



Small Town and Rural (STAR) Coalition Today



Rev. Amelia Price

Room 114

1:30pm - 2:30pm

 IN-PERSON EXPERIENCE



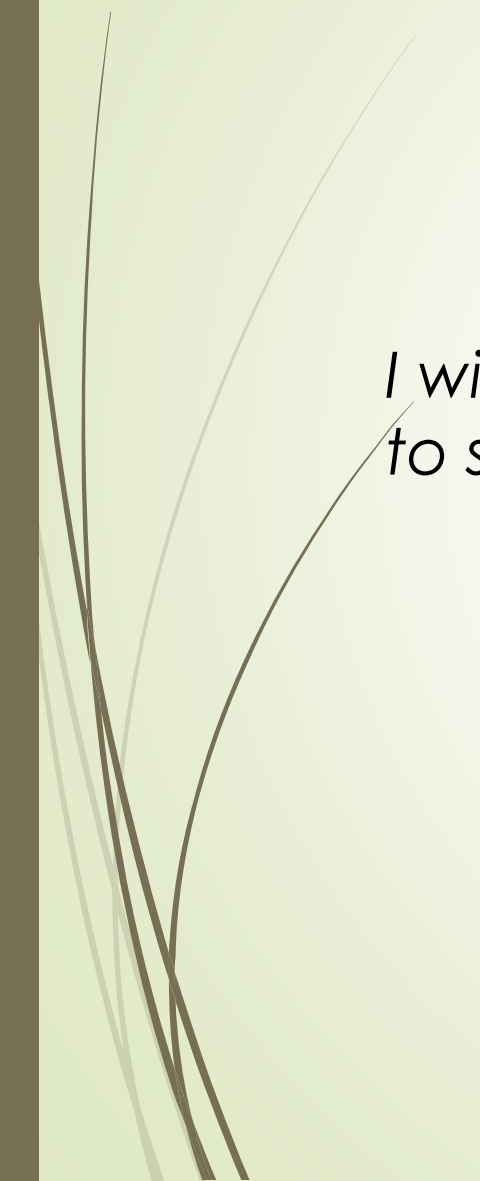
Small Town And Rural Coalition

"The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose...for we are God's coworkers, working together, you are God's field..." (1 Corinthians 3: 8-9, NRSV)

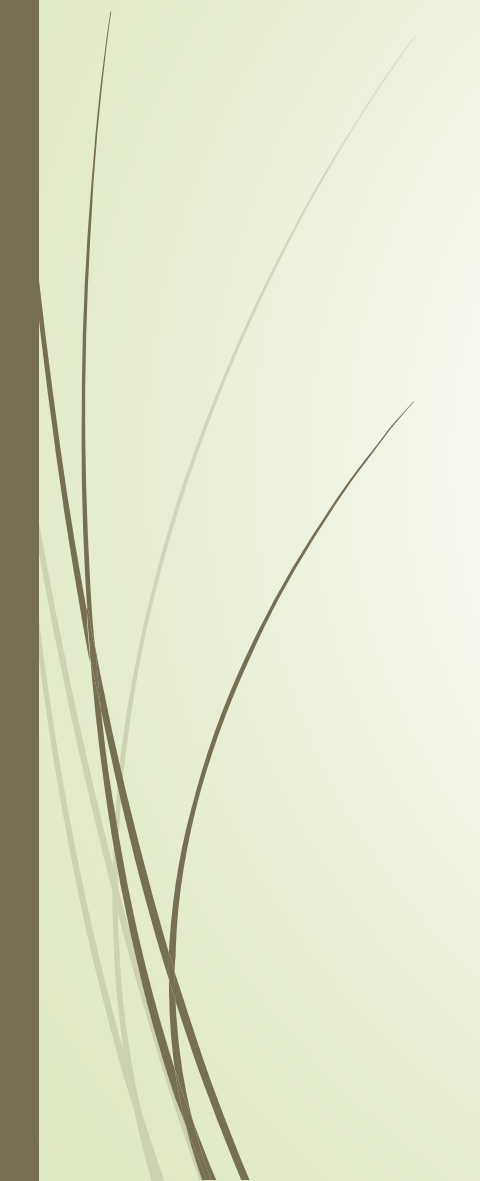


Today we will:

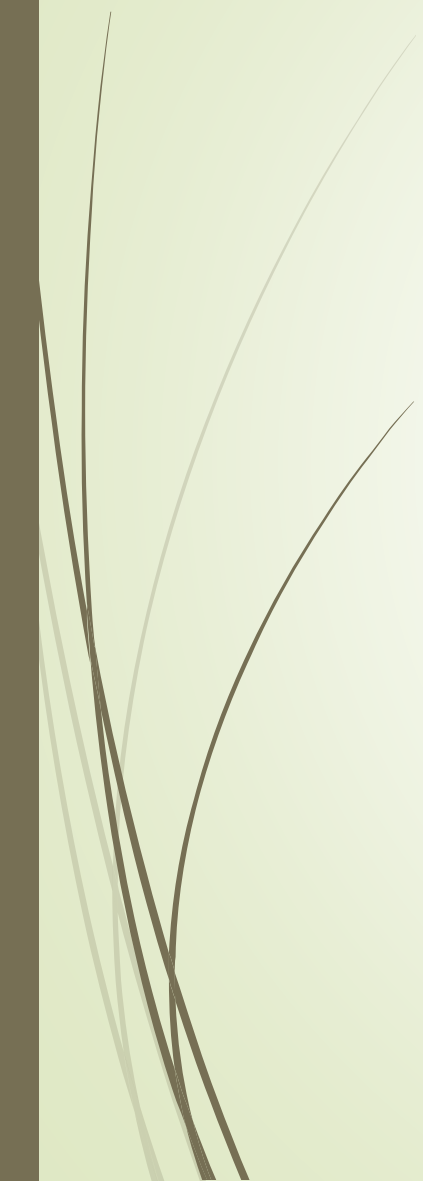
- Talk about the Small Town and Rural Coalition
- Discuss Current research about where the Church is in 2026
- Learn about other churches in the STAR Coalition
- Think deeply about ministry in our New Keystone Conference
- Talk about Your thoughts and reactions to this presentation



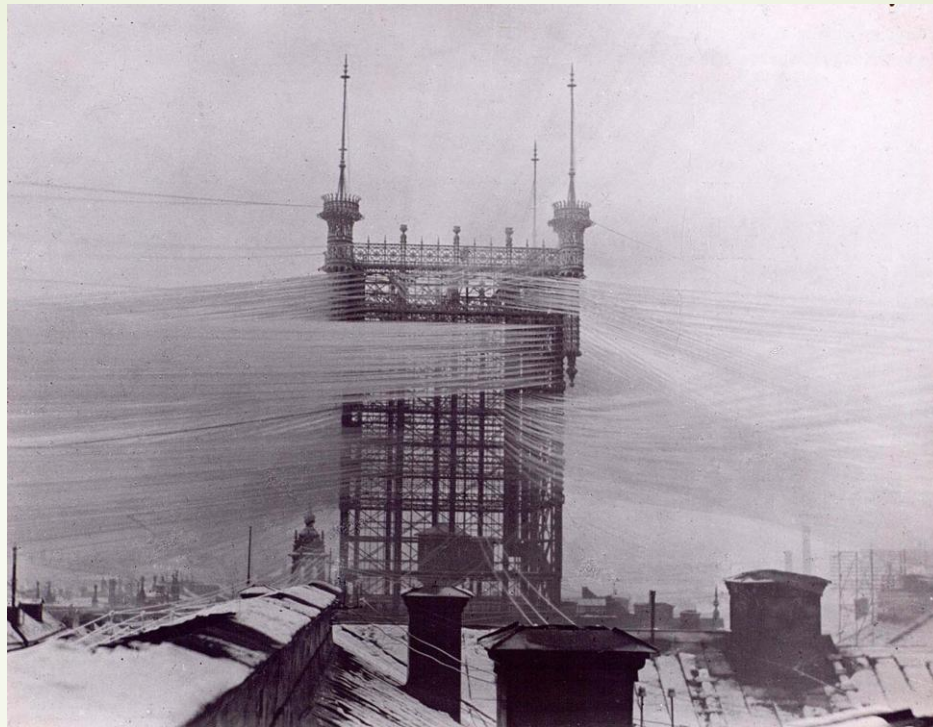
*I will provide these slides to the Conference
to share.*



What is a “Small Town?”

