

Shepherding the Light



Ted Dawson, Artist

Offering Guide 2017

★ THE CHRISTMAS FUND

for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



The Pension Boards
United Church of Christ, Inc.
WHERE FAITH AND FINANCE INTERSECT

www.christmasfund.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
How the Funds Are Used.....	2
Top Giving Churches to the 2016 Christmas Fund Offering.....	3
Timeline for Promoting the 2017 Christmas Fund Offering.....	4
Worship Resources.....	5
Advent I - Hope.....	5
Advent II - Peace.....	6
Advent III - Joy.....	7
Advent IV - Love.....	8
Christmas Eve/Christmas Day.....	9
Ordinary Time, Year B, #1.....	10
Ordinary Time, Year B, #2.....	11
Bulletin Inserts.....	12
Authors of Worship Resources.....	16
Artist of "Shepherding the Light".....	16
Is Your Church 5 for 5?.....	Inside Back Cover
Where to Donate.....	Back Cover
Ordering Extra Supplies.....	Back Cover
Further Assistance.....	Back Cover

May the love of God shepherd us;
The wisdom of Christ enlighten us;
And the working of the Holy Spirit quicken us.

- Lancelot Andrewes

For 116 years, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a tangible expression of God's love and light in the world. One of the four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ, the Christmas Fund provides UCC congregations and members an opportunity to reach out in kindheartedness to those who have faithfully shepherded our Church and who now find themselves facing unexpected financial needs.

In 2016, UCC congregations and members generously contributed \$1,562,260 to the Offering. This enabled the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, the charitable arm of the Pension Boards, to provide, on behalf of the whole Church, Supplementation of Small Annuities, Retiree Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants, and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks to individuals and families in need.

The theme of the 2017 Christmas Fund Offering is **Shepherding the Light**, and our goal is to raise \$1.7 million to help support these ministries of light and love. The recipients of these gifts have faithfully served the church and now, in their time of need, we can be the church to them. We invite and encourage you to shepherd God's light and support this year's appeal.

We are pleased to provide the resources in this **Offering Guide** to assist and inspire you in promoting the Christmas Fund in your congregation. These and other resources are also available online at www.christmasfund.org.

On behalf of the hundreds of clergy and lay employees and their families whose lives were touched by your support of last year's Christmas Fund Offering, we offer our sincere thanks for your generosity!

*The Pension Boards–United Church of Christ, Inc.
and United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance*



How the Funds Are Used

One of the unique aspects of the Christmas Fund is that the funds provide direct financial assistance to individual UCC clergy and lay church employees – the funds do not support programs or institutions, but people. With your continued generosity, more individuals will receive the support of the Church in their time of need.

- **MONTHLY PENSION SUPPLEMENTATION**
for 448 lower-income retired UCC clergy and lay employees

Our retired clergy and lay employees rely on this income supplementation for basic needs such as food, utilities, and living and medical expenses. Funds to meet this need come from three sources: the Christmas Fund Offering, Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM), and the Ministerial Assistance Fund. The amount of pension supplementation totaled \$1,507,787 in 2016.

- **QUARTERLY HEALTH PREMIUM SUPPLEMENTATION**
for 216 lower-income retired UCC clergy and lay employees

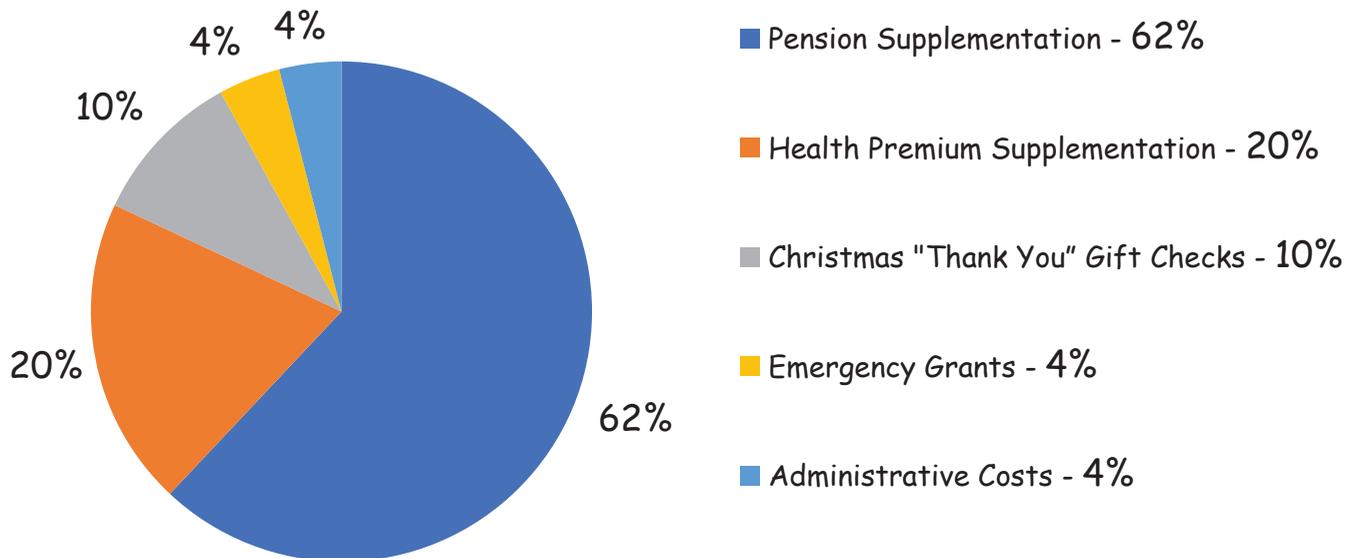
These funds subsidize premiums for the UCC Medicare Supplement Plan with Rx so that individuals can afford and receive quality health care. In 2016, assistance totaled \$487,338.

- **CHRISTMAS “THANK YOU” GIFT CHECKS**
given to 503 retired UCC clergy and lay employees

This special gift at Christmas time reminds these Veterans of the Cross that they have not been forgotten and that the Church is grateful for their service. Gifts totaled \$233,800 in 2016.

- **EMERGENCY GRANTS**
for 50 active/retired UCC clergy and lay employees

Sometimes those who serve the Church need our help. Emergency funds are available to assist in covering costs that arise unexpectedly – for example, large medical expenses, or home damage resulting from natural disasters. Emergency assistance in 2016 totaled \$90,927.



Top Giving Churches to the 2016 Christmas Fund Offering

United Church of Christ congregations from every state and Conference opened their hearts in 2016 to abundantly bless the ministries supported by the Christmas Fund.

Top Total Dollar Congregations gave more than \$5,000

Naples United Church of Christ	Naples, Florida
Rock Spring Congregational United Church of Christ	Arlington, Virginia
Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ	Seattle, Washington
Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ	Fort Collins, Colorado
University Congregational United Church of Christ	Seattle, Washington
First Church of Christ Congregational UCC	Suffield, Connecticut
Christ Congregational United Church of Christ	Silver Spring, Maryland
United Church of Christ	Medfield, Maine
Falmouth Congregational United Church of Christ	Falmouth, Maine
The Bath Church United Church of Christ	Akron, Ohio
Avon Lake United Church of Christ	Avon Lake, Ohio
Pleasantville United Church of Christ	Chalfont, Pennsylvania
Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ	Chillicothe, Illinois

Since 2005, Naples UCC in Florida has led the way as the top giving congregation to the Christmas Fund. With their gift of almost \$30,000 in 2016, they gave more than any other congregation and also made the Top Per Capita Giving List! Thank you!

Top Per Capita Giving Congregations gave more than \$25/member

Lahuioakalani Ka'anapali Congregational Church	Honokowai, Hawai'i
Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ	Chillicothe, Illinois
First Congregational Church United Church of Christ	West Chicago, Illinois
Congregational Church United Church of Christ	Deerfield, Illinois
Wai'oli Hui'ia United Church of Christ	Hanalei, Hawai'i
Rolling Hills Congregational United Church of Christ	Salina, Kansas
Prince of Peace United Church of Christ	Bargersville, Indiana
Helani Congregational Church	Holualoa, Hawai'i
Apples United Church of Christ	Thurmont, Maryland
United Congregational Church of Lubbock	Lubbock, Texas
First & Saint Paul's United Church of Christ	Downey, California
Peace United Church of Christ	Eden Valley, Minnesota
First Church of Christ Congregational UCC	Suffield, Connecticut
Falmouth Congregational United Church of Christ	Falmouth, Maine
Naples United Church of Christ	Naples, Florida
Safe Harbor United Church of Christ	Milton, Maine

These congregations gave between \$400 and \$25 per member to the Christmas Fund. How much would your congregation have to give to make the list next year?

Data provided by the Center for Analytics, Research and Data of the United Church of Christ



Timeline for Promoting the 2017 Christmas Fund Offering

Resource materials are available online at www.christmasfund.org

Beginning November 1, 2017

- Order additional envelopes or posters from UCC Resources, **1.800.537.3394** or www.uccresources.com, if needed.
- Work with your Missions Committee or Church Council to establish a 2017 giving goal. Look at last year's total and see if the congregation can increase it.
- Ask your Pastor or Worship Committee to use the Christmas Fund liturgies available in this **Guide** or online.

Week of November 26 - Begin Your 2017 Christmas Fund Promotion

- Display Christmas Fund posters prominently throughout the church building.
- Promote the theme and images of "Shepherding the Light" in your church's communications: newsletters, bulletins, social media, and worship announcements.
- Send a letter and Offering envelope to every household, announcing the Offering date and goal amount.
- Download, print, and copy - or purchase from UCC Resources - the companion "Shepherding the Light Coloring Book" for distribution during Advent.
- Recruit persons to give Mission Moments in worship regarding the Offering.

Advent Sundays (December 3, 10, 17, 24)

- Place additional Offering envelopes at each seat/pew.
- Distribute copies of the bulletin inserts with your weekly worship bulletins - make sure crayons are available!
- Share the "Shepherding the Light Coloring Book" during children's time, Church School, and wherever there are persons who like to color.
- Give weekly announcements or Mission Moments in worship to promote the Offering.
- Invite your Missions chairperson, church moderator, or a retired minister, missionary, or lay employee (or their widowed spouses/partners) to reflect during worship on what it means to be remembered and cared for as a "Veteran of the Cross."
- Use the liturgical resources provided in this **Guide** or online.

Sunday, December 24

- Today is designated as the day to receive the Christmas Fund Offering. Some congregations may elect to receive the Offering during the Christmas Eve or Christmas Day worship services.
- Make your personal gift to the Christmas Fund and, if possible, give your personal testimony in worship as to why you are supporting this Special Mission Offering.
- When the Offering is received, use the liturgy available in this **Guide** or online.

January 2018

- Have the Treasurer of the congregation forward the contributions received to one of the addresses listed on the back cover of this **Guide**.
- Celebrate your congregation's generosity! Announce the total gifts received, and publicly thank all who helped make the appeal successful.
- Invite those who have not yet provided their gifts to the Christmas Fund to do so.
- Prepare an article for your church newsletter or website thanking church members and friends of the congregation for their generous response.



Worship Resources

The theme for the 2017 Christmas Fund Offering is "Shepherding the Light." These worship resources have been developed around that theme using the Revised Common Lectionary readings for this year's Advent/Christmas season. Ready-to-use PowerPoint presentations, bulletin inserts, information on how the funds are used, and an archive of previous years' worship resources are available at www.christmasfund.org.

We thank you for your willingness to use these worship resources and promote the important ministry that happens through the Christmas Fund!

ADVENT I - HOPE

Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

Lighting the First Advent Candle

One Some have said that the walls that divide us are impenetrable and that the mountains of injustice are unmovable. Yet, we hear another voice –

Many **A mighty voice from heaven, breaking the silence against the wicked forces of this world.**

One Behold, One is coming to whom all love, power, and glory belong. No wall or mountain will be able to stand in his presence!

Many **We have gathered as testimony of Christ coming.**

One Behold, God will answer you who are working and waiting for justice!

Many **We have gathered to remain vigilant in the work against wickedness and injustice, as we anticipate Christ coming.**

One Christ is near! With new hope do we light this candle, singing new songs of Christ's revealed and revealing kingdom.

Many **We have gathered to share our song of hope with one another.**

One Today our Advent wreath begins to shine as we light the first candle, the candle of Hope. Because God knows us and loves us and sends a savior to lead us, we have confident hope for the future God is creating, and can reflect the light of that good news to all we meet.

(The candle of Hope is lit, and the congregation sings a hymn of your choice.)

Invitation to the Offering

The pursuit of justice can be tiring work. It may seem that our efforts, no matter how great, are often thwarted by unjust systems and structures deeply ingrained within our society. In moments of despair, it is easier to turn a blind eye to injustice and rationalize our withdrawing. But does injustice end because we refuse to see it? By our dismissal, will those who need our aid in the pursuit of God's work no longer need it? Christ charges us not to fall asleep while working in the kingdom but rather to "keep awake" by the powers of hope. It is through this power that we are able to aid those who serve and have served in the relentless kingdom work of justice. Today, we are presented with the opportunity to keep awake and aid our retired clergy and lay employees. The Christmas Fund is used to aid those who have shepherded the Church and are living on the margins in retirement with income supplementation



for basic needs such as food, utilities, and medical expenses. It also goes directly to help active clergy and lay employees who are facing unexpected financial needs due to a crisis in their lives.

Prayer of Dedication

Still Speaking God, we are ever thankful for your voice, which breaks the silence against the wicked forces of this world. We honor those who have heard your voice, set to task, and remained faithful and vigilant in their service to the United Church of Christ. Accept these offerings as an act of loyalty and gratitude for their love for us and their commitment to your church. Multiply these gifts, we pray, that they who receive them will find within provision and comfort. May they know through these gifts that we, too, are keeping awake in the hope of your coming. Amen.

ADVENT II - PEACE

Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-8

The Hope candle should be lit before the service begins.

Lighting the Second Advent Candle

One A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare ye a way for the Lord."

Many **Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;**

One the uneven ground shall become level,

Many **and the rough places a plain.**

One Arise and Ascend! Let us go to the highest and most visible places, and let us proclaim good tidings of peace:

Many **Christ is coming!**

One Do not be afraid, lift up your voices so that all may hear and find peace!

Many **Christ is coming!**

One Here is our Peace! Although, as sheep, we have often gone astray, God has gathered us with arms of compassion. We are protected in God's bosom and led to quiet waters. Let us light this candle as we proclaim peace to all.

Many **We have been gathered; let us share our song of peace with one another.**

One Today we light the second candle on our Advent wreath, the candle of Peace. We celebrate and remember that our God offers each and all of us a peace that passes all understanding, a peace that shines most fully in the One who is coming into the world once more.

(The candle of Peace is lit, and the congregation sings a hymn of your choice.)

Invitation to the Offering

Take a moment and recall a very special opportunity you have experienced in your lifetime.

(Short pause)

Now, think of how the opportunity was made available to you. Did it come by way of the help from another? Did someone inform you of the opportunity or help you prepare for it?

(Short pause)

As we reflect upon the most meaningful events of our lives, we realize that very little of those moments happened without the freely willing help of others. John the Baptizer committed his life to helping people realize the ultimate opportunity in Christ's coming. Today, we too have



discovered Christ by contemporary “John the Baptizers” who have dedicated their lives to the service of proclaiming Christ. Although they may prefer robes over camel hair, and may not have a diet involving insects, they too have helped us live into the peace of Christ. This Christmas, let us show our appreciation to retired clergy and lay employees who have dedicated their lives in service to the United Church of Christ. The Christmas Fund is used to aid those who have shepherded the Church and are living on the margins in retirement with income supplementation for basic needs such as food, utilities, and medical expenses. It also goes directly to help active clergy and lay employees who are facing unexpected financial needs due to a crisis in their lives.

Prayer of Dedication

Still Speaking God, we are ever thankful for the “John the Baptizers” you have sent to us, who have made us aware of your love and care for us. Accept these offerings as an act of loyalty and gratitude for those who have dedicated their lives to serving your church. Multiply these gifts, we pray, that they who receive them will find within provision and comfort. May they know through these gifts that we have heard their proclamation of Christ coming. Amen.

ADVENT III – JOY

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28

The Hope and Peace candles should be lit before the service begins.

Lighting the Third Advent Candle

One The light of Christ shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Many Christ’s light shines in the hearts gathered here today.

One We are the church – called to be a beacon of light to the world.

Many We are shepherds of the light – called to be ministers of Christ’s gospel of reconciliation.

One We will carry Christ’s light forth into the world.

Many We will proclaim the Good News, rejoicing with exceeding great joy!

One Today we light the third candle – the “Gaudete” candle – in celebration of the joy of Christ’s coming into the world, and the joy of discipleship! Gaudete means “Rejoice!” Like the shepherds who rejoiced at the message of the angel, we rejoice today; and we are called to bear the message to the world that this tiny babe is God’s promise of hope, peace, and joy to us all. Thanks be to God!

(The candle of Joy is lit, and the congregation sings a hymn of your choice.)

Invitation to the Offering

We live in a world of abundance, and have so much for which to be joyful. Our ever-present God does not fail to provide for us when we are in need. Yet many in this world see the Christmas season as a season of scarcity. Let us consider in our hearts how God is calling us to share our own resources with those in need this Christmas season. The UCC Christmas Fund Offering goes toward assisting retired clergy and lay workers who have served our denomination. As God has used these faithful people to serve the church, now the church may serve them in return. Let us give generously as our God has given to us.



Prayer of Dedication

God of blessings, we rejoice as children of grace! We rejoice also for the gifts gathered here this morning, giving thanks for the abundance and generosity that fill your house. We ask that these gifts might be blessed by you to do good in this world. May they bring hope, peace, and joy to those in need. Send these gifts and your people forth into the world to do your will. Amen.

ADVENT IV – LOVE

Luke 1:26-55

The Hope, Peace, and Joy candles should be lit before the service begins.

Lighting the Fourth Advent Candle

One Love is of God. God is Love.

Many **Love makes the world go round – animating and sustaining life.**

One God called the galaxies into being, bringing order out of chaos.

Many **God sent Christ into the world to bring restoration to all creation.**

One Christ's gospel of reconciliation turned the tables on Rome's systems of oppression.

Many **Christ overturned tables of greed and corruption and sets a table of grace, where all have a place.**

One Christ brings healing and redemption to a world that longs for wholeness.

Many **We rejoice that we have been made whole in Christ's love!**

One Christ calls us together to be a community of love and justice.

Many **We will be shepherds of God's love and light to a world ready to be illumined with the wonder of God!**

One Hope, peace, joy, and love encircling the world, with Christ's light at the center: this is the ancient vision of the Advent wreath. We light these candles to remember what has already happened: Christ has come to dwell among us. Christ has redeemed and reconciled the world. Love wins!

(The candle of Love is lit, and the congregation sings a hymn of your choice.)

Invitation to the Offering

At the heart of love is a spirit of generosity. God gave all of Godself to humanity in Christ Jesus. When humanity was helpless and broken, God came in the form of a helpless baby. Yet that helpless baby grew to rise up and save the world from its aimlessness and sin. Such is God's loving promise to us: in the hardest of times, Christ can bring hope to us all. This morning we have the opportunity to share a portion of our resources with those in need. The UCC Christmas Fund Offering goes toward assisting retired clergy and lay employees who have served our denomination. As God has used these faithful people to serve the church, now the church may serve them in return. As Christ finds us worthy, let us in kind be attentive to the worth and dignity of others. As Christ offers us assistance, let us share our gifts.

Prayer of Dedication

How can we say thanks, O God, for the things you have done for us? We come before you with humble and grateful hearts to offer these gifts to the work of your Church. May they bear a message of love to those in need. May our hearts remain filled with your love as we go forth from this place, shining like candles of hope, peace, joy, and love. Thanks be to you, O God. Amen.



CHRISTMAS EVE/CHRISTMAS DAY

Nativity of the Lord

Isaiah 62:6-12; Luke 2: [1-7] 8-20

Lighting the Christ Candle

Congregation sings Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (verse 1)

(The Hope candle is lit.)

One In this world where discontent is revealed through actions and words, there is assurance in an expectant God. We come to this nativity with hope in the same holy radiance that encompassed the shepherds in their darkness. Angelic voices declared to them and to us: the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord, has been born in Bethlehem!

The Congregation sings the refrain:

Hark the herald angels sing, "Glory to the Christ-child bring!"

(The Peace candle is lit)

One The lowly shepherds, in awe of the heavenly angel's announcement that the Holy Prince of Peace is here, traveled, finding the beloved child just as was told to them, wrapped in pieces of fabric and lying in a manger. We share in the peaceful presence of Christ our Savior!

The Congregation sings the refrain:

Hark the herald angels sing, "Glory to the Christ-child bring!"

(The Joy candle is lit)

One Joy is shared as the shepherds' lives are changed! Following the brilliant angelic call to seek the holy, the shepherds were witnesses to the Lord, and they glorified and praised God. We, too, rejoice in the joy of God's love manifested in the Christ child!

The Congregation sings the refrain:

Hark the herald angels sing, "Glory to the Christ-child bring!"

(The Love candle is lit)

One The humble Christ child was revealed to the least likely of the world, resting his head in the lowliest of places: a feeding trough. Christ's birth was a sign of extravagant love from the God who is greater than all Creation. It is a declaration of divine grace to be shared with all people, even us, still today. Glory and honor be to the newborn Christ!

Many Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!

(The Christ candle is lit)

One Christ is born! The Messiah has come into the world! May we proclaim to the world our joy and share the light that we have received in Christ. Today, we glorify the gift of true light and abundant life that Christ brings to the world!

Many Thanks be to God!

Congregation sings Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (verses 2 & 3)



Invitation to the Offering

The in-breaking of God's grace into the world is humbly set before us. It can be hard to notice in the midst of all the powers that draw our attention away. And yet, sometimes a radiant band of heavenly voices guides us to see the gift of new life around us. New realities are created through the telling of stories, and God is praised for the glory revealed.

