

We have come to bear the **light of Christ**



2013
★
THE CHRISTMAS FUND
for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



2013 Offering Guide

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
...in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:1, 4-5 (New Revised Standard Version)

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Savior,
the Light of the World!

In this season of light, our thoughts turn to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, who reflects the love of God for humankind – a radical love that illumines our lives and helps us see more clearly the path of discipleship.

The theme for the 2013 Christmas Fund Offering is **We Have Come to Bear the Light of Christ**. For 111 years, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund – one of four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ – has been a way in which we, as members of the United Church of Christ and the predecessor denominations from which our Church was born, share the light and love of Jesus Christ to those who have so faithfully and selflessly served, and who now find themselves facing unforeseen financial crises.

Your generous giving to the 2012 Offering enabled the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance program

to provide, on behalf of the whole Church, \$1,465,437.55 in Supplementation of Small Annuities, Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks to individuals and families in need. We are thankful for your partnership and generosity, and ask that you prayerfully consider supporting this year's appeal to the best of your ability.

We are pleased to provide you with the resources in this Offering Guide to assist you in promoting the Christmas Fund in your congregation. Additional resources are also available online at www.christmasfund.org.

On behalf of the hundreds of 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 the love and light of Bethlehem's child continue to fill your life.

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 a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that grants us an opportunity to recognize and honor those who have served and continue to serve in lay and authorized ministries of the United Church of Christ.

One of the unique aspects of the Christmas Fund is that the funds provide direct financial assistance to individual UCC clergy and lay church employees – the funds do not support programs or institutions, but people.

During 2012, you provided gifts totaling \$1,465,437.55. Thank You!

Our goal for the 2013 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.

The theme of the 2013 Offering is **We Have Come to Bear the Light of Christ**. This Offering Guide contains many resources to help promote the offering in your congregation. All of these resources are also available in electronic format at www.christmasfund.org.

We suggest you begin promotion of the Christmas Fund Offering with the First Sunday in Advent, December 1, and receive the offering on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 22. However, there is no one way to receive the Offering, so use whatever dates work best for your congregation. Some congregations, for example, choose to have a “Christmas in July” offering.

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 legacy gifts.

Thank you for the ways you have invited others to give to this vital mission in the past, and thank you for the ways you will do so again this year. 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.



www.christmasfund.org



<http://bit.ly/PB-UCC>



[@pensionboards](https://twitter.com/pensionboards)



http://bit.ly/PB_2010

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 impact the lives of approximately 900 persons during the past year.



- **CHRISTMAS THANK YOU CHECKS** given to 500 retired UCC clergy/lay church employees.

This special gift at Christmas time reminds these Veterans of the Cross that they have not been forgotten and that the Church is grateful for their service. Gifts totaled \$200,000 in 2012.

- **MONTHLY PENSION SUPPLEMENTATION** for 395 lower-income retired UCC clergy/lay employees.

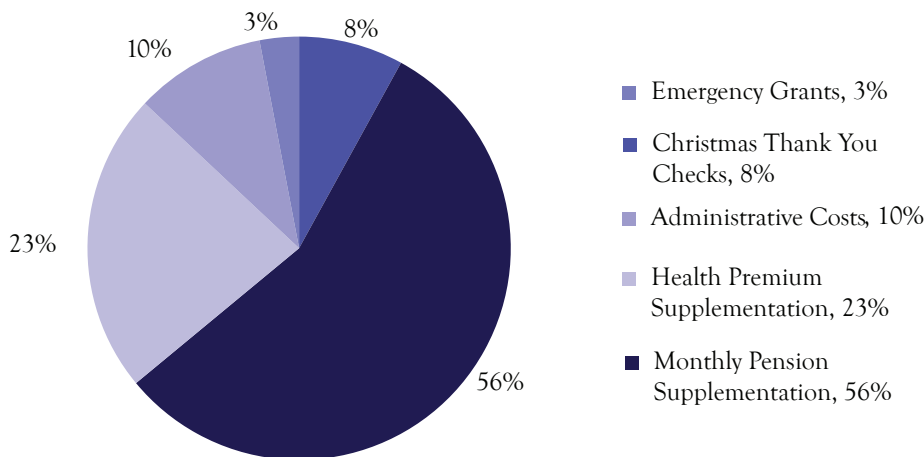
Our retired clergy/lay employees relied on this income supplementation for basic needs such as food, utilities, living and/or medical expenses. Since needs exceed the amount received through the Christmas Fund Offering, assistance was also supported by Our Church's Wider Mission and legacy gifts to Ministerial Assistance. The amount of pension supplementation totaled \$1,344,635 in 2012.

- **QUARTERLY HEALTH PREMIUM SUPPLEMENTATION** for 228 lower-income retired UCC clergy/lay employees.

These funds subsidized premiums for the UCC Medicare Supplement Health Plan with Rx so that individuals could afford and receive quality health care. Assistance totaled \$554,208 in 2012.

- **EMERGENCY GRANTS** for 45 active or retired UCC clergy/lay employees.

Sometimes those who serve the Church need our help, and emergency funds are available to assist in covering costs that arise unexpectedly – for example, large medical expenses, or home damage resulting from natural disasters. Emergency assistance totaled \$82,718 in 2012.





TOP GIVING CHURCHES TO THE 2012 CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING

Naples United Church of Christ in Naples, Florida has led the way as one of the top total dollar giving congregations since 2006. In 2012, it gave a little over \$21,000 to the Christmas Fund!

