



# 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 14 – Webinar

"Counting Your Blessings: Hope for Rural and Small-Town Congregations"  
with the Rev. Todd Kollbaum, director, LCMS RSTM, and the Rev. Heath R. Curtis, coordinator, LCMS Stewardship Ministry  
1–2 p.m. CST

### June 18 – Webinar

"Opioid Abuse in Rural and Small-Town Settings"  
with the Rev. Dr. Steven Schave, director, LCMS Urban & Inner-City Mission  
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

# The "New Selfie" World

Several years ago, I wrote about what I called "selfie mentality" — how the mania around selfies and now all forms of self-aggrandizement over multiple social media platforms had brought about a rise in the demand for plastic surgery, especially among young people. It seems that placed under the microscope of the selfie and when comparing themselves to the filtered images of others, they found themselves dissatisfied with how they looked and how they presented themselves to others. So the natural conclusion to this problem was to undergo a superficial fix.



Fast forward a few years and we find ourselves in a very new normal. Pandemic self-isolation and the moratorium on hair stylists and barbers has brought a new "selfie" of the unkempt and non-shorn. Unfortunately, even in this "new selfie" world, we are still, as the name says, awfully self-absorbed.

This tendency tends to play out in our congregations as well. We want to make things look good so that people will see us and want to come and look more. It isn't a bad thing to want to look good. However, when we strive solely for the slickest online videos or coolest-looking graphics or we spend all of our time lamenting the fact that we don't have those things, we miss the point of our existence. We as God's children gathered into congregations have been called to go, to connect with those around us. To be sure, this has to look different the time being. But when all the dust clears, will we be ready? Will we be poised and ready to engage people in their new normal with the Good News

*(continued on page 3)*

# Hearing God's Calling

by the Rev. Heath R. Curtis

**S**trange days are upon us. Lockdowns. Stay-at-home orders. Travel shut down. Offices closed. Millions upon millions out of work. What should the church be doing right now? What should I be doing as an individual? Where do we start?

"We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world" (1 Tim. 6:7) — it all belongs to God. But the Lord has blessed us to be His stewards: He gives us gifts to be used for His purposes. But how do we know what those purposes are? God's purpose for us in our lives is expressed in the various vocations, or callings, that we have. That's all the more clear in a time of emergency: God makes each aspect of our lives "holy ground" by calling us to be His children.

A great treasure of the Lutheran Reformation was the rediscovery of the holy callings given to each Christian. In Luther's day, it was taught that the surest way to enter heaven was to leave the world and join a monastery. But in Luther's eyes, to do this was actually to abandon the holy callings ("vocations") that God has given us to fulfill in *the home, the church and society at large*. Each one of these vocations makes a claim upon us. Luther

laid out the biblical commands for our various vocations in the Table of Duties in the Small Catechism, and specifically the command for all Christians when it comes to stewardship in the church:

- > **1 Cor. 9:14:** "In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."
- > **Gal. 6:6-7:** "Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."

## In the Church

Our vocation as Christians in the church makes a claim on us: on our presence on Sunday morning (even now that that might only be online!) and on our support for the work of the Gospel. We find purpose here: We are called to use what God has placed in our trust for His high purpose of bringing salvation to all people.

## In the Home

Likewise, our callings in the home make a claim on us: again for presence and

support. So, for example, parents use their income to feed, clothe and protect their children, and they must be present with their children to actually raise them. Children are called to listen to their parents. Grandparents give support, love and wisdom. And so on — whatever your role in the home, God is calling you to a high purpose.

## In Society

In society at large our vocations are varied, but they all boil down to being a good neighbor no matter where we are. We work, we have friends, we help those in need. In each place, we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. That means being a faithful friend and worker, a kind and generous neighbor, etc. Once again, this role places a claim on our presence and our support and gives us a role to play in God's high purposes for the world.

God has called you to be His child. He has made your whole life "holy ground," whether in the church, the home, or in society at large. In each role He has given you, pray for wisdom and seek to fulfill His purposes in your use of the gifts He has given you.

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THE  
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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.

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

## The "New Selfie" World, continued

of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Will we be prepared to share the peace that comes from the freedom of being a sinful, imperfect creature made perfect by the blood of the Lamb?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have an opportunity to recapture that which we are called to be: light in the sin-darkened world. Both now through our virtual interactions and soon face to face, hand to hand, life to life. To that end, we are striving to help congregations be equipped for these transitions. We have a myriad of resources available: congregational self-assessment and strategic planning, worship resources, evangelism training resources, outreach to inactive member resources, all available in various forms and formats which could be utilized right now even though socially distanced for training and planning. In this issue you'll see some great insight into stewardship, and we also want to alert you to our upcoming joint RSTM/Stewardship webinar on May 14 which



has been planned to assist congregations in these times of transition. We hope you are able to join us!

**Pastor Todd Kollbaum**

## RSTM Events Update

**D**on't forget important to congregations in town and country settings. Up next is **Counting Your Blessings: Hope for Rural and Small-Town Congregations** on May 14, followed by **Opioid Abuse in Rural and Small-Town Settings** on June 18. Find past webinars in our archive. Watch for information on all our upcoming events!

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.

Register for one our **Engaging Your Community** (EYC) or **Engaging the Wandering** (ETW) events at [lcms.org/rstm](http://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 2020!

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

