

## President's Report, 2023

Thankfully, and humbly, 2023 has been a year of renewing our mandate of CiRCLe M, as we emerge from Covid.

This year again we regret that some people have left our Board, and others have been invited to take their places. Kevin Driver resigned from the Board, and from his position as treasurer, however, he has very kindly continued to keep the books for the time being. Officially, Tim Wray is presently Board treasurer, and St. Andrew's Financial Dept will take over the books in the New Year. We are very grateful to Kevin continuing to do this until the books are turned over. In addition, Hati Mvundura resigned because of ill health of members of his family. We sincerely thank Kevin and Hati for their presence and walking with the work of CiRCLe M.

We have two other potential members who will be confirmed at the Annual Meeting. Father Rick Krofchek from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Regina, living in Raymore, and Shawn Sanford Beck, on staff at St. Andrew's. We rejoice in their bringing their gifts to our circle and work.

Sadly we lost one of the pillars of CiRCLe M and of rural ministry in western Canada. Rev. Dr. Joyce Sasse, who had received an honorary doctorate from St. Andrew's, and with her long-time blog, Country Preacher's Notes, and her downloadable book, Gleanings from a Prairie Pastor, both on the CiRCLe M website, provided important resources, passed away on Feb. 28. Her funeral was held in Pincher Creek United Church on March 16, and Kevin Driver attended and spoke on our behalf. Joyce's funeral can be watched on YouTube (and Kevin speaks at about 28 minutes).

Joyce is leaving CiRCLe M a legacy, for which we give humble thanks.

Our Board member, Dr. Tim Wray was invited to lead a 6-week course through the Niagara School for Missional Leadership through Jan. and Feb. His course was called The Rural Church: Fostering Relationships without Shortcuts. CiRCLe M offered to financially support prairie participants, and through our highlighting this through denominational connections, there were 4 Saskatchewan participants who took the course. (3 chose not to take financial support). It was a very useful course, and I hope Tim has the opportunity to share it again.

Catherine prepared a display for the United Church Living Skies Regional Council gathering in Prince Albert in May, of a number of rural ministry organizations. One of those on display was Centre for Rural Community Leadership and Ministry. It is a good way to make connections, and if any other group want to use this display of our work, we can provide it



Catherine attended the International Rural Churches Association conference in Iowa, in April, financially supported by CiRCLe M. Wartburg Seminary, who were the conference hosts, publishes an e-journal called Currents in Theology and Mission. Their Jan. 2024 edition will highlight rural ministry, with input from the IRCA Conference. Catherine is preparing an article on Rural Ministry in Canada.

At IRCA, CiRCLe M was asked to host the spring 2024 meeting of the Rural Church Network of the United States and Canada. This group is made up of academics and church leaders. We agreed to take it on, with the meeting to take place in the Calgary area, for ease of flights incoming. Tim Wray has made arrangements for us to meet at Mount St. Francis in Cochrane June 18 to June 20.

Our meetings had all been on Zoom, until July, when a Visioning Time was organized to take place at St. Martin's Church in Saskatoon. We invited a consultant, Keith Walker, to lead us through a process which could help to clarify our ideas. It was attended by 5 members, some by Zoom, and some in person. It was a valuable time, and we hope it will lead to a 'stakeholders gathering' to help us make renewed connections with judicatories and seminaries, to offer the supportive ministry that is ours.

Our August meeting was also held in a hybrid fashion, our Saskatchewan members gathering at Saskatoon Theological Union, while others were invited to Zoom in from Alberta. It is something we need to think about for wise stewardship of finances and time.

As we prepare for the Annual Meeting of CiRCLe M, the Board congratulates Tim Wray, whose farm in Irricana, AB, won The Environmental Stewardship Award, awarded by the Canadian Beef Industry. CiRCLe M helped Tim organize and run crop trials in 2019 which he says were part of the journey leading to this award.

I give thanks to all the members of the Board, the Executive, Dr. Iain Luke and Tim Wray, and supporters of our ministry throughout the prairies. God bless all those in Rural Communities.

Catherine Christie, Chairperson

Sept. 12, 2023