



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

Here's to all of you who serve so selflessly in one of the many rural/small town areas where the name of the Lord and His Word and the sacraments are taught and shared—*May the Lord continue to give you His guidance and wisdom in ministering in every way possible that puts the Living Word of Christ before His people. Thank you and may the Lord bless you!*

The Rat Patrol is back!

For those of you who were teenagers back in 1966-68, (and I realize this group is an ever smaller bunch of us in IDW) you might remember **The Rat Patrol** as a TV series on ABC. It followed the exploits of 4 (3 Americans, 1 Brit) Allied soldiers in the North African campaign of WWII. Their mission was to “attack, harass, and wreak havoc on Field Marshall Rommel’s Afrika Korps.” (Wikipedia) I write you that so I can write about this: **IDW has a RAT patrol!**

R.A.T. (Rural Advocacy Team) is not a TV show and is not comprised of 4 people. **RAT** is a term that sort of “caught on,” not only locally, but, even nationally with the Rural Small Town Committee. **RAT** began as a group of folks who had attended the 2nd Heartland Conference in Nebraska in the fall of 2008 and was invited to come together to discuss Rural/Small Town ministry in IDW.

We are a group of 9 who have met twice to talk about the challenges of being rural or small town congregations in areas dealing with the issues of declining populations, economic struggles, discussions of what it means to be the Church of Christ in these places, etc. We are not out to “attack, harass, and wreak havoc” on congregations of IDW but we do have a mission to share ideas and “tools” that might help in congregations having these, or similar, issues.

If you have read thus far, you might be a rural, small town congregation with issues about the future. The **RAT** patrol does not have all the answers but we do know of some places to find some “tools” to help deal with some of the above mentioned issues.

One of the BIG things happening this November is the 3rd Heartland Conference in Nebraska City, NE. **Reaching Rural America for Christ** tells you the heart and mission of this Nov. 5-7 gathering. **RR AFC** wants to help strengthen the care of Christ for children and youth, assist congregations in taking intentional steps to create a positive mission attitude, build a network of leadership training and ministry support for r/st congregations, and to celebrate our common heritage. There will be 5 break-out sessions for sharing, learning, and gleaning from one another.

Cost is \$325/person, covering 2 nights lodging, 6 meals, banquet, and all materials.

Participation is limited to the first 130 registrants; deadline October 3.

Talk this over with the church council and line up some folks to go. Secure some avenues of revenue. Talk with the District office regarding financial help for one/congregation.

My prayer is that this information will give you something to share with and talk about in your council/voters’ meetings and help to encourage your members to commit to attending this conference. I think it will be helpful in preparing for the changes that are happening and will continue to happen in our Synod, District, and local congregations.

Serving with Joy in His fields,

Rev. Gene Ernst

