoral visiting was also a common practice and encouraged as evidenced by Fritz himself[14] and a series of articles by

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[11]McNeill, p. 174.

[12]McNeill, p. 176.

[13]Armand J. Mueller, trans., Missouri Synod Central District Proceedings, 1855, p. 20, in Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the LCMS (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 245-246.

[14]Fritz, p. 185.

Streufert in the Concordia Theological Monthly in 1930.[15]

2. Pastoral Visiting. There are two chief ways that pastoral care reaches the members of a congregation, in pastoral visiting and in pastoral counseling. Although this distinction is rather artificial (Hulme proposes that up to eighty percent of a pastor's counseling may come through calling)[16] there is value in separating the pastoral care of individuals outside a formal counseling setting from that situation where members actually come to the pastor for pastoral care. Pastoral visiting poses a whole different set of problems and situations as over against more formal office counseling. Pastoral visiting will first be discussed separately as to its purposes, its scheduling, and the types of calls encountered.

There are several purposes for pastoral counseling. The first is the simple need for a pastor to know his people personally if he wishes to have opportunity to minister to them. Hulme writes,

> "The pastor's calling ministry can also help to shape his people's opinion of him. It is something of a preview of the counseling process. Since his people are hesitant to come for counseling they need this preview. The counseling ministry does not replace the calling program, since counseling grows out of calling. Just to call, however, is not enough; the preview may influence a person to stay away rather than to come. If the pastor is unable to keep a conversation moving, his parishioners may feel ill at ease in his presence. If he can talk freely but is not able to stimulate others to talk, his people may feel all the more incapable of expressing their problems to him. On the other hand, if the parishioner has enjoyed the visit and has participated in the conversation and found the pastor understanding and receptive, he is encouraged to make his problem the topic of conversation."[17]

"Every contact the pastor has with his people can be used to further his counseling program whenever he sees his people--on the street, in the store, at the game--he can aid his rapport by the warmth of his greeting."[18]

Schuetze and Habeck state,

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[15]See F. C. Streufert,"The Pastor at the Bedside of the Unbeliever," "Pastoral Visits," "Pastoral Visits: Visiting a Prisoner," all in Concordia Theological Monthly, 1 (1930), 601-604, 857-864, 916-920.

[16]William E. Hulme, How to Start Counseling: Building the Counseling Program in the Local Church (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), 15.

[17]Hulme, How to Start Counseling, pp. 13-14.

[18]Hulme, How to Start Counseling, p. 14.

> "In order to learn to know his congregation better and better and to remain in contact with each individual member the pastor will consider it part of his continuing obligation to endeavor to visit his members in their homes. There are, of course, occasions when circumstances demand that a pastor visit a member, as,for example, illness, calamity, or when personal admonition is called for. But even apart from these special occasions a pastor's calls as shepherd of Christ's flock makes it necessary for him to visit his members systematically and regularly in order to learn to know them better and to gain their confidence. There can be a sense of distance and strangeness over against the pastor if his people know him only from seeing him in the pulpit. If, however, he has contacted them in their homes and they have learned to know him as a friend who takes a personal interest in them, it will be much easier for them to accept his ministration in a time of trial, or go to him for help when a problem arises."[19]

Pastoral visiting includes more than just establishing rapport or as a preview to counseling. The pastor is a spiritual physician, as Fritz states, "He should well know each one of his members, be able to diagnose any case of spiritual illness, and prescribe and apply the necessary treatment."[20] This means that as the pastor encounters problems or potential problems with his members, he confronts and counsels that member where he has opportunity, even on that visit. A pastoral call is not merely a social visit, but has a spiritual purpose, the application of Law and Gospel to the person's needs. The pastoral call takes the pastor into the midst of the families of the congregation, perhaps before serious problems may occur. Behnke states, "Our basic effort must be to build rather than rebuild, to prevent rather than to cure. One may become so enamored with the 'glamor' of counseling that he neglects the type of pastoral care that should reduce counseling to a minimum."[21] To summarize, in pastoral calling the pastor has a unique opportunity to provide intimate spiritual care where it is needed the most.

The last purpose for pastoral visiting is perhaps the most obvious, the response to those who are in immediate need; the sick, the bereaved, the dying, etc.

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[19]Schuetze and Habeck, p. 139.

[20]Fritz, p. 185.

[21]C. A. Behnke, "A Physician of Souls," Concordia Theological Monthly, 23 (1952), 23-32.

Fritz states, "A pastor should always, at any time, by day or by night, readily and cheerfully respond to a sick-call."[22] In these cases the pastor will serve more aptly as a spiritual physician if he has had previous personal contact with the parties concerned.

The scheduling of pastoral calls is of extreme importance. Hulme points out that calling is the pastoral duty most easily put off or ignored.[23] Discher states, "Visiting requires a method and strategy not unlike program planning process or preparation for preaching. Pastoral visiting is a plan in ministry. For pastoral calling revitalizes ministry and churches for the sake of Christ."[24] Fritz states unequivocally, "The making of pastoral calls should not be limited to visiting the sick or such as are in spiritual distress, although these should be given first consideration, but a pastor should call upon all his members. Even in large congregations the busy pastor-who must preach often, visit many sick, be present at many meetings and tend to many other duties, too numerous to mention-should take time to visit all the homes in his parish."[25] This means that even as a pastor must schedule his office hours for study and counseling and faithfully stick to them, so he must carefully schedule his visiting hours and faithfully abide by them. He must not only be sensitive to his best hours for calling but also for his parishioners' best time for receiving calls. For this reason many pastors utilize afternoons, evenings, and Saturday and Sunday afternoons for calling.[26] Whatever times are chosen, the pastor should give systematic pastoral visiting a priority in his schedule.

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[22]Fritz, p. 187.

[23]Hulme, How to Start Counseling, p. 78.

[24]John Adams Fischer, "Pastoral Visiting," Your Church, July/August (1980).

[25]Fritz, p. 184.

[26]See Fischer, p. 4 and Hulme, How to Start Counseling, p. 80.

What types of people should pastors visit? As mentioned before, those seriously ill, the bereaved, those in calamity, and others who request a pastor's visit should, of course, be visited. The shut-ins form another whole group by themselves and must be regularly visited. The bulk of pastoral calling will still fall upon the large group of people who should be visited systematically. They should be visited in some logical order (Fischer suggests one) and with a purpose and an agenda clearly in mind. Without this, visiting becomes drudgery, but with a purpose of education, admonition or comfort in mind, pastoral calling will become a vital part of the total ministry of Jesus Christ.

3. Pastoral Counseling. Pastoral counseling may be divided into four main categories. What pastoral counseling is, building a counseling program, the problems of people encountered in counseling, and the solutions and techniques a Lutheran pastor brings to counseling situations.

Pastoral counseling is much more than a pastor "playing psychologist". It is pastoral, Scriptural, Christ-centered counseling. "Pastoral care is that pastoral care (seelsorge) of individuals as they face their problems, troubles, griefs, burdens, fears, and illnesses, which involves not simply giving advice, but assisting them to find help from the Word of God," in addition, "The pastor must always remain Seelsorger."[27] The pastor is still the shepherd of the flock, not a psychologist, and his answers are always centered on the Word of God.

How does a pastor build a counseling program in which his people come to him for assistance? William Hulme offers a program in How to Start Counseling: Building the Counseling Program.[28] Hulme states, "People as a whole are out of the habit of seeking their pastor's help in their problems. Even when they have serious problems,

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[27]Schuetze and Habeck, p. 181.

[28]Hulme, How to Start Counseling.

they may hesitate to talk about them. They feel they are different for having such problems and cannot afford to let others know it--least of all their pastor."[29] Hulme feels that pastoral calling and a character of compassion and confidentiality are the best ways to break down this barrier of fear. A pastor should also use appropriate forms of publicity, both oral and written, to encourage people to come to him. The pastor should set counseling hours convenient for his people and insure a private, undisturbed, and comfortable place for counseling. He stresses that initial interviews should be faithfully followed up and that youth and family interviews are the most effective means for promoting and maintaining a good counseling program. These interviews are designed to prevent serious problems from developing, not merely dealing with family crisis situations.