Thank You to all the givers!

These top giving per capita churches gave between \$55 and \$25 per member. How much would your congregation have to give to make this list?

Total Dollars

Naples United Church of Christ	Naples, Florida
Rock Spring Congregational United Church of Christ	Arlington, Virginia
The Second Congregational Church	Greenwich, Connecticut
Asylum Hill Congregational Church	Hartford, Connecticut
Wellesley Congregational Church UCC	Wellesley, Massachusetts
Christ Congregational Church	Silver Spring, Maryland
Little River United Church of Christ	Annandale, Virginia
The Church of the Palms	Sun City, Arizona
First Congregational Church of Bellingham	Bellingham, Washington
First Congregational Church	Holden, Massachusetts
St. Paul United Church of Christ	New Bremen, Ohio

Per Capita Giving

First Congregational Church	Bradford, Massachusetts
Rolling Hills Congregational Church	Salina, Kansas
First Congregational United Church of Christ	Pocatello, Idaho
Lahuiokalani Kaanapali Congregational Church	Lahaina, Hawai'i
First Congregational United Church of Christ	Asheboro, North Carolina
Sunnyslope Church	Wenatchee, Washington
Rock Spring Congregational United Church of Christ	Arlington, Virginia
Wai'oli Hui'ia Church UCC	Hanalei, Hawai'i
Friedens (Peace) United Church of Christ	Goehner, Nebraska
Collbran Congregational Church	Collbran, Colorado
Gustavus Federated Church	Farmdale, Ohio
Sweden Community Church UCC	Sweden, Maine
Congregational United Church of Christ	Ladysmith, Wisconsin

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

TIMELINE FOR PROMOTING THE 2013 CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING



Beginning **November 1, 2013**

- Check your supply of Offering materials – order extras from UCC Resources, **1.800.537.3394** or **www.uccresources.org**.
- Recruit your church's Missions Committee or other group(s) to assist in promoting the Christmas Fund Offering. Plan how to get the word out: newsletters, bulletins, mission moments, social media, and worship announcements are just a few possibilities. Resources are available at **www.christmasfund.org**.
- Work with your Missions Committee or Church Council to establish a goal for giving to the Offering in 2013. Look at last year's total and see if you can match and exceed it by 10%, 25%, or more!
- Ask your Pastor and/or church's Worship Team/Committee to promote the Offering by including the Christmas Fund worship resources in your worship services. Mission Moments, bulletin inserts, liturgy and ready-to-use PowerPoint slides are available in this Guide and/or at **www.christmasfund.org**.
- Consider if there are any small groups in the church – Sunday School classes, youth groups, men's or women's groups that you can approach and ask for their personal support and/or ask to organize a group fundraiser for the Christmas Fund.

Week of **November 24**

- Begin your 2013 Christmas Fund promotion.
- Display Christmas Fund posters prominently throughout the church building.
- Promote the theme and images of **We Have Come to Bear the Light of Christ** in your church's communications: newsletters, bulletins, social media, and worship announcements. Resources are available at **www.christmasfund.org**.
- Send a letter and offering envelope to every household on your church mailing list, announcing the Offering date and goal amount.

Advent Sundays (**December 1, 8, 15, 22**)

- Place additional Offering envelopes at each seat or pew.
- Distribute copies of the bulletin inserts with your weekly worship bulletins.
- Share information about the Offering in worship.
- Invite your Missions chairperson, church moderator or a retired minister, missionary or lay employee (or their widowed spouses) to share a Mission Moment about the Christmas Fund during worship. Ask them to reflect on what it means to be remembered and cared for as a "veteran of the cross" (retired church pastor or lay employee).
- Use the Advent Candle Lighting Resources provided in this Guide or at **www.christmasfund.org**. Ready-to-use PowerPoint slides are also available.

Sunday, **December 22**

- This is the day designated to receive the Christmas Fund Offering. Some congregations may elect to receive the Offering on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.





- Make your personal gift to the Christmas Fund and, if possible, give your personal testimony in worship as to why you are supporting this special mission offering.
- Use the Calls to the Offering and/or Prayers of Dedication when the Offering is received. Available in this Guide and/or at www.christmasfund.org.

January 2014

- Have the Treasurer of the congregation forward the contributions received to:
 1. Your Conference office

-or-

2. Directly to:

The Pension Boards-United Church of Christ
Christmas Fund
75 Remittance Drive
Suite 1637
Chicago, IL 60675

-or-

3. The secure online donation site: www.christmasfund.org.

- 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.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INCREASING THE OFFERING

Yes, it may be this simple!

Someone (perhaps YOU!) emerges as a leader for the effort. That leader:

- SETS A GOAL with the congregation.
- SHARES information about the ministry that the Offering supports.
- ASKS the congregation to be generous.
- LEADS with his/her personal contribution.
- CELEBRATES the results with the congregation.

ENDOWING A CHRISTMAS FUND GIFT

An increasing number of members who faithfully remember the annual Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund Offering are endowing their gifts. This is a way to make a lasting gift that ensures that those Veterans of the Cross who have faithfully served the United Church of Christ are not forgotten.

It's easy to do. For example, if your annual Christmas Fund gift is \$250, a one-time \$5,000 gift will generate \$250 annually based on a 5% return. If your annual gift is \$100, a one-time gift of \$2,000 will generate \$100 annually based on a 5% return.

