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

Oct. 15 – Webinar
“Technology and the Church in Rural and Small-Town Areas”
with Matthew Bergholt, coordinator of LCMS School Ministry
1–2 p.m. CST

Nov. 19 – Webinar
“Congregational Partnership Training”
with Rev. Todd Kolibaum, director of LCMS Rural & Small-Town Mission
1–2 p.m. CST

December 10 – Webinar
“Deaconesses and the Rural and Small-Town Congregation: Partnership and Ministry Models”
with Deaconess Faith Swenson of Fairbank, Iowa
1–2 p.m. CST

STRONG FAITH, FERVENT LOVE

A Season for Everything

In these days of COVID-19, opening up and shutting back down, keeping track of where we are and where we are going, can be quite tricky. One thing that has been a blessing (and let’s be honest, sometimes a curse) during this time is technology. I can’t imagine how we would have fared through these pandemic days if we didn’t have technology. So many people had to become instant Zoom, social media, Facebook and livestreaming experts just to have some semblance of gathering and a way to reach out to the hurting and scared with the salve of the Gospel.

Now that things are opening up a bit (at least in some parts of the nation), what are we to do with all this tech? How can we use it as a blessing to our ministries and not just dump it to the side or allow it to supplant our gathering together as we are called to do?

First of all, we must discern what is best and most beneficial for our ministry. So often what we do out of necessity becomes (continued on page 3)
**Technology and the Church in Rural and Small-Town Settings**

*by Matthew Bergholt*

**IF I WERE TO MAKE AN EDUCATED GUESS, I would say that over the course of the past eight months you either invested in some sort of technology for your congregation or, at the very least, thought about doing so. Regardless of your situation or location, the current ministry environment in which we find ourselves has impacted the way technology is used in churches both large and small.**

So what does that mean for a rural or small-town church? In many ways, these churches are in a unique situation in that small changes can have a large impact on continuing their mission in uncertain times. To be honest, the “small church” is ideally situated to integrate new technologies such as online streaming, an impactful social media presence or a “drive-in” worship service, and many of you did. However, that was all about reacting to the “right now.” What does it look like to be proactive in planning for the eventual end of COVID-19 and entry into the “new normal” of ministry when it comes to technology? Whether you already invested in technology or are planning to do so in the coming months, as you move forward it is important to focus on a few key best practices of technology integration and application in the church:

1. **Before looking at a specific technology, you have to start with the question of “what are we attempting to accomplish?” Leave technology out of the discussion at the beginning and focus on the objective. Once you have that established, then it is time to determine the technology that can accomplish the objective. Putting the cart before the horse in choosing a technology first and then fitting it to the mission often fails, as there was no thought put into the “why” of purchasing or integrating a new technology.**

2. **Do not be afraid that making a change through the use of technology will automatically drive members away from your church. In reality it is not the technology itself, but the manner in which the technology is implemented and communicated to the congregation, that will affect your members. More often than not your members will get behind a change if they understand and can internalize the reason for it, especially if they see it as beneficial for spreading the Gospel.**

3. **Regardless of where you are, what your comfort level is, where you “want to go” or where you end up, the most important thing to remember is to keep moving. Understanding this will help alleviate some of the “scramble to catch up” that we all experienced just a few short months ago and will better equip you to spread the Word.**

*Top: Peter Frank manages the livestream as the Rev. Wayne Huebner leads worship at Salem Lutheran Church, Affton, Mo.*

*Left: Bible class is led remotely as part of the deaf ministry program in 2019 at First Trinity Evangelical–Lutheran Church, Pittsburgh.*

PHOTOS: LCMS/ERIC M. LUNSFORD
A Season for Everything, continued

what we continue as the norm. Instead, as restrictions are lifted, let’s be certain that we are making informed decisions about what we continue and what we don’t. Let’s also consider the volume and content of our media usage. Perhaps it would be better, rather than having everything available online, to have select online content point toward our in-person gatherings. It’s also important for congregations to have a plan in place in the event that in-person gatherings become more or less limited over time. We must be poised to operate in the best way possible depending on the scenario.

While every congregation will have different answers to these questions, the important thing is that we are asking them.

In this edition of our newsletter and in the near future, we will have some information on some preferred methods and good guidance for use of technology in various ministry settings. If you are struggling with these issues, please take advantage of these resources and don’t hesitate to reach out to us for assistance.

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 Technology and the Church in Rural and Small-Town Areas on Oct. 15, followed by Congregational Partnership Training on Nov. 19. 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 offer practical resources on having welcoming buildings, welcoming publications and welcoming people.

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 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!