

When the Rev. Christopher (Chris) A. Hart's dad was laid off from his electrical engineering job in the mid-1980s, the family moved from southern California to Colville, Washington, where they opened up a business. The Harts started attending First Congregational United Church of Christ. At first, teenage Chris was not enthusiastic about church, but his perspective changed when he met Jennifer, a young volunteer in the nursery. Soon Chris was involved in youth groups and community events.

As high school graduation approached, Chris started thinking about where his path would lead. The Persian Gulf War brought fears of a military draft. He thought seriously about enlisting. But one day, at his niece's swimming competition, he heard a child crying and a line from a familiar hymn came to him: "I will hold your people in my heart." At that moment, he thought, "I'm here. I need to go find out why that child is crying. It's me that is supposed to go." Chris went to help until the parent came. He thought, "Maybe God might be calling me to something in a different direction." Instead of the military, he turned his eyes to ministry.

First, Chris earned a B.S. in developmental psychology from Eastern Washington University. He and Jennifer were married. He went on to Eden Theological Seminary, graduating in 2008, and was ordained in 2009.

Chris' first call was to a church-affiliated residence for at-risk youth. Although he found the work fulfilling, he and the leadership were not an ideal fit and he left in the summer of 2011. The Harts, who now had three young sons, had to pay for health and dental coverage out of their savings. Family stepped in to help, but eventually, their options ran out.

Chris had heard about the Christmas Fund as a kid in Colville, but didn't know much about it. His Conference recommended him for a grant, and he received enough assistance to cover two months of health and dental insurance for his family while he continued to look for work.

As of January 2012, Chris has been serving as Interim Pastor at Elias United Church of Christ in Newmanktown, Pennsylvania. As he looks toward the time when his interim placement ends, he is hoping to serve in an agency that works with children and families or as a pastor. When asked what he would say to those considering an offering to the Christmas Fund, Chris says, "It can be a genuine reminder that God's love is still there, and that is powerful stuff."



The Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 23, 2012

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 assistance to approximately 1,600 persons during the past year.

- Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks were sent to approximately 900 persons in 2011. 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 373 persons. These gifts total \$102,899.50 per month. A significant part of the annual total of \$1,255,885.20 comes from the Christmas Fund (2012 data).
- Quarterly Health Premium Supplementation is being provided to 250 families, totaling \$146,840.30 per quarter. All of the funding for Health Premium Supplementation is derived from the Christmas Fund (2012 data).
- Emergency Grants totaling \$27,177.62 were provided to 22 individuals and families from January 1 through June 30, 2012.

These statistics reflect annualized projections as of June 30, 2012. The numbers of persons receiving assistance and the totals of assistance payments fluctuate on a monthly basis.

