

**THE CHURCH AND COUNTRY LIFE; REPORT  
OF CONFERENCE HELD BY THE COMMISSION  
ON CHURCH AND COUNTRY LIFE UNDER  
THE AUTHORITY OF THE FEDERAL COUNCIL  
OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN AMERICA.  
COLUMBUS, OHIO. DECEMBER 8-10, 1915**

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**PAUL L. VOGT**

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EDITED BY  
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## SECRETARIAL PREFACE

In the years 1910-1912, under the supervision of Research Secretary, the Rev. G. Frederick Wells, the Federal Council maintained a "bureau and clearing-house of research, information, and promotion, touching the various church and country life interests." Since 1913 a special committee, known as the Committee on Church and Country Life, has been in charge of this work, and an executive has been employed to give it his undivided attention. During the past year the office of this executive has been in Columbus, Ohio. It was the idea of the committee to make Ohio largely a clearing-house of information and it was thought desirable to be in close contact with the rural work in a state which is fairly central and in which there is a variety of rural conditions.

The executive has been of some assistance to those interested in the organization for rural church and country life in Ohio. In August, 1914, an organization called the Ohio Rural Life Association was formed, including an Advisory Council made up of persons who are in close touch with work for the betterment of country life, while there is a Committee on Interchurch Cooperation, consisting of bishops, superintendents, and others, representing sixteen denominations. A program for constructive work has

been adopted. As soon as the church survey of the state should be completed, it was planned that this committee should meet for two or three days' session to determine the best possible plan of action to improve the serious rural church conditions disclosed by the survey.

The main work during the year in Ohio has been a state-wide survey supplementing the work of 1912 and 1913 by the Presbyterian Church and the Ohio Rural Life Survey. The attempt has been made to ascertain the location and denomination of every rural church, its present membership, whether it is gaining or losing in membership, and whether it ordinarily has a resident pastor, and what part of a minister's service it receives. Most of these facts have been ascertained for the churches in more than 1,100 out of a total of 1,352 rural townships, while the survey is well under way in most of the remaining townships. The data for 216 townships were taken from the work of the Ohio Rural Life Survey, whereas many data from nearly 200 additional townships, though not the location of the churches, were ascertained from the same source. So far as the data have been tabulated, they indicate that nearly one fourth of the townships of the state, comprising a territory of more than 9,000 square miles, are without resident ministers and that a very large proportion of the churches in this area are declining in membership; that on an average there are nearly four churches in each of these townships; that there is a church to every 286 persons, while there is one minister to about

800 persons. These persons, however, are divided in different communities in such a way that rarely does a minister have a community in which he has an opportunity for unhampered leadership in community betterment.

The surveys made during the last five or six years indicate that conditions may be no better in other states. However, there is ground to hope that through interdenominational cooperation something can be done for improvement. While betterment can be brought about only by slow advancement, it is a matter of great importance that, even though slow, such advancement shall be made. If the Commission in cooperation with the people of Ohio and through correspondence with persons in other states can learn ways and means for the solution of the vital and fundamental problem of rural church decline, its service should prove one of the most important of those rendered by the Federal Council of Churches.

The demonstration that it is feasible to make a state-wide survey is regarded as of some importance. If, as anticipated, the survey shall point out ways of betterment and the ecclesiastical forces of the state shall act successfully upon the suggestions to which it may lead, the survey work in Ohio and the program of the Committee on Church and Country Life will be justified by substantial results.

The high grade of accomplishment of many country pastors in various parts of the United States justifies expectation that, as the direct result of a propaganda, a great advance can be made in the work of