



# REACHING RURAL AMERICA for CHRIST

## RURAL AND SMALL TOWN MISSION

### 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

#### February 16

*Summer Outreach Ideas for Children and Families Webinar:*

Presented by Jill Hasstedt, Director of Family Ministry, Zion, Belleville, Ill. 1-2 p.m.

#### February 25

*Engaging Rural Communities Event:*  
8 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
St. John Lutheran Church, Waverly, Iowa

#### March 25

*Social Networking Strategies in RST Settings Webinar:*  
Presented by Sarah Guldalian, 1-2 p.m.  
LHM Mission U

If you have an idea or story for Rural Outreach, contact Amy at the RSTM office: 888-463-5127

## From Sem to Small-Town Parish

When Rev. David Herald received his first call in May 2010 to Trinity Lutheran Church in Appleton City, Mo., (pop. 1,300) he felt right at home very quickly. He had grown up on the edge of a Detroit suburb, so he was used to the idea of driving distances to get your groceries, go see a movie, or socialize. He had also served his vicarage in a town of less than 500, so he felt prepared for the idea of a small town.

He knew that Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, had prepared him for Word and Sacrament ministry, which is 90 percent of his job. It was that other 10 percent that no one talked about that has been his new learning curve.

In his small congregation there is no church secretary, so his clerical skills have been improving fast! At the seminary it was kind of assumed that pastors would have at least a part-time secretary, but Pastor Herald has learned instead to appreciate the willingness of his members' volunteer hearts.

He says he has many invitations to kids' birthday parties, lots of fresh produce

and plenty of ground beef. One member checks in on him once a month to see if his beef supply is low, then brings more in to restock if necessary.

A unique aspect of his congregation is that it receives about a fourth of its annual budget from the "Church Farm." In the 1950s, the farm was gifted to Trinity, to be used for the mission of the church. Two member families with adjoining farms donate their time and machinery to plant and harvest the land.

Pastor Herald says he had heard of something similar before but never had the chance to experience this uniquely rural offering until now.



## Seminary Events Scheduled for May

Rural & Small Town Mission, a ministry of the LCMS Office of National Mission, is partnering with both seminaries to provide support for seminary graduates who have been assigned to congregations in rural communities.

An event will be held on campus at both seminaries (May 8 in St. Louis and May 9 in Fort Wayne) between call day and graduation to provide practical guidance

for the candidates and their wives as they arrive at their first calls.

There will also be follow-up webinars to support the new pastors in the early months of ministry.

We hope that you will join us in this support with your prayers and financial gifts. We thank God for your partnership in the Gospel. To find out more about the work of RSTM and our work in

encouraging and support the 3000 plus rural and small-town congregations across the Synod, contact us at 1-888-463-5127 or [ruralmission@spife.org](mailto:ruralmission@spife.org).

**May 8  
in St. Louis, Mo.**

**May 9  
in Fort Wayne, Ind.**

# Fun in the VBS Summer Sun

Throughout the summer, many congregations work hard to put on successful vacation Bible school programs. One of the best things about these programs is the opportunity to reach out to the families in the community who aren't usually involved in our churches. We would like these efforts to lead to a lifelong relationship with our Lord. VBS is also a great time to get many congregation members actively involved in outreach.

Rev. Dean Hanson and his congregation members at Grace/Faith Partnership Ministry in Pleasanton and Hazard, Neb., are thinking about and promoting their VBS all year long. Each year they use VBS as a lead into their midweek program, so they want their VBS week to be successful, and they want it to be full of children who aren't all members of their church.

Even though VBS is scheduled for the third week of July, it really kicks off the first weekend of June at the annual Old Settler's Parade. Pastor Hanson uses his tractor to pull the VBS float sponsored by Grace and



*Riding the float at the annual Old Settler's Parade.*



*Caring teachers make all the difference in the life of a child.*

Faith Lutheran Churches through the parade. The congregation's children ride, walk and sing songs as they invite all the other children from town to join them . . . not just for VBS, but to join the parade too. The Partnership's motto is "Come Be with Us" and they try to let this show in their actions.

Grace/Faith Partnership Ministry has chosen to hold the VBS in the evenings from 5:30 to 8 p.m. They begin on a Sunday with a supper that they encourage everyone to attend. You don't have to be a child or have one involved to join in. They have Bible study, games and crafts. They follow this schedule all week, culminating with a balloon release on Thursday evening.

The children love to see if anyone will find the Bible verses and the church information they've tied to the balloons. Sometimes they get calls from several states away. There are usually 40-50 adult volunteers and more than 75 children, at least half of whom are not members. Some members have their grandchildren plan their summer visits to coincide with VBS week just so they can join in the fun.

Non-members are volunteers too. They serve by assisting with crafts and helping out with the sporting activities. The Partnership youth group is heavily involved. The youth are relied on for everything from song leaders and crafts to sports and layout design. They also encourage the junior high youth in the same way, asking for their help and skills for things like power points when possible. The Partnership has seen great results from all this involvement.

Pastor Hanson commented, "Involving adults helps them to be active the rest of the year. They have ownership."

