



THE CHRISTMAS FUND
For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

2020 OFFERING GUIDE

www.christmasfund.org

“For Such a Time as This.”

Esther 4:14

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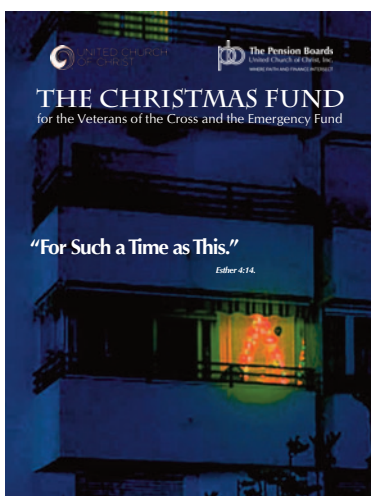
THE CHRISTMAS FUND

For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

Suggested offering date December 20, 2020

All of the bulletin inserts and worship resources in this guide are available for download at www.christmasfund.org.

About the Christmas Fund:



The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

Since last March, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency financial needs of many who serve the church have increased dramatically.

These difficult times make the need for the Christmas Fund more urgent than ever.

This year, as many UCC churches worship online, **Christmas Fund promotional resources will be available online only at www.christmasfund.org.**

Offering envelopes will not be sent automatically to your church. However, you may still order offering envelopes from UCC Resources at uccresources.com.

As an alternative to envelopes this year, please consider encouraging members of your congregation to donate directly and securely at www.christmasfund.org.

THANK YOU

for supporting the Christmas Fund!

Promotion CALENDAR

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Choose your offering date. The Christmas Fund offering is received by many congregations on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, which falls on December 20 this year. You can also receive the offering on any Sunday of your choice. Some churches choose Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, or the Sunday before Epiphany. Gifts to the Christmas Fund may be made year-round at www.christmasfund.org.

A Note about receiving the Christmas Fund offering during a pandemic

As many congregations are worshipping virtually, the familiar and traditional practice of using offering envelopes may not be the most effective way to receive gifts to the Christmas Fund. While members can be encouraged to send checks by mail to the Church Office, another safe and efficient alternative is to invite members to give online at www.christmasfund.org. The “Donate” button on the front page will link to a clear and secure online option.

Here is a schedule of recommended activities leading up to the offering:

4 Week of Nov. 23 4 WEEKS BEFORE

- Include one of the Christmas Fund Bulletin Inserts in your weekly newsletter or regular communication with members along with Christmas Fund poster graphic.
- Use Christmas Fund graphics in your social media.
- Download the companion “For Such a Time as This” Christmas Coloring Book for distribution during Advent. Post on your website and include link in your communications for members to download and print.
- Work with your Missions Committee or Church Council to establish a 2020 giving goal. Look at last year’s total and see if the congregation can increase it.
- If you plan to mail offering envelopes to members in U.S. mail, order your supply online now at uccresources.com.

Sunday, Nov. 29

- Use worship resources for 1st Sunday of Advent.
-

Week of Nov. 30

3 WEEKS BEFORE

- Include one of the Christmas Fund Bulletin Inserts in your communication with members along with Christmas Fund poster graphic.
 - If mailing offering envelopes to members in U.S. mail, send suggested Letter along with offering envelope this week.
-

Sunday, Dec. 6

- Use worship resources for 3rd Sunday of Advent.
-

Week of Dec. 7

2 WEEKS BEFORE

- Include one of the Christmas Fund Bulletin Inserts in your communication with members along with Christmas Fund poster graphic.
 - If mailing offering envelopes to members in U.S. mail, send suggested Letter along with offering envelope this week.
-

Sunday, Dec. 13

- Use worship resources for 3rd Sunday of Advent.
-

Week of Dec. 14

1 WEEK BEFORE

- Include one of the Christmas Fund Bulletin Inserts in your communication with members.
-

Sunday, Dec. 20
**Christmas Fund
Sunday**

- Use worship resources for 4th Sunday of Advent.
-

Sunday, Dec. 27

- Announce your church's total gifts to the Christmas Fund in your communication with members. Thank all who contributed and remind those who have not yet contributed that they may do so at www.christmasfund.org.

HOW TO DONATE:

- Please encourage your members to donate directly to the Christmas Fund online at www.christmasfund.org.
- If members wish to donate by check, please request that checks be sent to your Church Office for remittance to your Conference Office.
- If you plan to receive the Christmas Fund offering during worship using offering envelopes, make sure to order offering envelopes early from UCC Resources at uccresources.com. Please remit your offering receipts through your Conference Office.