There are a number of ways to make a one-time gift:

- Giving cash or stock
- Listing the Fund for Ministerial Assistance – Christmas Fund as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy you no longer need
- Listing the Fund for Ministerial Assistance – Christmas Fund as the beneficiary of an IRA
- Designating a bequest in your will

The standard legal wording for a bequest should read: "To perpetuate my annual Christmas Fund Gift, I give and bequeath to the Christmas Fund of The United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, Inc., incorporated in 1885 under the laws of the State of Connecticut and having an office at 475 Riverside Drive, 10th Floor, New York, New York 10115, the sum of _____ dollars (\$_____) for its uses and purposes."

For more information, please contact the Rev. Keith A. Tussing, Major Gifts/Planned Giving Officer, Pension Boards–UCC, toll-free at **1.800.642.6543, ext. 2718** or by e-mail at **ktussing@pbucc.org**.

ONLINE PROMOTIONAL 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.christmasfund.org**.

Among the resources you will find on the website are:

- Up-to-date statistics on the use of the Offering proceeds
- Ready-to-use PowerPoint Christmas Fund slides for worship services
- Articles and stories from those who have benefited from the Christmas Fund that can be cut and pasted into newsletters, bulletins, Facebook or Twitter posts, or used for Mission Moments in worship
- Archives of previous years' Christmas Fund worship resources
- A link for secure online giving through PayPal





WORSHIP RESOURCES

These worship resources are available in electronic form, including ready-to-use Power Point presentations at www.christmasfund.org. The website also contains an archive of previous years' Christmas Fund worship resources.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

Advent Candle Lighting resources are provided in multiple leader or single voice leader formats. There is also an optional reflection piece that allows for congregational personalization and participation.

Week One: Hope – The Prophet Isaiah – Isaiah 2:1-5

Multiple Voices (Leader 1 and Leader 2) and Congregation:

- L1 Isaiah's people probably thought he was peculiar – even for a priest.
L2 I am pretty sure we would find him unsettling, too. He had a habit of pacing the King's courts, yelling out his dreams:
L1 "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks...O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"
L2 But then it happened. In the midst of the occupation of Israel, in all the darkness of the first century, the dreams of the eccentric young priest came true.
God's light was born.
And people actually *followed* it.
L1 And now we call Isaiah a prophet.
L2 By speaking his dreams of a better future, Isaiah bore the light of God in the darkness. He brought HOPE.

**Optional Reflection from page 15 may be inserted here.*

- L1 Let us pray.
All We give thanks for all those who followed the light of Hope – the mentors and medics, poets and pastors – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. May their lives remind us that we light the candle of HOPE knowing Isaiah's words are not just prophecy but – promise.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these prophets in spreading the light of Hope beyond these doors. Amen.

One Voice (Leader) and Congregation:

- L Isaiah's people probably thought he was peculiar – even for a priest. I am pretty sure we would find him unsettling, too. He had a habit of pacing the King's courts, yelling out his dreams:
All "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks...O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"
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[Light blue candle of HOPE]

All This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these prophets in spreading the light of Hope beyond these doors. Amen.

Week Two: Peace – John the Baptist – Matthew 3:1-12

Multiple Voices (L1 and L2) and Congregation:

L1 Did you know the Christmas story has two Miracle Babies?

L2 Of course the angel Gabriel appeared first to his father, not his mother, and his parents were too old, not too young.

L1 But from the time when Mary visited and he started kicking in his mother’s womb, John the Baptist was a sign that Isaiah’s HOPE was happening.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

L2 Judea had been conquered by soldiers. The people of John’s day were overworked, underfed, and angry. But John didn’t preach rebellion. He preached metanoia (met-uh-noi-uh) – transformation, conversion, repentance.

L1 “Change your life!” he said. “God’s Realm is here!”

L2 And it was. John the Baptist bore the light of God in the darkness because he poured out God’s holy waters of forgiveness, and brought PEACE – one soaking tunic at a time.

**Optional Reflection from page 15 may be inserted here.*

L1 Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all those who followed the light of Peace – the activists and administrators, mediators and ministers – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. May their lives remind us that we light the candle of PEACE knowing John’s pathway to peace begins right here – with each one of us.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these peacemakers in spreading the light of Peace beyond these doors. Amen.

One Voice (L) and Congregation:

L Did you know the Christmas story has two Miracle Babies? Of course the angel Gabriel appeared first to his father, not his mother, and his parents were too old, not too young.

But from the time when Mary visited and he started kicking in his mother’s womb, John the Baptist was a sign that Isaiah’s HOPE was happening.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]





Judea had been conquered by soldiers. The people of John's day were overworked, underfed, and angry. But John didn't preach rebellion. He preached metanoia (met-uh-noi-uh) – transformation, conversion, repentance. He cried out,

All “Change your life! God's Realm is here!”

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[Light blue candle of PEACE]

All This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these peacemakers in spreading the light of Peace beyond these doors. Amen.

Week Three: Joy – Mary of Nazareth – Luke 1:47-55

Multiple Voices (L1 and L2) and Congregation:

L1 Parents, if you want your kids to stay out of trouble, you should leave now.

L2 Just ask Mary's parents. They warned her about everything: strangers, boys.

L1 But they forgot to warn her about God.

And God is the biggest trouble of all.

L2 One minute you will have a normal, moody teenager, and the next you will have a religious revolutionary – pregnant with God.

L1 When you worry about what the neighbors will say, she will remind you that, “God has scattered the proud.”

L2 And no matter what the world expects, or how hard life gets, she will declare only, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”

L1 And it will. Because she will have the HOPE of Isaiah, passed down through the generations.

