

RCN Visioning, 2007

Vision/Desires

The future of RCN is to be an inclusive community,
a network of passionate people for the mission of Rural Church Ministry.

Mission and Capacity

1. Ecumenical Networking
 - a. Supportive, relation, inspirational for now and future leadership for rural ministry
2. Advocacy and think tank
 - a. Education: be a source for exchange; collective, creative ideas, research, resources, publication that clarify social and justice issues that impact rural communities
 - b. Work for justice for God's creation and God's community on earth
 - c. Reflect the issues through a theological perspective
 - d. To and with denominational people (judicatory officials, seminaries, etc.)
3. Being open to the **FIRE** of the Holy Spirit
 - a. Bring compassion, life experience, and sense of call to rural church ministries
4. Model the Church
 - a. Be, live, witness
 - b. Share, not compete; listen, not final answer; learn/open, not conceal
5. Diversity

Summaries of Mission Items

Mission Item 1

- ★ Idea: Coordinate rural ministry events we sponsor.
 - Funding: none
 - Personnel: RCN and Dave Ruesink, plenary, during meetings as an agenda item
 - Structure:
 - include calendar planning/report time in RCN meetings
 - Post events on RCN website
 - Indicate how to join webcast hook-ups
 - Post summary reports about the events on RCN website
- ★ Idea: Include, at RCN meetings, a contextual experience of rural ministry/rural issues
- ★ Overall:
 - Funding: covered by registration fee(s)
 - Personnel: contracted resource person/people
 - Structure: Varies, depending on experience

- Executive committee has primary responsibility for planning the experience

Mission Item 2

- ★ Develop and release rural ministry resources with an RCN imprint
 - Gather information
 - Establish RCN project group
 - Partner with ELCA star alliance or similar group to utilize their process and network with appropriate expansion to include RCN denominational participation
 - Test a think tank approach in 2008 on a single issue (hot topic) pertinent to effective rural ministry
- ★ Glean resource material from a think tank process
 - RCN group receives and processes finding and determines subject matter and format of resource material
- ★ Release resources
 - RCN approves publishing plan
 - Publishing imprint designed
 - Resource compiled, edited, and formatted for release
 - RCN partners to distribute appropriately
- ★ Cost: \$1000
- ★ Overall:
 - Funding: Percent of license agreement for future
 - Personnel
 - 4-5 RCN members
 - RCN partners
 - Executive Committee determines task group
 - Structure
 - Think tank
 - Report back
 - Resource development
 - Publishing and Web
 - Eighteen month timeline
- ★ Comments:
 - Join ELCA Affinity group (\$100)
 - 6 month timeline for their projects
- ★ To implement?
 - Long range planning
 - Use plenary sessions
 - Executive Committee: RCN determine hot topics before ending this weekend; then Executive Committee determine team, create proposal for RCN approval

Mission Item 3

- ★ Initiate an intercessory prayer opportunity
 - Bring this up for discussion and approval

- Personnel: Dave R. and members. If passed – intercessions will be emailed to Dave who'll put it out on email
- Funding: no additional cost – budget neutral
- ★ Worship ideas
 - Sharing of ideas on various rural focused liturgies
 - More intentional sharing of what we have done and what can be done in liturgy, e.g. Cronin's sermon book
 - Bring copies of things to meeting to share
 - Have a meeting focused on sharing worship and prayer issues
 - More intentional in our meeting worship
 - Give more time to worship
 - Make worship more sensory – movement, music, sense of rural issues – environment
 - Worship that will carry through meeting
 - Pray before making of big decisions
- ★ Overall:
 - Funding: \$0
 - Personnel: chaplains (one assigned for meeting) and Executive Committee
 - Structure:
 - Share resources and ideas
 - Meeting agenda or focus
 - RCN worship expanded
 - Focus RCN issues
 - Intentional use of prayer
 - Integrated into meeting

