



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

May 19 – Webinar

"Preparing Your Grad for the Next Step"
with Rev. Marcus Zill, campus pastor at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Ariz. and former director of LCMS campus ministry and LCMS U
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

We Wish to See Jesus

"So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus'" (John 12:21).

According to several quotation sites on the internet, Johnny Cash once uttered something to the effect of, "anyone who really wants the truth ends up at Jesus." While I'm not a huge fan of the Man in Black, on this particular point he's not wrong. Jesus is truth, and He promised that through the work of the Holy Spirit we would be guided into all the truth. Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life is the focal point of our faith. So, when the Greeks approached Philip, they had a spot-on request!

People, whether they ask or even realize it, come to our churches to see Jesus. We train up our little ones, our youth and even our more seasoned folks so that they might always wish to see Jesus. Yet in the world and even sometimes within our own congregations there are myriad impediments to folks seeing Jesus. Sometimes these are self-imposed, sometimes they are not. Regardless, though, when folks arrive, we want them to see Jesus! In Word and Sacrament, we want them to see Him, touch and taste Him, be forgiven by Him and leave with Him.

It is good then that we as congregations take a look at our ministries, our buildings

and even our structures in order to determine if we are erecting impediments to folks seeing Jesus. Years ago when I was still in the seminary, we were invited to come worship at another congregation. We were to do so as if we were first time guests and didn't really know what was going on. The reason for this wasn't to be some clandestine secret shopper looking to infiltrate an errant group or even a type of undercover boss to call people on the carpet for bad practice. In fact, the goal of our time was to simply worship, and while we were worshipping to identify anything that might stand as an impediment to someone else who was doing the same. Some things we noted were easy fixes, such as the way bulletins and hymnals were distributed. Some things were a bit more difficult, such as signage pointing people in the right direction for that particular service. Yet all of these things were good to observe so that nothing would get in the way of the real reason we were there, to "see Jesus." Therefore, I encourage you this spring to engage in a bit of spring cleaning of sorts, and take a look at those things which might be an impediment for some who might come into our midst to "see Jesus."



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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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Thriving members: Remember that RSTM is eligible for Thriving Choice Dollars!

THIS MONTH'S WEBINAR:

Preparing Your Grad for the Next Steps

Questions about what to do following high school can be rather daunting. After years of simply getting up and going to school, suddenly a teenager is faced with the realization that things will no longer be the same, and a whole host of questions: What do I want to do with my life? Do I want to go to college? If so, where? And most importantly, why? What if I don't want to go to college? What other paths are there?

On top of the "college" question, young people also need to learn how to be independent as they transition out of the nest to life in a culturally "woke" world that is increasingly hostile to their Christian faith. This can be especially tough for those who have grown up in a small, tight-knit community. Whether they go to college or not, they will face many challenges and temptations as they seek not only to find their way and make education and career choices, but also, most importantly, to keep their faith, and hopefully find a God-pleasing spouse.

Simply put, there is no transition that takes place in one's life that is more critical than the one between the last two years of high school and the first few years following high school. Join us for some straight talk about this "great" transition



as we explore how we can help our young people discover or prepare for:

- 1) The joy of life-long learning;
- 2) The gift of God-pleasing work;
- 3) The decision to go, or not to go, to college; and
- 4) Preparing for college and beyond!

How can parents and congregations help best prepare their youth to take these "Next Steps"? Please join the Rev. Marcus Zill to learn more about how to prepare your high school graduates for their "Next Steps" on May 19 from 1 p.m.–2 p.m. Central time.

Pastor Zill has over 25 years' experience in full-time campus ministry and has served as the director LCMS Campus Ministry and LCMS U. He currently is serving as a campus pastor at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

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 **Preparing Your Grad for the Next Step** on May 19, followed by **Making Disciples for Life Resource Center** on Oct. 13. 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!