

## Kitchen Table Discussions

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### Consumerism—power of consumerism, drives of consumerism, rural/urban connections

7 participants

Walmart—how did it happen?

Looking for the hook, responding to pressure

Historically, Walmart's advantage has been scale and price.

Now, because of their size, sustainability has become an issue.

“Top down” driver initiative

Walmart is producing sustainability index that will be “downloaded” to their suppliers

Will consumer continue to demand local/organic or will consumer give in to price

Depends on economic base – where people have means to make choices.

Authenticity and credibility – these are keywords coming up in discussions with

Loblaws and Walmart—power of the consumer (consumer demand)

What about Fair trade? Trend?

Local – markets & farmers – demand for these are causing farmers to change their practices

Media, education – schools' culinary programs and gardens

Food summit in Waterloo (urban/rural connections)

New churches – what is the first step to linking rural/urban communities?

Education

Who is interested? Gather like-minded

Movies, discussions

Bring in local experts

Farm organizations – are they willing to embrace the “messiness” of where our food system is going?

Are they willing to change?

We don't feed the world.

e.g. much of what is grown in Manitoba is sold to people who can buy it i.e. USA

It is *not* sold to people who need it.

Consumer is generally unaware of this fact

Deep-rooted belief that GMOs help to feed people

Only 2 traits of GMs: insect resistant, herbicide resistant

Yield traits are NOT represented in GMs; they are represented in traditional breeding methods

Yield traits are multiple – not GM (which is a single trait)

What drives the consumer?

Nutritional aspect?

Energy aspect? (in terms of transportation, carbon footprint  
Media?)

Can we still grow our own food, cook our own meals?

Sustainable urban agriculture

Skills

2 Consumer Groups: those who can afford to buy how we want, and those who struggle to put food on the table

Where does the church move forward? What can we do? How do we do this with dignity  
Community meals, food pantries, education (how to grow food, provide land to grow it),  
political activism, community kitchens, partnerships with other organizations (health  
units, etc.) change of perspective “those people”, apathy? (How do we deal with this?)  
How can we be prophetic? Visionary?

As a church, we are called to do something. Who will champion the cause?

There are small things we *can* do. It’s so easy to become overwhelmed. Start small and  
where people’s interest is.

Value of food – family, connection, conduit for conversation

Must be a better way of distributing food than using excessive packaging.

Education is key – educating youth/children about healthy eating and food preparation.

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## **Sustainability – community and conversations**

4 participants

Church is the last institution to leave the community as rural communities die

Sense of abandonment, sadness, disappointment

How to find new life, new identities

How to embrace farmers in the conversation – farmers also feel abandoned and betrayed  
by a society who changed the rules – in the 70s and 80s, society wanted big farms and  
cheap food, so farmers did that and now perceive they are the bad guys because society  
wants “local”

Most of our farmers are younger than others in the congregation – town church is dying  
faster than the rural points.

Dynamic of retired farmers who “die off” younger farmers are trying to make a living

Ministering in a rural area where congregations are multi-generational – huge sense of  
community centred around a community hall – active farmers and those who have had to  
sell the farm because they can’t make a go of it.

Importance of shopping in local stores to support the local community business

Building links between the church and local business e.g. churches buying from local  
farmers, local businesses, local tradespeople

“Celebration of local food” dinner as a fundraiser for a project in a developing country to  
support farmers in another country.

When we read a book, *The 100 Mile Diet*, remember to talk with local farmers about their  
reality relative to the concepts in the book.

If you want to buy local, make sure it’s local.

How to start conversations with farmers:

1. Go to them – meet them at their farm, ride in their combine, ask about why they do what they do, ask for a tour, be genuinely interested
2. Don't preach – don't have "the answer"
3. How to talk about wind farms – only hearing from those who are opposed – role of church – where are the other voices?

