

I want to thank the members of this committee for allowing me to speak today, as well as Rep. Anderson for his invitation. I am here this morning as not only a pastor in this community, but a husband and father of two children who live a very similar reality as many of the people I serve.

Originally from Tioga County, I moved to Dillsburg in May of 2021 as I was appointed to serve as the pastor of Calvary Methodist Church. When I first met with the leaders of Calvary, I remember saying to them something along the lines of “I’m not just your pastor, I’m a pastor for Dillsburg.” I meant those words and try to be as connected to this community as I can. Which means that my testimony is not only influenced by the people I worship with on Sunday, but every person in town I meet.

For some clarity, I want it to be known that the Christian Church exists, first and foremost, to give worship and praise to God, above all else. It is then called to care for the members of itself, with multiple commands in Scripture to care for the brothers and sisters. Whenever possible the church is to also “do good to everyone,” as Paul says in Galatians 6:10. What this means is that every Christian church that exists is one that ought to be making a positive impact on the community around it by personifying Jesus of Nazareth.

That calling of the church to serve one another and the broader community is what brings me into contact with people from all walks of life who feel the impact of rising costs. I hear daily about the struggles that families and individuals have when navigating their monthly budget. While there are many in this area who are fortunate to not struggle, many others struggle silently off to the side because they either feel deep shame in their struggle, or they feel as though nothing can be feasibly done to mitigate the problem.

Sometimes, these concerns come to me when I have individuals call the church asking for financial assistance with rent. I’ve had people stop by the church needing something as little as a few bucks for gas to get to work, for help with their electric bill in the winter so they can stay warm, even some needing help affording essential prescriptions. I can all but guarantee that most weeks I have a phone call, email, or drop-in to the office from someone who is in need in many areas, most always because of rising costs. And my experience is not unique to Calvary. I know the other churches in our community are receiving many of the same requests.

Currently, in our church, I hear of even more struggles as families and individuals come to me for prayer and help. We have people unable to find affordable housing and are stuck living with week-to-week leases in hotel rooms. Some of the people in our church and community who need housing and can afford a monthly rent usually end up in apartments that are borderline uninhabitable. Unfortunately, it’s the best they can afford. Many of them are on waitlists for years for affordable housing options. As they wait, their monthly rent continues to increase for places that should simply be demolished. Still, we help however we can while they wait.

Whether it’s the cost of rent, gas, groceries, trash disposal, utilities, or something else, people all around us are in desperate need of help, and they see the church as a place that they can go to get some of that help. As a non-profit with funding consisting of tithes and offerings, we do the best that we can to meet as many needs as possible. Whether it’s by offering financial assistance, directing individuals to the many New Hope programs, offering low-cost or even free clothing

through our Calvary Thrift Shop, or offering free community meals every other month, Calvary and the other Christian churches in and around Dillsburg are working hard to be neighbors helping neighbors.

I share all of this so that our policymakers can hear that many in our communities are suffering and struggling because of things they cannot control. While there are so many wonderful neighbors helping neighbors, it can only go so far. The scale and scope of rising costs is growing beyond what neighbors alone can address. While the church continues to stand in the gap, we need our elected officials to catch up to this reality and help address the needs we are seeing every day.

We, as neighbors helping neighbors, need our elected officials to help neighbors as well. And so, I urge each person who hears this testimony to consider what you can do to help your constituents—but not only them. Consider what you can do to help your neighbor who lives right next door.