

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

Oct. 10 – Webinar

"Moving Beyond Survival: DOXOLOGY and Your Church's Future" with the Rev. Dr. Harold Senkbeil, executive director for Spiritual Care, DOXOLOGY 1–2 p.m. CST

Oct. 12

Welcoming Workshop event Pipestone, Minn., with the LCMS Minnesota South District 8 a.m.–3 p.m. CST

Oct. 26

Engaging the Wandering (ETW) event Groton, S.D., with the LCMS South Dakota District 9:30 a.m.–3 p.m. CST

Oct. 27

Engaging the Wandering (ETW) event Hartford, S.D., with the LCMS South Dakota District 1–6 p.m. CST

Nov. 14–16

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

"... 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

Our Commitment to You

By the time you read this article, I will have been at my new post, serving as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Madison, Neb., for over two months. While change is often hard and sometimes a bit scary, I can confidently say that the Lord has blessed us in so many ways through this time of transition. However, any time there is change, folks often worry that things will change too much. They fear losing what they might need or depend on. To this end, I can also confidently state that we at LCMS RSTM remain committed to providing necessary resources and training so that the Gospel might be heard through the faithful ministries of our Synod's rural and small-town congregations. In fact, even in this short time, I have seen the blessing of "living out" so many of the things that RSTM supports and teaches. This direct parish experience will no doubt shape how RSTM moves forward into the future. Therefore, I wanted to assure you of our commitment to the rural and small-town congregations of the LCMS and to provide for you a glimpse of what we are all about:

LCMS RSTM supports and encourages rural and small-town congregations in engaging their communities and growing together in Christ through Word and Sacrament. We have been charged by the Synod in convention to: "Promote Mission Awareness, Support and Collaboration, and Coordination for Rural and Small Town Ministry" as well as "To Reaffirm Faithful Church Revitalization." We are committed to establishing partnerships, providing training and developing resources for that purpose.

Through the LCMS Office of National Mission we are committed to you, the congregations of the LCMS that are

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Moving Beyond Survival: DOXOLOGY and Your Church's Future

by the Rev. Dr. Harold Senkbeil, executive director for Spiritual Care, DOXOLOGY

Boom and bust has been the cycle of farmers for generations, as well as businesses in small towns that depend on farm customers. But lately it's been mostly "bust" and very little "boom." Plummeting commodity prices, rising expenses and international trade wars have all taken their toll on those who live and work in America's heartland. Combine that with the advent of factory farms and vanishing family farms, add in plunging birth rates and the exodus of rural youth, and that leaves the average congregation on the ropes numerically and financially. A whole lot of churches in rural and small-town America are in survival mode these days.

Have your members begun to look backward instead of forward? Have you adopted a survival mentality? Is there a lot of nostalgia for past "glory days" when you had a flourishing children's Sunday School and far fewer vacant pews than you see at worship these days? Is there a growing and nagging sense of shame that somehow you've failed the pioneer generations who founded your congregation?

DOXOLOGY would like to be the catalyst to help your church members take a fresh look at what can be a pretty deflating picture and find the possibilities hidden behind the challenges.

Besides our classic program for pastors, lay leaders and clergy couples, the break-out session in Minneapolis will give you a fuller picture of what we have to offer you. In broad strokes, here's what we have to offer your congregation:

1. We're no miracle workers; there's no magic wand or button you can push to make all your problems go away. There's only this promise of our Lord Jesus: "I will build my church."
2. We need to explore what Jesus' promise means in your specific location: What does Jesus mean by "church?" More importantly, how does He build His church?
3. What is a pastor? How can you as God's people join together to enhance your pastor's ministry in mission to an increasingly paganized culture?
4. Which invisible people groups have moved into your community since the days of the founding of your



congregation? Where do they live and work? How can you get to know them (and speak to them, if they converse in another language)?

5. What are the resources the Lord has given uniquely to you in this generation to reach out anew with His changeless Word?
6. Which aspects of our Lutheran theology connect well to a world in spiritual free-fall?
7. Which points of connection have you been given in your daily lives with those who do not know the Lord Jesus and His church?

8. How can you partner with sister congregations in your vicinity to better address the work the Lord has given you to do in our generation?

9. What can you do to encourage fellow members to live more deliberately as the family of God, lifting each other's burdens and multiplying personal joys?

Join me for the webinar "Moving Beyond Survival: DOXOLOGY and Your Church's Future" on October 10 at 1 p.m. CST, as we discuss these and other matters facing church leaders in these momentous times.



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Rural & Small Town Mission

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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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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!

Our Commitment to You, *continued from page 1*

blessed to serve in rural areas and small towns throughout our nation, doing the following work:

- Strengthening, renewing, revitalizing and transforming the congregations, schools and workers of the LCMS through the life of Christ crucified and risen in His means of grace;
- Strengthening faith by giving God's Word free course in our congregations and homes;
- Strengthening love by nurturing ministries of mercy flowing from the gifts received at font, pulpit and altar;
- Strengthening hope by encouraging partnerships in the Gospel that clearly confess Christ;
- Strengthening workers by fostering intentional care of body, soul and healthy relationships;
- Strengthening schools by championing renewed clarity and commitment to the mission of Lutheran education;
- Strengthening youth work by nurturing our young people within a community shaped by Lutheran values, such as devotion to the means of grace and vigorous service to the neighbor; and
- Strengthening congregations by fostering a faithful Lutheran approach to confessing Christ to the neighbor and to planting daughter congregations.

Pastor Todd Kollbaum

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 "Moving Beyond Survival: DOXOLOGY and Your Church's Future" on Oct. 10, followed by "Dealing with Addictions in Rural/Small-Town Areas" on Nov. 21. 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 for reaching out to our wandering members and communities with Christ's love. Contact your district or our office if you are interested in holding an event near you.

The LCMS South Dakota District will partner with RSTM to hold **two ETW events**, at St. John Lutheran Church, Groton, S.D., on Oct. 26, and Trinity Lutheran Church, Hartford, S.D., on Oct. 27. Online registration is available for ETW events.

RSTM is also rolling out a new type of event, **Welcoming Workshop**, that we think you and your congregation are going to love and benefit from. These day-long events will help congregations become more welcoming places that provide God's Word to both current members and guests. Expect practical resources on Welcoming Buildings, Welcoming Publications and Welcoming People. The first Welcoming Workshop is being held at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Pipestone, Minn., on Oct. 12, in partnership with the LCMS Minnesota South District.

Pray for the 2019 National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference, "Running With Endurance: Eyes Fixed On Jesus," Nov. 14–16 in Minneapolis at the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington–Minneapolis South.

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.