



The Christmas Fund  
For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

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2021 Offering Guide

[www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org)

Good news...  
Great joy...  
All the people!

(Luke 2:10)



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# The Christmas Fund

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Suggested offering date December 19, 2021.

**All of the bulletin inserts and worship resources in this guide are available for download at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).**

## About the Christmas Fund:

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**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. Over the past 18 months, the emergency financial needs of many who serve the church increased dramatically. Many of our clergy continue to bear the consequences of lost or decreased income. These difficult times make the need for the Christmas Fund more urgent than ever.

This year, as many UCC churches continue online or hybrid worship, Christmas Fund promotional

resources will be available online only at [www.christmasfund.org](http://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](http://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](http://www.christmasfund.org).

# Thank you

**for supporting the Christmas Fund!**

# Promotion Calendar

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

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**Choose your offering date.** The Christmas Fund offering is received by many congregations on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, which falls on December 19 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](http://www.christmasfund.org).

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

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### Week of Nov. 21 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 “All the People” 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 2021 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 from [uccresources.com](http://uccresources.com).

3	Sunday, Nov. 28	● Use worship resources for 1st Sunday of Advent.
	Week of Nov. 28 <b>3 WEEKS BEFORE</b>	● Include one of the Christmas Fund Bulletin Inserts in your communication with members along with Christmas Fund poster graphic.
	Sunday, Dec. 5	● Use worship resources for 2nd Sunday of Advent.
2	Week of Dec. 6 <b>2 WEEKS BEFORE</b>	● Include one of the Christmas Fund Bulletin Inserts in your communication with members along with Christmas Fund poster graphic.
	Sunday, Dec. 12	Use worship resources for 3rd Sunday of Advent.
1	Week of Dec. 12 <b>1 WEEK BEFORE</b>	● Include one of the Christmas Fund Bulletin Inserts in your communication with members.
	Sunday, Dec. 19 <b>Christmas Fund Sunday</b>	● Use worship resources for 4th Sunday of Advent.
	Sunday, Dec. 26	● 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 <a href="http://www.christmasfund.org">www.christmasfund.org</a> .

## 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 by going to [www.uccresources.com](http://www.uccresources.com)  
Please remit your offering receipts through your Conference office.



A serene winter night scene. The background is filled with dark, snow-laden evergreen branches. In the lower right, a small, dark tree stands in a snowy field, its branches covered in numerous warm white lights that glow against the cool blue tones of the night. The foreground is dominated by tall, thin, dark grasses or reeds that rise from the snow. The overall mood is peaceful and festive.

2021 Christmas Fund

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# Worship Resources



# 1 First Sunday of Advent November 28, 2021

## LIGHTING OF THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE

One: At last, the end of yet another year is near!

**Many: It's amazing how quickly this year crept on; how slowly it sped by.**

One: In this hemisphere, the days are getting shorter,

**Many: and the nights are growing colder.**

One: We are ready to receive the wisdom hidden in the darkest of nights.

**Many: We are eager to experience the warm embrace of brand-new days.**

One: We long for the sustaining hope that will usher us into all that lies ahead.

**Many: We await the arrival of the One who shows us new ways of being.**

One: New ways that draw us nearer to God and each other.

**Many: New ways that illuminate God-with-us in every circumstance.**

One: Good news, great joy, all the people!  
*light the first Advent candle*

**Many: We are hope-accepting and excited!**

## CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

One: All God's paths are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep God's covenant and laws.

**All: And that's just the thing. We don't always live up to our part of your covenant with us. We commit to creating loopholes throughout the laws you established to protect us and care for all your creation. We are quick to invoke your name to endorse our own narrow beliefs while neglecting the impact of our words and actions. Forgive us, God of Hope. Do not remember our transgressions. Restore whatever is lacking in our faith.**

*observe a brief stretch of silence*

One: There is yet hope for us! You, God, are faithful and good. You consistently create accessible paths for us to turn toward you, right from where we are.

**All: Good news, great joy, all the people!**

## CALL TO THE OFFERING

One (unprinted): For over a year now, most of us have been figuring out how to emerge from the global pandemic that disrupted life as we knew it. Some have been isolated for months on end to protect their physical wellbeing. Others have been on the frontlines since the beginning and have yet to take a meaningful break to rest. Others still have been creatively learning new skills to continue serving those in their care. All of us facing new realities of life and living. The Christmas Fund has been a lifeline for so many during this time, offering emergency financial support just when it's needed to United Church of Christ active and retired clergy and their families, meeting their needs in crucial moments.

One: Through our giving, we can be messengers of the Good News, scattering hope to all the people.

**Many: We cheerfully open our wallets, purses, pockets, apps, and hearts to give what God has first gifted to us.**

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

One: Let us pray.

**Many: Thank you for these gifts that we have the privilege of sharing on this day.**

One: May they become beacons of hope as they go out into a world in need. Allow them to be the difference between giving up out of prolonged despair and sparking possibility where it's needed most.

**All: Bless every cent, dollar, minute, hour, skill, talent, mind, and body generously and freely offered to you, gracious God. Amen.**



# Second Sunday of Advent

December 5, 2021

## LIGHTING OF THE SECOND ADVENT CANDLE

*light the first Advent candle at the beginning of service*

**One:** In this time of preparing and waiting, we long for even just a glimpse of peace.

**Many:** There's so much noise around us that disturbs any semblance of peace.

**One:** All over the world and throughout this continent, country, state, city, town, village.

**Many:** we are hyper-aware of divisions and conflict that tear us apart.

**One:** Even in our own workplaces, schools, homes, and bodies, peace evades us.

**Many:** We need the arrival of the One who provides everlasting peace.

**One:** And so, we are preparing the way and readying ourselves,

**Many:** to receive guidance and seek courage,

**One:** to welcome a tiny and helpless little baby who changes the world

**Many:** and makes life possible for everyone.

*light the second Advent candle*

**One:** Good news, great joy, all the people!

**Many:** We are peace-seeking and preparing!

## CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

**One:** Prepare the way for God. Make clear a direct path.

**Many:** We are thrilled to welcome the coming Christ child into our midst! Preparations are underway, and yet they sometimes block God's path to our hearts and clutter our ability to fully perceive the Gift of this season. We lose ourselves in the competitive clutches of the accumulation of things. We measure our worth against productivity and busyness, deepening our disconnection from God and each other. Forgive us, God of Peace. Remove the glamorous illusions that prevent us from being holy and whole.

*observe a brief stretch of silence*

**One:** Unending peace awaits us! You, God, are tender and merciful. You unrelentingly draw us deeper into your serenity, saving us from our own chaos.

**Many:** Good news, great joy, all the people!

## CALL TO THE OFFERING

**One (unprinted):** They say money doesn't make you happy. But we all know that having enough to live is essential. The United Church of Christ's Christmas Fund offers a pension supplementation grant that provides additional funds to lower-income retired UCC clergy and lay employees. The peace that accompanies these monthly grants cannot be quantified. This and several other missions of the church are supported by the gifts we offer. Our few coins, bills, and digital transfers become multiplied as we join them with others, each deposit making a difference in our shared ministries.

**One:** Through our giving, we can be messengers of the Good News, providing peace to all the people.

**Many:** We cheerfully open our wallets, purses, pockets, apps, and hearts to give what God has first gifted to us.

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**One:** Let us pray.

**Many:** Thank you for these gifts that we have the privilege of sharing on this day.

**One:** May they create pathways to peace in our collective and individual lives. Enable them to bridge the increasing and devastating gaps between existence and life. Accept these gifts and make them useful for your greater work in this world.

**All:** Bless every cent, dollar, minute, hour, skill, talent, mind, and body generously and freely offered to you, gracious God. Amen.



# 3 Third Sunday of Advent December 12, 2021

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## LIGHTING OF THE THIRD ADVENT CANDLE

*light the first two Advent candles at the beginning of service*

One: If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands!

**Many: We can easily clap in this shared space. Deep down, though, we wonder:**

One: Are we happy? We're tempted to put on our happy faces for the sake of others

**Many: and we work hard to make sense of it in the face of so much struggle.**

One: Happiness is fleeting. Joy, however, is our birthright!

**Many: The One we await embodies the inherent joy**

**that's already ours.**

One: No one can take it from us, so we can actually "rejoice in the Lord always!"

**Many: We can express joy in our laughter, relationships, work, and play.**

One: We can express joy in our breathing and living, doing and being.

**Many: Rejoice! Joy is ours always and in all things.**

*light the third Advent candle*

One: Good news, great joy, all the people!

**Many: We are joy-filled and eager!**

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## CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

One: God is here in our midst. We need not fear disaster anymore.

**Many: We know this and still we allow ourselves to get dragged around by the never-ending news cycles. We are attached to social media and bottomless news feeds that keep us perpetually aware of various atrocities around the world. We convince ourselves that we're connecting with each other when instead, the constant connectivity thieves us of God's miraculous abundance within and all around us. Forgive us, God of Joy. Reconfigure our relationships so we can prioritize the things that matter to you the most.**

*observe a brief stretch of silence*

One: Joy is inseparable from our being! You, God, are present and understanding. You creatively tickle new possibilities into existence, transforming our insecurities into confidence.

**Many: Good news, great joy, all the people!**

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## CALL TO THE OFFERING

One (unprinted): Imagine the joy we can incite with the gifts we're called to share! What little we have becomes a lot when we bring it together and pour our offerings into the ministries we support. Our gifts to the Christmas Fund provide a financial gift of gratitude to retired clergy who in many cases have served small congregations throughout their careers and need monthly supplements to their pension payments. Our gifts have a tangible and real impact on the lives of those who have served with dedication and love for so many years.

**One: Through our giving, we can be messengers of the Good News, rekindling joy to all the people.**

**Many: We cheerfully open our wallets, purses, pockets, apps, and hearts to give what God has first gifted to us.**

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## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

One: Let us pray.

**Many: Thank you for these gifts that we have the privilege of sharing on this day.**

One: May they cultivate joy and eradicate the fear and despair that accompany not having enough. Activate our own joy also as we give out of gratitude and abundance and let our generosity be contagious beyond this moment.

**All: Bless every cent, dollar, minute, hour, skill, talent, mind, and body generously and freely offered to you, gracious God. Amen.**

## LIGHTING OF THE FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE

*light the first three Advent candles at the beginning of service*

One: Relatives. Friends. Pets. Plants. Time. Gifts. Service.

**Many:** These are a few things to engage and express our love.

One: Pungent animal smells. Straw mattress. Young, unwed parents. Traveling visitors.

**Many:** These are a few things that welcome the arrival of Love.

One: Apathy. Ignorance. Greed. Self-reliance. Exploitation. Violence.

**Many:** These are a few things that threaten love in action.

One: Life. Justice. Peace. Wholeness. Creation. Us. You. Me.

**Many:** These are a few things that Love embraces unconditionally.

One: Life. Justice. Peace. Wholeness. Creation. Us. You. Me.

**Many:** These are a few things that we can embrace unconditionally.

*light the fourth Advent candle*

One: Good news, great joy, all the people!

**Many:** We are love-ready and empowered!

## CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

One: Blessed are they who believe that what God has said will be accomplished.

**Many:** In our minds, we believe this to be true. In our bodies, we're not so sure. When the pain and struggles overwhelm us, we take matters into our own hands and deviate from what God has said would be done. We are fully aware that God loves and cares for us, except when we're in the thick of dire circumstances and put our trust elsewhere. We question our love-worthiness when we choose badly and punish ourselves endlessly. Forgive us, God of Love. Remind us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in your image.

*observe a brief stretch of silence*

One: Love never fails! You, God, are persistent and compassionate. You know us intimately and love us unconditionally.

**Many:** Good news, great joy, all the people!

## CALL TO THE OFFERING

One (unprinted): When we give only a portion of what we have, we sometimes overlook the fact that life-changing ministry occurs where our combined gifts land. Literal lives are at the other end of our donations when we contribute to the Christmas Fund. Our gifts help to supplement the payment of health benefit premiums of lower-income retired United Church of Christ clergy and lay employees who have given years of service to us. Our offerings are but one way we can express our love for God and the people our ministries serve.

One: Through our giving, we can be messengers of the Good News, expressing love to all the people.

**Many:** We cheerfully open our wallets, purses, pockets, apps, and hearts to give what God has first gifted to us.

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

One: Let us pray.

**Many:** Thank you for these gifts that we have the privilege of sharing on this day.

One: May they become expressions of love and care for those who are most in need. Transform them and us into agents of change toward a world where no one is lacking, and everyone has enough and more.

**All:** Bless every cent, dollar, minute, hour, skill, talent, mind, and body generously and freely offered to you, gracious God. Amen.



# Christmas Eve December 24, 2021

## LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

*light the first four Advent candles at the beginning of service*

One: The Arriving One alleviates our despair and offers us new possibilities.

**Many: We are hopeful and excited!**

One: The Arriving One quiets our distractions and calls us into new actions.

**Many: We are peace-seeking and prepared!**

One: The Arriving One dispels our insecurities and directs us to new depths.

**Many: We are joy-filled and eager!**

One: The Arriving One embraces our fullness and

guides us toward new living.

**Many: We are love-ready and empowered!**

One: The Arriving One repurposes our pain and invites us into new purpose.

**Many: We are excited, prepared, eager, and empowered!**

*light the Christ candle*

One: Good news, great joy, all the people!

**Many: We are here and whole!**

## CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

One: God's grace has appeared, bringing salvation to all.

**Many: We delight in the promise of liberation that Jesus brings for all! In practice, we create conditions for access to that freedom that preference ourselves and those like us. We mislabel privilege as persecution when our comforts are challenged. We silently accept the status quo even as it benefits some people at the cost of many more. Forgive us, God of All. Reorient our priorities and values so they better align with yours.**

*observe a brief stretch of silence*

One: The Christ child arrives once again! You, God, are near and attentive. You repeatedly enter the world and humanity to express the depths of your desire to be our God and us your people.

**Many: Good news, great joy, all the people!**

## CALL TO THE OFFERING

One (unprinted): 'Tis the season to give! Though we may not bring gold, frankincense, or myrrh, we offer our own variety of gifts to put in action alongside God's activity in the world. We are blessed to have ministries like the UCC Christmas Fund, which makes an immediate difference in the lives of those who serve the church across the denomination.

One: Through our giving, we can be messengers of the Good News, scattering hope, providing peace, rekindling joy, and expressing love to all the people.

**Many: We cheerfully open our wallets, purses, pockets, apps, and hearts to give what God has first gifted to us.**

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Many: Thank you for these gifts that we have the privilege of sharing on this day.

**One: May they resemble your goodness in the lives of those reached by these gifts. Create a new world within and all around us where we preference your creation over the accumulation of wealth. Let that day come soon!**

All: Bless every cent, dollar, minute, hour, skill, talent, mind, and body generously and freely offered to you, graci.

*Worship Resources written by the Rev. Phiwa Langeni. Phiwa is the Ambassador for Innovation & Engagement for the United Church of Christ, the Pastor of Salus Center UCC, Lansing, Michigan, and the Founder of Salus Center, Lansing's only LGBTQ Resource and Community Center. They are also a writer for the UCC's Stillspeaking Daily Devotionals.*



## Good news...Great Joy...All the People! (Linda Stilo)

### John and Anne McKinstry – “Veterans of the Cross”

In the United Church of Christ, through the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, we take care to express our love and gratitude for our retired ministers. One of the ways we do that is through the Annuitant Visitors’ Program, which coordinates visits by often younger retired UCC clergy to older retired ministers (annuitants) across the country. The purpose of these visits is to check in, see how they’re doing, find out if they have any needs that can be addressed, and thank them for their “years of service to a grateful church.”

One such visitor, now retired, is the Rev. Richard L. (Rick) Floyd, of Pittsfield, MA, who wrote of a visit to the Rev. John and Anne McKinstry of Great Barrington, MA, who are, in Rick’s words: “indeed Veterans of the Cross, having served small country congregations throughout their ministry (and they really did share the ministry as ‘old school’ minister and spouse).”

John McKinstry’s last pastorate ended with an unfortunate forced resignation from a church that was leaving the United Church of Christ. This left John and Anne—close to retirement age—with neither home nor equity, having lived in parsonages their entire adult lives.

That was over 20 years ago. Since then, the McKinstry’s have been able to manage with generosity from friends and with supplements and gifts from the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance through the Christmas Fund. John teaches guitar and dulcimer; Anne writes hymns (two of her hymns are in *The New Century Hymnal*, which can be found in UCC pews across the country).

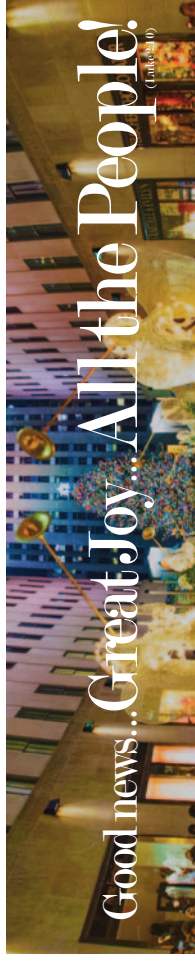
“I was proud that our church, through the Christmas Fund, could help these lovely people in retirement,” Rick says. “I think it meant a lot to them that I could hear their story. When I thanked them for their years of service from a grateful church, I thought they were going to cry.”

#### In 2020, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 276 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,180,187)
- Health benefits supplementation for 89 retired clergy and lay employees (\$274,008)
- Emergency grants for 96 individuals and families (\$214,649)
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 504 retired clergy and lay employees (\$252,000)

### The Christmas Fund

For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



## Good news...Great Joy...All the People! (Linda Stilo)

### “God is still speaking . . . to me!”

Every year, the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance receives dozens of letters, cards, emails, and phone calls saying “thank you” for much-needed financial assistance funded by your gifts to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross.