2020 Christmas Fund

WORSHIP RESOURCES



1 FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LIGHTING OF THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE

One: For such a time as this,

Many: God's Love becomes flesh. Again.

One: For such a time as this,

Many: A child is born to us. Again.

One: Though the night of our despair long lingers,

Many: There comes a Light no shadow can overcome.

One: Though our hearts ache for a justice we cannot yet see,

Many: The Holy One works for those who watch and wait.

One: Though distanced from one another and well-acquainted with death,

Many: Our Deliverer draws near to bring us new life.

One: No ear has yet heard, no eye has yet seen God's glory fully revealed.

Many: And so we wait.

One: We know not when or where or how our Hope will be made manifest.

Many: And so we watch.

One: The One who loves us does not slumber.

Many: So let us keep awake.

One: Hope of the nations, come.

Many: Hope of our hearts, come.

The first candle is lit. Silence is kept.

ALL: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS, KINDLE OUR HOPE.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

For our tendency to put our hopes in everything but you, forgive us. In the bitterness and despair we feel when our hopes are not realized, comfort us. O, that you would tear open the heavens and come into our wandering hearts with your love. O, that you would reveal your steadfast goodness and restore our hope. Honor our hope: That you would walk with us through these times, that you would redeem these times. Amen.

CALL TO THE OFFERING

For such a time as this God comes to be with us, again. These times also call us to deeper compassion and increased generosity. The Pension Boards of the United Church of Christ created the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross to support retired UCC clergy and church staff and surviving clergy spouses. Through the generosity of churches like ours, these servants of the church receive emergency financial assistance, help with health care costs, and annual "thank you" checks. We give not only to meet their needs, not only to thank them for their ministries, but also to make room in our hearts and their lives for a new thing to break forth.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Creator God who came to us as one of us, Spirit who lives among and within us, Redeemer who comes to us again in ways both mysterious and plain, at times long-awaited and in unexpected moments: See how your love has opened our hearts. Bless these gifts of hope and compassion, faithfulness and gratitude. For all your love has already done, thank you. For all you will yet do, through these gifts and by your Spirit, we praise you. Amen.

2 SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LIGHTING OF THE SECOND ADVENT CANDLE

The first candle is lit. Silence is kept.

One: Even now, the Peaceful One is drawing near.

Many: Even now, the day of our salvation is at hand.

One: The God who comforts us speaks tenderly to her people.

Many: The Shepherd who feeds us longs to take us into his arms.

One: While we watch and wait for steadfast love and faithfulness to meet,

Many: While we wonder if justice and peace will ever kiss,

One: We can prepare the way of the Lord.

Many: We can clear a path for him in our hearts and in our world.

One: In these days of setback and struggle, we choose to prepare and not to despair.

Many: In a world drunk on wealth and power, we choose to walk the path of peace.

One: For such a time as this, the Holy One comes speaking peace.

Many: For such a time as this, we are called to make peace.

One: Get ready! Our savior comes.

Many: Get ready! The peace of Christ is given for one and for all.

The second candle is lit. Silence is kept.

ALL: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS, FILL US WITH YOUR PEACE.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

So desperately do we want to avoid conflict that sometimes we speak “peace, peace” when there is no peace. Other times, wanting to prove ourselves right and others wrong, we sow discord and division. Forgive us, O God, and nurture our longing for true peace and justice. Prepare our hearts, that we might more fully receive the peace you offer us through Christ. Make us instruments of your peace. Amen.

CALL TO THE OFFERING

This season of waiting and watching is also a season of preparing. Our generosity prepares the way for hope, peace, justice, and community. This year the UCC Christmas Fund has received a record number of requests for financial assistance—more than twice as many as last year—from active and retired clergy, church staff, and their families. These servants of the church have spent lifetimes baptizing and blessing, teaching and preaching, marrying and burying, comforting and empowering God’s people. Now, through this special mission offering, we have the opportunity to sustain and empower them.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

By the power of your Spirit, O God, may these gifts of gratitude and love lift up your faithful servants from the valley of need. By the power of your Spirit, may these gifts from our hearts bring down mountains of bills and anxiety. Bless these gifts, that they may bring hope to the hopeless, joy to the sorrowful, and deep love to those who have ministered in your love for so long. Amen.