Rural vs. urban

Moving beyond labels "us" and "them"

Moving beyond defining ourselves only on the basis of what we are not

What is the role of the church in helping conversations to happen among members; helping people disagree and remain in relationship and in community

Demonstrating to others who don't appear to be like us (e.g. Asian Canadians running small town grocery stores) that they are integral to the community

Celebrating the amazing mix of people who live within the rural community – a big continuum, socio-economically, culturally, academically

"Where are you from?" —wherever I am right now is where I'm from

Isolation – being storm stayed and furnace breaks and no services

Don't see others "like me" a lot closer to parishioners – constantly "on" because I live in the community – "goldfish bowl"

Patterns of being within rural content – being able to talk about things other than what you might be calling about

Integration of family into neighbours' families – children treating other adults like aunts and uncles because they see them within the community and not just on Sundays

What we take away from our conversations – being present at farm auctions and hockey arenas

Similarity of our styles

Permission to not take a stand so that I can truly listen to all perspectives (so important especially in small congregations)

Sustainability and conversations

A good resource is "who has your church"

Describe each congregation as a person\went really well at an Official board meeting

Provides a foundation for responding to bigger questions related to where they want to be in five years

Not as esoteric an approach to visioning – people can be more honest talking about describing themselves as a person

In Guatemala, refer to building as the "temple" whereas the "church" is the people.

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## **Global Food Sustainability**

4 participants

Spent considerable time talking about the decline of bees around the world

A farmer receives \$4,200 for a truck load of grain, by the time it reaches the table, it is worth \$293,000.

It is very important to encourage local sustainable agriculture e.g. Clamming river in Ethiopia

It was helpful when city kids come to country

One 3<sup>rd</sup> world farmer couldn't afford to buy the product we produce

Will capitalism come to an end when everything is owned by one?

Strange anomalies about imports and exports

Internet having a big impact on world

In India 33 people control over 80% of the nation's commerce

Lack of universal free education is major development problem

We noted class and racial distinctions

Politics has been a real problem, i.e. polarization, democrat and republican are at loggerheads

War is a major problem.

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### **Future of Rural Congregations – viability, growth and demographics**

19 participants

Dorchester – offloading of all congregational responsibility to lay – spent time “permission giving” – now exploring mutual ministry after minister's plate got overloaded

Once a year offer training for ministries in the church

Mutual Ministry – started with a training session for servers of communion

gave language and theological rationale for the way the liturgy unwinds

each component is necessary for the whole

Anglican service

review – ask does this work, what do we need to do differently?

builds confidence

Avon/Putnam – came from larger city congregation

needs to be a culture that has nothing to do with or minimizes the financial viability of a congregation and augments the spiritual viability of congregation

how do we engage the community around us with the reality of demographics

free dinner for the community – entertainment

not to get people in the pews or joining the church

point was to establish their presence in the community

helped define who the church is and how they see themselves

helped them to name their purpose as a representative to the community

see them selves as part of creating a healthy community

“How we see ourselves” was key

Change and new ideas are a challenge – opportunity to say way we do what we do, the order of worship, how we worship says something about who we are

How can we work together, what can we do? Orientation for new members to congregation or committees is key  
Churches are bad at providing basic info and training for the ministries they are engaged in

doing this well allows others to feel they can contribute

community involvement key – Holy dinner community dinner in the parking lot  
may not be involved in the church on Sunday but in other ways

Demographics

no facilities for the people in their community

i.e. hospitals, retirement homes etc

at same time, new subdivisions going up bringing people with no previous connection to the community

used to be a village of retired farmers – no longer

What is the common denominator for the newly forming community?

New building - trying to address needs of the program/services and connections for the village

You can get demographics for your community – talk to Nancy Mann to get them  
enviro-nics/UC link

internal integrity is one component – without it, you have anxiety

small churches have low self esteem, grieving who they once were  
need to reclaim their value

some suffer from apathy, tired, blasé, no energy for ministry

sometimes anger is best way to break through apathy

“There’s nothing they can do to me now!” attitude

loss, lament, memorial for what was at 3 Mile Lake

way to reclaim any memory of who they are is simply to keep the lights in the building on

survival is preferable to destruction

Seeing the church still there is a symbol of hope

Lack of money is symptom of all that loss

Seems like there is a system beyond the control of local church members

One thing to refocus was to ask why do we have money at all? What is our purpose.

What’s the bottom line? May be silence when you get to that last question.