Mission Item 4

- ★ RCN should continue to meet regularly at a seminary
- ★ Overall:
 - Funding: no additional cost – budget neutral
 - Personnel: Local seminary contact to do local arrangements with our Executive Secretary
 - Structure:
 - At each meeting, RCN needs to decide desired meeting dates and sites 18-24 months in advance
 - After meeting, an Executive member (Executive Secretary or one other) would immediately be in touch with site to see about meeting at desired site
 - Once arrangement/date agreed upon, RCN membership notified by email (2 to 4 weeks after RCN meeting)
 - Local seminary contact and/or Executive Secretary of RCN develops meeting details
 - Seminary contact and Executive Secretary consider how RCN might contribute further to seminary -- through offering a workshop, for example

Mission Item 5

- ★ Increase racial/ethnic diversity of the RCN
 - Participate as group in Spring 2008 meeting Multicultural Awareness Workshop
 - Invite “outside” resource person(s) to lead
 - Following spring meeting devise plan to invite additional racial/ethnic representation from denominations
- ★ Invest \$1500 in resource person(s) for transportation, lodging, meals stipend (or honoraria)
 - Secure funding from
 - Assured – T&C Office GBGM \$500
 - Ask – ELCA, PCUSA, UCC, Disciple, Covenant, United Church of Canada, Episcopal
- ★ Consider implications of theological diversity within RCN
 - Secure at least 2 hours on agenda from Executive Committee for Spring, 2009
 - Identify/invite leadership for presentation/discussion
- ★ Overall:
 - Funding: from membership organizations
 - Personnel:
 - Contracted or in-house
 - RCN participants
 - Structure:
 - Spring 2008 workshop
 - Spring 2009 invitations
 - Discussion of proposal, 2 hours on 2009 agenda

Brainstorming Newsprint Sheets 1 through 27

Sheet 1:

2. Research and publish pieces that are congruent with the mission; develop resource list affordable
 5. Explore with seminaries how to reach students and faculty from denominations not currently represented in RCN. See if seminaries are close to meeting sites and invite them.
 2. Collaborate to envision the future of rural ministry, to shape it proactively and get past reacting to crises. ID issues along with RCN goals.
 2. Look at various ways of training other than seminary. ID goal, invite students to create a list.
 - 1 and 2. sharing success stories
- All facilitate global rural connections (define, give examples: Nicaragua)

Sheet 3

2. Internet chat on RCN page
5. Contact judicatories of ethnic leaders

- 1 and 4. Send notices and reports about conferences to denominational judicatories/officers. Use internet as communication.
- 4. Publicize and promote examples of noteworthy rural ministries – pastor web
- 3. Seriously engage dialogue and shared experience with Evangelical and Pentecostal churches
- 4. Need to identify models of church (inventory) nationally and world. Which do we have in RCN and don't have?
- 2. Ask rural church lay people what they need. Listen!
- 3. Ask God what God wants and listen. Yes, yes!
- 4. Focus on gifts that the rural church has to offer the Body of Christ. Identify needs to be met for these gifts to be released. Be proactive with gifts. List needs on web/chat. Asset mapping as a resource

Sheet 4

- 5. Personally contact leadership of racial/ethnic rural in denomination
- 1. Develop program to identify potential leaders from rural contexts
- 1. Coordinate with rural events already being held.
- 1 and 2. Send small delegations of visitors to seminaries and church assemblies/conferences/conventions to promote the mission of RCN
- 5. Explore through seminaries, ecumenical councils and rural people's organizations issues of importance to rural racial/ethnic folks and build exposure/educational experiences for RCN
- 5. Brainstorm with AA and Latino church leaders about how RCN can connect with their issues and with ours
- 2. Encourage rural pastors to be student of their individual contexts.

Sheet 5

- 2. Compile and maintain a bibliography.
- 2. Seek partnerships with publishers
- Identify funding to "scholarship" racial/ethnic participants
- 5. Secure funding for racial/ethnic participants
- 5. Secure funding for younger leaders to participate face to face
- 2. Dream ways to use Web: chat rooms, threaded conversations
- 2. Create opportunities to share ecumenically locally
- 5. Learn about minority groups/ministry from international partners, ex. IRCA
- 2. Continue and expand sharing of resources, information about study/learning opportunities and available leadership.
- 4. Engage with local churches when we have meetings
- 1. Intentionally organize meetings around mid-level judicatories (location, contact, motivation, etc.)
- 2. Share stories at local economic development initiated by churches

Sheet 6

- 2. Keep raising the visibility/voice of rural, its importance and needs.
- 3. Clarify the meaning of fire of Holy Spirit (how do we recognize it and put it into our mission?)

