



A newsletter of LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission

REACHING RURAL AMERICA FOR CHRIST



Our "Life Together"

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



Please Pray for These Important Dates

June 23 – Webinar

"Welcoming Buildings" with Rev. Todd Kollbaum, director of LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission, and pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Madison, Neb.
1–2 p.m. CST

July 28 – Webinar

"Welcoming Publications" with Rev. Jonathan Conner, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Manning, Iowa.
1–2 p.m. CST

October 13 – Webinar

"Making Disciples for Life Resource Center" with Rev. Dr. Mark Wood, director of LCMS Witness and Outreach and LCMS Revitalization
1–2 p.m. CST



"... and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord..."

—Post-Communion Collect, Divine Service, *Lutheran Service Book*

STRONG FAITH, FERVENT LOVE

At Home in God's House

Where is it that you feel most comfortable? Are there certain things you appreciate more than others, that make you feel more relaxed or contented? Perhaps it's the smell of vanilla, chocolate chip cookies or fresh popped corn. Maybe you like the sound of soft music, wind chimes or children playing. All of these things play into the way we feel, relaxed and welcome or otherwise. These are all things that create environments where we grow strong attachments.

Whether it's the feel of our favorite chair or a special place to vacation, we definitely prefer certain places and things to others. We grow attached to things like communities, neighborhoods, houses and even our churches. They just feel right.

To come "home" to the house of God where the sight of the stained glass, the fit of the pew and even the scent of decades of service clings to the air, just feels right. We feel at home in our congregation

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Welcoming Buildings

by Bruce Manzey

We often hear terms such as “people-friendly” or “guest-ready” to describe what we would like our churches to be. What does that mean? How does that factor into what we do as a congregation as we focus on our building? With challenging budgets, shrinking manpower and limited numbers of visitors, it becomes easy in rural and small-town congregations to overlook or even sometimes neglect cleanup, touchups and repairs.

It matters not where you are located; the bumps and bruises that distract from your facility all look the same. You may feel they aren’t noticeable, but that is because you have become accustomed to how things look.

One of the first things people see is the sign on your property that contains information about services, etc. Many times it is the last thing we think about. Are there bushes or trees near it that obstruct the view? Does it need updating? Is the information kept current?

Depending on your structure (wood/brick/concrete), a careful review will likely find cracks, paint peeling and other damage. Entrance doors take a beating, both from usage and the weather. Windows are particularly susceptible to weather issues. Sidewalks that are cracked or broken not only look bad but could also pose a tripping hazard, especially for older people.

What does it look like when you enter the building? Is the building clean, especially the bathrooms, kitchen, etc.? It is often tougher to make an older facility shine, but it is important. Your visitors may come only once for a special occasion but the impression it makes will not be forgotten. One of the things that can happen in churches that don’t have much going on during the week is the air gets stale in the building and will have an odor, and that is especially true in the basement. Running a fan in the building can help to alleviate the problem.

Is the narthex neat and uncluttered? Are the mailboxes and other materials

organized in such a way as to be attractive? There is nothing less appealing than mailboxes stuffed full of material waiting to be picked up or tract racks that are not neatly organized.

As you enter the sanctuary, what catches your attention? Do the pew racks have the proper material, visitor cards, pencils, envelopes, Bibles and hymnals? Uncluttered means that every pew looks exactly the same before every worship service before anyone enters to fill the pew. It may seem trivial, but it is not.

Is the signage in the church adequate to direct people to bathrooms, Sunday

school, kitchen or any other needs such as the church or pastor’s office? Signage is important since there may not always be someone available to give directions.

Take the time to be critical of your building. Imagine yourself a visitor — how would you rate your facility? Caring for your building is important not only for its physical well-being, but also because it is the place where God has planted your congregation.

This article was originally published in the June 2015 *Reaching Rural America* for Christ newsletter.

Your visitors may come only once for a special occasion but the impression it makes will not be forgotten.





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Contact us

We want to hear from you! If you have ideas for future issues, comments, or feedback on articles you've read in *Reaching Rural America for Christ*, please contact the RSTM office.

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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.

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and that is a good thing. To come home to be fed and nourished by God's Word and Sacrament in a place where it "just feels right" is most certainly a blessing in many respects.

What about those who are new to our communities and don't have that "home" in a congregation like we do? How might we better prepare ourselves and our congregations to better welcome these folks into our midst so that we can help connect them to the wonderful gifts God bestows to and through His church? How can we help them to feel at home when they are with us, partaking of God's life-giving gifts?

In our upcoming webinars and newsletters, we will discuss more about

"welcoming" through our buildings, publications and people. Through these avenues, we desire to present some ideas about how to make our ministries more welcoming to those around us. While our primary focus must certainly be Word and Sacrament ministry, we can also work to facilitate a welcoming environment so that we might continue to share these most precious gifts with those we have been called to serve.

We hope you find these articles and webinars to be helpful in your ministry. If you would like more assistance in the art of "welcoming" please feel free to contact us or check out further resources on our website.

RSTM Events Update

Don't forget that Rural & Small Town Mission provides free monthly webinars on topics important to congregations in town and country settings. Up next is **Welcoming Buildings** on June 23, followed by **Welcoming Publications** on July 28. Find past webinars in our archive. Watch for information on all our upcoming events!

RSTM's **Welcoming Workshops** are something we think your congregation will love and benefit from. These day-long events will help congregations become more welcoming places, providing God's Word to both current members and guests. They offer practical resources on

having welcoming buildings, welcoming publications and welcoming people.

Register for one our **Engaging Your Community** (EYC) or **Engaging the Wandering** (ETW) events at lcms.org/rstm. These partner events offer practical resources and communication skills for reaching out to our wandering members and our communities with Christ's love. Contact your district or our office if you are interested in holding an event near you. We are currently scheduling for 2022!

In addition, pray for the **Making Disciples for Life** conferences and watch for information on a regional event coming near you!

