



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

July 14

Engaging Rural Communities Event
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church,
Onalaska, Wis. 8am-3pm

July 26 • Webinar

Hispanic Outreach
Presented by Rev. Dan Vogel,
Missionary to Hispanics,
Iowa District West
Desison/Storm Lake

August 11

Engaging Rural Communities Event,
Zion Lutheran Church,
Hemlock, MI 8am-3pm

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

Mercy Flows from the Mighty One

The classic description of God in the Old Testament, found repeatedly, declares, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's threefold emphasis of Witness, Mercy, Life Together is composed of three rich, Biblical themes for the people of God. Mercy is first and foremost a description of God's attitude and actions toward us. The Almighty God of heaven and earth, the King of kings and Lord of Lords, the Alpha and the Omega, is *merciful* toward us though we have in no way deserved this mercy. As William Shakespeare wrote in *The Merchant of Venice* "The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven...Tis mightiest in the mightiest." The one true God is mighty, but He is also merciful, therefore He is mighty to save. His mercy is demonstrated fully and completely in the cross of Christ, the ultimate sign and action of grace and undeserved love. It is in the cross that God is found to be "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

Lutheran congregations

are found in small towns in New England and along the Pacific Northwest coast. There are rural parishes in the Carolinas and the Texas

kind. However, each day people around us are dealing with the disaster of sin. The mercy of God encountered through Word and



Cody Schrieman, St. Paul's, Concordia, MO during a church servant event to Joplin, MO after the 2011 tornado. He's holding a family Bible the team found for a lady in the ruins of her home.

panhandle in addition to the heartland. Each week, the people of God assemble to receive the mercy of God in Christ's Word, Holy Absolution and in the Lord's Supper. However, these merciful gifts of God are not only for those who receive, but are gifts given also for the sake of one's neighbor, one's spouse and children, one's co-workers. The Mighty One is merciful and His mercy shown to sinners such as us transforms us to be merciful to those in need. It is always encouraging to see the saints of God respond in acts of mercy when there is a natural disaster of some

Sacraments enables us to be merciful to those around us in need.

Members of small congregations are sent out into their communities every week as God works through them in their unique vocations to bring His mercy to a world in need. These acts of mercy can take many different shapes, from clothing and food to vocational training and counseling services, but what is common is that these acts flow from the Mighty and Merciful One.

*Rev. Dr. Lee Hagan
Interim Director
Rural and Small Town
Mission*



We're on the Web: www.lcms.org/rstm

RURAL AND SMALL TOWN MISSION E-NEWSLETTER • JULY 2012

RSTM National Conference

Registrations are coming in for the National Rural and Small Town Mission Conference November 1-3, 2012 at King's Pointe Resort in Storm Lake, Iowa. We hope you've saved the dates and have made your reservations to join us! The Conference is geared for congregational leaders from all rural and small town settings. While there is no "one size fits all" solution, you will be encouraged as you see new opportunities for engaging your 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! Registration is \$200/person and is available online through our website or by calling our office

Building on the theme, *In Christ for Church and World: Witness, Mercy, Life Together*, the conference will feature LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, Luther Snow, rural development expert and author, Rev. Bart Day, Executive Director of the Office of National Mission, and Rev. Dr. Lee Hagan, RSTM Interim Director as plenary speakers. President Harrison will be presenting on ***Witness, Mercy, Life Together In Rural America*** and speaking at our Friday evening banquet. Rev. Bart Day will be presenting on ***In Christ for Church***. Reminding us about the benefits and strengths of small churches and communities, Rev. Dr. Lee Hagan will be leading ***It's Okay to Be Small: In Christ for Rural America***.

If you are looking for new ways to strengthen your congregation for ministry and lift your own spirits at the same time, Luther Snow's first plenary, ***Asset Mapping: Energizing Congregations for Ministries that Matter*** is just what the doctor ordered. This presentation will assist congregations in identifying

physical, institutional, individual and community assets that are already in place. Come away with *tools and skills you can use right away* to energize your faith community. Luther created Asset Mapping, the in-person method for positive group collaboration that has gone "viral." Because of his engaging style and practical wisdom, Luther has been hired by LCMS congregations, Lutheran Foundations, Lutheran Services in America, and Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services, to apply his approach in specific contexts in our church. He's also a nationally recognized speaker in the Rural Development field across the countryside.

Luther's second plenary is ***Country Strong: Tapping Hidden Strengths for Rural Congregational Development***. What works for congregations in rural areas and small towns? Usually, models of congregational development are devised in urban areas and then applied, with limited success, to the countryside. But there are unique advantages and opportunities in rural life that are often overlooked or underappreciated. Snow will show us how to recognize our unique local strengths and tap them for appropriate and powerful impact in our own communities.

Finally, if you choose to go to Luther's breakout session, ***Congregational Partnerships***, build on what we learned in the Asset Mapping process, and look at how congregations can use our individual strengths to collaborate with potential partners and engage the community in new ways. There is great potential for congregations to work together for the purpose of serving communities and reaching the lost. Our own assets are made more valuable by connecting them with the assets of others. Depending on our local contexts, what forms of collaboration

will strengthen our efforts and extend our ministry?

Participants will also be able to choose from break out topics including youth /family ministry, funding /stewardship, rural resources, demographics, and many other topics affecting our rural and small town congregations. Breakout speakers will include Rev. Ray Smith, Assistant to the Mission Executive of IDW, Carole White, LCEF Vice President for Iowa East and West, Terry Gerdts, Senior Vice President LCMS Foundation, Rev. Gene Ernst, Pastor Emeritus, Rev. Dan Vogel, Missionary to Hispanics for IDW, Rev. Dr. Mark Larsen, Lutheran Hour Ministries, Rev. Al Tormoehlen, Director, The 72® –Partners on the Road, Rev. Mark Gerken, IDW, Executive Asst. Missions/Human Care.

Whether you watch our webinars, support our work with your gifts, or have ever attended one of our events, we hope to see you at the National Conference November 1-3, 2012 at King's Pointe Resort in Storm Lake, Iowa. For more information, go to www.lcms.org/rstm, contact us by email amy.gerdts@lcms.org, call 888-463-5127, or visit with us at www.facebook.com/lcmsrstm.



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.