What are some of the problems encountered by people today? Pastoral counselors speak of "a great void in hearts";[30] of attempts to cover up with business or deviant behavior the inner conflict of sin within a man's self;[31] of the tension and frustration that comes from the sin-sick nature of man.[32] The basic inability to face up to man's sin before God leads to all forms of anger or withdrawal from life's problems. What can pastoral counselors offer?

Wind states,

> "Men have become conscious of a great void in their hearts and lives which can be adequately filled only by the truths and comforts of Christ's religion. There was never a greater need for consecrated men to devote their lives to the Christian ministry and to bring to the longing hearts of men the comfort and peace of the Gospel through faithful missionary and pastoral work. And the Lutheran pastor of

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[29]Hulme, How to Start Counseling.

[30]H. F. Wind, "The Pastor and the Pastoral Cure of Souls," Concordia Theological Monthly, 8 (1937), p. 244.

[31]William E. Hulme, "Christian Persons in the Making," Concordia Theological Monthly, 33 (1962), p. 136.

[32]William E. Hulme, "The Nature of Spiritual Illness," Concordia Theological Monthly, 33 (1962), p. 70 ff.

> today, equipped with unshaken faith and profound love for souls, bearing the unadulterated Gospel of God's salvation, must realize that in God's providence he has been made a 'keeper of the wells of salvation' in one of the most critical periods of human history, and both in his missionary and pastoral work he must eagerly seize every opportunity to minister to the dying souls of sin-sick men."[33]

The Law of God exposes sinful man and leaves man with only one solution; the cross of Christ and the free forgiveness offered in Him.[34] The pastor must see his counselees not merely as 'cases' but as blood-bought souls.[35] The pastoral counselor seeks to come to the source of a man's trouble and apply true and lasting help to his spiritual problem.

4. Pastoral care of self. In order to attend to the souls of other men, a pastor must also attend to his own personal life. Hulme feels that every pastor needs at least from time to time a pastor's pastor, a spiritual counselor. Especially for younger pastors there is a vital need for pastors to have a confessor, someone to confide in. In lieu of this, God must be the "pastor's pastor".[36]

But even more important than this need is the need for a pastor to have an active devotional life. If he would apply the Word to men's lives, a pastor must constantly live in the Word.

> "To live in the Word means to make use of it as a thirsty man will make use of a spring of clear water, as a starving man will make use of a loaf of bread, as a sick man will make use of a healing remedy, as a dying man will make use of a new lease on life. The ability--or let us rather say the grace--to use the Word of God in this fashion, is after all, the sine qua non, the chief, the one indispensable requirement of him who would minister to the souls of men. Even the most brilliantly endowed, the most learned, the most eloquent, the most sympathetic-minded pastor who does not live his life in the Lord will fail in his attempt to cure the souls of men."[37]

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[33]Wind, p. 244.

[34]Hulme, Christian Persons in the Making, p. 140 ff.

[35]Behnke, p. 28-29.

[36]Hulme, How to Start Counseling, p. 102.

[37]Wind, p. 251.

The Lutheran pastor must not only express the love of Christ to others, but through Word and prayer have an ongoing relationship with His God. "So the pastor of today who lives in the very presence of the Lord will ever bear all his people in his loving heart. He will identify himself with them in their joys as well as their sorrows."[38]

The last aspect of personal pastoral care is so often neglected by pastors; that of the pastor's family. Hulme points out that most pastors feel that a successful family is an absolute must, yet in many cases the pastor is too busy striving for personal success to spend adequate time with his wife and children. Busy seminary students become busy pastors, burdened with the tensions of a parish and the need to constantly appear busy. All this adds up to tremendous pressure on the pastor's family with little time for them. The busy pastor must also make time for his family as well as time for the study of God's Word and the care of his people. All this involves setting personal as well as professional priorities.[39]

This brief survey provides a sketch of what pastoral care is and what it entails. The next two chapters of this paper will take a brief look at rural America and Lutheran rural America in particular. The last chapter will then show how this unique environment challenges the concept of pastoral care for the Lutheran pastor.

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[38]Wind, p. 251, 252.

[39]William E. Hulme, Your Pastor's Problems (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 77-89 and Hulme, How to Start Counseling, p. 113-114.

CHAPTER 2: Rural America

A. A unique sub-culture

Is rural America still really a unique way of life? Some believe that the traditional values and attitudes of farm life have nearly disappeared in a modern America. Many disagree.

"Rural-urban differences are frequently discussed in a misleading way by contemporary commentators on the American scene. It is true that real differences are declining, but many writers imply that they have practically disappeared in urban-industrial societies. Nothing could be further from the truth."[40]

"It is still true, however, that there is a basic psychological and philosophical difference between rural and urban people. Because a farmer has television in his living room does not make him an industrialist."[41]

"The more rural people learn of city life, the more they appreciate the advantages which rural living can present. This feeling is perhaps demonstrated by the fact that so many people in the city are moving out to the urban fringe in order to have a semblance of 'rural living'."[42]

"Too many people have been insisting that rural people should be brought up to urban levels. If this means losing some of the basic moral and spiritual values currently inherent in rural culture, can it be called 'up?'"[43]

If it may then be admitted that there is still a distinct difference between rural and urban life, what are the differences between rural and urban life? These differences will be considered first under rural traditions and values, and secondly under traditional rural problems.

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[40]Leo F. Schnore, "The Rural-Urban Variable: An Urbanite's Perspective," Rural Sociology, 31, No. 2 (1966), 131.

[41]Carl A. Clarke, Rural Churches in Transition (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959), 14.

[42]Clarke, p. 40.

[43]Clarke, p. 46.

1. Rural traditions and values. The most obvious difference between rural and urban life is the way in which a farmer traditionally views work. Unlike the city dweller, "the farmer does not work in order that he might escape from work."[44] The farmer sees work as a positive necessity, a way of life, not merely a living. There is a routine of work centered more around the seasons than the clock. R. C. Smith states,

> "What differences exist between rural and urban people?...Rural people live and work in a society governed less by the clock and more by the calendar. The regularity of an eight-hour shift is alien to them... They know seasons of relative leisure and seasons of unrelenting, almost ceaseless, toil. Their society by and large is one in which a man knows a small number of people and participates in groups, each one made up of a limited number of the same people."[45]

As the last quote points out, rural people tend to be small group and especially family oriented. The family works together and children learn responsibility at an early age.

> "This means that very early in life the farm boy and girl learn to take responsibility to develop initiative, to take pride in work well done and in having something of good quality to show for his or her labor. Perhaps this is an ideal, rather than an actual state of affairs, but the point is that on the farm this is possible and it is not possible to the same degree anywhere else. That is why we say the farm family is the foundation of society."[46]

This closeness is also manifested in a community neighborliness. "Many activities were found to be associated with neighborhood membership, centered around prominent rural social systems, such as the school and the church."[47] A strong sense of community is often evident in rural areas.

The land itself gives birth to several traditional rural values, a sense of stewardship of God's resources, a cautious conservatism and a rugged individualism.

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[44]Clarke, p. 44.

[45]Clarke, p. 28.

[46]A. G. Reynolds, "Values," Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, 96 (1944), p. 7.

[47]John R. Christiansen, "The Behavioral Correlates of Membership in Rural Neighborhoods," Rural Sociology, 22, No. 1 (1957), 19.

Otto F. Hinrichs is quoted as saying:

> "Rural people, both the farmers and those who depend on farm trade, live closer to nature and probably have a clearer realization of their dependence on God for a livelihood...Being so completely dependent on God's blessings in earthly things should make farmers more responsive to guidance and leadership in spiritual things. On the other hand, rural people are as a rule quite conservative. Too often their conservatism is carried too far and degenerates into isolationism and traditionalism. On the other hand, when the conservatism of rural people is properly guided, it can add to the spiritual strength and stability of the parish.
>
> At this point a farmer rose to the defense of his fellow farmers. He explained that experience with nature tended to make them cautious and conservative. Another speaker quoted the experience of a farmer who had agreed to go along with the program of Artificial Insemination when it was still in its experimental period. He allowed his entire herd to be treated, as a result of which every one of his cows went dry for a year. Such an experience would make an entire community cautious..."[48]

The traditional rural life is typified by pride in hard work, close family and community life, and traditional rugged spiritual and individual values. Many times these traditional rural values have been almost forgotten in a search for economic betterment. A writer warns,

> "If anyone has got the notion from what has been said so far that rural people can't be happy unless their economic lot is improved or that they are sure to be happy if it is improved, let him get rid of it now. Economic prosperity will not guarantee happiness. A fat bank account and a full stomach will not necessarily make a man happy. He was not made for these things. He is not an economic animal; he is a child of God, a spiritual being whom God made in His own image to have eternal fellowship with Himself."[49]

2. Traditional rural problems. What are the problems that stem from rural life and attitudes? Already mentioned is the traditional tendency toward isolationism and closed-mindedness among rural people. Often rural people see themselves as inferior and pessimistic toward the future. Albert Nickodemus, a rural pastor, described a case of this to the author in a personal letter:

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[48]Rural Life Institute, Social Changes and Christian Responsibility in Town and Country, Proceeding of two Rural Life Conferences held in Palos Park, Illinois, Jan. 1957 and Feb. 1958 (National Lutheran Council, 1960), 40.

[49]Reynolds, p. 1.

> "In my first congregation I had two boys that became interested in studying for the ministry. When I went to the farm home of one of the boys, just the mother was at the unkempt farmhouse. I talked about how wonderful that her John wanted to study to be a pastor. 'Oh,' she said, 'He can't become a pastor. We are just poor farm people.' I pointed out to her that I came from the farm, too, and we did not have much either. She and her husband consented and I signed the papers so John could go to Concordia College in Oakland. He has now been a pastor for 25 years and I am sure he is doing fine work in it."[50]

Beside these problem attitudes, there are also physical limitations that cause problems in rural life. Diversity of farmers, economic insecurity, erosion, lack of educational opportunity, social limitations and inadequate medical care all help to build a pessimistic, inferior kind of attitude among farmers.[51]

B. The changing face of rural America

Many of these problems and many of the traditional values and attitudes have changed in recent years as economic change has come to rural America. These changes and the ensuing problems will be discussed in this next section.

1. Change in rural America. There are two main areas of change in rural life; the change in farm methods and rural life improvement and the change in the makeup of rural population. The change in farming methods and rural life improvement are perhaps the most obvious to many observers. New techniques and technology in agriculture has caused higher labor efficiency with less farm workers needed, larger farms, more capital requirement per farm, and ever-higher production (see the chart on the following page for an illustration of this.)

The second change is more subtle. This is the change in the actual makeup of the rural population. R. C. Smith writes,

> "Rural people are commonly thought of as farmers. No notion could be more misleading. In the 1950 census 15.7% of the population was identified as rural farm; 20.6% was identified as rural non-farm. That means

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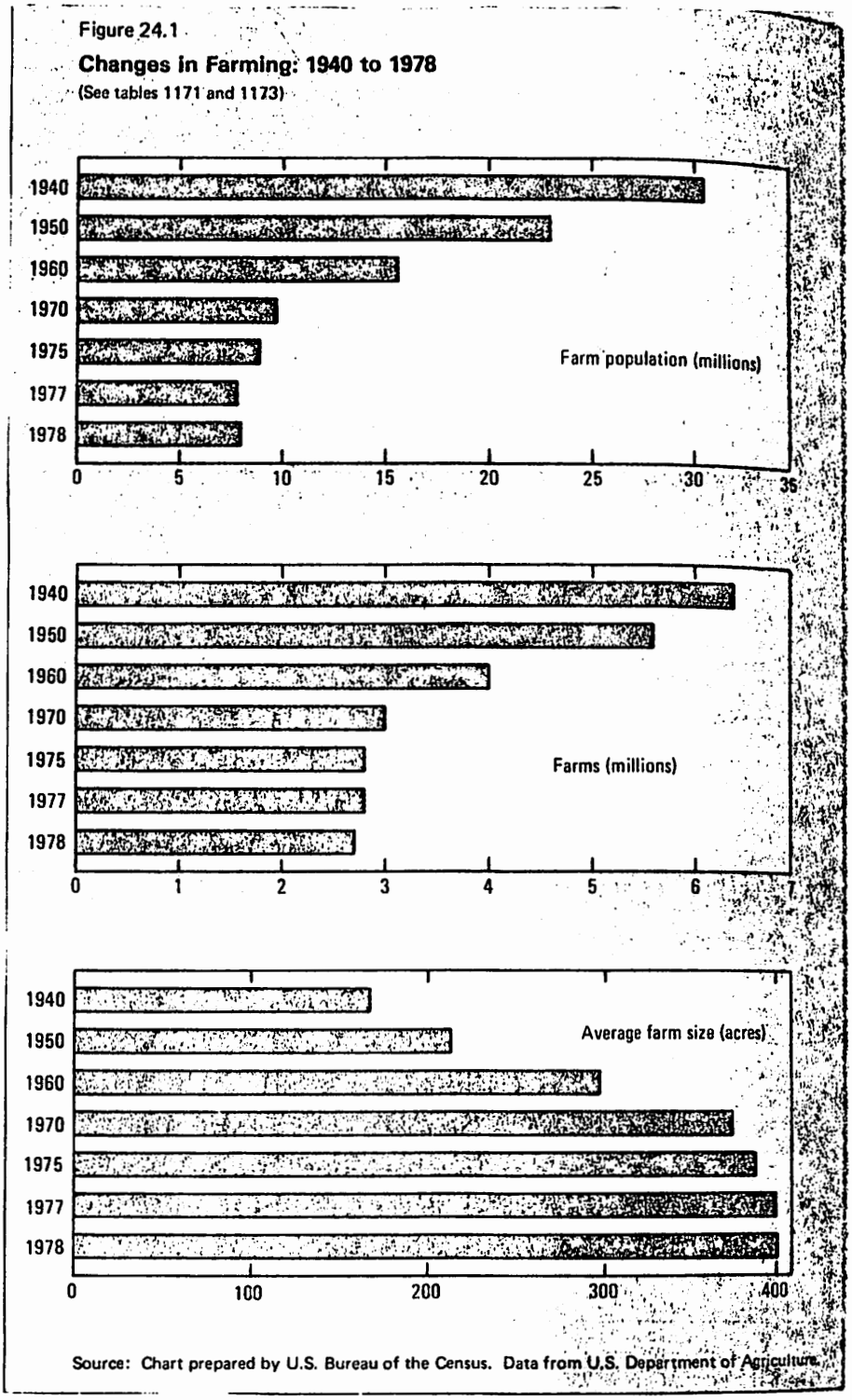
[50]Albert R. Nickodemus, Letter to Author, Received 15 October, 1981, p. 3.

[51]E. W. Mueller, More than Bread: An Analysis of Rural Life (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), 67.



[52]United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States (1979), p. 2.

> that in the entire rural population of the country, the farmers are in the minority. Nor do these farmers constitute a homogenous group in the population. They run all the way from the five-acre ranchowner who has an irrigated orange grove in California to the wheat farmer of the plains with his thousands of acres...Rural nonfarmers are likewise a heterogenous lot."[53]

Some of these non-farm rural people have a farm background, some do not. Carroll states,

> "Most Rural Settlement Churches, Type 12, the smallest of the rural churches, have remained stable in size over the last ten years. This is probably due to non-farm rural residents replacing those who moved out of the area with the decline in agricultural employment. Newcomers are persons who want to live in an uncongested area, and who affirm the rural value system, which includes the small church."[54]

Many areas are no longer rural or urban but "rurban" in this respect.

> "Many people living in the open country and villages are not rural in the sense that they practice farming as a way of life and major source of income. Rather we might think of mixed income communities and implications of a mixing and mingling of people from varied backgrounds, different values, interests and occupations."[55]

It is true that some rural areas have little change in population or are slightly declining but generally the rural areas are increasing in actual population.

> "The notion of a disastrous decline in the rural population is fanned by the boom in our urban population. The urban population has had the better of the ratio ever since it first went over the halfway mark in 1920. Mind you, the rural population is growing, but the urban population is growing so much faster with the help of the one million who annually migrate from the country to the city."[56]

From these a new picture of rural life is emerging. It is one of a mixed population of some large-scale farmers and many non-farm rural people. There is a

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[53]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), 15.

