



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

May 13 – Webinar

“Leadership Through Conflict”

with Rev. Mike Moreno (PMHP/PMSW),
mental health and marriage counselor
1–2 p.m. CST

June 24 – Webinar

“Youth Ministry in the Age of COVID-19”

with Rev. Mark Kiessling, director of
LCMS Youth Ministry
1–2 p.m. CST

July 22 – Webinar

“Schools Overview”

with Dr. Rebecca Schmidt, associate
director of LCMS School Ministry
1–2 p.m. CST



STRONG FAITH, FERVENT LOVE

After the Easter Rush

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (Is. 52:7).

As I write to you this article, I am sitting in my study prepping and preparing for Palm Sunday to kick off Holy Week and ultimately our Easter celebration. The more I prep, the more I remember just a year ago doing this same thing but trying to figure out how we could celebrate without anyone here in our church. The lockdowns were in full force and what and how things were going to happen was seriously up in the air. What has been amazing to me is to see the way so many congregations, leaders, pastors and members stepped up, adapted and overcame these adversities. Some a bit slower than others, but still they all strove to make sure the Word of God was delivered to the people. Now, a year or so later, as things are still morphing — opening up in some places, staying closed in others — I would encourage you to take the time to evaluate where you are and where you are going. It has been a tough and crazy



year full of challenges and changes. Now would be a great time to sit down with the leadership and laity of your congregation and take a good hard look at where you have been and do some planning regarding where you are going.

I realize that this might be a daunting task, especially since everyone has been wearied over the past year. And after a busy Easter season, it might be tempting to just sit back and coast a bit. The problem is, as busy schedules fill up and routines set back in, it becomes easier and

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Compassion Fatigue:

Serving Our Lord Faithfully Without Burning Out

by Rev. Rick Marrs, M.Div., Ph.D., licensed psychologist

P sychologists have been studying “occupational burnout” since the 1970s and “compassion fatigue” (also called secondary traumatic stress) since the 1990s. Many people whose vocations are in the “helping professions” are prone to experiencing compassion fatigue or burnout, which results from repeatedly listening to and helping others through their illnesses, including mental disorders, traumas and disasters. Church leaders, both professional and lay, can also be susceptible to compassion fatigue.

Our Lord calls upon us to have compassion for others, to comfort others with the Gospel of Christ, as in 2 Corinthians 1:3–6:

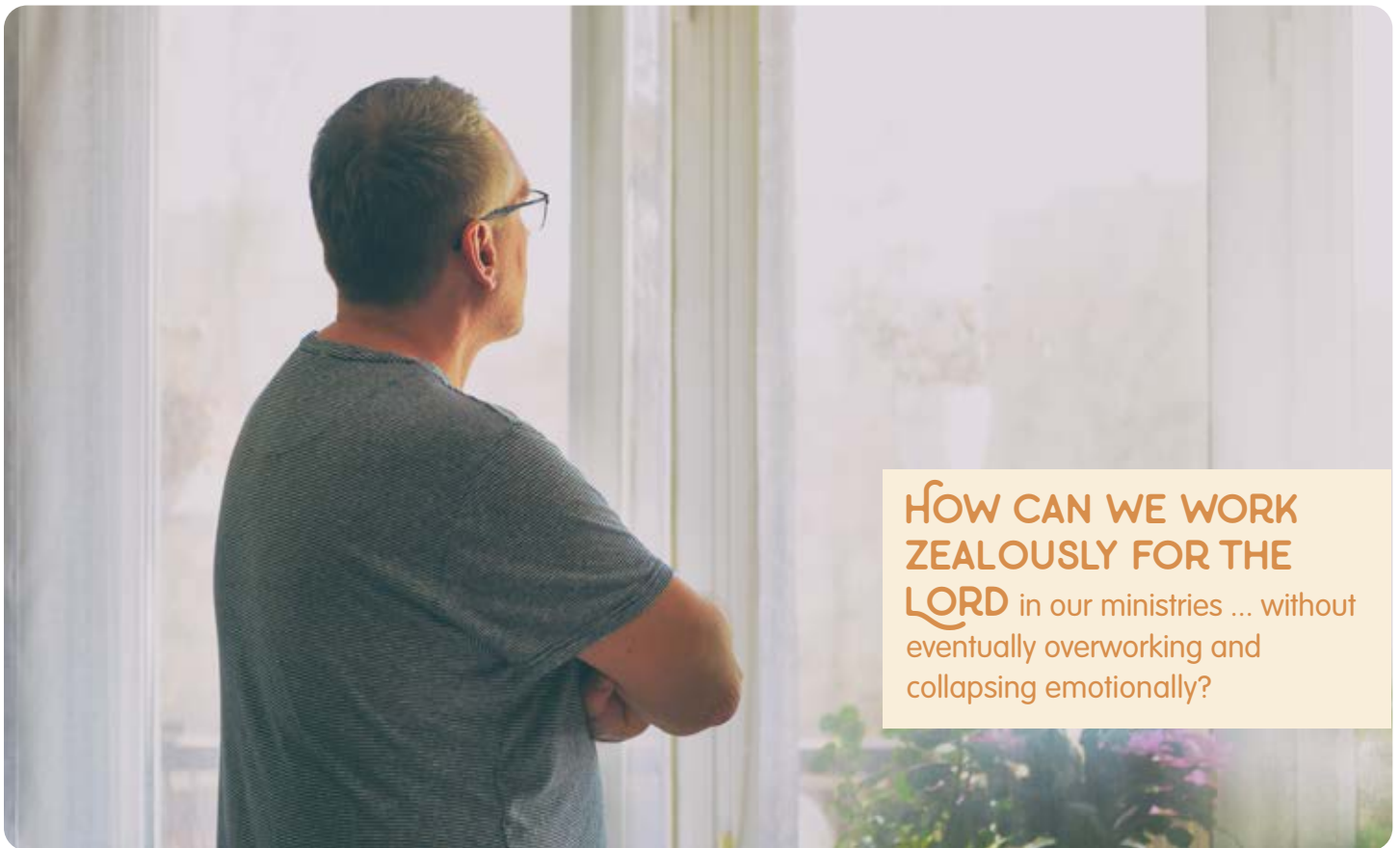
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies

and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

Paul uses the word “comfort” (the Greek words are *parakaleo* or *paraklete*) 10 times in just four verses! How can we comfort others with this Gospel, while still avoiding compassion fatigue within ourselves? How can we do the “good works ... God prepared beforehand, that

we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10) while avoiding the temptation to work harder and longer until we collapse physically? How can we work zealously for the Lord in our ministries, empowered by the Gospel, without eventually overworking and collapsing emotionally?

We are creatures, God’s creatures. But creatures have limits. In this webinar we will explore God’s Word about the comfort we receive in the Gospel, our own creatureliness and the limits that we have, and the areas of well-being with which our Lord Jesus has gifted us. We will discuss how our individualistic culture, rather than the Spirit, is often the driver for our earthly definitions of success. But as we value our gifts from our Lord, we can better balance all these blessings and not unwittingly succumb to compassion fatigue.



HOW CAN WE WORK ZEALOUSLY FOR THE LORD in our ministries ... without eventually overworking and collapsing emotionally?

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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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easier for congregations to slide back into their old self-interested habits. As things begin to look more “normal,” the temptation to “do things like we always have” may be more than just a temptation. It may become the norm. Instead of doing that, it would be of great advantage to plan and strategize about how you are now best being equipped by the Lord to carry out mission and ministry where you are at this time and in this setting.

Remember this about strategic planning, from a previous RSTM newsletter:

I would say that we are not being the best stewards we can be if we don't engage in at least a minimal amount of strategic planning. As Luther says in his Small Catechism explanation to the First Article of the Apostle's Creed, God gives us “our reason and all our senses.” It is indeed then good, right and salutary to use these good gifts in service to our various ministries.

As I stated before, we improve our stewardship of those resources God grants to us when we focus our attention on what it is that God has equipped



and called us to do. We waste a lot of effort and precious resources when we leave our work to chance or take a haphazard, helter-skelter approach. Yet, when we engage in strategic planning we are able to focus our attention on what is truly important. We can allocate resources to those endeavors which are in line with what we perceive as that which God has enabled us to accomplish. Strategic planning doesn't just allow us to best use resources but also equips us to most efficiently utilize the time and talents of our members as they serve His church. When there is a plan and a method, and people are educated on expectations and requirements, they are far more apt to agree to serve and will likely to a far better job.

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 **Leadership Through Conflict** on May 13, followed by **Youth Ministry in the Age of COVID-19** on June 24. Find past webinars in our archive. Watch for information on all our upcoming events!

RSTM's **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 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 2021!

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