[Light blue candle of HOPE.]

L2 And the PEACE of John, poured over her in baptism.

[Light blue candle of PEACE.]

L1 And, confident in herself, she will have faith that God is most visible in the dark. Following Mary, she will carry the light of God into the darkness with her JOY.

**Optional Reflection from page 15 may be inserted here.*

L2 Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all those who followed the light of JOY – the deacons and dancers, musicians and missionaries – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. As we light the candle of JOY, may their lives remind us that it is not only Mary's darkness that gives birth to God, but also our own.

[Light pink candle of JOY]



All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these faithful ones in spreading the light of Joy beyond these doors. Amen.

One Voice (L) and Congregation:

L Parents, if you want your kids to stay out of trouble, you should leave now. Just ask Mary's parents. They warned her about everything: strangers, boys. But they forgot to warn her about God. And God is the biggest trouble of all.

One minute you will have a normal, moody teenager, and the next you will have a religious revolutionary – pregnant with God. When you worry about what the neighbors will say, she will remind you,

All “God has scattered the proud.”

L And no matter what the world expects, or how hard life gets, she will reply only,

All “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”

L And it will. Because she will have the HOPE of Isaiah, passed down through the generations.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

And the PEACE of John, poured over her in baptism.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

And, confident in herself, she will have faith that God is most visible in the dark. Following Mary, she will carry the light of God into the darkness with her JOY.

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[Light pink candle of JOY]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these faithful ones in spreading the light of Joy beyond these doors. Amen.

Week Four: Love – Joseph – Matthew 1:18-25

Multiple Voices (L1 and L2) and Congregation:

L1 The townspeople must have thought he was a gambler. How else could he wager his wrecked heart on the woman who had broken it?

L2 But Joseph had something the others didn't. He had the knowledge that it might hurt but, with God, LOVE is never risky...at least not in the long term.

L1 He also had the HOPE of Isaiah, promising a bright future.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

L2 And the PEACE of John, leading him to forgive.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

L1 And how could he ignore Mary's JOY?

[Light pink candle of JOY]

L2 Joseph bore the light of God in the darkness because he loved – unreservedly and unabashedly – when others would have been too afraid.





L1 Thanks to him, Jesus's understanding of God was as a parent who took you in and loved you, no matter who – or whose – you were.

**Optional Reflection from page 16 may be inserted here.*

L2 Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all those who have been the light of Love – the camp leaders and caseworkers, teachers and preachers – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. May their lives remind us, as we light the candle of LOVE, that it has the power to illuminate even the darkest of places – our broken hearts.

[Light blue candle of LOVE]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these leaders in spreading the light of Love beyond these doors. Amen.

One Voice (L) and Congregation:

L The townspeople must have thought he was a gambler. How else could he wager his wrecked heart on the woman who had broken it? But Joseph had something the others didn't. He had the knowledge that it might hurt but, with God, LOVE is never risky...at least not in the long term.

He also had the HOPE of Isaiah, promising a bright future.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

And the PEACE of John, leading him to forgive.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

And how could he ignore Mary's JOY?

[Light pink candle of JOY]

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[Light blue candle of LOVE]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these leaders in spreading the light of Love beyond these doors. Amen.

Christmas!

for use on Christmas Eve or the Sunday After

Multiple Voices (L1 and L2) and Congregation:

L1 Later, there would be questions...

L2 ...why them? why there?

L1 Later, there would be visitors...





L2 ...relatives, friends, and strange strangers.

L1 Later, there would be celebration...

L2 ...choirs of little angels, and well-intentioned gifts.

L1 But right in that moment...

All Right in this moment...

L2 It was just them...

All It is just us...

L1 ...and God.

L2 Let us pray.

[Time of Silent Prayer]

L1 God, we give you thanks for all those who, like Isaiah, believed in a better future.

All Their lives give us HOPE.

[Light blue candle of HOPE.]

L2 Help us to recall the hands that, like John, showered us with the waters of your grace.

All Their lives lead us to PEACE.

[Light blue candle of PEACE.]

L1 We light this candle in remembrance of the people who, like Mary, taught us to see you in the darkness.

All Their lives bring us JOY.

[Light pink candle of JOY]

L2 And, for all those who, like Joseph, welcomed us as a parent, no matter who we were or what we had done, we ask your blessing.

All Their lives teach us that LOVE always wins.

[Light blue candle of LOVE]

Amen.

L1 There have been many before us who have borne your light, bringing the sacred Christmas story to life in each new generation.

L2 These are the ones who have been our witness, calling out to us in our longest night, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy!"

L1 They have been ministers and missionaries, disciples and deacons, youth pastors, lay leaders, and saints of the church.

**Optional Reflection from page 16 may be inserted here.*

L2 Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all who have borne your light, God. May we remember the faces and names of all those we have known who lived your light, who carried it and passed it down right through the ages to this moment, now, as we light the final candle, the candle of CHRIST.

[Light the white CHRIST candle]

All For all those whose lives have been beacons in our darkness, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to be the same for them and others. May your light of Christ be born not simply to us, but in us – all – this night. Amen.



One Voice (L) and Congregation:

L Later, there would be questions...

All ...why them? why there?

L Later, there would be visitors...

All ...relatives, friends, and strange strangers.

L Later, there would be celebration...

All ...choirs of little angels, and well-intentioned gifts.

L But right in that moment...

All Right in this moment...

L It was just them...

All It is just us...

L ...and God. Let us pray.

[Time of Silent Prayer]

L God, we give you thanks for all those who, like Isaiah, believed in a better future.

All Their lives give us HOPE.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

L Help us to recall the hands that, like John, showered us with the waters of your grace.

All Their lives lead us to PEACE.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

L We light this candle in remembrance of the people who, like Mary, taught us to see you in the darkness.

All Their lives bring us JOY.

[Light pink candle of JOY]

L And, for all of those who, like Joseph, welcomed us as a parent, no matter who we were or what we had done, we ask your blessing.

All Their lives teach us that LOVE always wins.

[Light blue candle of LOVE]

Amen.

L There have been many before us who have borne your light, bringing the sacred Christmas story to life in each new generation. These are the ones who have been our witness, calling out to us in our longest night,

All “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy!”

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[Light the white CHRIST candle]

All For all those whose lives have been beacons in our darkness, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to be the same for them and others. May your light of Christ be born not simply to us, but in us – all – this night. Amen.



OPTIONAL REFLECTIONS FOR ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

for congregational personalization and participation

WEEK 1—HOPE

L As in the time of Isaiah, the world is still dark and in need of hope. Where do you see the need for hope?

All (Call out the places in your life and community where you see the need for hope. Examples: We need hope for those in the darkness of disease; for the problem of unemployment.)

L But, like Isaiah, there are people who give us HOPE. This week, (fill in the blank) gives me hope.

(Example: a peaceful family Thanksgiving dinner!)

Who has helped you see or experience hope this week?

All (Call out the people in your life and community who have helped you see or experience hope.)

WEEK 2—PEACE

L As in the time of John, the world is still dark and in need of peace. Where do you see the need for peace?

All (Call out the places in your life and community where you see the need for peace. Examples: We need peace in our relationships; we need peace to illuminate the darkness of poverty.)

L But, like John, we have also seen people working for PEACE. This week, I see peace in (fill in the blank). (Examples: our exchange student; in my child's "big sister" mentor.)

Who has helped you see or experience peace this week?

All (Call out the people in your life and community who have helped you see or experience peace.)

WEEK 3—JOY

L As in the time of Mary, the world is still dark and in need of joy. Where do you see the need for joy?

All (Call out the places in your life and community where you see the need for joy. Examples: for those who are in mourning; for those for whom the holidays are hard.)

L But, like Mary, there are those who have helped us see JOY. This week, I see joy in (fill in the blank).

(Examples: the way kids like boxes more than presents; the time I got to spend with my mother before she died.)

Who has helped you see or experience joy this week?

All (Call out the people in your life and community who have helped you see or experience joy.)





WEEK 4—LOVE

- L As in the time of Joseph, the world is still dark and in need of love. Where do you see the need for love?
- All (Call out the places in your life and community where you see the need for love. Examples: those who are not able to be home for Christmas; those going through a divorce.)**
- L But, like Joseph, we have also seen an abundance of LOVE. This week, (fill in the blank) has helped me see love. (Example: my minister visiting those who are homebound.)
- Who has helped you see or experience love this week?
- All (Call out the people in your life and community who have helped you see or experience love.)**

CHRISTMAS!

- L For me, it was (fill in the blank) who showed me the light of God. Who was it for you? Call it out!
- All (Call out the people in your life – mentors and relief workers, etc. – who have shown you the light of God. Example: the Rev. Fischer, my childhood minister.)**

CALLS TO THE OFFERING

for use on Christmas Eve, the Sunday After, or any Sunday

CALL TO THE OFFERING FOR CHRISTMAS EVE OR CHRISTMAS

- L “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks!”
- All Like Isaiah, they gave us Hope.**
- L “Change your life!” they preached. “God’s Realm is here!”
- All Like John, they taught us Peace.**
- L “My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior!”
- All Like Mary, they brought us Joy, even in the darkest places.**
- L When others walked away,
- All Like Joseph, they stayed with us in Love.**
- L Today we give our money to support our congregation and community as well as a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ called the Christmas Fund. For over 111 years, the Christmas Fund has been there to be a light of Christ to our United Church of Christ clergy and lay employees who are facing difficult financial situations. The Christmas Fund gives direct support so that retired and active church workers will have quality health care and an adequate monthly income in retirement, as well as emergency assistance when those big burdens come up at any point in life.
- They gave their lives bringing us the light of God.
- All What we do now is give of our livelihoods, that they might receive that light back.**
- L The offering will now be given and received.



CALL TO THE OFFERING FOR THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

2,181,561 is the number of dollars the Christmas Fund distributed to active and retired clergy and lay leaders in 2012.

1,344,635 is the number of dollars that went to meeting basic needs.

228 is the number of leaders who relied on the Christmas Fund for health care subsidies.

45 is the number of families who received emergency grants.

Over 1,000 is the number of households who received God's message of new life from the Christmas Fund last year.

But the mystery we proclaim this day is:

1 is the number of people it will take to do it again.

1 is the number of people it takes for God to spread this message of light and life to the whole world.

Because that one person...is you.

The light of Christ is in our hands. It is in the dedication of our lives – and our livelihoods – to bearing – and being – the light of Christ.

The offering will now be given and received.

CALL TO THE OFFERING FOR ANY SUNDAY

They were with your mother when she died.

They have held your hands, your babies, and your secrets.

When you pledged your vows to your beloved, it was at their prompting.

When you weren't able to travel to Oklahoma or Newtown...when you couldn't be with the victims of Sandy or Irene...they were the body of Christ to and for all of us.

When you couldn't find the money for the heat, they could.

For our active and retired leaders in the same situation, let us now do the same.

Today we give our money to support our congregation and community as well as a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ called the Christmas Fund. For over 111 years, the Christmas Fund has been there to be a light of Christ to our United Church of Christ clergy and lay employees who are facing difficult financial situations. The Christmas Fund gives direct support so that retired and active church workers will have quality health care and an adequate monthly income in retirement, as well as emergency assistance when those big burdens come up at any point in life.

They gave their lives bringing us the light of God.

What we do now is give of our livelihoods, that they might receive that light back.

The offering will now be given and received.

PRAYERS OF DEDICATION

CHRISTMAS EVE

We have followed the magi, the wise ones, to this point, right up to the cradle, where we place our very hearts down at your wrinkly, baby feet, praying that somehow... somehow...this gift will express our praise, express our gratitude for the miracles of this night – the miracles of flesh and bone and life and breath. We place our very hearts





down, praying that the miracle of this night might transform us, just as it has transformed all the wise ones who we have followed. They bore their gifts to you, God, and in so doing, bore your gifts to us. As we give our lives, this night, to your light, we pray that we might also give your light to their lives. Not simply this night, but always. Amen.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION FOR THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

(Can be read in unison, or split into call/response)

Holy one, we give you thanks:

For the insight of Isaiah

...and all your servants who have hoped for your realm on earth, as it is in heaven.

For the work of John

...and all your servants who have prepared us for your way of peace.

For the wonder of Mary

...and all your servants who have taught our hearts to sing with joy.

For the faithfulness of Joseph

...and all your servants who have grounded us in love.

In our gratitude, we bring the very best gifts we have

...we bring ourselves.

That we might know the light of the Christ child

...and carry it to all your servants who are in need this day.

Amen.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION, ANY SUNDAY

Before you now, God, rests our money. Before you now, God, rest little green pieces of paper – our present for the one who literally has it all. But they have your name on them; and we do, indeed, trust that in your hands, they can be so much more. So take our hands, God, and turn them into your hands. Take this offering, take our very lives this day and whisper your blessing on them, that we might be your people, your hope and peace, your joy and love, and especially your light, to your faithful servants – and to a whole world – just waiting to be made new. Amen.

OFFERING OURSELVES AS POINTS OF LIGHT

for use on Christmas Eve, the Sunday After, or any Sunday

As a way of making visible and tangible the covenants you are making, make “offering cards” and place one in every bulletin each Sunday of Advent. Immediately following the Advent candlelighting liturgy, or during the time of offering, invite congregants to write on the card their promises – how they will be “points of light” that week – and place their cards into the offering basket.

Praying over them, displaying them on a bulletin board, or making a “chain of light” (by stapling, taping, or gluing them into interlocking circles) will be a visual reminder of the growing anticipation – and the growing light – of Advent.

On Christmas Eve, or the Sunday after Christmas, use the provided Christmas Fund envelopes instead. Giving to support our clergy and lay leaders in need is the covenant!





This week, I offer to bear God's light of Hope/Peace/Joy/Love by . . .



Write a way you can fulfill your covenant for the week.

Place in the Offering Plate with your regular collection – and watch how quickly
God's light can spread!

AUTHOR OF WORSHIP RESOURCES



Rev. Elissa Johnk

Our special thanks to the Rev. Elissa Johnk, the author of the 2013 Christmas Fund worship resources. Rev. Johnk serves as Senior Pastor of the Old Meeting House in East Montpelier Center, Vermont.

Elissa grew up in Iowa and is a graduate of Wellesley College and Harvard Divinity School. While at Harvard, she received a presidential scholarship and an award for Excellence in Liturgical Reading of Scripture. Previously, she has served as the Pastoral Resident at the Wellesley Congregational Church in Wellesley, Massachusetts, through a two-year grant from the Lilly Endowment's Transition into Ministry Program. She also has held a ministerial internship at the Old South Church in Boston, served as a chaplain intern, worked with Habitat for Humanity, and as a Fulbright ambassador in Korea.

Elissa is currently a member of the Class of 2023 in the Next Generation Leadership Initiative: Target 2030, the Pension Boards' leadership development program for young clergy. She is also a writer for the United Church of Christ's "Feed Your Spirit" webpage, including, at times, the Daily Devotional.

The First Sunday of Advent

December 1, 2013

The Rev. Sidat Balgobin's quest for spiritual growth has taken him halfway around the world and back. He has always believed that life is too rich and precious to live in the same way year after year. And retirement has not changed his opinion.

The Yonkers, New York native had been working in engineering for 20 years when he sensed that his life lacked challenge and growth. One day, while looking at want ads, he saw a posting for a hospital chaplain. "The light bulb went off – ministry! I went to Yale Divinity School feeling this is the place where I should be."

The first two years at Yale were "very academic," says Sidat. He felt a growing need to attend more to the inner spiritual life, and applied to the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, where he trained as a spiritual director. "It was such a rewarding thing to do...listening to others and journeying with them. Mysticism is about awareness and stillness, silence – to have people come to the truth that resides within themselves."

After seminary, Sidat considered his next step. "One day, I was down on my knees, asking 'God, what do you want me to do?'" He felt God leading him to pastoral ministry and accepted a call to Falls Village Congregational Church in northwest Connecticut, where he served from 1994-1998. By then, he was feeling a strong call to leave the United States and seek his Indian heritage. "It was a very humbling thing – months of saying goodbye."

