

Merry Christmas

December 2020

Merry Christmas to you and your family!

I am writing to you this Christmas season asking for your help. **Many of our pastors are struggling.** They are stressed financially due to seminary debt. You see, their salaries may never be enough to cover the costs required to become a pastor.

There is a solution. But your help is needed now. *Read on.* And I'll share how your gift now can have *triple* the impact.

To care for their congregations and to minister to their communities, our pastors receive a unique call. To answer this call, many of our pastors have taken out loans to pay for seminary. So, some of our pastors are carrying enormous student and seminary debt.

Many pastors have shared with me that they continuously worry about the impossible amount of debt they carry. **This is where you come in.** The Dakotas-Minnesota area is blessed with a \$1 million grant from the Lilly Endowment to help pastors in financial distress - that is, if \$500,000 in matching funds is raised. We are so grateful for the funds this match has already received. But more financial support is needed now to fulfill the terms of the grant.

To care for others, one must take good care of themselves. This past year has been unprecedented for everyone. No one could have predicted the pandemic of 2020 to have impacted individuals, families, and businesses locally and worldwide. This pandemic has affected you, your neighbor, and your pastor, who continues to care for the community, meet the needs of their churches, and support their families.

The average education debt for our pastors is \$67,000. This debt, coupled with low salaries, is overwhelming and all-consuming in our pastors' everyday lives. **With your help and the partnership with Lilly, these debt loads will decrease.** Your pastor will be in a healthier place financially, which will enable them to concentrate on the needs of the people they minister.

Thank you for your past gifts and for being a vital part of sharing God's word! Because of your generous donations, prayers, and partnerships, many people across the region have the experience of following Jesus. Your commitment to the ministries of the Dakotas/Minnesota Annual Conferences has helped share the Good News! Many lives are being transformed, and programs flourish because of you.

Your help is needed now.

Your gift today will have triple the impact with the matching funds from the Lilly Endowment. It helps pastors develop more vital financial literacy skills. By reducing or eliminating educational debt, pastors become more viable in their ministry.

Great strides have been made. But there is so much more to do! Your gifts have made a financial and educational impact on so many pastors in our Conference:



The “Investing in Leaders” grant is an investment in my pastoral leadership that allows me to speak about money matters with less anxiety, lead with more confidence in my family’s security during these economically uncertain times, and helped my example of debt repayment to offer hope for parishioners in financial literacy education.

Pastor Jerad Morey, Northfield UMC

During this Christmas season, let’s take a moment to thank our pastors for the work they do for us and in our communities. Let’s show them support during these trying times of COVID-19. **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 to ministry? 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 genuinely share the “Joy to the World!”

I wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas!



Sheri Meister
President/Executive Director

P.S. Your gift before December 31 will help change the pastors’ lives in your Conference, in your community. Plus, it will have triple the impact, with the matching funds from the Lilly Endowment. Please join me in helping to rid our pastors of the insurmountable seminary and educational debt they face. *Thank you!*