



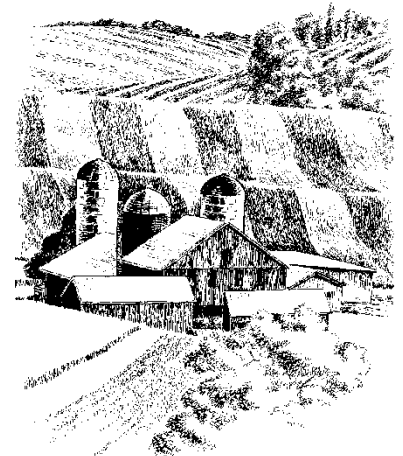
## *Thoughts on Rural Ministry...from my corner of the pasture*

Happy New Year! May the hope and joy of Christ among you bring joy and hope to your members and community because of Him.

### *Looking back at 2009...*

It is generally helpful to glance over one's shoulder and gather a sense of where one has been and what has transpired. However, I would encourage one to pull over to the side of the road before taking that look back, something about plowing a straight furrow comes to mind.

- a RAT (**Rural Advocacy Team**) pack formed following the 2<sup>nd</sup> Heartland *Reaching Rural America for Christ* conference. The group has met three times and discussed the implications of rural/small town ministry in their particular situations. That RAT pack has now expanded to include others who attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> Heartland *RRFAC* conference this past November at Lied State Park in Nebraska and has met most recently at Our Savior, Denison, to discuss the group's District outreach.
- *Reaching Rural America for Christ* 2009 conference hosted 130+ men and women from 14 LCMS Districts; speakers challenged the group with statistics and what to do with those numbers; updated the group on a work in progress of transforming churches, with particular emphasis on rural/small town settings; offered chances to break down in small groups to discuss education, youth ministry, Sunday school, and Bible classes in rural/small towns; led in Bible studies by our own Bob Riggert asking the participants to consider *Wandering Faces, Weary Faces, Wondrous Faces, and Window Frame Faces* (these studies are excellent and you might e-mail Bob and ask for a copy for your Bible class); led in worship by Ray Smith of Missouri Valley as he had us think about Faith to Face the various challenges in our ministries. Overall, the conference was well received and served as a blessing to those who attended. **There will be another so keep your eyes and ears open for details.**
- As Rural Ministry Coordinator for IDW I have been involved in a number of discussions with multiple congregations to talk about sharing, helping one another, and regional ministries. There are some exciting things happening and we all need to work together to let the Lord work through us in these challenging times of declining numbers and its attendant declines in finances and community morale. If I can be of help in working through some ideas or models of ministry, or trying to answer some of your questions, please let me know.



Serving with Joy in His fields,

*Gene Ernst*