Parry Sound

struck by how different the congregations are – one more community based, the other is family church

family church sees no need to “advertise” everyone knows who we are

community based church has sense of vitality since they have found “programs” they can contribute to the community – i.e. extended meals on wheels program

letting go of money issues – no longer saving for a rainy day – spending it doing ministry  
– discovering a rebirth of vitality – beginning to thrive

Vitality:

spiritual growth

giving and life giving to others

vital comes from the word for life

accepting of change

focused on ministry not surviving

what are you known for? If your church disappeared from the community, would it be missed.

apathy is opposite of vitality – apathy is a symptom of people being comfortable with who they are

energy

Identity and Communication

two keys for rural church to consider

can't assume people know

communities are dying around us

farmers aging, industries/employers closing

partnered with a community group to offer programs in the unused manse

Tuesday lunches – discovering renewed enthusiasm – not just property use but

also congregants find new ministry opportunities

was about getting out into the community

If we are spiritually well with the church, the church will be financially well

changed name of the finance community to “wellness community”

now they do more than finances

spiritual identity is grounded in how to nurture the body of Christ – helping people to come to Christ

Lot of churches in a small area (50 mile radius) – trying to work together

can't all do everything – we can provide shared ministry

take offering for community needs not own church needs

Urban sprawl – rural churches will be enveloped by growing cities

Rural is diverse – not just farming

Joint worship teams for multipoint charges

a pastoral charge team that goes to all services on the charge

Demographic – kids have moved away – adults stayed but now that grandkids are coming, the people are leaving to be near their grandkids

Congregation communication boards – trying to keep in touch

where is so and so – put a pin and update what they are doing

post addresses for congregation to be in touch

privacy issues need to be addressed

Seniors feel forgotten – will ask for a newsletter rather than a visit  
churches lose track/contact with their elder members  
no living memory in pastors with high turn over of pastors

multipoint charges

different in their construct and theology even when all the same charge  
signs of vitality = strong music leadership, people care for each other  
neighbourliness  
we choose to get along – hard to break some of the rigid concepts  
music creates cohesion – without youth in the church we're destined to obsolescence  
people will give to specific projects – less willing to give to just survive

conference position to support these congregations

send in crises teams to first listen allow people to vent, to name their worries  
then identify key people to help them figure out next steps  
hard work trying to convince people to risk – let go of their own self interest and  
preoccupation with survival to determine what their purpose is

Become Esther – focus on why you are in this particular place at this particular place –  
what is the ministry you have to offer – for some- this might be to close and let others  
live more fully

How do we refocus energy/interest off the presenting problem to underlying issues.  
Viability needs to refocus attention.

We need to die. We don't want to die. But we don't know how to live.

Isolation for ministers/pastors huge – support for the rural minister in these situations

Diocese and presbyteries need to look at the systemic state of rural churches – needs to  
take a role

Nancy invited those interested to present a case study

Congregations don't trust presbytery/diocese or conferences

feel we are going to take things away from them  
there are resources their for congregations if we can open them up to trust  
workshops on the basics help – congregations don't know who we are and what they do  
too often presbyteries are involved when congregations are in trouble

Lutheran church is trying to refocus congregations on amalgamation. Not use up  
everything and close. Then the church has to deal with it. Hard for some to give up their  
building. People worship the building.

For the elder generations, going to the church is where they meet God. The building is more than just a building.

Trying to do things to bring people into the church. Apathy settles in when programs start and end for one reason or another. Volunteers are getting tired.

Wealth in the community is not indicative of the state of the church finances.

Status Quo

Decide what's important. (Is this the building or is it the people?)

Then what's your priority.

Naming volunteer work as mission.

    this is missional work. we are a mission church

        polled congregation – how many hours to do you volunteer?

    in the church, community, globally

    Showed them they are vibrant/vital

If you have youth in your congregation – What is it in contemporary life that speaks to you? give the ministry to the kids. Ottawa – the Point, London – the Swell  
    regional ministry

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## **The Church as Role Model – community gardens & the church as farmer**

11 Participants

“I live north of Hwy. 7. Logging used to be the main industry, now there are a lot of folks with interest in organic; there are no farms, but my spouse started an organic garden club which has really taken off, people visit each other's gardens and exchange organic eggs, etc.”

At Virginia Summer Collegium 2010 on small church ministry, someone shared about all amalgamation of three churches, bought a farm and the church owns the farm and runs it. Their “foodbank” is the food they are growing. They finished their food processing plant before they finished their sanctuary! This is a Lutheran church in Pennsylvania.

One congregation farms for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (Cambridge, ON). Church has a few fundraisers to buy seed and fertilizer

“We bought a farm and decided to do organic corn for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

They brought together conventional and organic farmers, labelled it as a learning project. It was all ecumenical. Joined ‘Ecological Farmers of Ontario’ and they provided 2 year mentorship out of which grew the Foodgrains project.”

Providence Centre, Kingston, has Heritage Seeds Bank which gives out seed free under certain conditions. Rare Breeds Canada, of which Elisabeth is a member, helps preserve biodiversity via livestock.

