

**SEEKING SUSTAINABILITY FOR THE ST. PAUL AND MOUNTAIN
GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES UTILIZING A
RURAL/AGRICULTURAL MODEL**

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of
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Dedicated to the memory of my father, Grimes Harrelson.

He was a farmer.

ABSTRACT

SEEKING SUSTAINABILITY FOR THE ST. PAUL AND MOUNTAIN GROVE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES UTILIZING A RURAL/AGRICULTURAL
MODEL

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This project seeks to develop a congregational development model for rural churches utilizing concepts from the sustainable agriculture movement. It has a theological foundation in the Walter Brueggemann's book "The Land," and in the writings of Wendell Berry. Biblical foundations come from certain key gospel passages drawn from agricultural life. It includes a recap of the six sessions developed for teaching this ideas to St. Paul United Methodist Church and Mountain Grove United Methodist Church. It also includes a conversation with a local Amish farmer.

The underlying premise of this project is that rural congregations would benefit from having a model that is primarily based on the farming principles they are familiar and comfortable with. The model seeks to find a way to help these small membership churches, which exist at a subsistence level, and find a way to become more sustainable so as to provide a clearer vision for the future. It also seeks to take seriously the consequences of what can happen if sustainability is not achieved. It utilizes commonly

used aspects of congregational development, such as demographics and asset identification, but does so using the language of vineyards, planting seeds, and distinguishing between wheat and weeds. Each congregation was given an opportunity to develop a list of ideas that they believed would help provide a more sustainable future.

The document also contains a glossary explaining different types of agricultural models and a PowerPoint presentation that was used during the class sessions.

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GLOSSARY

One advantage of doing this project in a rural area is that all the language surrounding agriculture needed no explanation. However, I do not presume that other readers are familiar with these terms. The glossary will provide a background for those unfamiliar with agricultural terms.

Agriculture: Generally speaking agriculture is defined as “the science and art of farming; work of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock.”¹

Agribusiness: “An industry engaged in the producing operations of a farm, the manufacture and distribution of farm equipment and supplies, and the processing, storage, and distribution of farm commodities.”²

Community Supported Agriculture: Community supported agriculture consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production. Members pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer's salary. In return, they receive shares in the farm's bounty throughout the growing season.³

¹ David B. Guralnik, General Editor, *Webster's New World Dictionary, Concise Edition* (The World Publishing Company, 1971), 15.

² Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web, 22 Nov. 2013. Accessed on November 16, 2013. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agribusiness>.

³ *Community Supported Agriculture*, National Agricultural Library, Thesaurus and Glossary, United States Department of Agriculture, 2013. Accessed on November 16, 2013. <http://agclass.nal.usda.gov/mtwdk.exe?s=1&n=1&y=0&l=60&k=glossary&t=2&w=community+supported+agriculture>

Organic Farming: "Organic farming is a production system which avoids or largely excludes the use of synthetically compounded fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators, and livestock feed additives. To the maximum extent feasible, organic farming systems rely upon crop rotations, crop residues, animal manures, legumes, green manures, off-farm organic wastes, mechanical cultivation, mineral-bearing rocks, and aspects of biological pest control to maintain soil productivity and tilth, to supply plant nutrients, and to control insects, weeds and other pests."⁴

Subsistence Farming: A farming system where the food and goods produced are predominantly consumed by the farm family and there is little surplus for sale in the market.⁵

Sustainable Agriculture (Legal definition): "The term "sustainable agriculture" (U.S. Code Title 7, Section 3103) means an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will over the long-term:

- Satisfy human food and fiber needs.
- Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon the agriculture economy depends.
- Make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls.

⁴*Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming*, (Washington DC: USDA, 1980), p. xii, NAL Call # aS605.5 U52. Accessed on November 17, 2013. Available at AFSIC Website: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs /USDAOrgFarmRpt.pdf> (8/23/07).

⁵ *Subsistence Farming*, National Agricultural Library, Thesaurus and Glossary, United States Department of Agriculture. 2013. Accessed on November 17, 2013. <http://agclass.nal.usda.gov/mtwdk.exe?k=glossary&l=60&w=8451&n=1&s=5&t=2>.

- Sustain the economic viability of farm operations.
- Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.⁶

⁶ National Institute of Food and Agriculture, *Agricultural Systems/Sustainable Agriculture/Legal Definition of Sustainable Agriculture*, United States Department of Agriculture, March 18, 2009. Accessed on November 14, 2013. [http:// www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/ag_systems/in_focus/sustain_ag_if_legal.html](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/ag_systems/in_focus/sustain_ag_if_legal.html).

INTRODUCTION PRIOR TO PLANTING

In 2010 I was appointed to serve four very small United Methodist Churches as part of an experiment in cooperative ministry. I was no stranger to serving smaller congregations or to working in cooperative ministry. These congregations were located in a rapidly changing area of North Carolina near the city of Charlotte. What once had been a rural area that relied heavily on agriculture was becoming a bedroom community to the growing urban Charlotte area. While the number of people living in the area had grown exponentially, the congregations had continued to stagnate. Not only were they not growing, they were declining in membership. At that time I found myself asking several questions. Why, with all the literature available on church growth, were these congregations not thriving? In focusing on surviving, were these congregations actually causing their own demise? What would these congregations need to do in order to be sustainable, and was this somehow different from just surviving? By finding new ways to cooperate in ministry could they collectively find the things needed to become vital congregations?

Early on in the first year of this appointment I went to visit my sister, Sylvia, who lives in Nashville, Tennessee. Although it is an urban area, she actually lived on what had been a farm, and that she was now returning to a new agricultural use. It was a different type of agriculture, one that was designed to fit with an urban area, community driven, with the intent of helping an urbanized population have a positive perception of farming.

I wondered whether congregations could find in this a model for congregational development.

It was with this intention that the first seeds of this project were sown. I use this image intentionally, as those agricultural images are ones with which I am very familiar. I am one of a decreasing number of people who actually grew up on a small family farm. It is one of the reasons that I have always found myself more at home in less urbanized areas, and have chosen to serve as a pastor in more rural settings. As I began looking at this project it occurred to me that three of the four congregations I had been appointed to were founded as rural churches serving a still agricultural/small town population. The people who were moving into the area were overwhelmingly coming from an urban/suburban mindset. The two groups were not only speaking different languages, but their values were totally different, and in some cases oppositional in nature (this would later become one of the topics of discussion in my project).

As it turned out, other issues soon began surfacing in the appointment. By the middle of my second year it was apparent that the answer to my question of whether the churches were sustainable was probably not. They did not have the financial resources to support the salary and other expenses – a factor that remains one of the basic factors in creating a sustainable climate. Some of the congregations did not have the desire to actually make any changes, and really were not interested in cooperating with each other. Consequently I could not remain at that appointment, and was appointed to a different charge. At the time I decided that I would continue on with the basic premise of the

project – sustainability – but with a particular emphasis on the rural/agricultural nature of sustainability since this new appointment was to congregations in a truly rural setting.

Beginning in July, 2012 I was appointed to the St. Paul-Mountain Grove Charge, consisting of two very small congregations, in Yadkin County, NC. The congregations have a combined membership of less than 100 people, with a combined worship attendance of around 50. Primarily made up of individuals over 50, there were no children or youth in either congregation beyond visiting grandchildren. Yadkin County is a rural



Figure 1. St. Paul United Methodist Church.

county, with farming as its number one source of income by a large margin – in fact, probably greater than all other income sources in the county. Both churches are located in open rural country, without the traditional infrastructure of stores, restaurants, and other businesses. The St. Paul Church is located in a community most noted for the presence of the only Amish community in NC, including an Amish store. In the area are several vineyards, as well as farms growing more traditional crops of corn, soybeans, and some tobacco as well as raising beef cattle and poultry.

In the spring of 2013, as this project was ending, one of the local farmers



Figure 2. Field of canola flowers.

experimented in planting *rapeseed*, from which canola oil is produced. Before maturing, the plant has lovely yellow flowers, distinctive enough to create a small uptick of tourists in the area simply to look at the breathtakingly beautiful fields. The area both churches are in is designated as

Hamptonville, which is a zip code, not an actual town. The Hamptonville zip code is divided into four quadrants, created by the intersection of Interstate 77, vertically, and US Highway 421, a four lane highway similar in design to the interstate, horizontally bisecting the area. While the St. Paul church is located in the lower left corner, the Mountain Grove Church is located in the upper left quadrant. Most of the residents have grown up in this area; a number having lived here for several generations, and some having returned to the area in retirement. Agri-tourism is a big drawing card in the St. Paul community, while Mountain Grove is a little more isolated. Both have relatively small sanctuaries and church cemeteries; the St. Paul Church has a relatively new, spacious and comfortable Fellowship Building, while the Mountain Grove has a large picnic shelter available for events in good weather, but no kitchen facilities are available.

When I first met with the members of my new appointment I was upfront with them about doing my project. I knew that the concept was going to need to be tweaked in order to fit the new situation. Also, I was just barely learning who the members of the churches were at the same time

when I would be forming the advisory committee. For me, I realized that the advisory committee would probably not be able to function in quite the way intended by the Drew



Figure 3. Mountain Grove United Methodist Church.