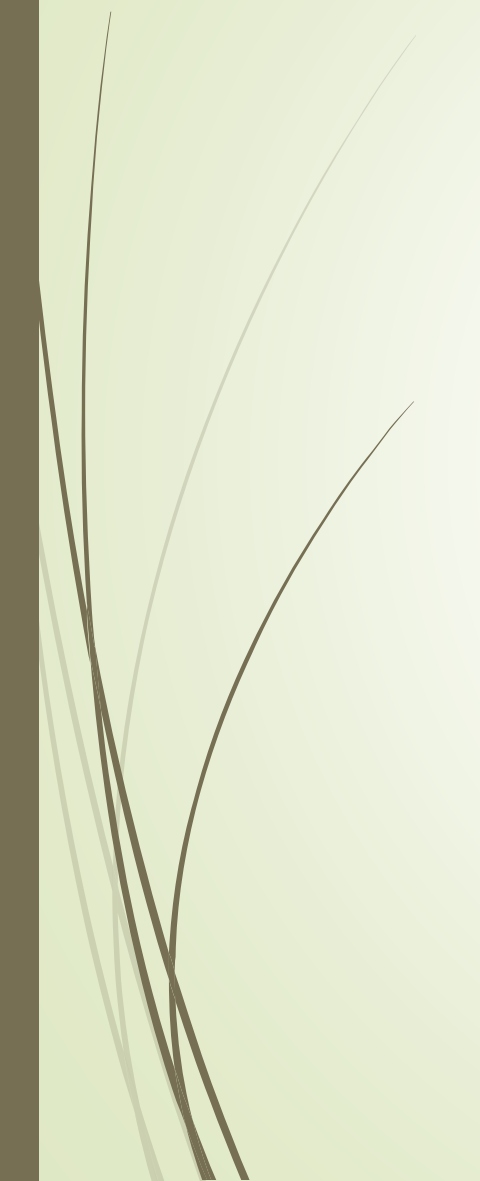


What does “Rural” mean to you?



The old "Telefontornet" telephone tower in Stockholm, Sweden, with approximately 5,500 telephone lines c. 1890.

<https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/the-stockholm-telephone-tower-1890>. Accessed Tuesday February 7, 2023



Things we all face:



A STATISTICAL PROFILE 2022

WITH REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS
RESEARCH FROM THE UCC CENTER FOR ANALYTICS, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT, AND DATA (CARD D)



Special Report: Where our UCC Congregations call Home: Rural, Town, Suburban, and Urban Congregations

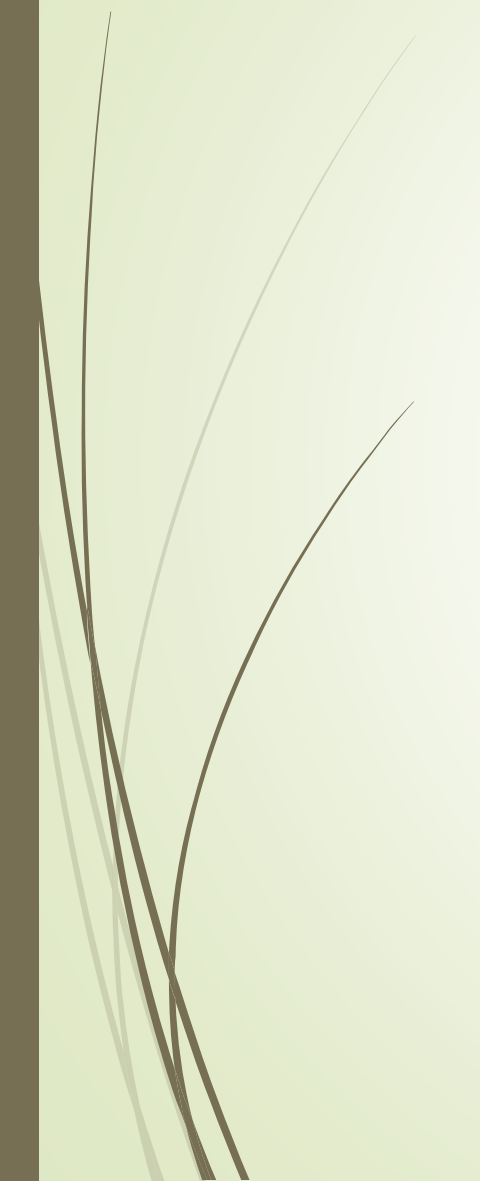


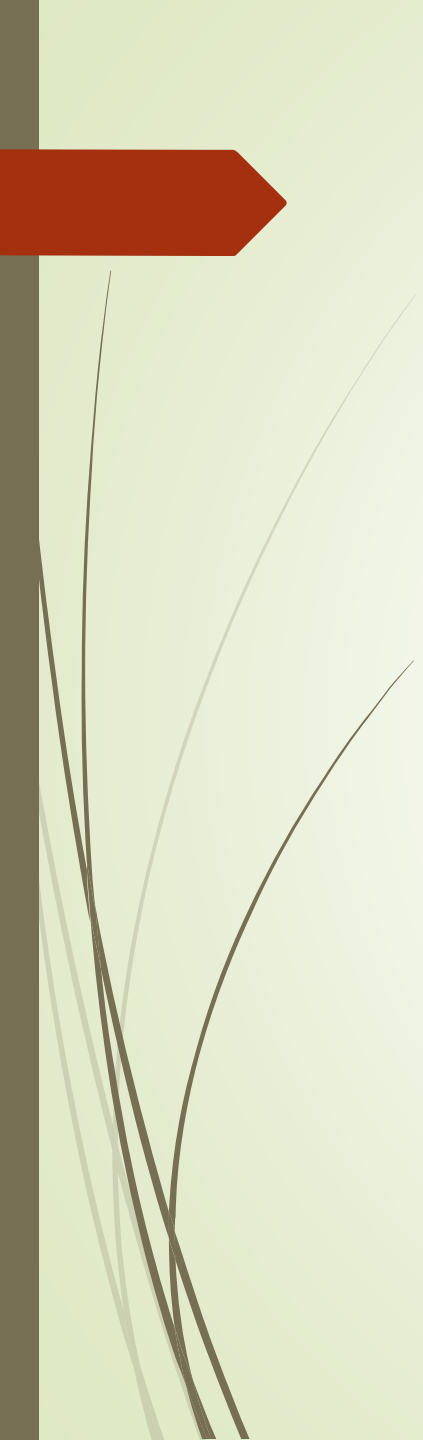
Who are these churches?

For this report, population was broken down in four categories:

- Communities of less than 25 thousand.
- Communities of 25K-300K.
- Communities of 300K and less than 1 million.
- Communities of over 1 million.

A total of 4,753 UCC congregations were studied to determine the community population of each congregation based on 2019 population estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau.

