



Pass It On

August, 2018

Rural Churches and Change: Why Are We Here?

The following article written by Pastor Erik was originally published by Bearings Online as part of a series on the lives of rural Christians and the rural Church.

In rural spaces we spend much of our time looking back. We say things like “the landscapes don’t look like they used to” or “towns have gone from vibrant hubs of commerce to struggling communities with shrinking populations and economic life.” We reminisce about family farms, lamenting that the agricultural industry has gobbled up land, creating farming operations that span thousands of acres.

The inevitable result of these very real changes is that structures and institutions now serve smaller populations. Businesses have closed, schools have consolidated, and churches have shuttered. Congregations founded in towns and in the countrysides during population booms are now a shadow of their once-vibrant selves. Countryside churches like mine face oceans of monocrop farmland instead of a rural landscape peppered with homesteads.



For the congregations that haven’t already shut their doors, there seems little hope of returning to the perceived golden-days of full pews and multigenerational fellowship. Not only has population shrunk, but those who remain lament that their children and grandchildren aren’t interested in coming to church except for the occasional holiday service or baptism. Many attending rural churches wonder if there is a future for their faith communities. Perhaps shifts in culture and demographics make the challenges of rural ministry insurmountable.

Rural Church continued on page 2

Dawson Covenant Church

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Strap on your life jacket and get ready for a rip-roaring river ride with Splash Canyon: God’s Promise on Life’s Wild Ride! VBS will be held on August 5-8 from 6:00-8:00 p.m. with a meal provided at 5:30 p.m. each evening. The VBS program will coincide with the Ice Cream Social program which will be held on Thursday, August 9 at 7:00 p.m. VBS is for all kids ages 3 years old through those entering 7th grade.



Ice Cream Social

The annual Ice Cream Social will be held on Thursday, August 9 to coincide with the last day of VBS. This year’s theme is Route 66. Come on out and enjoy an evening of good food and entertainment! All proceeds are designated for the Youth Center building fund. There are sign-up sheets in the kitchen for providing food, help and entertainment.

Rural Church continued

Eight years ago when I arrived to take the position of pastor at Dawson Covenant Church in rural Dawson, Minnesota, it felt like a risk. My wife and I had a son under a year old, we both grew up in large cities and had spent the previous eight years in Chicago. All of my personal experience and training took place in or near urban settings. I felt unprepared and inadequate to pastor a rural and remote church. And yet, as I stood outside the church building and saw sprawling fields noticeably devoid of farms, I knew one thing for certain. We needed to answer the question: “Why are we here?”

This congregation needed a clear, distinct reason for existing. There was no longer an obvious township neighborhood of farming families to serve. Relative to population levels, there were plenty of existing churches in town, or nearby. Most people in our region already self-identified as Christians. Reasons for existing that worked for other churches—the need for worship spaces, an existing community to be served, and the need for missional presence—weren’t sufficient answers for our church.

Entertaining such a fundamental question as “why do we exist?” is unsettling. We might struggle to develop a good answer, or, scarier yet, finding an answer might lead to fundamental changes in a ministry model that had lasted generations. The answer most feared (and I believe this stops many from exploring the question) is that the church time is finished in this place.

Change is unsettling and pastors know this well. Our local ministerium runs a tent at our country fair called “The Diaper Depot” for nursing, feeding, and diaper-care for young infants. In an attempt at levity, the booth is subtitled “for those still willing to accept change.”

Resistance to change isn’t just out of stubbornness or fear, though that can be a part of it. Rural communities often place a high value on tradition, respect for elders, and the desire to avoid causing offense (perhaps especially in Minnesota). When enacted at their best, these values created strong community ties and loyalties that were integral to survival. But it has made many afraid to reimagine things, perhaps especially in our churches.

As a rural pastor I’m convinced that we can respect the past, but we also need to leave room for imagining new futures. We must be willing to answer the question, “why are we here?” even if it is painful, and when it leads us into discomfort or difficult decisions. Our deep histories and traditions can be fuel for positive change if

we can remind ourselves that every song was once new. Most of our ancestors who planted these churches did so with great risk and uncertainty.

In my own church’s journey, we sought to address the question “why are we here?” by asking more questions. What things did we need to change or let go of that no longer speak to our context and identity? What ministries is our congregation most passionate about? As our church leadership explored these questions, we arrived at a foundational conclusion: We don’t exist for the church of yesterday, but rather for the church that is here now and the church that will be.

