



The Pension Boards  
United Church of Christ, Inc.

# Twelve Days of Bringing Gifts

2012 Offering Guide



**THE CHRISTMAS FUND**  
for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory...  
From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."

*John 1:14a, 16  
(New Revised Standard Version)*

Grace to you and peace, in the name of Emmanuel, the Word made flesh!

In this holy season, as we share gifts with our loved ones, we are reminded of the ultimate gift we have received – God's great gift to humankind, Jesus Christ, the promised Savior. In Jesus, the fullness of God's love is revealed, a love that reconciles us with God and with one another, bringing hope and healing to a broken world.

For 110 years, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a way in which we – as members of the United Church of Christ and the predecessor denominations from which our beloved Church was born – bring hope to those who have so faithfully and selflessly served. The Christmas Fund, one of four Special Mission Offerings received annually in the United Church of Christ, is a way in which we share with others from the fullness that we have received.

Your generous giving to the 2011 Offering enabled the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance program to provide, on behalf of the whole Church, \$1,536,460 in

Supplementation of Small Annuities, Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks to individuals and families facing unforeseen financial crises. We are thankful for your partnership and generosity, and ask that you consider supporting this year's appeal prayerfully and to the best of your ability.

This year's Christmas Fund Offering theme is **12-12-12: Twelve Days of Bringing Gifts**. The Offering materials in the following pages illustrate the difference your gift can make in the lives of those in the greatest need.

On behalf of the nearly 1,600 clergy and lay employees and families whose lives were touched by your giving to the last Christmas Fund Offering, I express profound gratitude for your generosity and compassion.

May you be blessed, and a blessing to others.

Faithfully,



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

## INTRODUCTION

### 12-12-12: Twelve Days of Bringing Gifts

**The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund** is a unique Special Mission Offering of the United Church of Christ that affords us an opportunity to recognize and honor those who serve our beloved Church.

One of the special aspects of the Christmas Fund is that the funds do not support programs, make grants to institutions, or fund advocacy programs, but rather, they provide direct financial assistance to individual UCC clergy and lay employees.

The theme of the 2012 Offering is **12-12-12: Twelve Days of Bringing Gifts**. This Offering Guide contains many resources to help promote the Offering in your congregation. Additional resources are available in electronic format on the Christmas Fund section of the Pension Boards' website at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).

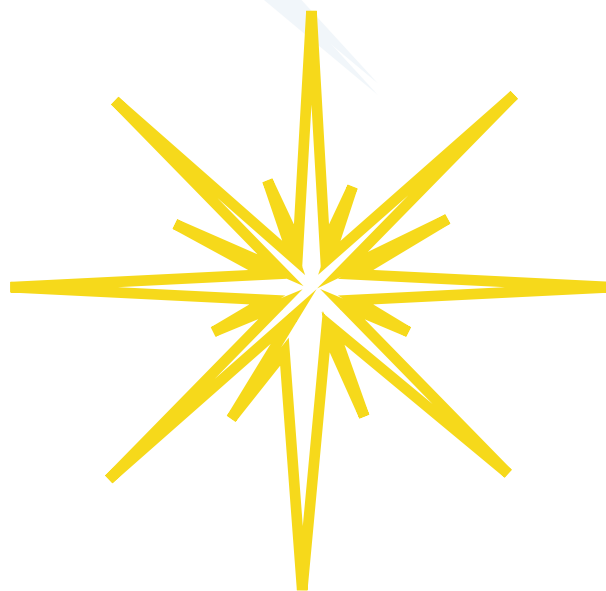
Beginning on December 12, 2012 (12-12-12), we will celebrate Twelve Days of Bringing Gifts in support of this year's Christmas Fund. Over the years there have emerged many varied traditions around the 12 days of Christmas – many of them culturally specific – but all focusing on the gifts given by God to God's people. We will be creating one more tradition this year. For 12 days, we will publish devotions, stories and interpretations of the life-giving possibilities gifts to the Christmas Fund generate. The celebration will culminate as we bring our Christmas Fund gifts to our local congregations on Sunday, December 23.

We will be serious, and we will have some fun. Ever wonder how much it would cost to buy a partridge in a pear tree, or five golden rings? We will find out and also learn what a gift of that same value to the Christmas Fund can mean in the life of someone who served or is serving the United Church of Christ.

The 12 messages will be available in print form, on the web, and via e-mail. Can you help spread the word? If you are willing to resend the e-mails to your congregation, friends, or e-mail list, please e-mail [12-12-12@pbucc.org](mailto:12-12-12@pbucc.org) to be added to our distribution list for this project. (Please be assured that we will keep your e-mail information private and will not share it with others.) You also can get updates on the 12-12-12 campaign by following us on Twitter [@CF12\\_12\\_12](https://twitter.com/CF12_12_12).

And of course, we hope you will provide your generous personal contribution to the Christmas Fund in 2012!

Should you have questions, or need more information, please do not hesitate to contact the Rev. Krista L. Betz, Director, Ministerial Assistance, toll-free at **1.800.642.6543, ext. 2716 (212.729.2716)**, or by e-mail at [kbetz@pbucc.org](mailto:kbetz@pbucc.org).



## 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 the 2012 Offering is to raise \$1,700,000 for the vital ministries of Pension Supplementation, Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants, and Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks to low-income retirees during 2013. During 2011, you provided gifts totaling \$1,536,460, which was significantly more than the previous year. **Thank You!**

It is possible to increase the size of the Offering in your congregation!

First, someone must emerge as leader for the effort. Then, that leader will:

1. SET A GOAL with the congregation.
2. SHARE information about the ministry that 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.

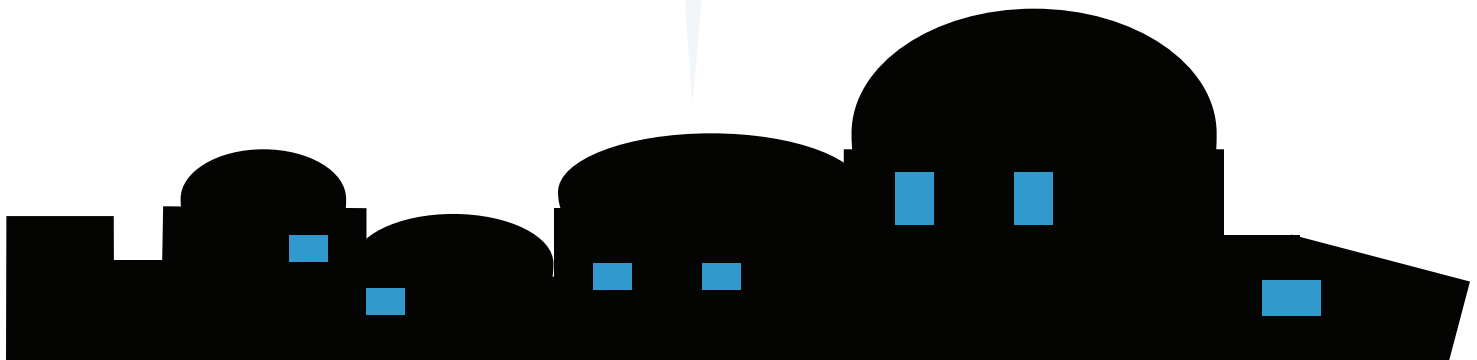
We welcome your willingness to tell the story, share the good news, and ask your friends, colleagues, acquaintances and congregants to join you in providing support both for the annual Christmas Fund appeal and with legacy gifts.

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

In 2012, you can help spread the word in a special way. Beginning on Wednesday, December 12 (12-12-12) there will be 12 daily devotions published via e-mail as a part of the Stillspeaking Daily Devotional, through the Pension Boards’ e-mail list and to others by request. We will also be using social media to reach as wide an audience as possible. You can help promote the Offering by:

- subscribing to one of these distribution lists and then forwarding the e-mails to your congregation’s e-mail list each day (to be added to the Christmas Fund list, please send an e-mail to [12-12-12@pbucc.org](mailto:12-12-12@pbucc.org)); and
- following us on Twitter @CF12\_12\_12.

You can also engage small groups in your church such as Sunday school classes or youth groups by having them raise funds for one of the 12 days as a mission project.



## CAMPAIGN 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 at [www.pbucc.org](http://www.pbucc.org) or on the Christmas Fund section of the Pension Boards' website at [www.christmasfund.org](http://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
- Stories and articles that can be cut and pasted into newsletters and/or bulletins
- Testimonials from those who have benefited from the ministries supported by the Offering
- Secure online giving



## 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 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).
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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.



## TOP GIVING CHURCHES TO THE 2011 CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING

### Total Dollars

Naples United Church of Christ	Naples, Florida
Rock Spring Congregational UCC	Arlington, Virginia
The First Church in Oberlin UCC	Oberlin, Ohio
Liliuokalani Protestant Church	Hale'iwa, O'ahu, Hawai'i
University Congregational UCC	Seattle, Washington
Mission Hills UCC	San Diego, California
Evangelical Reformed Church	Frederick, Maryland
First Congregational UCC	Sioux Falls, South Dakota
First Congregational Church of West Chicago UCC	West Chicago, Illinois
United Church of Christ in Medfield	Medfield, Massachusetts

### Per Capita Giving

Storrs Korean Church at the University of Connecticut	Storrs, Connecticut
First Congregational Church of West Chicago UCC	West Chicago, Illinois
Liliuokalani Protestant Church	Hale'iwa, O'ahu, Hawai'i
United Church of Bevier	Bevier, Missouri
First Congregational UCC	South Windham, Connecticut
North Congregational UCC	Amherst, Massachusetts
Rolling Hills Congregational UCC	Salina, Kansas
Rock Spring Congregational UCC	Arlington, Virginia
Central St. Matthew UCC	New Orleans, Louisiana
Carrier Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ	Carrier, Oklahoma

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



# THE CHRISTMAS FUND

for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



## MISSION MOMENT

One of the stories featured on a recent edition of a television news magazine show recounted the hardship of a family that had slipped from the middle class into poverty as a consequence of the continuing effects of the recent recession. The story graphically illustrated the emotional devastation visited upon this family, as they had to rely on a food bank for the first time in their lives.

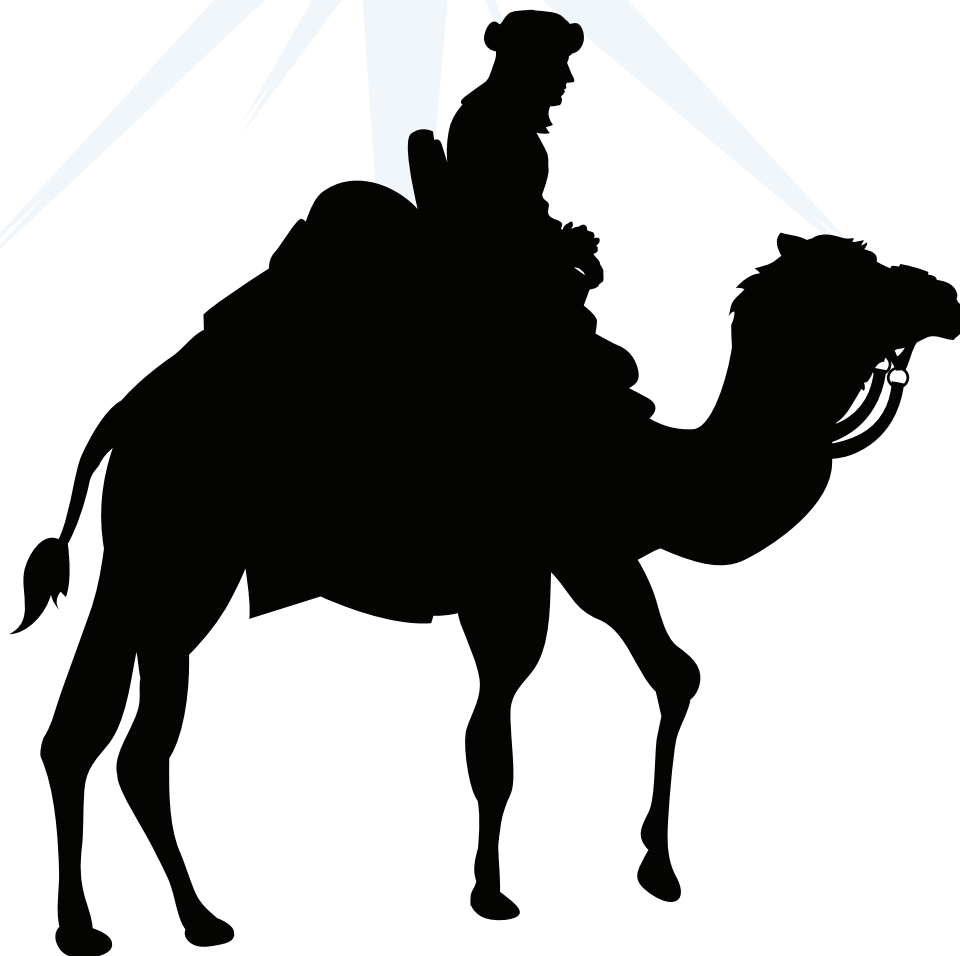
The United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, a ministry of the Pension Boards, hears similar stories recounted on an almost daily basis as active and retired clergy and lay employees turn to us for help because the economy has eroded their financial resources, and their dreams.