Every year the VBS chooses a new mission project to support, such as a missionary in a foreign country. And every year there is a special challenge event for the kids if they hit



*Painting faces for VBS fun!*



*Rev. Dean Hanson getting hit with a pie after the kids win a challenge.*

their mission goal. Pastor Hanson has been challenged to kiss a pig and kiss a steer. One year he and the teachers took turns in the dunking tank, spent a lot of time getting wet, and discovered there were a lot of good arms and aims in VBS!

Another memorable time, Pastor Hanson painted his mustache blue and told the kids if they hit the goal he'd shave it off. . . . When they hit the halfway mark, he shaved off half to motivate them. He reminds us that this is all in good fun and is not what the giving is about. Pastor Hanson says, "How do we bring the Word of Christ to our community? How do we serve?"

*But Jesus called the children to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."*

*Luke 18:15-17*

# Fun in the VBS Summer Sun (Continued)

LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission has put together a few ideas to help you and your church continue your VBS summer outreach to the community all year long:

- Be intentional! Seek out the parents of those without a church home and personally invite them to come with you to church. Then, offer to attend the service with them! People always respond better to personal invites than group ones. You may have to think about making this a greeter “job” so that people don’t slip through the cracks. It’s a #1 priority!
- Finish out your VBS with a celebration and invite all the parents and grandparents. Consider having this some place besides the sanctuary, so it’s not intimidating to those who are first timers, and make it FUN! You might have an ice cream bar, a hot dog roast, or do something to go with the theme. Have the children sing the songs they’ve learned and invite everyone to join you at church and Sunday school where they can learn more
- Some congregations have the children sing their VBS songs at church Sunday morning or include children’s sermon for them. Invite the children to wear their VBS T-shirts if you have them. Remember to include invitations for this special service in any material you send



At Grace/Faith Partnership, VBS takes planning and preparation by a large group of willing volunteers.

home from VBS.

- Create a VBS newsletter to send home each day or at least at the end of the week. Include Bible verses, special projects, and many sincere invitations to join you at weekly worship.
- Keep the communication going and place them on your church mailing list for newsletters. A few weeks after VBS, have member families contact them. Remind them you were glad they came and want them to join you in at God’s house again!
- Make sure the pastor is involved in some way, especially at the closing. Have him tell stories or lead a sing-along. Maybe he isn’t a great singer ... so what! Let the little ones, and their parents, see that he wants to be involved with what they’ve learned at VBS and praise God with them.
- Be sure to hold some activities in places besides your facilities! Some congregations invite VBS children and their families to participate in service projects that benefit the community
- Make sure you have age-appropriate activities for the older kids. If you think you are losing them after fifth grade, ask why! Consider having a junior high VBS that has different activities for the older kids. Make it THE PLACE to be

for the tween set. Don’t forget the skills that kids this age can bring to the table. Pre-teens and teens are frequently the most accomplished musicians, the most talented artists, and the most knowledgeable computer experts in our midst and we never remember to ask them to help.



Rev. Dean Hanson enjoys using his tractor to pull the annual float.



Singing praises at Grace/Faith Partnership VBS.

- Don’t let your VBS become a one person show! The more volunteers you have, the more opportunities you have for individuals to reach out in their daily lives and issue those personal invites. Get volunteers from all ages and groups! Don’t overlook young men and women in high school or your retirees. Just because they don’t have a child of their own in VBS doesn’t preclude their desire to help

But above all, remember to praise God, have fun, use your imagination, and welcome them with the heart of Jesus!

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. If you have a good idea for outreach or a story you’d like to share with us, so that we can share it with others, please contact us at 888-463-5127 or [ruralmission@spife.org](mailto:ruralmission@spife.org). Learn more about us at [www.spife.org](http://www.spife.org) or by calling us anytime.

**The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod**  
Rural and Small Town Mission  
Office of National Mission  
1333 S. Kirkwood Road  
St. Louis, MO 63122

Phone: 888-463-5127  
email: amy.gerds@lcms.org  
www.lcms.org/rstm

Let us go to the  
small towns . . .  
Mark 1:38

## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE:

### Rev. Dr. Lee Hagan

In the movie *Dances with Wolves*, Lt. John Dunbar is stationed at a remote military outpost on the Western prairie during the Civil War. Though alone, he strikes up a relationship with an unusual source of companionship—a wolf. Likewise, in *Cast Away*, Tom Hanks' character, Chuck Noland is stranded alone on a desert island and his source of camaraderie is "Wilson," a volleyball with a face painted on it.

No one wants to be alone. One of the ways that Rural & Small Town Mission is trying to help congregations and districts is by helping provide support for new pastors as they receive their first calls. In time, seminary graduates grow accustomed to their new surroundings and the congregations that they serve. More than anything, it our hope that seminary graduates have support that they need so that they do not feel alone.

Dozens of seminary graduates are placed in rural settings and many of

those are small congregations. However, the members of those congregations need pastors to proclaim God's Word and administer the Sacraments to them.

We are glad that we can help

support that work in any way we can. Please pray for those seminarians who are preparing for their first calls and the congregations that they will serve.

Rural & Small Town Mission is here to support pastors at all stages of ministry and lay leaders for the work of engaging their communities no matter what the size of the church or town. Thanks for your support of this work.



LCMS Church and Community Engagement Staff: from left, Pastors Lee Hagan, Al Tormoehlen, Quentin Poulson and Carlos Hernandez.