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Rural Welfare in a Revolutionary World

A GUIDE TO CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATION



RURAL MISSIONS COOPERATING COMMITTEE

Report of a Rural Work Consultation
1963

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RURAL WELFARE in a REVOLUTIONARY WORLD

A Guide to Christian Participation

More than half of the three billion people in the world live blighted, anguished lives, demoralized by hunger and frustrated by poverty. Of these, about three fourths live in the rural areas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where many are members of our Christian churches. They call us "brother," and profess allegiance to our Lord. Yet they are hungry.

The call to all men of good will has been sounded from the rostrum of the United Nations and from the halls of various individual governments, as well as from such desperate areas as Southwest Africa. Hosea Kutako of that region cries, "Tell of our sadness, for the Creator does not wish that His children should live as now my people must." In response to such sobering challenges, Protestant mission leaders met in Philadelphia March 13-15, 1963, to consider what God would have Christians do within the revolution of the common man around the world.

Those present at the consultation represented twenty-three Protestant denominations and six inter-denominational agencies engaged in rural work of the Church in fifty countries. The meeting itself was called and sponsored by the Rural Missions Cooperating Committee of the Division of Foreign Missions of the National Churches of Christ in America. Those in attendance were:

Missionaries	15
Board Secretaries	15
Overseas Church Leaders	7

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Representatives of Church Service Agencies	5
Professors of Missions and Rural Church	2
Members of Mission Boards	2
Division of Foreign Missions Staff Members	10
Agricultural Missions Staff	2
Visitors	2
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Total Attendance	60

The purpose of the meeting was to consider the best plan for the coming years in the light of our understanding of the Gospel, the urgency of the world's needs, and the awakening of universal conscience concerning widespread hunger in many of the countries where our churches are at work. Members came to seek out new and more effective ways of bringing Christ's teachings into everyday rural life.

Unquestionably the function of the Christian missionary, whatever his assignment, is to preach the word of God; but this word "preach," long understood to mean an exhortation, must today be implemented by visible demonstrations. Those attending the consultation represented various organizations dedicated to this interpretation of the future. Thoughtful papers were prepared in advance, yet inevitably questions arose concerning the extent to which these practical programs are appropriate to the Christian mission. A Findings Committee* was appointed for the purpose of drawing together the results of discussions. The following report is a summary of these findings, and of recommendations for the immediate future of Christian rural work.

* Members of the Findings Committee: John A. Reuling, Chairman, Richard O. Comfort, Herman L. Gilbert, Malcolm McVeigh, Clifford L. Samuelson, and Eugene Stockwell.

I. POINTS RAISED and DISCUSSED

Concerning the Work of Mission Boards

Can mission boards today, with their limited funds, possibly add anything to the large, official efforts toward national development?

Members were united in commending the board efforts projected by many lay agencies toward rural development. Among these were the U. S. Agency for International Development, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the U. S. Peace Corps, and such national schemes for community development as the Five Year Plan in India. Government as well as the churches now know something of the complexity and enormity of rural problems, and of the urgency of their solution. The common man of many countries has little reason to share the rising expectations of the world in spite of technical advances. Menacing clouds gather over our neighbors in Latin America, for example. Yet the rich grow richer, the poor, poorer. This is no time for the Church to retreat, but rather for her to fulfill her peculiar mission.

The special contributions of the Church to the welfare of rural families lie in the following directions:

1. *Emphasis on the Human Factor in Rural Development.*

Technical advances alone cannot cure the world's ills. In setting up rural programs, the Church should hasten the "shift from dominant technical and material emphasis toward human growth and spiritual values." This can make the difference between success and failure in those cases where government programs are designed with material goals and bureaucratic methods. Changes

taking place in people while they are learning are what really count. Such changes *in addition to* new skills call for spiritual transformation in individuals and in their relationship with each other. In the Christian congregation is found the community of faith essential for such a transformation.

2. *The Establishment of a Liaison between Village People and Government Programs.*

The place at which some development programs are weakest is at the point of people's participation. Technicians bemoan the villager's lack of receptiveness to new ideas. This lack of confidence stems partly from the traditional view of government as an agent of exploitation and control. It also involves psychological and spiritual fears deeply embedded in village life. The village church *and* the missionary can find ways to help people to accept official aid not yet being used to advantage.

3. *Leadership for the Rural Church and Community.*

The discovery and training of leaders, both for church life and for the technical aspects of village uplift, should receive priority attention from rural missions. While some of these may be paid by the churches, a far greater number will come from among men and women who earn their living in secular ways while serving the Christian cause.

