

Reaching Rural America for Christ

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission

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THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
Missouri Synod

Rural & Small Town Mission

Our "Life Together"

- To follow the core beliefs of the LCMS
- To equip rural professional and lay leaders
- To support congregations in community engagement

Remember: RSTM is eligible for Thrivent Choice Dollars!

Please Pray for These Important Dates

Sept. 14

Engaging Your Community event
Trinity Lutheran Church, Parsons, Kan., presented with the LCMS Kansas District
8 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Sept. 26 - Webinar

Stewardship Strategies
Rev. Nathan Meador
St. John's Lutheran Church, Plymouth, Wis.
1 – 2 p.m. CST

Sept. 28

Engaging Your Community event
Trinity Lutheran Church, Wellsville, N.Y., presented with the LCMS Eastern District
8 a.m. – 3 p.m.

If you have an idea or story for Rural Outreach, contact Amy at the RSTM office.
Phone: 888-463-5127
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Marriage 'Insurance'

CONTRIBUTED BY THE REV. JEFF MEYERS
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What if your church could provide marriage insurance for couples seeking to get married? That's right, provide marriage

insurance to the one man and one woman desiring a lifelong union. Considering the fact that the average couple is going to spend more than \$30,000 on the wedding, marriage insurance is a great investment. But the investment is not about money, it's about time. By investing 25 to 30 hours of time over six months and following six simple steps, marriage insurance can raise any couple's chances of success from a mere 50 percent to more than 98 percent.

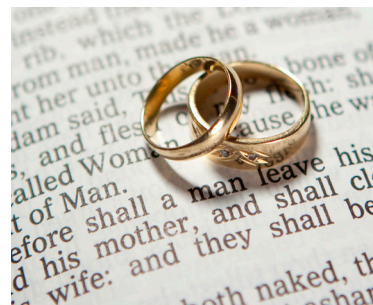
While the divorce rate in the United States hovers around 50 percent, with your marriage prep couples can decide to divorce-proof their marriage. Marriage is not simple fate or odds, like flipping a coin. The choices made in the time of preparation make that big of a difference.

God's blessing for holy marriage is not about getting married in church by some pastor, but it's seeking God's presence in Jesus Christ and following His direction in His Word. Guess what? It works.

Here are the steps for this successful marriage insurance program:

1. Teach them to pray together. Some studies show that couples who pray together have a 99 percent success rate. Marriage, at its heart, is a spiritual institution.
2. Live in separate households before marriage. Cohabitation is a cancer on the institution of marriage. Statistically, it is a trial divorce. More than 90 percent of cohabiting relationships fail.
3. The couple should be over the age of 20. Couples under 20 have a dismal track record of success. Besides, waiting shows a strong ethic of commitment and strengthens the marriage union.
4. Put in place a six-month waiting period used for solid preparation including a commitment to sexual abstinence.
5. Use a marriage preparation inventory like Zoe (www.zoescore.com), with at least three advising or mentoring sessions. Consider training successfully married couples as mentors or advisors. Studies show that when steps #3 and #4 are in place, the marriage is essentially inoculated against divorce for seven years.

(Continued on page 3.)



RSTM 2013 National Conference: *Planting in a Changing World*

Don't delay! Registration will close Sept. 15 for the 2013 conference, which will be held Oct. 31–Nov. 2, 2013, at the Kansas City Airport Marriott at 775 Brasilia Ave., Kansas City, MO 64153. We hope you will join us there!

The theme is “Planting in a Changing World.” Plenary speakers will include the Rev. Dr. Paul Maier, author and LCMS third vice-president; the Rev. Jonathan Fisk, pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Naperville, Ill., and “Worldview Everlasting” video blogger; Dr. Adam Francisco, associate professor of History and Political Thought at Concordia University, Irvine, Calif., and expert in Islamic worldviews; Dr. Shannon Jung, noted rural-ministry author; and the Rev. Todd Kollbaum, RSTM director.

Dr. Maier will lead Bible study throughout the conference on the topic of “Planting,” as well as present a plenary session called *Sowing the Seed in Rural America* addressing our unique areas of ministry today while understanding that

the seed of the Gospel is more powerful than ever.

Dr. Jung will explore the changing landscape to which God is calling rural Christians to spread the Word of hope and God's presence to people inside and outside the church in *The Changing Fields of Rural America*. Jung also will present a breakout session called *Understanding Rural Culture*, which will explore such questions as: Where will we be called to witness? What will our situation in life be? and How do we adapt our cultural assumptions to meet these “changing fields”?

In his plenary *Planting in a Virtual Field*, the Rev. Fisk will examine the strengths and weaknesses of social media as a form of communication, diagnose how this media is currently directing American culture (from the big city to the small, quiet town) and prescribe how faithful Christians must respond. Fisk also will present *Teaching Vocation in a Compartmentalized World: The Echo of*



Truth and Why It Makes Total Sense, a breakout session that will examine the “noise of thought” in which the average postmodern American lives. He also will diagnose means for breaking through that noise with faithful integrity and a focus on things that never change.

