

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

REMEMBER:

RSTM is eligible for Thrivent Choice Dollars!

PLEASE PRAY FOR THESE IMPORTANT DATES

June 21 • Webinar

Understanding Rural Culture

Dr. Eugene Bunkowske,
Hoffman Institute,
Concordia University, St.
Paul, Minn.

July 14

Engaging Rural Communities Event
Shepherd of the Hills
Lutheran Church,
Onalaska, Wis.

July 26 • Webinar

Hispanic Outreach
Rev. Dan Vogel,
Missionary to Hispanics,
Iowa District West

If you have an idea or story for Rural Outreach, contact Amy at the RSTM office: 888-463-5127 amy.gerdt@lcms.org

Lasting and Limited Legacy

I’m amazed that when a project needs to be done, there is a tool, talent and time that God provides through His people in rural settings. People in rural settings are very resourceful. They know how to get a job done! Because of their own abilities and contributions, major projects are accomplished at a cheaper cost.

Generally, older members of rural and small town congregations do not like to go into debt for any reason! They have been raised to pay as you go, so if you don’t have the money, you don’t get it. Younger members are more comfortable with debt because they deal with personal debt daily. Pastorally, I must ease the concerns members have with an operating debt of tens of thousands of dollars, while at the same time,

making other members aware that we can’t just keep spending what we don’t have.



Congregations may have a large bequest or endowment fund. It is tempting to save this money and only use the interest from it. The congregation can become asset-rich but cash-poor. The large amount of money in the endowment can also decrease giving because the congregation’s members think that regular contributions are not needed. However, the little interest the endowment generates does not go far in funding

the congregation’s ministry. Seeing that trend may discourage anyone in the future from making a similar bequest to the congregation. Because of this, I believe that any such major gift should be structured so that both interest and 4 to 5 percent of the principle is used every year, providing more funds to the congregation. Down the road, someone else could be ready to make a similar gift to the congregation. Ideally, bequest funds should be used for special projects or missions — not operating expenses. Finally, in all things, we should remember that giving is to be done freely and cheerfully, in accordance with how our Lord has blessed us.. —Rev. Mark Nebel, St. John Lutheran Church, Red Bud, Ill.

National Conference Update

Registration for the Rural and Small Town National Conference is open on our website! Choose from breakout topics including youth/family ministry, funding and stewardship, rural resources and other topics affecting our rural and small town congregations. The national conference is geared for congregational

leaders from all rural and small town settings. While there is no “one size fits all” solution, participants will be encouraged as they see new opportunities for engaging their communities and are filled with hope for the future. Fellowship and discussion with others who have also been placed in this unique mission field will

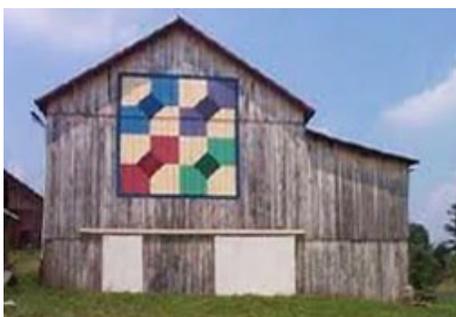
be invaluable too!

If you wish to participate or would like to know more about the rest of our calendar, visit www.lcms.org/rstm, contact Amy at 888-463-5127 or amy.gerdt@lcms.org or visit us on facebook at www.facebook.com/LCMSRSTM.



God's Storehouse

Growing up in a rural community, I don't remember being taught stewardship in church. But, on the farm, we stewarded everything! We used leftover lumber, even old nails, after un-bending them, to repair the buildings. Then we planned out what we needed to buy in new supplies.



I was taught at home to use the 10-10-80 plan: give 10 percent of our income to church/God, 10 percent to savings and learn to live on 80 percent. I didn't do very well following this until later years, but I firmly believe that it is a good system. Plan what you will need, budget and manage your money. I found later as a pastor that God wants us to plan out our finances. He is a God of order; Satan is the master of chaos. Malachi 3:7-12 tells us to bring our first fruits to God's storehouse, the church, not with limitations, but for God to use as He pleases. And He blesses. In His mercy and love, He showers His blessings upon His church and creation. Blessings that come in ways we cannot measure or fathom.

You can imagine my amazement when I was called to my first parish in a rural community and discovered that the congregation did not have a plan or a budget, but often relied on district subsidies and a handful of wealthy members to cover the church's expenses at the end of each year. The congregation did not have evangelism programs, stewardship teaching or officer and elder training. They did not see the need for those

things. Yet in Acts, these are exactly the types of emphases that the early church had. We see this in the sending out of Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13 and 15). We also see this in 1 Corinthians 16, when Paul says to set aside money from our income. While this may not be a formal budget, it is planning!

As I grew as a pastor, I learned that many rural congregations don't plan or budget and they are dying. When I last checked, my own home congregation didn't have a budget or financial plan for each year. When we study the book of Acts, we find that the people of Christ worked, shared, planned and managed what they were given and they grew in number and in faith during a time of high persecution.

Most of us are not living in a time of high persecution, so we have an awesome avenue to share Jesus. What better example than the rural community to share and steward God's gifts? The rural congregation should relate more than any other to the examples in Scripture on being organized to tell people about Jesus. Rural people plan their day, their week, planting, harvesting, what equipment to fix and more. They do all this within a very tight budget throughout most of the year. Frequently, they do not have an external job, so they only get paid a few times each year!

Even if it's not in writing, rural families have a plan and a budget; the church should do no less. We have been given the gift of eternal life. While we should be good stewards by planning our daily lives and personal budget, our focus is not this earthly life but Jesus and what He has called each of us to do. Proclaim Him! I encourage every congregation to develop a plan and a yearly budget within the commission given to us in Scripture.

- Rev. Larry Block, *Our Savior Lutheran Church, Platte City, Mo.*

Stewardship Tips

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it." (Malachi 3:10) Consider these stewardship ideas:

- Commodities giving
- Electronic giving/Direct deposit
- Gifts of stocks and mutual funds
- Stewardship courses for newly married couples and new members
- Giving of talents — a skilled carpenter, a trained electrician, an accountant, a registered nurse, a computer whiz or someone who is willing to give of their time and talent to the congregation
- Estate planning — Contact the LCMS Foundation for help with giving through your will or estate plan



LCMS Rural and 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 amy.gerds@lcms.org.

Learn more about us at www.lcms.org/rstm or by calling Amy at 888-463-5127.