3 **THIRD SUNDAY** OF ADVENT

LIGHTING OF THE THIRD ADVENT CANDLE

The first and second candles are lit before the service begins.

One: In times like ours, joy can be hard to summon.

Many: In times like ours, joy can be hard even to imagine.

One: And still the season beckons us to make merry.

Many: And yet the scriptures tell us to “rejoice always.”

One: It sounds almost ludicrous.

Many: It borders on outrageous.

One: How can we rejoice under the burden of so much injustice?

Many: How can we rejoice under the pall of so much death?

One: It's enough to make those who are alone feel lonely

Many: It's enough to make the grieving or depressed feel sadder still.

One: But ours is not a joy dependent on circumstances.

Many: Our joy is not derived from measurable outcomes.

One: Advent invites us to rejoice in God's goodness.

Many: Even as we watch and wait and aren't sure what's coming.

One: Advent invites us to rejoice in all the ways God's love is with us.

Many: Even as it empowers us to be true to all we feel.

One: It won't be long now 'til the blessed babe is born.

Many: We rejoice in the true light shining its way into the world.

The third candle is lit. Silence is kept.

ALL: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS, MAY OUR JOY BE FULL.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We confess, O God, that we spend far too much of ourselves chasing happiness, which often leaves us wanting. Even as we await your coming, you wait for us to come home to you: to your dream for the world, to your love made flesh, to your joy overflowing. Forgive us, and grace us with an ever-deepening capacity for joy. We rejoice in your mercy for all. Amen.

CALL TO THE OFFERING

When Esther's Uncle Mordecai suggested that she had come to the king's court “for such a time as this,” conditions were grim. The king of Persia, prompted by his evil aide Haman, had issued a royal decree for the massacre of all Jews in the land. In the end, Queen Esther risked her life to save the lives of her people. Things aren't quite so bad for the beloved clergy and staff retirees of the United Church of Christ, but times are hard. The Christmas Fund is a lifeline for retired servants of the church who need help paying health insurance premiums, regular bills, and emergency expenses. For just such needs, at just this time, we have the opportunity to give to the special Christmas Fund offering. Inspired by Esther and motivated by love, let's be generous.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

We come with joy, O God, rejoicing in our capacity to give, grateful for the ministries and the ministers of the United Church of Christ. Take our gifts, and make of them blessings. Take our gifts, and make them instruments of life. To the One who can do much with little, to the One who can do more than we can ask or imagine, we offer our thanks and praise. Amen.

4 FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LIGHTING OF THE THIRD ADVENT CANDLE

The first three candles are lit before the service begins.

One: Into our tumultuous times, the Love of God breaks in.

Many: Into our fearful times, the glory of God is revealed.

One: Sometimes it announces itself.

Many: Other times we must look high and low.

One: Sometimes we recognize it.

Many: Other times we walk right past it, lost in ourselves.

One: Love's in need of willing hearts.

Many: Love's in need of the smallest opening.

One: Greetings, favored ones! God's Love is with you.

Many: Here? Now? How can that be?

One: Be not afraid. With God, nothing is impossible.

Many: Love is knocking at the door.

One: Be not afraid. The Mighty One will do great things.

Many: Who can say what awesome thing God is up to now?

One: Arise and shine, beloveds. God's Love wants to be born in you.

Many: Here we are, servants of the Lord. Let it be so.

The fourth candle is lit. Silence is kept.

ALL: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS, MAY YOUR LOVE BE BORN IN US.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

From the fear that keeps us from answering your call, liberate us. From our attachment to the way things have always been, deliver us.

From the despair that is unable to see a new thing breaking forth, save us.

For every time we've said "no" to Love, forgive us, and open our hearts wide to receive you anew. Amen.

CALL TO THE OFFERING

On this day when we magnify the Lord for the great things God has done through unlikely people and in unexpected ways, we give thanks that we, too, by God's Spirit, can do great things. We, too, can lift up those who are laid low. We, too, can fill the hungry with good things. We, too, through our open-hearted generosity, can proclaim that nothing will be impossible with God. We can do all of that and more by contributing to the Christmas Fund of the UCC Pension Boards. Our contributions will help retired clergy, church staff, and their survivors pay bills, maintain health insurance, and meet emergency needs. Our contributions tell our former pastors and church staff members that they are not forgotten, that they are loved, that they and their ministries are appreciated and remembered. For Love's sake, let's give generously.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Holy One who scatters the proud and lifts up the lowly, Mighty One who fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty: Receive these, our humble gifts. Bless them, that by your Spirit they might bring hope and healing, encouragement and joy, sustenance and love. Amen.