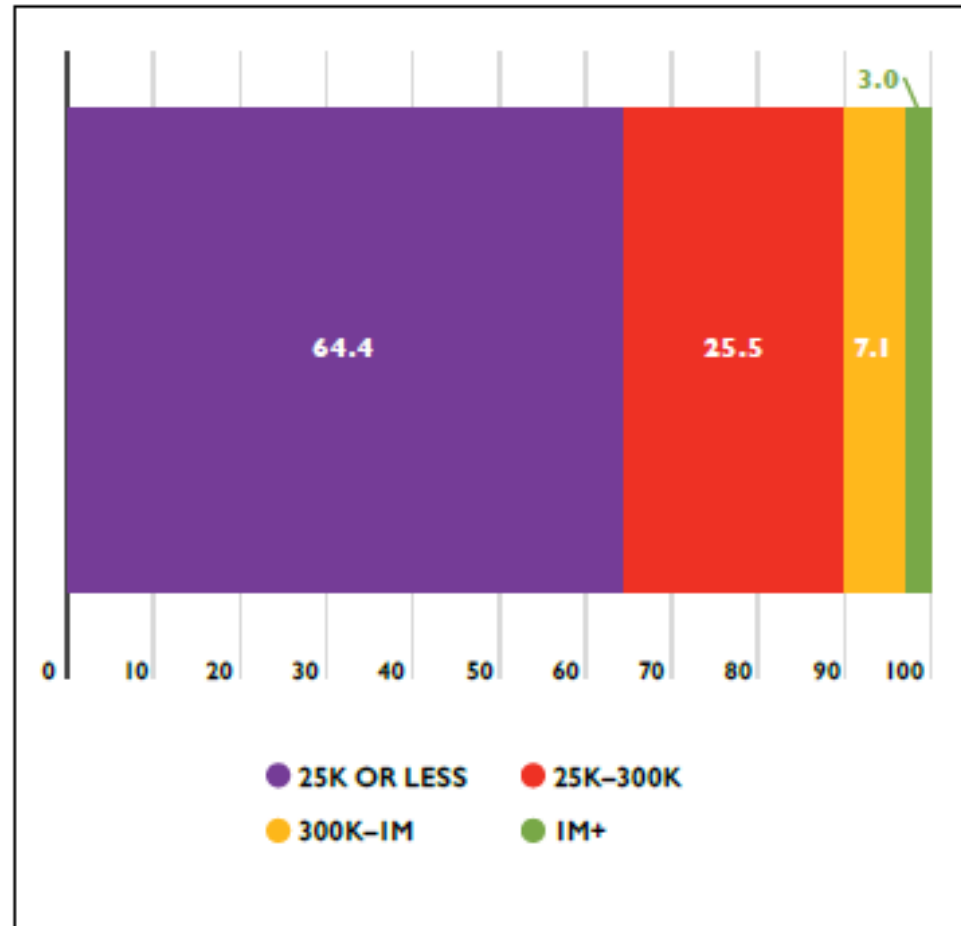




The study shows that:

- 64.4% of all UCC congregations can be found in communities of less than 25 thousand.
- 25.5% in communities between 25k and less than 300K.
- 7.1% in communities between 300K and less than one million; and
- 3.0% of UCC congregations are in urban centers of more than one million.

PERCENTAGE OF UCC CONGREGATIONS & COMMUNITY SIZE





REFERENCES:

¹For more information regarding the coalition see the Facebook group:

[UCC Coalition for Rural Ministries](#)

²Source for population and area sq. milage: U.S. Census Bureau

³"What is rural?"

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/classifications/what-is-rural/>

For more detailed information on the various classifications the U.S. Census Bureau used to define rural, town, suburban, and urban please go to

<https://www.census.gov>.



A STATISTICAL PROFILE

WITH REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS
RESEARCH FROM THE UCC CENTER FOR ANALYTICS, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT, AND DATA (CARD D)



Updated 3-12-2024

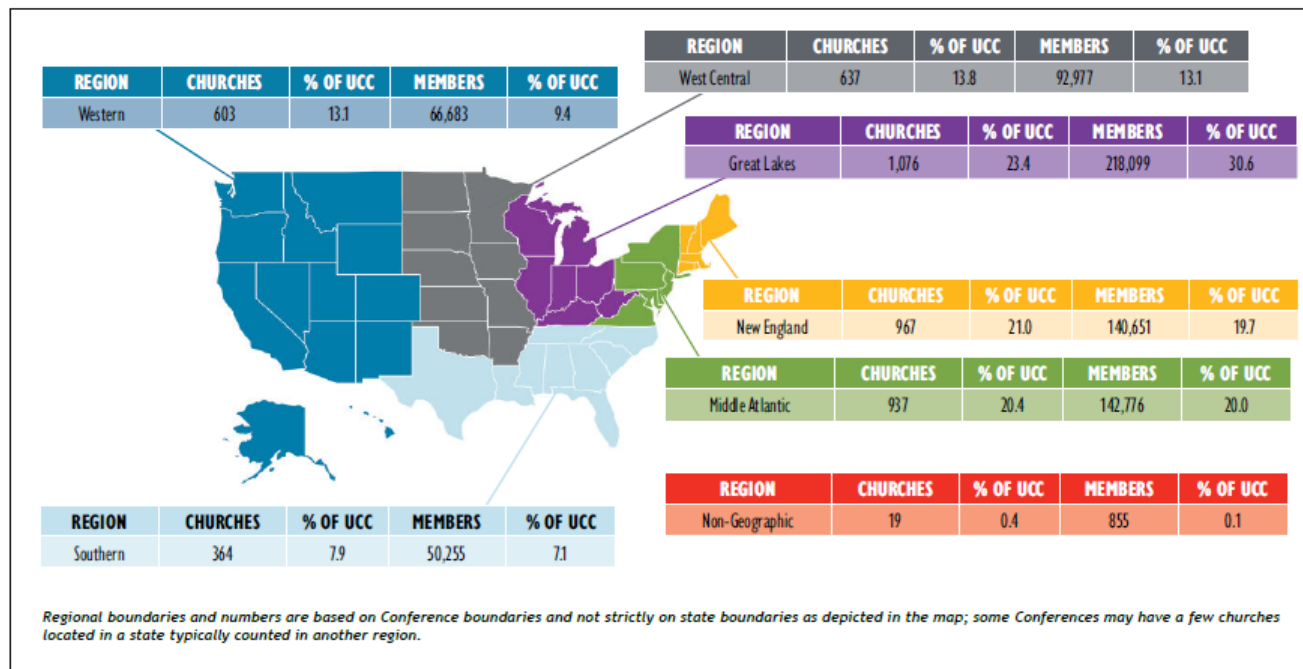
CONGREGATIONS AND MEMBERS

At the end of 2022, there were 4,603 congregations in the United Church of Christ with a total of 712,296 members. The UCC's congregations represent about 1.3% of total U.S. congregations* while the membership of the UCC represents slightly less than one half of one percent (0.44%) of total U.S. religious adherents* and about 0.21% of the U.S. population.** UCC membership is concentrated in the Great Lakes, Middle Atlantic, and New England regions of the country.

*2020 U.S. Religion Census <http://www.usreligioncensus.org/>

**U.S. Census <https://www.census.gov>

UCC CONGREGATIONS AND MEMBERS BY REGION



From: 2023 Statistical Report Faith info Team

TOP FIVE STATES: UCC CONGREGATIONS

STATE	PERCENTAGE (NUMBER)
Pennsylvania	11.9 (549)
Massachusetts	7.1 (325)
Ohio	6.9 (318)
Illinois	6.3 (291)
New York	5.1 (235)

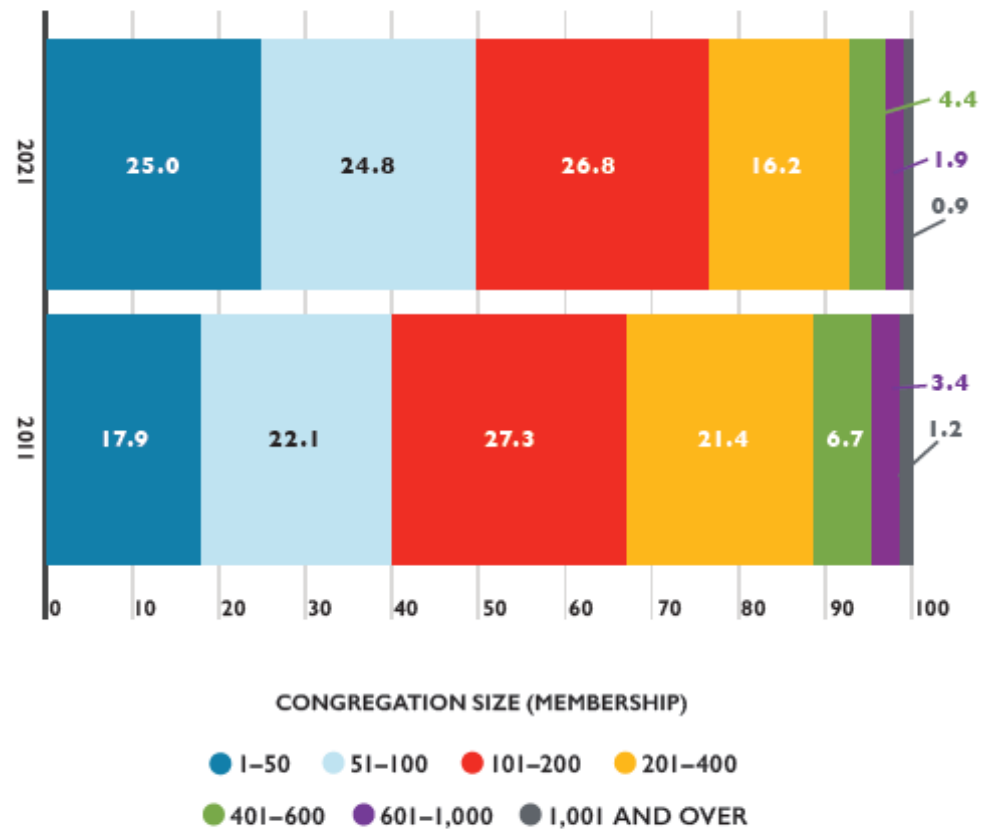
TOP FIVE STATES: UCC MEMBERSHIP

STATE	PERCENTAGE (NUMBER)
Pennsylvania	13.6 (97,008)
Illinois	10.1 (72,178)
Ohio	9.9 (70,743)
Massachusetts	7.3 (52,041)
Connecticut	7.0 (49,749)

A detailed list of congregations and membership statistics by Conference can be found in the 2023 UCC Yearbook & Directory, p. 6.

