



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

Offering Guide | 2019

The Light Shines in the Darkness



**The Pension Boards**  
United Church of Christ, Inc.  
WHERE FAITH AND FINANCE INTERSECT

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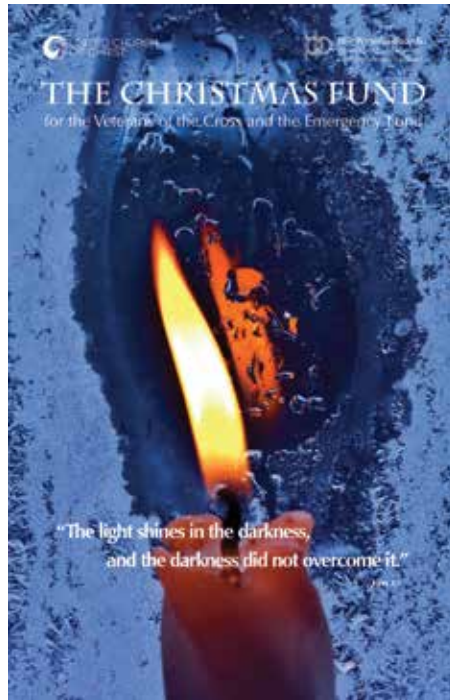
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“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

John 1:5

For over 100 years, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a way to ensure that a light of love and hope will always shine for faithful servants of our church who find themselves facing unforeseen financial need.

We are grateful for the generosity of churches and individuals who contributed a total of \$2,539,471 to the 2018 Offering, enabling us to provide Pension Supplementation, Health Premium Supplementation, special grants for emergencies, and Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks to over 1,000 individuals and families in need.

The suggested date for the Christmas Fund offering is December 22, 2019. The resources in this Offering Guide are also available online, along with a brief video, at [christmasfund.org](http://christmasfund.org).

On behalf of the hundreds of clergy and lay employees and their families whose lives were touched by your support of last year’s Christmas Fund Offering, we offer our sincere thanks for your generosity!

The Pension Boards–United Church of Christ, Inc. and United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance

# Timeline for Promoting the 2019 Christmas Fund Offering

## Beginning November 1, 2019

Order additional envelopes or posters from UCC Resources, **1.800.537.3394** or [www.uccresources.com](http://www.uccresources.com), if needed. Promotional materials are also available online at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).

Download, print, and copy—or purchase from UCC Resources—the companion *The Light Shines in the Darkness, a Christmas Coloring Book* for distribution during Advent

Work with your Missions Committee or Church Council to establish a 2019 giving goal. Look at last year's total and see if the congregation can increase it.

Ask your Pastor or Worship Committee to use the Christmas Fund liturgies available in this **Guide** or online.

## Week of November 24 – Begin Your 2019 Christmas Fund Promotion

Display Christmas Fund posters prominently throughout the church building.

Promote the theme and images of “The Light Shines in the Darkness” in your church’s communications: newsletters, bulletins, social media, and worship announcements.

Send an email or a letter and Offering envelope to every household, announcing the Offering date and goal amount.

Recruit persons to give Mission Moments in worship regarding the Offering.

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

Place additional Offering envelopes at each seat/pew.

Distribute copies of the bulletin inserts with your weekly worship bulletins—make sure crayons are available!

Share *The Light Shines in the Darkness, a Christmas Coloring Book* during children’s time, Church School, and wherever there are persons who like to color.

Give weekly announcements or Mission Moments in worship to promote the Offering.

Invite your Missions chairperson, church moderator, or a retired minister, missionary, or lay employee (or their widowed spouses/partners) to reflect during worship on what it means to be remembered and cared for as a “Veteran of the Cross.”

Use the liturgical resources provided in this **Guide** or online at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).

## Sunday, December 22

Today is suggested designated as the day to receive the Christmas Fund Offering. However, some congregations may elect to receive the Offering during the Christmas Eve or Christmas Day worship services or even . Others choose to receive the offering after Christmas, often on the first Sunday after Epiphany (January 12, 2020).

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.

When the Offering is received, use the liturgy available in this **Guide** or online.

## January 2020

Have the Treasurer of the congregation forward the contributions received to one of the addresses listed on the back cover of this **Guide**.

Celebrate your congregation’s generosity! 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.

## 2018: How the Funds Were Used

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. With your continued generosity, more individuals will receive the support of the Church in their time of need.