The incredible sharing of resources happens in the communities with community gardens. They feed each other. Can we extend this to the seniors in the community who can't garden anymore?

When you have people in church process the leftover local produce and sell it canned or frozen—it works as a great fundraiser.

In Newfoundland of Jim's parents' youth, each family had a tiny subsistence farm, where one grew potatoes, the next turnips, the next horses, they shared the produce and the equipment.

It's not just about food; the community that's being created at the same time is amazing. Skepticism is overcome by a different experience.

Markdale United youth group grows the vegetables for the big annual turkey dinner!

"For me, it's about taking your stand somewhere and then look at the policy issues."

Foodbank receives donated produce, but now has forbidding signs, "this material was not federally inspected", so veal for example can't be given away at the food bank.

Political Action – see uprising re Health Unit rules on church dinners.

Political action re maintaining local slaughterhouses necessary.

United Church in St. Marys lends their kitchen out to all kinds of community groups to host a free community supper open to anyone. They take donations and the revenue is distributed among needy groups. They happen every two weeks. The richest guy in town would come every time and never paid until someone suggested he should. He came because he was lonely!

Church started community garden to combat poverty in the region. The project built community in a way they did not anticipate. The seniors had a wealth of knowledge. They uncovered heritage recipes native to the plains (North Dakota). "We are slowly recovering the old ways." This year, they pledged 500 lb. of food to the local food bank. Sometimes the new emerges from the death of the old. Example of a conventional hog farmer who has lost everything; Christian people who rebuilt farm as a Heritage Farm with pastured poultry, etc. Out of the ashes of a hog farm that brought only losses, this new (old) concept arose. But these people are now seen as "lunatic fringe." Organic farmers are shamed.

In our communities very often the organic people are already outsiders, as they moved into a community from outside.

It is less of a risk for them to do the new and different thing, than for the folks who have lived somewhere all their life long.

Potential role for churches might also be to collect heritage recipes, produce directory of local producers.

Theological connections: stewardship, hospitality, Holy Spirit working "way out there" in organic communities to heal the earth.

Pauline from St. Stephen, NB, 5 point charge, tiny churches. It's a different world out there. Her families arrived in the 1500s. There is such a sense of belonging in a place of abject poverty. There are still subsistence farms there. Church does meatless fundraising suppers, because people had no meat. They know how to live with who they are, and where they are. These folks help each other quietly and would recoil from organizing something on a large scale. They practice the 100 mile diet without naming it that.

It's protective isolation in the Maritimes according to Pauline: suspicious of outsiders.

Michael observes the same thing in the US Plains. Problem in the Maritimes like elsewhere is that small farmers are dying out; so ten years from now, they may not be able to get local eggs anymore.

We live in a perpetual sense of grief. The youth have gone to Alberta. If we're gonna die, the world had better wish that we've been here.

Your folk will test you and try you until they know they can trust you. Change can be driven by the laity. Building resilient communities is important. Forget about how many bums are in the pew. Let's put uncooked pies in people's freezers.

Weblink to Pennsylvania Lutheran Community, Big Spring United Lutheran:

[www.bsulc.com](http://www.bsulc.com)

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## **A Theological Response—establishing a church food policy**

### **“Nature Abhors a Vacuum.”**

11 participants

Some Bible stories that speak to these issues:

Psalm 24: the earth is the Lord's – stewardship

Noah's Ark: shifting relationship between God and humanity – rainbow as promise and covenant

Tower of Babel: empire/fall (God/self) and covenant

Consider recent earthquakes – different results to different levels of affluence or standards of building

Isaiah – we rely on God not ourselves

Technology = false God? (what we can control)

What are we privileging (outside discussion)?

Prayer is a response to God and do our lives and challenges like sustainability

God and we are all connected.

### **Church Food Policies**

Is the creation story (human stewardship) part of the problem? What about humility

Pay attention to our neighbour - care for one another – start small - helps to care.

The farmer's back yard, over time, is eroded and taken “down the river”

Why do we ask agriculture to be pure/organic – i.e. hold them to different standards than we demand of other industries.

Theology of food system must be holistic.

How do we include large farm industry in the discussion.

Consider Newfoundland Conference cutting back on paper while Corner Brook Paper

Companies laying off people

Or

Bottle water vs. rural congregations

Local conversation and smaller communities bring gospel encouragement – ideas may be more acceptable than when “natural church” dictate – we get our backs up – this applies locally and globally – communities need to build capacity to help themselves.

