

SMALL-TOWN PASTORS' CONFERENCE

April 20-22, 2026 ♦ ♦ ♦ Morton, Illinois

A conference tailored for those who minister in town and country settings

PLENARY SESSION SPEAKERS

Brian Croft



Founder and Executive Director of Practical Shepherding; served in pastoral ministry for over twenty-five years; Senior Fellow for the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; written or contributed to over twenty-five books on pastoral ministry

Brandon O’Brien



Senior Director of Global Thought Leadership, Redeemer City to City, a global church planting network; two former small-town church pastorates; author, including *The Strategically Small Church: Intimate, Nimble, Authentic, Effective*

Mark Yarbrough



President and Professor of Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary; conference speaker; author, including *Jonah: Beyond the Tale of a Whale*

SEMINAR LEADERS

Daniel Bennett



Katie Faris



Katrina Forseth



Marty Giese



Jill Hostetler



Jay Lindstrom



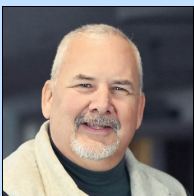
Kathy Petersen



Mark Underkofler



Jeff VanGoethem



Barney Wells



SEMINAR LEADER BIOS

Daniel Bennett

Senior Pastor, Bethany Community Church, Washington, Illinois; DMin in Expository Preaching, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author of *A Passion for the Fatherless*

Katie Faris

Pastor's wife and mother of five living in New Jersey; author of four books, including her new devotional, *Every Hour I Need You*

Katrina Forseth

State Director for *Child Evangelism Fellowship of Illinois* since 2000; served in children's ministry since 1993; Doctor of Biblical Studies in Theology, Master's International University of Divinity; teaches God's Word through her weekly radio program, *Telling Future Generations*

Marty Giese

President, Oak Hills Christian College; grew up on a farm in western Minnesota; longtime small-town pastor; founder of Country Shepherds' Workshop; professor, RHMA's TACT program

Jill Hostetler

Assistant State Director for *Child Evangelism Fellowship of Illinois* since 2002; homeschooling mother of four; kindergarten Sunday School teacher at Bethany Community Church, Washington, Illinois

Jay Lindstrom

Pastor, Christ Community Church, Roggen, Colorado; longtime rural RHMA pastor; DMin in rural ministry, Dallas Theological Seminary

Kathy Petersen

Wycliffe Bible Translators Global Counseling Coordinator; lived much of her life in Africa, both as a child and then as a missionary; women's Bible study teacher

Mark Underkofler

RHMA Regional Representative and Church Ministry Consultant; former rural and small-town church pastor in South Dakota and Iowa for 13 years

Jeff VanGoethem

Associate Pastor, East White Oak Bible Church, a rural church in Central Illinois; seminary professor; four town and country pastorates; conference speaker; member, RHMA Board; author, including *Living Together: A Guide for Counseling Unmarried Couples*

Barney Wells

Director, Fred Craddock Center for Preaching Excellence at Johnson University; longtime country church pastor; consultant and professor, RHMA's TACT Program

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SEMINARS

Tuesday Morning

Daniel Bennett – Preparing and Preaching an Expository Sermon Series

Sunday morning is relentless. It doesn't care how many people we visited in the hospital or how many families were in crisis – it arrives right on schedule. It can be daunting to prepare a single sermon, much less an entire series. This seminar lays out a methodology and practical suggestions to help prepare and preach an expository sermon series.

Brian Croft – The Unhurried Pastor: Redefining Productivity for a More Sustainable Ministry

Many pastors feel trapped in a ministry life and schedule that is full of busyness, noise, and constant running. This commonly leads to burnout, depression, joylessness, and simply leaving the ministry. In this seminar, we will look at a different approach to pastoral ministry that can lead to more productivity, greater personal joy, and longevity in the ministry.

Katie Faris (*women*) – How Not to Get Lost and Lonely in Your Husband's Ministry

While being a pastor's wife is a privilege, it also brings unique challenges, including feeling lost and lonely at times. How do we face these challenges with faith? Through God's Word and the real-life stories of experienced ministry wives, this seminar will remind us who we belong to and why that matters for the long-haul.

Marty Giese – Confronting the Theology of Culture: Rightly dividing Christianity and Culture in the Rural Church

Like Christians everywhere, rural church members carry a set of cultural values and preferences so familiar that they may be confused with biblical truth. This seminar will help rural church leaders identify some areas in which "rural isn't right" and lead their congregations toward a biblical correction of cultural assumptions.

Jill Hostetler – 1, 2, 3 Jesus Loves Me!: Sharing the Message of Salvation with Children

Dr. Francis Schaeffer said, "There is only one Gospel for both adults and children . . . sharing the Gospel with a child is not a different Gospel, but only a translation problem." This fast-paced workshop introduces a hands-on, visually powerful tool used worldwide to clearly communicate the Gospel to children and lead them to Christ.

Jeff VanGoethem – The Healing Power of Intimacy with God

Pastoral work invites many difficulties and troubles. Can prayer and intimacy with God help us? This seminar will examine scripture, the practice of prayer, and the helpfulness of drawing near to God in the midst of the battles of life and ministry.

Tuesday Afternoon

Brian Croft – Biblical Church Revitalization: Building a Plan to Bring New Life Back to Dying, Declining, and Struggling Churches

Eighty percent of North American churches are plateaued or declining. Many pastors seek quick-fix solutions

through some church growth fad. We will turn to the Scriptures to see that God can and does breathe life back into struggling churches through faithful pastoral ministry, and share some practical tools on how to make a plan to implement God's design for your church.

Katie Faris (*women*) – Every Hour I Need You

God designed us to depend on him in everything, including ministry life. In this seminar for pastors' wives, we will explore how our need is part of God's plan, consider the sufficiency of Christ, and connect truths about God's character to our roles and responsibilities as wives, mothers, and church women.

Jay Lindstrom – Why Training Rural Evangelicals to Reach Catholics is Needed

In many rural communities, the unsaved are the "religious lost." They are good, hardworking people, but many are trusting their justification in something other than the Gospel. We will look at the need to increase Gospel dialogue for our congregants.

Brandon O'Brien – The Small Church in the Bible

"Bigger is better" is not in the Bible. Instead, throughout the Scriptures, God delights in doing extraordinary things through ordinary leaders and unimpressive groups. The goal of this seminar is to root our confidence in the "strategically small church" in the big story of Scripture.

Barney Wells – Rural Ministry 101

This seminar is an orientation to rural ministry, geared primarily for pastors and spouses who are just getting started in rural ministry. Seasoned rural pastors and spouses are welcome to attend for a refresher course!

Wednesday Morning

Katrina Forseth – Help! We Need Kids and Young Families in Our Church!

Child Evangelism Fellowship partners with local churches to equip them to reach out, connect with, and minister to children and their families. This seminar will present practical ways your church can connect with your community by focusing on children's ministry, with the ultimate goal of establishing both children and their families in the local church for further spiritual growth and Christian living.

Marty Giese – Balanced Shepherding

Rural church pastors are often solo pastors. This seminar is about keeping three major aspects of pastoral leadership in balance as a solo shepherd in a rural setting.

Brandon O'Brien – Designing a Ministry for Your Context

Small town and country communities are unique, complex, and changing. Copy-and-paste approaches to ministry are unlikely to serve the people in our care. We need local ministries customized to local realities. The goal of this seminar is to provide tools for developing a ministry as unique as your ministry context.

(Cont.)

Kathy Petersen (*women*) – Honest Hope In The Messy

Jesus has come, but until he comes again, we still spend most of our lives dealing with the messy. How do we live in hope when our culture honors cynicism as a way to cope with the messes out there, and self-deprecation as a way to cope with the messes in here? Let's explore Jesus' way to live honestly in the messy.

Mark Underkofler – Small Church Conflict Is No Small Matter

One of the worst things in this world is when a small-town church has a big-time fight. In this seminar we will discover ideas about how to Prevent, Survive, and Recover from the damaging effects of church conflict. But we will also look at how God can redeem the worst situations to accomplish good.

Wednesday Afternoon

Daniel Bennett – Bells and Whistles: Preaching to a Distracted Church

In this seminar we will ask what God desires in our worship. We'll then explore ways technology potentially distracts us from that worship and encourage pastors to think critically about how we adopt technology in our churches. Finally, we will present practical suggestions for pastors who want to help their church engage in worship that proclaims the glory of God to the nations!

Jay Lindstrom – What Pastors Can Do to Train for Catholic Dialogue

There are many factors that reduce dialogue with Catholics in rural communities. We will explore removing roadblocks, reducing Evangelical missteps, training congregants, and suggesting helpful resources they can use.

Kathy Petersen – Come Listen to Jesus Pray for You

Let's slow down to soak in John 17 and receive what Jesus says. To help us, we will address some common ways we resist the glory He gives us.

Jeff VanGoethem – Social Media and the Town and Country Pastor

Social media has become a way of life in our society. It is time for pastors to think through both the opportunities and dangers of the use of social media for the pastor, his family, his church, and his community. This seminar will walk through many of the key questions and concerns.