This emphasis on the church of now freed us to reinvent ourselves and even reclaim parts of our rich history that had gone out of focus. This led to renewed emphasis on ministry to children, youth, and families, as well as integrating new musical expressions in worship. While

our region has plenty of churches, there was room for contemporary worship expression. We had the musicians, space, and technology to offer a blended worship style that spoke to younger generation without jettisoning our hymnody.

While the township population has diminished, understanding our place as a regional church allowed us to focus on developing a welcoming posture. We couldn’t depend on the township to support the congregation: there weren’t enough people. But we could model ourselves after Christ by intentionally loving every person that walked through our door. We expanded our definition of neighbor from those in the eight-

mile radius around to the church, to one that included neighboring towns and counties, and this meant surrendering our historical identity for our regional reality.

We let go of some of our cultural church traditions as a Swedish immigrant church that no longer spoke to much of our congregation. Together, we said goodbye to Lucia Fest, a December celebration focused on Santa Lucia, and replaced it with a hymn sing and favorite holiday-dish potluck. We are even considering reclaiming our historic name as Mission Covenant Church, since many of our members now come from the surrounding region and not just Dawson.

However, the most important piece of our church’s transformation was a willingness to look at what God was already doing in us and around us, and adapt.



As people explored membership, we allowed the newcomers to change who we were. We began holding a ministry fair every fall to introduce everyone—new and long-time members—to opportunities for service. We welcomed people to serve as greeters, ushers, coffee-servers, and on lay-committees. We made time for new members to get to know people by scheduling social Sunday School hours once a month, the same Sunday as communion.

As mentioned, we are considering reclaiming our historic name as Mission Covenant Church, since many of our members now come from the greater surrounding region and not just Dawson. It may be the case that most people identify as Christians in our rural location, but it isn't true that everyone feels as though their gifts and talents are a vital part of a congregation. We wanted to communicate that we valued the contributions of everyone, and that our faith practice was as much about doing life together as it was about a confession of faith. Our mission was not just to tell people about the Gospel but to disciple those who had joined in our membership—emphasizing their value as members of the greater body of Christ.

Committing to adapt was not easy for our church. More than once I heard a lament that we weren't the small country church we used to be. More than once I heard longtime members remark bittersweetly that they didn't know many of the new people in the church. Old-timers have had to learn to connect with newcomers and bring them into the wider family of the church.



So much of our church's story isn't about what we have done but how we've responded to what's going on around us. Many families that have joined our church over the past ten years didn't come because they are new to church.

Rather, our church has become a landing spot for people whose churches have closed. We have been a middle ground for couples coming from different denominational backgrounds. People who are new to our region feel welcomed as contributors since we've become flexible and invitational.

Our story as a church is part of larger story of our surrounding region. What has become more clear over the past few years is that part of our calling is to stand in the gap as a regional church located in the countryside. The changing rural landscape has deemphasized the importance of centering on small town centers, and instead has created regional partnerships where communities thrive because of their relationships with one another. For example, healthcare providers have formed networks to address rural needs because the resources, in both town and country settings, are limited. Similarly, we hope to forge relationships in the wider area in order to welcome and care for those whose own faith communities are no longer sustainable.

Fostering a church culture that sincerely values hospitality and relationships has been central to our mission. As a result it's become a hub for relationships in a sea of change. We often take for granted in rural areas that everyone feels known. However, people in rural areas can be just as isolated, just as siloed in their relationships, as anywhere. Intentional hospitality is no less important in rural contexts as in what many perceive as the anonymity of the city.

Freedom is also key to who we are as a church. We have decided to anchor ourselves within the stream of the great traditions of the Church and to allow freedom in Christ wherever we can. One of the core affirmations of our denomination, the Evangelical Covenant Church, reads: "We offer freedom to one another to differ on issues of belief or practice where the biblical and historical record seems to allow for a variety of interpretations of the will and purposes of God. We in the Covenant Church seek to focus on what unites us as followers of Christ, rather than on what divides us." This posture has allowed us to forge relationships within the church body that would normally cause breaks in fellowship. This commitment comes with tensions, but we've found space for new people, new relationships, new mission, and renewed hope.

As the trends of farmland consolidation and population movement out of the countryside continue, I believe rural churches must ask hard questions and be willing to step out on new and uncertain paths. Perhaps asking these questions is the first step in retelling the rural story. While it is true that rural places have witnessed dramatic changes over the past fifty years, our hope in Christ compels us to rejoice in the new day God has made.

As the landscape has changed, so has the possibility for transformation. We must pay attention to the Spirit's leading because, as the prophet Joel tells us, God is at work, "your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young people will see visions." May we pay attention to dreams and visions of those in our fellowship when we answer the central question: "Why are we here?"

You're Invited!

Dawson Covenant Church Ice Cream Social

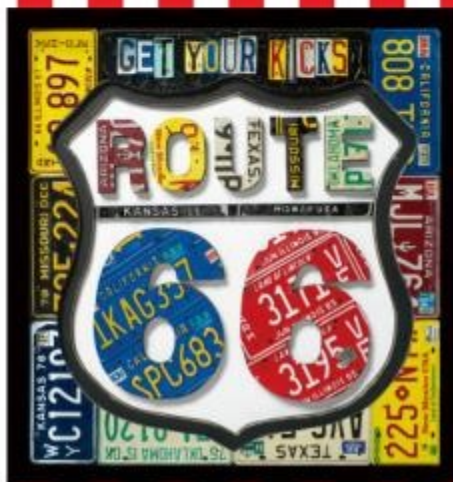
Thursday, August 9
5:30 p.m. Meal
7:00 p.m. "Route 66" Program

Dawson Covenant Church is located 5 miles south & 2 miles west of Dawson * 2756 130th St., Dawson
www.dawsoncovenantchurch.org 320-769-2255 office@dawsoncovenantchurch.org

Menu includes:

Hotdogs
BBQs
Chips
Ice Cream Sundaes
Homemade Pie
Bottled Pop

\$8.00 Adults
\$4.00 Age 10 & under



50TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY



Saturday, August 18th, Stan and Diane Miller are hosting an Open Barn / 50th Anniversary party at their farm with musicians from Nashville. The gathering begins at 6:30 p.m. with the music by 360 Degrees getting under way at 7:30. Bring your lawn chair if you would like to sit and enjoy. No bales available! Home grown popcorn, lemonade, water, and etc.

1182 295th Ave, Dawson
from Church - 2 miles East, 1 1/4 miles south

Equip Campus Ministries Mission of the Month



Luke Christie-Perkins/Equip

Equip is the ministry directed by Luke Christie-Perkins who lives in Brookings, SD with his wife, Emma, and their three children. Luke has recently completed 10 years in full-time college ministry with Equip. As the new school year is fast approaching, please pray for this ministry and all the students who may be touched by it. We are hoping to hear more from Luke later this month with an update on Equip and plans for the future. There will be a basket in the back of the sanctuary throughout the month of August if you would like to support this ministry with a financial gift.



Five high-schoolers from Dawson Covenant Church recently had the opportunity to attend CHIC, the National Covenant Youth Conference which is held every three years. Those attending included Katelynne Ashling, Kannon Wicht, Wylie Wiebe, Tyler Buer and Heath Buer. Chaperones were Phil Tolbert and Ashley Tensen. The group traveled to Tennessee along with other Northwest Conference groups. Over 1,100 students from the NW Conference attended.

If you've ever wondered what CHIC is all about, here is a peek into the days and nights taken from the NW Conference website, "During morning Basecamps (experiential education sessions), students had a chance to interact with four of the priorities of the Covenant: make and deepen disciples, serve globally, develop leaders, and love justice and do mercy. In the afternoons, participants had a chance to head off campus on excursions like white water rafting, horseback riding and exploring caves. Some stayed on campus where they could swim or hang out at the Nest where they had crafts, conversations, and a chance to connect with others in the denomination.

The evenings were marked by powerful gatherings called "Main-Stage," at the University of Tennessee's basketball arena. Five thousand people worshiped together, led by the CHIC band. They heard from world-class speakers like Megan Fate Marshman and Eugene Cho. Included in the evening sessions were artists like For King and Country and Andy Mineo. On Tuesday night, students and leaders alike participated in communion. Those who were sensing a call to ministry or missions had the chance to be anointed with oil."