Doctor of Ministry program. It

was with this idea that I approached members of the congregation, whom I had just begun to know and asked them to serve on an advisory committee. The first meeting of what would be the advisory committee included a discussion on what I was seeking to do with the project and how the logistics might be carried out. In the planning process these individuals all seemed to understand what I was talking about, and became the core group who served not only as the advisory committee but also the ones who came for the six weeks to study the concept of sustainability as it could be applied to their congregations. As a group we decided to have each session begin with a meal, with the primary work of preparing the meal going to three of the class members: Judy Allred, Judy Howard, and

Carol Shuffler. For that reason, all the sessions would be held at the St. Paul Church in their fellowship building. Three of the people whom I had wanted for my advisory committee had to drop out – two due to illness, and one due to work conflicts. This group met several times to plan out the logistics of the sessions: meal plans, materials needed, and discussions on recruiting individuals to the classes. Neither congregation has had



Figure 4. Fellowship meal prior to class; pictured l-r Shelby and Kenny Allred; Carol and Eugene Shuffler.

much familiarity with technology, so I wanted to introduce how that can be used by utilizing a PowerPoint presentation with each session, with each participant having a print copy of the slides and any other material we were using. I had requested that, if possible, for those participating to

attend all the sessions, however several were unable to attend every session, due to illness and other factors. My hope had been to have 15-20 participants, but I ended up with a dozen who attended the majority of the sessions. The sessions were all held on Monday evenings, with the first session beginning in January (delayed one week due to illness). The initial design was to have five regular sessions and one special session where we invited a member of the Amish community to speak to us about the way their faith speaks to their way of life. However, we were unable to schedule someone from the Amish community during the time period of the project, so a sixth session was held as a wrap-up for evaluations and general discussion. We did manage to arrange for a visit from an

Amish farmer after the project period, and that visit is included as a separate chapter. Each of the classes followed the same format, beginning with the meal followed by welcome and prayer, review of the previous week, handing out of materials, and working through the slide presentation. The meal was served at 6 p.m. and the sessions were to run from 6:30 to 8 p.m., but all the sessions lasted longer due to conversation. The first session had the most participants, and participation was nearly evenly provided between the two congregations. One further note of introduction was that, although the two congregations had shared pastoral leadership for decades, they had never really done much together as congregations. This provided an opportunity for members to actually get to know each other. In just getting the two churches together has already accomplished a much greater spirit of cooperation and fellowship.

CHAPTER 1

. THE LAND THAT I SHALL GIVE YOU: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

A quick search of the internet provides evidence that the concept of sustainability is a hot topic in many arenas – more than 43 million possible topics according to a Google search – on everything from urban planning to environmentalism. Sustainability is, however, a very ancient concept, biblically speaking, although it is not called that. The more familiar usage in the Old Testament is that of stewardship of the land that God gave to the people of Israel, and the concept that God would sustain them as long as they remembered the gift of the land.

This is the essence of what Walter Brueggemann tells us in his book, “The Land,” appropriately subtitled “Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith.” The very first chapter lays out what would be one of the underlying themes behind this project on sustainability. Brueggemann writes,

The sense of being lost, displaced, and homeless is pervasive in contemporary culture. The yearning to belong somewhere, to have a home, to be in a safe place, is a deep and moving pursuit. . . . We have become precisely the inversion of the live-giving One, who had nothing, yet was as though possessing everything. This of course is not a new struggle, but it is more widespread and visible than it has ever been. Nor is this sense alien to the biblical promise of faith. The Bible itself is primarily concerned with the issue of being displaced and yearning for a place. Indeed, the Bible promises precisely what the modern world denies.”¹

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land*, (Fortress Press, 1977), 1-2.

Throughout the book, Brueggemann holds out the premise that understanding land as a gift is that which brings life, but that once land becomes just another commodity, a possession easily traded or sold, then we are in danger of losing the gift. More than that, the land is an inheritance, that which we hold only in order to provide for the next generation. If this generation abuses/loses the gift, then the coming generation will have nothing to sustain it. This is particularly stressed in Brueggemann's exposition of the 1 Kings 21, the story of Naboth's Vineyard. "(The view) of Naboth represents traditional covenantal language in which the land is not owned in a way that permits its disposal. It is "inheritance," which means it is held in trust from generation to generation, beginning and continuing so, and land management is concerned with preservation and enhancement of the gift for the coming generations. Naboth is responsible for the land, but is not in control over it. It is the case not that the land belongs to him but he belongs to the land."²

Brueggemann's description of the covenantal nature of the land strongly resonates with me on a very personal level. I come from a farming family – the land on which we farmed came to my father from his father, who purchased it from his brother and his father's father, who received it as an inheritance from his father, and so on. It is hard to explain the tremendous grief to a modern, urbanized, landless culture, which is experienced by traditional farm families who have had to sell their farms. It is very much like a death in the family.

Of course, agriculture in modern America operates primarily on the model of land as a commodity. The contemporary business of agriculture is fairly complex. In the last

² Ibid., 88.

half of the twentieth century farmers of all kinds were encouraged to “get big or get out.” So farmers attempted to follow this advice. They purchased additional land, buildings, and herds, along with more equipment as was needed to deal with all the additional land, buildings and herds. More indebtedness to afford all this accrued as farmers were pushed to get bigger and more profitable. For example, the most basic piece of farming equipment is a tractor, which will cost a farmer upwards of \$90,000. In the farm crisis of the 1980’s farmers found themselves under crushing amounts of debt. Some farm families were foreclosed upon, losing their farms. Some became successful in moving to a corporate, large-scale type of farming. Some decided to work toward new models of farming on a smaller scale leading to rise of organic farming and the sustainable agriculture movement.

One thing has happened in the modern era of farming in America – the practice of subsistence farming in the United States has very nearly vanished. In subsistence farming, a family grows and lives on the land that provides most of what is necessary; what remains is sold or traded to provide for those things that cannot be grown on their farm. There is another crisis going on in the world of agriculture: the aging of the American farmer. Currently the average age of a farmer in NC is 57. The number of children in farm families continues to decrease, and most of those children will not follow into farming. The next generation will likely either sell the land to another farmer, seeking to increase their productivity or to an enterprise that will convert the land into other purposes, industrial or residential. One’s perspective, I suppose, would determine if this is a good or a bad thing. If profitability and the possession of modern lifestyles is considered to be of the greatest value, then much of what has happened in agriculture

might be seen as good. Placed alongside the concept of land as gift from God, however, might lead one to a different conclusion.

One of the primary speakers against much of what has taken place in modern agriculture is poet and farmer Wendell Berry. A cursive reading of his essays dealing with agriculture provides a not at all subtle defense of the more traditional views of farming and a disparaging of what modern corporate farming has become. In his essay on “The Family Farm,” he states,

One could argue that the great breakthrough of industrial agriculture occurred when most farmers became convinced that it would be better to own a neighbor’s farm than to have a neighbor, and when they became willing, necessarily at the same time, to borrow extravagant amounts of money.³

The pushback to large-scale corporate farming has been in the sustainable agriculture movement. This movement encompasses a variety of types of farming including organic farming, and simply put, encourages smaller farms that are designed to be sustainable from one generation to the next. In so doing, this movement has picked up on a number of themes from the conversation movements as well as movements promoting healthier forms of eating, and issues of food security. In some communities farmers have experimented with the model of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), which is an attempt at reconnecting an urbanized culture with that of the farm culture.

Wendell Berry, in his 1979 essay “The Gift of Good Land,” picks up on the same themes of land as a gift from God that Brueggemann points out in writing. In discussing the image of the Promised Land as gift, not possession, he concludes by saying this:

³Wendell Berry, “A Defense of the Family Farm.” in *Home Economics*, (North Point Press, Ferrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1987), 173.

Finally, and most difficult, the good land is not given as a reward. It is made clear that the people chosen for this gift do not deserve it, for they are “a stiff-necked people” who have been wicked and faithless. To such a people such a gift can be given only as a moral predicament: having failed to deserve it beforehand, they must prove worthy of it afterwards, they must use it well, or they will not continue long in it.

How are they to prove worthy?

First of all, they must be faithful, grateful, and humble; they must remember that the land is a gift....

Second, they must be neighborly. They must just, kind to one another, generous to strangers, honest in trading, etc. These are social virtues, but, as they invariably do, they have ecological and agricultural implications. For the land is described as an “inheritance”; the community is understood to exist not just in space, but also in time. One lives in the neighborhood, not just of those who now live “next door,” but of the dead who have bequeathed the land to the living, and of the unborn to whom the land will in turn bequeath it. But we can have no direct behavioral connection to those who are not yet alive. The only neighborly thing we can do for them is to preserve their inheritance; we must take care, among other things, of the land, which is never a possession, but an inheritance to the living, as it will be to the unborn.⁴

I would submit that the rural church parallels in its development the same patterns that are taking place in agriculture. Consider that many rural churches are, although not exclusively, comparatively smaller than their suburban counterparts, with aging memberships, and declining numbers of children and youth. Historically they have been made up of several key families who have bequeathed the church from generation to generation. As has happened in American culture in general, the size of farm families has decreased from one generation to the next, and those children have been encouraged to leave the farm for educational and employment opportunities elsewhere. Thus at the beginning of the twentieth century, most people in the United States lived in a rural area; at the end of the twentieth century most had moved to metropolitan areas. As these families left, there are no longer families to bequeath either the land or the church or. It

⁴ Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land*, (North Point Press, Ferrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1981), .271-272.

could be said that rural churches follow the same subsistence model that family farms practiced up through the first half of the twenty century. Modern agriculture has encouraged a move to business models of thinking, with increasing acreage, and a concentration of farming as a bottom-line, profit-driven enterprise. In parallel, during the last half of the twentieth century, congregations, including rural congregations, have been encouraged to become program-driven enterprises serviced by professionally trained clergy and other staff, driven with the need of increasing attendance and financial giving (but not necessarily on creating disciples). At this many rural churches have failed to break out of their subsistence mentality, and, as a result have become struggling to survive shells of once vibrant communities of faith.

