*All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*

*“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”*

*which means, “God is with us.” (Matthew 1:22-23)*

Grace to you and peace in this season of hope and promise!

Matthew’s Gospel begins with an affirmation of God’s covenant faithfulness. A troubled Joseph **−** caught between the harsh demands of the law and the tender leanings of his heart **−** receives assurance from a heavenly messenger. The inexplicable events that are unfolding reveal God’s greater plan for humankind, as prophesied by Isaiah more than seven centuries earlier. With the gift of God’s own Self **−** Emmanuel **−** humanity is redeemed and renewed.

In this holy season, our hearts turn toward Emmanuel,the Presence of God-with-us. As the Body of Christ, we are called to reflect that Presence in our relationships, with one another and with the world God so loves.

For 108 years, the Christmas Fund Offering for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a means by which we, as members of the United Church of Christ and its predecessor bodies, live out the mandate to be Christ’s Body in the world. The Christmas Fund, one of four Special Mission Offerings received annually in the United Church of Christ, is a ministry of compassion and care to those who serve our church. Your generous giving to the 2009 Offering enabled the Pension Boards’ Ministerial Assistance program, on behalf of the whole church, to provide $1,504,420 to individuals and families in need.

Lower-income retirees continue to feel most keenly the financial stress brought about by the current economic climate. Because of that, we ask you to prayerfully consider your response to the 2010 Christmas Fund Offering and give to the best of your ability. Reflect upon the ways in which your life has been touched by a retired pastor, a former youth leader, a Christian Education director, a church secretary, a custodian, or a minister of music, and honor their ministries in a way that will help them and others like them in these challenging times.

On behalf of the nearly 1,600 clergy and lay individuals and families who received some form of Ministerial Assistance since the last Christmas Fund Offering, I express heartfelt thanks to you for your generosity. May you continue to experience the blessings of Emmanuel **−** the One Who is with us, now and always.