What an awesome and life-changing experience this can be for our youth. Thank you for supporting them on this trip!



Below, the group explored a cave on one of their outings, and cell phones lit the "Main Stage" during a time of praise and worship.



Summer camps are wrapping up! Joshua attended LBBC Frontier Kids camp in early July along with Parker, Landrey and a couple of friends. Dawson Covenant Church has two campers heading to Lake Beauty in August for Senior High Camp as well. Please keep all our campers in prayer as they return home after their fun-filled days at camp.





QUILTING GROUP

The Covenant Quilters meet on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month from 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Lunch is provided. You are always welcome to join and can come and go as your schedule allows. In August we will meet on the 13th and the 27th.

Nursery Volunteers Needed

Adults and high school students are needed to staff the nursery during Sunday services each week. Please sign up in the fellowship hall if you are able to help in the nursery this summer. Thank you for serving in this important way!

Prayer Service

A community prayer service will be held on Tuesday, August 21 at 7:00 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church in Dawson. This monthly prayer service is hosted by the Dawson Area Ministerium and the community is invited to attend.

MAILBOXES

Just a reminder that the mailboxes for Pastor Erik, Phil, and their families are located in the fellowship hall due to the limited number of mailboxes available in the hallway. You can also find labeled mailboxes for the treasurer and secretary in the fellowship hall. We are trying to post all sign-up sheets on the small bulletin board in the fellowship hall as well for easier access and better visibility. Thank you!

Rosalie "Rose" (Schuelke) Wold, of Dawson, passed away Sunday, July 22, 2018, surrounded by her family at her home in Dawson at the age of 73.

Memorial services were held Friday, July 27, 2018 at 3:00 p.m. at Grace Lutheran Church in Dawson.

In lieu of flowers, memorials are preferred to Rice Hospice or Lac qui Parle Hope Network.

Rose was born on January 28, 1945, in Milbank, South Dakota to Donald and Eleanor (Stoick) Schuelke. Her family moved to Dawson in 1959 and she graduated from Dawson High School in 1963. On March 21, 1964, Rose married her high-school sweetheart, Rollie. They lived in Spencer, IA, Bloomington, MN, Delano, MN, and Wausau, WI before moving to Dawson in 1976. They were blessed with four children: Marty, Michael, Stephanie, and Jennifer.

For over 40 years, Rose lived a life entirely dedicated to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—she served Him with endless passion and contagious joy. Without question, she loved nothing more than praising the Lord and sharing Jesus with everyone. Her warm gift of hospitality was second to none—opening her home to all, anytime, for meals, coffee & desserts, celebrations, visits on the deck, prayer meetings and Bible studies.

When she wasn't swinging her dishtowel over her shoulder as she served in her beautiful kitchen, shaking her pom-pom at a sporting event—particularly football, or sitting with her Bible opened, she was a wonderful grandmother and truly was the heart of her family, lavishing them each with her love, grace, kindness, and Truth.

Rose enjoyed over 30 years selling real estate and insurance at Wold Agency in Dawson. She served on the Dawson-Boyd school board as well as local educational cooperative boards and was active with the Dawson Chamber.

She is survived by four children: Marty (Shelly) Wold, Michael (Jennifer) Wold, Stephanie (Mark) Weber, and Jennifer (Austin) Colby; fifteen grandchildren: Josie, Riley (Mikayla), and Mari Wold; Elle, Esten, Emma, Eli, and Eden Weber; Luke, Jake, Kate, Jude, Claire, James, and Joel Colby (+ one on the way); two great grandchildren: Charlotte and Tripp Wold; twelve siblings: Jeanette (Tom) Dooley, Jerome (LaVonne) Schuelke, Sandra (John) Reger, Mary (Bob) Kvam, DeAnne (Ron) Loven, Donnie (Diane) Schuelke, Larry (Ginny) Schuelke, LeRoy (Karen) Schuelke, Joseph (Donna) Schuelke, Joan (Tom) Zaiser, Jim (Carol) Schuelke, and Jacque (Craig) Leis; one sister-in-law, Mary (Paul) Wager and numerous nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Rollie, and her parents.



