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# RUPERT'S LAND? A COMMUNITY OF DISCIPLES WHERE GOD CAN DO GREAT THINGS!

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You've probably heard the phrase "many hands make light work." It usually describes a task that would have been difficult for a few to accomplish and much easier and more enjoyable for a larger group to do. This month, I want to share with you the accomplishment of a task much larger than any of us dreamed when we began. This involves the same little four-congregation parish I wrote of last month, centred in Lac La Biche, Alberta.

Those of you who were active Anglicans 20 years ago probably remember the nation-wide Anglicans in Mission Campaign made up of mission education and financial stewardship. Each diocese in the Canadian Church was asked to accept a financial goal, in the form of three- to five-year pledges. In turn, each parish was asked to accept its fair share of the diocesan goal. Our four congregations together were asked to raise about \$7,000. Each congregation deliberated, worried over, and eventually accepted its portion of this \$7,000. But there were many voices sharing a good deal of skepticism about being able to reach this target.

Immediately after this initial step, all four congregations began the intensive "mission education" phase, which was a series of mission studies (Biblical and theological), involving groups that met regularly in each location for several months. People enjoyed these opportunities to learn, share and grow together.

When we moved into the financial pledge portion of the campaign, as is often the case, there was a "major gifts" phase where gifts of \$5,000 or more over three to five years were solicited. Our little parish had no major gifts – often not a good sign in financial campaigns. But we were not discouraged and we moved into the "general phase" and invited everyone in the parish to consider making a pledge and/or gift.

When all of the pledges were in, we were completely amazed by what had happened. This struggling little rural parish had generated over \$28,000 in pledges – over four times its goal. This turned out to be the strongest response in the diocese! Like the "five loaves and two fish" offering of the boy in the feeding of the five thousand story in the Gospels, we experienced God taking what our little parish could offer and multiplying it several times over. Thanks be to God!

So what happened? We all knew that we couldn't risk any reduction in regular offerings to our local churches – that would have been disastrous. Instead, each congregation took a hard look at itself and decided the best way to try to make its goal. One congregation was concerned about the number of parishioners on modest and fixed incomes so it worked hard at redirecting its fundraising activities to meet its share. (It didn't exceed it, but it was met.) Each of the other three congregations challenged their members to look at their own personal financial stewardship – to consider "re-allocating" their own financial patterns to free up financial gifts for Anglicans in Mission. The overwhelming result amazed us all. And it didn't come from a few wealthy sources – it came from many people putting Christian stewardship principles to work in their lives, in light of their renewed mission consciousness. And they were able to do that because they trusted that God was at work, in their lives and in the life of their Church. So they were willing to take the risk of faith.

Direction #5 in our diocese's Way Forward Action Plan reads:

*"Examine and reallocate resources to where Christ's mission calls us."*

It challenges us to discern together where we are being called to expend our efforts, and then to direct our time, talent and money – in our personal lives, in our parishes, in our diocese – to answer that call of God into ministry and mission. In the feeding of the five thousand story, it's tempting to think that the boy should have kept the loaves and fish for himself – at least making sure that he had something to eat. We could even rationalize keeping them as a good move so that he would have the stamina necessary to help others. But instead, he *let go* of what he had and released it for the good of all. The result of that gift offered to Christ was amazing. God can do that same mighty work right here in Rupert's Land – through you and me!