



Rev. Jeanne Tyler

"A call is about recognizing your gifts with other people and for other people on behalf of the Gospel. I could listen to people, for their emotions, for what they were really saying...ironic for a hearing-impaired person."

That's how the Rev. Jeanne Tyler describes her call to ministry in the 1960s while living in Germany with her husband, John. The Tylers attended Chicago Theological Seminary together, were ordained together, and spent the next 33 years jointly serving congregations in Wisconsin, Nebraska, and Iowa.

But Jeanne's service to the United Church of Christ found another essential expression. Born with cerebral palsy and diagnosed with moderate to severe hearing loss in the third grade, Jeanne became a fierce advocate for the church's awareness of, and response to, those with disabilities, especially those in authorized ministry. "There is a hidden cost of disability of which many are unaware," she explains. "The financial cost - speech therapy, hearing aids, motorized wheelchairs, specialized computers - all expensive. Without these, isolation and depression can set in."

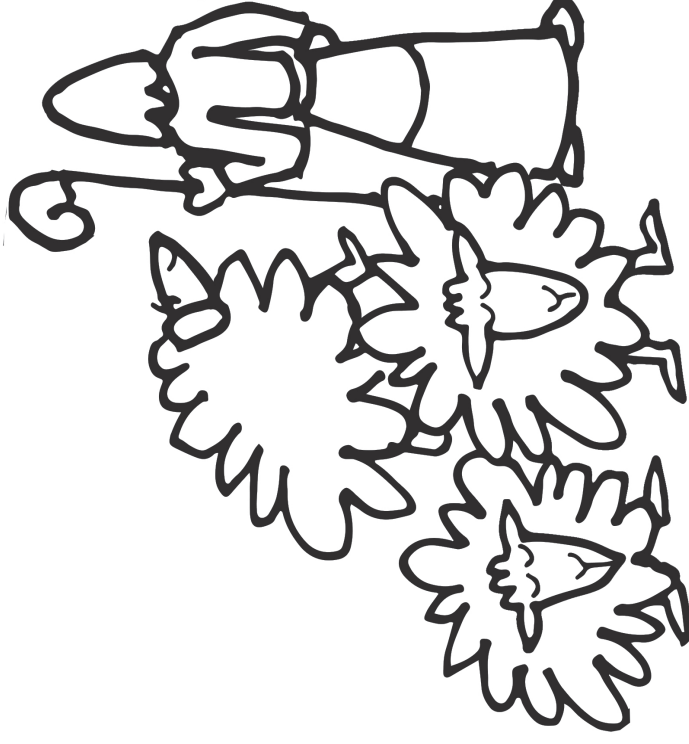
Jeanne served with the UCC's Disabilities Ministries for two six-year terms, as well as with Local Church Ministries and Wider Church Ministries, and served a term on the UCC Board of Directors. She was instrumental in the conception and funding of the Virginia Kreyer Endowed Scholarship Fund, which provides tuition and assistive technology for authorized ministers with disabilities. "I'm grateful for the United Church of Christ being with me on my journey, and it's essential that the church continue its commitment to clergy who have disabilities."

Hearing aids have been a godsend to Jeanne, from the first ones she used while still in college. "They worked well for the time - I could hear the fire crackle for the first time and it was just thrilling." When Jeanne and John retired in 2011, they were mostly prepared financially, but the high cost of newer technology hearing aids was problematic. Last year, a grant from the Christmas Fund filled in the gap left by her insurance allowance, allowing Jeanne to have hearing aids that make all the difference. As she is a member of five different reading groups, the hearing aids have enabled Jeanne to participate more fully in those conversations that mean so much. She also praises the efforts at accessibility put forth by her home congregation, First Congregational UCC of Madison, Wisconsin, as a model for others.

"As a pastor, I always asked people to support the Christmas Fund, to support those whose life work has been serving and empowering others, but I never thought I would be on the receiving end. I am humbled and grateful for this acknowledgment by my church that hearing aids are life-giving."

★ THE CHRISTMAS FUND

for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



In 2016, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled

- Small pension supplementation for 448 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,507,787)
- Health benefits supplementation for 216 retired clergy and lay employees (\$487,338)
- Emergency grants for 50 individuals and families (\$90,927)
- Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to 503 retired clergy and lay employees (\$233,800)