The more you talk about it, the more complicated it all seems.

We're all affluent, lots of food—global food shortages and food bank, low income diets here are low in protein and nutrition.

God loves and saves communities (economy is a means to caring for people.

Salvation through “encounter with the stranger.”

Farmers and fishermen must have a voice in this: what are the cities willing to pay for; what can we learn from each other. We're in this together! Not us against them!

Churches play an integral role in rural communities.

Struggle for Political Relevance

Farmers make up only 2-3% of the population; even 10% of rural is farming.

Equip people for moral, theological, conversation in the workplace

Call for churches to focus/trust and stand for God even in the face of ridiculous odds.

Another Bible Story

Moses and the burning bush—holy ground. We need to look at all the world as holy ground (sacredness of the ground)

Metaphorically think of earth as God's body.

WTO smaller countries standing up (assertiveness)

Community Soundings asset mapping in local communities

Leadership: Grassroots level encouragement is a role for the churches. What can we do together? The story of resurrection – sometimes things must die before new life can begin – sustainability is about communities.

God is with the suffering ones and God doesn't abandon us in exile or bondage.

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### **Tying together Gil & Rene**

3 Participants

Family Farms are always needed to be sustainable to be passed on. Farmers moved to growth and specialization and economic growth, but serving is more important than growth – living humbly is a good goal.

Church is the right place to bring this message.

God is in this – the church bringing the message

The moral issue of green is happening around us, and outside of the church

Sophistication of rural technology – GPS fertilizer spraying

Social sophistication – learning to live together sustainability

Certainty vs faith.

Christianity is getting ready for another Reformation - environmental, social gospel (away from personal salvation) - recognising creation as control and redemption out of creation.

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### **Tools for Knowing and Loving our Community – Conflict Between Environment and Community**

Photo Voice – ask folks to take pictures of community/environmental scenes they feel are “significant.” And write in a photo log about why they think they are significant

Surprising what different folks see as significant

Ask questions like: Where is God here?

Considering doing as part of confirmation

Friday Night Groups – ask politicians, business people, neighbours

What are the challenges in this community?

Kids go out for community walk about or drive about – return to tell us what they saw

Where are we?

What it is like to live here?

What is it like to go to school here?

Learn to listen to youth and to community members

Takin' it to the Streets

Close one Sunday and take worship out to where the people are (arena, park, etc.)

Offer blessings (to children)

Inviting them into church doesn't work, but going to brings more folks together

Missio Dei – a figure out of what God is doing in community and “run to catch up”

Our church was becoming like a nursing home/palliative care organization, so we asked ourselves: Where are we? Where is God? How can we share the good news where they are?

Try 6-panel, bright yellow paper: Community Spirit Newsletter

1525 homes, twice a year

printed and folded at Staples.

Rural post office loves the business

Onions at Easter – onion sets wrapped up like Easter eggs

Onions make you cry. Onions have layers. Banquet needs flavour. Healing powers in onions.

Mining the Wisdom of the Group (at church)

Imagine the church burns down

Imagine the minister dies in the shock

Imagine all the money is stolen.

What do you do next? Who do you call? What assets do we still have? Let's build a new ministry without money, pastor, building

This is a re-framing to discover our assets.

Pay it Forward Fundraiser – people used their talents to create wealth.

\$400 out; \$2,000 return for missions

Advertise “something special is going to happen, so be here Sunday”

Partner with firemen (come and touch the trucks

Church table at local market (produce, knitting, crafts)

Praise in the park community worship

Re-think the church; don't just go—be the church.

Let's spend 80% of our time outside the church instead of 80% inside the Church

Christmas Walks/Drives/Pickups  
From church to church and nursing home and pub  
Core choir

How deeply do we know the land?  
Visit people and ask to show land, animals, and hear their stories.  
Visit local farmers market  
Canning seminars/community kitchen.

Invite local farmers to arena/museum for a celebration in the community.  
Prayers from the farm  
Beating the bounds  
Telling stories.

Don't use the prayer book—you'll just remind them of why they don't come to church

If you can't buy fresh produce (even some villages don't have grocery stores) develop a farmer's market and church garden sharing.

Walking the Kingdom in Your neighbourhood. Where are we?