1. Intentionalize the praying and caring for one another.
- 3 and 2. Develop and share rural worship resources that reflect rural voices.
5. Identify and work with existing racial/ethnic leadership of rural areas to participate in RCN in person and online.
3. Create website “witness” page of our passion for rural ministry
3. Think bigger than current available resources – projects that challenge/push us and others

Sheet 7

Continue 2 times/year meetings of this group

2. Share stories of how advocating with/being voices for the voiceless
 2. Develop strategic plan for periodic “impacting” of church denominational decision makers in geographic area in which RCN has its meetings.
 5. Be strategic and intentional about inviting guest speakers or presenters, or greeters to RCN meetings.
 4. Meet to discuss/formulate response to rural concerns.
 4. Organize summit on a rural issue
 2. Publish major outcomes of meetings – organized report
 - 1 and 2. Hold RCN meeting at places, and in conjunction with, other events of the ecumenical church.
 5. ID, build relationship with Roman Catholic leadership – bishops, priests, sisters, lay leaders, seminary professors – for inclusion in RCN and for educational leadership and sharing at events/meetings.
- Amen above has to be more than NCRLC office – try orders (rural): Glenmary, Franciscan, Maryknoll, etc.
4. Host regional/ecumenical educational events for pastors/lay leaders.

Sheet 8

2. Identify definition of advocate
1. Encourage broader denominational involvement
2. Develop a to-be-shared list of book, articles, events in RM
3. Share intentionally your sense of calling to rural ministry
4. Call for regional summits of judicatory leaders (bishops, etc.) to discuss/formulate plans for continuing Christian witness in rural areas
2. Target certain judicatory leaders based on recent efforts by denominations – engage while issue is “fresh” for denomination
- 1 and 4. Invite local denominational officers to give greetings at RCN meetings

Sheet 11

Begin process for securing adequate funding

1. State groups developed with emphasis on advocacy and rural needs, nondenominational and open to rural context
4. In our work (presentations/writings, etc.) identify ecumenical partners by name and denomination whose work informed ours.
4. Model cooperation ecumenically.
1. Be “protective” of the mix of denominational, regional, local, practioner mix

5. Bring denominational leaders in anti-racism/multicultural ministry together with us to discuss how we can increase our diversity.

1. Read “other” denominational writings

5. Learn Spanish, other languages, to read and communicate with ethnic groups

Sheet 12

2. Meet together, choose an issue to work on and share ideas

Direct David ____ to become aggressive about initiating process to seek corporate, etc. funding.

Increase awareness of RCN to churches, more visibility of RCN, representatives/lobbyists to state and local governments

5. Locate racial/ethnic/theologically diverse folk whose passion is rural ministry and find ways to help them participate in RCN.

1. Recognize the fact of “fluidity” of participation of network members and seek ways to compensate for that fact while maintaining the vision and capacity of the group.

2. Write up/publish online and/or in print the results of first item above (meet together on an issue, work on and share ideas)

1. Develop articles and research about rural issues appropriate for many denominational magazines/publications – build relations with editors to assure publication

Sheet 13

1. Share what’s being done, find common areas to work together.

2. Develop seminary and online programs to help train clergy and lay leadership to work in new models of rural ministry. Assign 4-5 persons to monitor/guide how NC will implement our vision, etc.

4. Education of judicatories to review rural church ministry and create rural departments

5. Seminary awareness of RCN

2. Find a way to inform all key denominational leaders 3-4 times per year of important issues/ideas/happenings/ new model of rural ministry. (Amen!)

2. Map out a specific process for transparency of the group – what it is, represents, seeks to advocate for in the church and the larger community.

1. Inform denominational leaders of churches not currently represented at RCN’s renewed vitality and openness.

Sheet 14

5. Find funding to enable some unrepresented groups to attend

5. Send invitations to denominations not currently represented.

2. Advocate for rural church ministry being “real” church ministry

2. Rural is more than agriculture – it is a unique culture relating to way of life.

Web site expansion to seminaries and churches

1. Invite folks with more intention towards diversity of all kinds to our meetings. Have meetings in an area that has diverse folks and ministries going to make attending a first time easier.