Barney Wells – The Big Challenge of the New Rural Poor

Over the past 40 years, rural villages have become pockets of inner-city-like poverty. Differing from the traditional rural poor in many ways, these new rural poor can present challenges to the church in the smallest of towns. We will learn what makes this ministry so challenging and some successful strategies for engaging it.

SCHEDULE April 20-22

Monday

3:00-5:00 p.m. Check-in at Grace Church
1325 E. Jefferson, Morton
5:15 p.m. Supper at Grace Church
6:30 p.m. Plenary Session with Mark Yarbrough
8:00 p.m. Ice Cream Social and Fellowship
Hosted by the RHMA Board of Directors

Tuesday

8:00 a.m. Prayer Meeting with Phil Somers
8:45-9:45 a.m. Seminars
9:45-10:15 a.m. Break – Bookstore open
10:15-11:15 a.m. Plenary Session with Brandon O'Brien
11:30 a.m. Lunch / Free-time Options
1:00-2:00 p.m. Seminars
2:00 p.m. Free Time
5:15 p.m. Supper
6:30 p.m. Plenary Session with Mark Yarbrough

Wednesday

8:00 a.m. Prayer Meeting with Phil Somers
8:45-9:45 a.m. Seminars
9:45-10:15 a.m. Break - Bookstore open
10:15-11:15 a.m. Plenary Session with Brian Croft
11:45 a.m. Lunch / Options > *Fellowship with other pastors and wives*
> *Get-to-Know-RHMA presentation*
12:00 noon Lincoln Museum, Springfield
1:00-2:00 p.m. Seminars
2:30-3:30 p.m. Ladies' Tea and Men's Dessert
5:15 p.m. Supper
6:30 p.m. Closing Plenary Session with Mark Yarbrough

REGISTRATION COSTS (REGISTRATION OPENS IN JANUARY)

Pastor only	\$130	Optional additional costs:	
Pastor & Spouse	\$170	Funk Prairie Home/Museum	\$5/person
Full-time Student	\$70	Lincoln Museum	\$15/person
Full-time Student & Spouse	\$110		

› *After April 6, ADD \$20/person*

› *Registration costs are non-refundable after April 6*

ACTIVITIES

In addition to seminars, the following are options for Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon.

Tuesday

Funk Prairie Home Museum *(Limit 20)*

Lafayette Funk was a founder of the Chicago Stockyards and Director of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. His family owned one of America's largest farms and created the first hybrid commercial seed corn. The 13-room home, built in 1864, has been extensively restored. The museum is home to over 4,000 specimens of gemstones and minerals, including an intact saber-toothed tiger skull! The cost is \$5.00 per person.

Disc Golf

Morton has two nationally-ranked disc golf courses. Bring your own discs and enjoy! No cost.

Golf Outing

Weather and interest permitting, we will schedule a golf outing. The cost will be determined based on sign-ups. We will contact you before the conference with further information.

Bass Pro Shops – East Peoria

Bass Pro Shops is an outdoor retail leader in hunting, camping, nature gifts, outdoor cooking, and much more. They have become one of America's premier outdoor retailers with destination outdoor retail stores across America and Canada, serving over 75 million sportsmen a year. Each store is unique and offers a truly unforgettable shopping experience – as close to the Great Outdoors as you can get indoors!

Wednesday

Abraham Lincoln Museum *(Limit 20)*

Step through the doors of the official Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum, and you'll feel as if you've stepped into the life of our 16th president, widely acclaimed as our nation's greatest. The museum features state-of-the-art exhibits, interactive displays, and multimedia programs. It also contains the world's largest collection of documentary material related to the life of Lincoln. Join us for an experience you will never forget, and learn more about Abraham Lincoln and his legacy to the United States and the world. The cost is \$15.00 per person.

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HOTELS

The following rates have been secured at these Morton hotels. Mention RHMA to receive these rates.

Baymont by Wyndham

Phone: (309) 266-8888

\$89.00 – King

(rate expires 4/1)

Best Western Morton Inn

Phone: (309) 266-9933

\$119.00 – King

(rate expires 3/31)

Comfort Inn & Suites

Phone: (309) 263-5116

\$94.00 – Two Queens

(rate expires 4/14)

Days Inn by Wyndham

Phone: (309) 266-1600

\$99.99 – Two Queens

(rate expires 4/10)

Holiday Inn Express & Suites

Phone: (309) 263-4400

\$144.00 – King

\$144.00 – Two Queens

(rates expire 4/1)

Quality Inn

Phone: (309) 524-6064

\$89.00 – Two Queens

(rate expires 4/1)

