

## FROM TUESDAY TO TWO MILLION

A United Church of Christ pastor, three Lutheran pastors and Rachel Rosendahl, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church met every Tuesday to talk about lectionary texts or whatever else might be on their minds. On one such Tuesday, the subject of medical debt was a topic. Medical debt is not simply an issue for the people of Winona or even the state of Minnesota. It's estimated that half of the people living in the United States carry the weight of medical debt. The discussion that Tuesday morning created a spark. In what can only be described as the work of the Holy Spirit, that spark created a brushfire that moved those pastors to consider a way they could work together to eliminate the medical debt of as many people as possible.

Their ministry began in the season of Lent. Each pastor used this season to inform their congregation of the need that existed and of a ministry to remove crushing medical debt that was beginning. Included was an invitation to work together so the impact of their gift could be magnified. At Grace Presbyterian Church, the ministry was discussed in worship. Letters were sent. Information was posted to the church's website and Facebook® page. Close to \$3,000, raised through the sacrificial giving of Grace Presbyterian Church members, was added to the gifts of the other congregations.

At the same time, the pastors were looking to find a partner with the knowledge and skill to make their ministry a reality. They chose to work with "RIP Medical Debt", a company founded in 2014 by two former debt collection executives. The result? A total of just over \$15,000 was received by the five participating churches. From that tidy sum, \$2,024,000 in medical debt for people in Minnesota and Wisconsin was eliminated. That's a little over \$2 million of debt gone. The final part of the process is notifying those whose medical debt has been reduced or removed. The yellow envelope that those households receive is the best news they may ever get. Try to imagine the surprise, the relief and the joy those letters bring. Now multiply those emotions by 1,057. That's the number of households that were able to eliminate or significantly lower their medical debt. No longer would that debt be a black mark against their credit rating. No longer would they struggle to pay even the minimum payment. No more would they be turned down for a loan. Simply put, no more would they be drowning in medical debt. Because of the efforts of these five churches, the world now has 1,057 more resurrection stories to celebrate.

Grace Presbyterian Church in Winona, Minnesota is a Matthew 25 congregation. One focus of Matthew 25 churches is to work for the eradication of systemic poverty. The story of five congregations in Winona working together, people who pooled their resources and were able to remove a staggering amount of medical debt for over a thousand households, is a story of both resurrection and generosity, a testimonial to what can happen when we work together and one more reminder that God accepts what we offer and makes it amazing.