Concerning this aspect of leadership training, considerable discussion centered on whether the emphasis should be on the training of pastors or laymen as potential leaders in community improvement. Traditionally, the spotlight has been upon the pastor as the person best qualified. His position is indeed important. The consensus was that the rural minister does not have to become a technical expert; but he does need some knowledge of and experience in village life, rural sociology and economics, principles of cooperative organization, and methods of adult education. The minister should also know where to go for advice and help. For this kind of synthesis, the minister must be prepared in his seminary or Bible School years. The belief that a much greater emphasis should now be placed on the training of local laymen also

for leadership in Christian rural reconstruction was strongly supported. Both they and the pastor should see such activity as a part of the ministry of the Church.

A number of successful approaches for such training were cited: a three-year Bible School for young laymen and their wives in Nigeria; short-term institutes on rural themes in several Latin-American countries; a one-year *gramsevak* (village servant) training program in India; and the more professional courses offered by Agricultural Colleges for those aspiring to serve through the government. Each of these, it was agreed, has its place, as does the indispensable training going on in local congregations. Here the pastor, missionary, and national technician are constantly on the watch for youths and adults who, as disciples of Christ, yearn to help lift the burdens from their neighbors.

Concerning the Work of the National Church

Is it not the sole task of the National Church to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, leaving concern for material progress and physical well-being to the government or to the foreign missionary organization?

The consultation members reaffirmed the concern of the Church for rural welfare, and a basic belief in the all-of-life concept of the Christian mission. Since life is a unity, efforts for its improvement should demonstrate care for the *whole* man and his needs: physical, intellectual, religious, and social. There is ample foundation in the Bible for this conviction. For example, according to our Lord (Luke 4:18-19), the release of captives, sight for blind eyes, liberty for the oppressed, and the proclamation of faith were all a part of His good news.

How can village Christians in the newly developing countries be interested in serving others, when they themselves are so desperately poor, and often the objects of discrimination on the part of non-Christian governments?

The recognition of local needs by local people is an important step toward the solution of complicated rural problems, yet real interest in rural uplift on the part of national churches has been slow in coming. Some of the reasons for this are: agricultural projects have been seen as a function of the mission; decisions on such matters have been left largely in the domain of the foreign missionary; young churches, absorbed in their own pressing financial and organizational problems, have had little time or energy for ministering to the biting problems of their neighbors, or, indeed, of their own members.

It is urgent that in the future, mission boards must look more to the related overseas churches for initiative in determining the nature of the rural program in a particular area. This does not mean an abandonment of present leadership activity. It does mean there should be meaningful communication between partners. When decisions about agricultural or other rural work become *joint* decisions, *all* become responsible for the outcome.

Concerning the Volunteer

Can missions utilize the present popular interest in international aid as expressed in the large response to the efforts of the U. S. Peace Corps?

The volunteer, defined here as a person with special skills, serving on a short-term assignment (one to two years), receiving only his maintenance and a small personal allowance, is an increasing source of manpower for various organizations. The age and skills vary greatly.

Some are skeptical of the contribution such a person can make in missions, feeling that short-term service is unproductive. "How can they learn the language and gain understanding of the culture and customs in so short a time?" they ask. For many, the word "volunteer" implies youth, inexperience, lack of judgment. Others who have had volunteers working in their service feel there is a contribution to make, particularly in mission work.

Advantages cited by these members were: He can "travel light." He has flexibility, can travel anywhere. He communicates well, living close to the people. He is a threat neither to the national technician nor to the local church leader. In a mission setting, he may make valuable contributions. For example, he may fill out a temporary personnel gap by carrying out jobs while nationals are being trained. Or, working shoulder-to-shoulder with nationals, he may demonstrate the dignity of labor and the importance of high standards of performance. A director of a group of volunteers in Greece said, "What people remembered is the individual who was their friend. Volunteers are remembered for their honesty, their refusal to make distinctions between rich and poor, their willingness to work hard, and their obviously selfless desire to be helpful."

Concerning the Work of the Agricultural Missionary

Is the agricultural missionary to be primarily a technical worker in charge of his own project, or a church worker with special skills to be used by the national church as it sees fit?

In rural missions over the years there has been a steady shift from institutional work toward emphasis on village extension projects. Yet today the heavy expenditure of missionary time in the care of mission farms, schools, and experimental centers makes it necessary to consider the agricultural missionary and the rural institution together. Members of the consultation were clearly in agreement that from now on the agricultural missionary generally must be free to give more attention to actual village work than to institutional administration. He must be able to spend most of his time in the village and on the farms of the people whom he serves. Without sacrificing technical excellence, he should now see his work as a part of the local Christian community. His center of operation will more often be the local church than the mission station.

By identifying myself with the weak, struggling Christian community, will I not tend to cut myself off from the non-Christians and the larger technical assistance programs existing in some countries?