Be advocates to denominations and community structures regarding injustices rural churches/peoples continue to endure

2 and 4. Continue or become a louder voice for social justice in rural (and all) places as some seek to undermine justice work.

3. Be open to movement/coming of Holy Spirit in our midst.

Create a team of 4-5 leaders who have time and skills to facilitate several of the components of vision.

Local people of interest together

2. Organize one of our meetings around training ourselves for more effective advocacy.

Sheet 15

2. Help congregations develop rural health networks

2. Include a specific educational component (e.g. presentation, speaker [from inside or outside group]) in each meeting

1. For next several years, meet in mid-western US where greatest potential attendance is possible.

3. Continue to talk, and promote RCN as a way to make Den's and other organizations and agencies a way to have rural action

4. Still do some meetings at seminaries. Maybe seminarians and other professors would catch our spirit. Invite them to sit in. do the liturgy – be part of it.

3. Continue sharing among ourselves what makes us “passionate.”

5. Be alert to new people who can contribute to rural church work: local, regional, diverse group: Den's, ethnic, age, organization, agencies

Don't forget we are “professionals” regarding rural ministry and we have responsibility to advance the goals, etc.

5. Provide travel scholarships for those without travel funds.

Sheet 16

1. Connect with judicatory and ecumenical officers and apprise them of what we're doing. Get their lists of people and stuff.

2. Link with action groups on issues.

5. Local workshops – training in ethnic communities with agriculture specialists and rural specialists.

2. Continuing education opportunities for rural pastors/lay leaders offered in various regions

2 and 1. Invite local judicatories to join us when we meet.

4. Rural is able to show rest of church how to survive in times of trouble. Find innovative ways to work on opportunities due to financial cuts or changes in leadership and direction.

2. Market ourselves purposefully and seriously.

Form a group to do basic research regarding the practices and beliefs of rural church people.

Identity promotion to those who are not familiar to RCN – who, what, where, and why

Bring together groups who have same interests.

4. Encourage rural pastors who are effective in rural ministry not to be “enticed” by the church system to go to “bigger and better” things in urban settings.

Sheet 17

1. Annual meeting for ecumenical, national leadership to guide resource development.
Annual meeting for all to learn – network together
 4. Lobby with judicatory – ecumenical team visits
 4. Identify demonstration projects in special areas around key issues
 5. Actively recruit more diverse membership
 - 1 and 2. Include in each meeting a set time (10 minutes or so) for each person present to share ideas, current work as part of check in at the beginning of the meeting
 2. Stress with denominations the importance of rural ministry desks.
 - 1 and 4. Continue to include a Friday contextual experience of rural ministry/rural issue when we meet as RCN
- In teaching/training standards, etc., make use of “contextual” settings.

Sheet 18

Ministerial associations contacted about work of RCN

Develop an RCN imprint for shared resources that can be formatted for web, print and event (released by denomination with dual RCN imprint), i.e. Discipleship Resources, UMC/RCN (ISBN)

2. Create national research/writing teams to collaborate on projects and host readings – peer review
2. Develop rural research projects that can be funded
2. Have a discussion at each meeting around a topic (e.g. what Shannon, Joretta, and Jean did this time) that helps all of us to think about some particular rural ministry, rural community issue.
 1. Network for economic development in rural communities
 2. Help rural congregations identify possible candidates for rural ministry. Amen.
 2. Share strategies different denominations are using for recruiting candidates for rural ministry.
 2. Those of us who have opportunities sort of often to interface with bishop-types – don’t be afraid to speak up until they “really” hear us about rural church and community issues. Be compassionate toward leaders – inform, wheedle, etc. Inform with trustworthy data.
 2. Encourage sustainable agriculture through congregational farm partnerships.
 2. Develop administrative structure to provide leadership for RCN.