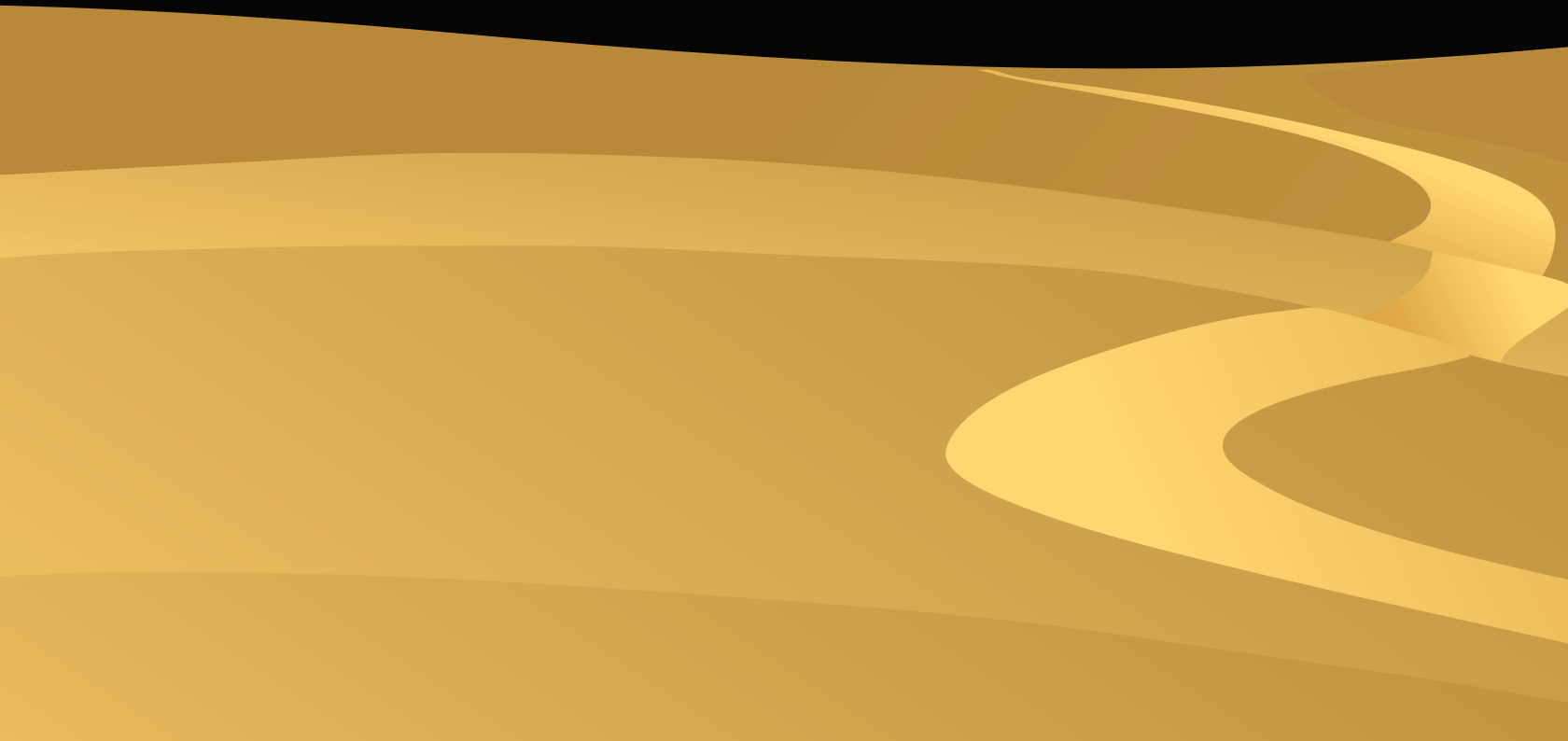
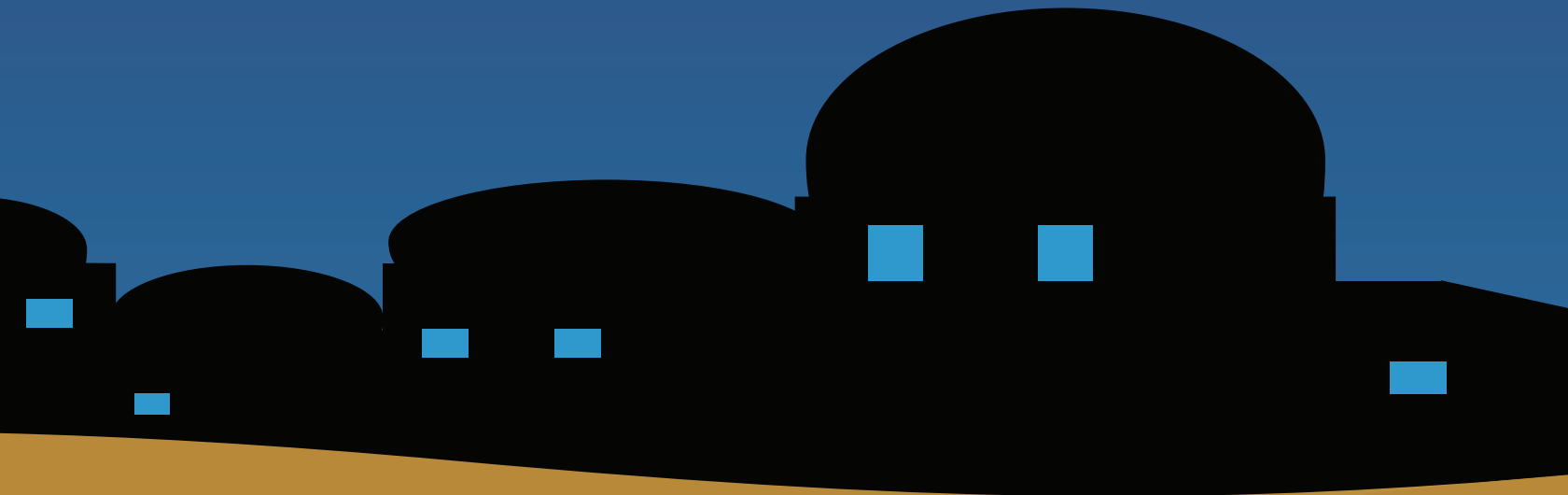
Your gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund helps the Ministerial Assistance Board to bring a ray of light and hope in desperate life circumstances.

Your gift can bring joy to the simplest of life's moments, as illustrated in this note from a recipient of a Christmas "Thank You" Gift Check:

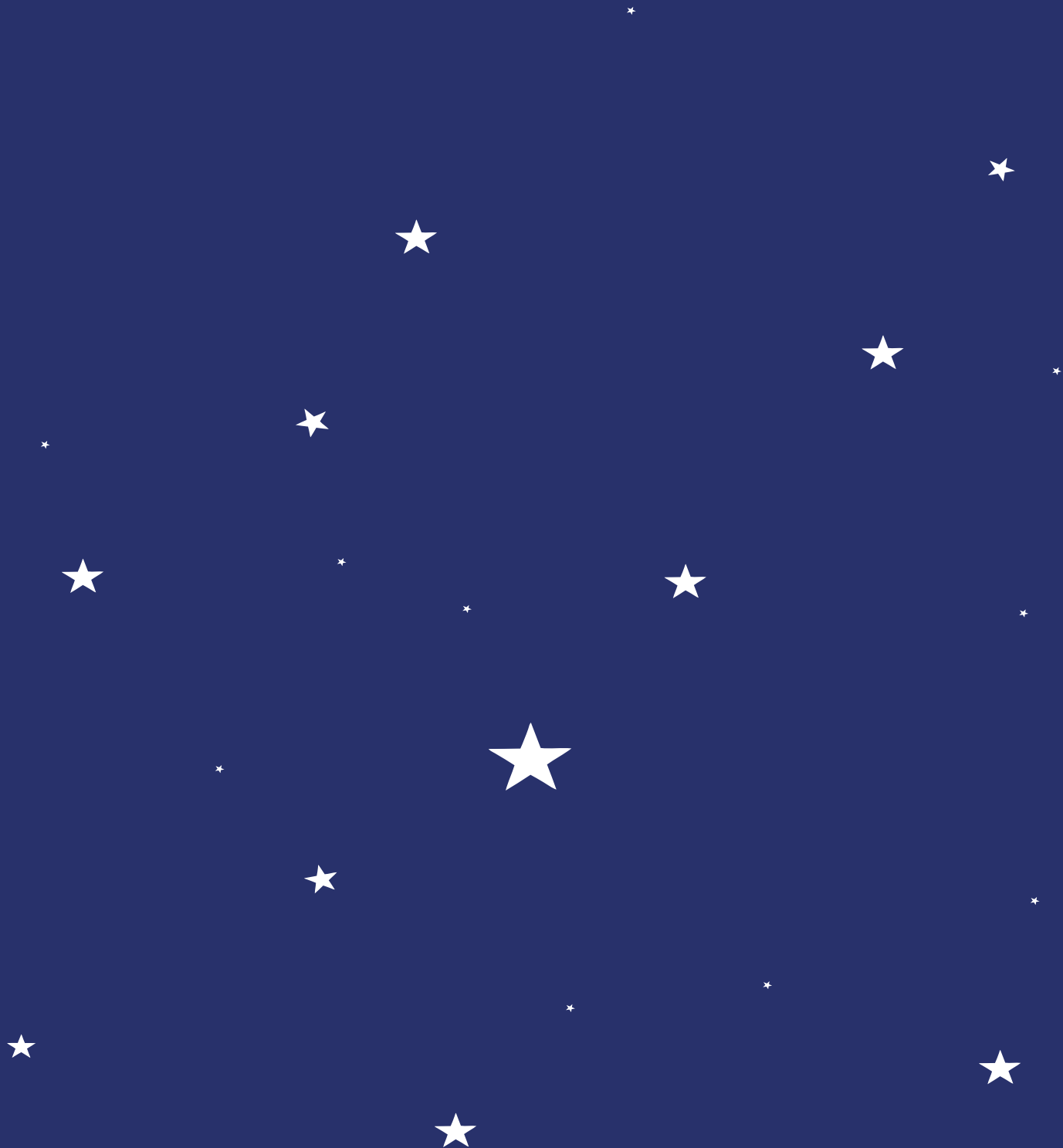
What a most wonderful blessing it truly is to receive a "check of love" from the Pension Boards in this Advent season of our Christian Year!

My wife and I were thrilled to receive your generous donation so that we can experience a wonderful family togetherness...and then share all our love...and some gifts for our grandchildren and our great-granddaughter too. All this because of your thoughtfulness...so that we know we are not forgotten.





★  
THE CHRISTMAS FUND  
**2012 Bulletin Inserts**



The Rev. William (Bill) A. Main says he was always on the liberal side of the family, “which resulted in a lot of lively discussion.” Although there may have been disagreements on many issues, Bill knew that his mother was proud that her son was a minister.

Bill grew up with his parents and three siblings in Crystal, Maine. When he was in high school, they moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts where his father worked for General Electric and his mother for Sears, Roebuck and Co. On Sundays, his mother would take Bill and his siblings to an American Baptist church.

After receiving his undergraduate degree from Eastern Baptist College (now Eastern University) near Philadelphia, he attended Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Massachusetts. Between degrees, he married his fiancée, Christine.

Bill was ordained as an American Baptist minister in 1962, after which he served as an associate minister at the historic First Baptist Old Stone Church in Tiverton, Rhode Island. “It was a wonderful place to begin ministry,” he recalls. “The old building is set in a beautiful area near the sea.”

From Rhode Island, Bill went to Steubenville, Ohio, to help two congregations merge. From there, he would go on to serve in Brentwood, Missouri and eventually at Faith United Church of Christ in Bayard, Nebraska.

Although Bill had retained his American Baptist standing, increasingly he found the United Church of Christ to be a good fit with his progressive outlook. From Nebraska, he went on to serve Faith Congregational Church in Oskaloosa, Iowa and First Congregational UCC in Henderson, North Carolina before retiring in the early 1990s.

Bill and his wife retired to Florida, and Christine maintained the small crafts business she had established earlier in their marriage. Bill served two interim pastorates in Florida while occasionally working part-time at Office Depot and Walmart to supplement the couple's retirement income. In 2007, after a long illness, Bill's wife of 48 years passed away.

That year, Bill began to receive assistance from the Christmas Fund. Now, he can pay his bills, eat out once in a while, and occasionally take a small trip. This year, he is looking forward to attending his 60th high school reunion. A longtime supporter of the Christmas Fund, he has known others who have been helped by the Offering in the past, and is now a grateful recipient himself.

“The Christmas Fund,” says Bill, “is one of the best things the UCC does.”



The First Sunday of Advent  
December 2, 2012

## *Christmas Fund Gifts Provided...*

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The Rev. Jane R. Ireland was studying zoology at Carlton College in Northfield, Minnesota when she met the University of Michigan law student who would become her husband. After their marriage, the couple set up housekeeping in Ann Arbor, Michigan. After her husband's graduation, Jane left her job at the University of Michigan biology lab and the couple moved to Rapid City, South Dakota. They had four children, and soon Jane found herself actively involved in their church's Christian Education and Sunday School ministries.

Jane also developed an interest in spirituality. She opened a spirituality center in Rapid City that offered classes and group meditation sessions.

In 1984, Jane entered Sioux Falls Seminary. At the same time that her spiritual life was burgeoning, her marriage was coming to an end. She and her husband separated and divorced soon after her graduation in 1986.

After her ordination at First Congregational United Church of Christ in Rapid City, Jane served a number of churches – First Congregational Church in Stockton, Kansas, First Presbyterian Church of Sturgis, South Dakota, and several interim calls. She also served as a chaplain at the Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis, a therapist at the Evangelical Children's Home in Kansas City, and a chaplain at a rehabilitation facility for head trauma patients. As Jane reflects on her ministerial career, she sees a unifying theme. "A lot of my ministry was about healing from grief," she says. Certain events hold a special place for her. A

confirmation class she led in one of her interim pastorates started out contentiously, but the dynamic of the group changed and, by the end, the confirmands wrote a poem together and left as good friends.

Jane retired in 2009 at age 75. She attends a church where there are nine other retired ministers. She serves on the worship committee and preaches sometimes. She is in good health and remains active, but due to her late start in ministry, her pension income is low. After having supported the Christmas Fund for years, Jane is now among the hundreds of lower-income annuitants who receive Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks. This past year, the check was particularly appreciated:

"I want to thank you for the generous Christmas Fund check...It was an answer to a prayer I didn't know I needed. I received the check on a Friday and that very same night while I was attending a meeting I had two tires slashed, an expense I never dreamed of. The check replaced the tires, and I still had some left to pass on. It was a real blessing."

The Second Sunday of Advent  
December 9, 2012

## *Christmas Fund Gifts Provided...*

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Being the son of an army air corpsman prepared the Rev. Robert (Bob) R. Ruse to a life of moving from place to place. By the time Bob reached his senior year of high school, he and his family had settled in Belleville, Illinois. It was then that he discerned a call to ministry.

Bob started his education at Elmhurst College, but it was at Tarkio College, a Presbyterian school in northwestern Missouri, where he found fresh inspiration.

While at Tarkio, Bob met Jacqueline, a nursing student. Jackie left school to marry Bob shortly before his first call. She has always been very supportive of his career and active in his churches. They have three sons: Robert Jr., Michael, and Timothy.

Bob's first call was to a yoked parish near Fall City, Nebraska. Nineteen months later, he was called back east to serve on the pastoral staff of Maple Street Congregational Church in Salem, Massachusetts. In 1983, he accepted a call to St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Elgin, Illinois, where he served for seven years before moving to Philadelphia's First United Church of Christ. In June 1997, he went to the Ridge Road United Church of Christ at Parma, near Cleveland.

In 2004, Bob had surgery to correct an aortic aneurysm, but found that he was unable to sustain the energy he had had before the diagnosis. Reluctantly, he retired from full-time ministry in 2005. Initially, he and Jackie enjoyed retirement. They traveled, visited their children's families, and Bob occasionally preached and took odd jobs. But the weakness persisted, and in 2008, he was diagnosed with kidney failure. His only hope was a kidney transplant.

Bob was spared being placed on the lengthy waiting list for a kidney because one of his sons turned out to be a perfect match. However, in spite of having enough insurance and other resources to pay for the surgery, they did not have the necessary funds to cover the expensive after-care regimen that would keep the new kidney healthy. Meanwhile, Bob's condition was worsening.

As a pastor, Bob had helped raise money for the Christmas Fund Offering every year, but had not considered himself a possible recipient. He received a \$2,500 Emergency Grant, which was enough to get him approved for surgery in May 2011.

The surgery, says Bob, was "truly a total rebirth. The Christmas Fund was life-changing for me, and I now know it has been for others, whether they are facing disasters of health or financial difficulty. If you are looking for a place to make a difference, the Christmas Fund is the place to do it."

The Third Sunday of Advent  
December 16, 2012

## *Christmas Fund Gifts Provided...*

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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 Newmaston, 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...*

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## WORSHIP RESOURCES

### First Sunday of Advent Unison Prayer Option:

*(singing or speaking)*

On the first week of Advent  
the gift God gave to earth  
was the hope of the Bethlehem birth.

Giver of all gifts, your first gift is hope. We thank you for letting us be hopeful people – expecting good tidings for ourselves, for our families and churches, and for our world. As we unwrap the Advent season, now beginning, help us to focus on the promise of Bethlehem, enjoying as simple pleasures the presents, traditions, special food, music and stories, without letting them control our time, spirits or resources. Help us to share your hope with others this week as it has been shared with us. Amen.