Although in some cases an open Christian avowal may create barriers between the technician and the non-Christian community, this is less dangerous in the end than a division between the Church and her scientific specialists. However weak and struggling the Christian disciples with whom he works, the technical missionary should sustain and comfort the minister, commit himself unashamedly to Christian worship.

Concerning Various Types of Rural Institutions

What is the value, today, of the several kinds of rural institutions? To what extent are they useful for the future?

Heavy investments have been made in equipping mission farms, usually in the hope of "showing" better methods, or of making money for the support of other projects. In both cases, results have often been disappointing. By what criteria is it decided that certain mission farms and schools should continue, and which give way to other forms of service?

In the case of the "demonstration farm," an honest evaluation of changes in local agricultural practice must be made. It is important to judge whether those at the bottom of the social and economic ladder have benefited equally with those more progressive individuals who customarily take advantage of opportunity.

Agricultural schools should be tested to determine whether graduates are using their training only to better their own conditions, or also to serve others. In certain countries where there are governmental agricultural schools, it is better to provide scholarships and spiritual guidance for the attendance of young Christians than to found or maintain special, Christian agricultural schools.

II. SOME VALID, but UNRESOLVED, QUESTIONS

Time prevented the members of the consultation from dealing satisfactorily with many other questions. Among these were:

1. Does all mission work have to come through denominational channels? The result of this is that some church areas become rich in resources while others, perhaps more needy, or with higher potential for church growth, are left behind.
2. How can the Church tap the potential among rural women, for leadership both in homes and communities?
3. How can we avoid duplication of effort, repetition of errors, and actual competition between rural missions and the newer church service agencies moving now into current projects of self-help?
4. Why have not mission efforts thus far paid off more in terms of improved living standards and the ability of people to help themselves?

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *That National Churches and mission boards combine their efforts, both in planning and in carrying out, programs of rural development.*

One overseas presbytery took the initiative, calling an agricultural couple, and instructing them to spend one year discussing local needs with the local congregations before a mutual decision on what their actual work would be.

2. *That the technical missionary and National Church leaders strive to incorporate the skills of both National and foreign technicians into the heart and life of the church.*

A step in this direction has been the formation of a Rural Affairs Board or Economic Development Committee within the National, or area Christian Councils.

3. *That rural mission institutions be measured by their ability to effect change in attitudes and practices at the level of the village and village churches.*

This may lead to closing down certain mission farms, thus freeing personnel to move among village people. It may also require establishing strong extension departments in other institutions.

4. *That "mission" and "service" agencies of the churches work out a single plan for Christian participation in rural development in a given country, each contributing whatever it has in resources of personnel, funds, or experience.*

Examples of this have been in the use of surpluses to pay for work done by local people under skilled leadership in land reclamation, re-forestration, and other projects of long-range significance.

5. *That more missionary time be spent giving training courses for Christian farmers and their wives, who will in turn become local leaders in village improvement.*

These courses should include such subjects as: Poultry Raising, Gardening, 4-H Club Leadership, Home Improvement. All should be conducted with the central idea of "learning in order to serve."

6. *That boards, in recruiting agricultural missionaries, look for both technical excellence and proven ability to identify oneself with humble people as well as to communicate ideas.*

Such qualifications are often found in those who have proven themselves as agricultural extension or home demonstration agents in the U. S.

7. *That certain seminaries provide for the teaching of courses in: Rural Sociology, Principles of Rural Development (including an introduction to the program of the government), Methods of Community Action (Fairs, Young Farmers' Clubs, Cooperatives, The Lord's Acre).*

8. *That the various denominations pool resources to make possible a maximum impact in such strategic areas as those of rapid colonization or shifting population.*

The evangelical federation of one country now channels funds from ecumenical sources into a colonization scheme. The church in the area is charged to act on behalf of the other member churches.

9. *That mission boards should consider youth and adult volunteers, even for two or three year assignments, as a possible asset in Christian rural work, and additionally as a means of encouraging volunteerism within the national churches.*

Some churches not having an established volunteer service program have turned to those who do with requests for persons of specific skills needed in their areas.

10. *That missions and national churches of any country should call on and expect services from Agricultural Missions, Inc. in shaping new programs and strengthening present ones, in line with the above recommendations.*

It is generally known among those working abroad that *Agricultural Missions* has been the recognized center of rural services for overseas workers for more than thirty years. Here have been combined the selection and preparation of young people dedicated to work in agriculture and community development, field services of every kind, technical information and supplies, printed material, counsel, and research.

Members of the consultation felt that the time has come to call upon this organization to step up certain services. The need for a liaison between the work of the church and the now corresponding thrust of governmental and other lay agencies seems indeed to point toward *Agricultural Missions, Incorporated*, as a central clearing house in several fields. A resumé of past and current work, with suggestions for stepped-up services follows.

IV. AGRICULTURAL MISSIONS—PRESENT FUNCTION and REQUESTED FUTURE SERVICES

Established in 1930, Agricultural Missions is the recognized center for services to churches and their overseas workers. The link between this organization and the various churches is the Rural Missions Cooperating Committee, in general, a policy-forming body, and consisting of representatives from the churches which make up the Division of Foreign Missions.

The present work of this organization may be outlined as follows:

Leadership Training: The selection and preparation of young people for work in agriculture and community development; the conduct of courses and workshops for those in service abroad.

Field Services: The provision of field counselors to assist young people; aid for rural pastors in developing self-supported churches; assistance in youth work, extension services, and co-operatives; the conduct of field conferences for workers.

Technical Information and Supplies: Seeds, livestock, machinery (through Heifer Project, Inc., Agricultural Aids, Self-Help, and Christian Rural Overseas Program); Literature, counsel, and research (successful methods of work, studies of procedures for aid to village people, correspondence and counsel, assistance in field program planning.)

Requested Further Services

1. *Increased training activities:* Specialized training such as that offered annually on Extension Education, sponsored by

Agricultural Missions at the U. S. Department of Agriculture, should be more widely known and promoted. Missionaries working with rural people in any capacity, should be exposed to such seminars in order to gain understanding of rural people, basic skills in informal adult education, and philosophy of program development.

2. *Further interpretation of rural missions "at home":* The organization should find ways of describing the work being done by churches to raise the level of living and of combating hunger.

3. *Broadening of the relationship with rural mission workers:* The present close relationship between workers overseas and *Agricultural Missions* should be further developed through correspondence and reports, visits to the central office while on furlough, and an increasing number of visits by the staff to these workers in the field.

4. *Assistance to national churches and boards in determining policy:* This requires a much closer contact between Agricultural Missions and national church bodies, especially with area Christian Councils. Here should be explored new forms of rural service, with close communication between overseas churches (and missionaries), and related boards concerning new or revised rural programs.

5. *Increased function as a clearing house for technical information:* Missions and churches should be able to turn to this organization for scientific answers to specific technical problems, as well as for successful methods of organizing and carrying out projects. Agricultural Missions has the obligation of establishing contact with research in agriculture and community development whether through government or non-government agencies.

6. *Assistance in resolving conflicts between "service" and "mission" in rural work:* Once the domain of mission boards and their workers, rural development is now also a part of the endeavor of church "service" agencies. Any failure in these cf-

forts because of confusion of aims or discrepancy of goals should be prevented by a careful cohesion of programs requiring the highest standards of excellence whether under mission boards or service agencies. This should be done at the national level, since it is there that understanding is most essential.

7. *Interpretation of the goals and philosophy of rural missions to non-agricultural missionaries:* A proper balance in the efforts of the Church requires that all workers have some understanding of the various specialized ministries. The philosophy of rural missions requires an all-of-life integration of preaching, teaching, healing, and economic development. To keep rural development in perspective, Agricultural Missions is asked to produce a pamphlet on its work for the non-agricultural missionary. The country and area rural work conferences encouraged and sponsored by Agricultural Missions from time to time should include by invitation national church leaders and non-agricultural missionaries.

8. *Counsel and aid to seminaries for the training of students aiming for the rural ministry:* Books and pamphlets on rural development and the rural church should be provided. At the present time, Agricultural Missions, with the help of the Theological Education Fund, Nanking Founders, and certain boards, has organized a series of consultations on the training of the rural ministry in Asia. Under the leadership of Dr. Frank W. Price, who will devote fourteen months to the project in 1963 and 1964, these consultations should help to strengthen the work of seminaries in this field.

The findings reported here are by no means the last word that may be said concerning Christian rural work abroad. While those who attended the consultation were seasoned, experienced workers, they were well aware that if the hundreds of missionaries engaged overseas had been able to be present, debate and discussion would have been greatly enriched. The Rural Missions Cooperating Committee and Agricultural Missions invite field workers and others to help solve unanswered questions or to raise new ones. Correspondence will be welcomed.

CHURCHES, MISSION BOARDS, AND AGENCIES

Participating in the Work of the

RURAL MISSIONS COOPERATING COMMITTEE

African Methodist Episcopal Church
American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society
Women's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society
American Friends Board of Missions
American Lutheran Church, Division of World Missions
Anglican Church of Canada
Church of the Brethren, Commission of Foreign Missions
Church of God
Congo Inland Mission
Cumberland Presbyterian Church
Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities
Evangelical United Brethren, Division of World Missions
Japan Committee, Friends
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Methodist Church, Women's Division of Christian Service
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United Church of Christ, Board for World Ministries, Mission Division
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