



A newsletter of LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission

# 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

### Sept. 26 – Webinar

“Church Reflections”  
with the Rev. Benjamin Meyer, Hope  
Lutheran Church, Sunbury, Ohio  
1–2 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](https://lcms.org/rstm/conference)

## STRONG FAITH, FERVENT LOVE

# Marked by a Living Hope

**B**y the time this article makes its way to you, I will have been installed and serving with the saints in Madison, Neb., for a whole month. While this reality is still a way off as I write this, I am confident that the Lord’s hand is and will be with me in my ministry and with you in yours as well! It’s at times like this that I often turn to 1 Peter 1:3 where we are reminded, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Several years ago, as I was early in my journey with RSTM, I wrote about this passage: “While I’m not one to say, ‘This is my favorite passage in Scripture,’ if I were hard pressed, 1 Peter 1:3 would certainly make the list. What joy it is to know that we are able to praise our God regardless of the circumstances because we have been given new life in Jesus Christ. This is phenomenal news, yet even better is knowing that this new life is marked by a ‘living hope.’

While we may find ourselves in terrible straits in this worldly sojourn (‘though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials’), we can without fail rejoice ‘with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,’ for in Christ we have obtained the outcome of our faith, ‘the salvation of your souls.’ Even when things seem beyond what we can take, when our ministry appears to be difficult at best, futile at worst, our Savior Jesus lives, and because He lives our hope is not lost but lives in Him ... ‘and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us’ (Rom. 5:5).”

Thanks be to God, His Word remains steadfast, even when the circumstances of our life change according to His good and gracious will. May we always remember this truth *for us*, and may God bless you in whatever stage of ministry you are in now!

**Pastor Todd Kollbaum**



# Church Reflections

by Rev. Benjamin Meyer, Hope Lutheran Church, Sunbury, Ohio

**“Check the Mirror, Pastor** — After Five Years, Your Church Looks Like You.” This was the headline of an article that caused me to stop and reflect. If it’s true that after five years the congregation I serve will look a lot like me, is that a good thing or a bad thing?

If congregations begin to reflect their pastor over time, it might lead the pastor to think about what he should do to shape his congregation. The pastor will be tempted to think about how *he* can and should shape it: *How can I make my congregation enthusiastic for evangelism? How can I make my congregation take the Word of God seriously and want to study it? How can I shape my congregation to make an impact in our community?*

But if those are the first questions the pastor asks, his focus is in the wrong

place. When I first read that headline and the accompanying article, the reality that my congregation would reflect me as a pastor felt like a heavy burden to bear. *Do I really want my congregation to look like ... me?* To paraphrase St. Paul, *Do I really want my congregation to look like the chief of sinners?*

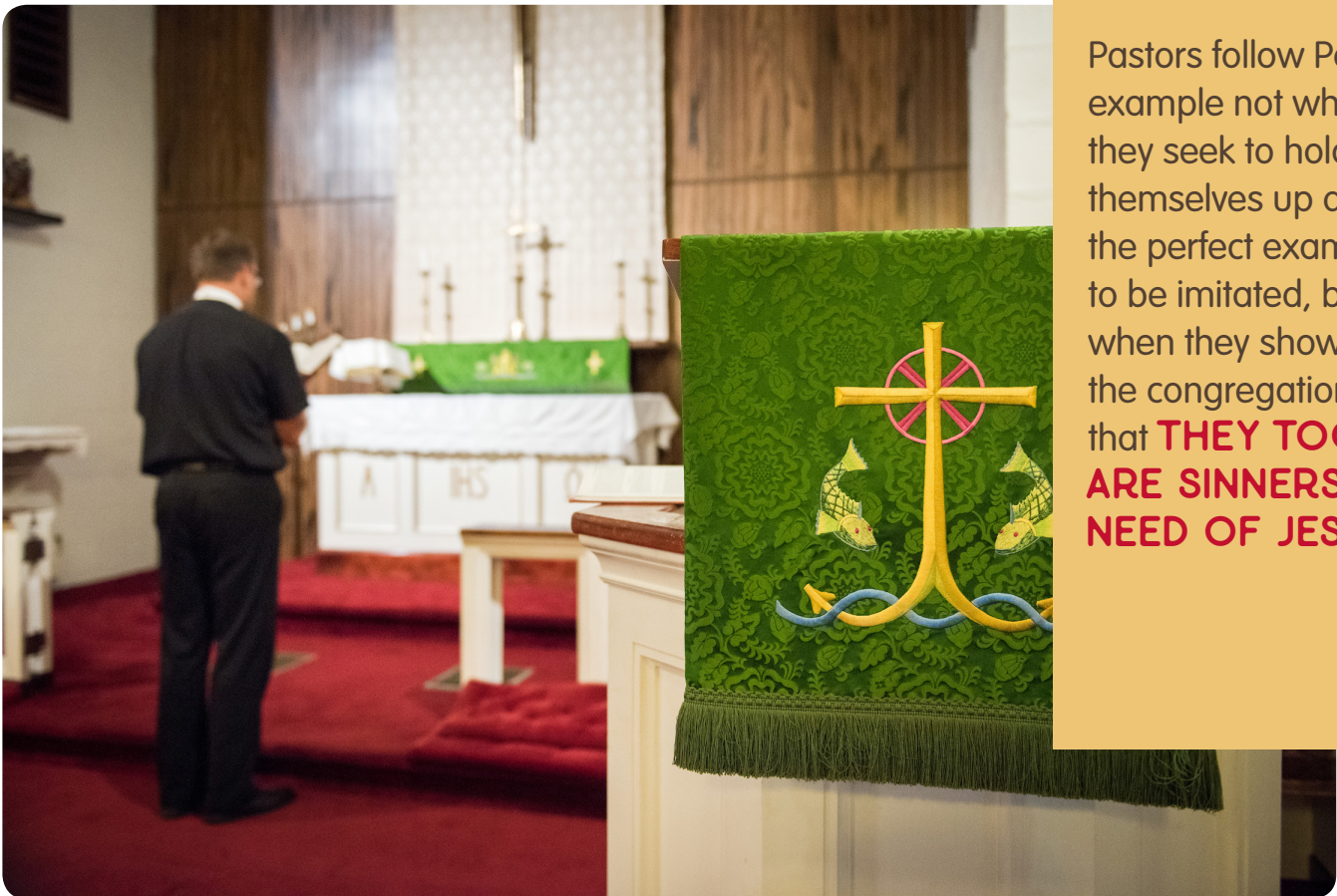
And yet, St. Paul also wrote in 1 Cor. 11:1, “*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*” How can Paul claim to be the chief of sinners and yet say, “be imitators of me”? How can a pastor do the same?

