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◆ At the congregational level, pastors must be better equipped to address the despair affecting rural people, and work closely with local organizers and grassroots organizations.

◆ At the institutional level the Church should:

**Work** with universities in rural areas around the world to reclaim land-grant colleges, including historically black and Indian tribal colleges in the USA to promote the interests of small-scale farmers and ranchers instead of agribusinesses;

**Consider** setting up national ecumenical funding mechanisms to assist small farmers and ranchers threatened with bankruptcy to keep their farms and assist them in engaging in sustainable farming practices;

**Promote** a culture and economy of sufficiency, conservation and thrift for corporate and individual lifestyles as best models of stewardship of God's Creation;

**Urge** for a process of public audits to call to accountability agribusinesses, banks and other financial institutions (including the international financial institutions), and trans-national corporations and call on them to remedy the negative impact of their policies and activities on rural communities;

**Strengthen** its partnership with farm and rural community-based organizations and networks to educate and engage members on critical policy issues including agriculture, food and trade policies, economic justice and the integrity of creation;

**Accompany** farm workers in their struggles to secure healthy living conditions, decent wages and the right to organize and support rural grassroots organizations that work with them in these endeavors;

**Develop** concrete programs to demonstrate its solidarity with and accompaniment of small-scale, minority and indigenous producers to secure their rights to their land and the fullness of life promised by Jesus Christ.

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CALL TO THE CHURCHES  
FOR THE RENEWAL OF RURAL MINISTRY



...I assure you, as often as you neglected to do it to one of these ones, you neglected to do it to me...

Matthew 25:45



## PROLOGUE

*Based on our commitment to Christ, acting as a servant and catalyst in the world, the Church is called to humanize, empower and liberate. The Church, and the ecumenical agencies like Agricultural Missions, has a unique role to play as an advocate of justice, to lend its power—resources and credibility—to the disempowered, to denounce those whose power has become self-serving and oppressive to others. As a prophetic voice, the Church must legitimize the pursuit of new visions emerging from the rapid social change of the times. The accelerated globalization process has created a new reality, including suffering and exploitation on a grander scale, as well as new possibilities for redemption and neighborly love. These times are calling on the Church to use wisdom and experience, to offer leadership in envisioning new models of action to achieve the gospel's promise of abundant life for all.*



## THE CALL

For 70 years the religious community has joined together through Agricultural Missions, Inc. as one way of supporting and accompanying rural communities around the world in their efforts to end poverty and injustice. For many years rural communities in the United States and across the world have faced daunting new challenges in the wake of increasing globalization of food systems and promotion of policies that favor corporations over family farms.

Using global and regional trade agreements, corporations are controlling decisions that profoundly affect the lives of rural people. Trade regulations and treaties both current and under negotiation, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), have conferred on corporations the right to supersede national farm policies in any nation, to demand access to local markets, and to purchase and own local water distribution systems and other essential services.

The market-based model of economic development fostered by the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and imposed through international trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has resulted in and/or hastened the:

- ◆ Displacement of people from the land and the decline in the culture of the family farm;
- ◆ Belief among rural residents, particularly the youth, that there is no future in agriculture; leading to the impoverishment and eventual death of many rural communities;
- ◆ Increasing rates of farmer suicides and farm worker exploitation, as well as violence in the family and the community, substance abuse and related problems;
- ◆ Violation of the Integrity of God's creation as typified by the pollution of the air, land and water and disruption of the ecology and climate on a global scale.

It is essential that the Churches stand with those who work the land in their struggles, and witness to their work. As Churches, we need to provide material and moral support and raise our voices, lest by our silence the structures of power assume our consent to the injustices being committed against rural peoples and communities. We bear witness that alternatives that are just and sustainable are being developed, despite enormous odds, by the shared efforts of rural communities in many countries and regions. The Church needs to renew and expand relationships with these communities and struggles and make common cause with them.

The Church possesses the lens of the Gospel and has the responsibility to bring moral and ethical scrutiny to social and economic policy. The Church must play a critical and essential role in evaluating economic policies for consistency with the scripture and the Christian principles of justice.

The Church needs to respond as worshipping congregations and as institutions responsible for providing moral guidance and prophetic vision to society at large and to impoverished people, in particular: