

What the Country Church Needs

RURAL CHURCH

"What kind of a country church is needed in Western Canada, and what can the country church do toward building up a higher and nobler type of citizenship?"

1.—The needed rural church must be spiritual. It must set high standards for personal spiritual life and individual moral conduct. These standards must be positive as well as negative. One shows less Christian spirit by doing no evil than by doing good, especially by joining with others for the all-round uplift of the community. This is the work for which the needed rural church will enlist its members.

2.—The needed rural church has a world ideal and a community ideal. It sees the whole world, first and especially the rural parts, bathed in even-handed justice, harmonious peace and satisfactory happiness, and bends all her efforts to realize the ideal.

3.—The needed rural church has a ministry that live in the country with their people. They study the country's needs and do what they can to have them supplied. They speak the language of the country, and their illustrations have the "smell of the field which the Lord hath blessed." Their sermons are frequently brought back to the mind of the hearers by the things which they see. Their education specially fits them for their task.

4.—The needed rural church is a uniting one. Nearly everything tends to divide the country people. They need a uniting force. Most churches cultivate denominational loyalty by emphasizing the things in which they are peculiar. Such churches tend to further divide the people. The needed rural church will emphasize the Gospel of Salvation to Christlike



The church of the open country. There is little attractive about it and it is not put to nearly as many uses as it might be. This one is out of use now. Why?

service and Christlike character and make nothing else important.

5.—The needed rural church will inspire to and lead the way in all needed community efforts. As self-help is best, it may organize a social survey that the community may see its needs and adopt an appropriate program. It will help to organize the community in any and every way for its benefit, but especially to study its own needs. For this there must be frequent meetings to discuss community improvement and the needs of the country in general. Most of the people leave all their political thinking to their political party, just as some leave their thinking on religious matters to their church and do just as they are bidden. It is ever the effort of a faithful church to have the people do their own thinking. Yet the church cannot take either side in politics, not only because neither party might do her credit, but also because she would thereby lose her influence with the other side. But the church that is needed will encourage the discussion of political issues where no professional politician is present, so that the people may learn the facts and vote freely and intelligently.—W. J. Conoly.

THEY HAVE PRACTICAL CHURCH UNION

This opportunity to put forward some thoughts re the claim that people do not go to church as much as in days gone by should not be lost. One reason is that the rural churches do not live up to Christ's teaching. Whereas he rebuked his disciples when they asked him to restrain others from preaching in a different way to Christ, it is and has been in the past a policy on the part of the rural church, and one denomination is as guilty as the other, to see how many they could get to attend their particular church, no matter what other church they deprived. In places where one denomination predominates it is not uncommon for the people in that church to believe they have the right to impose their religious views on all the community, absolutely regardless of other people's thoughts. But the time has passed, I hope, when the masses are to be dictated to on the question as to which denomination is right. We must all recognize the fact that every individual in a community has a perfect right to his particular views on religion and to work out his salvation as he sees fit. For a person or a denomination to force their views, or their church

On this page are three letters giving the opinion of some of our readers as to how the true mission of the rural church can best be fulfilled. This is a critical time in the evolution of the country church and all who can contribute something of value to its evolution along right lines will be doing a real service. We want more letters and we want them practical, the results of your own observations and experiences. We don't want dissertations on creed or doctrine but practical ways and means by which the rural church can help mankind to live up to the ideals taught by Christ.

and minister, on a community because they happen to be in the position to do so, brings up the old question that "might is right," one of the very things Canadian boys in Flanders are evidencing their disbelief in at the sacrifice of their lives. The Western Canadian people will not willingly be stampeded into another church against their will, and so they stay away.

Western Canada is thinly settled and the church is very often quite too far away for some to go. A mother with two or three small children finds it quite a task to keep her little ones cool in summer and warm enough in winter for a long drive. Then as help is hard to get in the West she oft times feels more in need of a quiet rest when Sunday comes and is hardly in the mood for further effort. In a very great number of cases it would also mean going to a church where the people were not in sympathy with her particular denomination and in most cases the husband stays home with his wife and family. Who shall say he is not right in doing so? The result is they gradually give up going to church and that is very easy to do.

Does our present rural church promote unity in the rural community? I do not think so. More parties and more splits are directly due to the rural church than thru any other one cause I know of, consequently quite a number of people just stay away from church to keep out of trouble. This all goes to show that there is not a very Christlike spirit working in our rural communities. In far too many cases two or three denominations are trying to establish their church in a community where there is only room for one (the overlapping committee try to prevent this, but they cannot stop the people where mean tricks are employed to bring their object about). Hence we see two or three stagnant, dying or dead churches and that has a tendency to cheapen the church where one good live church would quicken all the community and be a real community social centre. These are some of the reasons why people do not go to church.