### Second Sunday of Advent Unison Prayer Option:

*(singing or speaking)*

On the second week of Advent  
the gift God gave to earth –  
was a dove of peace between us  
and the hope of the Bethlehem birth.

Giver of all gifts, your second gift is peace, but we need hope in order to open peace up and share it. We thank you for calling us to be peace-makers in everyday December situations like road rage or shopping dysfunction. We have the chance to model reconciliation in family, school, church, workplace, or community. Help us lift up our harmony as long as there is one hungry child, one homeless refugee, one soldier far from home, one lonely patient in a hospital or one unvisited inmate in a prison. Someone passed the peace to us and we want to pass it on. Amen.

*Congregation may wish to pass the peace of Christ.*

### Third Sunday of Advent Unison Prayer Option:

*(singing or speaking)*

On the third week of Advent  
the gift God gave to earth  
was joy never-ending,  
a dove of peace between us  
and the hope of the Bethlehem birth.

Giver of all gifts, your third gift is joy. We expect it with hope and quiet ourselves to receive it with peace. Joy lights Advent from the inside out so that all come to the manger of your story from their happy weeks or sad days, from their month of renewal or year of grief. Remind us that to re-joyce means to find our own joy beyond circumstances and share it with others. Amen.

### Fourth Sunday of Advent Unison Prayer Option:

*(singing or speaking)*

On the fourth week of Advent  
the gift God gave to earth –  
was love that's still-calling,  
joy never-ending,  
a dove of peace between us  
and the hope of the Bethlehem birth.

God, you are both the Giver and the Gift. As your star leads to the stable where the story comes true, we call upon you to light our manger-paths. Some are traveling in these next few days. Some are busy with preparations and some are hollow with loss. Some have witnessed only a few Christmases and others have seen many. Because we learned how you first loved us, and we continually experience the Holy Spirit's love through this church, let all that we do welcome others to the love we have known. Amen.



# THE CHRISTMAS FUND



**Responsive Reading for Advent and Christmas Use** (for churches that do not light an Advent wreath or wish to do the Offering in one focus)

Introduction

Leader: If we tried to divide this congregation into people who will give a gift this month and those who will receive one, we would have a unison prayer instead of a responsive reading. We do celebrate this holy season of gift-giving, in spite of all the problems of holiday spending. Let us reflect on some of the gifts we have received in our lives and honor the particular ways those gifts are given in churches.

People: God is the Giver of all our gifts!

Leader: Reflect for a moment on a Bible story that is precious to you – it may be the Bethlehem story or David and Goliath, or stilling the storm on the sea.

*Pause*

People: We give thanks for clergy, active and retired, who have shared the stories of our faith.

Leader: Reflect for a moment on a time in your childhood or youth when an adult mentor made all the difference.

*Pause*

People: We give thanks for Christian educators and youth group leaders.

Leader: Reflect for a moment on sacred spaces in your life. Is there a sanctuary you remember that held your joy or peace or pain or all three?

*Pause*

People: We give thanks for administrators and sextons, for Conference staff and those who work in the National Setting, who are sanctuary-makers.

Leader: Reflect for a moment on a song that always touches your heart...

*Silent Night...Mary, Did You Know?...Carol of the Bells*

*Pause*

People: We give thanks for organists and choir directors, song leaders, praise bands and soloists.

Leader: On the 12 days of Christmas and the 353 other ones, we celebrate the truth that God's gifts have been shared in this congregation and others.

People: Giver of all gifts, whose holy season fills our hearts with wonder, we give thanks for those who share their gifts with us in the packages of different professions –

clergy and musicians, chaplains and counselors,  
educators and youth leaders, sextons and administrators,  
those both retired and currently employed.

Bless the offerings we bring that they may, indeed,  
unwrap hope, peace, joy and all our love –  
to your faithful ones. Amen.

*Receiving of the annual Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and Emergency Fund Offering should include explanation of the four uses (Pension and Health Supplementation, Emergency Grants and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks).*

**Prayers of Dedication for Christmas Fund Gifts:***(For the Fourth Sunday of Advent)*

Giver of all gifts, whose holy season fills our hearts with wonder,  
we give thanks for those who share their gifts with us  
in the packages of different professions –

clergy and musicians, chaplains and counselors,  
educators and youth leaders, sextons and administrators,  
those both retired and currently employed.

Bless the offerings we bring that they may, indeed, unwrap hope, peace, joy and all our love –  
to your faithful ones. Amen.

*(For Christmas Eve)*

Gracious God, on this holy night in which the good tidings of angels, shepherds and magi fill our hearts, we give you thanks for those who have wrapped up your gifts to us in our own time with their stories, music, caregiving and service in this and other faith communities. We dedicate our offerings of help, hope and healing for them, and, modeling ourselves on their care for your church, pledge our gifts of time and prayer, energy and skills in the ongoing ministries of Emmanuel, God present with us. Amen.

*(Sunday after Christmas or first Sunday in January)*

Gift-giver God,  
though the after-days of Christmas  
on this we can agree  
the tinsel is dragging off the tree!

Now we return, O God, to the long and faithful seasons of congregations and remember those who preach and pray, who lead music and stand with youth, who counsel and are chaplains, who administrate our sacred space and care for it. This Christmas Fund is our re-gifting some of their blessings to those who make a difference in our lives through all the precious ordinary days of the year to come. Amen.

**General use litany, for another time of year but reflecting the Twelve Days of Christmas theme:**

Leader: As we reflect this morning on our gifts to the “Christmas Fund,” we remind ourselves how the Christmas Gift of God’s presence in our lives is not only unwrapped in December. We keep Christmas all year long.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and so many givers among us.

Leader: In the first month of Christmas we give thanks for pastors  
who preach and teach and sit by hospital beds,  
who celebrate weddings and gather us in funerals,  
and who often do these things in blizzards and wind!

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the second month of Christmas we give thanks for youth ministers –  
leading a ski trip, a Valentine’s visit to the nursing home, a  
February mission trip, or sharing a long talk with a bullied teen.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the third month of Christmas comes Easter! We celebrate church musicians – from organists to praise bands to choir directors who harmonize us for Lenten cantatas and Alleluias.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the fourth month of Christmas we are blessed by pastoral counselors who often translate resurrection into emotional unbinding and the healing of relationships.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the fifth month of Christmas we stand still to recognize how much in our churches is rooted and growing, budding and blooming because of Christian educators.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the sixth month of Christmas we look around our sacred space indoors and outdoors and give thanks for sextons and janitors, and how they bring the sanitary to the sanctuary.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the seventh month of Christmas we celebrate Outdoor Ministry and all who camp and hike and climb and bike and sleep under the stars for God.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the eighth month of Christmas we appreciate the work of Conference staff and Transitional Ministers, of Mission personnel and those who serve the National Setting in so many ways.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the ninth month of Christmas as colleges begin again we pause to recognize college chaplains meeting lonely freshmen and we remember hospital and prison chaplains who also share God's love with lonely people.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the tenth month of Christmas – Fair and flu season – we honor parish nurses and caregivers and those who administrate the details of sacred space.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the eleventh month of Christmas we give thanks for those sometime-saints, our retired clergy who have given and still give richly of themselves.

People: We give thanks to the Giver of all gifts and these givers among us.

Leader: In the twelfth month of Christmas we gather our gifts for all these givers.  
*Let us pray:*

People: Bless, O God, these Christmas Fund gifts that they may express our gratitude to retired and active clergy and lay employees, in so many areas of our church's life every season of the year. Their caring keeps your presence with us and inspires each one of us to find ways to use our gifts to bless our congregation and our world. Amen.

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Additional liturgical resources, including ready-to-use PowerPoint presentations, are available on the Christmas Fund website at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).





THE CHRISTMAS FUND

DEVOTIONS FOR 12-12-12: TWELVE DAYS OF BRINGING GIFTS



## The First Day of Bringing Gifts – December 12, 2012

Christmas is too full of significance to fit into one day. Church tradition soon recognized at least 12 days – from the celebration of Jesus' birth through Epiphany, January 6, commemorating the manifestation of Jesus to the world ("gentiles") in the persons of the Magi. In some places it became traditional to give gifts on each of the 12 Days of Christmas. In this spirit the popular religious folk song arose that still delights many today.

This year, the Christmas Fund invites you to enter into a spirit of prayerful and generous giving over the 12 days leading up to December 23, the day the Offering will be received in most UCC congregations.

The familiar song begins, "On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...a partridge in a pear tree." Imagine opening that gift!

Mark Twain said, "You can't depend on your judgment when your imagination is out of focus." The 12 gifts of the carol stretch our imagination. They have challenged many Christians to look again at the gifts of love that the birth of Jesus is all about. These gifts can lose their specialness until taken from us – as when a loved one dies, health fails, bonds of family or friendship are strained, confidence in the future is undermined. What was once simply important becomes more precious than ever.

The new life we celebrate at Christmas is the promise of new life for us, too. God gives us love and hope we thought we had lost, not by replacing what we once knew but by redeeming it – saving and preserving its value. This can mean learning something valuable from hard times in the past as well as cherishing all over again the happiness we have been given to know.

The nonsense of gifts like "a partridge in a pear tree" is much like the strange and surprising sense God makes of our lives. And the song says it's given over and over along with other gifts.

Knowing this, it's hard not to give as we've received, often beyond what we think we have to share. That only makes sense – God's kind of sense!

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of a partridge and a pear tree is approximately \$185. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$185 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_12-1](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_12-1).

## The Second Day of Bringing Gifts – December 13, 2012

"On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree."

So far, a partridge and doves. On the 12 days of Christmas half the gifts in the song are birds with varying capacities for flying. The rest are about joys that don't leave the ground.

What an excellent reminder of how the power of faith is twofold: it gives us "wings" and lifts us up while exalting in what's here already, on the ground – even "gold," no less – or "acres of diamonds," as Russell Conwell, a Baptist minister, put it at the turn of the last century!

In a speech delivered more than 6,000 times around the world, Conwell was saying that God has given us so much in the birth of Christ. Our job now is to let his new life be experienced as precious and "incarnate" for us right now – touchable, seeable, feelable, exactly where we are: in the nip of autumn, the crunch of snow, the scent of soil unthawing, the warmth of summer; in the love and affection of family and friends; through all those willing to help if we have the nerve to ask. But also in times of crisis and despair. Then, too, in the spirit of Jesus, God waits to heal and direct us.

How fitting that "doves" follow right upon the first verse of the carol. Of all the symbols from the earliest times that Christians adopted, the dove was understood to represent the gifts of the Holy Spirit and Jesus. And in the carol we have two doves, no less, along with that partridge!

Is all this again to make sense of nonsense? Of course! God does that all the time. Martin Luther said, "God can draw straight with a crooked line and ride a lame horse." Crazy grace, "how sweet the sound," rescuing love from whatever gets in the way.

So may it be with our own generosity, in the spirit of Jesus.

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of two turtle doves is approximately \$125. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$125 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_12-2](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_12-2).



## The Third Day of Bringing Gifts – December 14, 2012

“On the third day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.”

French hens?

Imagination often gets a bad rap. Maybe you have a childhood memory of a parent, not believing your story, telling you, “You’ve got quite an imagination.” But so did Jesus! The parables he told were not necessarily actual events but were often drawn from his own imagination to teach eternal truths. And what he imagined was drawn from daily life: cloth, wine, lamp, seeds, birds, fishing nets, vineyard, sheep, goats. On it goes...

Jesus described himself as a hen! “How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings” (Luke 13:34). So, following Jesus is like following...a hen?

It is hardly surprising that Christians could imagine significance in a popular folk song apart from anything originally intended. How many pastors have been surprised to hear what their sermon meant to people apart from anything they thought they were saying! The Spirit works as it wills and often in strange ways indeed!

So it is that three hens – “French hens,” the most delicious of all, first bred in France centuries ago – came to classify faith, hope, and love. These are the “theological virtues,” so called because they cannot be shared with others until first received as gifts of true love, the love of God (theo-).

We know it’s more blessed to give than to receive. But sometimes the best gift of all is the willingness to receive. When we give, we’re in control. When we receive, someone else is. And it can be hard to receive because then we’re dependent. Most of us would prefer to be independent. But where does that leave someone who really wants to give us something special – like God? Are we as good at opening gifts as we are at giving them?

How well we ourselves give depends on how much we appreciate what we receive. In faith, hope, and love may we give back, thankful for all we have been given.

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of three French hens is approximately \$150. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$150 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_12-3](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_12-3).

## The Fourth Day of Bringing Gifts – December 15, 2012

“On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.”

In the imagination of church tradition the four calling birds refer to the fourfold call of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

There is more than one way to respond to Jesus. And we will find more accounts of them than four if we take to heart Jesus’ words at the end of the Gospels, “I have still more to say to you,” as we grow in his Spirit, although not until then (John 16:12). So it is that on the brink of travel to the new world, our Pilgrim forefather, the Rev. John Robinson, said, “The Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy word.”

While God has more to say – “God is still speaking!” – holy Word has already been spoken in the four Gospels. These are considered “canonical,” originally meaning “measuring line, rule, and standard of excellence.” Of all the accounts of Jesus available at the time, the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were selected as the best – just as everywhere in ancient times particularly beautiful birds were selected as the best representations of glory, exaltation, favor, and help from on high.

How do each of the four Gospels call to you from on high? At root, all offer much the same story. But in Matthew we receive the forms of the Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer that have become practically Christian ID badges. Mark proceeds at a breathless pace and the word “immediately” recurs, describing his feeling about responding to Jesus now, not later. Luke begins by placing Jesus and the story of Christianity in the broader context of history. John’s Gospel soars above the others in grandiosity, setting the backdrop of a cosmic event.

Just “four birds” representing four altogether human authors. But how beautiful! What a gift! Beginning with who we are and just what we have, our own gifts can soar, too! The spirits of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John can lift our own generosity higher than we imagine, in the name of Christ.

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of four calling birds is approximately \$520. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$520 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_12-4](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_12-4).

## The Fifth Day of Bringing Gifts – December 16, 2012

“On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me... five gold rings – four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.”

How many gold rings have you received in your life? Five? All at once? That’s a lot. And given such extravagant generosity, why not diamonds? Because diamonds’ resale value is always less than gold? That’s not a reason that befits true love!

Diamonds have been treasured as gemstones since their use in religious icons in the ancient world. But the main reason they have perceived value today is because of a century of ingrained marketing strategy and the monopoly that DeBeers enjoys.

Heaven knows “true love” itself is marketed today. You may pass by those magazines and tabloids at the checkout lane of the grocery store. And you may not have watched the PBS television special, “Finding Your Own True Love” or purchased any of a number of bestsellers at Barnes & Noble about improving your love life.

But we can miss the real problem here. It’s not so much that love is trivialized as that it begins at the wrong end. True love is not something we find and make real but something we’ve already been given! When we cannot recognize how much we are already loved we “look for love in all the wrong places,” as Waylon Jennings sang. We’re drawn to whatever feels good at the expense of what is good. We over-expect from loved ones – a spouse, a partner, our children, friends, and often enough the church.

No need to put away that beautiful diamond ring! But the density and luster of gold have made it more venerable and the best expression of love since before recorded history. No wonder gold and the five rings have been likened to the first five books of the Bible – the Torah or Pentateuch – where the story of God’s love begins.

God’s true love for us started a long time ago, since the foundation of time. It’s already ours. Instead of looking for it elsewhere, let’s live, and give, grateful for what we already have!

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of five gold rings is approximately \$645. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$645 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_12-5](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_12-5).

## The Sixth Day of Bringing Gifts – December 17, 2012

“On the sixth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...six geese a-laying, five gold rings – four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.”

In his historical novel, *Chesapeake*, James A. Michener describes life on the eastern shore of Maryland over the course of many generations. Its main theme is slavery. But as always with Michener, his allusions to nature make his plot more compelling. At one point he notes how families of geese do not break up after the breeding season, raucously protect their young, and form strong units that migrate and winter together until they return to their breeding ground. What is notable is their intricate reliance on wing tip formations in flight (something that cyclists practice in big races).

Geese have been recognized as reflecting the interdependence of creation itself. Consider the six days taken together as described in Genesis 1. Not a single one works without the others – from light-darkness, and water-earth through the creation of humanity in God’s image that the other days make possible. Six days a-laying indeed! Remove one and it’s like an entire act of a Broadway play has dropped out. God never produces a one-act play.

Nor does God produce lone rangers. That’s our doing. However strong we may be, we can’t truly know God on our own. We have only ourselves to go on. God is superfluous except as a spiritual sidekick who supports us and what we think is right. God always speaks to an “us” before a “me” – much as I exist as a result of many others who preceded me, two of whom are responsible for my birth.

We can’t be wisely independent unless we recognize our interdependence first. That’s why God created us in the first place and wants to be with us. That’s why Jesus needed disciples. That’s why believers need the church, for all its faults and shortcomings. That’s why we give: to honor and nurture the interdependence that protects our young, sustains us in our journeys, cares for us when we’re vulnerable, and leads us home.

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of six geese a-laying is approximately \$162. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$162 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_12-6](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_12-6).



## The Seventh Day of Bringing Gifts – December 18, 2012

“On the seventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying, five gold rings – four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.”

Remember the tale of the Ugly Duckling by Hans Christian Andersen? Misclassified from birth, the duckling grows up with the heart of a swan. Once becoming strong under the care of kind humans, the duckling is set free and finds its image for the first time in a pool of water. The duckling is transformed into what it always was inside – a graceful swan.

How well this tale reminds us of our own inherent power and beauty. Early Church Fathers (and Mothers) considered seven gifts essential to living true to the image in which we're created: wisdom, understanding, wonder and awe, right judgment, knowledge, courage, and reverence.

Isn't this quite a stretch from a verse in a folk song whose lyrics first appeared in an eighteenth century children's book, *Mirth without Mischief*? And isn't the "ugly duckling" just something for children? Jesus scolded his disciples for that kind of attitude. He said, "The kingdom of heaven belongs to people like these children" (Matthew 19:14). And the great prophet before him said, "A little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6).

"Seven swans a-swimming" speak well of our need for those seven gifts of the Spirit. These qualities help us see and express our own inherent beauty. They are not qualities to be achieved but received! Just as the ugly duckling needed to receive the care of others before it could discover its own grace and elegance, so do we.

This is what God gives us through one another. I'm not as wise as I'm made to be without the guidance and support of others. I'm not as understanding as I'm made to be without the understanding others give me. And so with all the other gifts. These qualities may at heart be ours, too. But we can't know and practice them – without help beyond ourselves.

In the spirit of our newborn Savior, in the Spirit of the help that awakens our own power and beauty, may we give to help others know the same.

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of seven swans a-swimming is approximately \$6,300. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$6,300 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_12-7](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_12-7).

## The Eighth Day of Bringing Gifts – December 19, 2012

“On the eighth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...eight maids a-milking, seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying, five gold rings – four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.”

Since numbers arose they have had meaning beyond what they measure. Folklore has picked up on this. It would have been impossible to come up with thirteen days of Christmas. Twelve represents perfection. Thirteen represents trouble. In the first book of the Bible itself the first war began in "the thirteenth year" (Genesis 14:4). And so it went through the centuries in secular as well as religious imagination. It's no wonder that hotels don't have a thirteenth floor or that Friday the 13th has a bad name!

The seven days of creation, including a day of rest and dedication, also represent perfection – eight, the beginning of a new era. Nothing describes better what life is meant to be like on this eighth day than Jesus' Beatitudes, eight in number.

"Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad. Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth. Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full. Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy. Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God. Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God's children. Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs" (Matthew 5:3-10, Common English Bible).

This eightfold teaching is as nourishing to the soul as milk, the first and most nutritious food, is to the body. So it was that in the first millennia of Christian custom and belief "8" became associated with happiness and blessing, however well practiced.

The true love of God nourishes body and soul. The blessings of God affect our entire well-being. We're meant to live and give on "the eighth day," mindful that, in the birth of Christ, a new era of happiness, a new kind of blessing, really has begun.

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of eight maids a-milking is approximately \$58. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$58 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_12-8](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_12-8).

## The Ninth Day of Bringing Gifts – December 20, 2012

“On the ninth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...nine ladies dancing, eight maids a-milking, seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying, five gold rings – four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.”

Dance is part of worship and celebration. It’s commended in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms (e.g., 49:3; 150:4). Following Hebrew tradition, the church beyond the first millennium saw dance as an expression of prayer and praise. Relatively recently it has resurfaced in some worship services.

The popular song, “The Lord of the Dance,” portrays Jesus’ life and mission as a dance. Its words were adapted to the tune from the American Shaker song, “Simple Gifts.” On this ninth day of Christmas, with today’s verse about dancing, see how these words get your own feet tapping – or set you to dancing!

I danced in the morning when the world was begun  
I danced in the Moon and the Stars and the Sun  
I came down from Heaven and I danced on Earth  
At Bethlehem I had my birth:

Dance then, wherever you may be  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said He!  
And I’ll lead you all, wherever you may be  
...lead you all in the Dance, said He! (or She!)

“...and I danced on Earth”! How at odds this is with portrayals of Jesus as serenely private, sad, melancholy – or hanging on a cross. Those are true, too, no doubt. But what’s missing is “the joy set before him” at the heart of it all (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus was a Jew who participated in the traditions of his day. There’s no way the special joy he knew could have kept him from dancing along with his fellow Jews. He was not a recluse. He wanted there to be enough wine at weddings! He wanted his disciples to be as caught up in the Spirit of celebration as he was.

For the reserved among us who refuse to dance or lack the occasion, we can still get the Spirit. We can let the joy of Emmanuel – “God with us” – dance in our hearts. And in how we come across to others, they’ll know the same joy we do.

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of nine ladies dancing is approximately \$6,294. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$6,294 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_9](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_9).

## The Tenth Day of Bringing Gifts – December 21, 2012

“On the tenth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...ten lords a-leaping, nine ladies dancing, eight maids a-milking, seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying, five gold rings – four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.”

Dancing...now leaping! We’re getting swept up in the good news of Christmas: the Savior is born, life is redeemed from sin and injustice, and we can anticipate God’s victory about to be made known to the world!

Luke says the baby in Elizabeth’s womb leaped for joy in the presence of Mary, pregnant with Jesus (1:41). The prophet says “the lame will leap like a deer” (Isaiah 35:6). And just that happens when a man described as lame in Acts is healed by Peter and John: he jumps up, “leaping and praising God” (3:8). Later on it’s said that Jesus himself was “anointed with the oil of gladness” (Hebrews 1:9). The word gladness in the original language means to leap or to jump.

How many times have we felt like “lords a-leaping”? The verse speaks of the number 10. Think of the Top 10 most popular songs, books, and movies. What are your Top 10 experiences of leaping for joy, or feeling like you wanted to? At first we may think only of several. But press on... and on.

We’ve been given – and promised – so much. Those times we can’t feel the difference this makes, the best thing to do is to practice it anyway. Visit someone you know needs company. Or spend more time than you think you have talking with a friend. Keep taking that walk every morning when often enough there’s an excuse to first read the newspaper. Perhaps discover neighbors who might be willing to take that walk with you. Beyond workaday responsibilities, do at least two things you don’t want to do but know need doing and do them as soon as you can, every day!

The true joy of giving moves beyond “I’ll do it” to doing it! There’s no better time to practice this joy than right now, in celebration of the One born among us as the gift of new life and hope, now and forever.

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of ten lords a-leaping is approximately \$4,767. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$4,767 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_10](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_10).

## The Eleventh Day of Bringing Gifts – December 22, 2012

“On the eleventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...eleven pipers piping, ten lords a-leaping, nine ladies dancing, eight maids a-milking, seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying, five gold rings – four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.”

Of all the exciting moments at my ordination service one thing stood out: a funny little duet for tuba and piccolo. “We are fools for Christ’s sake,” said Paul (1 Corinthians 4:10). Apparently so!

It is hard not to feel foolish celebrating the birth of One who heralds the world’s salvation. Sin and injustice are as powerful as ever. Despotism regimes are overthrown only to be replaced, too often, by rulers unwilling or unable to rule democratically. Hunger, poverty, and discrimination of all sorts remain too real.

Easy to miss is the courage and hope continually born and reborn, evident in so many lives, on the world stage or right at home – “light in the darkness that the darkness cannot overcome” (John 1:5). Next to a tuba of trouble this can seem like a piccolo of good news. But it’s impossible to miss that piccolo! Its bright, clear sounds often upstage the tuba, making the tuba’s sound a bumpy thump, thump, thump, like the gasps of a dying behemoth.

It’s easy to feel like a “piccolo” next to the thump, thump, thump of trouble. We can forget what immediately follows Paul’s comment about being fools for Christ: “When I am weak, then I am strong.” We can’t receive God’s power if we’re looking for it in the devices and desires of our own hearts. Idealism and good intentions can become yet another thump – sometimes the thump of guilt because we’re forever falling short. But like the piccolo, “the still small voice of God” (1 Kings 19:2) won’t go away. It can’t be drowned out.

May the spirit of Jesus sound for us amid the burdens we carry. And like children, may we know something of playfulness amid it all – as in singing “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” G.K. Chesterton said the devil, a former angel, “fell by force of gravity”! That doesn’t have to befall us! God is by our side.

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of eleven pipers piping is approximately \$2,428. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$2,428 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_11](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_11).

## The Twelfth Day of Bringing Gifts – December 23, 2012

“On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...twelve drummers drumming, eleven pipers piping, ten lords a-leaping, nine ladies dancing, eight maids a-milking, seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying, five gold rings – four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.” Drummers drumming, as if leading a procession of praise in which the earlier gifts are represented as part of all God’s “true love” gives us.

In the Christian calendar, the twelfth day is also known as Epiphany, a word meaning to show, make known, or reveal. In Eastern Christianity as well as in Hispanic and Latin American churches, Epiphany celebrates the fullness of Jesus’ significance for everyone, shown through the so-called wise men – “gentiles” who represent the whole world beyond the confines of established belonging and belief. Epiphany also celebrates Jesus’ embodiment of divinity, his “fullness” as the Son of God, revealed later, at the time of his baptism at the Jordan River: “This is my Son” (Matthew 3:16). As the Puerto Rican Epiphany carol puts it, “Gloria en las alturas al Hijo de Dios...tu luz bien hechora” (lit., “Glory in the highest to the Son of God... whose light is well made”).\* Jesus is the light of God, “well made” to shine even in the deepest darkness – even on a cross.

We are given more than we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). From the next breath we take through our last gasp, we are promised life and hope that can overcome the worst – even death itself. We are given the assurance of divine companionship that can withstand the loss of others while finding in those companionships, too, expressions of God’s unconquerable love. No wonder the Bible speaks of eternal life. This part of life alone cannot hold all that we’re given to enjoy!

On this Twelfth Day of Bringing Gifts, UCC individuals and churches will bring their Christmas Fund Offerings – gifts that are an expression of extravagant love. Before falling back on our usual, “I can’t do as much as I’d like” or “I can’t give enough to make a difference,” remember “that little light of mine” that God makes shine – a light “well made,” that God won’t let go out.

\* *The New Century Hymnal* (The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland), 1995, #155, “Los magos que llegaron a Belén” (The Magi Who to Bethlehem Did Go)

According to an annual study by a national financial institution, the cost of twelve drummers drumming is approximately \$2,630. To explore the life-giving possibilities of a \$2,630 gift to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, visit [http://bit.ly/CF12\\_12\\_12](http://bit.ly/CF12_12_12).



## IS YOUR CHURCH FIVE FOR FIVE?



Being 5 for 5 is one sign of congregational vitality in UCC churches that fully support Our Church's Wider Mission. These leadership churches give to Basic Support and all four special mission offerings.

Is your church 5 for 5?

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.

### 5 ways to support our United Church of Christ!

#### 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 23, 2012 / December 22, 2013**

#### 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 10, 2013**

#### Strengthen the Church

Grows the UCC's future funding The Stillspeaking 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 Stillspeaking Ministry.

**May 19, 2013**

#### 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 6, 2013**

#### 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](http://www.pbucc.org) or at the direct link, [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).

## AUTHORS



Rev. Maren C. Tirabassi

Our special thanks to the Rev. Maren C. Tirabassi, the author of the liturgical resources for the 2012 Christmas Fund Offering for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund. A Pilgrim Press author, her recent titles include **Gifts in Open Hands – More Worship Resources for the Global Community, All Whom God Has Joined: Resources for Clergy and Couples for Same-Gender Loving Marriage, Caring for Ourselves While Caring for Our Elders**, and **Before the Amen: Resources for Worship**. She is the pastor of Union Congregational Church, UCC in Madbury, New Hampshire.



Rev. William Green

Our thanks to the Rev. William Green, who authored the devotions for **12-12-12: Twelve Days of Bringing Gifts** for the 2012 Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund. Raised in Venezuela, Bill was educated at Oberlin College and Yale Divinity School. He has held local, regional, and national church positions in the U.S., and is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ. He has served in pastoral ministry; developed interfaith programs; served in community organization in support of public education; been a political candidate; and worked in fundraising and stewardship. He speaks Spanish, and brings cross-cultural sensitivity to his work. He is the author of **52 Ways to Ignite Your Congregation: Generous Giving** (Pilgrim Press, 2010) and co-author of one of the UCC's basic stewardship resources, **Inspiring Generosity**. Bill is now the Vice President of Strategy and Development for the Moral Courage Project, an international human rights initiative challenging religious and political extremism, and is a member of the UCC Writers Group.

# Bringing Gifts

## PROMOTING THE 2012 CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING

### Beginning **October 29, 2012**

- 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](http://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](http://www.christmasfund.org)) for ready-to-use PowerPoint worship resources.

### Week of **November 26**

- Begin your 2012 Christmas Fund promotion.
- Begin to raise awareness of the theme of **12-12-12: Twelve Days of Bringing Gifts** in your church's communications.
- 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](http://www.christmasfund.org)) for a sample letter and newsletter articles.

### Advent Sundays (**December 2, 9, 16, 23**)

- Alert the congregation about the **12-12-12: Twelve Days of Bringing Gifts** e-mail and social media updates that will start on December 12. Watch your e-mail for Twelve Days of Daily Devotions beginning on December 12, and forward them to members of the congregation.

- 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) to make a special announcement about the Christmas Fund during the service.
- Distribute copies of the bulletin inserts with your worship bulletins.
- Use the Advent Candle Lighting Liturgical Resources provided on the web: [www.christmasfund.org](http://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](http://www.christmasfund.org).

### Sunday **December 23**

- 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. These resources are provided in this Offering Guide, and also available in electronic format, including PowerPoint, on the web: [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).

### **January 2013**

- 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](http://www.christmasfund.org).





THE CHRISTMAS FUND

**2012 Offering Guide**