

2008 Rural Life Task Force Report

The Rural Life Task Force has been in existence for twelve years. Current task force members include: Rev. David Andreae, Rev. Kris Synder, Wayne Schroeder, Pastor David Nelson, Craig Russell, Fred Greder, Rev. Matthew Voyer, Kenneth Debner, Richard Gates, Kevin Tobin, and Rev. Dennis Hanson. The Rev. Nancy Larson from the synod staff oversees the work of our task force.

Our chief purpose has been to work to help support and sustain small town and rural churches and communities. One of the events we endorse is the Rural Ministry Conference which is held each year at Wartburg College. We also created the litanies *Blessing of the Seeds and Soil* and *Harvest Time: Litanies for the Fall* that are used by many of our congregations in the spring and fall.

In 2008 our emphasis has been on Geographic Parishes. Well over half of the churches in our synod worship 100 or less each Sunday. A high proportion of the churches in the Northeastern Iowa Synod share a pastor or Associate in Ministry. The demographics of our area show us that mutual ministry will have to continue to be developed and maintained. No two geographic ministries are the same. We are in the process of creating a network of people familiar with geographic ministries for support and training. Pastors coming in to our synod who have grown up in suburban congregations need training on how small town ministry works. We also recognize that change brings pain. Hope can move us through the pain to journey forward with renewed zeal. Pastor Darrel Gerrietts will be working with us to strengthen the Synod's ministry through Geographic Parishes.

We invite you to visit our display at the Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly on June 5-7 at Luther College in Decorah. We hope to offer three workshops at the upcoming Synod Assembly. The workshops will be: *Geographic Parishes* facilitated by Pastor Darrel Gerrietts; *Support for Soldiers and their Families upon Returning Home* facilitated by Pastor Lance Kittleson; and *Keeping Hope and Faith in Troubled Times* facilitated by Professor Chip Bouzard from Wartburg College.

Pastor Dennis Hanson, Chairperson
Rural Life Task Force