Public Abstract

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Title:Preparing for Rural Ministry: A Qualitative Analysis of Curriculum used in Theological Education to Prepare Clergy for Ministry in a Rural Context

Increasing the capacity of rural clergy through their educational preparation is important. Unfortunately, there is lack of research and understanding about the educational preparation of clergy to work in rural communities. This qualitative content analysis of course descriptions, goals and objectives and an analysis of the content covered in twenty syllabi, reading materials and films was conducted to provide current and sociologically informed knowledge and understanding of rural clergy preparation programs.

Three themes were found that describe the general intent and purposes for the preparation of clergy to work in a rural context. The three themes are: Contextual, Professional Skills Development, and Issue Specific. Seven themes describing a majority of the course content were discovered. These themes are: Rural Context, Rural Churches, Rural Culture, Pastoral Care in a Rural Context, Leadership in a Rural Context, Agriculture and Environment, and Demographic Changes in Rural Areas.

This new knowledge was placed into the context of the historical Rural Church Movement. Recommendations were made for additional training for clergy preparing to work in a rural context by discussing the social and economic changes that have taken place in the century since the Country Life Commission report. Clergy preparing to work in a rural context need the capacity to be community leaders in order to coach, guide and care for rural communities experiencing social change.