### MONTHLY PENSION SUPPLEMENTATION

for 379 lower-income retirees

Our retired clergy, lay employees, and their surviving spouses rely on this income supplementation for basic needs such as food, utilities, and living and medical expenses. Funds to meet this need come from three sources: the Christmas Fund Offering, Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM), and the Ministerial Assistance Fund. The amount of pension supplementation totaled \$1,435,050 in 2018.

### HEALTH PREMIUM SUPPLEMENTATION

for 174 lower-income retirees

These funds subsidize premiums for the UCC Medicare Supplement Plan so that retired individuals can afford and receive quality health care. In 2018, assistance totaled \$429,903.

### CHRISTMAS "THANK YOU" GIFT CHECKS

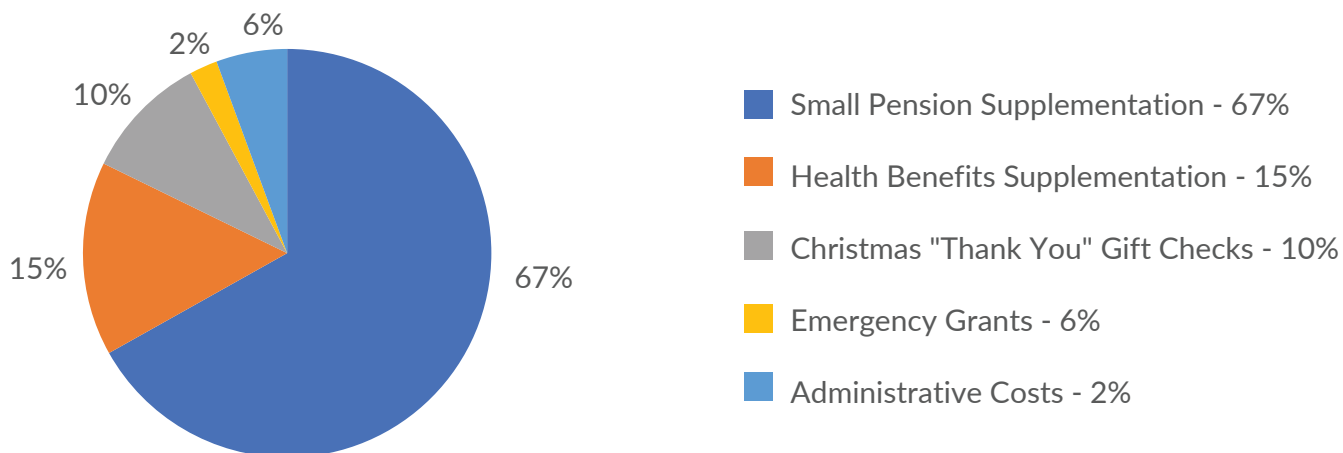
given to 401 retirees

This special gift at Christmas time reminds these Veterans of the Cross that they have not been forgotten and that the Church continues to be grateful for their service. Gifts totaled \$214,100.

### EMERGENCY GRANTS

for 49 active/retired UCC clergy and lay employees in urgent need

Sometimes those who serve the Church need our help. 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 in 2018 totaled \$60,526.



# Top Giving Churches to the 2018 Christmas Fund Offering

United Church of Christ congregations from every state and Conference opened their hearts in 2018 to abundantly bless the ministries supported by the Christmas Fund.

## Top Total Dollar Congregations that gave more than \$5,000

Naples United Church of Christ	Naples, Florida
Trinity United Church of Christ	Coplay, Pennsylvania
Union Congregational Church United Church of Christ	Richmond Hill, New York
First Congregational Church United Church of Christ	Western Springs, Illinois
Rock Spring Congregational Church United Church of Christ	Arlington, Virginia
University Congregational Church United Church of Christ	Seattle, Washington
Claremont United Church of Christ	Claremont, California
First Church of Christ Congregational United Church of Christ	Suffield, Connecticut
Evangelical Reformed Church United Church of Christ	Frederick, Maryland
Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ	Fort Collins, Colorado
The First Church in Oberlin United Church of Christ	Oberlin, Ohio
Saint Paul United Church of Christ	Waterloo, Illinois
Trinity United Church of Christ	East Petersburg, Pennsylvania
Pleasantville United Church of Christ	Chalfont, Pennsylvania

Congratulations, Naples UCC! You have led the way as the top giving congregation to the Christmas Fund since 2005! Thank you!

