

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

April 11 – Webinar

“Community Engagement”
with the Rev. Dr. Keith Schweitzer,
pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church,
Greenfield, Iowa

1–2 p.m. CST

May 11 – Engaging Your Community (EYC) event

Waldport, Ore., with the LCMS Northwest District

9 a.m.–3 p.m. Pacific time

May 23 – Webinar

“Outreach Through Lutheran Braille Workers” with Daniel Jenkins, vice-president of Ministry Advancement for Lutheran Braille Workers

1–2 p.m. CST

Nov. 14–16

RSTM National Conference

Doubletree by Hilton Hotel

Bloomington-Minneapolis South

lcms.org/rstm/conference

STRONG FAITH, FERVENT LOVE

Patient Perseverance

“As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5).

In a presentation several years ago,

I shared this: *“In an increasingly impatient world, we all want the fruit but don’t want to wait for the plant to grow. Come explore how patient perseverance in our planting will produce a fruitful harvest.”*

Patient perseverance is hard to come by these days. In a day and age when we are used to immediate and instant gratification, it’s tough to wait. Long gone are the days of “Anticipation” for Heinz Ketchup and now we’re all about microwaves and instant messaging. So, how does this jive with the work we do in the church and that church’s work in the community?

The short answer? Not very well. It is good for us to be reminded that the work of sharing the Gospel isn’t an instant gratification endeavor. In fact, it is through patient perseverance that we faithfully carry out that work which the Lord has called us to do. Sometimes it’s in the scattering of seed, sometimes the tending and watering, all patiently waiting for the Lord to bring about the growth. It helps then to know that we are not in this alone but the Lord of the church is always and continually with us, working through us to share His love. As St. Paul reminds us in Col. 1:11–12, “[May you be] strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

May God grant you that strength!

Pastor Todd Kollbaum



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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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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.

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GIVE NOW

Thrivent members: Remember that RSTM is eligible for Thrivent Choice Dollars!

Engaging a Changing Community

by Rev. Dr. Keith Schweitzer

My entire 30 years as a parish pastor have been spent serving LCMS congregations in rural and small-town communities. That's remarkable when you consider the fact that I grew up in Houston — the fourth largest city in the country. I've truly been "converted" to the small-town way of life, serving the hard-working people whom I've had the privilege and blessing to know and love.

Yet, dramatic changes are sweeping across the rural plains of America. No doubt about it. I've seen it. We've entered an era of congregations closing because their memberships have literally died off. Offerings have dwindled dramatically. Pastors are becoming "bi-vocational," meaning they are employed and working outside of their called pastorate to supplement insufficient and declining salaries. Pastors are absorbing personally more of the costs of the routine day-to-day operations of their congregations. These changes can be nothing short of terrifying to a pastor and his family.

As is always true, the Lord nonetheless brings amazing and oftentimes surprising blessings and opportunities in this newly emerging ministry landscape. As some congregations die, others are born. Pastors who find themselves becoming "entrepreneurs" can be involved in their communities in truly remarkable ways.

In my own ministry here in southwest Iowa, we have given birth to a new congregation. I substitute teach in the public schools in five local school districts. The opportunities to witness and share my faith, to minister and pray with students, teachers and administrative people abound. Sometimes, I say tongue in cheek that I have the largest youth group in the Synod with over 6,000 kids, referring to the student populations of the schools in which I teach, on their own turf.

That we must engage our community is a fact of our ministry and congregational outreach that hasn't changed. How we engage our community is changing dramatically in ways we could never have imagined.

Personally, I love this new ministry field. I embrace it. To be able to maintain our Lutheran confessional integrity and continue to proclaim salvation only in the Lord Jesus Christ provides a Gospel message people need and desire to hear even today.

Ready or not, the future is now. It's here. And our Lord is still touching lives and bringing people to faith in Jesus. For that I will always rejoice.

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 **Community Engagement** on April 11, followed by **Outreach Through Lutheran Braille Workers** on May 23. Find past webinars in our archive and 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 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.

Register now for the 2019 National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference, *Running With Endurance: Eyes Fixed On Jesus*, Nov. 14–16 in Minneapolis.

To see our calendar, visit lcms.org/rstm. Contact our office at 888-463-5127 or rstm@lcms.org.