

Discerning and Implementing Social Justice Outreach Programs in Rural Churches
Roanridge Grant from St Paul's Episcopal Church Watertown, 2015

This grant seeks to help rural Episcopal churches develop and provide a series of training experiences for Episcopal church leaders and volunteers in rural Episcopal churches who struggle with resources and are puzzling through where to start in outreach development. We know from Diocesan reports that outreach development is a needed training, particularly in the smaller churches where local expertise and experience are not available. These small rural churches lack the wherewithal to assess for, implement and sustain an outreach program in their community. We also know from our own experience that outreach programs are an essential component of a spiritually healthy church, and that outreach does, in effect, contribute to growth. This growth occurs, not necessarily through the people you are serving, but because people on the outside see that good things are happening and want to be part of them.

St Paul's has a level of expertise in developing and maintaining outreach programs. We are part of a larger mission within the Watertown Community, and have a unique way of involving the larger community and the ecumenical church community in outreach efforts even though our church membership is small (75).

St. Paul's Outreach Committee will develop a training curriculum with three distinct parts. Part one will cover discernment of the outreach program that would fit the individual parish and community; Part two will cover the various methods for starting an outreach program, including developing links to the community, recruitment of volunteers and distribution of information to the targeted population. Part three will cover sustainability and avoidance of "giving fatigue" within the parish. The training also will include a segment on the methods to continuously assess parish outreach programs through the Plan-Do-Assess-Redo method used internationally by both profit and non-profit organizations.

This training program will be offered to rural churches individually as well as in regionally-based training with multiple churches when appropriate to conserve energy and funds. The training team will also develop an interactive web based training program with access to the trainers built in through email and telephone once the training is developed, tested and feedback is gathered from congregations.

We will form a Diocesan team to help with the development of the training. This team will include two main trainers from St Paul's Episcopal Church, Alice Mirk, who has a masters degree and thirty years experience in social work. Her experience includes teaching community linkages state-wide to social workers and nurses who provide long term care to persons in the community. Ms. Mirk is currently retired and willing to develop and provide the training. She is the volunteer outreach coordinator for St Paul's Episcopal Church. The second trainer will be Georgia Irre who has a master's degree in Applied Linguistics/ESL/adults learners. Both individuals have extensive experience in adult learning theory, are culturally competent and have extensive experience with the culture of poverty. The remaining team members would be available on a planning and consulting basis and will include :Deacon Kevin Stewart, Executive Director and training coordinator for Hospitality Center in Racine, (Wisconsin's largest meal program); Peggy Bean, Canon for Congregations for the Diocese of Milwaukee and a principal trainer for the Congregational Development Institute, and; Reverend Elizabeth Tester, Priest in Charge for St Paul's Episcopal Church.