## Top Per Capita Giving Congregations that gave more than \$35

Lahuiokalani Kaanapali Congregational United Church of Christ	Honokowai, Hawaii
Kanaana Hou-Siloama United Church of Christ	Kalaupapa, Hawaii
Union Congregational United Church of Christ	Richmond Hill, New York
First Congregational Church United Church of Christ	Savannah, Georgia
Wai'oli Hui'ia United Church of Christ	Hanalei, Hawaii
Trinity United Church of Christ	Coplay, Pennsylvania
Community United Church of Christ	Atascadero, California
Bedford Park Congregational United Church of Christ	Bronx, New York
Rolling Hills Congregational United Church of Christ	Salina, Kansas
Chinese Community United Church of Christ	Southfield, Michigan
First and Saint Paul's United Church of Christ	Downey, California
Peace Congregational Church United Church of Christ	Clemson, South Carolina
Immanuel United Church of Christ	Catonsville, Maryland
Apples United Church of Christ	Thurmont, Maryland
Seaside Community United Church of Christ	Torrance, California
Congregational United Church of Christ	Conrath, Wisconsin

These congregations gave between \$35 and \$500 per member to the Christmas Fund. Thank you!

Data provided by the Center for Analytics, Research and Data of the United Church of Christ.

# Worship Resources

These worship resources have been developed around the theme for the 2019 Christmas Fund Offering: "The Light Shines in the Darkness." Ready-to-use PowerPoint presentations, bulletin inserts, information on how the funds are used, and an archive of previous years' worship resources are available at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).

## ADVENT I

### LIGHTING OF THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE and CONFESSION OF BROKENNESS

One: Violence stalks the world. Families flee in fear.  
From where will their hope come?

**Many: From One who was born to save, and who became a refugee in the process.**

One: The planet warms with every turn. Storms worsen; the poor pay the price. From where will their hope come?

**Many: From One who taught Noah to survive the flood,  
One who walked across its surface,  
One who promised that we would not be overwhelmed.**

One: One among us is waiting for the doctor's call. Another staggers with depression. From where will their hope come?

**Many: From One who has wept and despaired and then emptied tombs.**

One: Desire of Nations, Glory of Heaven, Light of the World:  
You are our hope, you are our light.

**Many: We don't know the hour of your coming,  
so until then, let us be the hope and the light.  
See us shining, and come.**

*The first candle is lit. Silence is kept.*

One: Like calls to like. Deep calls to deep. After shadow, light.

**Many: Deep calls to deep. Like calls to like. After shadow, light.**

### CALL TO THE OFFERING

*To be spoken, not printed*

Meister Eckhart was a 13th century mystic. Among his choicer bits of wisdom was, "If the only prayer you ever said was, 'Thank you,' that would suffice." The Pension Boards' Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross aims to be that prayer in our midst. The Christmas Fund supports retired clergy and lay staff and surviving spouses in need through regular gifts to supplement their (often very limited) retirement incomes, through help in paying medical insurance premiums, and through once-a-year "Thank-you" checks. It also provides individual grants to clergy in crisis or acute need. The Christmas Fund is one of the Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ, and this congregation supports it with our gifts, because we believe that while the sacrifices clergy and church workers make for their ministries are good for our churches, they can be challenging to those professionals' bottom lines. We do it because clergy are as likely to need help as the rest of us, maybe for different reasons, maybe not. We do it because their service is valuable to us. We do it to say, "Thank you."

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

*To be spoken, not printed*

See, O God. Look at all this array: coins old and new, bills crumpled or crisp, checks large and small, the electronic transfers that only you and the computers can truly see, and we, the ones who have given it. See, O God. See these things for what they are: our thanksgiving, for you and for all who serve you. Transform, God. Transform these things into what your people need: shelter and support and healthcare, love made real. And transform us, your people, into the same things. Amen.

## ADVENT II

### LIGHTING OF THE SECOND ADVENT CANDLE and CONFESSION OF BROKENNESS

*The first candle is lit before the service begins.*

One: Conflict convulses the nations. Where is the peaceable realm?

**Many: Borne in the most unexpected of hands.**

One: Conflict tears at our nation. Where is the peaceable realm?

**Many: Borne into our midst when we least expect it.**

One: Conflict echoes in our streets. Where is the peaceable realm?

**Many: Borne by the most unlikely of vessels.**

One: Conflict rips at our homes and at our hearts. Where is the peaceable realm?

**Many: Borne in the heart of one with a heart like ours.**

One: Denial, distraction, silence, acquiescence—false peace is offered at every turn. Where is the realm of true peace?

**Many: Borne in the person of one we didn't know we needed.**

One: Desire of Nations, Glory of Heaven, Light of the World:

You are our peace, you are our light.

**Many: We don't know the hour of your coming,**

**So until then, let us be the peace and the light.**

**See us shining, and come.**

*The second candle is lit. Silence is kept.*

One: Like calls to like. Deep calls to deep. After shadow, light.

**Many: Deep calls to deep. Like calls to like. After shadow, light.**

## CALL TO THE OFFERING

*To be spoken, not printed*

They came when you needed them. They answered the phone when you called. They baptized and married and buried your loved ones and you. They gave up weekend after weekend after weekend to care for your spirit and lead you in worship and call you to justice and point to God in your midst. Some of them did it for way less money than they could easily live on. Some of them did it while living in parsonages instead of building home equity for retirement. Some of them did it for less than they would have been willing to do any other job for, because of what they believe about who God is, and what they believe about who YOU are. For all the sacrifices that clergy and other staff have made in our congregations, the United Church of Christ has created the Christmas Fund, one of our Special Mission Offerings, to support them in retirement and during times of emergent need. This congregation takes a special offering today to support that work. They came when you needed them. They answered when you called. They baptized and married and buried, year after year after year. They gave so much to you; how much is enough to give back to them?



## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

*To be spoken, not printed*

Come, God, come. Send your Holy Spirit to bless these gifts for the work for which they are intended. And then go, God, go. Send your Holy Spirit far beyond these doors. Let her rest with gentleness and power on all who receive the ministry of the Christmas Fund: the retirees, the ill, the desperate, the ones who just need a little help. And bless, too, the ones who perform this ministry: the accountants, the directors, the communicators, the Conference staff, the Association staff, and all who make this ministry possible. Amen.

## ADVENT III

### LIGHTING OF THE THIRD ADVENT CANDLE and CONFESSION OF BROKENNESS

*The first and second candles are lit before the service begins.*

One: The problems are huge,  
the solutions are microscopic.

Bad news crowds the world,  
refuses passage to delight.

Who will prepare the way of our joy?

**Many: The One who promised to exchange  
a garland of beauty for the taste of ashes.**

One: When garbage chokes the sea  
and threats choke the airwaves;  
When the rich buy books  
to learn to divest themselves of things,  
while the poor long for just enough to stop worrying;  
When only those who can pay can be healthy,  
Who will prepare the way of our joy?

**Many: The One who made the earth and all its contents good.  
The One who promises to bring all things to fulfillment.**

One: When men are full of anger and power,  
when women are not believed.  
When those who are neither, or both, are abused.  
When children are exploited  
by governments or by traders.  
When color is still the measure of personhood,  
when wealth is still the measure of worth,  
who will prepare the way of our joy?

**Many: The One who came in a human body  
with human needs and heavenly desire,  
a human brain and God's own thoughts,  
a human heart and Eternity's love.**

One: Desire of Nations, Glory of Heaven, Light of the World:  
You are our joy, you are our light.

**Many: We don't know the hour of your coming,  
So until then, let us be the joy and the light.  
See us shining, and come.**

*The third candle is lit. Silence is kept.*

One: Like calls to like. Deep calls to deep. After shadow, light.

**Many: Deep calls to deep. Like calls to like. After shadow, light.**

## CALL TO THE OFFERING

*To be spoken, not printed*

Last year, the United Church of Christ's Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross provided pension supplementation to 379 retired clergy and church professionals, and 174 received health insurance supplementation. Over 400 received a special Christmas thank-you check. Over \$60,000 in emergency grants were made to those struck by catastrophe. Every cent of that money came from the pockets of people like you. You may not be able to write checks to rescue retirees from poverty. You may not be able to help your pastor with her medical bills—mostly because your pastor has good boundaries and probably won't come to you for help. But you can help anyway. Give to today's special offering for the Christmas Fund, and you will make sure that your pastor has a place to go for help if she needs it, make sure that those retirees have support when they need it, make sure that this season, our church can be the church for those who need it throughout the UCC.

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

*To be printed*

One: God, we cannot do everything

**Many: But we can do something.**

One: We cannot do all things

**Many: But we can do many things indeed.**

One: So we pray to you, the one who can do all things,

**Many: For whom everything is possible:**

One: Take these incomplete efforts of ours

**Many: And complete them utterly.**

One: Receive this offering, which is not enough,

**Many: And make it sufficient for this day.**

One: Come to us, your half-full people,

**Many: And fill us to overflowing. Amen.**

## ADVENT IV

### LIGHTING OF THE FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE and CONFESSION OF BROKENNESS

*The first three candles are lit before the service begins.*

One: Jesus said, "Love your neighbor."

**Many: But we rarely leave our houses except to go to our cars,**

**And we have not met our neighbors.**

**How do we love whom we have not met?**

One: Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

**Many: But we are addicted to self-improvement,  
see ourselves as incomplete, not beloved.  
We hold our faultiness and failures tight,  
refusing to be introduced to our own good selves.  
How do we love whom we have not met?**

One: Jesus said, "Love your enemies."

**Many: Some we have met. A few.  
So many enemies have eyes we cannot look into.  
How do we love whom we have not met?**

One: Jesus and the Torah say,  
"Love the lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and strength."

**Many: But we are best at loving that which we can control,  
and Mystery will not take our directions.  
How do we love whom we have not actually met?**

One: Desire of Nations, Glory of Heaven, Light of the World:  
You are our love, you are our light.

**Many: We don't know the hour of your coming,  
So until then, let us be the love and the light.  
See us shining, and come.**

*The fourth candle is lit. Silence is kept.*

One: Like calls to like. Deep calls to deep. After shadow, light.

**Many: Deep calls to deep. Like calls to like. After shadow, light.**

## CALL TO THE OFFERING

*To be spoken, not printed*

Imagine this. A young clergyperson graduates from seminary, tens of thousands of dollars in debt, and eagerly takes a first call. It's a small church, but do they have a lot of heart! They can't pay Conference guidelines, and benefits are pretty scarce on the ground, but they love their pastor. There are a lot of casseroles. The parsonage is nice, and the church works hard to maintain it and keep good boundaries. The church never once forgets their pastor's ordination anniversary. The pastor is making ends meet, barely, if they make the minimum payment on everything. Then they discover they need a medical procedure not covered by the basic (non-Pension Board) insurance the church provides. What will they do? Take out a loan to save their own life? Or will they call the good people at The Christmas Fund?

Now imagine, if you have the luxury of not already having done so, the ways that sexism, or ageism, or ableism, or racism, or homophobia, or transphobia, or classism might impact the situation, might shape that pastor's ability to advocate for better pay, or to access calls with higher salaries. Multiply that across a career's worth of years and emergencies and student loan payments. How will that pastor ever retire? What kind of life will they have if they do? What good will a former parsonage and all those loving casseroles do then? Who will show them the love of Christ other than the good people at the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, who administer the Christmas Fund?

If any of this scenario makes you anxious, or mad, some things you can do include: solving the student loan debt crisis, financially stabilizing all our small churches, and ending sexism, ageism, ableism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and classism. Please do that. But while we're waiting for you to finish up with those solutions, maybe you could give to the special offering we're taking today to support the Christmas Fund, which is our United Church of Christ's way of taking care of that pastor—and all UCC pastors and church professionals—throughout their careers and beyond.

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

*To be spoken, not printed*

Take these gifts, O God, and with your blessing let them accomplish mighty things. Let them abolish sexism, ageism, ableism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, classism. Failing that, let them bring comfort to the suffering, rescue to the drowning, reward to the righteous, and soft hearts to us, who are ever in danger of hardening and forgetfulness. Amen.

## CHRISTMAS EVE

### LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

*The four Advent candles are lit before the service begins.*

One: All this season, as night beats back the day,  
We lit our lights to call the Light.

Many: **“The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness did not overcome it.”**

One: We kindled Hope against apathy  
Peace against war  
Joy against despair  
Love against estrangement.  
We lit our lights to call the Light.

Many: **We said,  
“After shadow, light.”**

*The Christ candle is lit. Silence is kept.*

One: But now we pray for a miracle bigger than our former prayers.  
Come now, O Holy one, and do better than we have imagined.  
Do not overcome, but transform.

Many: **Do not be light without shadow,  
blinding spotlight, desert sun.  
Do not defeat darkness. Be shadow and light together.  
Come, dappled sunlight,  
Come, curtain-filtered glow.**

One: Come, pool of lamplight and dim corner,  
Come, bonfire and crisp evening.