He traveled to India, but once there, was surprised to experience extreme culture shock. "I never felt at home and came back in six weeks." After returning to the U.S., he was called as pastor of Park Congregational Church in Norwich, Connecticut, where he served for 10 years, until his retirement at the end of 2009.

Sidat envisioned retirement as an opportunity "to go more deeply into the interior life. As a mystic, an awareness of the holy has always been an important thing." But one day, as he exercised on a treadmill, he developed chest pains that would lead to two cardiac surgeries. "Like most things that are difficult at the time, it turned out to be a blessing. I got to do a lot of interior work," he says.

In retirement, Sidat is able to live a quiet and simple life and have the balance to give back through spiritual direction and supply preaching. The ministerial assistance he receives in the form of pension and health premium supplementation "is a blessing because it comes from the generosity of people of the past and present, but what's in that generosity is holiness."

HOW THE FUNDS ARE USED

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- **CHRISTMAS THANK YOU CHECKS** to 500 retired UCC clergy/lay church employees.

This special gift at Christmas time reminds these Veterans of the Cross that they have not been forgotten and that the Church is grateful for their service. Gifts totaled \$200,000 in 2012.

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- **EMERGENCY GRANTS** for 45 active or retired UCC clergy/lay employees.

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The Second Sunday of Advent

December 8, 2013

Vernis Brown recalls how her husband, the Rev. Roy Brown, “always said he would never marry a redhead. Guess what he did?” Roy and retheaded Vernis were married on June 3, 1951. “He preached in the morning and we were married in the afternoon on Sunday.”

The Browns served churches in Minnesota and Wisconsin for 15 years before moving to South Dakota, when Roy was called as pastor of Edgemont United Church, a congregation dually affiliated with the United Church of Christ and United Methodist Church. “Roy said that God called him when he was seven years old. He promised God that he would go to small churches. He kept that promise.”

In the meantime, Vernis was busy as a homemaker raising the family’s 10 children, and active in the churches her husband served. She taught Sunday school, ran a Vacation Bible School, and worked with women’s and youth groups, often hosting meetings in her home. “All this means that you do a lot of cooking and fixing!” she says. The small churches Roy served had no staff other than the pastor. Vernis tells of the family “cleaning the church and getting it ready for anything that was going to happen. We did it all ourselves.”

Roy retired from the Edgemont church in 1990, but it wouldn’t be long before he “got restless.” From 1993 to 1997, he served the United Church of Christ in Dupree and First United Church of Christ in Eagle Butte, until he suffered a stroke. He passed away in 2002, at the age of 77.

Honoring his childhood promise to God had meant that the Browns “lived on very little. The churches couldn’t afford to pay much.” Throughout his ministry, Roy had to hold down other jobs. He drove a school bus, and was a farmer, trapper, hunter, and fisherman as well. The ministerial assistance Vernis continues to receive in the form of a Christmas “Thank You” Gift Check “has really been a blessing and helped us in so many ways.”

Looking back now, Vernis reflects: “Being in the ministry is wonderful. I wouldn’t want to be anything other than a pastor’s wife.” At Edgemont United Church, she remains active teaching adult Sunday school class, quilting, and running the women’s group as its president. “It’s fun and I enjoy the work – God’s work.” And she is a strong supporter of the Christmas Fund, encouraging others to give. “I’m the first one to stand up and say, ‘I’m a recipient. Give generously to help other people!’” And she leads by example, tithing her Christmas check to the Christmas Fund, “because that can help someone else. You cannot out-give God,” she says. “He won’t let you.”

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The Third Sunday of Advent

December 15, 2013

When the Rev. David Huels felt God calling him to ministry, his initial response was "Who am I to be a minister?" It was UCC missionary Ray Whitehead who told him, "You are trusting in yourself too much. You're not trusting in God."

David has witnessed first-hand the power of trust. After his conversation with Ray Whitehead, the Buffalo, New York native was accepted to UCC-related Elmhurst College. He drove a dairy truck to put himself through night school, but housing costs were too high, and he ended up returning to Buffalo. He was working at another dairy when he injured his back and had to go on disability. He was out of work for about a year, and visited the unemployment office several times a week looking for work. "Then one day, they asked me if I'd like to go to school, and said, 'we'll help you with money toward tuition for whatever school you go to for whatever rehabilitation program.' I'd been trying to go to school for years!" David went home and said to his wife, Ellen, "Start packing – we're going to Bangor!"

David and Ellen and their three young children "loaded up the old station wagon and got the biggest U-Haul we could find and packed all our worldly goods in it. The bumper was almost touching the ground!"

As a student at UCC-related Bangor Theological Seminary, David served as a supply preacher, then was called to two small, rural UCC churches. One paid him \$25 and the other, \$15. "The farmers would put vegetables in my car," he says.

The Bangor community formed a circle of care when David and Ellen's daughter Nan was born with a birth defect that required cranial surgery. They had no insurance and very little money. The physicians waived their fees, but there were still hospital costs totaling \$7,000. In chapel, a collection was taken to help the family with expenses. Today, Nan is a musician and choir director, "a miracle child," says David.

The Huels family returned to New York State in 1969, and David went on to serve St. Paul's UCC in Wendelville, Eggertsville UCC in Amherst, and Cambria UCC in Lockport. In 1993, he had to have a cancerous kidney removed. "Walking through the hospital after the surgery, feeling sorry for myself, I asked 'Lord, why is this happening to me?' There was a young boy with a bald head from chemo. God said, 'Go into him and tell him that the Lord loves him.' That's what I did."