In *A World Hostile to the Sower and the Seed*, Dr. Francisco will explore the major challenges to Christianity posed by a culture that is becoming increasingly hostile to the Gospel and outline some basic responses to these challenges. Francisco also will present *Witnessing to Muslims*, a breakout session addressing the tremendous growth of Islam in America over the last two decades and equipping Christians for evangelistic encounters with Muslims.

Finally, the Rev. Kollbaum will present the plenary *Planting Before the Harvest*. In an increasingly impatient world, we all want the fruit but don't want to wait for the plant to grow. Explore how patient perseverance in our planting will produce a fruitful harvest. Kollbaum also will present breakout session *Planting the Gospel Through Congregational Partnerships*, exploring partnership ministries, benefits and possibilities that might be overlooked. In addition, he will take part in Rural Resources with RSTM Project Coordinator Amy Gerdt.

Other breakout topics will include older adult ministry with Dr. Renae Gernant; inactive members with the Rev. Dr. Lee



Hagan; rural church planting with the Rev. David Johnson; outreach ideas from the Rev. Mark Wood; challenges and opportunities for Lutheran schools with Lori Flenner; a panel of presenters with practical experience and hands-on VBS ideas; small Sunday school ideas with Deaconess Pamela Nielsen; stewardship with the Rev. Nathan Meador; human-care projects with Deaconess Dorothy Krans; youth and family ministry with Professor Ben Freudenberg; resources from Concordia Publishing House; Concordia Plan Services; and the Rev. Mark Kiessling, the Rev. Steve Cholak, James Lohman and the Rev. Terry Schmidt from LCMS Youth Ministry and School Ministry. Registration for \$200/person is available at www.lcms.org/rstm/conference. Rooms are available at the Marriott for \$83 a night. You may reserve rooms through the special link on our conference webpage or by calling 816-464-2200, but be sure to ask for the "LCMS 2013 Rural and Small Town National Conference." The registration deadline is Sept. 15!

We have engaged a larger venue this year, but we still encourage you to get your spot secured now so that you can join us. The national conference is geared for congregational leaders from all rural and small-town settings. While there is no "one size fits all" solution, participants will be encouraged as they see new opportunities for engaging their communities and are filled with hope for the future. Fellowship and discussion with others who also have been placed in this unique mission field will be invaluable too!



Scenes from the LCMS 2012 Rural and Small Town National Conference.

Marriage Insurance

(Continued from page 1.)

6. If one of the partners is divorced, make sure that all avenues of reconciliation have been pursued, an appropriate amount of time for recovery has occurred (18 months) and recovery activities have been pursued (divorce-care programs).

I've been using these steps for more than 15 years now and have designed a program around them. It works. I suppose I can't say it any simpler than that. Everything you need is available for free at www.clcop.org. Click the "ministries" tab and look under "marriage and family." Go ahead

and download these materials. Have a good look at what a marriage insurance policy looks like.

One of the most rewarding moments in ministry for me comes when I see the look of fear and insecurity change in a couple's eyes to a look of confidence and security in the wonderful divine institution of marriage. By following these simple steps and committing time to learning the skills of a lifelong love, couples will experience the joy, wholeness and healing God intends for marriage.

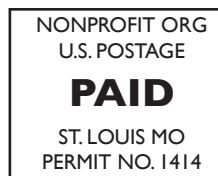
LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission supports and encourages rural and small-town congregations in engaging their communities and growing together in Christ through Word and Sacrament.

If you have a good idea for outreach or a story you'd like to share so that we can share it with others, please email Amy Gerdts at amy.gerdts@lcms.org.

Learn more about RSTM at www.lcms.org/rstm or by calling Amy at 888-463-5127.

Click the Give Now button below to support the work of RSTM.

Give Now



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Director's Message

"Then [Jesus] said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.' "
(Matt. 9:37–38 ESV)



That season of harvest is beginning here in the heartland, a time to reap the bounty of what has been planted. While this is an easy reference to understand for those involved in agriculture, what does this mean in the broader context of our lives together as the Church? What does it mean when Jesus says these words to His disciples in Matthew 9?

Jesus introduces us here to our prayer. That is to say, the prayer He encourages His disciples to ask the Father — that He send laborers to reap the harvest of the Word sown — is our prayer as well. This prayer, which looks to the Father to provide laborers to work the fields, sow the seeds, tend and cultivate for the ultimate harvest, has been given to the church. Who are these laborers? We are ... the Body of Christ! Therefore, while the time is ours,

let us pray fervently and work diligently with joy to spread the message of Jesus.

To that end, this is why we are here at LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission. To help, empower, encourage, equip and support you in this harvest mission. Whether it be through our national conference, regional Engaging Your Community Events, topical webinars or other resources that we are striving to develop for your benefit, we are here for you and the mission of the Gospel.

May God bless us as we walk together laboring for the plentiful harvest!

Pastor Todd Kollbaum
Director, LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission