

Christmas Fund Gifts Provided...

The generous gifts of UCC congregations and individuals to the Christmas Fund enabled the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance Program to provide some form of Ministerial Assistance to approximately 1,600 persons during 2009:

- Emergency Grants have been provided to 44 individuals and families, totaling \$61,716 in the first eight months of 2009.
- Monthly pension supplementation is provided to 450 persons. These gifts total \$101,400 per month (\$1,216,800 per year). A significant part of the annual total of \$1,216,800 comes from the Christmas Fund.
- Quarterly health premium supplementation is provided to 294 families, totaling \$165,200 per quarter. All of the funding for health premium supplementation is derived from the Christmas Fund.
- Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks will be sent to approximately 900 persons in 2009. Of those who will receive checks, 20 are over 100 years of age. The oldest person is 107. One person has received Christmas checks continuously since 1976. The 900 gifts total \$270,000.

(These statistics reflect activity as of August 31, 2009.)

Please log on to the Christmas Fund web site at www.christmasfund.org for updated information.)



Ruth and Everett Bodge

"You can't go home again, but I did," says Ruth Bodge, who at age 88 lives in the house her parents once owned in Hopkinton, Massachusetts.

Born in Somerville, Massachusetts, Ruth grew up in neighboring Medford and was baptized as an infant. At 17, she joined the nearby Congregational Church. After high school, she worked as a secretary for a Boston-based insurance company. She met J. Everett Bodge, her future husband, when he was a student pastor studying at Tufts College (now Tufts University).

The couple married in 1943 and honeymooned in New York City, where they visited landmark churches. At The Riverside Church, they got to meet the Rev. Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick; they also met the Rev. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. "We had a lot of faith and a lot of fun," says Ruth.

The Bodes served congregations ranging from small rural churches to large downtown "steeple" churches. The first congregation the Bodes served was a small country church in Hopkinton, Massachusetts and during their five-year stay, Ruth's parents moved from Medford and lived near them. After another pastorate in Melrose, Massachusetts, Everett was called to be Associate Minister at the First Congregational Church in Columbus Ohio, which Ruth remembers as "a huge gothic cathedral located downtown with a large membership and a full staff."

From Columbus, the Bodes went on to serve churches in Bronxville, New York, and in the Massachusetts communities of Andover, Brookline and Nantucket Island. Their seven years in Nantucket meant a two-and-a-half hour boat ride each way whenever they wanted to visit the "mainland." Ruth recalls the time there as "peaceful - especially in winter, and busy all year round at the church."

By the mid-1980s, the Bodes were looking forward to retirement that would begin with an extended trip to Florida. But the day after Christmas in 1985, just four days before his retirement, Everett suffered massive heart failure and passed away.

Relatives and friends helped Ruth in the weeks after her husband's sudden death. On top of the overwhelming grief, the Bodes had just given up the church parsonage, leaving Ruth with no place to live. Part of the planned trip became an opportunity to visit Florida with two of her sons and their families. Eventually, Ruth returned to the old family home in Hopkinton, where her sister lived alone. Their parents were long deceased, and Ruth moved in and provided care for her sister for six years, until her sister moved into a nursing home in the final year of her life.

Ruth has now been a member of Grace Congregational United Church of Christ in Framingham, Massachusetts for 23 years - the longest time she has spent in any one church. She recalls that she and Everett were advocates of the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross throughout his career. A Ministerial Assistance Grant helped provide money for necessary dental work.

"If you want to give to something you know does good, that helps widows and the disabled, look no further," she says. "It's important to provide this safety net."

The Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 20, 2009