THIS MONTH'S
birthdays

- 2 Dale Miller
- 2 Manley Peterson
- 3 Mitchell Myers
- 6 Arlene Ulstad
- 11 David Pederson
- 14 Dean Pearson
- 17 Kevin Rosendahl
- 18 Angie Sather
- 26 Ephraim Delp
- 26 Stan Nelson
- 29 Myrtle Anderson
- 31 Ethan Myers
- 31 Vanessa Ruether

Electronic & On-Line Giving

Dawson Covenant offers electronic giving as a way to automate your regular offering donations. To set up an electronic giving schedule, please complete the Automatic Payment Authorization Form, which can be found on the table in the entry, and place it in the Treasurer's mailbox or the collection plate. On-line giving is also available through our website at www.dawsoncovenantchurch.org. You can use your checking account, debit card or credit card. If you have any questions, please see Dan Schluter or Loral Steinke.

Pastor's Office Hours

Pastor Erik & Phil's scheduled office hours are as follows:

- Monday** Off
- Tuesday** 8:30-2:30
- Wednesday** 8:30-2:30
- Thursday** 8:30-2:30
- Friday** 8:30-2:30

Other times they are available by appointment, and may be reached at church at 320-769-2255 or Pastor Erik's cell: 320-305-9304 Phil's cell: 269-547-7537

DAWSON COVENANT CHURCH IS ON-LINE AND ON T.V.

Did you know you can view our past worship services online anytime?



Visit our website at dawsoncovenantchurch.org and click on the Worship tab. Worship services are also shown on local cable t.v. in Dawson at 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, in Madison at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, and in Canby at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday. Like us on facebook to receive updates and reminders on your facebook newsfeed!

Church Council Meeting Notes

The church website has a password protected page where you will find things like Church Council Meeting notes and other kinds of information that we want to share with our church family but not necessarily post publicly on the web. Please contact Karla Perkins to get the password. The church website is:

www.dawsoncovenantchurch.org, then click on the "Members" tab. Church council meeting notes are also posted on the bulletin board, and past meeting notes are available to view anytime in the church office.

Free Wi-Fi

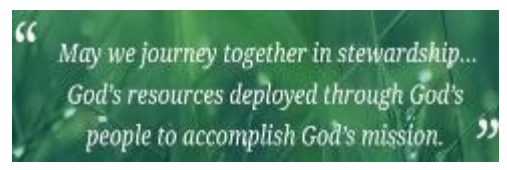
The password to sign-in to the wi-fi at the Youth center is "guest2255".

PASS IT ON CONTACT INFORMATION

Deadline for the September *Pass It On* is Wednesday, August 22.
 Dawson Covenant Church
 2756 130th St.
 Dawson MN 56232
 320-769-2255
www.dawsoncovenantchurch.org
office@dawsoncovenantchurch.org

Attention!

If you are not getting church e-mails (prayer requests, occasional announcements, etc.) and you would like to be added to the list please let Karla Perkins or Pastor Erik know, or send an email to office@dawsoncovenantchurch.org



ON-LINE GIVING

Online giving is available through our website and is a powerful way to faithfully give in a consistent manner. Visit the church website at www.dawsoncovenantchurch.org to learn more or to sign-up.

PRAY FOR OUR MISSIONARIES







Kevin & Sylvia Rosendahl
 Joel & Kim Delp
 Covenant World Mission
 Covenant Youth of Alaska
 Randy & Cheryl Bevis
 Doug & Jill Nelson
 Emma Weber
 Luke & Emma Christie-Perkins
 Prairie Waters Growing Project
 KICY
 Joy Boxes
 Food for Kidz

August 2018

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
5 9:30 Worship Service 10:30 Prayer Meeting 10:45 Fellowship Time	6 5:30 Supper 6:00 VBS	7 5:30 Supper 6:00 VBS	8 5:30 Supper 6:00 VBS	9 5:30 Ice Cream Social 6:00 Route 66 Program/ VBS Program	10	11
12 9:30 Worship Service 10:30 Prayer Meeting 10:45 Fellowship Time	13 10:00 Quilting	14	15	16	17	18
19 9:30 Worship Service 10:30 Prayer Meeting 10:45 Fellowship Time	20	21 7:00 Community Prayer Service at Presbyterian Church in Dawson	22	23	24	25 1:30 Baby Shower for Amy Gustafson and Reagan
26 9:30 Worship Service 10:30 Prayer Meeting 10:45 Fellowship Time	27 10:00 Quilting	28	29	30	31	