Sheet 19

2. RCN should have a few pieces of literature with its own logo on it – Is there a basic philosophy?
2. Organize seminars and workshops on rural issues specific to regional concerns – identify academic/educational resources for above agenda/programming
2. Hold a rural church summit with RCN denominations, institution, etc. as co-sponsors in 2011.
 1. Sponsor regional events to introduce and excite people/youth about rural life and ministry

Sheet 20 – Shannon

Coordinate loosely the many rural ministry gatherings that we already sponsor (1,2,3,4,5)
Info. From Dave. Do we have access to everyone’s email addresses?

Need to think about who is not included on RCN.

3. Organize local congregational forums, i.e., “soundings” to help discern felt concerns of rural community and Holy Spirit’s leading

1 and 2. Launch a comprehensive rural research project through participating denominations that look at stats and plan release in all judicatories with a study/response

Sheet 22

2 and 5. Find a grant writer who can help find funding for increasing diversity

3. Worship vigorously at this gathering

2. Include at least one meal of locally grown and/or processed foods

4. Re-institute former practice and liturgical celebration of Rogation Sunday, involving potluck of above local foods

1, 2, 4. Establish RCN, inc. to distribute resources through license fee (and sale), sponsor events with participant fee to raise sustainable funds for RCN projects

Sheet 23

Ask rural churches what they perceive about their call, issues, etc. (link to 4. below – summit)

5. Open the doors/invite/proactive to new members

1. Full web with stories – contact/vision/mission statement – open web to more participation

4. Set up “summit”

2, 4, 5. Develop online courses on rural ministry with sufficient funding and authorship to sustain this effort

5. Invite lay persons from rural churches

5. Work out “friendly” missional outreach strategies for above

3, 2, 5. Form a “rural leader colloquy” to encourage and develop effective rural leaders. (Like Academy of Spiritual formation), 2 year process

2. Education/mission trips linking globalization and issues in rural communities

Sheet 24

2. Keep reminding people (bishops) of the importance of rural churches

2.. Web-based resources for pastors to share – sustainably!

3. Exchanges of stories on web

5. Network/specific task-oriented professional organization can be separate, overlapping (network within and without)

3. Keep vision/mission alive (refine) with “chat” on web

2, 3, 5. Find a medium to accomplish links above.

4. Develop/start small group cells in rural congregations for either women or men or both to study spirituality in rural context – research effective strategies for re-energizing rural youth ministries

1 and 5. Offer pre-session at one RCN meeting yearly that focuses on cultural sensitivity and diversity and make it possible for ethnic leadership to attend RCN meeting that follows.

Sheet 25

- 1 and 2. Contact midlevel judicatories for ability and willingness to participate in RCN and other agencies. Lobby if necessary.
- 2. Study rural issues from various perspectives (we won't all agree!). Develop resource information from study.
 - 1. Web-based community. Web resource center for issues to be kept alive and information as a network. Sustainable web site.
 - 1, 2, 3. Could we do a web-casting of parts of each other's gatherings?
 - 2. Emphasize justice issues inside and outside church
 - 2. Serve fair trade coffee, tea, cocoa, etc.
- 4 and 5. Assess RCN practices that may exclude new people, ideas, or undermine respectful partnership.

Sheet 26

- 5. Identify and spend time with rural leaders (pastors, laypersons, denominational executives) in communions not currently represented in RCN. Emphasis on racial/ethnic churches. Network with seminary for ED and purpose. Ask to be invited to nonconventional denominations.
- 2. Clarify difference between advocacy and think tank. Which comes first?
- 4. Tell stories of local churches working ecumenically.
- 2. Various models (ex. on web/successes) of rural ministry
- 1 and 4. Facilitate congregational connections across denominational lines. Open door/diversity with open doors for new membership
- 1, 2, 3. See if a conventional church will incorporate us.
- 5. Invite younger comrades individually.

Sheet 27

- 2. Sponsor rural church training programs
- 2. Rural health programs
- 3. Do oral history/ "This I believe" blog/forum for those in rural ministry
 - 1. Link seminaries, judicatories, and congregations in demonstration projects
 - 2. Help judicatories explore new models for rural ministry (i.e. shared ministry/team ministry)
- 1. Continuing current "report" component from constituent groups, but this component needs to be limited so as not to be the whole meeting.