[54]Jackson W. Carroll, Ed., Small Churches Are Beautiful (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1977), 42.

[55]Rural Life Institute, New Thousands in Town and Country: Concern of the Church, Proceedings of Rural Life Conference held in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 1962 (National Lutheran Council, 1962), 74.

[56]Rural Life Institute, Rural Church Work, Proceedings of four Rural Life Conferences held from 1954-1958 (Rural Life Commission, 1958), 3.

tendency towards less isolationism, larger neighborhood centers, and a more rapidly changing value system. These changes bring with them in many cases economic blessing as well as social and psychological problems.

2. Problems caused by change in Rural America. There are three main areas of problems in changing rural America; a loss of family ties, a farm - non-farm tension and loss of neighborliness, and a tendency toward materialism and tension over a new pace of life.

As children have moved away from rural areas, as farms have become bigger and more specialized and as the pace of life has quickened in rural areas so there has resulted a loss of family ties, of family solidarity. "Commercialization of agriculture and the improvement of commerce have reduced neighborhood contacts in rural areas. Thus the primary institution of the family, the neighborhood, and the rural community have suffered in loss of leadership and in loss of membership participation in these activities."[57] Ironically, more dependence of farm families upon others has brought a loss of family solidarity. There is no longer a feeling of self-sufficiency and dependence upon the extended family. "The invasion of rural life by the urban outlook means less reliance on family and more on calculation. Even the arrangements between father and son in regard to income and transfer of title are becoming contractural arrangements. Rural people, too, are beginning to be motivated by enlightened self-interest as part of the swing to the mass society that is forming."[58]

This loss of community within the family is also reflected in the rural community as tension between farm and non-farm people and values. "The problem usually is a mixture of population; there is a danger of conflict of interests between rural

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[57]P. E. Lindstrom, "Preserving Rural Values," Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, 64 (1941), 1-4.

[58]Rural Life Institute, Rural Church Work, p. 5.

and urban people when the more progressive urban people move to rural communities."[59] Even between farm families there can be this same kind of tension.

"Here we have then, a loss of the sense of identity, a loss of the sense of communion, of belonging. This degeneration of fellowship and community extends also into our rural areas. We are experiencing a decline in the solidarity of the rural community. Where heretofore the rural area had its own community, today with increased migration to the cities, with transportation so easy, and with the decrease in the number of people needed on farms because of farm machinery, the farm community is being broken up. One by one these communities are ceasing to be genuine communities. As a result we are finding the same sort of anxiety and illness in the rural areas that we find in heavy population centers."[60]

The increase in materialism and a quickened pace of life has also had its effect upon the psychological makeup of rural people.

> "The rural pastor still finds it a challenge to keep the people who work in the fields all week awake in the pew on Sunday morning. Yet the age of tension has reached the rural areas. Factors in rural and small-town communities have been finding a decided increase in psychosomatic disorders since the beginning of World War II. Bigger and better machinery has created greater opportunities for making big money and more anxiety over the greater gamble that is involved. That certain wholesomeness that comes from living close to the land is not enough to repel the destructive motions that accompany any surrender to the competitive egocentricity of our culture. The rural or small-town pastor has the same need to do counseling as does the urban or suburban pastor. The former is handicapped even further, however, in getting his people to come to him for this counsel, because of the traditional independent spirit of the rural heritage."[61]

In conclusion, the rural areas of America are marked by both traditional values and problems as well as tension brought on by increased economic and social change. How does Lutheran rural America fit into this vast picture? This will be looked at in the next chapter.

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[59]Clarke, p. 13.

[60]W. E. Hulme, The Nature of Spiritual Illness," Concordia Theological Monthly, 33 (1962), 70.

[61]W. E. Hulme, How To Start Counseling, p. 11.

CHAPTER 3: Lutheran Rural America

In general, Lutheran rural America typifies the picture of a changing rural America in Chapter 2. This chapter will seek to define what Lutheran rural America is (with special concern for The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod rural America) and how it too, is changing.

A. Lutheran rural America--a definition

A definition of Lutheran rural America should answer two questions: First, who is Lutheran rural America? Second, do these Lutherans share the same traditional tendencies of most rural people?

1. Who is Lutheran rural America? Lutherans in America began as a rural people. E. W. Mueller writes,

> "The Lutheran church in America began as a predominantly rural church. Immigrants from Lutheran countries tended to settle in the rural areas of the Middle West. Lutheran pastors either accompanied or followed them and organized great numbers of congregations, the major portion of which were rural. More Lutheran congregations were established on American soil between the years 1885 and 1910 than during any other twenty-five year period."[62]

Where did these Lutherans specifically settle? "81% of all Lutherans in America, 4,715,000 of them, live in the heartland of America. This includes the two Dakotas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Ohio, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, New York, and Pennsylvania."[63] The Lutheran church (especially the LCMS) considered itself predominantly a rural church. They are still very strong numerically in the rural states of the Midwest. "Lutherans constitute the largest Protestant church group in the States of the great rural Midwest (Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Montana)...."[64]

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[62]Rural Life Institute, Report of Rural Life Institute, Proceedings of Rural Life Conference held in Valparaiso, Indiana, July, 1954 (Rural Life Commission, 1954), 1.

[63]Rural Life Institute, Report of Rural Life, p. 2.

[64]W. W. Steunbel, "Rural Life and the Church," Concordia Theological Monthly, 22 (1951), 43.

The LCMS Statistical Yearbook reveals that 36.4% of the congregations and 23.9% of the members in the LCMS are rural. (Rural means that the congregation is located in a township of less than 2,500 people.)[65] The largest percentage of rural congregations are located in the districts comprising the "great rural midwest" with eleven districts comprised of over 50% rural churches. Although the percentage of rural congregations has decreased in the last fifty years, the actual number of both congregations and members in rural churches has actually risen in the last fifty years. The Lutheran church in America is still a strong rural church although not as predominantly rural as in the period when indeed all of America was predominantly rural.

2. Do rural Lutherans share the same traditional tendencies of most rural people? Seven pastors of predominantly rural churches in Southern Illinois were asked what the joys and frustrations of working with rural people were. The majority of them listed these frustrations: (1) A well-established gossip line; (2) A strong Herr Pastor image (He does it all); (3) Strongly opinionated and set in their ways; (4) An inner circle work-force; (5) Indecisive and deliberate; (6) Strong family interelatedness and resistance to one outside that family; (7) A lack of education in leadership roles; (8) A lack of communication between the pastor and laity; (9) A resistance to change; (10) Conservative economically; (11) Slow in accepting new people; (12) A lack of an evangelism program, and (13) Inbred satisfaction with status quo.[66]

The pastor's list of joys in working with rural Lutherans was even longer: (1) Close to nature; (2) Very helpful people; (3) Freedom of spirit feeling; (4) Greater acceptance of pastor as person; (5) Strong family caring, (6) Very

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[65]See appropriate tables in 1980 Statistical Yearbook, Department of Personnel and Statistics of the LCMS (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1981).

[66]Rural Life Institute, Synod's Task Force on Rural Ministry Data-Gathering Interview, Proceedings of Conference held in Belleville, Illinois, 19 October, 1981. (Unpublished notes by author, 1981).

church minded; (7) Tolerance of others' mistakes; (8) Hidden salary, (full freezer, etc.); (9) Close to pastor; (10) Hard working people; (11) Faithfulness at worship and church life; (12) Approach to life is simple; (13) Work together as a team in community activities and church projects, (14) Gemutlickeit; (15) Easy to relate Scripture to them; (16) Giving of themselves in time and energy; (17) Open to change if properly presented; (18) Much trust in God; (19) Everybody knows everybody else; (20) Acceptance of pastor's family; (21) True-blue Lutherans; (22) Strong church loyalty.[67] From these characteristics it can be readily seen that Lutheran pastors perceive rural Lutheran people in much the same way as rural people traditionally view their attitudes and values.

B. The changing face of Lutheran rural America

As rural America changed, so did Lutheran rural America. This may be seen by the problems Lutheran congregations faced in a changing world and how they have worked toward solutions of their problems.

1. Problems of Lutheran rural congregations in a changing world. There are four main problems encountered by rural Lutheran congregations in a changing environment. The first problem is that as farm population in rural areas declined, rural congregations declined in membership, leading to formation of multiple parishes.

> "The majority of rural churches, whether in town or open country, are one-room structures. Not only are they minus a specialized ministerial staff, they share the same pastor. They are on circuits of from two to as many as ten churches. This means that the rural pastor in the majority of cases must operate two or more organizational systems. He has two official boards, two women's societies, two church schools, and so on. If his circuit is an exceptionally large one, he may not see some of his congregations more often than once a month. Obviously without the advantage of direct and continually recurring contacts with his people to help him, he must develop a quality of statesmanlike understanding and leadership if he is to do anything more than maintain a precarious ecclesiastical status quo. The more than one-third of Americans who are rural must find their religious salvation in an institution and through a pastoral leadership like this."[68]

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[67] Synod's Task Force on Rural Ministry.

[68] R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 18.

The second problem that rural congregations encounter is the difficulty in reaching non-farm people that have moved into the community. Especially this is true if there is little competition from other churches and no understanding of outreach evangelism.[69]

The third problem is that as some rural people have become more prosperous they have also become materialistic and indifferent to spiritual things. One writer states,

> "He (the pastor) will find that the people of his flock, to whom he is primarily obligated, also have been affected by the many influences in the world of today which are destructive of Christian faith, that they are no longer the simple, unsophisticated, pious folk to whom his predecessors were privileged to minister, that the cure of souls, always a delicate and difficult task, becomes more difficult with each succeeding year, that his work is all too often not appreciated even by his own people."[70]

The last problem faced by rural congregations is with the pastor himself. He may not be able to relate well to rural people if he is from an urban background. More will be said concerning this in the last chapter, but this quote may suffice to point out the problem.

> "It was mentioned above that in the Lutheran church there is not too great a difference felt between rural and urban pastors. This may result in part from the fact that there are many fine parishes in the small town, and open country, which are mannered by very able pastors. Another reason may be that practically all Lutheran pastors have received the same standard training, having completed both a four-year college course and a three-year course in theology. This may likewise account for the feeling expressed in more than one study of the rural situation--that there is no fundamental difference in rural and urban ministries, 'since all members have the same spiritual needs'. There are other people who admit that there are fundamental spiritual needs for all mankind, but who also insist that the outward circumstances which clothe those needs differ. There are approaches to the city Christian which are more meaningful to him than other approaches, and the same holds true in rural areas. It is important to understand where a man is, in order to get him to go where you want him to go. Therefore some understanding of rural life is required of those who would lead rural people.[71]

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[69]Charles DeVries, Inside Rural America: A Lutheran View (Chicago, Illinois: National Lutheran Council, 1962), 35.

[70]H. F. Wind, p. 244.

[71]E. W. Mueller, More Than Bread, p. 67-68.

2. Some solutions to a changing rural situation. The optimism that the rural church can solve its problems is best expressed by W. J. Stelling, "Truly, the rural church has every reason not only to stay where she is, but to grow and improve with the needs of the people she serves. Her job may be a little more complicated than in the 'good old days' but complications provide a healthy challenge!"[72]

The solutions in rural congregations to these problems follow two main patterns. The first is to strengthen the education and evangelism program of the rural church and attempt to win the unchurched. "The Lutheran church has demonstrated the strength of its appeal by growing in a declining population...a church which can achieve this has a promise of winning out and it should look upon all rural America as its mission field."[73] The church must have strong pastoral leadership to achieve such an aggressive program, often against the tide of traditionalism and materialism.

The second solution to this problem and often a necessary one, is the consolidation or merger of small rural parishes. This may be the case in an area of declining rural population. This often follows the same pattern as consolidation of schools, towns, farms, etc.[74] In 1954. W. H. Hillmer of the Synod Board of Home Missions could state, "During the last five years 138 stations in our Synod have been consolidated."[75]

In many areas the second solution has been applied to the full and only the first solution is left as a viable alternative to abandonment or at least stagnation of the congregation.

In the last chapter of this paper, the role of the Lutheran pastoral care in this unique, challenging situation will be shown and the challenge of the rural pastor providing the cure of souls to his people in the rural church.

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[72]W. J. Stelling, "God Counts in God's Country," The Lutheran Witness, 20 March 1951, 85.

[73]Report of Rural Life Institute, p. 3.

[74]Edwin A. Hunter, The Small Town and Country Church (New York, New York: Abingdon Cobesbury Press, 1947), 40.

[75]Report of Rural Life Institute, p. 5.

CHAPTER 4: Pastoral Care in Lutheran Rural America

A. The Uniqueness of Pastoral Care in Lutheran Rural America.

Pastoral care in Lutheran rural America is unique and different than pastoral care in urban or suburban America. It will first be demonstrated why pastoral care is unique in rural America. Secondly, the characteristics and habits that make a rural pastor unique, and third, specifically <u>how</u> pastoral care is unique.

1. Why pastoral care is unique in rural America. Perhaps many would contend that pastoral care in rural areas is no different than pastoral care in any other area. But those who are rural pastors say there is a decided difference not because the message of Law and Gospel is not the same, nor the problem of sin any different, but because rural <u>people</u> are different. Culturally, socially, and psychologically, they differ. The whole problem of an urban pastor understanding and communicating with his rural people will be discussed later, but let these quotes suffice to show that rural pastoral care is different than in other environments.

> "Persons are persons everywhere and the gospel is for all men alike. But we shall not deal in these pages with the problems of making the gospel message effective among persons in general. There are areas of life and work in which rural persons face special problems and need particular applications of the gospel message. It is with these that we shall concern ourselves. Red and blue have much in common: They are both colors. But it would be a strange sort of artist indeed who refused to recognize the difference between them or to take account of it in his creations."[76]

A Lutheran pastor warns,

> "To bring the message of God to our community we need to understand that community. Be a student of rural sociology, either by living with it or by studying it. If you study rural Sociology do not make it the <u>content</u> of your message. The solution to our rural problem is found in theology. The study of rural sociology and other subjects will only help us to improve our methods."[77]

> "The assumption still exists that one type of preacher, leaving school, could serve either city or country church with equal ease and efficiency.

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[76] R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 13.

[77] Report of Rural Life Institute, p. 4.

> From my own student days I well remember a lecturer who, belonging himself to the old 'no-difference' school, addressed us hopefuls, 'Gentlemen', he counseled benevolently, 'it may do you no harm to spend the first five or ten years of your ministry in a country church.' However the context made it plain that the real stakes for the man with the message are in the city, where thousands live within reach of his influence and hear him preach--if they will come. The man who lectured might have been heard in almost any seminary. It was and with some still is, 'the line'."[78]

> "The conscientious reader is by now asking: 'Granted all that you say, why is it that sincere church leaders continue to urge that there is no difference between urban and rural church problems and leadership?" An answer to such a question must be speculative of course. Most ministers, church leaders included, began their ministries in rural churches. Most of us do not do our best at first, we make mistakes, have to learn through costly experience, often end our first pastorate with failure. Most church leaders came to their leadership through pastorates of unusual significance in urban churches. The memory of urban successes is sweet, of rural failure bitter. We are tempted to forget the problem we never did solve by denying its existence and basking in the light of later victories. Hence we say: 'People are alike everywhere; there's no difference between urban and rural churches.' We as churchmen, and the church itself, will be better off when we realize that there is no shame in failure providing our failure becomes a means of self-exploration, self-understanding, and self-improvement."[79]

When near the end of the afore-mentioned Synod Data Gathering Interview the seven rural pastors were asked, "We have been operating with the assumption that the rural parish is unique. Is it?", the seven pastors unanimously answered with two words, "It is."[80] No matter what may be said to the contrary, all evidence points to the fact that the rural congregation and with it, rural pastoral care, is unique.

