



MERRY Christmas

A merry heart does good like medicine.
Proverbs 17:22

Greetings to you and your family during this Christmas season!

Thank you for being a vital part of sharing God's word! Because of your generous support of gifts, prayers, and partnerships, many people across the Dakotas have had the experience of following Jesus. Your commitment to the ministries of the Dakotas Conference has helped share the Good News! Many lives are transformed and programs flourish because of you. **Now...**we need your help again.

Entering the ministry is a call. Our pastors follow the Holy Spirit to bring the word of God into our communities. But, to answer this call, it takes sacrifice. Sacrifices these individuals are taking for us. Sacrifices taken for our communities. Sacrifices to preach the word of God to our children and families. Sacrifices to guide us spiritually in our journeys. These individuals are **called**. But that call often comes with a price tag that spins many of our pastors into a financial crisis.

Each year the Dakotas United Methodist Foundation highlights a ministry. We ask for your support at Christmas time. Your gift today provides yet another opportunity for so many to connect with Jesus. What's weighing on our hearts today is the insurmountable seminary and educational debt our pastors are facing.

If we step back and take a look, the math doesn't work. Education and seminary costs are high. Pastor's salaries are low. Those called to ministry are so deeply committed they take on debt. They hope that they'll be able to pay it off once they are in the field. But today's entry-level salaries do not allow this to happen. The stress takes a toll on the effectiveness of their ministry. The ministry in which they **are called!**

Over the past three years, we've had the privilege of partnering with the Lilly Endowment to help end these crises. The generous grant from Lilly helps us help pastors develop stronger financial literacy skills. By reducing or eliminating educational debt, pastors become equipped to foster a theology of generosity within our congregations.

We've made great strides in addressing the issue. But there is so much more to do! Your gifts have made a financial and educational impact on so many pastors in our Conference:

"We know from research there's a direct correlation between pastors who are financially healthy and literate and the financial well-being of their churches. Pastors lead in generating missional resources. Their ability to give generously and ask others to give generously become compromised if they are anxious about their personal finances,"

—Diane Owen, area program director for the Lilly Grant initiative

During this Christmas season, let's take a moment to thank our pastors for answering their call. Together, let's give from our hearts to help alleviate our pastors' educational debt. Let's help them find a place of financial freedom. Let's help them lovingly and effectively pastor and celebrate the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Won't you please join me this Christmas in giving back to those who have been called? Let's help those who have entered the ministry to share the joy of the birth of Jesus. May this season give our pastors financial peace so they can truly share the "Joy to the World!"

We wish you a very Merry Christmas!



Sheri Meister

PS. Your gift before December 31 will help change the lives of the pastors in your conference, in your community. Please join me in helping to rid our pastors of the insurmountable seminary and educational debt they are facing. **Thank you!**

