



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

Dec. 12 – Webinar

"Always Prepared to Give Reason for Your Hope"

with the Rev. Craig Niemeier, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Worms, Neb.
1–2 p.m. CST

Jan. 9–12

Making Disciples for Life Initial Gathering
LCMS International Center, St. Louis
lcms.org/making-disciples-gathering

Jan. 16 – Webinar

"LCMS Rural and Small-Town Church Dynamics"

with the Rev. Todd Kollbaum, LCMS RSTM director, and Amy Gerdts, associate director of Communications, Lutheran Bible Translators
1–2 p.m. CST

Feb. 13 – Webinar

"Rural and Small-Town Disaster Response"

with the Rev. James Daub, pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Havelock, N.C.
1–2 p.m. CST

Eyes Fixed on Jesus

Over 150 pastors and lay leaders gathered Nov. 14–16 at the Doubletree by Hilton Bloomington-Minneapolis South in Minneapolis, Minn., for the 2019 National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference.

The Rev. Dr. Keith Schweitzer, a dual-parish pastor in Iowa who also serves as a substitute teacher, attended the conference for the sixth time and presented for the first time. He was just one of many congregational leaders from coast to coast who were in attendance. Over the course of three days, the attendees were impacted by inspirational plenary speakers, practical sectionals, time together in worship and Bible study, and time for attendees to encourage and support each other. In the words of Jocelyn Benson, exhibitor and presenter, Wittenberg Academy, "Having attended every single RSTM National conference (since Storm Lake, Ia.) and being in a small town, small congregation myself, I wish everyone knew just how vital and worthwhile this conference is!" And first-time attendee, Rev. Armand Boehme shares the same sentiment when he said, "You have no idea how delightfully refreshing this is!"

In keeping with the theme of "Running with Endurance: Eyes Fixed On Jesus," those in attendance considered topics such as: seeking Christ's presence in rural and small-town areas, the pastor and congregation's role together and within the community, and carrying out ministry with patient perseverance in an impatient world. The Rev. Robert Zagore led the theme Bible study (Heb. 12:1b–2a) for the conference, sharing how God trains and equips us to joyfully endure in whatever setting God gives us. The Rev. Todd Kollbaum opened and closed the conference with meditations on the blessings of faithful endurance in rural and small-town ministry and a reminder to stay focused on Jesus in all we do. The Rev. Dr. Harold Senkbeil discussed faithfully engaging our world without shrinking from the current challenges, and how we can bring healing to the broken by providing a positive, hopeful witness. In addition, participants were able to choose from breakout topics such as dealing with addictions, mental health, bi-vocational pastors, stewardship, community engagement, youth ministry and more.

On the heels of this wonderful conference, plans are being made for RSTM to join in the new *Making Disciples for Life* conferences. The first will be held Jan. 9–12 in St. Louis. Make plans to join us!

Thank you to all who attended the 2019 national conference! To keep up to date with 2020 events, go to lcms.org/rstm or contact the RSTM office by emailing rstm@lcms.org or by calling 888-463-5127.



The Rev. Robert Zagore, executive director, LCMS Office of National Mission, leads the "Eyes Fixed On Jesus" Bible study.

One for the Books

LOOKING BACK ON THE RSTM 2019 NATIONAL CONFERENCE



^ The Rev. Todd Kollbaum and Amy Gerdtz, of LCMS RSTM, shared about rural and small-town church dynamics.

◀ Breakout sessions offered many opportunities for learning in smaller group settings.

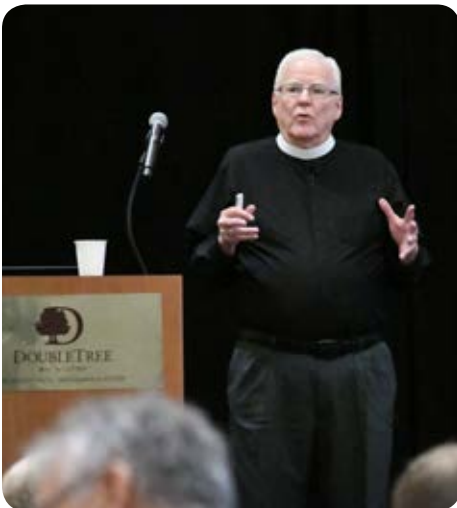
Social hour and fellowship were highlights!



The Evening Roundtable time allowed participants to share ideas about what works and to seek help with problems.



The Rev. Dr. Harold Senkbeil opened eyes and provided encouragement during the "For Such a Time As This" plenary session.



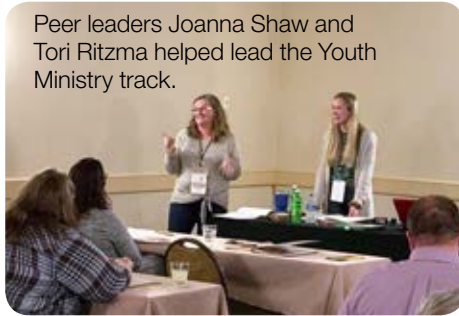
^ Exhibitor Bingo was lots of fun and offered participants opportunities to win fabulous prizes ... including a \$200 gift certificate from Thrivent!



◀ The Rev. Dr. Mark Wood shared about the *Making Disciples for Life* program during the banquet Friday evening.



⤴ Bi-vocational ministry, led by the Rev. Troy Neujahr, was one emphasis of the conference.



Peer leaders Joanna Shaw and Tori Ritzma helped lead the Youth Ministry track.



⤴ The conference was well-attended, and the food was excellent!



⤴ The plenary sessions were well-attended and received great feedback.



Rural & Small Town Mission

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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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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.

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

GIVE NOW

Thrivent members: *Remember that RSTM is eligible for Thrivent Choice Dollars!*



GOD'S BLESSINGS TO AMY GERDTS!

After serving as the coordinator for LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission (RSTM) since 2009, Amy Gerdts is joining Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT) as their Associate Director of Communications. Her last day with RSTM is Jan. 3, 2020. We pray for a smooth transition for Amy and blessings on the work of both RSTM and LBT going forward.



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

RSTM Events Update

2019 was another great year! As the year wraps up, we hope you'll look at the calendar of upcoming RSTM events to see if there is an event near you in 2020 or a resource you can use.

We'd like to invite everyone to join us online each month for the RSTM webinars. Up next is **"Always Prepared to Give Reason for Your Hope"** on Dec. 12, followed by **"LCMS Rural and Small-Town Church Dynamics"** on Jan. 16, 2020. Find past webinars in our archives.

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 training in communication skills, to better reach out to our wandering members and communities with Christ's love. Contact your district or the RSTM office if you are interested in holding an event near you.

RSTM's newest events, **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 will offer practical resources on Welcoming Buildings, Welcoming Publications and Welcoming People. Online registration is available for all these events.



We are in the process of scheduling events for 2020. Contact your district if you are interested in having an Engaging or Welcoming event come to your area. If you would like to know more about either of these events or how to register for an event, please contact RSTM at 888-463-5127.