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### *Dear Friend of Rural Life,*

What is the situation of rural parishes and pastors? Catholic Rural Life asks and tries to answer this question every ten years or so. We sent surveys to our diocesan contacts around the country and heard back from 25 dioceses and scores of rural parish pastors. The gifts within the rural church are sense of community and a prayerful connection to the land. The challenges are economic and social changes and how to keep the triangle of church, community and family in balance.

This issue illuminates what has changed in the past several years as rural communities adapt to a global economy and family transitions. We also try to understand how attention to rural life issues has changed within parishes and dioceses, given all the demands placed on pastoral and lay leaders.

The centerpiece of this issue lays out the pastoral experiences among rural parishes in various parts of the country. Both the difficulties and successes of parish life in rural America are presented. Many communities are at the mercy of local economic downturns and hard weather; we marvel at those parishes that hold onto hope in the challenge of decline and renewal.

We hold in our thoughts those who gather around their kitchen tables and pray for their rural parish. We pray for those who gather in church meeting halls and ask for guidance in creating a new pioneering spirit of the Catholic faith in rural America. We believe in the community of a Eucharistic people and take comfort when we gather around the bountiful table of our Lord.

In your service,  
*NCRLC Staff*

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