

2023-2024 Annual Report



CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE
Promoting Catholic Life in Rural America

Letter from the Executive Director

Fr. Edwin V. O'Hara grew up on a dairy farm in southeast Minnesota in the late 1800's. Fr. O'Hara knew he wanted to be a priest at an early age. He was ordained in 1905 at the Saint Paul Seminary in St. Paul, MN, and received permission from Archbishop John Ireland to serve in the Diocese of Oregon City. His love for rural life and the need for catechesis in rural areas eventually inspired him to begin a Catholic Apostolic to rural communities. He founded the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) on November 11, 1923. The mission of NCRLC was to promote Catholic life in rural America.

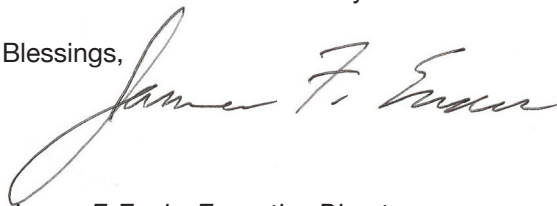
Today, one hundred years later, housed on the campus of the University of St. Thomas, Catholic Rural Life continues the legacy and vision of Fr. Edwin V. O'Hara. We work with dioceses and parishes all over the country to promote Catholic life in rural America. Our work includes:

- 1) Thriving in Rural Ministry** - a program focused on supporting and developing rural pastors through the sharing of best practices in rural ministry, bringing rural pastors together in retreats, conferences, and workshops to sharpen one another, and help develop a vision for what flourishing parishes look like in rural communities. Over 300 pastors have gone through the Thriving in Rural Ministry training.
- 2) Thriving Rural Congregations** - a program focused on developing lay leadership in rural parishes. This program is just ramping up, and we are working in four pilot dioceses.
- 3) CRL Chapters** - we have 32 chapters, made up of men, women, and clergy to support rural Catholics by providing spiritual/liturgical events (Rural Life Mass, Novenas to St. Isidore, Feast of St. Isidore celebrations, etc.); educational programming such as the Vocation of the Agricultural Leader - Faith, Food, and the Environment; and social outreach. CRL is a hub for these chapters to share ideas, best practices, and inspire the development of new chapters around the country.

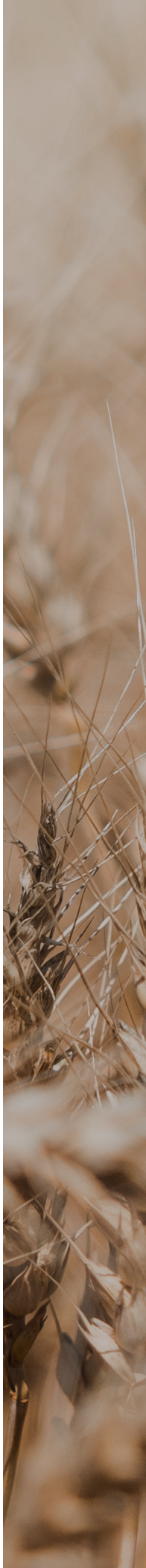
On May 8th of this past year, over 325 CRL members and friends joined us at the University of St. Thomas to celebrate and give God glory for all that he has done through the ministry of CRL over the past 100 years and articulate CRL's vision for the next 100 years. The needs in rural America are still great. Priests are responsible for multiple parishes often covering long distances. Suicide rates and cases of substance abuse are increasing across the rural landscape. Many in rural communities are losing faith and hope. Many farmers are facing challenges to keep their family farms. CRL is committed to strengthening rural communities through its network of CRL members—bishops, clergy and laity— in 45 states.

Thank you for your partnership with CRL over the past year. The Lord is opening more doors for CRL's work across the country. We could not do this work without your financial support.

Blessings,



James F. Ennis, Executive Director



*Promoting
Catholic
Life in
Rural
America*

Mission.



100th Anniversary Celebration

After months of preparation, Catholic Rural Life gathered more than 300 people on May 8 for *Rejoicing in the Harvest: Celebrating 100 Years of Catholic Rural Life*. The celebration took place at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. The event highlighted the history of the organization and the robust and joyful community that CRL has established. The gathering also increased the bonds of CRL's community through presentations, a banquet meal, and most importantly, the Eucharist.

Headlining the event was Cardinal Timothy Dolan of the Archdiocese of New York, who was the main celebrant at the afternoon Mass, held in the university chapel. He was joined by 11 bishops, more than 40 priests and deacons, and a dozen seminarians, who asked God for His blessing on the farmers and ranchers who depend on the land for their livelihood. In his homily, Cardinal Dolan encouraged the worshippers to continue to appreciate and support rural life.

