

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

Jan. 24 – Webinar

“Rural Ministry Resources”

with Rev. Todd Kollbaum, director, and Amy Gerdts, coordinator, LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission

1–2 p.m. CST

Feb. 21 – Webinar

“Reaching Young Women: LWML”

with Kaye Wolff, vice-president of Special Focus Ministries, LWML

1–2 p.m. CST

March 7 – Webinar

“Raising Young Leaders and Lutheran Youth Corps”

with Julianna Shults, DCE, program manager, Special Ministries-Lutheran Young Adult Corps (LCMS Youth Ministry)

1–2 p.m. CST

STRONG FAITH, FERVENT LOVE

Immersed in Rural Life

Cows, hogs, trucks, dirt, tractors, mud — all things we would expect

to find on the farm. But what about high-tech computers, global positioning devices and industrial cheese making equipment? Participants of the LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission’s (RSTM) latest Rural Seminary Immersion experienced all this and more, including conversation with a lot of faithful folks and great food. On the heels of our 2018 national conference, LCMS RSTM was privileged to host our third immersion event in partnership with Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind. We find that holding these events is especially important for the benefit of those who will be serving in rural and small-town congregations.

As you might know, more than 50 percent of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is made up of rural and small-town congregations. Each year at the Call Day services at both our seminaries, an average of 50 percent of the new calls are issued to men to serve in these congregations. Most of those called to serve do not have a background in rural and small towns; they are typically from more urban and suburban areas. To be sure, they are trained well by our seminaries to proclaim God’s Word, administer His Sacraments, teach, care and serve. Yet, we have found that because of the “culture shock,” these men often struggle to make the transition to RSTM or they simply don’t last that long in these congregations.

Additionally, many of these congregations come to see themselves as just a “first call” or less important than other, bigger congregations with “more to offer.” This simply isn’t and shouldn’t be the case. We at RSTM are endeavoring to break that cycle through these immersions as well as other training events. We want congregations to know and understand that they have a vital role to play in the Kingdom of God. Likewise, we





Rural & Small Town Mission

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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.

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!

want these men serving them to think of their new rural and small-town call much like C.F.W. Walther describes it when he said:

“When a place has been assigned to a Lutheran candidate of theology where he is to discharge the office of a Lutheran minister, that place ought to be to him the dearest, most beautiful, and most precious spot on earth. He should be unwilling to exchange it for a kingdom. Whether it is in a metropolis or in a small town, on a bleak prairie or in a clearing in the forest, in a flourishing settlement or in a desert, to him it should be a miniature paradise. Do not the blessed angels descend from heaven with great joy whenever the Father in heaven sends them to minister to those who are to be heirs of salvation? Why, then, should we poor sinners be unwilling to hurry after them with great joy to any place where we can lead other men, our fellow-sinners, to salvation?” (*Twentieth Evening Lecture*)

Imagine if pastor and parish together considered this ministry a great joy and were more than willing to “hurry after them with great joy.” This is why we spend time doing things like our seminarian immersion. It is through events such as this that we are able to focus on those subjects, which can help future pastors (and even current ones) decrease the learning curve and hit the ground running. **While we won't make them agriculture experts, we hope to expose them to those that are so that they may gain an understanding of how things work in a rural and small-town areas and how that affects the congregation's life together.** Through visits to working farms and dairies, we learn how agriculture has transformed over the years and what it takes to make it in that world. We see for ourselves the high-tech equipment and how it has changed the face of farming.



Chris Heins gives the men a close-up look at the silage feed of the cows.

In order to better understand leadership in town and country, we visited with agriculture industry leaders, local volunteer firemen, bank presidents and business owners. We learned about parish life from pastors of larger and smaller congregations and from those who shepherd in congregational partnerships. We talked to school leadership about what that dynamic means for the congregations. We worshipped, we ate, we prayed and we learned, all in an effort to better serve the rural and small-town congregations of the LCMS.

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 **Rural Ministry Resources** on Jan. 24. **Reaching Young Women: LWML** will be on Feb. 21. Find past webinars in our archive. Watch for information on all our upcoming events!

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. Online registration is available for both types of events. Contact your district or our office if you are interested in holding an event near you. Watch for 2019 National RSTM Conference announcements coming soon! To see our calendar, visit lcms.org/rstm. Contact our office at 888-463-5127 or rstm@lcms.org.