

Seminary Debt Assistance Program helps a young pastor couple with their seminary debt of \$25,000

Amy Lehr and Hunter Camp met at Columbia Seminary and married a month after graduating. Answering their first calls at small churches in Virginia, they arrived with their wedding gifts and the makings of a new life together – plus \$25,000 in combined student debt.

“It was an overwhelming year for us with all those changes at one time,” Rev. Lehr recalls. **“And the debt was an added weight on our shoulders.”** The two pastors were earning modest salaries (in fact, Rev. Lehr is serving two churches to create a full-time position). It would take years for them to pay off their loans.

Fortunately, the couple was able to benefit from the Seminary Debt Assistance Program, initiated by the Board of Pensions in 2001.

“Our Associate Presbyterian told us about the program,” says Rev. Lehr. **“We filled out the applications as soon as they became available.”**

Applying in 2001 and again in early 2002, the couple qualified for a total of \$10,000 in debt repayment assistance.

The Board’s assistance seems to have served as a catalyst for the wider community. Rev. Lehr’s two churches, her family and her hometown church all stepped forward to help pay off the rest of the debt. **“We feel wonderfully free and blessed that we would be assisted this way,”** says Rev. Lehr. **“This is testimony to me that we have an abundant and generous God.”**

Interview conducted in April 2002.

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.