

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 2010.

- Christmas Gift checks will be sent to approximately 900 persons in 2010. Of those who 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.
- Monthly pension supplementation is being provided to 431 persons. These gifts total \$98,988 per month. A significant part of annual total of \$1,187,856 comes from the Christmas Fund. (2010 data)
- Quarterly health premium supplementation is being provided to 292 families, totaling \$177,361 per quarter. All of the funding for health premium supplementation is derived from the Christmas Fund. (2010 Data)
- Emergency Grants were provided to 39 individuals and families from January 1 through October 31, 2010, which totaled \$61,717.48.

These statistics reflect annualized projections as of October 31, 2010. The numbers of persons receiving assistance and the totals of assistance payments fluctuate on a monthly basis.

When Linda Knight was ordained in 1988, she was a single mother with two young sons. "While Charles and Christopher were supportive of my calling, everyone else thought I was nuts," she says.

Prior to attending seminary, Linda - who received undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Vermont - had worked as a high school English teacher and volunteer Chaplaincy Visitor at Massachusetts General Hospital. She earned her Master of Divinity degree from Boston University School of Theology and was ordained at Hancock United Church of Christ in Lexington, Massachusetts. Her first ordained call was as Associate Minister of The Congregational Church of Littleton UCC, in Littleton, Massachusetts. She was then called to Broadway Winter Hill Congregational UCC in Somerville, Massachusetts. "The Conference Minister, Charles Harper, said that the challenge would be to help the church grow or to help them close the doors," says Linda. What began as a three-year assignment lasted for nine years.

Linda's next call, as Associate Pastor at North Prospect Union UCC in neighboring Cambridge, was a part-time position, which allowed her to spend two days a week as Chaplain, first at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, and later, at Massachusetts General. Increasingly, she found herself drawn back to hospital ministry, and served as Interfaith Chaplain at Massachusetts General for the next six years, ministering to families in crisis.

Linda served in low-paying positions throughout her ministry, but her financial situation was further impacted when her elderly mother came to live with her in the last four years of her mother's life. The ministerial assistance she received in the form of pension supplementation helped meet their living expenses. Following her retirement in 2007, Linda received her first Christmas "Thank You" Gift Check, made possible by contributions to the Christmas Fund. "It came at just the right time, like a Christmas miracle," she says, helping with expenses incurred in caring for her mother.

In retirement, Linda is writing every day. Some of her poetry has been published and she self-published her first novel, *The Journey Home*. Now, she is writing a second novel, and enjoying being with her sons and daughter-in-law, who live nearby.

The Christmas Fund, says Linda, "is a reminder that God is always taking care of us, surprising us at the times when we most need assistance." To those who are considering a contribution to the Offering, she says, "Remember pastors and church workers who have been on call 24/7 throughout their careers, working for inadequate pay, often without benefits." She adds, "They have given so much and are grateful for a few years when they don't have to worry."

The Second Sunday of Advent
December 5, 2010

