

## **February Outreach of the Month Rostered Minister Debt Reduction**

This month's Outreach of the Month will go to the Synod's Rostered Minister Debt Reduction Fund. The indebtedness (due to college and seminary loans) of the rostered ministers in the ELCA has become an increasing problem. At Luther Seminary, the largest ELCA seminary, average student indebtedness is \$62,000. Unlike other professions, it is more challenging for pastors and deacons to repay their student loans because of the compensation pastors and deacons receive. Indebtedness impacts pastors and deacons in several ways. Luther Seminary research has found:

- 52 percent of pastors surveyed say loans negatively impacted their standard of living.
- 30 percent of pastors surveyed are bi-vocational.
- 26 percent of pastors surveyed left ministry due to financial pressure.
- 25 percent of pastors surveyed pursue higher paying ministry opportunities.
- 24 percent of pastors surveyed postpone health care.

Our Bishop has stated that he experiences the impact of rostered minister indebtedness in pastors who are open to serving in our Synod and intrigued by some of our smaller congregations but determine they cannot enter into the call process because of the burden of indebtedness. In response, the Synod Council has approved a plan to begin to address the burden of seminary education debt born by many of our pastors and deacons. The plan is to annually award as many 2,000-dollar grants as possible directly to lending institutions for educational debt to be applied to the principal of a rostered minister's seminary student loans. The synod has been advised that 2,000 dollars is the minimum amount that will have a lasting impact.

*Pastor Gary*