CHRISTMAS EVE

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

The four Advent candles are lit before the service begins.

One: Because God so loves the world,

Many: This beautiful and broken world,

One: This divided and distanced and world,

Many: This warming and burning world,

One: This lost and hurting world,

Many: God's love is made flesh.

One: For such a time as this,

Many: A child is born unto us.

One: For such a time as this,

Many: The light of Christ shines upon us.

One: In a stinky stable turned birthing room,

Many: New visions of family and community are born.

One: By the surprising subversion of God's in-breaking love,

Many: The burden of injustice is thrown off.

One: Through the ages-old song of angels and shepherds,

Many: God's glory is proclaimed.

One: On this holy night, the one we've been watching for is here.

Many: On this holy night, the time we've been waiting for is now.

One: Let us rejoice together!

Many: Glory to God in the highest, and peace and goodwill to all!

The Christ candle is lit. Silence is kept.

ALL: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS, THE CHRIST CHILD COMES TO US.

FOR SUCH AS TIME AS THIS, GOD'S LOVE IS BORN IN US.

JOY TO THE WORLD!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We admit it, O God: That in a time such as this, it can be harder than usual to open our hearts to the wonder of your love. In a time such as time, it can be harder to feel the joy. Thank you for reminding us that Christ comes for such as time as this. Thank you for understanding that in such a time as this, we need you all the more. Thank you for promise of the Christ Child, come to us again. Amen.

CALL TO THE OFFERING

The sacred story tells us it was on this night that God's greatest gift was given. But the story does not end there: It goes on to show us how to respond to that wondrous gift with offerings of our own. Now, we probably don't have any frankincense in our pockets. Chances are we have no myrrh in our purses. We may not possess even a glimmer of gold. What we do have is the greatest resource of all: God's love in our hearts. By that love, let us care and give like never before. By that caring and with great joy, let us give to the United Church of Christ's Christmas Fund, so that the church's retired clergy and lay staff might know the miracle of God's love through our generosity.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

One: Good Christian friends, rejoice!

Many: All God's beloveds, rejoice!

One: All creation groaning, rejoice!

Many: Retired clergy, church staff, and spouses, rejoice!

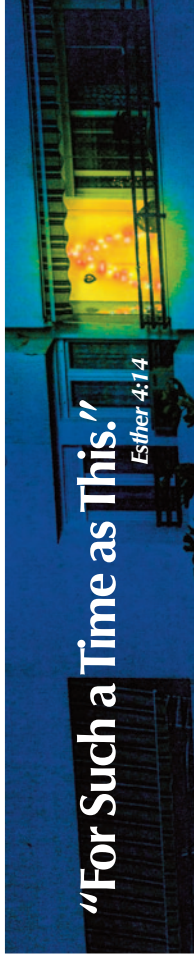
One: Heaven and earth, rejoice!

All: Jesus, our savior, is born today!

Christ, our Lord, was born for this!

Love, our light, shines brightly through our gifts!

May our offerings, by God's blessing, become hope renewed and life restored. Amen.



“For Such a Time as This.”

Esther 4:14

The Rev. Jeanne Tyler was called to ministry in the 1960s, and along with her husband, John, spent 33 years jointly serving congregations in Wisconsin, Nebraska, and Iowa.

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.

“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 and in other capacities with the national church and was instrumental in the conception and funding of the Virginia Kreyer Endowed Scholarship Fund, which provides tuition and assistive technology for 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.”

After retirement, the high cost of newer technology hearing aids was problematic. A grant from the Christmas Fund filled the gap left by her insurance allowance, allowing Jeanne to have hearing aids that make all the difference. “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 acknowledgement by my church that hearing aids are life-giving.”

In 2019, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 350 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,347,419)
- Health premium supplementation for 144 retired clergy and lay employees (\$374,577)
- Emergency grants for 69 individuals and families (\$123,727)
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 521 retired clergy and lay employees (\$260,500)

THE CHRISTMAS FUND

For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



“For Such a Time as This.”

Esther 4:14

Rev. Cathy Barker

My father, a UCC minister, died of cancer at age 54, just after Thanksgiving. I was fourteen; my brother and sister were grown and had to go back to their homes. Mom and I were lonely, confused about the future, and our financial picture was very shaky. Further, we faced a bleak Christmas . . . we didn’t even want to think about that.

“Then came a check from the Christmas Fund. We were both deeply touched that our national Church somehow knew that we were in need and gave us this gift. It didn’t solve all our troubles, but it made it possible for us to have Christmas. We felt the love behind the gift, and that was transformative.

“Throughout my mother’s long life, she gave faithfully and gratefully to the Christmas Fund, and I have done the same through the churches I have served as pastor. I’ve often told our story, because I want people to know how important it is to reach out in this way.

“When the pandemic caused such upheaval, and an appeal came from the Pension Boards telling about the increased need for emergency funds, I sat right down and wrote a check. My husband and I are glad we could help.”

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In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, which administers the Christmas Fund, experienced a 400% increase in requests for emergency grants over the previous year. Thanks to the generosity of more than 275 donors to urgent appeals for gifts to the Christmas Fund, UCBMA was able to say “yes” to each of these requests.

Most of the donors who responded to these special emergency appeals were older persons and nearly half were first-time contributors to the Christmas Fund. Many are also themselves recipients of Ministerial Assistance.

Here are just a few of the notes of thanks received from some of the Emergency Grant recipients:

“I must tell you that before I opened the envelope with the check I prayed that whatever the contents, that somehow I would make the days to come work . . . and when I opened that envelope with a great amount of trepidation, I could not believe my eyes that you and your Committee granted me even more than I had requested! I am still in shock, and still feeling so very grateful as I sit down with that fear off my shoulders.”

“Wow, what can I say but a very humble thank you. This is tremendously generous and I never, ever expected it. The best I had hoped for was to cover my recent medical bill. I am surprised and tearfully grateful.”

“The emergency grant money arrived in last night’s mail. THANK YOU to all who approved this emergency grant. I will be able to pay back loans that were made to make rent. We will also be able to supplement our rent money for quite some time until greater income starts coming in. We are hopeful those days will come.”

“I’m speechless - Thank you all so very, very much! Keeping you all in my prayers. May the gift of your generous blessing spread wide and far.”

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Each year, the Pension Boards receives many notes and letters of thanks from recipients of assistance made possible by your gifts to the Christmas Fund.

These letters come from both retired and active UCC pastors or their surviving spouses. Here are excerpts from just two of the letters received by the Pension Boards letting us know what a difference your generosity has made in their lives and the lives of their families. Here are excerpts from two notes received last year:

“My/our gratitude goes beyond words! With this gift I was able to pay the outstanding propane bill and have the propane tank refilled. It was depleted to 10% of capacity, and we have been having some very cold nights this winter. My husband’s illness has precluded him from doing any work for the last 6 months, and we have fallen way behind in our living expenses...”

“My church, although solvent, was unable to give me a raise this year and is experiencing a shortfall in pledges. Thank you again for your faithful and compassionate gift which has enabled us to keep warm!”

“This note is a heartfelt thank you for the very generous emergency grant that the Board provided us to help offset costs associated with my kidney transplant and follow-up medical procedures and appointments. Not surprisingly, our family prayed a lot in the months leading up to my transplant in great anticipation of what was coming, and in the time since, having received the gift of a ‘second chance’ at life...”

“We are grateful for modern medicine, excellent medical providers, and the support of our local and wider church families and friends, including the United Church of Christ Pension Boards...”

“We never lost faith, trusting in Christ’s promise that we would not - and will not - have to walk alone. Thank you for meeting us along our path and for extending your outstretched hand to help us financially.”

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2020 Christmas Coloring Book

The 2020 Christmas Coloring Book tells the story of one family's experience navigating the holiday in the midst of a pandemic. Follow along with Oscar as he figures out a way to make Christmas 2020 especially meaningful. Appropriate for anyone of any age who likes to color.

Available for free download at www.christmasfund.org.

Print copies available at www.uccresources.com.

*Single copy **\$5**; 5-pack **\$15**.*

HOW TO DONATE:

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Worship Resources written by Vicki Kemper, Pastor of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Amherst, Massachusetts. A former journalist, Vicki is also a writer for the UCC's Stillspeaking Daily Devotionals.



The Pension Boards—United Church of Christ
475 Riverside Drive, Room 1020 New York, NY 10115
1.800.642.6543 ministerialassistance@pbucc.org