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## Body, Mind and Spirit Lighten up

By Todd Outcalt

Like most congregations across the country, Calvary in Brownsburg is experiencing financial stresses and struggles. Unemployment, underemployment and economic fears have impacted congregational giving to the operational budget and our building fund – though giving to mission and outreach has never been greater. Calvary also is committed to paying 100 percent of its conference tithe and other commitments.



But during the past year, as I have listened to stories about congregations who have cut staff, cut ministries and cut mission, I continued to wonder if there is another way to face a financial hurdle. I found myself drawn to Gospel lessons where Jesus told His disciples, “Take nothing for your journey, no money or tunic and minister among those who receive you.” Or “Consider the sparrows, how your heavenly Father cares for them. And you are of much more value than they.”

Noting how many in the congregation had been weathering through unemployment for months and trusting God, I felt my family could trust God, too. And so I wrote a heartfelt letter to the congregation and staff informing them that I would go without salary, housing allowance and benefits until the church could balance its income with our expenditures.

This decision, of course, was made with conversation around our family dinner table. Our family had to be committed as a whole to this course of sacrifice.

After 27 years of pastoral ministry, I had to wonder: Had my pasto-

ral work just become a paycheck? Was I doing the work to preach the Gospel and to help the church feed the hungry, clothe the naked and stand in solidarity with the poor? Or, at this juncture of my life, was I just going through the motions?

What I discovered about myself and the church was legion. First, I found myself working harder and longer hours without pay. But I also believe I helped more people, preached stronger messages (certainly more passionate and urgent messages), and I truly experienced sacrificial giving to God’s work because our family couldn’t afford to give much. Some 20 days, when the family bills came due, I had no idea where the next dollar was coming from – for Ball State tuition, for mortgage, for utilities and sometimes for food. We had savings, but not enough to pay Uncle Sam, Ball State and tithe at the same level. But we did it anyway!

Our family testimony is – God is good. God is faithful. And God provided everything we needed as a family. Taking an unemployed status as a pastor also helped me to encourage people to give more to God’s work despite our circumstances, to live more simply and generously, and to trust God with more of their difficulties, struggles and their resources. I had more conversations with people about fear, and trust, and generosity than ever before. And, although our family was committed to not receiving income, the administrative council at Calvary had lengthy conversation about stewardship and voted to pay my salary in

full by the end of the year. So the conversation became larger than just a family issue. We all learned God’s people are generous and the church responds in times of crisis.

Sure, my five weeks of unemployment were few in comparison to many others, but I did discover gospel in profound ways. And now, before I step into the pulpit, I do thank God for the blessings I have received – even a paycheck.

*Todd Outcalt serves as senior pastor of Calvary UMC in Brownsburg, Ind. His blog can be found at [toddoutcalt.blogspot.com](http://toddoutcalt.blogspot.com) and his latest books are *School’s Out (Abingdon)*, *\$5 Youth Ministry (Group)*, and *Your Beautiful Wedding on Any Budget (Sourcebooks)*.*

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