



EMBARGOED UNTIL 10 A.M. CST SATURDAY, JAN. 18, 2020

CONTACT: Connie Larkman, UCC News Director, Cleveland, office 216-736-2196, cell 216-496-5540, larkmanc@ucc.org

Church groups to announce the forgiveness of millions in medical debt affecting 11,108 St. Louis families

- WHO:** The United Church of Christ, a collaboration of St. Louis churches, and the Deaconess Foundation
- WHAT:** News conference/celebration
- WHEN:** Saturday, Jan. 18, 10 a.m. CST
- WHERE:** [Christ the King United Church of Christ](#), 11370 Old Halls Ferry Rd., Black Jack, MO 63033
- WHY:** To note that \$12.9 million in medical debt has been abolished in St. Louis city and county
- VISUALS:** Clergy will share the localities targeted and lead a celebration in the sanctuary

REPORTERS AND EDITORS: Local, regional and national leaders of the [United Church of Christ](#) will share details Jan. 18 that church donations, matched by a generous gift from the Deaconess Foundation, have wiped out \$12.9 million in medical debt for 11,108 families in St. Louis and St. Louis County. In a news conference at [Christ the King UCC](#), which begins the celebration of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend, they will talk about why the campaign got started and how it is bringing debt relief to scores of local neighborhoods.

“This endeavor is the intent of the United Church of Christ to make this tangible ministry of debt abolishment in our denominational regions another expression of the ways we seek to live out our commitment to Three Great Loves -- Love of Neighbor, Love of Children, Love of Creation -- and to call attention to the impact of the failure to expand Medicaid in Missouri on poor families,” said the Rev. Traci Blackmon, senior pastor, [Christ the King UCC](#), and UCC associate general minister of Justice and Local Church Ministries.

Church bodies raised more than \$60,000, matched by a \$40,000 donation from the [Deaconess Foundation](#). Working with the New York-based nonprofit [RIP Medical Debt](#), the group bought medical debt in December at pennies on the dollar. Families will receive letters on MLK weekend telling them that their medical debt has been forgiven.

“We recognize access to health care is a persistent challenge for the 1 in 5 children living in poverty in the St. Louis region,” said the Rev. Starsky Wilson, president and C.E.O., [Deaconess Foundation](#), St. Louis. “Furthermore, medical debt is a drag on family stability and economic mobility for these families.”

“People should not face poverty because of illness or injury,” said the Rev. Rebecca Turner, pastor and teacher, of [Christ Church UCC](#), Maplewood, Mo. “We see the way this action can interrupt a downward spiral into a black hole of poverty and can give families a chance to 'reset' their financial situation.”

“What a way to be sharing vital communion together for the forgiveness of medical debt for the poor in St. Louis city and county!” said the Rev. Ginny Brown Daniel, [Missouri Mid-South Conference](#) minister.

NEWS CONFERENCE SPEAKERS ON JAN 18:

- The Rev. **Traci A. Blackmon**, Senior Pastor, [Christ the King UCC](#), Florissant, Mo. and Associate General Minister (national), UCC, Cleveland
- The Rev. **Rebecca Turner**, Senior Pastor, [Christ Church UCC](#), Maplewood, Mo.
- The Rev. **Starsky Wilson**, President & C.E.O., [Deaconess Foundation](#), St. Louis
- The Rev. **Ginny Brown Daniel**, Conference Minister, [Missouri Mid-South Conference](#), UCC
- U.S. Rep. [William Lacy Clay](#)
- **Rick Stevens**, President, [Christian Hospital](#), St. Louis
- **Tishaura Jones**, Treasurer, [City of St. Louis](#)
- A community member affected by medical debt

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

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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](#).