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Effective Community Engagement through Ministry Projects

Ann J. Salmon¹

Welcome to the Saskatoon Theological Union's Doctor of Ministry issue of *Consensus!* The Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program at the Saskatoon Theological Union (STU) is an accredited degree program created by its member schools: Lutheran Theological Seminary (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada), St. Andrew's College (United Church of Canada) and The College of Emmanuel and St. Chad (Anglican Church of Canada). The DMin is a professional degree intended to provide "ministry professionals with interdisciplinary tools to help congregations and other faith-based organizations engage their communities more effectively, bringing their gifts into stronger partnership with community groups and institutions."²

The DMin program was established in 2011 and initially administered by The Centre for Rural Community Leadership and Ministry (CiRCLe M). CiRCLe M was founded in 2007 under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Cam Harder, then professor of Systematic Theology at LTS, in order "to equip clergy and lay leaders in rural and remote places to help their churches be catalysts for the development of healthy Canadian communities."³ Though CiRCLe M no longer administers the DMin program, the degree remains rooted in this principle.

The DMin program is ecumenical. Teaching and student program and project advising is shared by the faculty of the three STU schools. While students are admitted into the program through either Lutheran Theological Seminary or St. Andrew's College, students enrolled in the DMin program represent many Christian denominations, often bridging the gap that can exist between main-line and fundamentalist denominations.

The DMin program is designed for Christian leaders working in a ministry site. A learning cohort of six to eight students start the program every other year. Over the course of two years, the cohort meets onsite for six intensive classes and on-line for two colloquia. Each student also chooses two elective courses that inform the development of their final Project in Ministry. The Project in Ministry, undertaken in the third year of the program, is a collaborative community-building project led by the student and a ministry team from her/his ministry site. The student and the ministry teamwork together to define an issue, consider the issue from theological perspectives, plan and execute appropriate research, analyze the data, and write the project. "In its final form, the project involves systematic research and action around a significant issue in the community in which one's ministry is located."⁴ The DMin program is normally completed in three years.

For this issue of *Consensus*, five graduates of the STU's DMin program were invited to submit summaries of their Projects in Ministry. Each author was asked to:

¹ The Rev. Dr. Ann J. Salmon, DMin (2017) is the guest editor for this issue of *Consensus*.

² Saskatoon Theological Union Doctor of Ministry Degree with a focus on Rural Ministry and Community Development, *Student Handbook, 2019-2020*, 7.

³ <http://www.circle-m.ca/>. Accessed: November 14, 2019.

⁴ *Doctor of Ministry Handbook, 2019-2020*, 14.

- state the core question that shaped the project and discuss the importance of that question in the ministry setting;
- summarize the theological foundation that guided the project;
- describe the research process and research methodologies used to acquire data;
- offer a summary of learning; and
- conclude by reflecting on how their project has affected or might affect their ministry.

Each summary includes a brief autobiography of the author, included in the first footnote, and concludes with a selected bibliography from the Project in Ministry. These summaries highlight each author's passion for ministry that embraces the ministry site and the community.

Catherine Holland and her ministry team sought "to understand their rural community of Oyen, Alberta – its vibrancy and its contributions – in order to enhance" their ministry site (All Saints Anglican Church). To achieve this goal, Holland and her ministry team interviewed professional and entrepreneurial women from Oyen. These interviews led to an interesting reflection on what it means for the church to be a neighbor to the community and what it means for the community to be a neighbor to the church.

Kevin Driver and his ministry team from Banff's Full Gospel Church in the town of Banff, Alberta, explored the "space or role a church can create for ministry by bringing together the established community and the newcomers (recent immigrants)." Dr. Driver and his ministry team measured voice, acceptance and purpose against the backdrop of Welcoming and Belonging and, in so doing, engaged in a fascinating discussion of what it means to be both cultural and intercultural in the context of church and community.

In his role as Director of Church Development for the Canadian Midwest District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, Robin Haensel has seen the devastating effects of population loss in rural areas of Saskatchewan and, indeed, across Canada. He knows that those who have been "left behind" in these once vibrant rural areas now find themselves without economic, social and spiritual care resources. The hopeful conclusions that Haensel and his ministry team drew from their research into "spiritual care in sparsely populated regions," which is the title of Haensel's project, point to the need for a "monumental shift in thinking" that defies denominational differences and focuses, instead, on "Gospel-based perspectives and partnerships."

Shirl Christian and her ministry team live, work and worship in the rural Ontario communities of Mt. Forest, Arthur and Palmerston. In their research, they explored the contributions the churches in these communities make to the life and value of the community. They discovered that the "contributions of the local churches, often working together, are tightly interwoven with the fabric of the community where people work together, play together, serve together and worship together." The stories that Christian and her ministry team gathered in the course of their research offer a wonderful and "clear picture" of what these small rural parishes have to offer the Anglican Dioceses of Niagara and Huron and, one hopes, beyond these diocese to the entire Anglican Church of Canada and all of its ecumenical ministry partners.

In his role as rector of St. Andrew Anglican Church in Sidney, British Columbia, Eric Partridge encountered chronic loneliness among some of his senior (over the age of 80) parishioners, challenging him and his ministry team to consider the affect daily practices of gratitude could have on loneliness. After using a common scale to measure loneliness in their

research group, they followed the plans in their carefully constructed binder of resources entitled “The St. Andrew’s Gratitude Project,” and made a series of visits to each project participant. To their surprise, they discovered that “all the senior parishioners who undertook the Gratitude Project had an increase in their level of gratitude and a reduction in their level of loneliness.” Thankfully, Partridge has already begun to share his valuable project resources widely in the Anglican Church of Canada.⁵

We trust you find the project summaries that follow interesting and inspiring as you consider what it means to stand at the intersection of ministry and community.

This volume of *Consensus* also includes, in its “Studies and Observations” section, a stimulating comment on “Martin Luther and the Creation of the Myth of Modernity,” written by Christine Helmer, Professor of German and Religious Studies at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. Following the frenzied commemorations of the 500th anniversary of the beginnings of the German Reformation, this article reminds us that Luther’s story has become a story of the “modern Christian” or the “cultural unifier of modern Germany, thus covering up the story of a medieval monk. The second contribution to this section is a case study completed by Gudrun Curri and Marianne Thornton that investigates the reasons and motivation for two Lutheran congregations, one English speaking and the other German, to amalgamate.

Finally, this volume concludes with two sermons. The first is by Gordon Jensen, preached at a commemoration of the signing of the Vatican-Lutheran World Federation document, The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which was later also signed by the Methodist, Anglican and Reformed communions. And Bishop Michael Pryse wrote his sermon in response to Black History Month 2020.

⁵ See <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/b-c-priests-study-finds-gratitude-a-potential-tool-in-fighting-loneliness/>