

Reaching Rural America for Christ

A newsletter of LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission

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Rural & 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

Nov. 3–5

RSTM National Conference
Wichita Hyatt Regency,
Wichita, Kan.
lcms.org/rstm/conference

Nov. 12–19

"RSTM Seminary Rural Immersion"
at Biltz Hall, Saint Paul Lutheran
High School, Concordia, Mo.

Nov. 17 - Webinar

"Using technology for ministry"
with Worldwide KFUD
1–2 p.m. CST

Dec. 8 - Webinar

"Enhancing Your Congregation's
Educational Efforts"
with Dr. Mark Blanke, Concordia
University, Nebraska, Seward, Neb.
1–2 p.m. CST

If you have an idea or story for
Rural Outreach, contact Amy at
the RSTM office.

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Engaging the Wandering

CONGREGATIONS OFTEN SPEND a great deal of time and attention looking at how they can increase attendance and get new members. This is certainly a good thing to address. Reaching out to those in and around our communities who have not heard the Gospel is a vital part of who and what the Church is. However, an often ignored (purposefully or unintentionally) segment of our population in desperate need of outreach is the group often referred to as inactives, delinquents or wanderers. They need to hear the Word of God and be brought to the fellowship of the Body of Christ.

The problem many encounter with this group, especially in rural and small town congregations, is that we know them so well. They are our children, grandchildren, godchildren, nieces, nephews, neighbors and friends. Because they are so "close" to us, we aren't comfortable bringing up the elephant in the room. Or, because they were once a part of the fellowship, we assume that their association with the church somehow "sticks" and what once may have been will always remain to be.



Who are the wandering?

"They are our children, grandchildren, godchildren, nieces, nephews, neighbors and friends."

We dance around this uncomfortable subject, stating that something needs to be done. Because we don't know what that something is, we often approach this issue one of two ways. We either do nothing or make the misguided attempt at restoration through a Law-oriented letter. Herein we establish the guilt of the delinquent and demand some sort of restoration timeline

RSTM Events Update

Don't forget: RSTM provides free monthly webinars on topics important to congregations in town and country settings. Up next is "Using Technology for Ministry" with Worldwide KFUD, followed by "Enhancing Your Congregation's Educational Efforts" with Dr. Mark Blanke, Concordia University, Nebraska, Seward, Neb. Find past webinars in the webinar archive on our website as a free resource for use when you need it.

Remember, you can register for our Engaging Your Community events (EYC) at

lcms.org/rstm/engaging-rural-communities. Also ask us about our newest events, Engaging the Wandering! Meant to partner with the EYC, these events will offer practical resources and communication skills for reaching out to our wandering members.

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



Engaging the Wandering, *continued*

lest they face the consequence — loss of membership. Neither of these approaches is a good option.

Instead, what if we reestablished relationships with these folks who have seemingly left the fold and bring to them the healing salve of the Gospel? What do you think would happen if we, instead of making assumptions, took the time to listen and learn from our inactive members the what, why and how of their distancing themselves from our fellowship?

Instead of taking a blanket approach to dealing with “inactives” as a group, we can take the time and make the effort to connect individually with these children of God so that we can care for them in a way appropriate to their situation. Rather than casting a judgmental eye upon their lack of participation, we could support, invite, encourage and even in some cases, enable their return. We can thus become the embodiment of Christ’s second greatest command, to “love your neighbors as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

For this reason, we have carried out a series of events through our partnership with the LCMS Nebraska District called “Engaging the Wandering” (ETW). Through these events — born out of one congregation’s struggle with this difficult topic and a desire to help others in this same struggle — we learn and grow with each other so that we might win back our

brother or sister for Christ. We endeavor to support, encourage and equip our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. ETW employs an individualized approach to reaching out to inactive members so that they might be reconnected to God’s Word and His fellowship, the Church.

What if, instead of being a statistic or just a number on a box of envelopes, we show people that they mean as much to us as they do to their Savior who gave up His life for them? This is the type of interaction we encourage for outreach to those we no longer see among us.

This, however, is not easy task! As Darrell Whiteman states in his book *Globalizing Theology*, “We must never forget that there are seldom shortcuts to building interpersonal relationships through which the power of the transforming gospel may flow.” It doesn’t matter if we are reaching out to folks who have never heard the Good News of Jesus Christ or to those who have fallen away from it; we need to develop those relationships through which we can share the Gospel. This includes connecting, or in this case, reconnecting, those folks with the local congregation so that they can be fed and nurtured by God’s most precious Word and His Sacrament.

Herein, lies the challenge. May the God of all grace grant to you His strength and wisdom, that you may be up to the task!

“What if we reestablished relationships with these folks who have seemingly left the fold and bring to them the healing salve of the Gospel?”



Life-long relationships are built and strengthened at church.



Pastor Luke Brown welcomes three new members to his congregation in Aliceville, Kan.



An Engaging the Wandering event in McCook, Neb.

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.

Learn more about RSTM at lcms.org/rstm or by calling Amy at 888-463-5127. “Like” us on our Facebook page at facebook.com/lcmsrstm.

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