

**Congregational Development – Small Town/Rural
Report to Annual Convention 2011
Diocese of West Missouri**

The vision cast for the Department of Congregational Development – Small Town/Rural, in the words of Bishop Howe in 2005 was to

- nurture existing congregations,
- support Total Ministry and Regional Ministry strategies where appropriate,
- develop initiatives to assist congregations whose resources and circumstances call for models of clergy leadership distinctly different from the traditional “one priest, one congregation” model;
- and strengthen and enhance the gifts and skills of clergy and laity for these missionary initiatives.

We believe that it is the responsibility of the department to support current congregations because this is where Christian formation occurs, where we learn the Story of our faith (*the Apostles’ teachings*), *where we break bread, and share our most heartfelt prayers.*

This year the department had some significant changes in our membership, for the first time since its inception. We have used meeting time to review past successes, to re-think what resources would be helpful to our constituent congregations, and to continue to offer grants to congregations for new initiatives in congregational development or outreach. It is in these efforts that congregations can *proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, and where they can seek and serve Christ in all persons.*

Our budget includes the funding for the Sacred Hills Regional Ministry and for Northeast Regional ministries.

We also have funds for new initiatives in areas where congregations have expressed an interest in working together. This year, the area where we have had the most interest and excitement has been among the churches who are forming The Episcopal Churches of the Ozarks, or EChO. These congregations are exploring new ways to work together to increase their visibility, to draw upon each others strengths, and to support each others ministries. We provided financial support for a retreat in which the leadership

from the congregations began working out their model, and recently we made a grant to be broadly administered by the steering committee, and issued as smaller grants to their individual congregations who wish to develop workshops, activities, curriculum or interest groups that further the goals of EChO as a group.

We have been using a Visioning workshop, developed several years ago for our department by Mthr. Virginia Brown, to work with congregations who desire to refocus their ministries, and are not sure how or where to start. We will be training several more members of our department in January so that we are fully resourced at the start of 2012 to be responsive to requests for these workshops. Please contact myself or any member of the committee should your congregation want to participate.

We would welcome any requests for consultation, resources, or conversation.

We rejoice in the unique gifts of churches in small towns and rural areas: for building up the body of Christ.

Respectfully submitted,
Cheryl Moon, chair