He spoke again following Mass, this time on the vision Catholic Rural Life's founder, Archbishop Edwin V. O'Hara, and the history of CRL. Cardinal Dolan, who wrote *"Some Seed Fell on Good Ground: The Life of Edwin V. O'Hara"*, noted that CRL's founder believed "there was no greater challenge facing the Church in the United States than the strengthening of rural life."

Following dinner, Monsignor James Shea, President of the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota, inspired attendees to keep their trust in God, even when it's difficult. He referenced the "Manifesto

on Rural Life," put out by the organization in 1939, commending it for speaking on the nobility and perils of rural life. "It speaks about the value of the small family farm, the large families, the hard work, the dedication, and the resilience that comes from it," he said. "It speaks about the way in which its farmers feed the nation, not just by giving meat or grain, but by the example that they set for the rest of civilization."

While the majority of guests attended the evening festivities, CRL's anniversary event spanned the entire day. Those who signed up for the extended morning track attended either the CRL Chapter Education session or Thriving in Rural Ministry session. Approximately 35 CRL Chapter Education participants heard from Dr. Carmina Chapp, a Catholic theologian and founder of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker Farm in Harveys Lake, Pennsylvania, whose talk was entitled, "Glorify the Lord by Your Life, The Dignity of Agricultural Work." Chapp encouraged participants to seek the truth, pray, and participate in the Church's liturgical life and evolving seasons. She also urged attendees to educate themselves on current challenges and be courageous in their response to God's promptings in their daily lives, for this is how one brings together the sacramental worldview and the dignity of work. Following Chapp's presentation, Chapter Leaders and pastors shared how their participation in CRL Chapters provides a wonderful way to work, pray, and come together as a community to support one another.

In the Thrive session, more than 40 rural priests, religious, and pastoral leaders, most of whom had previously attended an in-person retreat or convocation through the program, gathered to hear from Catholic speaker and licensed counselor Catherine DiNuzzo, founder of Sacred Heart Mental Wellness. DiNuzzo spoke about mental health and burnout amongst rural clergy. The presentation led to a vibrant discussion about the needs of those who serve in pastoral ministry in the Church, with several pastors sharing their practices for staying rooted and well-balanced while ministering to multiple towns over large geographic distances. This was the first time that CRL has hosted a national gathering through the Thriving in Rural Ministry program. The participants shared fraternity before the session over breakfast and through morning prayer together.

Before the afternoon public sessions began, CRL hosted a luncheon for 100 program participants, pastoral leaders, and close collaborators. The luncheon was co-sponsored by Catholic Home Missions and the Earl and Kathy Hoaglund Fund. Catholic Home Missions supports the work of financially challenged dioceses around the country by funding pastoral programs they would otherwise not be able to carry out. The Earl and Kathy Hoaglund Fund serves Native Americans pursuing research into the preservation of wild rice in its native habitat. University of St. Thomas President, Rob Vischer, welcomed guests at the beginning of the luncheon. The university houses the offices of Catholic Rural Life and has been a longtime supporter of CRL's work.

Guests heard testimonials from CRL program participants, including Father Phillip Tran, who represented the Thriving in Rural Ministry program. Father Tran, of the Diocese of Beaumont, Texas, was originally ordained for the Archdiocese of Miami and had little experience in rural life before he transferred to Texas. He stated he received a "call within a call" to exercise his priesthood in a rural area. He was assigned to two rural parishes

and attended a Thriving in Rural Ministry retreat, which helped him to acclimate to the new charism of rural ministry.

Deacon Kent Ferris, of the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa, also gave his testimonial for the CRL Chapters, and Joe LaGarde and Dr. Michael Dockery highlighted the relationship between CRL and the Niibi Center. The Niibi Center, assisted by the Earl and Kathy Hoaglund Fund, supports the preservation of Native American culture, foods, and water through research scholarships. The day continued with a presentation from Dr. James Nolan from Williams College in Massachusetts, on his book, "What They Saw in America: Alexis de Tocqueville, Max Weber, G.K. Chesterton, and Sayyid Qutb." His presentation gave insights into the thoughts of

these foreign visitors to the American countryside, especially their admiration of American rural communities. Dr. Nolan specifically referenced Chesterton, who viewed farming communities "as among the very best things about American society."



Dr. Christopher Thompson, academic dean and professor at the Saint Paul Seminary, spoke next on "Another Way of Seeing." Dr. Thompson's presentation looked at literature, education, tradition, and more through the lens of rural life. He also pointed to previous pastoral letters from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that addressed the importance of rural life, "affirming the dignity of agricultural work, speaking to its challenges, and working hard to bring the revelation of Christ and His Church into these communities."

The bonds of friendship between attendees were ever-present throughout the day, as smiles and laughter abounded. As CRL members and friends reflected on their gratitude for all CRL has accomplished over the past 100 years, it was also a moment to look to the future with hope for the next 100 years.

Thriving in Rural Ministry

CRL hosted a retreat for rural priests at St. Benedict's Abbey in Benet Lake, WI in early October, 2023 with 10 participants. The retreat was fruitful in sharing best practices and encouraging fraternity between priests from 6 dioceses. In addition to the in-person retreat, CRL was invited into 4 dioceses to present to clergy both in-person and online to share about specific best practices in rural ministry such as rural feasts and liturgies, evangelization, multiple parish management, and to provide an overview of the Thriving in Rural Ministry retreat content.



Clergy met online throughout the year to continue their education in rural ministry. Last year's topics for the online sessions included: Outreach to Farmers, Rural Youth Ministry, Mental Health and Pastoral Ministry, Rural Evangelization, and Rural Spirituality. These sessions not only provided additional ideas for successful ministry, but also helped build up a network of clergy across the country who support one another. These sessions were available to program participants who have attended a retreat organized by CRL or a conference hosted through their diocese.

To date more than 300 clergy from 53 dioceses have participated in the Thriving in Rural Ministry program - impacting hundreds of parishes and thousands of rural Catholics across the country. CRL plans to grow the program to more than 500 clergy and expand to include support for rural deacons in the next 5 years.

Each year Thriving in Rural Ministry hosts in-person retreats, provides conferences and workshops for dioceses and schools, online clergy sessions on best practices, and public webinars around cultivating a spiritual vision of the rural landscape.

Thriving Rural Congregations

In February 2024, Catholic Rural Life initiated the Thriving Rural Congregations (TRC) program with the hiring of Program Manager Laurie Forner, to direct the efforts.

The purpose of CRL's TRC apostolate is to train rural parish teams of lay women and men in collaboration with their pastors, equipping them to be competent, confident, and courageous leaders in their faith and in the face of a rapidly changing rural culture. Our hope is through this program, our selected pilot participants will grow in their own interior faith life, be a source of support to their pastor, and a beacon of encouragement to their community as they walk in faith together.

Our four pilot participants, with the support of their bishops, include:
Diocese of Fargo, ND; Bishop John Folda
Diocese of Saginaw, MI; Bishop Robert Gruss
Diocese of Salina, KS; Bishop Gerald Vincke
Diocese of San Angelo, TX; Bishop Michael Sis



In addition to our grant sponsors and our bishops, the Thriving Rural Congregations program will be supported by its thirteen (13) member Advisory Team. This is a highly equipped team of individuals representing clergy from multiple states, academia, USCCB Social Teaching, diocesan and national faith-based ministries, the MN Department of Agriculture, and rural life and farming in the United States. The team will provide consultation and support as well as their skills as speakers and creators of content.

The initial TRC phase has included research with the pastors of each diocese and their selected parish lay leaders. Surveys will provide an indication of personal and parish demographics as well as each respondent's definition of "thriving congregations" and insight into their current challenges.

To date we have met our goals of diocesan participation, and we have exceeded our parish and lay leader participation goals. Our initial goals included four (4) dioceses, four (4) parishes and four (4) lay leaders per parish. We currently have eleven (11) parish participants confirmed and estimate an additional four to six (4-6) parishes to join in 2024. We currently have fifteen (15) lay leaders selected across 2 dioceses to-date. We estimate we will have another 6-8 named by November 2024.

As we move into 2025, our focus will be on engagement with our pilot priests and lay leader participants. We will begin to create plans to address the needs of each parish and based on each parish's unique needs.

"As we move into 2025, our focus will be on engagement with our pilot priests and lay leader participants. We will begin to create plans to address the needs of each parish and based on each parish's unique needs."

-Laurie Forner, Program Manager

Catholic Rural Life Chapters

Catholic Rural Life (CRL) Chapters are a witness to our Catholic faith in rural America. CRL has developed a network of over 30 Chapters across twenty-one (21) states and twenty-nine (29) dioceses. The chapters and their members live out the CRL vision of thriving families, farms and parishes centered on faith, community and the care of creation. Since our 100th anniversary celebration in May 2024, there has been increased interest in chapter membership and CRL is in conversation with over a dozen new dioceses with interest in CRL Chapters.

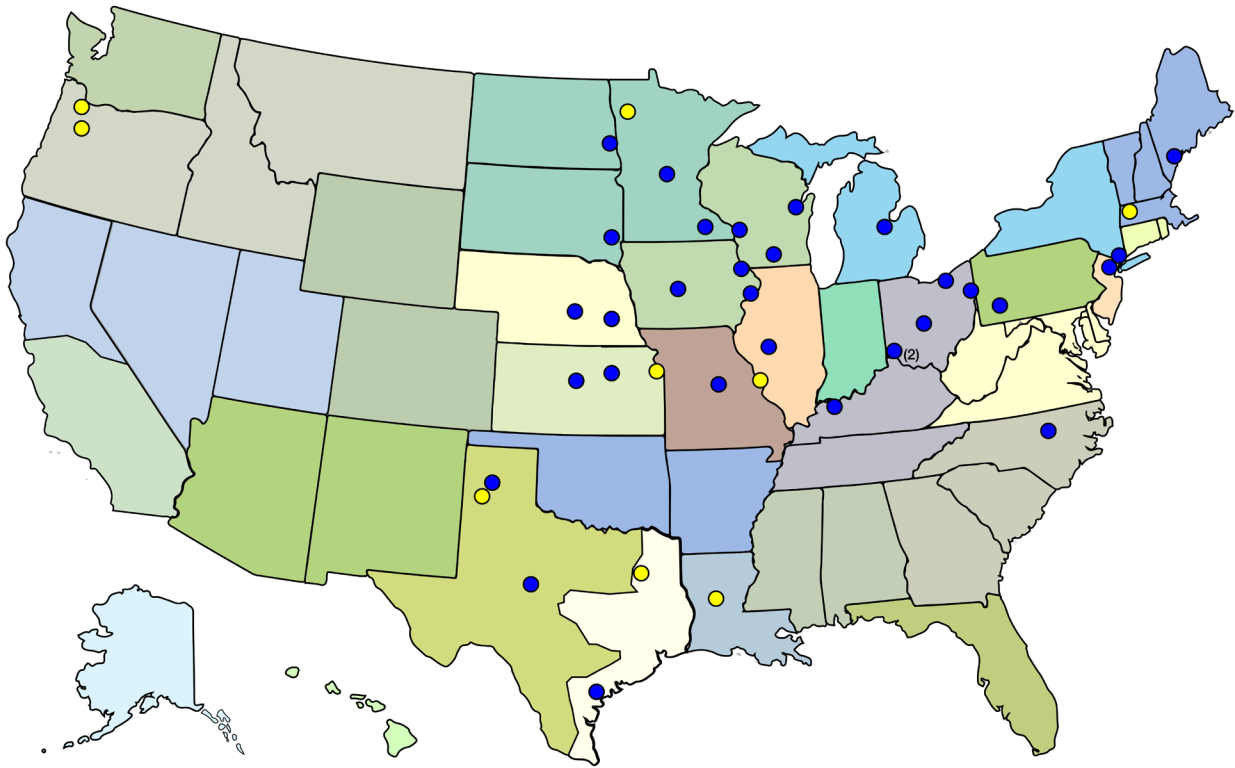
CRL recently added its first college chapter at K-State in Manhattan, Kansas. We want to continue to engage our young adults and will focus on land grant colleges and expanding our chapters in the agricultural college community.

CRL Chapters have been committed to fostering and celebrating Catholic rural culture and each chapter finds unique ways to share in liturgical celebrations, provide education in faith and rural topics, or celebrate and work together in service for their larger community. Many chapters meet regularly, host an annual Mass celebrating rural life, organize social programs and events, and pray the St. Isidore Novena each May.

CRL visited several rural life Masses in 2024 and loves to meet the Chapter communities to support their efforts. CRL also provides the opportunity every quarter for Chapter Leaders to meet online and share information and their events. We also provide support on an updated web portal for Chapter leaders and members with ongoing support from our Program Manager to support and guide Chapter efforts. In fiscal year 2025, CRL is working to expand our network of Chapters with a focus on expansion outside the Midwest.



Catholic Rural Life Chapters



Our Current Chapters:

Iowa

Diocese of Davenport, IA
 Diocese of Des Moines, IA
 Archdiocese of Dubuque, IA

Illinois

Diocese of Springfield, IL

Kansas

Kansas State University (Org)
 Diocese of Salina, KS

Kentucky

Diocese of Owensboro, KY

Maine

Diocese of Portland, ME

Michigan

Diocese of Saginaw, MI

Minnesota

Diocese of St. Cloud, MN
 Diocese of Winona-Rochester, MN

Missouri

Diocese of Jefferson City, MO

North Carolina

Diocese of Raleigh, NC

North Dakota

Diocese of Fargo, ND

Nebraska

Diocese of Grand Island, NE
 Diocese of Lincoln, NE

New Jersey

Diocese of Metuchen, NJ

New York

CRL Mt. Carmel (NYC) (org)

Ohio

Archdiocese of Cincinnati, OH
North

Archdiocese of Cincinnati, OH
South

Diocese of Cleveland, OH

Diocese of Columbus, OH

Diocese of Youngstown, OH

Pennsylvania

Diocese of Greensburg, PA

South Dakota

Diocese of Sioux Falls, SD

Texas

Diocese of Amarillo, TX
 Diocese of San Angelo, TX
 Diocese of Victoria, TX

Wisconsin

Diocese of Green Bay, WI
 Diocese of La Crosse, WI
 Diocese of Madison, WI

Staff



Jim Ennis, Executive Director

"I feel a tremendous responsibility to be a good steward of the organization and to help CRL serve the rural Church in ways that can inspire the next generation of men and women to take their faith in Christ seriously and to use their gifts and talents for the glory of God and for the good of their communities."

Kate Gapp, Development Director

"Interacting with our members and donors is a privilege – without them, CRL couldn't support, inform, and promote rural Catholic communities in America. God's economy of grace is always at work showing us that it is worthwhile to trust in Him and be good stewards of the gifts he gives us! It's a joy to be part of."



Tim Streiff, Program Manager

"I love working with priests in the Thriving in Rural Ministry program across the country. Rural life is a beautiful calling; to steward the land and cooperate with God in work and in ministry. When we build up Catholic culture and dedicate our work to God in rural places, it elevates and returns to God the gifts He has given us."



Laurie Forner, Program Manager

"My Catholic faith has been handed down to me from my parents, my grandparents, and their grandparents and ancestors. I treasure this gift. I look forward to working with, and supporting, the members and friends of CRL."



Zach Wiese, Communications Manager

"It is a blessing from God to be able to take my love of rural and the Catholic faith and use it everyday in my work at Catholic Rural Life. Communicating the mission of Catholic Rural Life helps build up the Church and thriving communities in rural America. I am grateful to get to work with the CRL team, those that live in rural, and those that love rural life."



Board of Directors 2023-24

Chair

Most Reverend
Robert D. Gruss

Most Reverend
John T. Folda

Most Reverend
Myron J. Cotta

Most Reverend
James R. Golka

Treasurer

Mr. Emery Koenig

Secretary

Ms. Cecilia Calvo

Mr. Julian Heron

Mr. Art Befort

Sr. Esther Mary Nickel, RSM

Mr. Mike Etzel

Mr. Michael Hirt

Fr. Jesús Mariscal Guzmán

Mr. Richard Coll, USCCB
Observer

Sowing Seeds for Faith and Growth Capital Campaign

Catholic Rural Life's capital campaign, Sowing Seeds for Faith and Growth, has two primary objectives:

- Increase CRL Chapters to a total of 60 nationwide and increase support of CRL's current 31 Chapters
- Train 500 priests through the Thriving in Rural Ministry program through retreats, workshops, conferences, and ongoing formation
 - 500 priests would serve in approximately 1,200 parishes across rural America, reaching about 250,000 Catholics

CRL is pleased to report that the campaign continues strong in the silent phase. As of June 2024, over \$2.6 million has been pledged toward our campaign goal of \$5 million over the next three-five years. We are grateful for all the early and generous leadership commitments to our Sowing Seeds for Faith and Growth campaign.

IN CATHOLIC
RURAL LIFE®

CRL FINANCIAL REPORT / JULY 2023 - JUNE 2024

EXPENSES \$753,094



- Program Services
\$418,055
- Administration
\$152,338
- Development
\$182,701

INCOME \$2,033,041



- Foundations
\$1,779,382
- Annual Appeal Fund
\$185,795
- Other
\$67,864

YEAR AT A GLANCE

Celebrating CRL's 100th Anniversary is a milestone we don't want to forget. This year was full of growth and impact across the country for Catholic Rural Life, and we want to share some highlights with you who made it all possible.

31

Total Chapter

68

Diocese Gave

100TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT

60

Clergy Attended

12

Bishops Attended

65

New Members

FIRST COLLEGE CHAPTER

K-State University

6

Webinars Hosted

Some of our webinar topics for this year were:

