Our joy at Christmas is a response to God's promise of new life through the birth of Jesus. It is a joy we are called to share widely, through our witness and gifts, both to loved ones and to distant neighbors.

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, one of four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ (UCC), is an important way of sharing our joy at God's renewing and life-giving grace. The Offering, which is administered by the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance of the Pension Boards on behalf of the UCC, is an expression of joy and gratitude to, and for, those who serve the church.

Gifts to the Christmas Fund help provide pension and health premium supplementation to low-income retirees, emergency assistance to the families of clergy and lay employees and Christmas Gift Checks to hundreds of annuitants.

When the United Church of Christ celebrated 50 years of ministry in 2007, the Christmas Fund celebrated 105 years of continuous ministry.

Facts taken from a 1953 publication indicate that: "In 1902, a little money was collected and special Christmas gifts were sent to ten older ministers." The same article also reports that $121,054 was received for the Christmas Fund in 1952.

A little more than 50 years later, in 2008 the Christmas Fund received $1,600,000 and nearly 1,500 families were assisted. Our goal is to be able to provide at least $1,650,000 in assistance from the 2009 appeal.

Amidst the depressed economic climate which continues to drag on, your gifts are needed more than ever to help the growing number of retirees whose low income annuities make it difficult to meet increasing living costs. The requests for Ministerial Assistance provided by the Christmas Fund are greater than at any point in recent history.

This is your opportunity to participate in God's promise of renewal by enabling this ministry of compassion and care. Please give generously to the annual appeal for The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund.