



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 This Important Date

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 Keep Fighting the Good Fight

We've been going through an awful lot of change these days. Between restrictions and easing of restrictions, social distancing and re-entry, it's hard to know where we are supposed to go or which direction to turn. I recently read a story about an ice cream shop somewhere in the Northeast. The owner was excited to open his business again and customers responded resoundingly with long lines, eager to enjoy the sweet taste of freedom (and ice cream). However, what should have been a fun, joyful time turned ugly when the crowd grew impatient and upset that the lines were too long and the staff weren't moving things along quickly enough, even though they were maintaining the safety and cleanliness standards required of the day. As a result, one exemplary employee quit and the owner decided to shut down his business again. What a shame that the people reacted in such a way. But, to quote Jim Croce, "isn't that the way they say it goes." Sinful people act like sinful people and quickly return to their "old" ways when faced with not getting their way.

We in many churches all over the country are going to be faced with a very similar situation. Having been more or



less "closed" off from gathering face to face for months, many now are starting to ease back into a more "normal" worship life. Hopefully this will come with a resurgence in attendance, people hungry for what they haven't been able to get — maybe even some who have not availed themselves of corporate worship or haven't ever been connected to a church will come in an effort to connect themselves to something greater which brings hope and peace to a chaotic and lost world. There will be a hunger for the sweetness of the Gospel and our congregations are poised to dish that up profusely.

But, as time goes on, old habits will sneak back and worship and the study of

(continued on page 3)

We Are All Beggars by the Rev. Dr. Steven Schave

Once thought to only be a problem for large cities, the opioid epidemic has affected almost every family in America in some form or fashion. According to the USDA, between 1999 and 2015, drug overdose deaths in rural counties jumped by 325 percent as compared to 198 percent in metropolitan areas. Harvard University released a survey of rural Americans who identified drug addiction as the biggest challenge facing their communities. And, in 2017, two leading farm groups, the American Farm Bureau Federation and National Farmers Union, conducted a survey that found that nearly 50 percent of rural Americans, and 74 percent of farmers, have been directly impacted by opioid misuse. The USDA goes on to say that “in the face of these challenges, rural leaders are working hard in collaboration with government and private sector partners to improve SUD [substance-abuse disorder] outcomes while building strong and healthy rural communities.”

Because this is an issue that affects both body and soul, the church must find her place in making a difference. To emphasize the gravity of this epidemic, according to the CDC an average of 115 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose. In 2016, over 11 million Americans misused prescription opioids, nearly one million used heroin, and 2.1 million had an opioid-use disorder due to prescription opioids or heroin. In other words, addiction does not discriminate, and we are all susceptible even to homelessness if our social ties are weak and we lose everything. Two important factors for recovery are getting past the stigma of asking for help and getting people back to being productive citizens. Social enterprise and workforce development through the church help to fill the gap where hope of a second chance has been lost.

Fight Stigma

At a recent two-day seminar on addiction recovery in Washington, D.C., co-hosted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National League of Cities, the U.S. Surgeon General addressed the issue of stigma by using a personal example of his own brother who had been incarcerated for illegal drug use and had ongoing struggles with addiction. General Adams elaborated on his deci-



Resources

- › [usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rural-community-action-guide.pdf](https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rural-community-action-guide.pdf)
- › [wsj.com/articles/the-company-of-second-chances-11579928401](https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-company-of-second-chances-11579928401)
- › [sobergrid.com](https://www.sobergrid.com)
- › [hhs.gov/sites/default/files/hhs-partnership-ctr-opioid-practical-toolkit-unremediated.pdf](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/hhs-partnership-ctr-opioid-practical-toolkit-unremediated.pdf)

sion to tell that story, stating, “I share my family’s struggle to illustrate that addiction can happen to anyone — even the brother of the U.S. Surgeon General. By sharing my story, I hope to give others the courage to share theirs, so that together we can fight stigma.” He went on to say that the challenge for faith-based organizations who want to help addicts “is that they must make it more attractive for an addict to recover than to get high, because [recovery seems like] ... an impossible

dream. ... It is just easier to stay high when you are alienated from family and no one will hire you.”

Holistic Mercy

It is important then for faith-based organizations to have an immediate response to someone who has recently left a recovery center. This may involve transitional housing, an ongoing recovery program, and workforce/job readiness development.

Otherwise it can become a vicious cycle of hopelessness: They can’t get a job because of circumstance, while they can’t change their circumstance due to unemployment. To overcome addiction is a deeply physical and spiritual matter, and faith-based organizations alone can transform the heart and soul.

The church has historically offered emergency aid for shelter/clothing/food, but to offer holistic mercy with dignity requires job readiness education and employment opportunities. This is a new, more enterprising approach to mercy work in the church. And it must be sustained for the long haul. Healing requires getting into the muck and mire, dealing with major setbacks and failures, being both wise and merciful. But ultimately it requires caring for those who have fallen into addiction. You can get people to come and serve their neighbors, but caring goes further. To get people to care requires helping them put themselves in others’ shoes, to see that the other person

is the apple of God’s eye. We must recognize that before God we are all habitual sinners, we are all beggars, we all fear, love and trust in our false idols with an evil that may eventually possess our body and souls. So we see in the lost and the broken our fellow man, our neighbor, one whom God loved so much that He would send His one and only Son. And we, too, daily fix our eyes upon the cross to stand in awe of this amazing grace.



THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
Missouri Synod

Rural & Small Town Mission

Reaching Rural America for Christ is published monthly by LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission.

Reaching Rural America for Christ may be reprinted with acknowledgment given to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

© 2020 LCMS

Staff

Rev. Todd Kollbaum

Director, LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission, and pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Madison, Neb.

Chrissy Thomas

Designer

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.

LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission
205 S. Main, P.O. Box 719
Concordia, MO 64020

888-463-5127
rstm@lcms.org
lcms.org/rstm
📍 [lcmsrstm](https://www.facebook.com/lcmsrstm)

How to Subscribe

To subscribe to *Reaching Rural America for Christ*, contact the RSTM office by calling 888-463-5127 or sending an email to rstm@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.

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

GIVE NOW

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

Keep Fighting the Good Fight, continued

God's Word will take a back seat as things return to normal. As God's church, His workmanship, we are in the perfect position to remind folks that this need not be the case. Paul put it this way in his second letter to Timothy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul reminds us that here we have no lasting prize, but the Lord calls

us to keep our eyes fixed on that which is of true value, our crown of righteousness! He has called and equipped us as His redeemed to fight this good fight and finish the race, no matter how the race looks or where the road takes us. The race has seemed very strange of late, but the prize is no less amazing. May the Lord of the church continue to equip you in every good work that we might continue as His church to fight that good fight!

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 **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. 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!