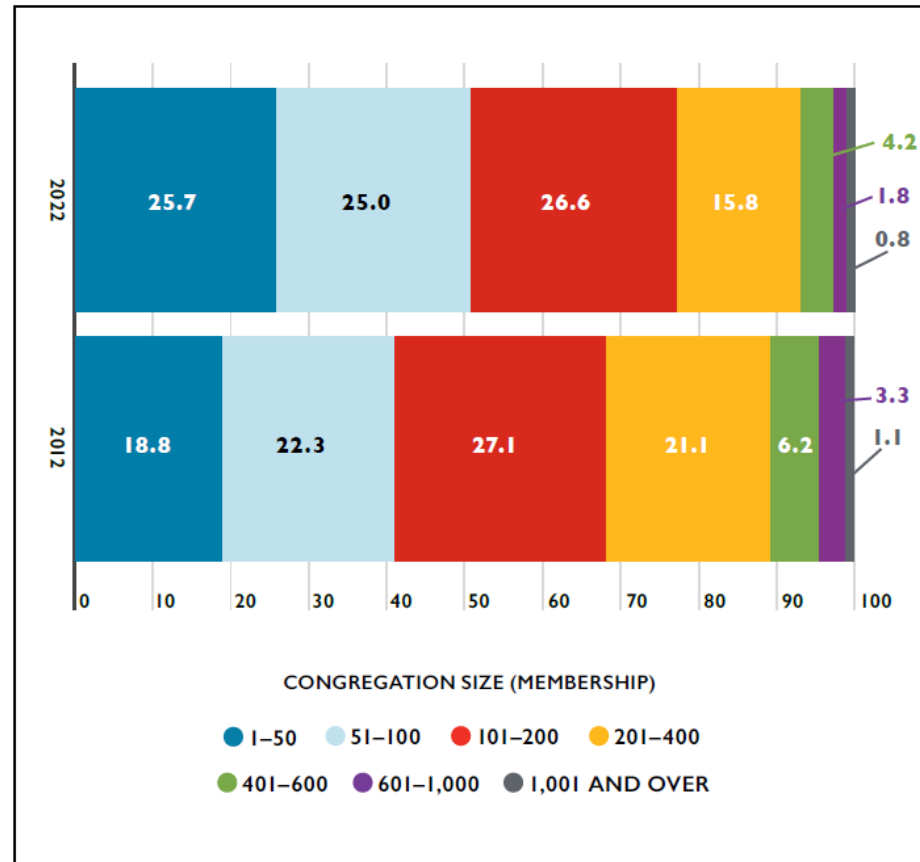
From: 2023 Statistical Report Faith info Team

PERCENTAGE OF CHURCHES BY CONGREGATION SIZE



From: A Statistical Profile 2022

PERCENTAGE OF CHURCHES BY CONGREGATION SIZE



From: A Statistical Profile 2023

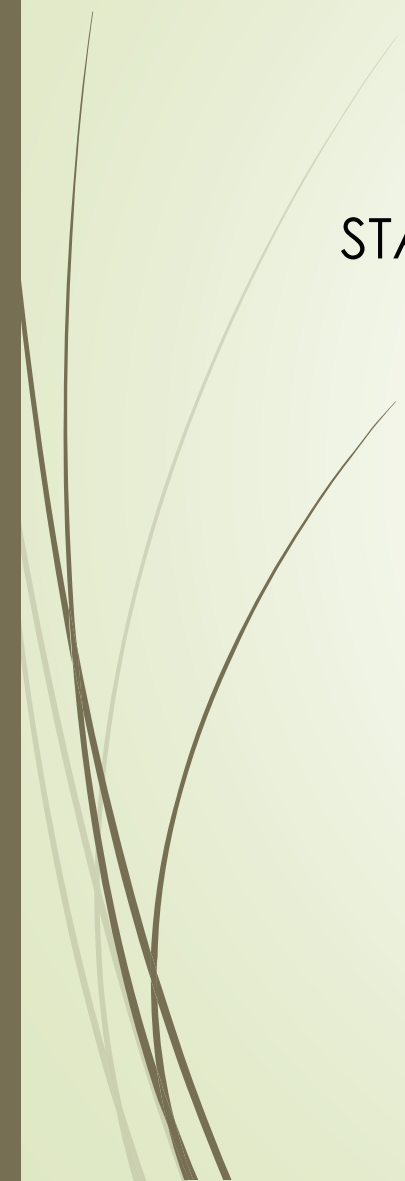


Who are STAR Congregations?

- 64.4% of all UCC congregations can be found in communities of less than 25 thousand
- These communities generally are near or connected to Agriculture
- Low population density
- Population generally older, related, have a strong sense of communal Identity



STAR Coalition History:

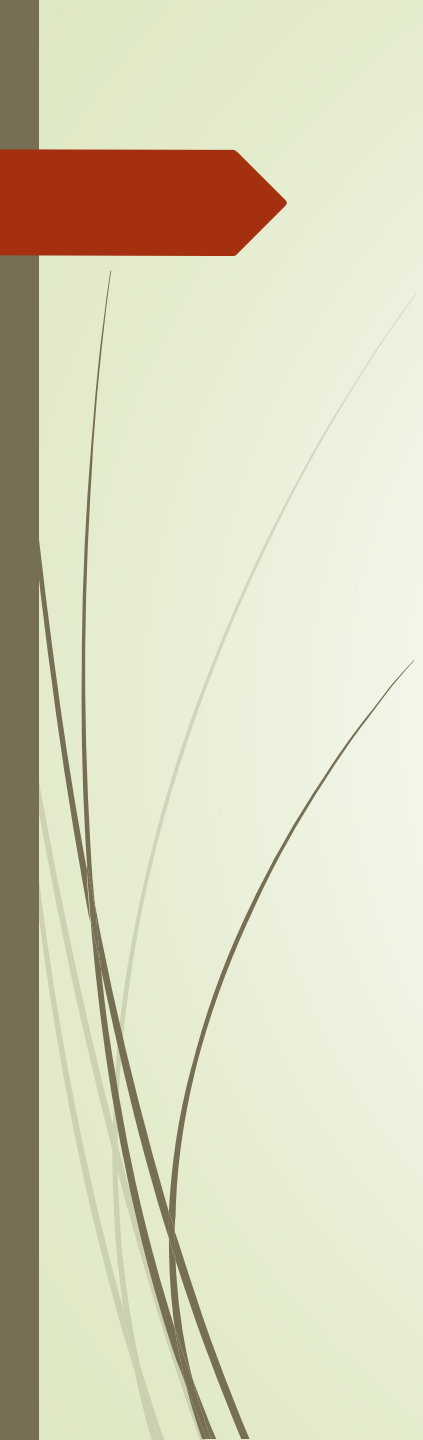


2021 Virtual General Synod

Shared Hopes, Frustrations and Concerns

Shared the Spirit and Realities of STAR Communities

Shared Strengths and Hopes of STAR Churches



Why STAR Churches Matter

64.4% of Churches in the UCC match the definition
of a STAR Church

Vibrant Ministries

Meet particular needs within their communities

With fewer than 100 members, find ways to be the Body of
Christ in their particular areas

Examples of living in a deeper connection with the earth and
the seasons



What does STAR Ministry look like?