Mother Mary, the first disciple, pondered the mysteries she witnessed and proclaimed the power of God made known in Jesus. We, too, learn about the power of Christ from others. Through the mutual gifts of ministry, lives continue to be changed by the presence of Christ. Serving one another through relationship, providing opportunities for growth and giving, we can continue to provide assistance to others. Through the Pension Boards, the United Church of Christ supports retired and active ministers and lay leaders who have told and retold their stories as beacons of light so that all in their midst may hear of the message of Christ. Let us rejoice and give generously, knowing the importance of proclaiming the presence of God in Christ has come into the world!

Prayer of Dedication

Holy God, your love of all of creation provides ways for us to continually be in relationship with you. Through tangible forms of interaction with one another we can stand tall in the face of the world's injustice. Proclaiming Christ to the world through our own testimony we acknowledge your voice in our own lives. We pray for continued opportunities to be shepherds of your brilliant light in the world, reflective of the love, grace, and forgiveness already at work in the world. May these gifts we bring – time, talents and offerings – be multiplied, that all may have the opportunity to know your glory and love! In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Ordinary Time Resources for Year B

The Gospel According to Mark

Call to Worship

One We gather today as a community of faith, thankful for the leadership and service of pastors, elders, and lay leaders.

Many **We thank God for those who have come before us, and who continue to teach us.**

One We are living in difficult times. We need wisdom and guidance.

Many **We thank God for calling pastors, elders, and lay leaders to help us grow into God's kingdom.**

One They have been a light to us.

Many **We will pass on that light.**

All **Let us be open to the light. Let us worship God!**

Invitation to the Offering

God calls all of us to be servants to one another. Mark tells us that "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..." (10:45). It is those who have retired from formal ministry and the service of lay employees that we honor today with our offering to the Christmas Fund of the United Church of Christ. The Christmas Fund provides direct financial assistance to UCC clergy and lay employees. Monthly pension and quarterly health premium supplementation are two ways the fund helps retirees who have served the church. Let us give as we are called, as we remember the ministry of past clergy and leaders who have guided us and shone a light on our paths.



Prayer of Dedication

God, sometimes we are like James and John, wanting to be your favorite. Help us to know what we are really asking. Help us to know what serving others really means in your kingdom. Remind us that there are some who need extra help. We are thankful that we are able to serve others and to give these gifts. May they strengthen those in need. In your many names we pray, Amen.

Ordinary Time Resources for Year B

The Gospel According to Mark

Call to Worship (based on Mark 3:33)

One Jesus asked, "Who are my mother and my siblings?"

Many Then he said, "Here are my mother and my siblings!"

One Jesus said, "Whoever does the will of God is my sibling and mother."

Many As siblings in Christ's family, let us strive to do God's will.

All Let us prepare to worship God and learn how to better love others as our siblings.

Invitation to the Offering

The call that God puts on the hearts of so many of us is sometimes not an easy call to answer. Our communities may reject us, or may not want to hear what we have to say. We may be thrust into new ways of living. Our definition of family may be altered. But God's call is not easily ignored. When God selects some to light the way for others, perhaps through formal ministry, one must answer, "Yes." Today, we honor those who have said "Yes" to God in a life-changing way. Today, we are receiving an Offering for the Christmas Fund of the United Church of Christ. The Christmas Fund is used to aid those who have shepherded the Church and are living on the margins in retirement with income supplementation for basic needs such as food, utilities, and medical expenses. It also goes directly to help active clergy and lay employees who are facing unexpected financial needs due to a crisis in their lives. Let us honor those who have helped to guide us in the past, by giving as we are called.

Prayer of Dedication

We are thankful for so much, dear God – for clean water to drink, for comfortable homes to live in, for being part of a faith community that serves you, for leaders who have been faithful to their call. We are thankful that we are able to show our gratefulness through these monetary gifts, knowing that you call us to use them for the betterment of your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Advent I – Hope



Rev. Louise Marks*

The Rev. Louise Marks pastors a United Church of Christ congregation on the eastern seaboard, while her husband Paul is a small businessman, designing and installing water gardens. During Advent 2015, Paul hadn't been feeling well, but was able to carry on his daily routine. Eventually he consulted his physician, who recommended a catheterization procedure. While Paul was still lying in the exam room, "the doctor pulled me in and said, 'we have to take him right in to emergency surgery for a quadruple bypass.' It was quite shocking to be told that my husband would be undergoing emergency surgery for a life-threatening medical condition of which we were unaware." Thankfully, the surgery was fully successful, and Paul has since recovered and resumed the work he loves with his typical energy and enthusiasm.

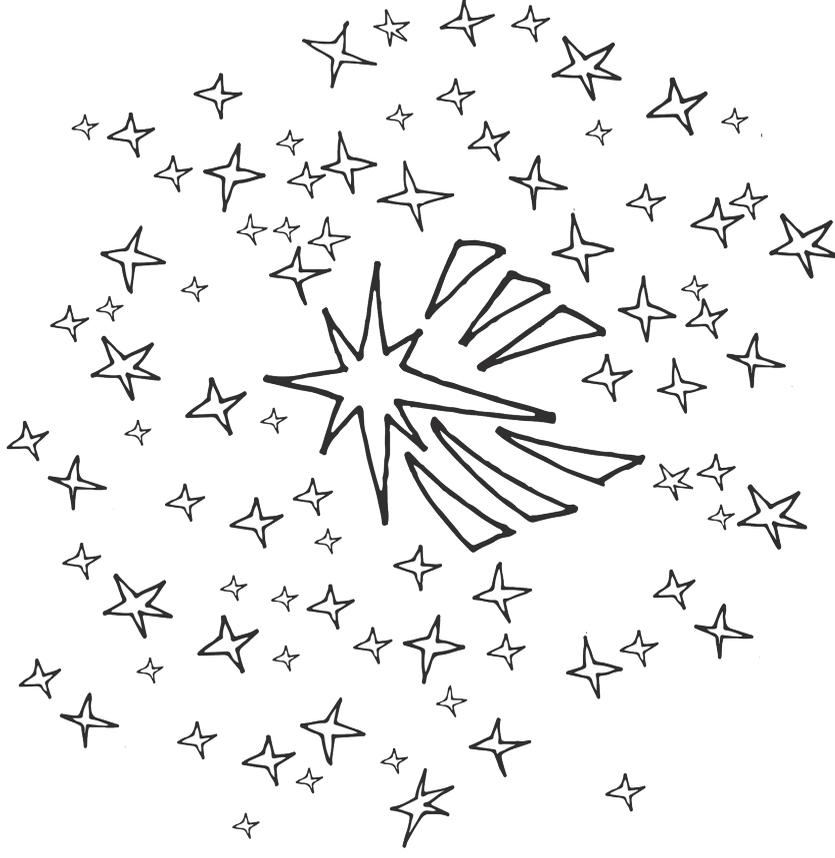
But, at the time, explains Louise, "Not only were we unprepared for the diagnosis and surgery, we were unprepared for the financial burden of the medical bills and lost wages." As a small businessman, Paul had a payroll to meet, but no money was coming in. At the suggestion of a Conference staff person, Louise reached out to the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance for help. Louise and Paul received an emergency grant, which they used to pay their mortgage, enabling them to "squeak through" until their financial situation improved. "Otherwise, the financial transition into January would have been extremely challenging."

Louise's gratitude for her husband's healing "is all the more strengthened by the support we received through the Christmas Fund. It has blessed us immeasurably, as has the knowledge that we have the support and caring of the wider United Church of Christ. It means more than you can ever know."

*a pseudonym

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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)



Rev. P.E. Martin

While working in analytical laboratories for a major food processor, a recurring voice seemed to be urging the Rev. P.E. Martin toward pastoral ministry. "A snapshot of me back then would have had two furrows in the ground where my heels were dug in resisting," she says, but the call was persistent. After graduation from Pacific School of Religion and ordination to authorized ministry, P.E. was called to small parishes in the Pacific Northwest. She loved the rhythm of interacting with parishioners, being with them when they needed support, and "though it was overwhelming at times to know I was responsible for the worship part of their spiritual lives, I enjoyed all of it."

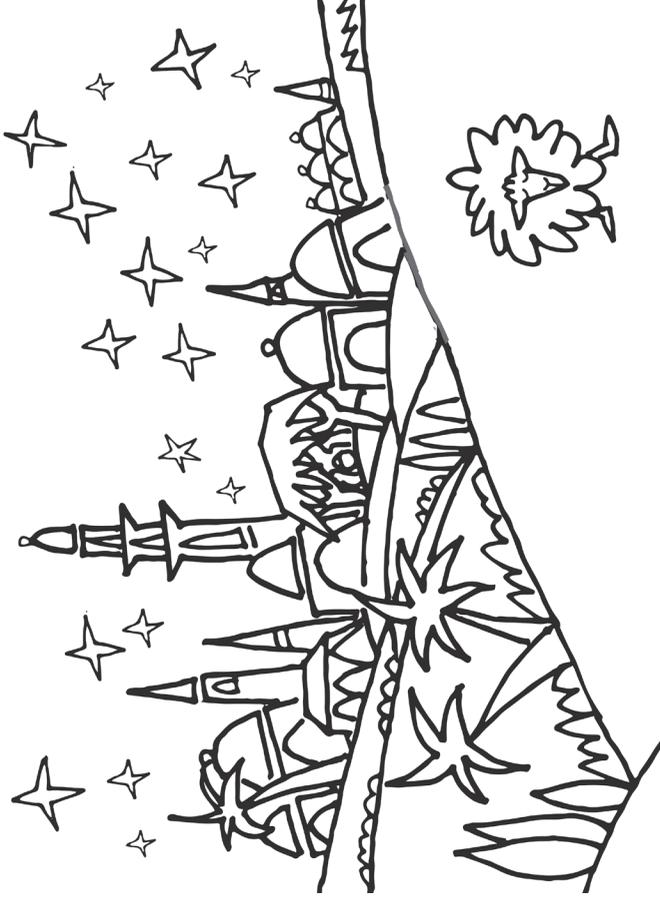
Serving small congregations, however, put a strain on her family's finances. The compensation she received while ministering at a Conference camp provided some relief. When P.E.'s husband died in 2004, "the question of how I would be able to support myself in retirement" became even more urgent. "I really didn't know if the combination of my pension and Social Security would be enough."

To be closer to her son and his family, P.E. moved east to North Carolina the next year, and began the routine paperwork with the Pension Boards in advance of her retirement. That process revealed that the total of all her income sources was still below the annual household baseline, and P.E. was contacted by the Rev. Krista Betz, Director of Ministerial Assistance. Since then, she has received a pension supplement and assistance with health insurance premiums, as well as a "Thank You" gift check at Christmas.

The assistance provided to P.E. through the Christmas Fund "has been a huge help for me, made it possible for me to live in my own modest house in a small town of 10,000, and have enough to meet my obligations each month." She also counts as a blessing the support provided by her Pension Boards Annuitant Visitors. "I am still supported spiritually and helped financially in these latter years of retirement. The generosity of the members and churches of the United Church of Christ touches my heart. I give thanks to God for this united and uniting church."