Wendell Berry proposes that agriculture should follow models related to agriculture to find solutions to the problems of modern day agriculture. These are models which call for the more sustainable models of agriculture. Is it possible that these models, which have an inherent theological base in the concept of land as gift, might provide a clue for development within the rural church that still speaks the language of farming? In particular, might there be hope in helping a subsistence mentality congregation move towards practicing a more sustainable ministry? The parallels are remarkable. For example, one of the most exciting movements in twenty-first century congregational development is the “Missional” church concept. In these models, congregations are driven by their relationships in and with the community as opposed to being program-driven or clergy-driven. The agricultural parallel found in various forms of Community Supported Agriculture, wherein a farm does not exist in isolation, but creates community by bringing and teaching about how and where food comes from. Rural churches

sometimes have difficulty understanding much of the language used to describe the Missional Renewal, as the language is usually urban driven. But rural churches understand the language of community involved in farming, and so have the ability to pick up on concepts that will help promote sustainability. Sustainability is about making certain that there is not only a next generation, but that it also has the necessary things for that and succeeding generations. A sustainable church is not so much concerned about struggling to provide for today (subsistence), but has the ability to envision what they can bequeath tomorrow.

That inevitably brings us to another theological conclusion that can be drawn from rural life. The pattern of bequeathing the land takes seriously the inheritance principle; but in order for there to be an inheritance there must also be an understanding and acceptance of death. Farming is ultimately based on the concept that there can be harvest without planting, but there can be no new planting without harvest. Life must yield to death, but it is in death that new life comes forth. This may happen over the course a single season or take decades, but it is inevitable; and without it continued existence is not possible. This tenet is basic to Christian belief; resurrection only comes through death.

From a Biblical/theological perspective Walter Brueggemann compares the concepts of gifting and grasping of the land to the dialectic of crucifixion and resurrection. “Jesus embodies precisely what Israel has learned about land: being without land makes it possible to trust the promise of it, while grasping land is the sure way to lose it.”⁵ It is very obvious that congregations who struggle with keeping their doors open

⁵ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 169.

often have at the heart of the issue an attempt of trying to hold on to a past glory instead of accepting the life of a congregation as a gift. In an American culture where death is all too often seen as failure, agricultural sustainability can once again teach us how to die a good death. It is interesting to note that all too often very small congregations are called “hospice” congregations as though they should be ashamed of dying. But there is no shame in death that leads to new life. One of the most powerful agricultural metaphors comes from John’s Gospel, where Jesus proclaims that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it dies alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit. In an age where denominations are constantly alarmed about declining attendance, the rural church which lives out of a sustainable context of church as gift, but not grasp has much to offer in terms of hope and renewal. The gift of seeking a sustainable congregation comes with it an acknowledgement that there are times and places for congregations to die an honored death as long as there is also an understanding that within the Christian faith resurrection follows after.

In conclusion, many rural churches could benefit from having a model of congregational development that is based on rural models of sustainability and of the land as God’s gift. This is a very different way of looking at congregations as it runs counter to much of the urban-based business models that are used not only in much of American society, but also in modern agri-business models. However, rural models based on the Biblical and theological concepts of land as gift can provide a more easily understood paradigm for the rural church which offer parallels with the Missional Renaissance movement in familiar agricultural terms. Additionally such models may provide a

renewed understanding to denominations as a whole to a broader range of issues dealing with sustainability and a Christian understanding of death and resurrection.

CHAPTER 2

SEEKING SUSTAINABILITY – A FIVE WEEK STUDY FOR THE ST. PAUL AND MOUNTAIN GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES

Session 1: The Vine and the Branches

The focus of the first session was on introducing the concept of sustainability. Following the meal, there was a time of welcoming, introductions, announcements, and handing out of consent forms. Then I gave a brief overview of what to expect in the upcoming weeks. As the concept of sustainability was to be the overriding theme of the work ahead, I wanted to make sure everyone in the class was using the same definition of the term. Consequently the first slide contained the definition of sustainable. I pointed to the second meaning as the one that we would be using: “pertaining to a system that maintains its own viability by using techniques that allow for continual reuse: sustainable agriculture.” I then moved the class toward the Biblical and theological foundation for the class, beginning with using a quotation from Walter Brueggemann’s “The Land.” This work is one of the primary theological pieces for the project, and is discussed in the first part of this paper. Without being redundant, let it suffice to say that I wanted the class to get a feel for how land is gift and not possession, which I understand to be a major concept in looking at sustainability of resources. This theological concept when applied to a specific congregation serves to remind us that churches are gifts of community given by God, not achieved by our own works. It also evokes a familiar sentiment in rural communities about the interconnectedness of land, family and belonging.

I asked the class what they thought about the concept of belonging to the land. It was difficult at first to draw out comments, and I found myself working to rephrase things in order to get the discussion going. Most of the people in the class have always



Figure 5. Picture of class session; pictured from left to right, Patricia Rogers, Doretha Wagoner, Judy Allred, Shelby Allred, Kenny Allred.

lived in this or other nearby communities, many for several generations. One such person was Patricia Rogers who remembered that she had “grown up on 150 acre farm in the same house (her) father was born in.” Others remarked on

the temporary feel of today’s culture, and one of the class members, Eugene Shuffler, put into context that the encouragement to put one’s money into home equity, leading to the housing bust of 2008, was a reflection on the desire to have a place to belong. Another member of the class, Judy Howard, in talking about sustainability, said this: “That to me is sustainability. Keeping the land in the family, giving them the opportunity to share the blessings that we have from the land and from our experiences, and to keep passing (it) on from generation to generation. This is the hope.”

During this part of the discussion I talked about my understanding of what Brueggemann was trying to say. I told the class that because we live in a rural place, we are used to having this sense of belonging. Then I added that “Church has always been for most of us, where God offers us a place to belong, even if we do not have land or anything else...Where do we find a place that will sustain us for all of our life’s journey?”

To begin to move the discussion to the next segment I told the class members that it is interesting to think about the ways that people now think about the life of faith, the life of a congregation. For perhaps some of us, we've seen that life as something that does sustain us, as opposed to younger generations that see church as a place where some type of program is going on that will be of their benefit or a place where, and I'm not sure exactly to say this, they are entertained. At the same time we have a whole new generation of young people who are seeking for something to sustain them, and yet they have, for so many of them, have turned away from the church as a place where they can belong and be sustained. I showed the class a picture of a grape vine, laden with fruit. It is an image about which everyone in the class is very knowledgeable (Yadkin County is second in North Carolina in vineyards, and several of the families grow various types of grapes). After reading the passage from John 15:1-8, I told the group that while this passage talks about us as individuals being sustained by Jesus Christ, it is also about how communities are sustained as well. We briefly discussed how it is that some congregations of varying sizes reflect the presence of Jesus, while others seem to suck the life out those who attend. They miss opportunities and ignore new ideas. I told those present of a particular unnamed congregation because they believed the scouts were "messing up" their fellowship hall. The final blow came when the ladies of the church proclaimed that the scouts had broken a punch bowl. They showed me the "crack," I looked at it and told them that the bowl was not cracked, that was a natural seam in the glass. They did not believe me and asked the troop to meet elsewhere. Class members nodded their heads in understanding that it was a golden opportunity wasted.

The vine must bear fruit. Farming people know that one always plants with a purpose. Trees are planted with several possible purposes in mind: to give shade, provide lumber for building, firewood for warmth. Flowers are planted to provide beauty, comfort, and hope; they also provide bees with a food source to make honey which has both nutritional and medicinal properties. They, in essence, bear fruit, albeit not always in the sense we most commonly think of. We plant gardens with the expectation that they will provide food to eat. If we take what Jesus has to say seriously, unless we are bearing fruit, we are not sustainable. As Judy Howard observed, “We are a link in God’s chain.”

At this point I wanted to move the class into an understanding of why I wanted to talk about sustainable agriculture. For much of the last fifty years farmers have been encouraged to “get big or get out.” This has led to the rise of corporate farming, which is not necessarily good for sustaining land and the ecology. In the past few years there has been a countermovement in agriculture toward sustainability. Part of this is found in the organic farming method, as in well as in the “eat local” aka locovore movement. Likewise most congregational development has been aimed at making congregations bigger, but not necessarily able to sustain their growth. Can the movement that has been seen in agriculture toward sustainability also be applied to the church? I proposed that we paraphrase the statement Wendell Berry makes in the essay “Agricultural Solutions for Agricultural Problems,” that appears in the essay collection “The Gift of Good Land.”¹

If we agree with him that the best solutions for problems in agriculture come from agricultural models themselves, as opposed to industrial or corporate models, can the case

¹ Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land*, 113.

not also be made that models for congregational development for rural churches should be rural models. Berry makes this point, “The most necessary thing in agriculture, for instance, is not to invent new technologies or methods, not to achieve “breakthroughs,” but to determine what tools and methods are appropriate to specific people, places, and needs, and to apply them correctly.”² Substitute the phrase “congregational development” for “agriculture” in order to make the inference that perhaps we need a different type of model in rural settings. I reminded the class that, like Brueggemann, Berry sees land as a gift from God, not as something we possess.

This then allowed us to move quickly into the slides pertaining to sustainable agriculture. In doing so, I was very much aware that class members were already familiar with the subject and probably had greater knowledge about it than I did. Nevertheless, it is good to make sure that the entire class was working from the same definitions. In addition, most of the class members do not utilize technology very much, that is to say, they are not very likely to go online and look up the latest resources available in sustainable agriculture.

The class was divided into small groups to talk about four discussion questions. The primary feedback was they were, for the most part, unsure of how to answer these questions. One of the things I learned was that none of the current models emphasized for congregational development had been introduced or used in either church. The most discussion came around the issues of sustainability, with questions being raised concerning how one decides what to sustain, and how to determine what is most

² Ibid, 280.

important to keep going. The class ended with a preview of what was to take place in the upcoming sessions.

Session 2: Unless a Grain of Wheat

The intention of this session was to talk about demographic and other community information. The basis of the discussion centered on a study of John 12:20-25. In this passage Jesus states that “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it dies alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” I reminded the class of the previous week’s



Figure 6. Wheat being harvested from the field across from the St. Paul Church.

discussion of the concepts of gift and possession introduced by Brueggemann, and talked briefly to the class of how Brueggemann paralleled these concepts with death and resurrection. One of the things I took from the previous session was a feeling that I had waited

too late to enter into discussion with the group, so I began with a series of discussion questions. This led to a very lively discussion around the passage. The people present were divided into four groups, and reported answers back to the entire group. Group one was made up of Patricia Rogers, Dorethea Wagoner, and Judy Allred. Group two consisted of Shelby Allred, Kenny Allred and Elaine Sherrill. Group three was made up

of Richard Sherrill, Carol Shuffler and Eugene Shuffler. Group four was made up of Ronnie Nicks, Connie Nicks, Judy Howard, and Dot Pate.

The first questions asked: What do you think Jesus means when he talks about the death of the grain of wheat leading to life?

Group one answered this question by saying that “If we don’t plant the seed, we won’t have any new wheat. We have to die in order to live again.”

Group two answered in a similar fashion, “We have to die in order to live; to die is to live.” They also made the statement that “Death is good.”

Group three agreed with the previously given answers, but went onto elaborate by saying that “The seed must die so it can grow; so we must die in order to grow. Jesus is talking about himself. From his death will come the church.”

The fourth group answered the question slightly differently. They said, “This was a type of parable – this is Jesus’ death and resurrection in order to give us new life. We have to decide how to use this. The comparison is between grain/seed dying in order to create new life and our dying to sin and resurrection to a new life in Christ.”

The second question asked: Do we, in trying to hold on to things, actually cause us to lose what we are trying to keep?

The first group answered the question by agreeing that we need to try new things and that holding on to the old doesn’t always work.

The second group focused on the economic issue by saying it is like a church that tries to hold on to its money. In refusing to spend money it (the church) ends up losing money. They also noted that the church must find ways to attract young people.

The third group talked about what they called the rule of economics: have to reinvest in order to have a future. They gave the example of a dairy farm where the cows must either be bred so that new calves are born or additional cattle must be purchased in order to have future generations.

Economics was also a concern from the fourth group. In this group two of the members came from the St. Paul Church while two were from Mountain Grove. Connie Nicks, who serves as treasurer of the Mountain Grove Church spoke about their particular situation. She noted that it

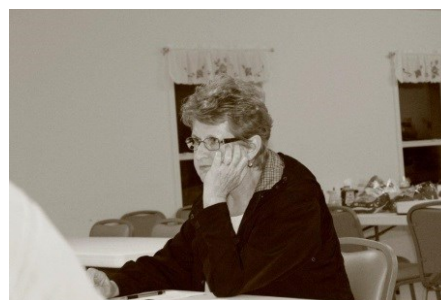


Figure 7, Connie Nicks, Photograph by Judy Howard.

seemed at Mountain Grove they spent so much time trying to raise money it prevented them from doing other things. People have to want to have a part, and the church must spend wisely. As a group they suggested we needed some radical thinking; we may be overlooking people who have a lot to offer.

That led to the discussion of the third question, which asked: What do these images mean for congregations who are struggling to survive?

Since the fourth group had already touched on economic struggles at the Mountain Grove Church I asked them to begin this round of answers. They stated that there was a general feeling that we are not being productive. Ronnie Nicks, who is a farmer, told the group that he thought we as churches tended to do things backward, and that things must be done in the right order, that order being growing from the nucleus with God at the center.

The group consisting of the Shufflers and Richard Sherrill countered with their own argument that we must be willing to sacrifice and invest in the church, and that this did not necessarily mean money, but in all ways. We must be meaningful in our actions and live by example.

The next group that reported (this was group two) was very succinct in their answer: “Plant that seed!”

Group one answered the question by saying that we sometimes hide our struggles and don’t want to ask for help. Then they raised the question of where can we go for help?

Ronnie Nicks then asked the question, “If churches are struggling, should they be saved?”

Patricia Rogers, from group one responded with, “It depends.” This was followed by a few moments of silence as the participants thought about their situations, before the group indicated they were ready to move on to the fourth question.



Figure 8. Class members in small group discussion; pictured left to right, Eugene Shuffler, Judy Howard, and Dorothy Pate.

The fourth question asked: Is there a difference between surviving and sustaining?

Group two began this round of answers by saying “Yes; surviving is ultimately dying, while sustaining is choosing life. They then raised two very important questions that I said we

would discuss more about in the future. They were “What is the purpose of a church?” and “Is there a time when a church should close?”

The third group also indicated that they saw a difference between surviving and sustaining. They indicated that there is a difference between being will to change and adapt or just staying the same. They also said that they believed that the church was not always willing to let younger people take leadership.

The fourth group did not give a yes or no answer. Instead they stated that they thought that not all church are destined to have young people. We should try to attract people of a similar age to what was already in the congregation.

The first group did not have a definitive answer to the question.

The final question asked: If a congregation is chiefly concerned with only keeping the doors open, is it truly alive? What might the concepts of death and resurrection mean in this context?

As the first group had not really responded to the last question, I began this round of answers with them. They saw this image of a doorway as being a key issue. It is a matter of who comes in and why, and then what they do when they go out.

The second group affirmed that need to have new people to come in.

Group four indicated that we may have to shuffle our expectations and alter direction. Group three countered that by stating “If we alter too much we may lose what we have.” They then asked about ways the area was changing.

This created a nice segue to the next part of the session, which was a chance to look at the demographics of the area. Utilizing information from the 2010 census, I reviewed with the class population information for Yadkin County including total

population, racial/ethnic breakdowns, income and poverty statistics, health, education levels, and employment. We also looked specifically at agricultural statistics for the county. I was also able to provide them with data for the specific census tract we were in as well as outlining resources for demographic data.

At this time I had also included some basic resource information for the churches on the N. C. Rural Economic Development Center and the Duke Endowment.

It just so happened that all the class members had received that day in the mail The Yadkin County Annual Report for 2012. This publication provided a lot of basic information about Yadkin County in general. The most amusing part of the class was when members tried to guess the twenty top employers for the county.

I raised one final question at the end of the class for the participants to think over until the next session: What ideas are you getting that our church can do that would help us move from simply keeping the doors open to being more sustainable?

Session 3: Wheat and Weeds - Part 1

The third session began with a look at the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds found in Matthew 13:24-30. The inspiration for using this parable was sparked by a conversation at a community breakfast fundraiser. I was sitting with a



Figure 9. Claudia Harrelson, class leader, shares responses of small group discussions.

couple of people who attended the St. Paul Church, and an individual who had grown up in that church but who now attended another, larger United Methodist Church – actually driving by the St. Paul Church in order to go to the other church. The couple encouraged this person to come to worship at his old home church. What I heard in his response was how he now saw the church he grew up in as having become a closed community; closed off in worship, closed in offering programs that provided an openness to study and understanding of the scripture, and closed in the manner in which the church connected with the community. I took that conversation very seriously. What members of the congregation might have seen as being what they liked in their church, others could see as negative qualities. In order to address this issue I found that the parable of the wheat and the weeds to be an extremely valuable metaphor for a farming community. The discussion centered on how what some people might think is wheat, others might think are weeds. We talked about what factors in the field and garden determine whether a plant is considered beneficial or not. I used this to build on a discussion of how a church can find and focus on its assets instead of spending time focusing on what it did not have. I also talked about the assets that a congregation may have that they did not realize it had – their potential through hidden assets. Finally I lifted up some resources for discovering a congregation's assets.

There were three books I specifically mentioned that were available to help congregations build on their strengths. The first was Luther Snow's groundbreaking work on asset mapping, *The Power of Asset Mapping, How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*. I briefly talked about the concepts provided in the book on how a congregation can determine and focus on its strengths. The second book was a fairly new publication I had

used in one of the Doctor of Ministry classes entitled “*Growing an Engaged Church*” by Albert L. Winseman. I again went through briefly the major concepts presented in the book that could be useful in helping the congregations determine and focus on their



Figure 10. Claudia Harrelson shares studies that the churches can use.

strengths. The third book I highlighted was also a new resource developed within my annual conference entitled *Checking Vital Signs - Assessing Your Local Church Potential* by Nancy Burgin Rankin. This resource, as I explained to the congregations, was one developed in our annual conference to help a local church determine its potential for growth. That is to say, it was developed to help in gauging whether a congregation can continue and be willing to take steps necessary in order to remain a church. This a study and related program now being used in the Western North Carolina Annual Conference as a means of helping the annual conference determine whether congregations should remain open or be closed. It utilizes many of the concepts that are mentioned elsewhere, such as looking at demographics, financial status, etc. that are commonly used in congregational development.

At this point we moved to the discussion questions that I had prepared for the class. The four questions were:

List some of your churches assets.

Would people outside of our church see the same assets that we see?

How can we better focus on our assets?

What unique assets do rural churches have?

This turned out to be both formative and for me personally frustrating. The members of the class had a lot of difficulty naming things they considered to be assets. With a great deal of prodding I eventually got them to come up with a list of things that I consolidated for the class. This is the list of assets for the two congregations:

1. History and traditions (such as Homecoming, revivals, etc.)
2. Cooperation
3. Buildings/facilities – sanctuaries, fellowship hall (St. Paul), picnic shelter (Mountain Grove), class rooms
4. Cemeteries
5. Piano, organ, music, choirs
6. “Comfortable” seats
7. “Friendly” atmosphere
8. Love for each other
9. Get along with each other
10. Willingness to donate time/money/skills
11. No debt
12. Have pew Bibles (KJV)

Because the group was having difficulty in answering the next two questions, I decided to not push them that evening, but to rephrase the issues in the next session.