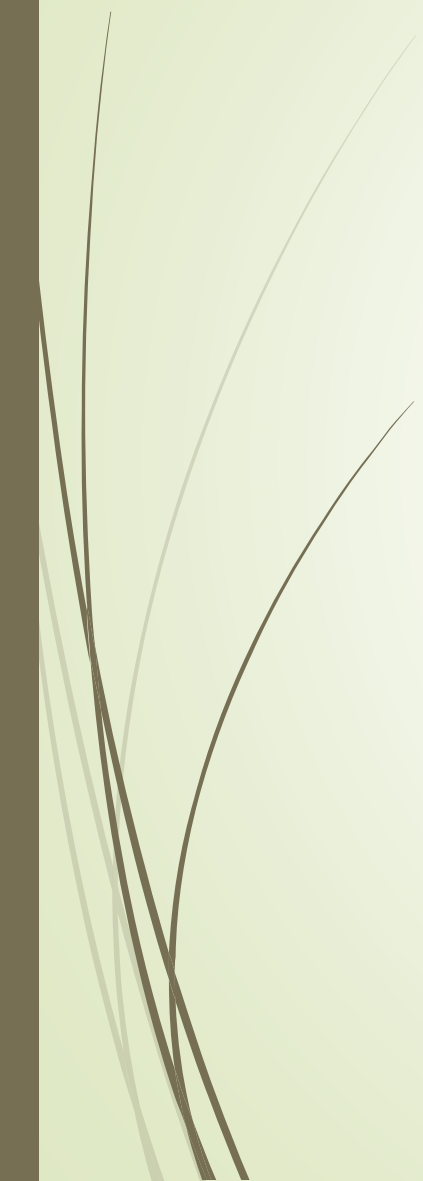
Every church tries to meet the needs all around them.

In small towns and rural areas, “neighbor” looks different.

Farms are farther apart than apartment buildings.

Community and familial relationships are deep.

Neighbors need each other in different ways.





What the STAR Coalition hopes to achieve?



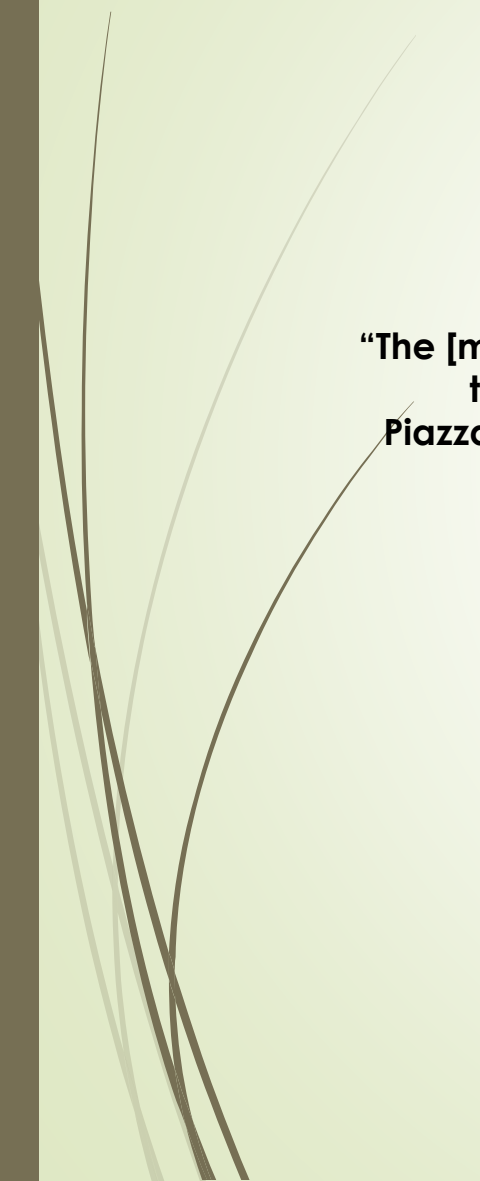
Give Voice to 64.4% of UCC Churches

Give Voice to the Lay Leaders, Pastors and Congregations who identify as STAR

Give Voice to the Wisdom and Concerns of STAR Congregations, Lay Leaders and Pastors

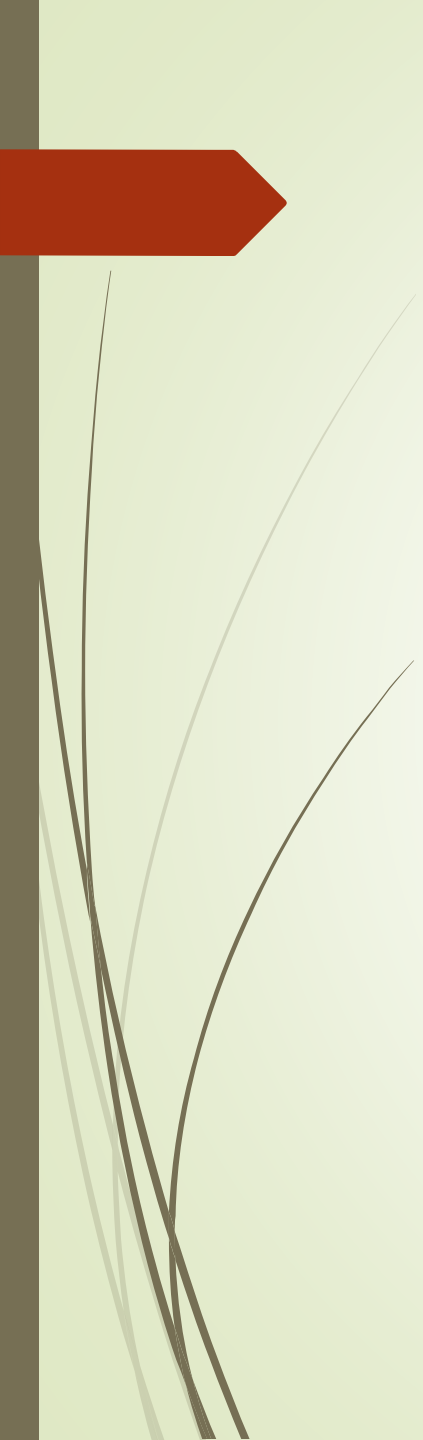
Share the unique experience of Ministry in these STAR Churches

Remind the Church that these are Vibrant, Loving, Real Communities of people living out their faith and doing the work of God in the World



“The [mainline church] institution as we have known it doesn’t have to survive, but the mission and ministry of God’s transforming grace and love must.”

Piazza, M. (2016). *Vital Vintage Church: How Traditional Congregations Survive*



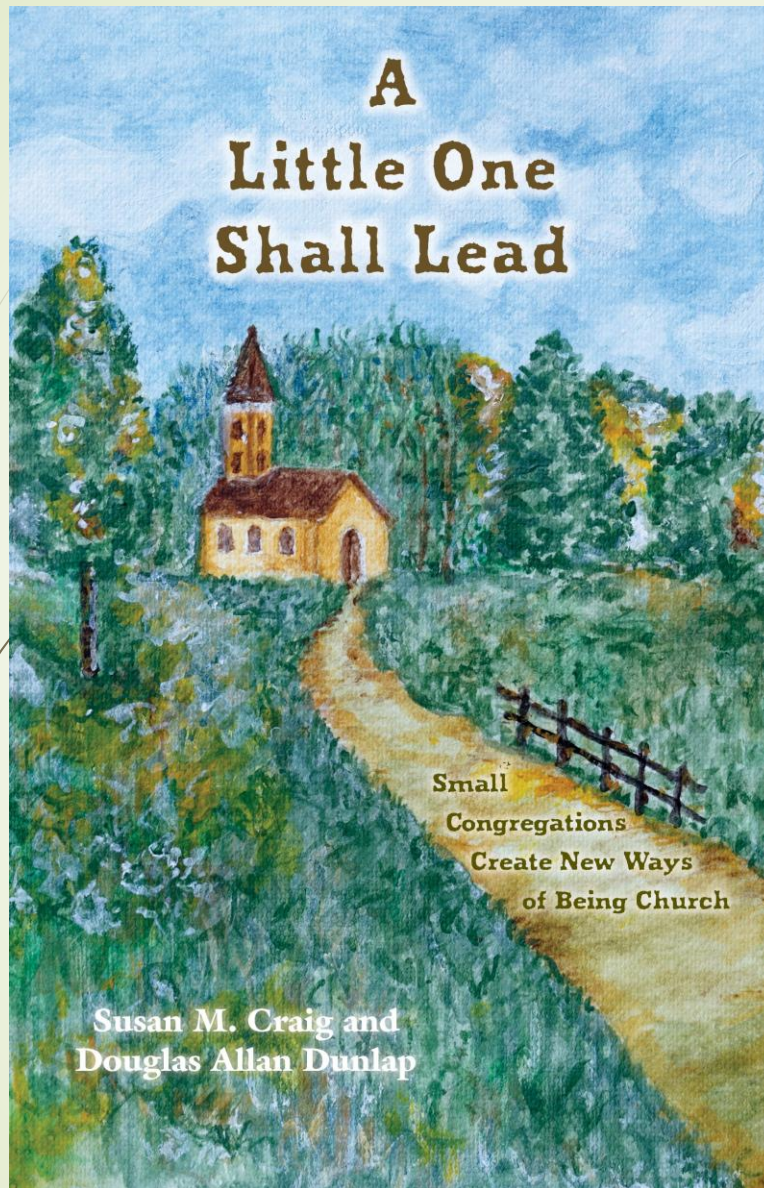
Resources & Information



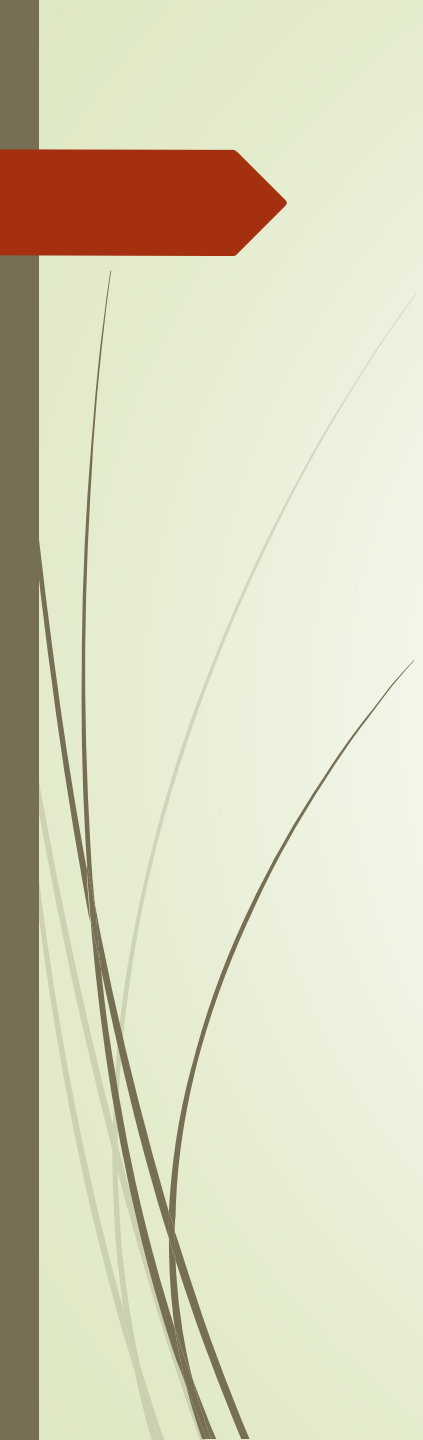
A Little One Shall Lead



Susan Craig and Douglas Dunlap, Douglas is a member of the STAR Coalition, authored “A Little One Shall Lead” stories about how the wider church and congregations can discover opportunity in their smallness. Stories highlight how to create *spirited worship*, *highly engaged prayer practices*, and an invitation to live into a *committed and generous response to suffering* in the communities where they are located. These compelling stories from 17 small UCC congregations can offer perspective on how denominations may relate with small congregations in fresh ways, and how seminaries, through inclusion of small church studies and field experience, may enrich clergy education.



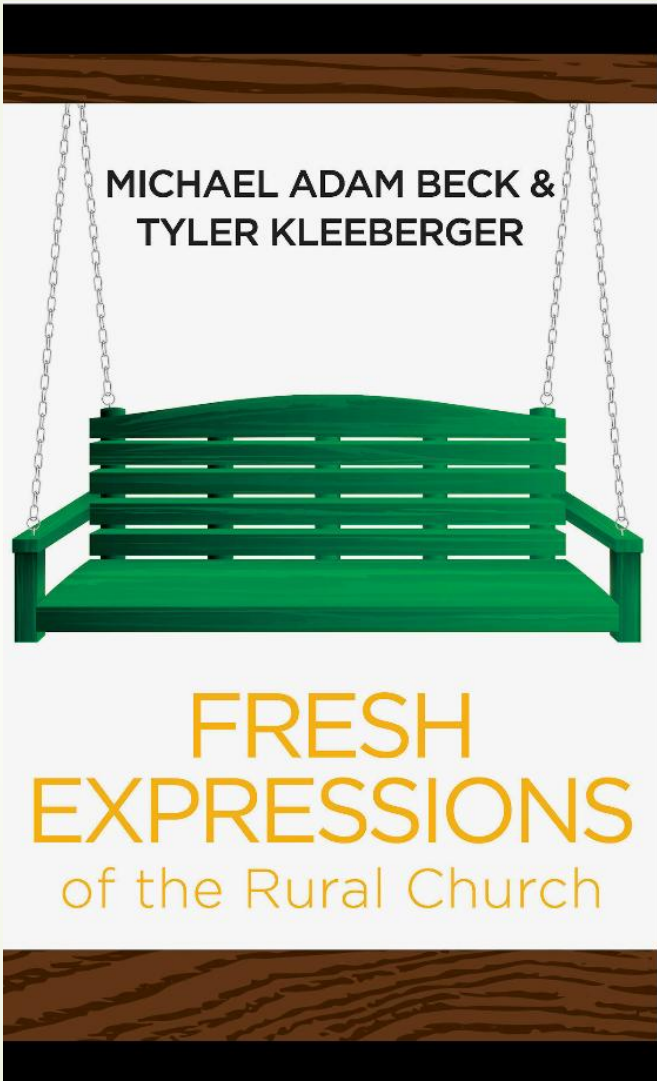
ISBN-13 : 978-0829800944
by Susan M. Craig (Author),
Douglas Allan Dunlap (Author)
Publisher : Pilgrim Press



Wherever 2 or 3 are gathered...

When did Christians begin to believe that the only vital churches are big churches? Jesus can get to work with only 2 or 3! *A Little One Shall Lead: Small Congregations Create New Ways of Being Church*, new from The Pilgrim Press, celebrates the kind of churches most of us attend: small ones, with outsized impact on their communities.

Meet 17 small congregations that are making it work, loving their neighbors, deepening their faith, and creating new ways of being church! Against the narrative of decline, *A Little One Shall Lead* uplifts the good news of the Holy Spirit at work in local, life-giving ways.



**MICHAEL ADAM BECK &
TYLER KLEEBERGER**

**FRESH
EXPRESSIONS**
of the Rural Church

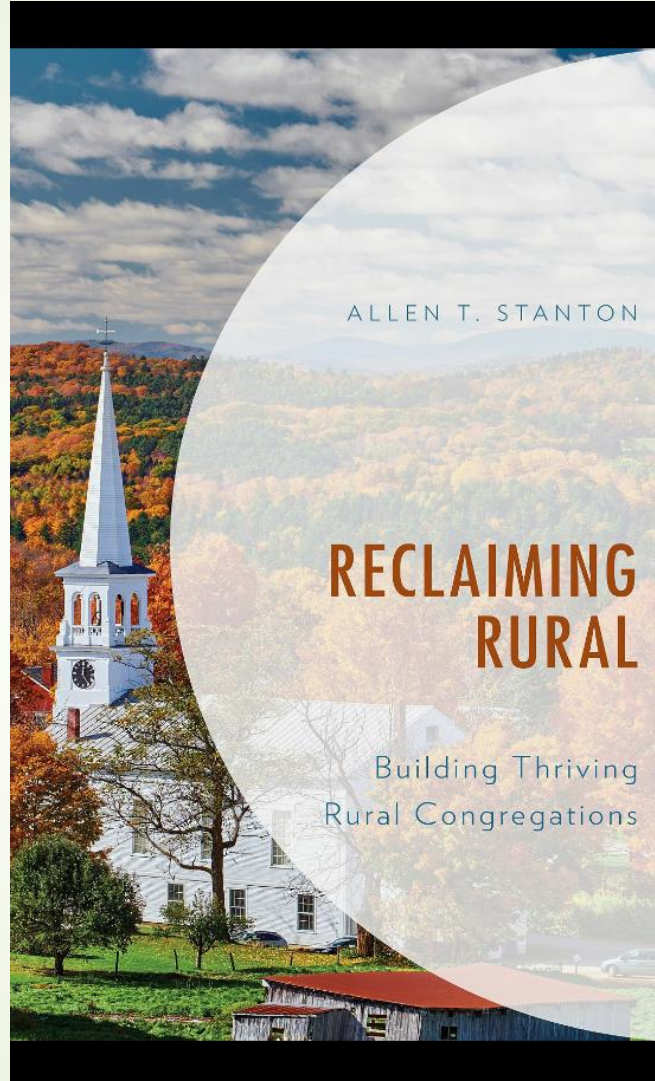
ISBN: 978-1-7910-2579-3

Beck, Michael Adam;
Kleeberger, Tyler. Fresh
Expressions of the Rural
Church (p. iv).
Abingdon Press. Kindle
Edition.



Where did the rural church come from? Perhaps having a clear answer to this question can help us act accordingly in the present and chart a course to a fruitful future. We must avoid a myopic view of history. We must also avoid pushing the dreadful acts of that history under the rug. At the deepest level of US American soil is an entire history of indigenous people. Scholars debate the details of how these people arrived, perhaps across the Bering Strait during the most recent Ice Age. Nevertheless, we do know with great certainty that various tribes migrated from the north to the south and occupied these lands for at least 20,000 years. Hence, Europeans arrived in what was to them a “new world,” but for the indigenous population, this was the land they called simply home. These native inhabitants are people of sophisticated, mature cultures and religions. They share a rich tapestry of established languages. Much work is yet to be done in exploring the treasury of gifts they’ve offered to the world.

Beck, Michael Adam; Kleeberger, Tyler. *Fresh Expressions of the Rural Church* (p. viii). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.



ISBN 9781538135259
(epub)

Stanton, Allen T..
Reclaiming Rural:
Building Thriving
Rural Congregations
(p. 4). Rowman &
Littlefield Publishers.
Kindle Edition.



The church is a vital anchor institution in rural communities that does not receive enough attention or study. The rural church is one of the rare places where people gather frequently, bringing expertise, passions, and skills in the community. The question that I often ask is, what if we could leverage that for the Kingdom of God? This book is an attempt to answer that question. It is born out of a passion for rural communities and a pride in the ingenuity and commitment that I see these small-membership churches exhibit.

Stanton, Allen T.. Reclaiming Rural: Building Thriving Rural Congregations . Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Kindle Edition.

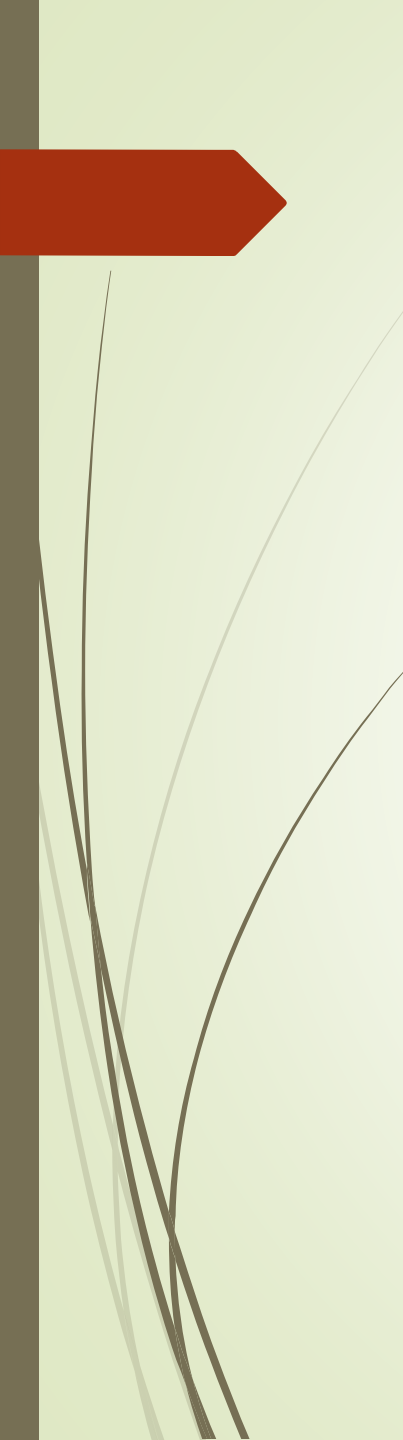
Practicing Care in Rural Congregations and Communities



Jeanne Hoeft | L. Shannon Jung | Joretta Marshall

eBook ISBN: 978-1-
4514-3851-2

Hoeft, Jeanne; Jung,
L. Shannon.
Practicing Care in
Rural Congregations
and Communities .
Fortress Press. Kindle
Edition.



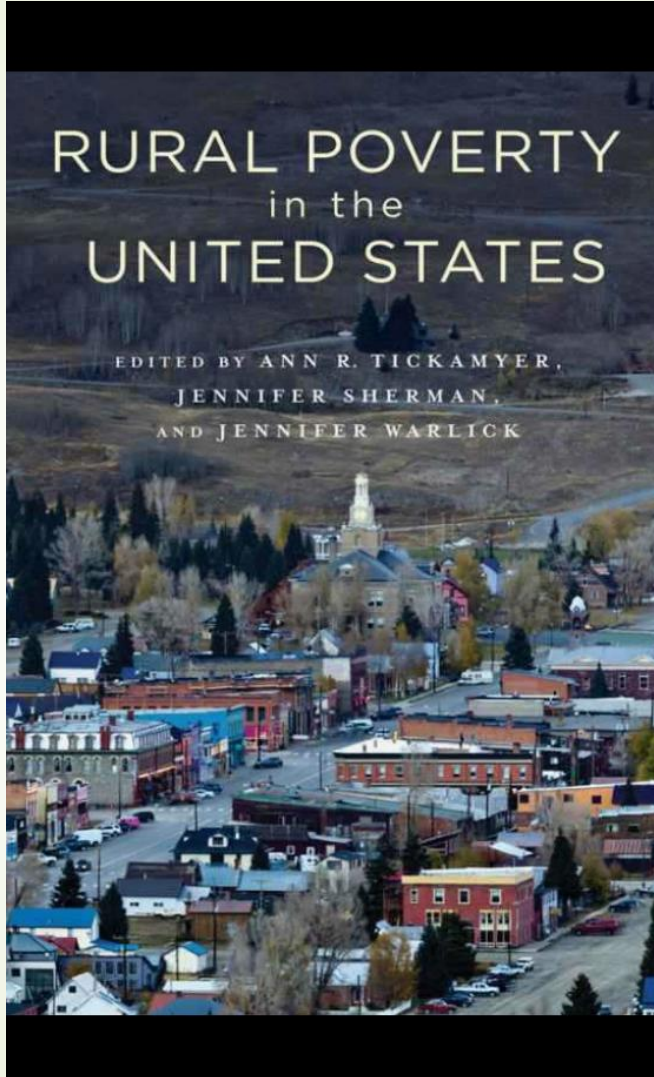
Introduction The vast majority of people in the United States of America live in metropolitan areas, but the vast majority of the land in the United States is rural. Over half of all churches in the USA are in small towns and rural areas across the country, not in cities. Almost every pastor in the country will at some time in her career serve a small town or rural church. Rural places such as the Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, and the Midwest not only make up a significant portion of the U.S., but the people who live and worship there hold a particular wisdom and face unique challenges. Rural places are different and rural places matter. What happens in rural churches significantly affects the whole body of Christ, but they are largely devalued and marginalized by the metropolitan centers of power. Rural churches have been largely overlooked in pastoral care literature.