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### **The Sacrament of All Creation**

7 participants

Communion of all creation's dance  
Discussion of question, "Where are you?"  
Lending itself to prayer/hymn service  
Communicating the good news in our parishes: what we are, who we are, where we are  
Creation is sacrament  
Celebrating the grace in ministry—how we are the body of Christ  
Paradigm shift to Evangelical Ambassadorship  
The church at work in the community is Christ at work in the community.  
As we live and as we die we continue to be part of creation.  
When you welcome the stranger, you welcome the Christ—this is sacramental.  
We are the body of Christ, what we consume becomes who we are.  
Communion→communication→communing  
Finding comfort in the darkness i.e. taking city children to the forest.  
We need to find ways to lift up vocation, finding ministry opportunities in every day  
We need to name the sacraments in our lives.  
Finding God and Christ in our lives.  
Discussion of bread vs. water  
Intinction vs. common cup.  
Children in worship as servers "remember Jesus"

Sacrament is meant for everyone.  
Creation is God-with-us for everyone  
What comes from the earth is sacred → sacrament  
Shift from who are you to where are you – relation of sacrament to where we are.  
What is the challenge we have in telling others who we are?  
If we change that to where we are, we may wish to be able to speak more freely.  
Where you are is where God is.  
Having communion outside.  
Words help with sacrament  
Bethlehem = House of bread  
Need to return to sacrament of earth  
Transubstantiation and creation – what changes in substance is us  
We are the earth standing up  
The where is here, and goes beyond us.  
Communion around the dining room table.  
Discussion of coffee hour fellowship – sacrament in gathering  
Self-care of congregations - one checks on another, care for each other  
Thanks for broadening the understanding of what is sacrament.

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## **Dealing with and Identifying with the Marginalized**

6 participants

Why are people at this workshop? New to rural community, so want to hear what is said.  
We are all close to being marginalized  
What do we mean by marginalized? All of us are marginalized in some way. We think of these in terms of economic challenges. Marginalized have little impact on those who have power.  
Marginalized in economic way have less ability to do environmental work – requires free time.  
What do we do? Help people feel empowered in what they are doing – not rail about all not doing.  
Support farm families in crisis  
People under great stress are more marginalized  
Marginalized includes all economic strata—many ways to be marginalized  
Those who do everything in church can be marginalized  
Hiddenness of rural poverty that rural churches have in their midst  
Poor families in midst of prosperous agricult  
e.g. Shoe box gifts for poor native children. Environmental question: cheap goods fill boxes to get stretch money – a problem.

Queens Bush Rural Ministry

Church is in area where many farm closures all put money in to agency to listen to stories and provide possible options for them, including advocacy with government and/or money lenders to fund alternative solutions.

We identified listening as a primary task we can fulfill as church

Are there churches in our communities that are more connected to power systems and can do advocacy work for systemic change.

Perhaps through pairing affluent church with poor church

Sharing church buildings can be helpful, but some church communities feel heritage of God in community even if really know church is not a building – place becomes sacred, so hard to share.

Traditions really underpin a church community's sense of self – have to pay attention to this and hard to change their traditions.

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### **Conflict within the Parish with Respect to Environmental issues**

Waste management – the dump

Whose land, whose garbage

Environmental impact – water

Impact on human and animal communities

Corporate pressure

What do you do when one side support dump expansion and have sold land, while others are opposed? How do you advance an ethic when two sides are in conflict?

Affordable housing developments on previous parkland – on fragile environment.

Oil refinery (Newfoundland) expansion

Environmental/human implications

Risk of tanker collision at sea

Competition between fishery and oil industry

Does oil expansion keep the community alive despite the risk?

Corporate farming

Social conflict between previous farmers and new immigrant farmers

Increase size of manure

Wine industry (Prince Edward County)

Changes in use of sustainable land

Conflict with neighbouring farms.

Common Voices

Economic driving forces

What is the cost of sustaining an industry?

Changing nature community demographics

Is politeness in church helpful?

David Suzuki is getting less polite

So where are we? How do we care for where we are?

How do we live ethically where we are?

Key learnings

Churches can be placed where ideas and alternative vision can be lifted.  
Awareness not only of where we are but how we got here.  
Greater understanding of history and geography of where we are.  
Necessity to be sensitive to issue while at the same time perhaps being a little less polite.

Resource:

*Creation Time in the Season of Pentecost* materials from United Church:

<http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/creation>

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## **Making the Shift from Who to Where**

13 participants

who/where is spectrum – the emphasis we are being asked to consider needs to be where, but we can't let go of the who – a continuum

Can we know the who without knowing the where and vice versa?