Many: **Come, stars and the blackness,  
Come, moon-silvered night.  
Come, pillar of fire and darkened Sanctuary,  
Come, candle-glow on careworn faces.**

One: Come, Denier of Divisions,  
Come, Closer of Gaps,  
Come, Repairer of the Breach  
Come, you who unites Heaven and Earth,

Many: **See us here, Shining and Shadow together, and come.**

## CALL TO THE OFFERING

*To be spoken, not printed.*

This! This is the night of miracles. The animals can talk tonight, they say. Combatants lay down arms and shake hands across front lines. The world falls silent to hear a mother's song. Angels take to the skies, and at least one saint does too, they say. This. This is the night that Heaven and Earth kiss. This is the night of miracles.

What if one of the miracles tonight was that we started caring for, really caring for, the lives and comfort of our elderly? What if one of the miracles was that when people retired, they didn't start wondering what they were worth when they weren't working? What if everyone had someone to call when the going got really rough?

Well, tonight you can help make that miracle come to pass. The United Church of Christ's Christmas Fund supports retired clergy and lay staff in need through regular gifts to supplement their (often very limited) retirement incomes. It also provides individual grants to clergy and professional staff in crisis or acute need. The Christmas Fund is one of the Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ, and this congregation supports it with our gifts, because we believe that tonight is the night of miracles, and we want in on the action.

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

One: This is the night of miracles!

**Many: This is the night of wonders!**

One: Turn this place to the stable where salvation is born.

**Many: Turn us to wise ones, kneeling in awe.**

One: Turn these gifts to frankincense and gold

**Many: Turn them to myrrh and devotion.**

One: Tonight, let our generosity be a wonder.

**Many: Tonight, let us be the miracle. Amen.**

## LITANY IN CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTMAS FUND

One: Jesus never mentioned clergy.

**Many: We can't imagine church without them.**

One: Jesus had nothing to say about staff.

**Many: All this would grind to a halt without them.**

One: Jesus was mum on college, and seminary,  
on internships, and continuing education.

**Many: We want someone who's trained in this stuff.**

One: Jesus did not tell us to designate people  
to love, care, visit, preach, baptize, marry, bury,  
teach, write, meet, make music, lead, organize.

**Many: We're glad we did it anyway.**

One: Jesus did not require us to have church professionals.

**Many: But thank God we do.**

One: For preachers and teachers,

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

One: For childcare workers and nurses,

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

One: For music-makers and worship leaders,

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

One: For administrators in all their kinds,

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

One: For sextons and all providers of hospitality,

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

*Other titles and positions may be added, or specific names lifted up.*

*Those present may be asked to stand.*

One: For church professionals of every kind, let us pray:

**Many: God, you did not declare any of these positions necessary,**

**and yet our life of praise and prayer is better because of them.**

**Thank you for their skills, their training, their conscientious ministries.**

**Bless our professionals, God.**

**Strengthen them for their work, continue to fit them for their high callings.**

**Show us how to support and care for them.**

**Help us to minister to them as they minister to us. Amen.**

### **PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

*To be spoken, not printed*

God, here is our offering for the “not all,” for the in-between, for the not-quite-OK. Let it be a safety net, sure and strong, for those in danger of falling, and let it stand in token of our intent to make a world where all, including those who serve our churches, are compensated justly and cared for fully. Amen.

## **CHILDREN’S MESSAGE I**

Who can tell me what we celebrate at Christmas? (Take responses)

Right! At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. This time of year is all about babies! So if Christmas is our big baby holiday, who can tell me which holiday is the one where we celebrate old people? (Take responses, but there probably won’t be many!)

You know, we don’t actually have a holiday that really focuses on old people. Isn’t it weird that Christmas is all about the baby, and we have baby baptisms and Youth Sunday and (fill in other celebrations of youth from your congregation), but we don’t have a specific time to celebrate people who are older? And yet they’ve done so much in their lives, and they know so much, and none of us would be here without them! How can we not have a day to celebrate them?

Well, we’re working on changing that today. Today, our church is taking a special offering for something called The Christmas Fund. The Christmas Fund is money that our whole United Church of Christ gathers and uses to help, and love, and take care of retired clergy and church professionals. It’s one way that, even as we’re celebrating our big baby holiday, we can celebrate the older people in our midst, too, and give them some love.

Will you help us take this special offering?

Leader gives more details on the nature and work of The Christmas Fund. Children then proceed through the congregation with baskets or offering plates, and then return.