Donations of any amount to the Christmas Fund truly do bring “great joy” to so many people, year after year. The assistance and connection provided by your gifts lets these servants of the church know that they are not forgotten. Here are excerpts from just a few of the notes of appreciation we have received:

*From a retired pastor in Chicago . . .*

I do not have words adequate to express my appreciation for the Christmas gift from the Christmas Fund. My prayer is that those who contributed to make this gift possible experience God’s manifold blessings.

*From a retired pastor who received assistance to purchase hearing aids . . .*

Thank you for the gift from the church. I had no idea such help was available, especially to that extent. It gladdens my heart to know the church still cares. Sometimes, we don’t always get that affirmation while in the midst of doing ministry. But, God is still speaking . . . to me. Thank you so much!

*From a pastor’s spouse in North Carolina . . .*

My husband and I thank you so very much for the ministerial assistance that was provided for us. It was so helpful and took a lot of stress from us, so we could concentrate on my husband’s medical care and treatments. We never thought we would need ministerial assistance, but believe me, we are thankful for our national church and all those who give.

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## They Came When You Needed Them

**T**hey came when you needed them. They answered the phone when you called. They baptized and married and buried your loved ones. They gave up weekend after weekend after weekend to care for your spirit, lead you in worship, and point to God in your midst.

Some of them did it for less money than they could easily live on. Some of them did it for less than they would have been willing to do any other job for, because of what they believe about who God is, and what they believe about who you are.

For all the sacrifices that clergy and lay church workers have made in our congregations, over 100 years ago the Pension Boards of the United Church of Christ created the **Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund**, to help support them in retirement and during times of emergent need.

The Christmas Fund provides supplementation of small pension payments for retired clergy who often served small congregations throughout their careers. It provides supplementation of health premium costs, to help ensure their wellness throughout their lives. And the Christmas Fund provides emergency grants Christmas "Thank You" gift checks for retirees and those facing unforeseen financial hardship.

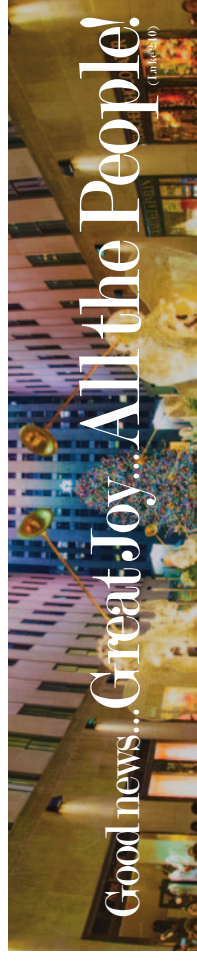
*A gift to the Christmas Fund is your opportunity to join with others in the United Church of Christ to bring good news and great joy to those who have given so much to our church.*

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## "A Wonderful Connection to the Church I Love"

**S**ince March of last year, our lives have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and many have experienced great loss. These months have also had a profound impact on United Church of Christ clergy and congregations—physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially.

We have labored through this difficult time together, and because of gifts to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross, our active and retired pastors who have been affected the most have known they are not alone.

Last year, donations to the Christmas Fund helped pay the rent for low-income retired ministers and bridged the gap for one active minister's family when her husband lost his restaurant due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Christmas Fund gifts took care of the unexpected expense of a major car repair, helped a retired minister attend his brother's funeral, and assisted in paying for daunting medical expenses, prescriptions, and groceries.

When money is tight and stress is high, your gift to the Christmas Fund brings relief and hope to the clergy and church employees who have dedicated their lives to serving our churches and each of us. You help the people who have helped us. You make a huge difference and bring great joy!

In the words of an emergency grant recipient...

*"Your letter has brought great joy and relief. The grant is enough to allow me a little breathing room at the end of each month. Thank you for that gift. But equally important to me personally is this grant symbolizes a wonderful connection to the church I love. I have been blessed in so many ways."*

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## 2021 Christmas Coloring Book

The 2021 Christmas Coloring Book is a collection of portraits of different people around the world as they celebrate the good news and great joy of Christmas.

Available for free download at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).

Print copies available at [www.uccresources.com](http://www.uccresources.com)

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](http://www.christmasfund.org)**.
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- Please remit your offering receipts through your Conference Office.



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