



Pension Boards
United Church of Christ

2011

Offering Guide



★
THE CHRISTMAS FUND

for the VETERANS OF THE CROSS and the EMERGENCY FUND



Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Psalm 80:3

(New Revised Standard Version)

Grace to you and peace in this season of light and life!

At this joyous time of year, our thoughts turn to light: the light that shone in Bethlehem's sky, illuminating the path of wise visitors from far away; the candles of the Advent wreath, each week bringing us closer to the holy night of Jesus' birth; and, at last, the celebration of the inbreaking of God's own Light into human history – a light that blazes so brightly that it cannot, will not be obscured. In Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, we see the radiant, loving face of the One who came to save us from ourselves and who desires that we be reconciled, with God and with one another.

For 109 years, the Christmas Fund 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 denominations – reflect the light of God in the world, individually and in community. The Christmas Fund, one of four Special Mission Offerings received annually in the United Church of Christ, is a beacon of light for many who have served, and who continue to serve, our church.

Your generous giving to the 2010 Offering enabled the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance program to provide, on behalf of the whole church, \$1,504,420 in Pension Supplementation, Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks to individuals and families facing financial crises.

The global economic climate continues to affect most profoundly those with the most limited financial resources. In the face of rising fuel prices, the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance (UCBMA) was pleased to be able to provide one-time Energy Assistance Grants in the amount of \$200 to 1,000 lower-income annuitants and 500 lower-income active clergy in the summer of 2011. These grants were made possible by the income generated by the Fund for Ministerial Assistance.

Still, the need continues to be great. We are grateful for your partnership in this vital ministry, and ask that you consider supporting the Christmas Fund Offering again, prayerfully and to the best of your ability. Your gift to the Christmas Fund helps us to reach out in love and compassion to provide assistance to those in the greatest need, who selflessly have given of themselves for the sake of the Gospel.

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 my deep gratitude to you for your generosity. May the light of Jesus Christ shine brightly in your life, now and always.

Faithfully,



Michael A. Downs
President/Chief Executive Officer
The Pension Boards–United Church of Christ, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund is the primary source of annual income for the work of the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, one of the corporations comprising the Pension Boards of the United Church of Christ.

You can honor the Christ Child during this season by bringing gifts that will be used to support and honor those who have served, and are serving, this beloved church. Your gifts will truly represent the incarnational nature of the church at its best.

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 "Thank You" Gift Checks to hundreds of annuitants.

The Christmas Fund provides a lifeline of hope to many lower-income active and retired clergy and lay employees in the United Church of Christ. Due to the lingering effects of the economic recession, there have been many instances in which gifts from the Christmas Fund have made a critical difference in the lives of people living literally on the edge.

The United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance and the staff of the Pension Boards are confident that, through your continuing faithfulness, we will be able to provide the same level of care and compassion as has been our tradition for more than a century.

INCREASING THE OFFERING

The mission of the Christmas Fund is to provide assistance dollars in situations of critical need, while preserving the dignity of those who receive the aid.

Our goal for 2011 is to raise \$1,650,000 for the vital ministries of Pension Supplementation, Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants, and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks to low-income retirees. During 2010, you provided gifts totaling \$1,504,420, which was slightly less than the previous year. Amid the effects of the lingering recession, we are grateful for the generosity you have shown. So, simply put, we **Thank You!**

Even in these trying times, it is possible to increase the size of the Offering in your congregation!

First, someone should be tapped to serve as leader for the effort. That leader will:

1. SET A GOAL with the congregation.
2. SHARE information about the ministry the Offering supports.
3. ASK the congregation to be generous.
4. LEAD with his/her personal contribution.
5. CELEBRATE the results with the congregation.

You Can Help

We welcome your personal gifts.

We welcome your willingness to tell the story, share the good news, and ask your friends, colleagues, acquaintances and congregants to join you in providing support for both the annual Christmas Fund appeal **and** with legacy gifts.

Setting goals, telling personal stories, asking for personal annual gifts and thanking donors are all proven methods for raising awareness of, and support for, the Christmas Fund.

RISING STAR CHURCHES

2010 was the final year during which congregations could achieve the status of Rising Star Church as part of the five-year Magi Project.

A congregation that tripled its yearly giving was designated a Rising Star Church and will receive a banner celebrating this achievement. (A minimum level of \$1,000 is required; if giving is already \$10,000 or more, then a 30% increase is required.) Banners, for congregations that achieved Rising Star status during 2010, will be distributed in the fall of 2011.

Congregations that achieved this level should inform the Pension Boards to ensure recognition. The reporting process in the UCC takes months and we want neither to delay nor miss providing appropriate recognition.

Churches identified as Rising Star congregations include 51 congregations that became Rising Star Churches through their 2010 Offering:

2010

Fremont Congregational Church
Fremont, California

San Marino Congregational United Church of Christ
San Marino, California

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Washington, D.C.

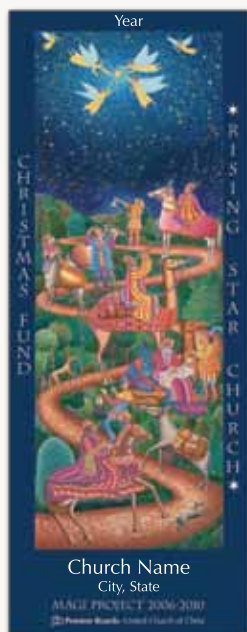
Grace United Church of Christ
Frederick, Maryland

The Spring Glen Church
Hamden, Connecticut

Rocky Hill Congregational Church
Rocky Hill, Connecticut

Congregational Church of Somersville
Somersville, Connecticut

Warren Congregational Church
Warren, Connecticut



First Church of Christ
Woodbridge, Connecticut

The United Church of Christ at The Villages
Oxford, Florida

Congregational United Church
Punta Gorda, Florida

Makiki Christian Church
Honolulu, Hawai'i

St. Peter United Church of Christ
Lake Zurich, Illinois

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Naperville, Illinois

New Hope United Church of Christ
Bippus, Indiana

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

First Congregational United Church of Christ
DeWitt, Iowa

First Parish Congregational Church
Saco, Maine

Park Avenue Congregational Church
Arlington, Massachusetts

First Congregational Church
West Tisbury, Massachusetts

Peace United Church of Christ
Rochester, Minnesota

Wabasha United Church of Christ
Wabasha, Minnesota

Community Church of Walker UCC
Walker, Minnesota

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Zumbrota, Minnesota

Bethany-Peace United Church of Christ
St. Louis, Missouri

Evangelical United Church of Christ
St. Louis, Missouri

Bethlehem Congregational United Church of Christ
Worden, Montana

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Norfolk, Nebraska

St. John's Westminster Union Church
Cincinnati, Ohio

St. Paul United Church of Christ
Cincinnati, Ohio

First Congregational Church of Claridon UCC
Huntsburg, Ohio

First St. John United Church of Christ
Hamilton, Ohio

Mount Olivet United Church of Christ
North Lima, Ohio

Richfield United Church of Christ
Richfield, Ohio

St. Peter's United Church of Christ
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

St. Paul's United Church of Christ
Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania

Shiloh United Church of Christ
York, Pennsylvania

Trinity United Church of Christ
Coplay, Pennsylvania

Salem United Church of Christ
Denver, Colorado

St. John United Church of Christ
Robinson, Texas

Spirit of Peace United Church of Christ
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Elon Community Church UCC
Elon, North Carolina

Peace United Church of Christ
Greensboro, North Carolina

Bethel United Church of Christ
Hickory, North Carolina

Community United Church of Christ
Raleigh, North Carolina

Oakland Christian Church UCC
Suffolk, Virginia

North Congregational Church
St. Johnsbury, Vermont

Newport United Church of Christ
Newport, Washington

United Christian Church
Campbellsport, Wisconsin

Evansville Congregational United Church of Christ
Evansville, Wisconsin

The Congregational United Church of Christ
of Neenah-Menasha
Neenah, Wisconsin

2009

First Congregational Church of Palo Alto
Palo Alto, California

St. John's United Church of Christ
San Francisco, California

Woodland Hills Community Church
Woodland Hills, California

New Ark United Church of Christ
Newark, Delaware

Pilgrim Church United Church of Christ
Silver Spring, Maryland

Ashland First Congregational United Church of Christ
Ashland, Oregon

Bridgeport United Church of Christ
Portland, Oregon

First Church of Christ
Woodbridge, Connecticut

Riviera United Church of Christ
Palm Bay, Florida

St. Andrew United Church of Christ
Sarasota, Florida

Spring Hill United Church of Christ
Spring Hill, Florida

Community Church of Honolulu
Honolulu, Hawai'i

Kaumakapili Church
Honolulu, Hawai'i

Congregational United Church of Christ
of Arlington Heights
Arlington Heights, Illinois

Zion United Church of Christ
Gilman, Illinois

Second Congregational United Church of Christ
Rockford, Illinois

St. Paul United Church of Christ
Waterloo, Illinois

St. Peter's United Church of Christ
Carmel, Indiana

Immanuel United Church of Christ
Lafayette, Indiana

First Congregational Church of Chatham
Chatham, Massachusetts

The Plymouth Church in Framingham
Framingham, Massachusetts

Pilgrim Congregational Church
Harwich Port, Massachusetts

First Church of Christ in Pittsfield, Congregational
Pittsfield, Massachusetts

First Congregational Church of Rockport
Rockport, Massachusetts

First Trinitarian Congregational Church
Scituate, Massachusetts

Edgewood United Church
East Lansing, Michigan

St. John's United Church of Christ
Port Huron, Michigan

Congregational United Church of Christ
Detroit Lakes, Minnesota

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Moorhead, Minnesota

Olivet Congregational Church
St. Paul, Minnesota

St. Paul's United Church of Christ
Marthasville, Missouri

Friedens United Church of Christ
St. Charles, Missouri

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves
Webster Groves, Missouri