The last question, however, left me stunned. When asked about the unique qualities of rural churches, they named things such as friendliness, cooperation, history, etc. – in short qualities that could be found in any church anywhere. They were unable to

articulate anything that could be considered uniquely rural. I am not sure why this was so. I prompted them by mentioning things such as the way in which they saw the natural world and its stewardship, concepts of family relationships and growth, which they somewhat agreed with. I decided that it might be best to save these issues for the next session.

Because the session was running long, I told the class that we would discuss the last issue, dealing with whether assets can become roadblocks in the next session. I also handed out to the class copies of three articles that I thought they might find useful to the discussion. I asked that they read through these and comment on them during the next class. The three articles are listed in the bibliography. They are not mentioned here because the class members actually never took the time to read them and did not have any comments on them.

Session 4: Wheat and Weeds - Part 2

In planning for this session I took the lists of “assets” that the group had provided and placed them on a piece of newsprint and posted them so that the group would be able to see them. I created a second category that I labeled “Missing Items,” as in looking at their lists there are obviously things that were not listed that perhaps needed either to be included or at least addressed as to why they were not present. I included three things on the list, with the hope that more would be added. The three items I included were *sacraments, mission involvement, and traditions/new traditions*. I chose these three because in the limited time I had been there these were three things that I had noticed were not being emphasized. Let me note that by saying “traditions” I had in mind

activities that the congregation participated in annually such as Christmas Eve services, Holy Week services, joint services with other churches, church-wide picnics, etc. I also created a third piece of newsprint with roadblocks, the weeds, so to speak. I intentionally listed many of the same items that the class members considered to be assets. This list included:

1. History
2. Perceived insider/outsider
3. Concern for others?
4. Cemetery/facilities
5. Piano/organ (i.e. types of music)
6. Pew Bibles
7. (Lack of) Technology/social media
8. Traditions

I began the session with a reminder that in the parable of the wheat and the weeds it is difficult to tell the difference between the two. I then told the class that what might appear to be wheat to us might be considered weeds to those who are looking at the church from the outside. I took them through the lists I had made, and talked about the power perception has when it comes to church growth. If people aren't seeing your assets, then either we must change the perception that others have of us or we must change the things we are doing if we are to reach a new audience. I asked them if there were things that they considered to be so important that they could not be changed, and if so, what is the cost of keeping those things. I also asked them if there were things that we

perhaps could change that would help us to be more sustainable, using as an example of a farmer who chooses to grow something other than what they have always grown. I asked



Figure 11. Small group discussion; foreground, Judy Allred, Carol Shuffler; background, Connie Nicks, Ronnie Nicks.

if we made good choices that would keep us sustainable. During this section I was the person doing most of the talking. I am not sure whether the group was simply resistant to the concept, did not understand the concept, or needed more time to consider the implications. I opted to leave this as a seed sown with the intention of continuing to bring back this concept in future discussions.

One of the things I asked the class to keep in mind was that most people in the United States no longer come from an agrarian background. They perceive rural life often as being limited and unappealing. Those who move to rural areas from more urban areas seek to make rural areas more like the places they come from including the places where they worship. One of the class members then spoke up, remembering that not too many years ago, a rather large company headquartered in a small town about 25 miles away was purchased by a larger corporation. Part of the agreement was that the corporate headquarters had to remain in the small town. He spoke about all the money that the town spent in trying to make improvements that would make those new corporate families, all from much more urban areas, feel at home in their new setting. Ultimately it did not work, and the general feeling was that no one on either side ended up being happy. I

reminded them again that changing perceptions had to be an intentional task, one that would be difficult and might not be successful. But it was also necessary if a group wished to be sustainable for the future.

This provided an entrée to talk about what I termed “The Elephant in the Room,” i.e. money and sustainability. This is a subject that many small churches will complain about not having enough of, but are uncomfortable discussing. I began by talking about certain denominational issues pertaining to pastor’s salary and benefits and other expectations that are required because we are a part of the United Methodist Church. In the United Methodist denomination, the annual conference fixes the minimum amount that a pastor must be paid for full time service. The minimum varies dependent of whether or not a pastor has been ordained and what educational requirements have been met. Appointments are made by a bishop (as opposed to having a congregation call a pastor), and churches that cannot afford to pay the costs are often linked with other churches to share the pastor’s services and resulting costs. Currently those costs include the salary, the cost of health insurance, a pension, and a parsonage or housing allowance if no parsonage is available. The fixed costs for a full time pastor are anywhere from \$50,000 to \$60,000 per year. This does not include travel or other reimbursements for expenses. In addition every church is asked to pay an apportionment for items beyond the local church, with the amount dependent on a complicated formula the annual conference uses. In the case of these two churches this amounts to approximately \$5,000 per year. Currently the churches are getting some help from the annual conference; however, I explained that this help is expected to be limited and short-term. I noted that due to the economic downturn of the past few years, much of the funding for these things has

decreased significantly, just as overall giving in congregations has decreased. I talked about options that are available, including having a less than full-time pastor or increasing the number of churches sharing a pastor's services. These are all things that increase what members of the congregation may have to do, and are often not desirable changes for a congregation to make. I also talked about the need for denominational reform in this area. For any reform to take place, it must happen at a general church level. Unfortunately, those who make these decisions often hold the small church and rural levels in low esteem, and such reforms can take years to bring about. While there are those who work to bring these reforms and champion the cause of the rural church, including myself, the current political climate has made this very difficult. I ended with words of both encouragement – they are not alone in this struggle – and warning that they must be open to dealing with the financial issues in positive ways and be willing to find new ways of funding the church if they are to be sustainable.

The session ended with three questions that I asked the class members to think about in preparation for the next session. They were:

1. Right now, what is one thing we can do to make our church more sustainable?
2. What is one thing we could do in the next six months that would make us more sustainable?
3. What is something we could do in the next year that would make us more sustainable?

Session 5: Preparing for the Harvest

This session began with the three questions that were used to conclude the previous session, and a list was made up of the responses.

What is one thing we can do right now that will help us be more sustainable?

1. Continue to explore possibilities and choose items that make sense for our two churches
2. Take advantage of the lending library
3. Pray
4. Develop a plan for getting ideas across to church members and community to remember the church in their wills
5. Have “Bring a Friend” Sundays
6. Have “welcome wagon” approach for newcomers to the community
7. Plans for a community garden – raised beds; recruit labor; consult with members and delegate according to equipment availability
8. Discuss walking trail possibility
9. Old Fashion Day – History Sunday; Record Oral History
10. Group study of one of the resources for congregational development or attend one of the conference/resources offered by the denomination

What is one thing we can do in the next six months to help us be more sustainable?

1. Begin UMW (United Methodist Women) again
2. Begin Men’s group
3. Have Bake Sales
4. Inspect Kitchen (St. Paul) in order to have scheduled meals for community
5. Raise vegetables for sale
6. Find new ways to get the church name out and raise awareness
7. Prepare land for spring planting
8. Have beds ready to plant in spring
9. Bingo in the fellowship hall (St. Paul)
10. Create a Meditation Garden/Labyrinth

What is one thing we can do in the next year to help us be more sustainable?

1. Visitation program
2. Check into having a Day Care
3. Fix up basement into a game room for teens
4. Rummage Sale
5. Bring underused and unused exercise equipment and make a gym/offer exercise classes in basement of fellowship hall
6. Quilting classes
7. Partner with an urban congregation for a community garden

It was agreed that these ideas would be presented to the other members of the churches for future consideration.

Farming is a cycle of birth, growth, and harvest. Without harvest there can be no rebirth. Sustainability is about providing the materials so that there is always the possibility for harvest and rebirth. What does it imply if a farm or a church is unsustainable? How does death fit into the picture? Farm families are accustomed to following the seasons. I asked them to think about what season they thought their church might be in. I also asked them to consider who we move forward into a new season. Most importantly, I wanted the group to take with them the concept that it is acceptable to embrace a good death that will allow for resurrection. These are concepts most of us do not like to discuss, so it was not surprising that in this discussion the concepts remained in the abstract. Members do not want to think about these concepts being concretely applied to the congregations they are a part of.

The class was ended with a reading from Wendell Berry's essay, "The Gift of Good Land." I chose this because it brings the study back to the initial premise, that land is a gift from God, and must be used accordingly.

Session 6: Gleanings and Evaluations

At the final session, class members were given a list of the things they had thought of to help keep make their church sustainable to share with others in the congregation. The bulk of the session was spent in having the class members complete an evaluation form which I had created for their use.

CHAPTER 3

A CONVERSATION WITH AN AMISH FARMER

As mentioned in the introduction, the two churches I serve are in an area where there is an Amish community. Given the nature of the topic on sustainability, I thought that it would be interesting to talk with one of the Amish farmers. This idea was further solidified by the realization that most of the members of the two congregations, while they knew some things about the Amish community, actually knew very little about who they were and what they believed. In fact, there were some who weren't entirely sure whether this was an Amish community or a Mennonite community. I sought permission from the community to have someone come and talk to us. In early April around 25 church members met with an Amish farmer, Tom Colletti, and his wife Sandy. Tom was the primary speaker. In respect for their customs, no photographs or other recordings were made of the event.

Tom introduced himself to those present. He was already known to a number of people in the room as he was the person who originally built the Amish general store in our community. Tom is not a typical member of the Amish community in that he and Sandy did not grow up in the Amish tradition. They were, in fact, Roman Catholic, and Tom had studied to enter the priesthood before meeting Sandy. As adults, they converted to the Amish faith, and later moved to be part of this community in North Carolina. Tom spoke of the Amish belief that what one does spoke of the Amish belief that what one

does in everyday life must be entwined with one's faith. It is this belief that drew him to the Amish community. He quoted from two of the Psalms, 8 and 24, stating that what we call the land is not ours, it is a gift and we are stewards of the land.