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- Emergency grants for 50 individuals and families (\$90,927)
- Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to 503 retired clergy and lay employees (\$233,800)



Rev. Walter Koch: A Donor's Story

The seeds of Chaplain Wally Koch's call to ministry were nurtured growing up as a pastor's son. Wally's father was a missionary in Australia and Brazil before serving as a local church pastor in Wisconsin and then in Minnesota, where Wally was born. After enlisting in 1952 for service with the Navy in Korea, Wally returned home, went to college, was a member of the first graduating class of Minnesota's United Theological Seminary in 1963, and was ordained shortly thereafter.

Soon afterwards, while serving a parish in Nebraska, Wally felt a call to chaplaincy in Vietnam, rejoined the Navy, and provided pastoral care aboard ships for two years. Back home, that Vietnam experience led to 20 years with the Reserve Chaplaincy Corps in Minnesota, as well as 19 years as a chaplain at Fairview Southdale Hospital in Edina, Minnesota, where he became the hospice program manager. "It often felt like I was still at war, having to provide constant ministry to those in pain. But there was joy in that work, too – working with patients especially, helping them to a place of peaceful acceptance of who they were, and where they were."

As a pastor's child, Wally also witnessed the severe limitations of making ends meet on a pastor's salary. There was simply never enough to provide for the family of six. As a young boy, he supplemented the family food supply by hunting; at the age of 12, he went to work from Monday to Saturday at a local farm to earn extra dollars. While the Navy provided much-needed assistance to Wally's family at home after he enlisted at age 18, even that had to be supplemented by most of his Navy pay.

Years later in retirement, Wally and his wife, Shirley, received their first appeal for the Christmas Fund for Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund. Seeing that it often provided for pastors living in scarcity, "We looked at each other and knew this is what we had to do." Since then, the Kochs have contributed generously each year for more than two decades. For Wally, early experiences of life on a pastor's salary remain vivid to this day. "We feel so blessed to be able to make a difference now knowing what it can be like."

★ THE CHRISTMAS FUND

for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



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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."

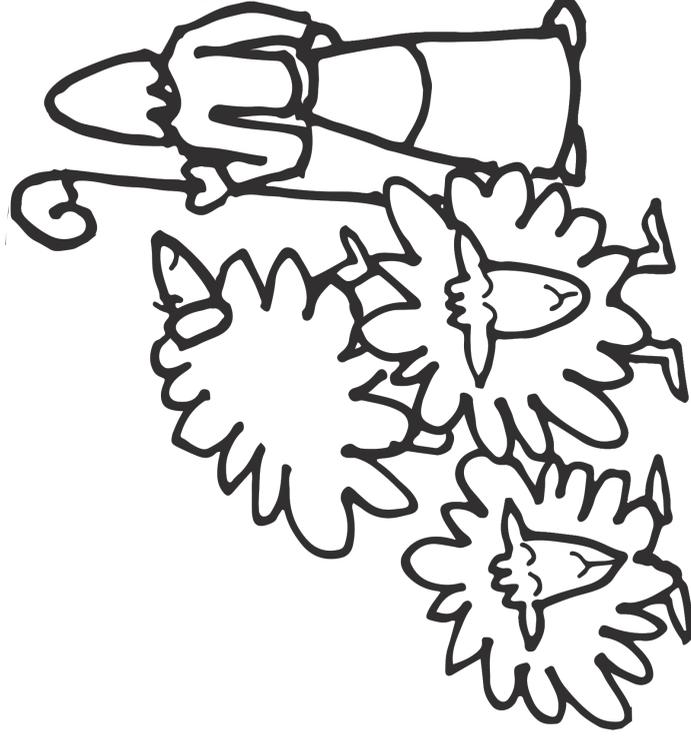
Jeanne served with the UCC's Disabilities Ministries for two six-year terms, as well as with Local Church Ministries and Wider Church Ministries, and served a term on the UCC Board of Directors. She was instrumental in the conception and funding of the Virginia Kreyer Endowed Scholarship Fund, which 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."

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Authors of Worship Resources and Artist of “Shepherding The Light”

Our special thanks to the following students and professor at Lancaster Theological Seminary (LTS) in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Affiliated with the United Church of Christ, LTS is home to an engaged community of students and faculty from many Christian traditions and backgrounds. Its mission is to educate and nurture leaders to join in God's redemptive and liberating work so that all creation may flourish. To learn more, visit www.lancasterseminary.edu.

Scott Siciliano



Scott is a 2017 Master of Divinity graduate of Lancaster Theological Seminary. He also holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Sacred Music and Organ from Messiah College. Scott serves as the Minister of Worship and the Arts at Colonial Park United Church of Christ in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He became a licensed pastor within the Harrisburg Association in 2015, and is pursuing full ordination in the United Church of Christ.

As a liturgical artist and musician, Scott works with sound, spoken word, sight, shape, and movement to enrich the worship experience. In addition to his ministry as a worship pastor, Scott serves on the worship planning team at Lancaster Theological Seminary, is a private instructor of piano and voice, and sings with the nationally-acclaimed Susquehanna Chorale under the direction of Linda Tedford. Scott and his husband, Michael, reside in the city of Harrisburg, where they are active residents and advocates in their community.

Donté Aaron Jones



Donté leads a vibrant and colorful ministry in the United Church of Christ. With roots in the Baptist and Pentecostal traditions, he invites all to experience God's fresh winds of transformation. As a recent graduate of Lancaster Theological

Seminary's Master of Divinity program, Donté now serves in the Seminary's admissions department as a recruitment assistant. He is also the Resident Pastor of Connectional Ministries at Wisdom's Table at St. Peter's UCC in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Donté is excited about his work with the seminary and his home church. In both positions, he is blessed almost each day to develop new relationships and tell people about the new and exciting activities taking place in Lancaster.