Immanuel United Church of Christ
Ferguson, Missouri

Saint John's United Church of Christ
Saint Louis, Missouri

Red Lodge Community Church
Red Lodge, Montana

Maranatha Indonesian Church
Madbury, New Hampshire

The First Church Congregational
Nashua, New Hampshire

United Church of Christ
Bismarck, North Dakota

St. Peter's United Church of Christ
Amherst, Ohio

Immanuel United Church of Christ
Cincinnati, Ohio

Mount Zion Congregational Church
Cleveland, Ohio

St. John United Church of Christ
Defiance, Ohio

St. John United Church of Christ
Elmore, Ohio

The First Church in Oberlin
Oberlin, Ohio

First Congregational Church of Tallmadge
Tallmadge, Ohio

Mt. Zwingli United Church of Christ
Wadsworth, Ohio

Church of the Redeemer United Church of Christ
Westlake, Ohio

St. Paul's Church of the United Church of Christ
Alexandria, Kentucky

Shiloh United Church of Christ
Danville, Pennsylvania

Faith United Church of Christ
State College, Pennsylvania

St. John's United Church of Christ, Fullerton
Whitehall, Pennsylvania

St. Mark's United Church of Christ
Cressona, Pennsylvania

Community United Church of Christ
Boulder, Colorado

Congregational United Church of Christ
Buena Vista, Colorado

First Congregational Church
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Sixth Avenue United Church of Christ
Denver, Colorado

Christ Congregational Church
Fort Morgan, Colorado

United Church of Huntsville
Huntsville, Alabama

Holy Covenant UCC
Charlotte, North Carolina

Peace United Church of Christ
Greensboro, North Carolina

St. John's United Church of Christ
Kannapolis, North Carolina

First United Church of Christ
Salisbury, North Carolina

Congregational Church United Church of Christ
Tryon, North Carolina

Lynnhaven Colony Congregational
United Church of Christ
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Tombstone Community Congregational Church
Tombstone, Arizona

Rincon Congregational Church
Tucson, Arizona

First Congregational UCC of Everett
Everett, Washington

Wayside United Church of Christ
Federal Way, Washington

United Church in University Place
University Place, Washington

Emanuel United Church of Christ
Hales Corners, Wisconsin

St. Stephens United Church of Christ
Merrill, Wisconsin

2008

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Platteville, Wisconsin

Scottsdale Congregational United Church of Christ
Scottsdale, Arizona

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Asheville, North Carolina

Community United Church of Christ
San Antonio, Texas

Emmanuel Reformed United Church of Christ
Export, Pennsylvania

Forks United Church of Christ
Stockertown, Pennsylvania

Trinity United Church of Christ
Canton, Ohio

First Parish Church Congregational
Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts

Groveland Congregational Church
Groveland, Massachusetts

St. Paul United Church of Christ
Eudora, Kansas

Trinity United Church of Christ-Gary
Gary, Indiana

O'Fallon United Church of Christ
O'Fallon, Illinois

Iao Congregational Church
Wailuku, Hawai'i

Southport Congregational Church
Southport, Connecticut

Higganum Congregational Church
Higganum, Connecticut

Samoan Congregational Christian Church
of South Los Angeles
Carson, California

Murphys First Congregational Church
Murphys, California

Congregational Church of Belmont
Belmont, California

2007

Gethsemane United Church of Christ
Houston, Texas

2006


Naples United Church of Christ
Naples, Florida

2005

Urbandale United Church of Christ
Urbandale, Iowa

Have we missed your congregation? We are very sorry! Please let us know; it is very difficult to track this information from the data available to us. We will make every effort to provide your recognition banner in time for the Christmas Fund promotional season this December.

WEB-BASED RESOURCES

High-quality materials are provided to help you tell the story of the Christmas Fund and encourage giving. In addition to the resources in this Offering Guide, an extensive array of electronic and downloadable resources is available on the Pension Boards' website at www.pbucc.org. You may also go directly to the Christmas Fund section of the site at www.christmasfund.org. 

Among the resources you will find on the website are:


- Up-to-date statistics on the use of the Offering's proceeds
- Ready-to-use PowerPoint presentations for worship services and the Christmas Fund Offering
 - ▶ Candlelight Services for each week of Advent
 - ▶ Responsive Readings
 - ▶ Prayers
- Stories and articles that can be cut and pasted into newsletters and/or bulletins
- Written testimonies from those who have benefited from the ministries supported by the Offering
- Video testimonials
- Online giving

CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING: HOW THE FUNDS ARE USED

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 over the past year:

- Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks were sent to approximately 900 persons in **2010**. Of those who received 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 434 persons. These gifts total \$103,401 per month. A significant part of the annual total of \$1,234,344 comes from the Christmas Fund. **(2011 Data)**
- Quarterly health premium supplementation is being provided to 267 families, totaling \$160,608 per quarter. All of the funding for health premium supplementation is derived from the Christmas Fund. **(2011 Data)**
- Emergency Grants totaling \$38,163.35 were provided to 24 individuals and families from January 1 through July 31, 2011.

These statistics reflect annualized projections as of July 31, 2011. The numbers of persons receiving assistance and the totals of assistance payments fluctuate on a monthly basis.

Updated information is available on the Pension Boards' website, www.pbucc.org, or visit the Christmas Fund section of the site directly at www.christmasfund.org. 

“ This gift of \$300 came at a fantastic time. I had to have a root canal and crown. Without enough money to cover it, I could not get the permanent crown put on. Your gift enabled me to get the crown this week. After having pain or discomfort since July, I am now able to chew. ”

TOP GIVING CHURCHES TO THE 2010 CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING

Total Dollars

Naples United Church of Christ
Naples, Florida

Rock Spring Congregational United Church of Christ
Arlington, Virginia

Central Union Church
Honolulu, Hawai'i

Evangelical Reformed United Church of Christ
Frederick, Maryland

First Congregational Church of Palo Alto
Palo Alto, California

The Bath Church UCC
Akron, Ohio

Shiloh United Church of Christ
York, Pennsylvania

The Church of the Palms UCC
Sun City, Arizona

Old South Union Church UCC
South Weymouth, Massachusetts

Christ Congregational Church UCC
Silver Spring, Maryland

Per Capita Giving

United Church of Bevier
Bevier, Missouri

San Marino Congregational United Church of Christ
San Marino, California

Rolling Hills Congregational Church
Salina, Kansas

Hauula Congregational Church
Hauula, Hawai'i

Warren Congregational Church
Warren, Connecticut

Fremont Congregational Church
Fremont, California

Grace United Church of Christ
Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan

Christian United Church of Christ
Sawyer, Michigan

Zion United Church of Christ
Pacific, Missouri

The United Church of Christ at The Villages
Oxford, Florida

Data Provided By: Yearbook Office, UCC Office of General Ministries

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THE CHRISTMAS FUND
2011 Bulletin Inserts



Christmas Fund Gifts Provided....

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Betty Spooner, originally from Kentucky, was working on a teaching degree when she met Willard Strong. His family had owned farmland for five generations, and he had every expectation of carrying on the family business. He had served with honor in World War II and, with the help of the GI Bill, attended college. They were married in 1948.

Four years later, it became clear that farming could not support their growing family. Reluctantly, Willard sought other means of making a living. He returned to school to complete his undergraduate degree at Youngstown State and went on to pursue a Master of Divinity degree at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, commonly known as "Methesco." After ordination, he served a number of churches in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Willard's specialty became small, underserved churches; there were times when he served three churches simultaneously.

Both of the Strongs loved music. Betty spent many happy hours directing musicals with youth groups, singing in the choir, and working with women's clubs. In his spare time, Willard created art; his painting of the Last Supper is on display at Hartsgrove Community UCC in Hartsgrove, Ohio, where he was ordained.

After Willard's retirement in 1989, the couple spent nearly 20 years traveling and visiting family. Willard continued to paint, and sometimes still performed ministerial duties. However, in 2009, he succumbed to pancreatic cancer.

Today, Betty lives in Maine in an apartment attached to her daughter's home. She still travels, but not as much as she used to. "The hardest part about being older is not being able to do what I once did at the church, and giving up more and more things." She is grateful for the Ministerial Assistance grant checks she has received over the years. "The grants always help," she says. "With six kids and Willard's career in small churches, the budget was tight. Any money was always immediately put to good use, to pay bills or things the children needed, and tithing."

Betty says she witnesses God at work in most things, "... including the Christmas Fund. If someone sees a retired minister or minister's [spouse] not able to get along, with small parishes and not enough work, who do the work of keeping small churches alive, they [are] deserving."



The First Sunday of Advent
November 27, 2011

Susi Jacobsen tells the story of how she went to her 30th high school reunion in San Bernardino and ran into a man she had once dated. He had been a brilliant, but also somewhat troubled, youth. Now, 30 years later, he was clean and sober and working as a chef. Susi had become an elementary school teacher. They were both divorced, and each had two children.

By the time Susi married Stephen Jacobsen, he had developed a strong interest in religion that before long blossomed into a calling to ministry. Stephen's theological education was interrupted when Susi became ill enough to require a strict regimen of bed rest for about a year. He took a leave of absence to care for her. When Susi's condition improved, he returned to school. His first call after ordination was to a small, at-risk church in Southern California. Although challenging, soon there were children coming to services, and Stephen started a youth ministry. The church was very happy with its new minister.

Unfortunately, the church's financial difficulties meant that Stephen eventually had to seek work elsewhere. His chef's skills proved indispensable; he found a job running a nearby hospital's cafeteria and food services. In three months, he would have badly-needed health benefits.

A month later, Susi went out to run errands while Stephen stayed home. When she returned, the house seemed too still. Stephen had passed away. Susi's grief was compounded by financial hardship. Her medical condition did not allow her to work full-time, and since Stephen had still been in his initial probationary period at work, there was no health insurance coverage at the time of his death.

Susi misses Stephen and still faces daunting obstacles. Her teaching pension dwindles yearly. She volunteers with Youth Hope, a project that mirrors a dream Stephen had of a ranch for troubled kids. Susi is grateful for the monthly Ministerial Assistance support she receives. Recently, she sent a note in response to an increase in her small monthly grant. "When I got the renewal reply in the mail I felt a little reluctant to open it and afraid to read past the first line. I felt incredible when I read past the first paragraph...It was wonderful to be approved for a grant, but an increase was something I never expected. It reminds me that there are people who care and not just about me, but all others. I would say to people that your donation [to the Christmas Fund] is an investment in God's work."



The Second Sunday of Advent
December 4, 2011

Christmas Fund Gifts Provided...

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Lynne Busch was caught off guard the first time someone suggested she pursue a seminary education. True, she had been a lifelong United Church of Christ member and a long-time church and youth volunteer. Both her parents were long-time, active UCC members as well. But at the time, Lynne already had established a career as a paraoptometric, and she had a young daughter to care for.

Lynne had been involved in several youth events, and by the late 1980s, had become the Indiana-Kentucky Conference Director of Youth. When she confided to her mentor, Greg Bain, that she was interested in additional religious instruction to help guide her youth groups, he said "No, you should get a Master of Divinity at Eden Theological Seminary." She said she nearly fell out of her chair.

She decided that she would pursue the degree when she felt it was God's will rather than her own ambition talking to her. God's unmistakable call came to her at a youth event where she felt as if the entire program was speaking directly to her. With her family's help and support, she went back to school, first finishing a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and then receiving an M. Div. from Eden in 1995. Her first year of internship was at a city jail "which some hate, but I loved," then her second year was at Mt. Tabor, "a good proving ground," and finally, Open Arms. In 2008, she left Michigan for Clarksville, Iowa, right before a tornado and resultant flood. Clarksville struggled to recover, but as Lynne says, the people staunchly look out for one another. She remembers the Christmas Fund Offering as one of the ways in which the United Church of Christ has always looked out for those who have faithfully served. "I remember the Christmas Fund from way back. Each year my parents would give the envelope to one of the kids and let them drop the money in."

The generosity of UCC churches and individuals has helped provide Lynne with Ministerial Assistance in the form of emergency grants and an energy assistance grant, as well as financial support to assist with health insurance coverage while she was in seminary. "The Christmas Fund is incredible and I was very blessed many times."

Today, youth work continues to be a priority. She helped develop an activity-based confirmation program that has given rise to a vibrant youth ministry. "We are always the energy church," says Lynne. "Growing up in the Conference like I did, to me nothing is impossible!"

The Third Sunday of Advent
December 11, 2011



One thing Milwaukee native Joyce Niemann was sure about in 1952 was that she was not going to marry a doctor, mortician or minister, because they were never home. Then she met Cliff Munger. Then again, he was an accountant at the time.

Clifford Munger had had a long association with the church, first with an evangelical church, then, after high school, with the UCC. He'd always been drawn to youth ministry, and at one time was a superintendent of Christian education. But it was not until he had a wife, two children, and an established job as an accountant that the call to ministry came to him.

In spite of her earlier protestations to the contrary, Joyce proved to be an enthusiastic supporter, as were their two sons. Cliff went back to school at Elmhurst College to complete a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy and then to Eden Theological Seminary. By 1966, he was ready for his first call, which came at a time when four churches in Pennsylvania were beginning to discuss a merger. Cliff spent two years guiding them through the transition. He would go on to serve churches in Indiana and Ohio before retiring in 1998 at age 65, when Joyce was stricken with a rare form of cancer. "My wife was seriously ill," Cliff recalled. "I retired to help and spend time with her; she passed in 2003."

As a second-career pastor, Cliff's pension was small. These days, he works part-time. "After I retired, I stepped into an interim call that has lasted far longer than I expected. I work at a small church of 15-20 people in Bellville, Ohio and alternate Sundays with another retired pastor."

During his years as a full-time pastor, Cliff encouraged congregants to give generously to the Christmas Fund, never imagining that one day he would be the recipient of Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks. To those who are considering a donation, he says, "The people are called by the church to do God's work by making a difference in the lives of other people. By all means, support the Christmas Fund because I see many pastors in my situation, those who served smaller churches or new churches that are only able to provide a very low pension. I want to extend to you my deepest gratitude for the gift that I received from the Christmas Fund."



The Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 18, 2011

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PRAYERS OF DEDICATION FOR CHRISTMAS FUND GIFTS:

(For the Fourth Sunday in Advent)

Emmanuel, God, whose face shines upon us,
we give thanks for the shepherds in our midst –
those clergy and musicians,
educators, sextons, administrators
who keep watch over our churches.

They have been faithful for the least and the lost,
alert to help angels and strangers,
and willing to seek and share your story.

Bless these gifts that they may, indeed, bring
hope, peace, joy and our love to
these shepherds of yours. Amen.

(For Christmas Eve)

O God, whose face shines on us,
whose story restores us,
whose birth in Bethlehem saves us,
we give thanks for shepherds in our midst –
active and retired clergy and lay employees
who faithfully keep watch over the church
announce the song of peace, encourage joy,
and share the love we find at the manger.

Bless these gifts that they may, indeed, bring
hope, peace, joy and all our love to
these shepherds of yours. Amen.

(Sunday after Christmas)

Gracious God, let your face shine on us
with a light that does not dim
when the calendar day of Christmas passes.
We give thanks for shepherds in our midst –
who have been faithful in keeping watch,
alert to angels, welcoming to strangers,
willing to seek and share your story
in season and out of season.

Bless these Christmas Fund gifts that they may
express our gratitude to retired and active
clergy and lay employees, as well as our commitment,
each one of us, to become shepherds of your grace. Amen.

MISSION MOMENT

Hear these words:

"I would like to thank you, the Pension Boards, and the hundreds of congregations and thousands of individuals who contributed so generously to the United Church of Christ's annual Christmas Fund.

It is because of such a giving spirit that pensioners like me, celebrating 57 years in the Christian ministry, can have a most enjoyable and heart-warming Christmas this year! With this gift, we will have an opportunity to share the great joy of celebrating with family and loved ones...the birth of our Savior and the rebirth within us all! We have been blessed with the birth of a great-granddaughter this year...and though they are 2,000 miles away...we can now send a gift of our love to her and her dear ones...plus share with others, as well as something for ourselves!

