

Rev. Angela Wright

Rev. Angela (“Angie”) Wright and her son were sleeping when a tornado touched down in Birmingham, Alabama last winter, causing a tree to crash through the roof of her house and tearing the roof off Beloved Community Church (UCC), where she is the pastor. Rev. June Boutwell, Southeast Conference Minister, was among the first to call. “Without hesitation, she arranged for me to get an Emergency Grant from the Pension Boards. I didn’t have to apply for help,” Rev. Wright says. The Emergency Grant helped ease the pressure of mounting out-of-pocket expenses, including a \$3,000 septic tank repair.

Rev. Wright is the founding pastor of Beloved Community, a small church started in 2000 with funds from the UCC’s Neighbors in Need Offering. It is a diverse congregation in an inner city that was once the heart of the Civil Rights movement. The church suffered massive water damage, taking three months to repair. Rev. Wright is still living in a rental until her house is renovated. “To be reminded that you are not alone, that you are part of an extended family is a tremendous gift,” she says.

A native of Atlanta, Rev. Wright grew up during the tail end of the Civil Rights movement. Profoundly affected by the racism around her, she felt led to become a community organizer in Alabama after graduating from college. “I did not go to church growing up. But I became active in Greater Birmingham Ministries, an interfaith social service organization, and it opened my eyes to what Christianity was really about,” she says. “Working with people whose work was rooted in faith brought about a transformation within me. After 13 years I decided to go to seminary, although I saw myself being ordained to do social justice ministry.” A large part of Rev. Wright’s social justice ministry is linked to the immigration work she has been doing since 2011.

Rev. Wright, who is bivocational by circumstance, went into ministry late and does not have a pension – a reality that concerns her as more individuals enter ministry later in life, or are called to serve in part-time settings. “I don’t know if people are thinking about what it will mean from a pension standpoint. I have worked for nonprofits my entire life so I do not have a retirement plan.” She is grateful for the Pension Boards and the benefits it provides to those who serve the church. Through financial hardships and the experience of being uprooted from her home, she remains grounded in her faith, quoting God’s words to the prophet Jeremiah, “For surely I know the plans I have for you...” (Jeremiah 29:11, NRSV).

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 hundreds of persons during the past year.

- **MONTHLY PENSION SUPPLEMENTATION** for 408 lower-income retired UCC clergy/lay employees.

Our retired clergy/lay employees relied on this income supplementation for basic needs such as food, utilities, and living and 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 \$1,342,000 in 2013.

- **QUARTERLY HEALTH PREMIUM SUPPLEMENTATION** for 239 lower-income retired UCC clergy/lay employees.

These funds subsidized premiums for the UCC Medicare Supplement Plan with Rx so that individuals could afford and receive quality health care. Assistance totaled \$508,000 in 2013.

- **CHRISTMAS “THANK YOU” GIFT CHECKS** given to 543 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 \$235,800 in 2013.

- **EMERGENCY GRANTS** for 65 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 \$57,000 in 2013.

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