2. Characteristics and habits that make a rural pastor unique. Not only is rural pastoral care unique but the rural pastor must be a man with unique characteristics and habits to be a successful rural pastor. The "work is for the strongest of men, well-trained, oriented to rural life."[81] First, what are the characteristics and attitudes of an effective rural pastor? Many of the characteristics are worthy

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[78]Martin Schroeder, "The Rural Minister and the Country Church: The Country Church is Different," Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, 55 (1940), 1.

[79]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 19.

[80]Synod's Task Force on Rural Ministry.

[81]Edward K. Ziegler, The Village Pastor: His Work and Training for Tomorrow's World(New York, New York: Agricultural Missions, 1959), 14.

of any pastor, but are especially important for a rural pastor. There is no getting away from the importance of the pastor for the success of the rural congregation. Ziegler writes, "The key to the effectiveness of the village church is the pastor."[82] Steunkel states, "We must admit that particularly in the rural church the greatest problem is the pastor. In the large Rural Life Conference in Lincoln, Nebraska, that sentiment rang as 'an ominous refrain' through all the workshops and joint sessions. Again and again rural laymen arose and said, 'Give us a good resident pastor, and 90% of our problems are solved.'"[83]

The characteristics of a rural pastor often stated are as follows: He must know and love rural people, he must be proud of his calling as a rural pastor, he must learn to speak the people's language, he must be a diligent scholar, he must be devoted to family ministry, he must have high moral standards, he must be patient with his people, he must manage his own household well. The characteristics not to have are such as these: critical, pessimistic, selfish, lazy, prideful, talebearer. Below is a list of these characteristics and a few comments concerning them: Knows and loves rural people: The rural pastor must know and understand his rural people.[84] He must know them as they relate to each other and for an extended period of time.[85,86] He must love them both in word and deed and be personally acquainted with both their joys and sorrows.[87,88] This kind of intimate pastoral care argues against short pastorates. But a true shepherd will not find that a burden. "It is to love them and find your heart so full of them you cannot leave them."[89] Proud of his calling:

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[82]Edward K. Ziegler, The Village Pastor, p. 3.

[83]W. W. Steunkel, "The Rural Church", Practical Essay from the Proceedings of the 67th Convention of the Western District of the LCMS, p. 32-48 (1948), 39.

[84]Harry Coiner and Allen Nauss, "Assignment to Xanadu, U.S.A.: Bane or Blessing?" The Springfielder, 34, No. 1 (1970), 60.

[85]Schuetze and Habeck, p. 138.

[86]Rural Life Institute, Report of Rural Life Institute, p. 5.

[87]W. W. Steunkel, "Rural Life", p. 41.

[88]Edward K. Ziegler, p. 49.

[89]A. W. Hewitt, Highland Shepherds: A Book of the Rural Pastorate (Norwood, Mass.: The Plimpton Press, 1939), 2.

The rural pastor can take comfort that this rural church is his call from God. People should know that there are happy rural pastors. "Never let anyone hear you say, 'I'm just a country preacher.'"[90] Learn to Speak the People's Language: Rural pastors must not only be well-trained but also speak a message people can understand.[91] Country people have their own language. They especially appreciate and understand physical labor and community activities.[92] The pastor should have at least some minimal knowledge of the everyday work of the farmer.[93] To do this he does not have to be country-raised or become a county agent. "The average city boy...realizes he doesn't know anything about rural life and wants to learn. That last fact is his salvation. What is important is not a man's place of birth, but being open-minded and willing to learn.[94] Don McGavran, of church growth fame, puts it in this terminology, "Evangelizers with cross-cultural sensitivities and communication skills can sometimes be effective, but they must adopt to the receptor's cultural frame of reference."[95] Devoted to family ministry: It is even more important in the rural church that the pastor "manage his own household well", as he is often seen as example for both congregation and community. The pastor should show strong interest in both his own family's well-being and those of his congregation.[96] High Moral standards: Moral problems in any pastor will eventually limit his ministry. This is doubly true of the rural pastorate where 'everyone knows everyone else's business.'[97]

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[90]Rural Life Institute, Report of Rural Life Institute, p. 5.

[91]Rural Life Institute, Report of Rural Life Institute, p. 4.

[92]C. R. McBride, Protestant Churchmanship for Rural America, (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1962), 29.

[93]W. J. Stelling, p. 85.

[94]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 22.

[95]Donald A. McGavran, Understanding Church Growth, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 70.

[96]Clarke, p. 97.

[97]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 23.

Put simply, "Faults in a rural pastor are far more swiftly deadly."[98] Patience: One of the most difficult things for rural pastors to learn is how to lead a naturally conservative congregation toward more progressive attitudes and practices without impatience.[99] Growth may in some ways be slower than in the city.[100] Other characteristics: The rural pastor should be no gossip,[101] he should be a gentleman,[102] he must not be overly critical or selfish or prideful.[103,104,105] The rural pastor who exhibits such traits will find himself alienated and distrusted by his people.

The habits that a rural pastor should develop are somewhat unique to the rural pastorate, although all of them would be good practice for any pastor. Those habits receiving special emphasis in the rural parish are: Study rural life, do physical labor, be an early riser, have private devotions, continue with systematic study. Each of these habits will be listed below with pertinent comments.

Study rural life: The rural pastor should draw his preaching and teaching illustrations not only from books, not only from observation of people, but also from the study of nature itself, even as our Lord often did. These illustrations will bring freshness and relevance to his texts.[106] Physical labor: Although work in the garden, in the shop or with livestock should not interfere with a pastor's schedule, they do serve not only as an outlet for tension but also as a contact with rural people. It may also serve to teach children responsibility and provide some

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[98]Hewitt, p. 13.

[99]Clarke, p. 97.

[100]Ziegler, p. 14.

[101]Hewitt, p. 221.

[102]Hewitt, p. 198.

[103]Hewitt, p. 14.

[104]Hewitt, p. 17.

[105]Wind, p. 250.

[106]McBride, p. 268.

much-needed exercise. It helps the members of the congregation understand that their everyday labor is also pleasing to God and important for others.[107,108] An early riser: The rural pastor who is not out of bed, shaved and dressed by eight o'clock may experience some embarrassing moments and a certain alienation from a people accustomed to arising at dawn.[109] Private devotions: The rural pastor, as well as any pastor, should set aside a time for uninterrupted word and prayer each day. The practice of a devotional life will show itself in almost every phase of pastoral care.[110] Practice systematic study: The rural pastor must discipline himself to study different subjects pertaining to theology and pastoral care. He is often more isolated from academic disciplines than an urban pastor and does not often have access to good study resources. One advantage that the rural pastor often does have is time to study, assuming that he has a small parish.[111] The pastor therefore, must discipline himself to do reading in several areas and to subscribe to several journals of varying viewpoints and interests.[112] The use of monthly group study can be very beneficial if pastoral conferences are used for presentation of papers, study of texts, etc., and not just for administrative business.[113] These group meetings can also be sources of encouragement and suggestions by other rural pastors.

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[107]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 32.

[108]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 33.

[109]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 32.

[110]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 32.

[111]McBride, p. 239.

[112]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 33.

[113]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 33-34.

These are a few of the characteristics and habits that the rural pastor should emphasize and strive to possess. These characteristics and habits are designed to help bring the pastor and his people closer together and to assist him in bringing them a relevant application of Law and Gospel. Of special note also are two articles by Walter Steunkel[114,115] which stress the heavy rural setting of much of the Old Testament and many of Jesus' illustrations and parables.

3. The uniqueness of pastoral care in rural churches. Pastoral care is indeed unique in many ways in the rural church. In this section the importance of pastoral visiting in the rural church will be discussed, second the specifics of regular rural pastoral care will be given, third the ministry to the sick and bereaved, and fourth a short note on rural pastoral counseling will be offered.

Why is pastoral visiting important in the rural church? Pastoral visiting is especially important in rural areas because: (1) This is the only way to really know the people; (2) It helps all other areas of the pastor's ministry; (3) In a rural church the opportunity for calling is at its best.

Pastoral visiting is the only way to really know your people. Pastoral visiting is not merely making social calls but both "a systematic and comprehensive audit" of the families of the congregation and a long-term attempt to conserve and increase spiritual growth among the members.[116] If a rural pastor wishes to bring Christ to his people, he "must walk where his people walk."[117] Most rural church members look forward to such calls and are pleased with a visiting pastor.[118]

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[114]W. W. Steunkel, "The Rural Church".