Melissa Burkhart



Melissa serves as the stated Supply Pastor of Zion United Church of Christ in Womelsdorf, Pennsylvania. She holds a Master of Divinity degree and Certificate of Youth Ministry from Lancaster

Theological Seminary and a Youth Ministry Certificate from the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg. Her passion for youth ministry, and now parish ministry, originates from sharing life with her husband and their three children.

Amy Fishburn



Originally from Kansas, Amy is a senior at Lancaster Theological Seminary, and a member of Grace UCC in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. After a year of volunteering with Brethren Disaster Ministries in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina,

Amy discerned a call to minister to individuals and communities who are in long-term recovery after disasters. She seeks a vocation where she may provide pastoral, spiritual, and emotional care to these communities.

Rev. David Mellott, Ph.D. (Advisor)



Dr. Mellott is Professor of Theological Formation at Lancaster Theological Seminary and has been a member of the faculty since June 2005. In October 2011, he was selected as the fourteenth Dean of the Seminary. He teaches in the

masters and doctoral programs, including courses in pastoral ministry, strategic planning, queer theology, sacramentology, worship, Roman Catholicism, philosophy, and spiritual formation.

Originally ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1982, Dr. Mellott is now a minister with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, with dual standing in the Lancaster Association of the United Church of Christ. He lives in Lancaster with his husband, the Rev. Lance Mullins, co-pastor of Wisdom's Table at St. Peter's United Church of Christ in Lancaster.

Ted Dawson



Ted Dawson is a graphic designer and illustrator whose clients include the New York Philharmonic, United Church of Christ, ASPCA, Bailey House, Rutgers University, CancerCare, and American Musical and Dramatic Academy. Ted

recently illustrated two children's books: **Hermie the Laughing Hyena** and **Sophie's Story**. See more of his work at www.tdawsonstudio.com.

Ted lives in New York City with his husband, Bart Boehlert, a writer, and their cat Bell. He is a member of Judson Memorial Church, affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the American Baptist Churches USA.



Is Your Church 5 For 5?

MORE THAN 1,500 UCC CHURCHES ARE!



5 for 5 churches are those that fully support Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) – both Basic Support and Special Support—including the four Special Mission Offerings: One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund.

This recognition program says “thank you” to congregations for their faithful and generous giving, and it strengthens their relationship with the wider Church. It also helps those congregations teach about mission and the ways their gifts are being used beyond the local church. Finally, the program serves as an incentive and a challenge to other congregations to add one or two offerings – or, in some cases, even to add OCWM Basic Support – to their stewardship and mission efforts.

Order promotional materials for any of the specific offerings by calling United Church Resources at **1.800.537.3394** or at **www.uccresources.com**.

5 WAYS TO SUPPORT THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

UCC Basic Support

Provides funding for Conferences and the national ministries of the United Church of Christ – Wider Church Ministries, Local Church Ministries, Justice and Witness Ministries, General Ministries, and the Pension Boards.

UCC Special Mission Offerings

United Church of Christ Special Mission Offerings (SMOs) exist to allow congregations and individuals to meet people at points of critical need in their lives. Though many options exist for direct, individual support of these needs, the SMOs allow a common witness and make a collective positive impact. Our church has identified four areas where these critical human needs exist:

- in places lacking health and educational resources and where disaster has struck;
- within systems of injustice that oppress daily life and opportunity;
- in the lives of church leaders without sufficient resources to live with dignity;
- in the nurture of youth and congregations just beginning their lives of faith.

We believe these SMOs collectively serve to lift people closer to the abundance and wholeness to which Jesus Christ has called us to work together to bring about.

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund:

Remembering Those Who Serve Our Church

Helps provide pension and health premium supplementation to lower-income retired church workers, emergency assistance to clergy or lay church employees in need, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to hundreds of annuitants; administered by the Pension Boards.

December 24, 2017/December 23, 2018

One Great Hour of Sharing: Giving Help, Hope and Life

Channels resources for international programs in health, education, agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries, and both international and domestic disaster response; administered by Wider Church Ministries, Global Sharing of Resources.

March 11, 2018

Strengthen the Church: Faithfully Building the Body of Christ

Strengthen the Church funds efforts to reimagine and build the future of the United Church of Christ. Shared at the Conference and national levels, Strengthen the Church largely supports youth ministries and full-time leaders for new churches in parts of the country where the UCC voice has not been heard.

May 20, 2018

Neighbors in Need (NIN): Justice and Compassion Like a Mighty Stream

Supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM). Two-thirds of the offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants.

October 7, 2018

WHERE TO DONATE

Thank you for your gifts to the Christmas Fund! You may remit your offerings to:

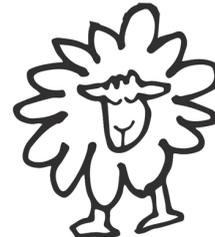
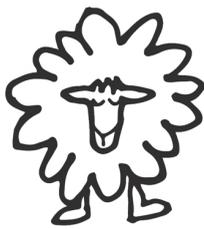
- Your Conference office

-or-

- Directly to:
The Pension Boards–United Church of Christ
Christmas Fund
75 Remittance Drive, Suite 1637
Chicago, IL 60675

-or-

- By making a secure online donation at www.christmasfund.org



Promotional resources available at www.christmasfund.org

ORDERING EXTRA SUPPLIES

Order extra supplies of envelopes, posters, and coloring books are available at:

1.800.537.3394 or www.uccresources.org

FURTHER ASSISTANCE

If you have any questions regarding how the Christmas Fund is used,
or how to make a major or planned gift, please contact:

Rev. Krista L. Betz, Director, Ministerial Assistance, kbetz@pbucc.org

Rev. Dr. Jonathan B. Lee, Philanthropy Officer, jlee@pbucc.org



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