Hoeft, Jeanne; Jung, L. Shannon. *Practicing Care in Rural Congregations and Communities* (p. 1). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.



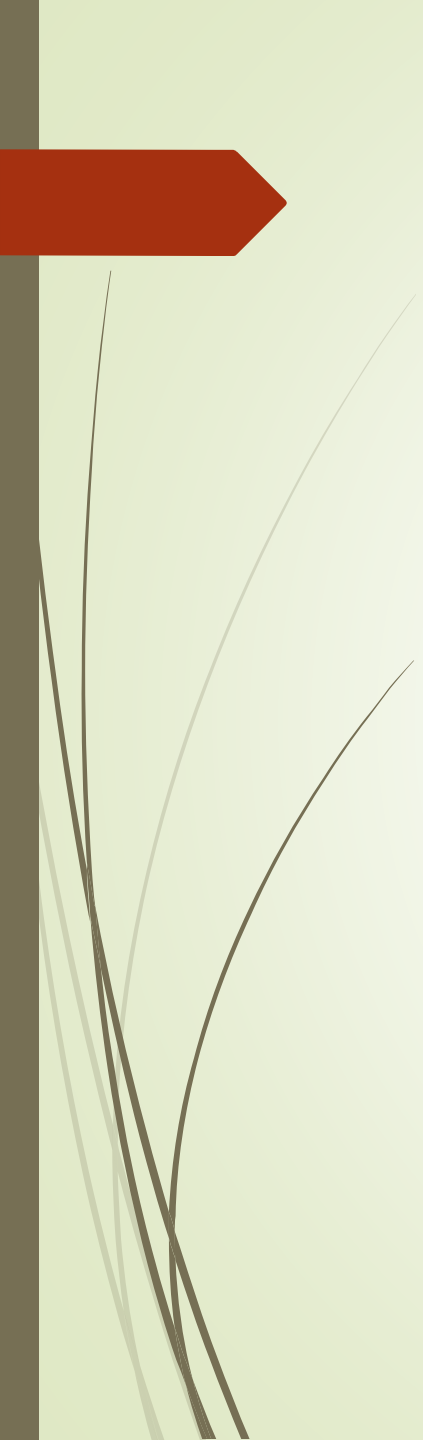
RURAL POVERTY in the UNITED STATES

EDITED BY ANN R. TICKAMYER,
JENNIFER SHERMAN,
AND JENNIFER WARLICK



ISBN 978-0-231-54471-9
(e-book)

Tickamyer, Ann;
Sherman, Jennifer;
Warlick, Jennifer. Rural
Poverty in the United
States . Columbia
University Press. Kindle
Edition.



INTRODUCTION Rural Poverty in the United States treats rural poverty as a uniquely important subject and set of issues. We provide a broad and multifaceted overview of the causes, consequences, and forms of rural poverty in the United States. The scope and intensity of poverty experienced by rural people are often overlooked by the public, scholars, and policy makers, yet it persists as an enduring social problem. In this book we address serious conceptual and empirical issues that are distinctive to rural poverty and that make it unique when compared to other forms of U.S. poverty, including poverty in urban and suburban areas. We include authors from multiple disciplines, including sociology, demography, economics, law, political science, public health, and education.

Tickamyer, Ann; Sherman, Jennifer; Warlick, Jennifer.
Rural Poverty in the United States . Columbia
University Press. Kindle Edition.



Resources:

Wartburg Seminary Rural Ministry Conference

<https://thecastleproject.org/articles/invitation-to-the-45th-annual-rural-ministry-conference>

The CaSTLE Project <https://www.wartburgseminary.edu/the-castle-project/>

The CaSTLE Project, Country and Small Town Lived Ecclesiology, is a bold initiative of Wartburg Theological Seminary that revitalizes ministry in rural and small-town settings.

International Rural Church Association <https://irca.online/>

Faith+Lead Faithful Ministry in Small Towns & Rural Communities

<https://faithlead.org/rural-ministry/>

UCC STAR Churches and Ministries FB

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1015320602739808>

Center for Rural Pennsylvania

https://www.rural.pa.gov/?fbclid=IwY2xjawKBjpBleHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHm53X4QF8OjWoro2khRE-2wEK4r9vaB2teknaxUO6Zq9hdhNjdKv0JwZYSvW_aem_DeWHVtmo-OtzcS3MxL5KzA

<https://thecastleproject.org/>

Supporting Rural Leaders &
Congregations @

Wartburg Theological Seminary

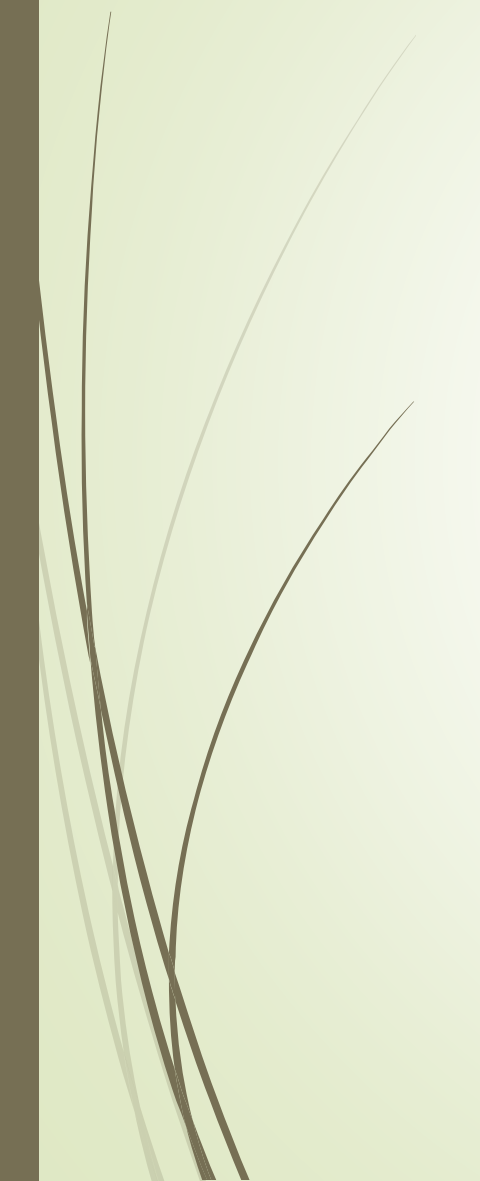




Questions?

Discussions?

Comment?





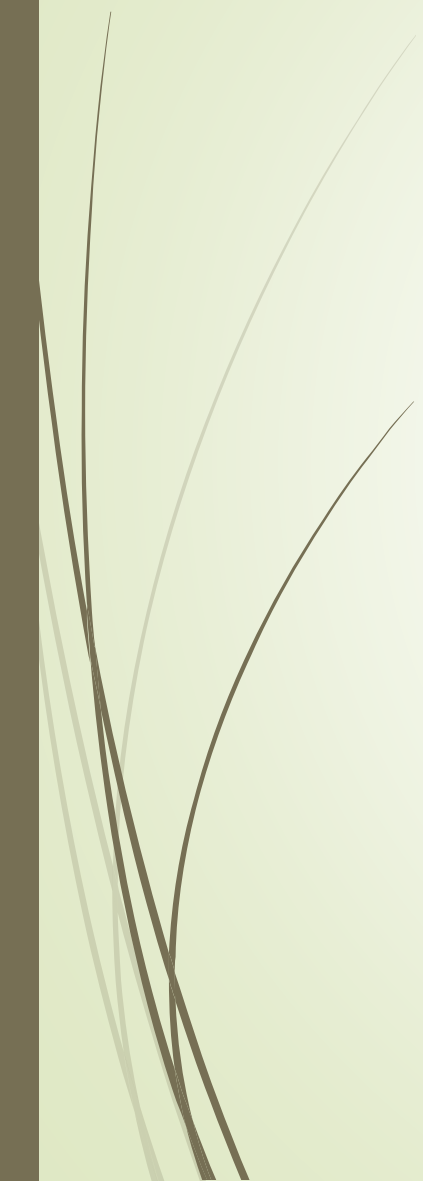
Thank you!



Small Town And Rural

Coalition

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