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DEAR FRIEND OF RURAL LIFE,

This issue follows in form and content from our previous issue, *The Rural Parish: Gifts and Challenges* (Vol. 50, #1). We continue exploring the situation of rural parishes, but this time we devote attention to programs and initiatives carried out in the name of rural concerns and social justice. As the previous issue noted, rural churches face the challenges of young people moving to urban settings, remaining parishioners holding on, and number of pastors dwindling. For those parishes with a pastor, we know they are stretched to the limit in time and energy. And so there is an uneasy sense of what the future holds. But within all this, our Church and dioceses must avoid the loss of connections between rural and urban.

We begin this issue with reference to the U.S. Bishops report of a generation ago on Food, Agriculture and Rural Concerns. This in turn references the important pastoral letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. economy, *Economic Justice for All* (1986). For more than 20 years now, you might ask what has improved and what has been lost in rural America?

We can ask in response: which of the three rural Americas do you speak? There is the amenity rich one, usually near natural beauty, with a high standard of living and a growing community. Another rural America is the resource dependent one, relying on its agrarian fields, rangelands, forested lands, and minerals to maintain a hardworking but gracious life for those able to ride out the rough times. Third is a rural America of persistent poverty, still found in parts of the South, Appalachia, Native American reservations and immigrant communities.

The church is found in each of these rural communities. The role of the church is to remind us to think not only of our own immediate needs, but to search for the common good.

“He has shown you, O people, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.” (*Micah 6:8*)

We know from our previous *Catholic Rural Life* issue that the gifts within the rural parish are sense of community and a prayerful connection to the land. We note in this issue the prospect for seasonal festivals and agricultural-based feast days, still common in rural parishes. Perhaps this is an opportunity to reach out to urban parishes and celebrate seasonal beginnings in worship and communal suppers. Within dioceses, this could be the start of much closer connections between rural and urban churches. Make this an opportunity to build links, enjoy fellowship, reconnect people to the land and bridge the urban-rural divide.

In your service,
NCRLC Staff

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