Tom provided the group with a brief history of the Amish tradition. They date back to 1525, in Switzerland, and were initially part of the reformation movement under Zwingli. They broke with the movement over the relationship of church and state, disagreeing with Zwingli's assertion that the state should reform the church. They also disagreed on the nature of baptism, believing that it should be an adult believer's baptism and confession of faith. The language background is German, which is still utilized in their current worship. The two main points of the Amish tradition are humility and submission. Those present were amazed when Tom said that in the Amish community any decision must be met with unanimous agreement; even if one person dissents, then it will not be done.

Another tenet of the Amish tradition is that of simplicity – in the clothes they wear, in their homes, and in their worship service. Although this community has a meeting house (which also serves as their school), most communities do not, holding worship in their homes.

The Amish, according to Tom, hold that the land is “borrowed from their descendants.” Biblically speaking he sees that there is a tension in the Bible, beginning in Genesis, between city and land. According to their reading, they see Jesus (and his family) as having been a farmer in Galilee, but who had to use other skills due to the forced labor policy of the Romans in the constructions of cities. That tension continued in

the early church. There is always a choice to be made, and the Amish have chosen not to be conformed to the world of the city.

Tom asked if we saw ourselves as stewards or as owners. Historically the Amish in Europe had not been allowed to own their own land until after the Thirty years war. Even then, there were conditions for land ownership. The land had to be desolate and they were required to sell it back to the previous owners if requested to do so. Consequently the Amish learned that land should be cared for whether or not it was owned by them.

Throughout the session those present asked a number of questions for information and clarification. One of the things Tom spoke about in this particular community was their decision to allow electricity to be used – but only enough for what was needed. They see the need to remain separate from the world, and that many of the things of the modern day world are temptations. That includes the modern view of agribusiness as being a temptation to farmers. Their children are schooled separately from other children in the community, and only through the eighth grade, a right won the past by going to the U. S. Supreme Court. Children are then required to begin learning a trade that they will practice throughout life for the entire good of the community. Someone asked about those who wanted to leave the Amish community in search of more modern ways. Tom's response was that usually those who become uncomfortable with Amish life ended up becoming members of the Mennonite community, as they are seen as being more "liberal."

One of the things Tom spoke about was what it means to submit to one another. For the Amish, they see that service to God cannot be carried out unless they intentionally live in servant-hood with one another. “To be obedient to God is to be obedient to one another.” Their tradition is one of “frollacke:” they show up to help one another. Therefore if anyone in the Amish community is in need the entire community will come together to help with that need, whether it be building a barn or contributing monetarily to pay for medical expenses. According to Tom, this is the heart of sustainability. They care for another in spite of the sacrifice required to do so. Tom told the group that, “Where love is perfect sacrifice is complete.”

Tom spoke about some of the issues he sees with modern ways of religion and life. He said that there is a tendency to teach “doctrine” first and then move to lifestyles, which he finds to be easy, but ultimately an unsuccessful strategy. Instead, he believes that there must be no separation between belief and lifestyle.

One of Wendell Berry’s essays found in the collection “The Gift of Good Land,” concerns the Amish. The essay, “Seven Amish Farms,” affirms what Tom Colletti shared with our group. He writes,

I do not think that we can make sense of Amish farming until we see it, until we become willing to see it, as belonging essentially to the Amish practice of Christianity, which instructs that one’s neighbors are to be loved as oneself. To farmers who give priority to the maintenance of their community...Community interest also requires charity, neighborliness, the care and instruction of the young, respect for the old; thus it ensures its integrity and survival. Above all it requires good stewardship of the land, for the community, as the Amish have always understood, is no better than its land.¹

¹ Berry, *The Gift of Good Land*, 261.

One of Tom's concluding remarks were that it was important to "touch the land wherever you can." In reflecting on the conversation, those present found a number of points of agreement, particularly in the view that we are called to be stewards of the land as opposed to merely owning land. Many of those present agreed it would be difficult to give up modern conveniences that we have grown accustomed to, but that in many ways they wish they could have a simpler lifestyle. Ultimately those present found a greater appreciation and understanding of the Amish tradition, while presenting themselves to the Amish community as those who can agree on several points as well as be good neighbors to one another. By doing so the entire community is strengthened.

CHAPTER 4

BRINGING IN THE SHEAVES: EVALUATIONS AND OUTCOMES

As a part of the class participation, the group was asked to fill out a written evaluation for the sessions. The evaluation asked individuals to use a number system of 1-10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high) to rate objectively parts of the session including things such as whether the session fulfilled their purposes, usefulness of the information, and preparation and leadership, etc. Those marks were generally consistent overall with the participants generally giving scores of 8, 9, or 10 throughout. They were also asked to make written comments. Looking at those comments, several class members remarked positively that the class provided an opportunity to come together and get to know each other. Several mentioned that it was hard for them to come up with ideas, and the need to have more people involved in order to be successful. These comments have been useful as future planning has taken place in the two churches. The biggest difficulty with the project was that everything took place in a completely new setting for ministry. Everything about the project was on a learn-as-you-go basis, and I am extremely appreciative of the patience shown by the churches in dealing with the change in pastoral leadership and all that encompasses. I know that if I had already been serving in this appointment I would have done some of the sessions differently. My self-assessment is that these sessions became an opportunity to get to know the two congregations better, and for that reason, I feel I tried to do too much in the opening

sessions. I did learn some unintended things from the sessions in terms of similarities and differences in the congregations. Both churches were similar in their concerns about lack of growth and financial problems. I would say that overall those members from the St. Paul Church seemed to be more positive about things that could be done to make their congregation more sustainable than those from the Mountain Grove Church. I would not recommend future students to try to carry out their project in the first year of a new ministry setting.

The class did provide me what I consider to be significant insights into not only the nature of the two churches in particular, but also into small rural congregations. There were two things in particular that stood out for me: the inability of individuals to articulate the unique nature of rural life and that what they considered to be their most important assets would be not be viewed as such by a majority of our contemporary culture. It also struck home to me hard it was for them to come up with truly innovative ways to be sustainable. On the other hand, implicit in most of the conversations was a confirmation that individuals who have spent the majority of their lives in a rural setting do perceive their lives as being a positive and richly rewarding, if not sometimes difficult, existence. For the most part the advisory committee and class participants were the same, and while, due to the relative newness of the situation, could not provide a great deal of assistance in planning the content, proved to be invaluable in terms of general support.

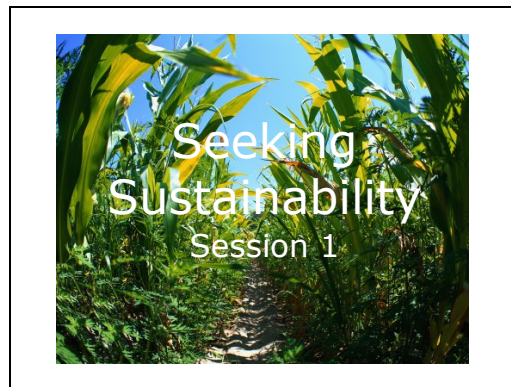
The site visit with Dr. Ciangio helped to bridge the gap between information shared in the class and how to implement the ideas within the individual churches. While I cannot say that there has been a huge desire to put many of the ideas into practice, class

members still talk about these suggestions. The most successful idea has been the desire to restart a United Methodist Women jointly with the two churches. A group of women have been meeting monthly for fellowship and for mission.

In the final analysis, there was both disappointment and excitement in this project. I would have liked more: more people involved in the classes, more innovative ideas, more movement toward sustainability. At the same time I can see that there has been set into motion a conversation about sustainability that will continue to inform the planning and leading of these congregations. Finally, although this project was primarily focused on two specific congregations, I think that the underlying principles have merit in working with small rural congregations in general, and would hope that any success stories from this project help other congregations in similar places seek sustainability.

APPENDIX 1
PROJECT POWER POINT

Slide 1



Slide 2

Fellowship Meal
Welcome
Overview

Slide 3

Consent Form

I hereby give consent that the following may be used in the writing of Claudia Harrelson's doctoral paper:
(check all that apply)

Name

Quotation

Picture

I would prefer not to be used in the writing of the paper.

Signed _____

Slide 4

Why Sustainability?

Definition:

sus·tain·a·ble

adjective 1. capable of being supported or upheld, as by having its [weight](#) borne from below.

2. pertaining to a system that maintains its own viability by using techniques that allow for continual [reuse](#): sustainable agriculture. Aquaculture is a sustainable alternative to overfishing.

3. able to be maintained or kept going, as an action or process: a sustainable negotiation between the two countries.

4. able to be confirmed or upheld: a sustainable [decision](#).

5. able to be supported as with the basic necessities or sufficient funds: a sustainable life.

Slide 5

Biblical and Theological Foundations

"The sense of being lost, displaced, and homeless is pervasive in contemporary culture. The yearning to belong somewhere, to have a home, to be in a safe place, is a deep and moving pursuit. ... We have become precisely the inversion of the live-giving One, who had nothing, yet was as though possessing everything. This of course is not a new struggle, but it is more widespread and visible than it has ever been. Nor is this sense alien to the biblical promise of faith. The Bible itself is primarily concerned with the issue of being displaced and yearning for a place. Indeed, the Bible promises precisely what the modern world denies."

Walter Brueggeman, "The Land"

Slide 6

John 15 – the image of the vine



Slide 7

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.


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Why Use Sustainable Agriculture as a Model for Church Growth?

To paraphrase Wendell Berry, rural churches need rural models.