[115]W. W. Steunkel, "Rural Life and the Church".

[116]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 121.

[117]National Lutheran Council, Pastor, How Can You Expect?... (Chicago, Illinois, 1960), p. 7.

[118]Fritz, p. 184.

Pastoral visiting brings benefits to all areas of the pastor's ministry. It brings obvious results in counseling and confession and practical application to his preaching and teaching.[119]

In a rural parish, pastoral visiting is not only important and helpful, it is also one of the most opportune places to call. While the average size of LCMS congregations has gone up by nearly 150 communicants since 1930,[120] rural congregations are still relatively small and all families can be reached by a single pastor once, twice, or even three times a year. "The pastor has the opportunity to maintain closer contact with people and to touch them in their personal moments of need and to be touched by them in return."[121] "You are not so overwhelmed with numbers of people that you fail to have a face-to-face ministry with all your people. I do more counseling riding around on tractors and combines, or drinking coffee in homes than I do in my study. But the impetus must come from me. Any pastor who wants to shepherd a flock will get his opportunity in a rural area."[122]

What are some of the specific practices and problems that are involved in rural pastoral care? The first practice is that a rural pastor must set a specific schedule and then stick to it. Does the pastor wish to visit every family in the congregation once, twice or three times a year? Depending on the pastor's decision regarding this, he must break this down to so many calls per week, allowing for interruptions, festival weeks (Christmas and Easter), and vacation time. The goals, in any case must be realistic and followed through.[123]

The pastor must take into account how many members may be visited during the afternoons and how many during the evening. If the pastor has a dual parish, he may

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[119]Schuetze and Habeck, p. 140.

[120]1980 Statistical Yearbook, p. 3.

[121]Coiner and Nauss, p. 60.

[122]Coiner and Nauss, p. 61.

[123]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 122.

wish to set aside certain days for visiting in each parish.[124] The visiting pastor must have a realistic idea of how many calls he can make in an afternoon or evening and how long they will be. (Some pastors are comfortable with 20 minutes, some an hour). Of course, there will be interruptions for funerals, weddings, etc. Some days more calls might be made than anticipated and another day may bring an especially problem-filled call that will take longer than planned. Whatever the schedule. it must be realistic and followed through by the pastor.[125]

The rural pastor should have a fairly fixed schedule mapped out according to a geographical pattern. This will not only save time and gas money, but also avoid hurt feelings of those who might think they were missed.[126]

For each set of calls the rural pastor should also have a special emphasis. This eliminates "chit-chat" and gives the pastor a chance for education of his people. These emphases should have to do with the programs of the church and spiritual growth of the members. Topics such as missions, evangelism, education, devotional life, etc., may be emphasized during different years and at different seasons of the church year.[127]

The pastor should also be sensitive to the rhythms of the day and the seasons for the rural family. Pastors should call ahead to schedule visits that avoid "chore time" or meals. At certain times of the year (harvesting, planting, etc.) most farm families have little time for a visit. In some areas there is a day when people "come to town" and the pastor may make it a point to do his shopping then and casually meet people on the street. Perhaps there are certain activities or sports events that virtually everyone in the community attends. It would be wise

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[124]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 35.

[125]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 122-123.

[126]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 123.

[127]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 123-124.

for the pastor to at least occasionally attend these. In a word, the rural pastor should be sensitive to his people's schedules as well as his own.[128]

Should the pastor take his wife on calls? If the pastor wishes to be open to opportunities for counseling, he should not. "It should not be necessary to say that he should make pastoral calls alone. The habit of taking one's wife on a series of pastoral calls is, to speak temperately, an unfortunate one. There are occasions when the pastor and his wife should call together, but these are not pastoral calls but social ones."[129]

The pastor should not call just on farms, but also visit the businesses and shops where his members work. This would also mean getting to know the manager of the business and something about his attitude toward the church.[130] The pastor will as a matter of courtesy not keep the employees from their work. The same should be true on the farm. If the pastor surprises the farmer while he is working with livestock or on the tractor he should greet him, and show some interest in what he is doing, but in any case, he should not detain him.[131] When talking to the men, "have a word with the men about their livestock, their work, their fields and their crops." Use this as an opportunity to stress the service they render to Christ in their everyday work. Too often laymen feel that their work is of no "spiritual" value.[132]

Be sensitive to the customs of rural families also. The story is told of a rural pastor who "stood waiting for admittance at the front door while on the

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[128]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 31.

[129]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 124.

[130]McBride, p. 280.

[131]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 125.

[132]McGavran, p. 389-390.

inside his winter-bound parishioner removed the nails with which the entrance had been made tight against the searching winds."[133] It is best to follow the housewife's lead in where to sit, whether to accept coffee, etc.

No matter what the length of the call the pastor should be relaxed and comfortable. He should not give the impression that he might rush out the door at any minute. The pastor's attitude may determine the whole atmosphere of the visit.[134] After the course of the call, especially if the family has discussed personal family problems or difficulties with the pastor, he should offer to pray with them. Often country people are shy about asking for anything from the pastor, even a prayer.[135] And when the pastor has said, "I must leave now," he should leave. If the pastor calls regularly and has completed the call with prayer, he should go and leave the extended social visiting for another time.[136] This may especially be true in the case of lonely shut-ins whom the pastor sees on a monthly basis.

Another distinctive type of calling done by rural pastors as well as any other pastor is the important work of calling upon the sick. Several things are unique about this form of rural pastoral care also. For many the sight of "their pastor" is a very comforting thing. "And here, of course, is one of the dividends of routine pastoral calling. Our parishioners are used to having us come to them, they have received us before, not once but again and again. When we enter the sickroom, the sick man is at once thrown into an old familiar situation. Perhaps he looks up to the preacher to say, "Preacher, I never thought you'd see me in as bad a shape as this." If we have been visiting him regularly as his pastor, we can reply, 'Why, Jim, I've seen you in all kinds of situations--on the tractor,

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[133]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 126.

[134]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 126-127.

[135]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 129.

[136]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, 129.

nursing a sick cow, digging out the lane after a blizzard, worrying when Martha was so sick. Why are you so concerned about my seeing you like this?' In the light of his memory of old fellowship he can gather strength to look at his fears, even the fear of death itself."[137]

Many rural pastors are often astonished and humbled by the strength of their people's simple faith.

> "Rural life, we must remember, is characterized by its wholeness. To rural people death is not an event divorced from the other aspects of life; most of them have seen their neighbors die and have helped to care for the dying. Death is part of the natural process which they observe in the seasons, in their crops and livestock, and in themselves. He may often find that the man whom he came to comfort has an attitude and a wisdom in the face of death which will comfort his pastor."[138]

Especially for rural people, being hospitalized means being torn from their familiar surroundings and given time to do nothing but worry. In such cases the pastor can often help reassure the patient concerning the home and family situation, that the farm or children are being cared for.[139]

The rural pastor will especially be faced with three types of hospitalization: There are generally many births in rural families (although this has declined somewhat), there are often serious on-the-job accidents, and there are usually many older people with diseases and ailments common to that time of life. The rural pastor should know how to deal as a Seelsorger with each person.[140]

When a parishioner is sick in the rural community it affects a large number of people. This means that the pastor should also be concerned about caring for the hospitalized person's family. Many pastors are pleasantly surprised by the community support that personal illnesses generate. Often the extended family and neighbors are of great help in caring for the patient's physical and spiritual needs.[141]

[137] R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 140.

[138] R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 141.

[139] R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 141.

[140] R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 133.

[141] R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 133.

Similarly, many people are directly affected by the death of one person in a rural community. The loss of the farm breadwinner especially affects the older children. Not only must their mother's personal needs be taken care of, but the farm is an immediate and sizeable management problem. Especially when none of the children were working with the father there may be added burdens on them and their spouses.[142]

Single children are often trapped by a bereavement in a different way. The mother may put pressure on a younger son or daughter to live with her and care for her needs. This often generates later bitterness and resentment by both mother and child.[143]

Let these examples suffice in the premise that ministration to the sick and bereaved in the rural church often involves unique methods and approaches in bringing the comforting word of the Gospel.