Liberty of Thought Essential

What kind of a country church is needed in Western Canada. It is very difficult for any one person to point out a certain type of church and say that is the church for the rural West, because liberty of thought must be kept first. Where a community has six or seven different denominations residing in it and each thinks that particular denomination is just a little the best, then liberty of thought comes to be the vital point on which all church questions for that community must be settled, if it is to be done to the satisfaction of all who reside there or who take any interest in their community. For a body of men of any denomination, no matter how clever, to get together in say Toronto and pass resolutions dealing with questions that are of vital interest to John Farmer of a different denomination somewhere in Saskatchewan and to try to get John Farmer to comply with them even against his wish, is trying to put the clock of religion back about two hundred years. Such a policy will not work for very long in any rural community and so we must approach the rural church problem from another angle.

There are so many rocks in the way it will need a man with Solomon's wisdom to steer past them all and bring the ship of rural churchdom to the best port. I think the best system that has been tried up to now (I do not say it is the only one) is that which three churches are trying to put into practice at present. Union between Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches would to a great extent solve the Western rural church problem. It should only be a short step for other denominations to join such a union, particularly if in the basis of such union the thought of a large degree of liberty be kept well in front. If the question were left to the young of this generation I do not think it would take very long to bring it about. The fact that older people, set in their denominational observances of nearly a lifetime, are hard to move, however, must be considered and rightly so. But the young people's movements of today, International Sunday School Federation, Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., etc., are all helping to break down the barriers of denominationalism for the coming generation, and I expect a time will come, tho I may not live to see it, when the people will have one rural church that will meet the needs of all the residents both socially and morally. They will then be inclined to indulge in a smile at the efforts put forth today to

keep up the old straight, proud, "my church," "split up community" rural system.

An Experiment in Union

Right here in this rural community we are trying to get away from the old "draw your coat tight about you" denomination, and have formed what is termed a union church. I believe the supporters of this church are honestly trying not to interfere in the particular belief that other people had in their home churches. We have six or seven different denominations represented and since we all recognize that a church for each is out of the question and that each one has an equal right to claim his own, we all join hands and approach our Maker thru one common channel where each one feels he is not an outsider. Our pastor can and does meet the spiritual needs of our community, composed of six or seven different denominations, by preaching the essential—the Gospel of Christ—and each member tries to realize that he or she is in duty bound to sacrifice his or her little non-essential denominational ceremonies so that the sharp points of it won't hurt his or her pew neighbors. Even from the peevish business point of view it is only reasonable. Does it work? It does. What would prevent it? "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you" will pay great dividends applied in our rural church communities.

From co-operation as farmers in Grain Growers' Associations, co-operative elevators, creameries, etc., it is only a small step to co-operative rural churches and social centres. But what a long time it takes to get some rural communities to go the first step and



There is little material difference in the various rural churches as far as preaching or commendation goes. The people attending them are practically alike. Why not more co-operation, more development of true community spirit?

co-operate to protect each other in their business life. Each one waits for the other to move and when he does move the question arises, "I wonder what he is going to get out of it?" But still it's an ill wind that does not blow somebody good, and if the rural communities did wake up, did co-operate in their business, did watch the making of the laws they have to abide by, did co-operate in rural church work, social reforms, etc., it would at once put hundreds of men who up to the present have lived on the fat of the land at the expense of our rural communities out of a job and they would have to work for a living. So if you think that all these non-producers are necessary to the well being of your rural community, just keep your nose on the grindstone of individualism in your community. Don't join the Grain Growers, the debating club, the church, the social reform centre and your rural community will poke along at a deadening pace till the end of time. "As a man soweth, so shall he also reap."—T. H. Scoffin, Fiske, Sask.

THE CHURCH SHOULD BROADEN OUT

When our country church is a failure it is often caused by teaching reformation without rather than transformation within. An unregenerate membership identical in character with the outside world has no true mission or message for it. The next reason for failure is the rural church's general neglect of sound and scriptural principles of co-operation and mutual development in the common service. Instead of being a great family where all are enlisted and actively employed in witnessing for and living the truth, the church is a preserve where a few professionals exercise a monopoly that denies a man's inherent right to discussion and reply, with the results one might expect.

Another harmful thing is that instead of dwelling on the possibilities of redeemed humanity, preachers talk about "The trivial round, the common task, that furnish all we ought to ask," etc., etc. The present war shows how our men respond to the call to face death and danger for duty and the right. Our people take little interest in playing a mute, inglorious subordinate part; they need to be fired with a passion for noble, Godly, fully-rounded lives.

The ordinary community is happy if it possesses enough Christian workers to carry on one set of church

Continued on Page 30