

Regional Youth Partnerships

“not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Heb. 10:25).

A recent article in *Reporter* highlighted the importance of relationships when working with youth.

Western Kansas churches have been providing opportunities for collaborative youth events, with the hope of creating stronger friendships and stronger faith among the participants, for over 40 years.

One such event is the winter Confirmation Retreat, hosted by Circuits 15 and 16, which draws participants from the western side of Kansas. This is an annual event, and not only do the youth learn about the Catechism, but they also learn that the Body of Christ is larger than their rural congregation.

Larger churches with multiple staff are often able to invite smaller churches to participate in their events. For instance, Trinity Lutheran Church in Garden City invited churches within the circuit/district to their annual Mexico mission trip and annual canoe trip. Other events have included the Fall Junior High Rally; the Wild, Wild West Paintball event; Youth Quake and the Mystery Bus Tour, an all-night event.

The LCMS Kansas District also sponsors events for youth, such as Senior High Summer Camp at Lutheran Valley Retreat near Divide, Colo. and District Youth Gathering. Often, one key person receives information of such events and forwards it to the smaller churches. Usually, a bus is used for transportation and picks up youth along the way to the event. Sharing transportation is another way for youth to gather and build friendships.

When churches collaborate, several outcomes occur: First, the workload can be spread among a larger group of people. If there are 13 pastors and two directors of Christian education (DCEs) represented in the circuit, then each can take a part of the planning process. Secondly, smaller churches that don't have resources to do events on their own can join an event that has already been created. Also, youth have an opportunity to interact with a variety of their peers and adults.

One key factor in collaborative events is the involvement of parents in the local congregation. Youth need to be encouraged to step out of their comfort zone and participate with others, and parents can serve as the contact person within that congregation rather than the pastors all the time.

As a DCE of 35 years, 25 of those spent in Western Kansas, it has been encouraging to see youth make new friends from a different part of the state. Youth friend each other on Facebook and encourage one another to participate with the next district or circuit event. I heard a story told of college students who met on a college campus and recognized one another as past participants of a circuit youth event.

In Western Kansas, we have worked hard to build relationships with one another and with Christ, who empowers us to live lives that make a difference in our churches and in our community. Our chief aim is to bring glory to God through collaborative youth events.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

Contributed through the LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission monthly newsletter by Leland Jackson.

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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. Learn more about RSTM at lcms.org/rstm or by calling 888-463-5127. “Like” us on our Facebook page at facebook.com/lcmsrstm

2018 National RSTM Conference

The 2018 National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference will be held Nov. 8–10 in Kansas City, Mo., at the Hilton Kansas City Airport.

LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission hopes you’ll join in by registering now and reserving your spot! And did you know you can earn Continuing Education credits by attending the 2018 National RSTM Conference?

Keynote speakers will include:

- the Rev. Timothy Koch, pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Cresbard, S.D., and Immanuel Lutheran in Wecota, S.D.;
- the Rev. Dr. Robert H. Bennett of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Ind.;
- Rev. Tom Schlund, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Algona, Iowa; and
- Chaplain Craig Muehler, director of the LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces.

The conference will address blessings and challenges facing rural and small town congregations today. Congregations will be encouraged in becoming healthy churches, eager to bear witness for Christ and able to show mercy to those in need in communities and develop a robust life together with fellow members. This conference is meant for anyone living, serving or interested in rural or small-town areas, with topics and resources specifically suited for this unique mission field. Breakout topics include:

- ministry to inactive members,
- stewardship,
- family ministry and outreach,
- hope during grief,
- opportunities with Recognized Service Organizations and
- many other topics affecting our rural and small-town congregations.

New this year will be a special track for LERT Disaster Training and one for Youth Ministry; these options will have a limited number of seats and require attendance in all six sessions. There is something planned for everyone, from lay person to pastor and from student to teacher!

RSTM Shirts

RSTM is also making the snazzy Reaching Rural America for Christ logo shirts available for purchase! Wouldn’t you like to sport one of the stylish RSTM Reaching Rural America for Christ shirts? Order online when registering or by contacting our office by Oct. 15, and you can pick up your shirt at the RSTM National Conference. They are available in gray or white; men’s and women’s polos sizes S–XL are \$19 each, and sizes 2XL–6XL are \$21 each. (Other styles have different prices.)

Registration and Lodging

Adult registration for the conference is \$215 per person and includes all plenary and breakout sessions, materials, Thursday dinner, Friday lunch and dinner and more. Special rates are available for couples, meals only and groups. Contact our office with questions or about group rates.

Hotel reservations must be made separately from conference registration. The Hilton Kansas City Airport is offering a rate of \$106 for a single or \$114 for a double (plus applicable taxes) for our group, including breakfast buffet per day per occupancy level, complimentary self-parking and complimentary airport transportation on request. More information and online registration are available at lcms.org/rstm/conference.