



SUNDAY, OCT. 20, 2019

Contacts:

- Connie Larkman, UCC News Director, Cleveland, 216-736-2196, larkmanc@ucc.org
- Donna L. Hammond, Trinity UCC, Chicago, 773-738-7989, dlhammond@trinitychicago.org
- On Oct. 20: Hans Holznagel, UCC News Team, 216-375-8776, holznagelh@ucc.org

Church bodies to announce the forgiveness of millions in medical debt affecting 5,888 Chicago families

WHO: The United Church of Christ and a collaboration of Chicago churches
WHAT: News conference/celebration
WHEN: Sunday, Oct. 20, 2 p.m. CDT
WHERE: [Trinity United Church of Christ](#), 400 W. 95th St., Chicago, IL 60628
WHY: To note that \$5.3 million in medical debt has been abolished
VISUALS: Clergy will share the geographic areas targeted and lead a celebration in the sanctuary with music and prayer

REPORTERS AND EDITORS: Local, regional and national leaders of the [United Church of Christ](#) will share details Oct. 20 that church donations have wiped out \$5.3 million in medical debt for 5,888 South Side Chicago families. In a news conference at [Trinity United Church of Christ](#), they will talk about the campaign that focused on communities in three specific ZIP codes for debt relief.

Working with the New York-based nonprofit [RIP Medical Debt](#), church bodies raised \$38,000 to buy debt in September at pennies on the dollar. Families are now receiving letters telling them that their debt, averaging \$907, has been forgiven. The urban neighborhoods were chosen because of their demographics, said the Rev. Traci Blackmon, the UCC's national associate general minister for [Justice and Local Church Ministries](#), which contributed to the debt buy. "Medical debt is now the leading cause of bankruptcy in the U.S.," she said. "Such debt further destabilizes the physical, social, financial and spiritual health of families and communities already besieged with economic challenges."

"When medical debt piles up, families have to make difficult financial decisions, sometimes cutting back on food, clothing or other basic household items," said the Rev. Justo González II, leader of the UCC's regional [Illinois Conference](#), another contributor to the project.

"Our prayer is that this release from burden will be a blessing in the lives of thousands of our neighbors," said the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, senior pastor of [Trinity UCC](#), the lead congregational contributor whose members made generous donations toward the effort. [St. Pauls UCC](#) in Lincoln Park, [Covenant UCC](#) in South Holland, Ill., and [The Leaders Network](#), a consortium of local Baptist churches serving Chicago's black neighborhoods, are other major contributors.

Fact sheets on the impact of medical debt relief are [here](#).

NEWS CONFERENCE SPEAKERS ON OCT. 20:

- The Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, Senior Pastor, [Trinity United Church of Christ](#), Chicago
- The Rev. Dr. Ozzie Smith Jr., Senior Pastor, [Covenant United Church of Christ](#), South Holland, Ill.
- The Rev. Matt Fitzgerald, Senior Pastor, [St. Pauls United Church of Christ](#), Chicago
- The Rev. Justo González II, Conference Minister, UCC [Illinois Conference](#), Westchester, Ill.
- The Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister (national) UCC, Cleveland

#

The [United Church of Christ](#), a mainline Protestant denomination, has nearly 900,000 members and 5,000 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, it is a church of many firsts: the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American. More on the UCC's justice ministries is [here](#).