In short, Paul wasn’t seeking to have the focus on him, but on Christ. He understood that the example he set would impact how those to whom he was ministering would see Christ. By speaking of himself as the chief of sinners and as the least of the apostles, Paul modeled

the reality of the need for Christ and His forgiveness.

Pastors follow Paul’s example not when they seek to hold themselves up as the perfect example to be imitated, but when they show the congregation that they too are sinners in need of Jesus. By spending time in God’s Word on a daily basis, devoting time to prayer, forgiving and seeking forgiveness quickly, valuing and hungering for the Lord’s Supper, and being honest about their weaknesses, pastors model the very things they want to see in the flock they serve.

There’s much more to discuss concerning this topic, but I think it starts with pastors echoing the words of John the Baptist: “*He must increase, but I must decrease*” (John 3:30).



Pastors follow Paul’s example not when they seek to hold themselves up as the perfect example to be imitated, but when they show the congregation that **THEY TOO ARE SINNERS IN NEED OF JESUS.**





## EARLY REGISTRATION OPEN UNTIL SEPT. 1!

**The 2019 National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference** will be held Nov. 14–16 in Minneapolis, Minn., at the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-Minneapolis South. Registrations made after Sept. 1 are available but at an increased rate. Register before Sept. 1 for the early registration rate!

### Guest Speakers

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.

### Sessions

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 dealing with addictions, mental health, bi-vocational pastors and partnering with LERT. Returning this year will be a special track for Youth Ministry, led by youth peer leaders and designed for your youth to join us as well. This option has a limited number of seats and requires attendance at all six sessions.

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. Plus, you can earn Continuing Education credits through Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

### Registration

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

### Lodging

Hotel reservations must be made separately from conference registration. The Doubletree is offering a rate for our group of \$100/single or double plus applicable taxes. This includes complimentary breakfast buffet, self-parking, and airport and Mall of America shuttles. Be sure to ask for the LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission Conference special rate. The deadline for hotel reservations is Sept. 30, but we have filled our hotel block the past few years, so don't delay. More information and online registration can be found at [lcms.org/rstm/conference](http://lcms.org/rstm/conference).

### Shirt Orders

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

Theme t-shirts:

- 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)

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.



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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 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.gerdts@lcms.org](mailto:amy.gerdts@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!

## Upcoming RSTM Events

**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 **“Church Reflections”** with the Rev. Benjamin Meyer on Sept. 26, followed by **“Moving Beyond Survival: DOXOLOGY and Your Church's Future”** with the Rev. Dr. Harold Senkbeil on Oct. 10. Find past webinars in our archive.

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

RSTM is also rolling out a new type of event, **Welcoming**, that we think you and your congregation are going to love and benefit from! We will address the little known “brain gain” of rural and small-town communities. These day-long events will help congregations to be more welcoming places that provide God's Word to both current members and guests. They are also great opportunities for leadership and volunteer training.

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