"The most necessary thing in agriculture, for instance, is not to invent new technologies or methods, not to achieve "breakthroughs," but to determine what tools and methods are appropriate to specific people, places, and needs, and to apply them correctly."
 from the essay "The Gift of Good Land," by Wendell Berry


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What is Sustainable Agriculture?
The US Dept. of Agriculture defines sustainable agriculture as "an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term: satisfy human food and fiber needs; enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends;

Slide 10

What is Sustainable Agriculture?
make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls; sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole."



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What is Sustainable Agriculture?
Some terms defy definition. "Sustainable agriculture" has become one of them. In such a quickly changing world, can anything be sustainable? What do we want to sustain? How can we implement such a nebulous goal? Is it too late? With the contradictions and questions have come a hard look at our present food production system and thoughtful evaluations of its future. If nothing else, the term "sustainable agriculture" has provided "talking points," a sense of direction, and an urgency, that has sparked much excitement and innovative thinking in the agricultural world.
The word "sustain," from the Latin *sustinere* (sus-, from below and tenere, to hold), to keep in existence or maintain, implies long-term support or permanence. As it pertains to agriculture, sustainable describes farming systems that are "capable of maintaining their productivity and usefulness to society indefinitely. Such systems... must be resource-conserving, socially supportive, commercially competitive, and environmentally sound."
[John Ikerd, as quoted by Richard Duesterhaus in "Sustainability's Promise," *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* (Jan.-Feb. 1990) 45(1): p.4. NAL Call # 56.8 J822]

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Sustainable agriculture was addressed by Congress in the 1990 Farm Bill [Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (FACTA), Public Law 101-624, Title XVI, Subtitle A, Section 1603 (Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1990) NAL Call # KF1692.A31 1990]. Under that law, "the term sustainable agriculture means an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term: satisfy human food and fiber needs enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls sustain the economic viability of farm operations enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole."

As more parties sign on to the sustainable agriculture effort, perceptions about what defines sustainability in agriculture have multiplied. AFSC's publication, *Sustainable Agriculture: Definitions and Terms*, <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsc/pubs/terms/srb9902.shtml> strives to illustrate the commonality and some of the controversy that defining such a goal entails, and it includes brief descriptions of the methodologies and practices currently associated with sustainable agriculture. "In popular literature, sustainable agriculture generally is presented as a new phenomenon. Wes Jackson is credited with the first publication of the expression in his *New Roots for Agriculture* (1980), and the term didn't emerge in popular usage until the late 1980s." ("A Brief History of Sustainable Agriculture," by Fred Kirschenmann, in *The Networker*, vol. 9, no. 2, March 2004.) However, the idea of agricultural sustainability – stewarding the food production resource base for use of future generations – is not a new phenomenon.

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Learn more:
Sustainable Agriculture: Definitions and Terms, by Mary V. Gold. AFSC, 2007
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsc/pubs/terms/srb9902.shtml>
Related Terms (Glossary)
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsc/pubs/terms/srb9902/terms.shtml>
For Further Reading (Bibliography)
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsc/pubs/terms/srb9902bib.shtml>
For Further Reading, Supplement 2000-2007 (Bibliography)
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsc/pubs/terms/srb9902bib07.shtml>
Tracing the Evolution of Organic/Sustainable Agriculture: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography, by Mary V. Gold and Jane Potter Gates. AFSC, 2007
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsc/pubs/tracing/tracing.shtml>
What is Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)
<http://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/SARE-Program-Materials/National-Program-Materials/What-is-Sustainable-Agriculture>
What is Sustainable Agriculture? ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service
<http://attra.ncat.org/fundamental.html>

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How can I find sustainable agriculture people and organizations?
 People and organizations are essential information sources for sustainable agriculture. Contacting your state or county Cooperative Extension Service is a good place to begin the search for helpful information and contacts at the local level. In addition to general agricultural information, each state Extension office has a designated Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator. Non-profit, farmer and trade organizations may also prove invaluable.

Learn more:
Sustainable Agriculture Organizations and Information Providers. AFSC, revised May 2011
 U.S. national and regional groups involved in research, outreach, advocacy and production expertise.
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsc/pubs/agnic/susagorgs.shtml>
State Sustainable Agriculture Coordinators. Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)
 Each coordinator facilitates a statewide training program in sustainable agriculture concepts and systems for field employees. Coordinators also serve as a point of contact for activities and information about sustainable agriculture specific to their states.
<http://www.sare.org/State-Programs/State-Coordinator-Contact-Information>
State and National Partners. National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), USDA
 National directory of state land-grant institutions, experiment stations and Extension Service offices.
http://www.nifa.usda.gov/qlinks/partners/state_partners.html

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Where can I explore educational and career opportunities?
Learning, career and job opportunities related to sustainable agriculture become more numerous every year.

Learn more:

Educational and Training Opportunities in Sustainable Agriculture, 20th edition. Compiled by Becky Thompson, AFSC, June 2012

Directory of U.S., Canadian and international programs, curricula, classes, distance learning and field days at academic institutions and non-profit organizations.

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/edtr/>

Sustainable Farming Internships and Apprenticeships. ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, 2011

Annual directory of farms seeking interns/apprentices from North America.

<https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/summaries/summary.php?pub=316>

Education and Training, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)

Educational tools from SARE for those who work with farmers and ranchers.

<http://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Topics/Education-Training>

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Sustainable Agriculture Resources & Programs for K-12 Youth. Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), 2006

<http://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Courses-and-Curricula/Sustainable-Agriculture-Resources-and-Programs-for-K-12-Youth>

SANET-MG. Sustainable Agriculture Network.

Job opportunities are often listed with the Sustainable Agriculture Network's e-mail discussion group, SANET-MG. To check recent archives/messages, go to

<http://lists.sare.org/archives/sanet-mg.html>; Select "Search the archives since July 2000." Use keywords like "position" or "intern" or "internship," or simply browse the

past 2 to 3 months worth of messages. You may also subscribe to the list via this site.

REE Employment Opportunities. U.S. Department of Agriculture

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hnd/jobs/index.htm>

Chronicle Careers: Jobs in Higher Education. The Chronicle of Higher Education.

<http://chronicle.com/section/jobs/61/>

Other resources may be found at the AFSC's *Education and Research* Web page and

through people and organization resources listed above.

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Who will fund my sustainable agriculture research project?

Sustainable Agriculture Research Funding Resources, AFSC, revised

May 2011

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/agnic/susagfunding.shtml>

Federal Conservation Resources for Sustainable Farming and Ranching

ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, 2010

This publication offers an overview of the major federal conservation programs that provide resources for farmers and ranchers to enhance and maintain sustainable farming and ranching practices.

[https://attra.ncat.org/attra-](https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/summaries/summary.php?pub=280)

[pub/summaries/summary.php?pub=280](https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/summaries/summary.php?pub=280)

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Discussion:

What models for helping our church grow are you aware of?

Do you think rural models are a good way of helping churches grow?

Do you think the concept of sustainability can be applied to your church? How?

What does sustainability mean to you?

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What's Next



Slide 20

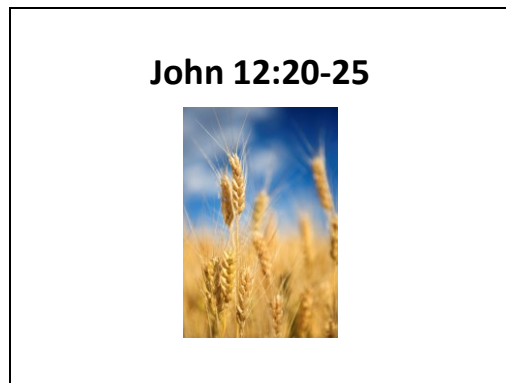
SEEKING
SUSTAINABILITY
Session 2



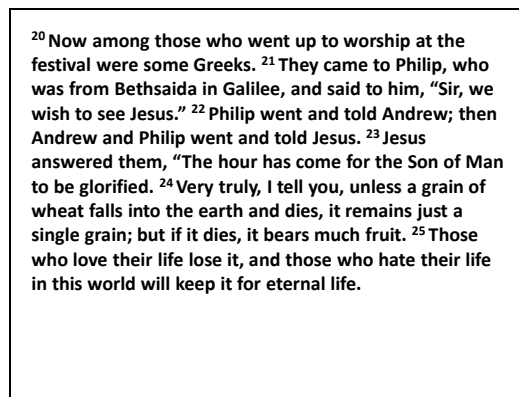
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In "The Land" Walter Brueggemann talks about the concepts of "gift" and "grasp." He equates "grasping" in the New Testament as equivalent to death and to the crucifixion. He sees "gift" as life, in particular resurrection.



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Discussion questions:

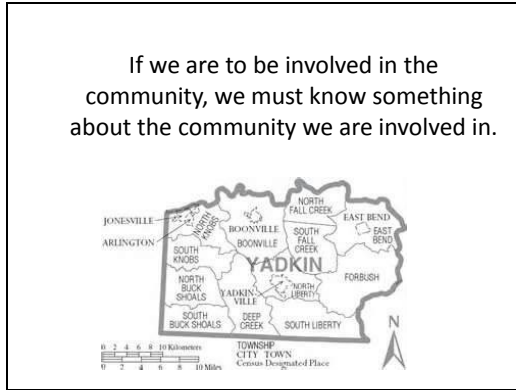
1. What do you think Jesus means when he talks about the death of the grain of wheat leading to life?
2. Do we in trying to hold on to things actually cause us to lose what we are trying to keep?
3. What do these images mean for congregations who are struggling to survive?

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4. Is there a difference between surviving and sustaining?
5. If a congregation is chiefly concerned with only keeping the doors open, is it truly alive? What might the concepts of death and resurrection mean in this context?

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If we are to be involved in the community, we must know something about the community we are involved in.



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County Profile for Yadkin County

Population	
Total Population (2010)	38,406
Population Density (2010)	115
Total Population (2000)	36,348
Percent Population Change (2000-2010)	5.70%
Percent American Indian (2010)	0%
Percent Asian (2010)	0%
Percent Black (2010)	3%
Percent Hispanic (2010)	10%
Percent White (2010)	86%
Median Age (2010)	41.4
Percent Under 18 (2010)	23%
Percent 18 to 29 Years (2010)	12%
Percent 30 to 64 years (2010)	48%
Percent 65 Or Over (2010)	16%
Percent Born in NC (2006-2010)	79%

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Income and Poverty

Median Household Income (2010)	\$41,095
Median Household Income 2000 (2010 Dollars)	\$47,671
Per Capita Income (2006-2010)	\$20,379
Poverty Rate (2010)	15%
Child Poverty Rate (2010)	24%
Elderly Poverty Rate (2006-2010)	15%
Percent Receiving Food Assistance (2010)	12%
Housing	
Home Ownership Rate (2010)	76%
Percent Substandard Housing (2006-2010)	4%
Percent Unaffordable Housing (2006-2010)	25%

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Health	
Infant Mortality Rate, per 1,000 Live Births (2010)	9.9
Percent Uninsured (2009)	19%
Physicians, per 10,000 Population (2010)	4.9
Education	
Students Passing End of Grade Exams (2012)	68%
Graduation Rate (2012)	82%
Per Student Expenditures K-12 (2011)	\$8,403
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2006-2010)	11%
Associate's Degree (2006-2010)	9%
High School Diploma (2006-2010)	38%
Less Than High School Diploma (2006-2010)	23%

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Labor Force and Employment	
Labor Force (2011)	19,286
Number Unemployed (2011)	1,895
Unemployment Rate (2011)	10%
Percent Working in Manufacturing (2011)	22%
Percent Working in Health Care (2011)	11%
Percent Working in Public Administration (2011)	9%
Other	
Crime Rate, per 1,000 Residents (2011)	30.5
Economic Tier Designation (2012)	2
Property Tax Rate (2012)	\$0.69
Rural or Urban Region	Rural

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Agriculture and Natural Resources	
Total Farms (2007)	990
Average Farm Size (2007)	106
Total Agricultural Receipts (2010)	\$98,765,657
Total Crop Receipts (2010)	\$24,319,000
Total Livestock Receipts (2010)	\$68,188,000

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Census Tract 504
 2010 population 6729
 Change since 2000 8.3%
 Population per sq. Mi 96.3
 Ethnic/Racial
 Whites 82%
 Hispanics 16%
 Black 1%
 Multiracial 1%

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RESOURCES FOR DATA AND DEMOGRAPHICS



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1. School performance maps (which link to individual school demographic information and report cards):

<http://schoolperformancemaps.com/nc/>

2. Census "quickfacts" site, which also links to more information when a particular geographic area has been selected:

<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>

3. NC Department of Commerce Division of Employment Security:

<http://www.ncesc1.com/LMI/workForceStats/workForceMain.asp>

4. NC Rural Data Bank:

<http://www.ncruralcenter.org/databank/index.html>

5. NC Center for Health Statistics:

<http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/data/county.cfm>

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For Discussion

What ideas are you getting that our church can do that would help us move from simply keeping the doors open to being more sustainable?



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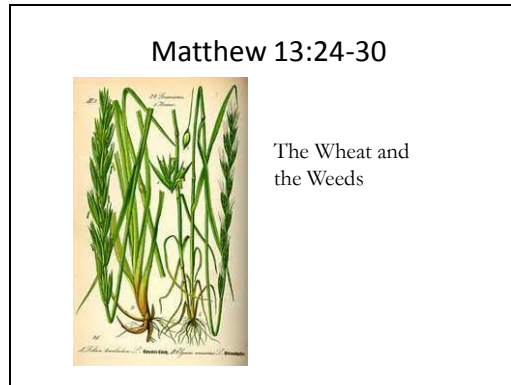
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Welcome

Prayer

**Review of Previous
Session**

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²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' ²⁸ "An enemy did this," he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' ²⁹ "No," he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

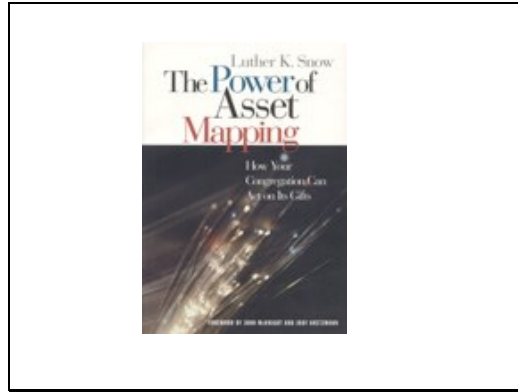
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What are our Assets?

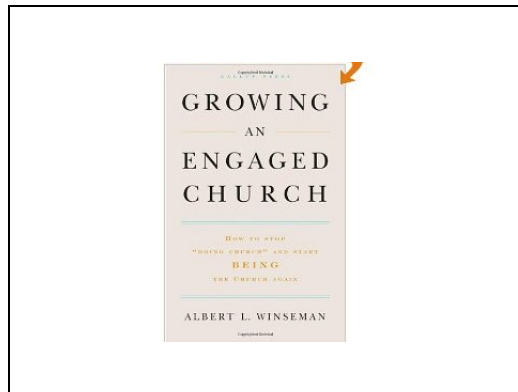
Hidden Assets

**Resources for Discovering
Assets**

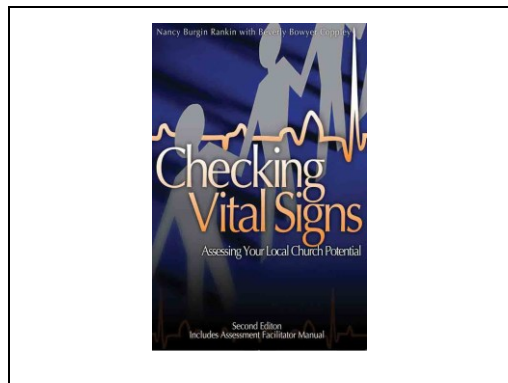
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Slide 43



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List some of your churches assets.


Would people outside of our church see the same assets that we see?

How can we better focus on our assets?

What unique assets do rural churches have?

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Roadblocks and assets



Can assets also be roadblocks to sustainability?

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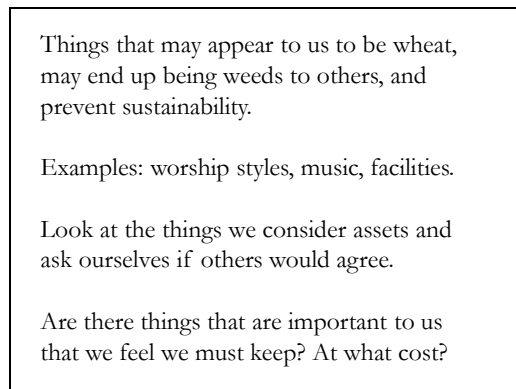
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Slide 49



Slide 50



Slide 51

Are there things that we could change, or do differently that might help us be more sustainable.

Example: a farmer who practices sustainable agriculture may have to make choices about the things grown or the equipment used.

Do we make good choices that will help us remain sustainable?

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The Elephant in the Room:
Money and Sustainability



Denominational Issues
Pastor's salary/benefits; apportionments
What choices do we have in our denomination?

Slide 53

Right now, what is one thing we can do to make our church more sustainable?

What is one thing we could do in the next six months that would make us more sustainable?

What is something we could do in the next year that would make us more sustainable?

Slide 54



Slide 55

Welcome

Prayer

Homework

Slide 56

Right now, what is one thing we can do to make our church more sustainable?

What is one thing we could do in the next six months that would make us more sustainable?

What is something we could do in the next year that would make us more sustainable?

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What
Happens

If We Are
Not
Sustainable?



Slide 58




Slide 59

People who live on farms know that there is a cycle to all of life:

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter
Planting, Growing, Harvest
Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection
What season is our church in?

If we are in winter, how do we move to spring?

How do we deal realistically with the fact that sometimes it is necessary for a church to die?

The Gift of Good Land
(closing thoughts)

- 1) Defining Sustainability for A Particular Situation
– “I am the vine and you are the branches”
- 2) Seeds are to be planted – “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth...”
- 3) Is it wheat or is it weeds?

APPENDIX 2
EVALUATION FORM USED BY CLASS

Name _____

Church _____

Date _____

The purpose of this project was to use a rural agricultural model of sustainability for congregational development with the St. Paul and Mountain Grove Churches.

On a scale of one to ten, with one being “not at all successful” and ten being “very successful,” how well did the class sessions fulfill this purpose? (circle one)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Using the same scale, evaluate how well each individual session fulfilled the purpose of the project.

Session One: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 n/a

Session Two: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 n/a

Session Three: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Four: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Five: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Using the same scale, evaluate how well Pastor Claudia was prepared to lead each session.

Session One: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Two: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Three: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Four: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Five: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Using the same scale, evaluate Pastor Claudia's leadership for each session.

Session One: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Two: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Three: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Four: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Five: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Using the same scale, evaluate the usefulness of the information offered in each session.

Session One: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Two: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Three: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Four: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

Session Five: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
n/a

On a scale of one to ten, with one being not useful and ten being very useful, evaluate the structure of the overall project (meal, class time, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Using the same scale, evaluate the use of scripture and theological resources in the overall project.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all clear and ten being very clear, evaluate how easy it was to understand what was being presented.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all original and ten being very original, evaluate the originality of the overall project.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What one thing did you find most useful in the sessions?

What was least effective?

Did you discover anything in the sessions that will help your congregation be more sustainable?

What suggestions would you make for improving the project?

Do you think the project would be helpful to other similar churches?

What other feedback would you like to share as the project is evaluated?

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