

Small rural church ends its 10-year wait for a pastor

“The church I serve is the only PC(USA) church for 30 miles around,” says Rev. Martha Shute Goodman. **“They operate a food pantry and feed approximately 160 people a month. I just can’t say enough good things about how committed they are to our denomination and how passionately they care about being Presbyterian.”** Even so, the small congregation in Tunica, Mississippi had to wait 10 years for a pastor who would accept the salary it could offer. The Board of Pensions’ Seminary Debt Assistance Program helped Rev. Goodman be that pastor.

Thousands of dollars in combined student debt

The situation didn’t look good when Rev. Goodman and her minister husband graduated from Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education. Each answered a call at a small rural church – and each had thousands of dollars in student debt. **“If you get an MBA, or if you get an MD, you’re usually able to pay back those school debts fairly quickly,”** Rev. Goodman explains. **“But the churches we serve are just doing the best they can. They are not able to pay salaries comparable to those other types of professions.”**

Although they clipped coupons and lived modestly, their small salaries left little to pay off their loans. Rev. Goodman and her husband applied for Seminary Debt Assistance and each received a \$2,500 grant. **“I just can’t tell you how much it meant to us, personally, and how much it meant to our individual churches to know that we had received this,”** she says.



Rev. Martha Shute Goodman

“They are encouraged by this program, knowing that the denomination is looking out for them, and trying to ensure that they do get a pastor, even this small, small church in the Mississippi Delta.”

Interview conducted in February 2004.

About the Seminary Debt Assistance Program

Under the Seminary Debt Assistance Program, ministers of the Word and Sacrament can receive a grant of up to \$2,500 per year for up to four years to help them repay educational debt incurred while seeking a Master of Divinity degree. The program is designed to assist small congregations with less than 150 members and a budget of less than \$250,000. Ministers who are in their first seven years of ministry can apply.

The Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) oversees benefits programs for church workers and their families, while being guided by the Biblical principles of community and stewardship.

For information and an enrollment form, call 800-773-7752 (800-PRESPLAN). Or visit the Board’s Web site at www.pensions.org.