Twenty years later, David is cancer-free. After 10 years as snowbirds in Florida, the Huelses now live in Tonawanda, New York.

The ministerial assistance they receive is "not just handy, it's a necessity," says David. "The Lord has given me 50 years of being a parish minister – rich, rich years. The Pension Boards and the Christmas Fund have not just been helpful, but have been keeping us alive. God has been super rich to us."

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The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 22, 2013

"Pretty immediately, we knew something was wrong," says the Rev. Alicia Spring, speaking about her son, Evan. "He was sick all the time and wasn't making eye contact. This was at the beginning of the autism epidemic and we pushed to get him diagnosed." Evan was diagnosed with autism at 39 months. At the time, says Evan's father, the Rev. James (Jim) Rapp, "It was quite a shock."

Alicia and Jim met at Eden Theological Seminary; after graduation, they were called as Associate Pastors of the United Church of Marco Island, Florida. They remained in Florida, and had two children, Renee, now 23, and Evan, 20. Over the years Jim served three UCC churches and a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation, and was called to his current pastorate at Church of the Isles in Indian Rocks Beach in 2009. After Marco Island, Alicia served as a hospice chaplain and then at Riviera United Church of Christ in Melbourne. She began teaching after the couple divorced, and is currently on the faculty of Eastern Florida State College, where she teaches world religions.

When Evan was about 10 years old, he had a series of urinary tract infections that persisted even with medication. His bladder became enlarged and his kidneys were failing. Dialysis was necessary, but as Alicia notes, "while it can keep a person alive, it doesn't always restore health. We wanted to keep his kidneys as long as possible and were able to for 10 more years. By the time he went in for transplant, he only had 14% kidney function." Jim turned out to be a donor match. "It was a no-brainer for me to want to share a kidney with my son. I shared my spare."

Evan's surgery took place in May 2013. The procedure was covered by insurance, but after being discharged, both recipient and donor needed to remain near to the hospital for post-operative follow-up, which meant several weeks of housing and meal expenses. The emergency grant they received enabled them to meet the costs. "Ministerial Assistance came through quickly and generously and we were able to be ministered to," says Jim.

Evan is now fully recovered. He is in a vocational program at a local hospital that trains young adults with special needs in how to be good employees, and enjoys "all things pop culture," says Jim. "When it comes to what's cool – he's on top of it!"

Jim hopes to see Church of the Isles become the highest in per capita giving to the Christmas Fund, and has already invited the Rev. Krista Betz, Director of Ministerial Assistance, to be there this year when the Offering is received. "We always supported the Christmas Fund," says Alicia. "I had always thought of elderly and retired ministers and spouses...I never thought of the other side – people who were in difficult situations. It was a real blessing to have that weight lifted."

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IS YOUR CHURCH FIVE FOR FIVE?

MORE THAN 1,200 UCC CHURCHES ARE!

5 for 5 churches are those that fully support Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) – 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 congregations that have asked how they, too, can meet this challenge.

This recognition program says “thank you” to congregations for their faithful and generous giving, and it strengthens their relationship with the wider church. It also helps those congregations teach about mission and the ways their gifts are being used beyond the local church. Finally, the program serves as an incentive and a challenge to other congregations to add one or two offerings – or, in some cases, even to add OCWM Basic Support – to their stewardship and mission efforts.

Order 5 for 5 stickers, posters or promotional materials for any of the specific offerings by calling United Church Resources at **1.800.537-3394** or at **www.uccresources.org**.

5 Ways to Support Our United Church of Christ!

UCC BASIC SUPPORT

Provides funding from congregations for Conferences and the national ministries of the United Church of Christ – 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, 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 lower-income retired church workers, emergency assistance to clergy or lay church employees in need, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to hundreds of annuitants; administered by the Pension Boards.

December 22, 2013/December 21, 2014

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 30, 2014

Strengthen the Church

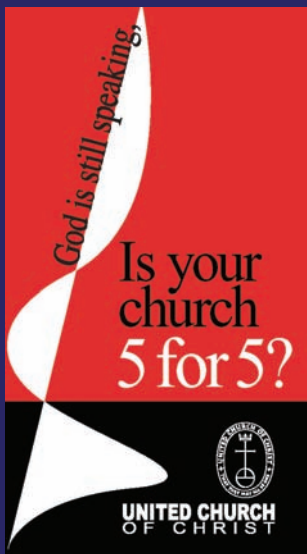
Grows the UCC's future by funding The Stillspeaking Ministry, new and renewing churches, youth and young adult ministries, and lay and pastoral leadership formation – especially among women and people of color; administered by your Conference, Local Church Ministries, and The Stillspeaking Ministry.

June 8, 2014

Neighbors in Need

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

October 5, 2014



WHERE TO DONATE

Thank you for your gifts to the Christmas Fund. Kindly remit your offerings to:

1. Your Conference office
-or-
2. Directly to:
The Pension Boards-United Church of Christ
Christmas Fund
75 Remittance Drive
Suite 1637
Chicago, IL 60675
-or-
3. The secure online donation site: www.christmasfund.org



Promotional resources available at www.christmasfund.org.



www.christmasfund.org



<http://bit.ly/PB-UCC>



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http://bit.ly/PB_2010



THE CHRISTMAS FUND

2013 Offering Guide