

REACHING RURAL AMERICA FOR CHRIST



“... 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*



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 13 – Webinar

“Witness & Outreach Resources”
with the Rev. Dr. Mark Wood, director
of LCMS Witness & Outreach Ministry
1–2 p.m. CST

July 25 – Webinar

“Active Stewardship in the Rural Parish”
with the Rev. Heath Curtis, coordinator
of LCMS Stewardship Ministry
1–2 p.m. CST

Nov. 14–16

RSTM National Conference
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-
Minneapolis South, Minneapolis
lcms.org/rstm/conference

STRONG FAITH, FERVENT LOVE

Trusting God’s Plans

“**Y**ou are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14–16).

Just a short year ago I quoted myself from an earlier newsletter, where I wrote: “Change ... it’s a tough word that carries a lot of baggage. Many, if not most, people have an innate dislike of the idea of change. ‘Can’t we just keep things the way they are?’ ‘It’s worked this long hasn’t it?’ ‘We’ve never done it that way before.’” Now, another year later, I find myself writing about change once again.

This time, though, it’s change of a different sort. Some of you might have heard already, but for those who haven’t, I have taken a call to serve as pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Madison, Neb. This transition was certainly not one I was seeking out. I have been quite in awe of the wonderful opportunities the Lord has given us at LCMS RSTM to support and assist rural and small-town congregations throughout our Synod. However, the Lord of the Church had a different plan in mind. So, after much prayer and deliberation, I decided to accept the call. Not because I was done serving with RSTM, but because I truly believe that the Lord was calling me to also serve the saints at Trinity and the broader community of Madison. My answer had to be, “Here am I, send me.” But my service with RSTM isn’t finished. Thanks be to God, He uses us as He sees fit to serve His Church. Therefore, I will continue (although on a more limited basis) to serve rural and small-town congregations throughout the LCMS through the work of RSTM. While scheduling might be a little more challenging, our commitment to support and encourage and to provide resources and ideas will not be compromised.



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What's New in Witness & Outreach?

by Rev. Dr. Mark Wood,
director of LCMS Witness & Outreach Ministry

When it comes to Witness & Outreach, there is nothing new under the sun. (Actually, according to Eccl. 1:9, that's true of everything!) But there are trends in the current work of sharing the Gospel that we should pay attention to.

A recent report from Barna Research, "Reviving Evangelism," highlights the importance of sharing the faith in the context of relationships. While this is not new, it shows that some of the ways we share the Good News of Jesus are not well received by people in our culture. Nonchurched people even find some of our traditional evangelism approaches offensive or off-putting. Worse than that, Barna reports that negative experiences of "depersonalized methods of sharing faith ... significantly depress openness to exploring questions of faith."

What's the takeaway from this report? We need to consider how nonchurched people prefer to discuss matters of faith and spirituality. There are a lot of lost people who are open to discussing spiritual matters. Although 49 percent of people who say that spiritual matters are unimportant to them are not open to any form of evangelism, 27 percent of them are willing to have a "casual, one-on-one conversation" about faith.

Unfortunately, evangelism that gets this personal is not something we have always emphasized in the past. This has left us unprepared for evangelism in our current context. But there is good news. The Synod's evangelism program, *Every One His Witness*®, is designed to equip Lutherans to be witnesses of Jesus to the people in their everyday lives. The LASSIE (Listen-Ask-Seek-Share-Invite-Encourage) approach of *Every One His Witness* is focused on intentionally engaging non-churched people in "casual, one-on-one conversations" about faith.

Everything that a congregation or group needs to conduct the basic *Every One His Witness* workshop is available as a low-cost kit from Concordia Publishing



"Every One His Witness is focused on intentionally engaging nonchurched people in 'casual, one-on-one conversations' about faith."

House. Since their release in September 2017, over 900 workshop kits have been distributed. Additional materials for witnessing to people in specific contexts (e.g., witnessing to Mormons, Muslims or adult children who have left the church) are available to workshop participants at no cost through the Synod's *Every One His Witness* website.

