



## Road Work Ahead

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The Gospel of Luke records the parable of the Good Samaritan, the story a man who has been assaulted by robbers and left to die on Jericho Road. Historically, Jericho Road is a dangerous 17-mile stretch of rocky terrain that connects Jerusalem to Jericho. So notorious is this road that until the fifth century it was called the *red* or *bloody way*.

In this parable, Jesus describes religious leaders who ignore the needs of the injured man on the side of the road as they go about their way. No one stops to help the man until a Samaritan tends to his needs. For those listening to Jesus tell such a story, the Samaritan would be recognized as the least likely candidate to grant such mercy, and yet it is the Samaritan that rescues the injured man.

We have many Jericho Roads among us. One way people are robbed, wounded, and discarded today is by falling victim to exorbitant healthcare cost and the lack of adequate healthcare coverage. Medical financial hardship is common in the U.S., especially in adults ages 18–64 and those without health insurance coverage. According to a recent study published in *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 137.1 million adults reported medical financial hardships in 2018.

In fact, according to TD Ameritrade, medical debt is the top reason people, regardless of age, consider cashing in their 401(k)s or other retirement savings. Because negative medical debt impacts credit ratings, potential harm is present for housing, employment, and educational opportunities.

The United Church of Christ's Justice & Local Church Ministries, in collaboration with our local churches, conferences, and affiliated ministries, is seeking to live out the parable of the Samaritan by abolishing medical debt for as many families as possible, in every region of the church, from now to General Synod 2021. We launched this initiative in October 2018, beginning with the Illinois Conference. We collected \$38,000 and as a result, the United Church of Christ abolished \$5.3 million dollars of debt for 5,888 families living at or below poverty in Chicago and beyond.

This year's Giving Tuesday donations will be used to contribute to local church and conference efforts ensuring no area is precluded from participating in this initiative if they wish. One might say that our collective participation in the abolishment of medical debt for so many vulnerable families living at or below poverty is tantamount to the charitable act of the Samaritan on Jericho Road.

It feels good to exercise charity, and yet charity is not our only call. We are called to do justice. We are called to not only help those who have been left to die on the side of the road, we are called to repair the road itself. We will use our charitable acts to keep the rising costs of healthcare in the forefront of our prophetic policy work as well. We hope you will join us in this effort. The road is also our responsibility.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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