



REACHING RURAL AMERICA FOR CHRIST



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

Nov. 21 – Webinar

"Dealing with Addictions in Rural and Small-town Areas"

with the Rev. Gary Griffin, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lockwood, Mo.

1–2 p.m. CST

Nov. 14–16

RSTM National Conference
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-
Minneapolis South, Minneapolis
lcms.org/rstm/conference

Dec. 12 – Webinar

"Always Prepared to Give Reason for Your Hope"

with the Rev. Craig Niemeier, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Worms, Neb.

1–2 p.m. CST

"... 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*

STRONG FAITH, FERVENT LOVE

Taking Stock of Blessings

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8).

On an episode of "Duck Dynasty" once upon a time, CEO Willie said something like, "Sometimes people hold on to old things because they want to hold on to old memories." I suspect we all have a few of those "old things" we keep around because they remind us of a happy time or someone special. In churches, we are especially good at hanging on to "old things," sometimes for the memories, sometimes because we just can't seem to get rid of them.



It is good to hold on to memories. We should celebrate how the Lord has worked through us over the years. Yet, how often do we stop and take stock? Having recently moved, we have come across a myriad of things we had simply forgotten we had and really couldn't come up with a reason why we had kept. On the other hand, we found some items that we *could* use which we had forgotten about or lost track of over time.

In our congregations, it is just as important for us to take time to assess what we have. Often, we get so used to the things around us that we forget their value or usefulness, or that we have them at all.

One way that we at LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission help congregations do this is by having them take a look at what the Lord has blessed them with and consider how those things might be used to benefit their congregation and engage their community with the Gospel. This includes taking a close look at their physical blessings, financial blessings, individual blessings, associated blessings and collective blessings. In taking stock of these things, we are enabled to see just how the Lord has fulfilled His promise to enable us to do the work He has given us to do.

If you'd like more information on this process or have any questions, please check out our website or contact us. We'd love to help.

Pastor Todd Kollbaum

Is There Hope in the Midst of Addictions?

DEALING WITH ADDICTIONS IN RURAL AND SMALL-TOWN AREAS

by the Rev. Gary Griffin, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lockwood, Mo.

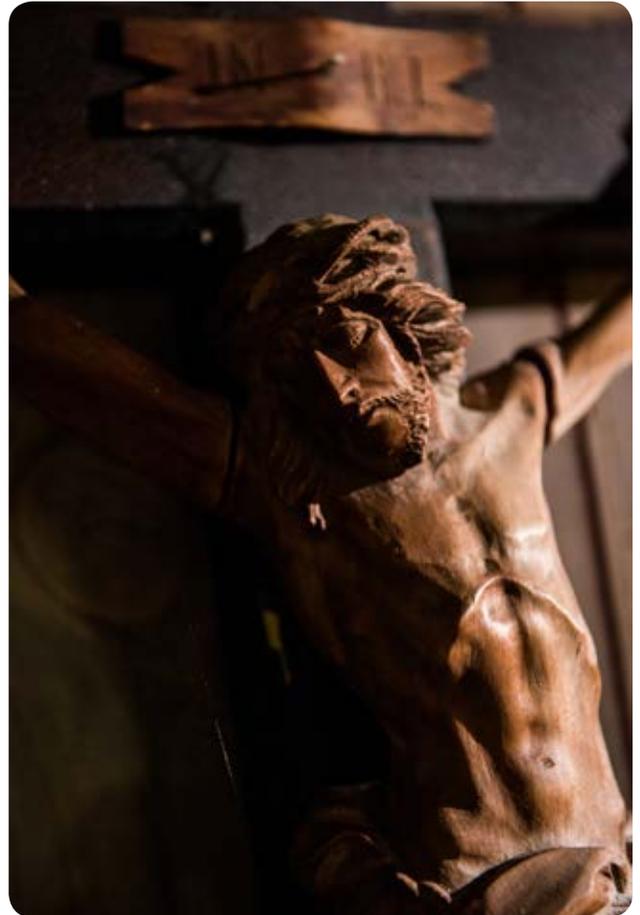
Once in a private counseling session with an addict, he said to me in tears, “I stole \$12,000 from my parents and I would walk the streets to see which house I could break into and steal money or goods in order to buy my next fix. I am so broken. I am so bad. I don’t know if I can be helped; is it possible?” Can you imagine how that person’s parents and family members feel? Lies, stealing, broken promises, sleepless nights, jail bonds, rehab, only to get out and return to addiction. Is there hope in the midst of addictions?

According to Farm Bureau statistics, 75 percent of the people living in rural communities have experienced the drug epidemic in some way. Families have a parent and/or child that is addicted, a relative who is addicted, work associates addicted, or have endured some form of crime because of the drug epidemic. Addictions affect the whole person spiritually, physically and mentally. It is important to understand all these ramifications in order to help and give hope to a person walking in the midst of addictions.

Spiritually, the addicted person is empty. The government paints addiction as a disease, but addiction is an idolatry, a misplaced lordship issue. These idols (addictive substances) promise the world but enslave the addicted person to the grave. The addicted person may sacrifice anything and anybody to pursue his addiction. Since we are born with original sin, sin in our nature drives us in the wrong direction. Consequently, the addicted person may not attend church for the following reasons: generally, pastors don’t know much about handling an addicted person; the addicted person may feel judged; he may feel that church is only for good people and he is bad; and he may believe he can’t be forgiven by God. In response to this, the Christian counselor or pastor can give hope in the message of the Gospel that God shows no favoritism. We all fall short of the glory of God, yet God in Christ Jesus forgives all sins, remembering them no more. If the addicted person is baptized, the pastor can direct him to God’s promises in Baptism. Then the pastor can give guidance from Scripture on how to walk as a recovering child of God, with eyes fixed on Jesus.

Understanding the addicted person

Physically, addictions are very hard to overcome. For instance, if alcohol is the substance of choice, its euphoric effect gives positive reinforcement to the addict. The action is repeated, and the brain adapts to the constant overload of alcohol by releasing depressant chemicals. Consequently, it takes more and more alcohol to reach that euphoric feeling. The person becomes dependent upon the substance in order to manage life. When he wants to abstain, there is withdrawal: shakes, sweating, nausea, panic attacks, etc. In order to overcome the withdrawal symptoms, the addict drinks to feel better. Now the person is hooked on the negative reinforcement aspect of alcoholism.



The Christian counselor or pastor can give hope in the message of the Gospel that God shows no favoritism.

WE ALL FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD, YET GOD IN CHRIST JESUS FORGIVES ALL SINS, REMEMBERING THEM NO MORE.



THE
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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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Similarly, a substance like meth acts as artificial dopamine. The artificial dopamine blocks the natural dopamine receptors in the receiving cells, thus flooding the synapse between the cells, causing the euphoric high. The brain shuts down the manufacture of normal dopamine because there is too much. Consequently, a meth addict will be awake for days, make erratic body motions, excessively lick lips with the tongue, etc. When the artificial dopamine has finally been absorbed by the body, the brain is still not producing an adequate supply of dopamine, so the meth addict crashes and sleeps for days. When he awakes, he feels terrible, like he has the flu. The hippocampus in the brain remembers feeling better with meth and the amygdala in the brain reminds him how good it felt. It's not long until he is searching for more. Thus, the addiction and its cravings.

Eyes fixed on Jesus

How can a pastor give hope in the midst of these physical struggles? He can point out that Jesus gives abundant life through faith in Him, while the idol of addictive substances only leads to death. He can read passages from Scripture on freedom from slavery to sin and on the fruits of the Spirit which give peace, joy, self-control, patience and more. As the pastor helps to direct the addict's life, it is important to

keep running with endurance, with eyes fixed on Jesus.

Mentally, addicted people have low self-esteem. They are guilt-ridden and carry with them false beliefs such as "I am always a failure," "My relapse proves I will always be a failure," etc. The pastor must help to question this false belief by asking, "Are you always a failure?", and then pointing out times and places where they have been successful. The pastor can direct the addicted person to read in Philippians where Paul tells us to think on what is good and admirable, pleasant and true.

Meth, opioids and heroin also create paranoid thoughts. This is why meth addicts often scratch themselves. They feel as if bugs are crawling on them, so they scratch sores on their body and keep scratching. If the person had tendencies toward mental diseases, those are magnified. As they become freed from addictive substances, some paranoia will dissipate. The pastor can reassure them from Scripture, pointing out how Jesus healed the demon-possessed man. Just so, God can heal their addictions.

If the addicted person continues to run with endurance, his eyes fixed on Jesus, he can be victorious and see better days. I have seen it happen in recovering addicts who endured with eyes fixed on Jesus. All glory and praise is given to God in Christ. Praise the Lord.

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 "Dealing with Addictions in Rural and Small-town Areas" on Nov. 21, followed by "Always Prepared to Give Reason for Your Hope" on Dec. 12. Find past webinars in our archive.

Register for one of our Engaging Your Community (EYC) or Engaging the Wandering (ETW) events at lcms.org/rstm. These partner events offer practical resources and training in communication skills for reaching out to our wandering members and communities with Christ's love. Contact your district or the RSTM office if you are interested in holding an event near you.

RSTM is also rolling out a new type of event, **Welcoming Workshops**, that we think you and your congregation will love and benefit from. These day-long events will help congregations become more welcoming places, providing God's Word to both current members and guests. They will offer practical resources on Welcoming Buildings, Welcoming Publications and Welcoming People. We are currently scheduling for 2020.

Pray for the 2019 National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference, "Running With Endurance: Eyes Fixed on Jesus," which will be held from Nov. 14–16 in Minneapolis at the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-Minneapolis South.