Every One His Witness isn't really new — it's a renewed effort to equip God's people to speak about Jesus as they go about their everyday lives, in a way to which the lost will really listen. By God's grace, that listening may lead to the Holy Spirit working faith in those who hear the Gospel. When and where He does, people are made new!

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So I can now say with even more conviction that I look forward to serving you in this "new" capacity, with the added insight I will gain from riding in my own rural and small-town mission saddle once again. My family and I would be most appreciative of your prayers during our time of transition. I look forward to seeing how the Lord will bless the mission in Madison, Neb., and our mission together in LCMS RSTM. Amy Gerdts, who you surely know if you have worked with us in the past, will continue to "hold down the fort" for RSTM by providing coordination, presentations and resource production just as she has in the past. We look forward to continuing our work with you!

Pastor Todd Kollbaum



The LCMS 2019 National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference will be held Nov. 14–16 in Minneapolis at the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-Minneapolis South.

We hope you'll join us by registering now and reserving your spot! This conference is meant for anyone living in, serving or interested in rural or small-town areas, with topics and resources specifically suited for this unique mission field.

Breakout topics include mental health, dealing with addictions, young adults in ministry, bi-vocational pastors, stewardship, community engagement, partnering with LERT, online education and many other topics affecting our rural and small-town congregations. Don't forget that there will be a special track for Youth Ministry again this year, led by youth peer leaders and specially meant for your youth to join you. This option will have a limited number of seats and will require attendance in all six sessions.

Keynote speakers will include the Rev. Todd Kollbaum, director, LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission and the Rev. Dr. Harold L. Senkbeil, executive director for Spiritual Care, DOXOLOGY. The Rev. Robert Zagore, executive director, LCMS Office of National Mission, will lead the theme Bible study of the Conference.

There is something planned for everyone, from lay person to pastor, student to teacher! We encourage you to bring your whole family to spend a few days together! Enjoy the Mall of America and take advantage of the special family rates that include access to all conference activities.

RSTM Apparel

This year we will have a theme t-shirt in addition to our standard apparel. These will be available in:

- Blue, short sleeve, youth-adult S–XL \$8 each (2XL \$10, 3XL \$14, 4XL \$16)
- Blue, long sleeve, youth-adult S–XL \$10.50 (2XL \$12.50, 3XL \$14.50, 4XL \$16.50)

Also available are men's and women's polos:

- Gray or white, S–XL \$19 each; 2XL–6XL \$21 each

Order online when registering or by contacting our office by Oct. 15 and you can pick up your shirt at the conference.

Registration

Adult registration for the conference is \$225/person and includes all plenary and breakout sessions and materials, Thursday dinner, Friday lunch and dinner and more. See our full form for special rates for youth, students, families, couples, meals only and groups.

Hotel reservations must be made separately from conference registration. The Doubletree is offering a rate for our group of \$100/single or double room plus applicable taxes, which includes one breakfast buffet per day per person (based on room occupancy), complimentary self-parking, and complimentary airport and Mall of America shuttles. Contact our office with any questions. More information and online registration can be found at lcms.org/rstm/conference.



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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 Amy Gerdts at the RSTM office.

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How to Subscribe

To subscribe to *Reaching Rural America for Christ*, contact Amy Gerdts at the RSTM office by calling 888-463-5127 or sending an email to amy.gerds@lcms.org.

Support This Work

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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Upcoming RSTM Events

Don't forget Rural & Small Town Mission provides free monthly webinars on topics important to congregations in town and country settings. Up next is “**Witness & Outreach Resources**” on June 13, followed by “**Active Stewardship in the Rural Parish**” on July 25. Find past webinars in our archive.

Register for one of 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.

Register now! The 2019 National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference, “Running With Endurance: Eyes Fixed On Jesus”, will be Nov.14–16 in Minneapolis. Watch for updates and more information at lcms.org/rstm/conference.

For more information about our events or to see the rest of our calendar, visit lcms.org/rstm or contact our office at 888-463-5127 or rstm@lcms.org.

