"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!
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.
HOW TO DONATE:

- Please encourage your members to donate directly to the Christmas Fund online at [www.christmasfund.org](http://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](http://uccresources.com). Please remit your offering receipts through your Conference Office.
2020 Christmas Fund

WORSHIP RESOURCES
**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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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)
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!”

“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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THE CHRISTMAS FUND
For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund
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.
Single copy $5; 5-pack $15.
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 www.uccresources.com. Please remit your offering receipts through your Conference Office.