Finally a note should be made about rural counseling. "The rural pastor will find that his counseling opportunities come mostly through casual contacts and very seldom through the establishment of a formal counseling program....The rural pastor who sets up a formal counseling program with stated hours for visitation from his people will become more or less a laughingstock in his community."[144]

Often instead, rural pastoral visiting will lead to rural pastoral counseling. Rural people will not come to the pastor at first, so it is best if the pastor comes to them before problems come to a crisis point. In visiting, the pastor should especially ask questions about the family. If this seems to reveal some difficulties, the pastor should encourage the member to talk about the situation. This may later lead to a more formal counseling situation.[145]

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[142]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 144-147.

[143]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 147.

[144]R. C. Smith, Rural Ministry and the Changing World (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 122.

[145]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 127.

B. The Challenge of Pastoral Care in Lutheran Rural America.

This last section of this paper will deal with the very serious challenge confronting the Lutheran rural pastor in America. First, there is the temptation to shun the rural parish. Second, are the problems with conditions in the rural parish. Third, the dedication demanded of the rural pastor and the challenge before him.

1. The temptation of leaving the rural parish. The first challenge to the rural pastor is that, although a rural parish must have a pastor to be successful, many men are unwilling to stay in the rural parish. One writer puts it this way, "The country is still clothed with prosperous rural congregations. What made them so prosperous, other things being equal, over against the problem congregations? The answer is not found in the name of the denomination, nor in the pulpit message primarily, but in the parsonage where you will find, almost invariably, long-time residents. In other words a content, settled ministry is the prerequisite to achieve fortification of the rural church."[146]

Why do men leave the rural parish if their residence is so essential to its success? There are several reasons. The first is that urban trained and raised seminarians are unprepared for the rural situation. They do not see the rural church as a career.[147] When they encounter resistance or cultural problems they begin looking for another call. Coiner and Nauss state, "Graduates said that they initiated programs without any real understanding of the rather unique problems and outlook of rural people."[148]

Another major problem is the "stepping-stone" attitude of some rural pastors. Although it is granted that some men wish to go to larger congregations to more fully

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[146]Martin Schroeder, p. 1.

[147]R. C. Smith, Rural Church Administration, p. 18.

[148]Coiner and Nauss, p. 59.

utilize their talents for God's service, many are moved by more selfish motives. Many simply want a bigger congregation for the prestige that it brings.[149,150] This attitude is often expressed unknowingly by people, "He seems to be a good man and very able; wonder why he never moved up to a city congregation?"[151]

E. W. Mueller responds to such an attitude, "If some of the boys who toil out 'in the sticks' would roll up their sleeves and go to work instead of deploring their disadvantages and coveting city congregations, we could begin to explore the possibilities of the countryside."[152]

2. The conditions of the rural parish. Often the conditions of the rural parish offer a pastor and his family their hardest challenge. Examples are the lower salaries, the isolated loneliness of the rural parish.

The plain fact of the matter is that rural congregations generally are unable to offer the same economic standard as in the city parish. Although this has improved markedly in recent years, the pastor entering the rural parish should be realistic and face this fact before he begins. If he does ready himself, he will be in a better frame of mind to face the problem and to better it.[153]

Loneliness in the rural parish is especially hard on the wife. Often the minister and his wife are not considered for the various social groupings of the community....This isolation is particularly hard on the wife. She probably came into the community with her husband directly from the seminary community where she likely enjoyed the intimate fellowship of the seminary trailer court or married student apartment. The change is difficult to take."[154]

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[149]J. W. Carroll, ed., Small Churches are Beautiful, (New York, New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977), p. 82-83.

[150]Charles DeVries, Inside Rural America: A Lutheran View (Chicago, Illinois: National Lutheran Council, 1962), p. 9.

[151]W. W. Steunkel, "The Rural Church", p. 40.

[152]W. W. Steunkel, "The Rural Church", p. 40.

[153]Harold W. Longnecker, Building Town and Country Churches (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1961), p. 32.

[154]Hulme, Your Pastor's Problems, p. 110.

3. Dedication needed for the rural parish.

A study by W. Gehrke in 1970 shows that about 50% of the ministerial candidates given calls annually from the two seminaries in the LCMS are given town and country parishes (parishes in towns of less than 5,000). But only 17% of these candidates are from town and country churches themselves.[155] Obviously there is and will continue to be a problem of sending urban men into rural environments.

The question must be asked by the rural pastor who finds himself dissatisfied with his situation, is the problem in the attitude of the man or the place? "He may need to change his attitude or his frame of reference," states the author.[156] No pastor can be effective in the rural parish while he secretly resents his situation and congregation.[157] The rural pastor must realize he has come into the ministry of Jesus Christ so that he might serve Him and win souls to Him. "A town is not a territory to be worked for the church, but a spot where the church and the pastor might become servants of people in need."[158] Many men have stayed in the rural parish because they saw their rural parishioners as every bit as dear to Jesus Christ as those in the suburbs or city.[159]

In the final analysis a rural pastor must serve where he hears God leading him to serve. "The rural pastor must be willing to serve in a small place as long as it is God's will for him to be there."[160] The country church pastor must settle once and for all the question of his life purpose. Carl Clark has summed it up this way: "Will he set himself to climb the ladder of so-called pastoral success? Is he ambitious to try to push himself into high denominational positions and widespread influence? Or is his primary purpose to serve wherever the place of service

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[155]Wilbur L. Gehrke, An Evaluation of the "Affirming Rural Mission" Workshop as a Vital Part of the Preparation of Lutheran Pastors for the Town and Country Ministry, Research Paper, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1970, p. 40, 41.

[156]Coiner and Nauss, p. 62.

[157]Martin Schroeder, p. 1.

[158]Pastor, How Can You Expect, p. 5.

[159]Martin Schroeder, p. 2.

[160]H. W. Longnecker, p. 33.

may be most effective?"[161] This question each rural pastor must ask himself before God and base his decision only on the basis of service to Him.

4. Conclusions concerning pastoral care in Lutheran rural America.

Many conclusions might be drawn concerning the rural situation and the Lutheran pastor's unique and challenging work of pastoral care. The following conclusions will serve as a short summary of this paper.

(1) Pastoral cure of souls (seelsorge) is important and vital to the pastoral ministry. This spiritual care involves systematic pastoral visiting, pastoral counseling, and the pastor's care for his own and his family's spiritual life.

(2) Rural life is unique and has both strengths and weaknesses, joys and problems. Rural people show many good qualities, which can also become problems (e.g. conservatism becomes stubborness to change).

(3) The rural scene is changing rapidly with influx of technology, rural nonfarm people, and also many of urban society's ills.

(4) Lutheran rural America began as a rural church and much of it still is. It exhibits many of the same strengths and weaknesses as all of rural America. One of the greatest problems it has is keeping good pastoral leadership.

(5) Pastoral care is unique in rural America. This is true simply because rural people are unique and the application of Law and Gospel must be made revelant to them.

(6) The rural pastor must be especially equipped with certain characteristics and attitudes to bring about successful pastoral care in rural areas.

(7) There are some aspects of pastoral care practice that are unique to the rural pastor. This was discussed at length in the last section.

(8) There is a tremendous challenge to the rural pastor, both in terms of leaving the rural parish for the wrong reasons and in terms of the tremendous challenge of service in the rural church.

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[161] H. W. Longnecker, p. 35.

(9) Rural pastorates require not "cast-off clergy" but the most dedicated, loving, and caring shepherds that God calls into the ministry.

(10) This author believes, that just as in 1968, "there exists a specific need for a still closer relationship between the seminaries and the field in order to fulfill the common objective of providing an effective ministry among God's people."[162]

Lutheran people and Lutheran rural churches may not be ignored for they also need the same Gospel message and the best pastoral care that God's pastors can give. This must be the goal of every Lutheran rural pastor, to serve God's people as God's shepherd in the place where Christ has called him to be.

Perhaps this paper has but scratched the surface of the rural pastoral care challenge. However, it is the author's hope that his and other works will stimulate new thinking, dedication and creativity in pastoral care in Lutheran rural America.

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[162]Coiner and Nauss, p. 63.

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