Why is it more important to know where we are rather than who we are?

When we know where we are, there are things about who we are that take on more importance depending on where we are.

The where draws things out of us. We are called to serve where we are. Implies we need to know where we are. Moving from interpersonal is connected to this.

Where is the church body in all this? It's not just rural churches that are decreasing in size. Need a broader context. Need to put yourself in context with your colleagues so you don't despair.

“Small” congregations face some of the same issues whether they are rural or not. The reflection was based on how to be strong/healthy congregations

How are we church in terms of God's creation?

Doctrine/belief/interdenominational/interfaith – theology gets in the way. “Where” is more than physical location of an individual.

Are we spiralling away from God or closer to God. Spirals throw things off as they spiral away and gather things in as you spiral toward God.

I am a child of God – that's first. The where is wherever I happen to be as that child of God. All encompassing sense of time under the canopy of stars – its ancient-ness, awe, then and yet somehow now.

Bloom where you have been planted.

Need to get out of our buildings – roll of the flaps of the tent – church needs to be more inclusive – our churches are locked up and closed off.

South Dakota - one church never locks the door – sees itself as a place of welcome for emergencies – a response to being robbed – made a decision to stay open 24/7

The where of our buildings can impede change – i.e. technology will ruin the décor  
Seminary burnt down – now where are they?

Are we visible to our communities? Is the congregation visible or only the pastor? Do our communities know where we are.

What are the rumors about my church? What do you say about us? How do you describe us?

Do you want to change these?

Many congregations think they have arrived on their journey. They don't want to keep moving. Their where is here and now and what they know.

If you're where is not a place, a physical location, then the who you are on the journey has to wrestle with this.

The church is wherever God's people are ... song  
whose responsibility is ministry? Jesus was hardly ever in the temple – ministry is where love is offer, healing happens etc, needs more than the pastor.  
I am a child of God – that requires responsibility to offer ministry in the where places it is needed.

This is bubbling up ecumenically but it has always been there. We need to make the connections. We are fragmented and disconnected. Can bring people together under the passion of the earth's needs – community will happen.

We need to claim the community around us and engage in shared ministry. Where is a physical reality and a perception.

Where offers a more holistic sense of how to be.

We have lost our memory of how active church used to be in social and political issues.

Technology offers a way to get our voice out.

assume technology is available – isolates rural communities

Youth – where is not so relevant. Global reality, information, giving up of land lines/connections

may be the hope.

not rooted to a particular place

Scary for some – what happens when there is no longer a gathered community in a particular place – job security, body of believers

Lost our voice somewhere along the way – have we been forgotten or did we hide  
do we have a voice?

Still a need to meet face to face – can see and hear passion and compassion.

Still an important place for the church to meet face to face, to challenge and gather

Thin places are another kind of where. Places where we can sense God's presence.

This is easier to get in a rural context.

Part of the where is that some don't have access to get out of the concrete maze – still  
under God's canopy – Urban sprawl needs green space. For some the concrete and  
architecture can be under the canopy – need to be aware of others ways of finding God's  
presence/awe.

Pieces of creation bring life and colour to drab/ugly places

Toronto – green roofs – harvesting the resources already there- fruit trees etc that people  
don't use – this is a paradigm shift

Michigan – uses abandoned lots for community gardens

Comic strip – Family Circle

neighbour talking to the dad, toys everywhere, no green space, paths are worn into yard,  
sees neighbours yard. Wife says are we raising grass or children?

Why don't we live as if where we are matters – let this dictate who we are and how we  
are God's people

Welcome to wherever you are – Bon Jovi

emails – you are right where you are meant to be

Peanut cartoon – Woodstock – scout leader – “Hark I must hasten after them for I am  
their leader” – they are way ahead.

Principles of open space – whatever happens is the only thing that could, who ever comes  
is meant to be there . . . etc

God has endowed congregations with resources to do what is needed where you are.

Not individual focus – needs the body of people, inspired to be and do – we need  
community.

After the resurrection – all but Thomas were present when Jesus appeared. Thomas  
needed to be where the community was to experience what the others experienced.

Risen Christ stories – most were to community – yet they were all hiding – Thomas was  
the brave one – out in the world

are we hiding – lost our voice or have we just stopped speaking?

If we want to be heard, we will only be heard if we are in relationship with those we want  
to hear.

If you are hiding, is different from God hiding you.

Shift – thought this meant letting go and taking something new. In this conversation, hearing holding on and using it to let something new emerge – healthier vision. Knowing where will help the who to re-emerge

As we become rooted in the where – who will emerge

We try to take people and congregations from here to there. There is a need to remind congregants who they are and who they are. Where is too hard for them as a result of dysfunction. For congregations that are not healthy and have no vitality this would be a struggle.

Some need to be nurtured in who they are so they can claim a different where.

need to live responsibly in our own areas and be aware of the global needs – it's a both/and not an either/or

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### **Inter-Church/Inter-Faith Conversation – sharing success stories**

7 participants

- discussion about broadening the community – making it limitless (especially when we use terms that create limits for others – i.e. God, Christ)
- experiences with language – God with capital G can kill conversation; yet when people describe what they believe, some of us would use the name God for it, some would not
- this kind of thinking is related to instigating the necessary paradigm shift
- mining industry experience – meeting people around the world who worried about resources – they often described where they lived in very academic language, but no sense of rootedness, connection to the land
- this different than how ancient peoples talked about where they live
- are we similarly detached from where we are?
- if minister's role (as community outsider) is to reflect back to them (behaviours, ideas)...then minister is not rooted in that community...but has fresh eyes...thus can be seen as a threat...and they don't have the strength that comes from having roots...the minister also doesn't have the same attachment to the building
- language of Jesus and way he lived can have value and teaching beyond Christian only communities
- we can still speak about things that are important to us, without apologizing or expecting others to apologize for the way they speak about things
- using language that crosses walls – presence, holy, divine, sacred.....can be understood by many
- many who grew up in the church see organized religion as irrelevant, but they likely still claim a belief in the divine
- and climate change etc are VERY relevant to them
- that's when/where we really include everyone!!

e.g. movie afternoons (Story of Stuff, Food Inc., Inconvenient Truth, Black Gold), fair trade products – folks are willing to go to the church for that – they might attend other congregations, or none, but they come to church for these activities

- therefore in these kinds of gatherings we maintain awareness of our language, yet we can still speak words that have value for us and them (Isaiah...lion & lamb...)
- communities KNOW who the local minister is...thus opportunities for broader conversations happen within the community (agriculture fair, coffee shop)...this is a way for integration of true/wider community...those outside the church see us in a different light (than what they assumed we are in churches)
- can also use movies beyond ecological issues (Fantasia, Bucket List) to instigate conversations among all ages & stages of faith journeys (in & out of the church)
- environmental foci in a rural community may have the effect of feeling exclusive to those who are tied to the land vs. newer rural people who aren't multi-generation farm families
- churches can show community by example – community gardens, solar panels...show people outside the church that we believe in caring for creation...starts conversations
- when a churches faced closing their building...reconsidered how they do ministry – open up doors to the marginalized in their community lead to growth, one rewrote music as a volunteer in gratitude for being accepted and feeling cared for
- underlies the importance of understanding our communities, and how that might change what we do
- ask people in the pews – where are you?
- one congregation did that – because of declining attendance and decreasing lay people to do the work of the congregation – dropping off because of age/illness – nobody in 40-55 age group – they read an article “Does your church have a will?” – some churches just spent every last cent, then the last one turned off the light and closed the doors and left it to synod to figure out...this lead to roundtable discussions in another congregation – then discussions & facts were shared with those who weren't attending church (but only 3 families showed up beyond those who were still participating in church)...having faced reality will now discuss where their next step might be (there is a commitment to stay 'together' as a community—besides the building -- and to be good stewards of their equity)
- these kinds of discussion are for the community/congregation to have...best if minister doesn't attend, because the congregation will need to continue with or without minister (but minister needs to be informed of plans/ideas)
- how can we as church leaders better equip the folks we work with – to be comfortable having conversations with community beyond the church...do they have the language they need?
- kids are full of ideas, few biases...they can talk very well about the environment and why we care for it
- their language doesn't tend to be as exclusive...they can teach us
- people generally have very little trouble talking about why they do stuff (local food, tap water)...with or without needing to attend church
- depends on their generations and depth of rootedness in the community; lasting negative feelings from community issues (i.e. Seaway expropriated churches & homes)
- this is still WHO we are language...perhaps re-focussing on WHERE may help

-we shouldn't be critical of others who do join us in the church...when they come with new ideas...allowing more space, being aware  
-any/all conversations/concerns we have at the local level can be expanded to national, denominational, universal church, and beyond