Again...a special thank you to you and all, who in any way, made this possible for us. May the Lord...born in a manger...who died on a cross for us all...bless you and yours at this most beautiful and love-filled time of our Christian year!"

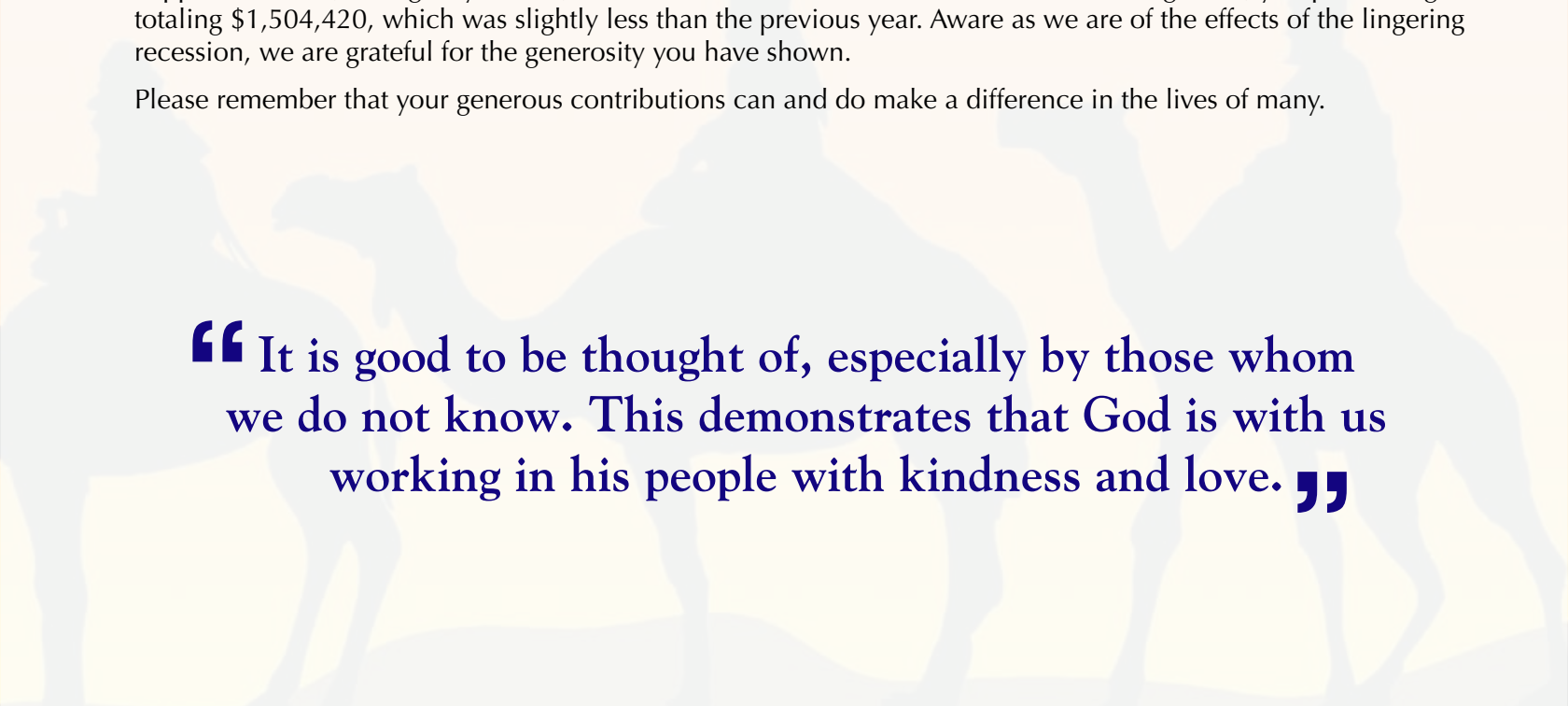
You have the opportunity to be a part of this ministry that cares for the active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ through your participation in the annual Christmas Fund Offering.

Your gift to the Christmas Fund will not only assist pastors like the one above with a "Thank You" Gift Check at Christmas, but also provide for the Supplementation of Small Annuities, Supplementation of Health Premiums and provide Emergency Grants to active and retired clergy and lay employees.

The mission of the Christmas Fund is to provide assistance dollars in situations of critical need, while preserving the dignity of those who receive the aid.

Our 2011 goal is to raise \$1,650,000 for the vital ministries of Pension Supplementation, Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants, and Christmas Gifts to low-income retirees. During 2010, you provided gifts totaling \$1,504,420, which was slightly less than the previous year. Aware as we are of the effects of the lingering recession, we are grateful for the generosity you have shown.

Please remember that your generous contributions can and do make a difference in the lives of many.



“ It is good to be thought of, especially by those whom we do not know. This demonstrates that God is with us working in his people with kindness and love. ”

FIVE FOR FIVE

Is Your Church Five for Five?

Being 5 for 5 is one sign of congregational vitality in UCC churches.

5 ways to support our United Church of Christ!

5 for 5 churches are those that contribute to Our Church's Wider Mission – both Basic Support and Special Support, including the four Special Mission Offerings (One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund). We have been delighted by the response of congregations across the entire church that have celebrated being 5 for 5, and just as delighted by the many churches that have asked how they, too, can meet this challenge.



This recognition program says “thank you,” often to churches that are small but nevertheless faithful and generous, and it strengthens their relationship with the wider church. It also helps those churches teach about mission and the ways their gifts are being used beyond the local congregation. Finally, the program serves as an incentive and a challenge to other churches to add one or two offerings – or, in some cases, even to add Our Church's Wider Mission Basic Support – to their stewardship and mission efforts. For more information, contact Tracy Carnes or Kate Huey at **1.866.822.8224, ext. 3858**.

UCC BASIC SUPPORT

Provides funding from congregations for Conferences and the national ministries of Wider Church Ministries, Local Church Ministries, Justice and Witness Ministries, General Ministries and the Pension Boards.

UCC SPECIAL MISSION OFFERINGS

Part of Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM), these four offerings sponsor vital ministries that bring hope to people around the world.

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

Helps provide pension and health premium supplementation to low-income retired church workers, emergency assistance to clergy families in need, and Christmas checks to hundreds of annuitants; administered by the Pension Boards.

December 18, 2011/December 23, 2012

One Great Hour of Sharing

Channels resources for international programs in health, education and agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries, and both international and domestic disaster response; administered by Wider Church Ministries, Global Sharing of Resources.

March 18, 2012

Strengthen the Church

Grows the UCC's future funding The Still Speaking Ministry, new and renewing churches, youth and young adult ministries, and lay and pastoral leadership formation – especially among women and people of color; administered by your church's Conference, Local Church Ministries, and The Still Speaking Ministry.

May 27, 2012

Neighbors in Need

Supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States and Puerto Rico, including the Council for American Indian Ministries (CAIM), justice and advocacy, and direct service projects supported by Justice and Witness Ministries.

October 7, 2012

ALREADY HAVE ANOTHER CHRISTMAS OFFERING FOR LOCAL MISSIONS?

Why not become a "5 for 5" church by taking a "Christmas in July" offering? Resources are available on the Pension Boards' website, www.pbucc.org, or visit the Christmas Fund section of the site directly at www.christmasfund.org. 





**“The gift truly represents God’s presence, care and love.
May the Lord continue to bless each of you and peace.”**

**“Your check couldn’t have come at a better time.
I was worrying how I was going to pay a large bill
for medication, and then I received your check.
I just sat and cried. I thank you from the bottom of
my heart. You did lighten my load a lot.”**

PROMOTING THE 2011 CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING

Beginning October 27, 2011



Watch for the arrival of Christmas Fund materials.

- Order extra materials, as needed, by calling toll-free **1.800.325.7061**.
- Enlist the help of your church's Missions Committee or other group(s) to assist in promoting the Christmas Fund Offering.
- Check the Web (**www.christmasfund.org**) for electronic resources to use in promoting the Offering. 
- Recruit your church's Worship Team/Committee to help in promoting the Christmas Fund Offering.
- Check the Web (**www.christmasfund.org**) for ready-to-use PowerPoint worship resources. 

Week of November 21


- Begin your 2011 Christmas Fund promotion.
- Send a letter and Offering envelope to every household on your church mailing list, announcing the Offering date and goal amount. (If you include materials in your regular church newsletter mailing, please make sure to emphasize that the Christmas Fund Offering is an expression of your church's mission. This ensures compliance with U.S. postal regulations governing the use of non-profit mailing permits.)
- Display Christmas Fund posters prominently throughout the church building.
- Check the Web (**www.christmasfund.org**) for a sample letter and newsletter articles.

Advent Sundays (November 27, December 4, 11, 18)


- Share information about the Offering in worship, during announcements or Mission Moments.
- Place additional Offering envelopes at each seat or pew.
- Invite your Missions chairperson, church moderator or a retired minister, missionary or lay employee (or their widowed spouses/partners) to make a special announcement about the Christmas Fund during the service.
- Distribute copies of the bulletin inserts (included in this Offering Guide) with your worship bulletins.
- Use the Advent Candle Lighting Liturgical Resources provided on the Web: **www.christmasfund.org**. 
- If your church uses projection systems as a part of the worship experience, check out the ready-to-use resources provided on the Web: **www.christmasfund.org**. 

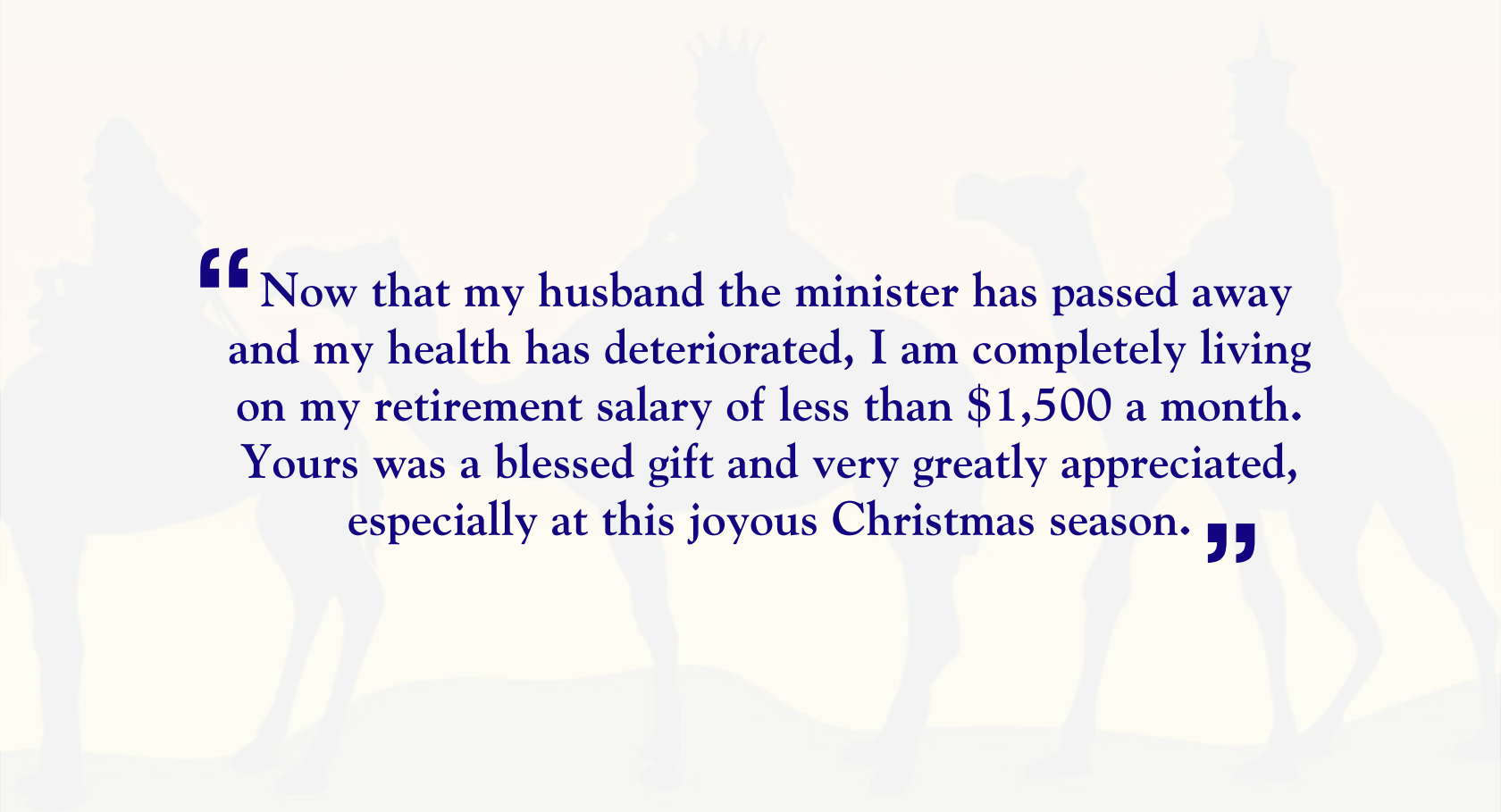
“Many thanks for the increase in monthly assistance. How grateful that the giving of faithful members has held up so well that we who are in the closing years on earth can be blessed by their goodness. I am most grateful.”

Sunday December 18

- This is the week designated to receive the Christmas Fund Offering. Some congregations may elect to receive the Offering on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.
- Use the Responsive Reading and a Prayer of Dedication when the Offering is received. Resources are provided in this Offering Guide, and also available in electronic format, including PowerPoint, on the Web: www.christmasfund.org. 

January 2012

- Announce the total gifts received, and publicly thank all who helped make the appeal successful.
- Invite those who have not yet provided their gifts to the Christmas Fund to do so.
- Prepare an article for your church newsletter or website thanking church members and friends of the congregation for their generous response. Sample articles are provided on the Web: www.christmasfund.org. 



“ Now that my husband the minister has passed away and my health has deteriorated, I am completely living on my retirement salary of less than \$1,500 a month. Yours was a blessed gift and very greatly appreciated, especially at this joyous Christmas season. ”



Maren C. Tirabassi

THE AUTHOR

Maren C. Tirabassi is the author of the liturgical resources for the 2011 Annual Christmas Fund Offering for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund. A Pilgrim Press author, her books include **DayBook for New Voices: A Calendar of Reflections and Prayers by and for Youth** (edited with Maria I. Tirabassi); **Gifts in Open Hands: More Worship Resources for the Global Community; All Whom God Has Joined: Resources for Clergy and Same-Gender Loving Couples** (co-authored with Leanne McCall Tigert); **Caring for Ourselves While Caring for Our Elders; and Before the Amen: Creative Resources for Worship**. She is the pastor of Union Congregational Church of Madbury in Madbury, New Hampshire.

“Thank you for the Christmas check I recently received in the mail. It is great that the UCC members think of us ‘old’ people.

Yes, this check from the UCC Annual Christmas Fund Offering did indeed brighten my day. Thank you!

And yes, this gift does remind me of God’s presence and the care He has given me my whole life. I thank God for all the blessings He has bestowed upon me.

May God bless you all. ”

“ My thanks to the Pension Boards...
...they help...
Making angels play heavenly chords. ”

“ Thank you for the gift that I received. I have been receiving gifts since 1982, when I became 62. I had a heart attack and was advised to retire, so I did. Now I have received blessings for 28 years. I will be 91 years on December 28 – and I still drive a car!
You have been most kind and generous. ”

“ Please extend to the Pension Boards my heartfelt Thank You for the most generous check. It indeed came at the right time. We needed a new dryer and with your thoughtfulness, it appeared. Many thanks. ”



THE CHRISTMAS FUND

2011 Offering Guide