OK, now I need your help blessing this offering. Will you help me by laying your hands on these gifts like this? OK, let’s pray: God, you came to us as a baby at Christmas, and you never got the chance to retire, or to grow old. And yet, we can see you when we look into our elders’ eyes. So take this offering we make to you, and help us to use it to take care of your people of every age. Amen.

## CHILDREN'S MESSAGE II

How many of you receive some kind of allowance?

OK, for those of you who get one, let me ask you a question: is it enough?

How would you feel if your church offered to supplement your allowance? To give you a little more each week on top of what your parents give? That would be pretty awesome, right?

Now, you said your allowance wasn't enough just now because you want to be able to buy more fun stuff with it, right? But now imagine you had to use your allowance to buy your lunch every day, and your school supplies, and your clothes, and pay rent at your house. Then it really wouldn't be enough, I bet. What would you do? You're too young to get a job! How would you make ends meet?

Well, there are lots of people out there in just that situation. One group of them is people who have retired from active work, and only get a certain amount of money each month from a pension or retirement fund, and they have to pay all their bills from that allowance, plus any money they may have been lucky enough to save. And if that's not enough, they're in trouble!

Well, our United Church of Christ wants to help as many people in that situation as we can. One way we do that is through something called The Christmas Fund. The Christmas Fund is money gathered by members of our churches—that's you and me—and then sent back out in the form of payments to ministers and others who have worked in our churches but who have now retired. It also helps people who aren't retired but who are having an emergency. We participate in this offering because we believe that everybody who has to live on a fixed income, like an allowance or a pension, deserves help if they need it.

Will you help us take this special offering?

*Leader gives more details on the nature and work of the Christmas Fund. Children then proceed through the congregation with baskets or offering plates, and then return.*

OK, now I need your help blessing this offering. Will you help me by laying your hands on these gifts like this? OK, let's pray: God, sometimes we live at the mercy of other people. Sometimes we have no control over how much money we have, and have to hope that others will provide for us. For those who are vulnerable in this way, we pray. Take this offering, and help us help them. And please make all these children's parents double their allowances. Amen.

### Author of Worship Resources

Quinn G. Caldwell is a father, husband, homesteader and preacher living in rural upstate New York. His most recent book is a series of daily reflections for Advent and Christmas called *All I Really Want: Readings for a Modern Christmas*, and he writes with the United Church of Christ's Stillspeaking Writers' Group. He loves stewardship. Learn more on Facebook at Quinn G. Caldwell.

### Artist of "The Light Shines in the Darkness"

Ted Dawson is a graphic designer and illustrator whose clients include the New York Philharmonic, the United Church of Christ, the ASPCA, Bailey House, Rutgers University, CancerCare, and the American Musical and Dramatic Academy. Ted recently illustrated two children's books: *Hermie the Laughing Hyena* and *Sophie's Story*. See more of his work at [www.tdawsonstudio.com](http://www.tdawsonstudio.com). Ted is a member of Judson Memorial Church of New York City, affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the American Baptist Churches USA.

## ADVENT I

“Understanding, Compassion, and Financial Relief When People Really Need It”

Jane, a recipient of a Christmas Fund emergency grant in 2018 who wishes to remain anonymous, says that she was incredibly grateful for the financial help she received. She was also very thankful for the caring and compassion of Pension Boards’ staff with whom she spoke. “It meant a lot for a stranger to care—without saying a whole lot, and in just a small amount of time,” she said, adding that since the UCC is very much focused on the local church, “it meant so much to me to be connected to the wider church and to feel this level of care and support.”

Ordained over 20 years ago and now in her 60’s, Jane works in a specialized ministry, a three-way calling among her congregation, a non-profit she leads, and her local UCC Association. In addition to the exciting but demanding aspects of her professional life, Jane has experienced the significant challenge of caring for a young adult son, who has incredible strengths and a disability. Jane’s former husband suffered from a series of major health issues and was unable to work for several years. Some years, Jane shouldered the burden of over \$17,000 in out-of-pocket medical expenses, in addition to the costs associated with her son’s disability. Even though they divorced, Jane says her ex-husband “was still my family and when he was diagnosed with yet another serious illness, I was going to make sure he was cared for. He counted on me as his trusted friend, and he and our son were very close.”

Jane was her husband’s main caregiver throughout his illness and dying. As Jane puts it, she has been “a caregiver for very vulnerable people for a long time,” and this took a major financial toll, including the accumulation of debt.

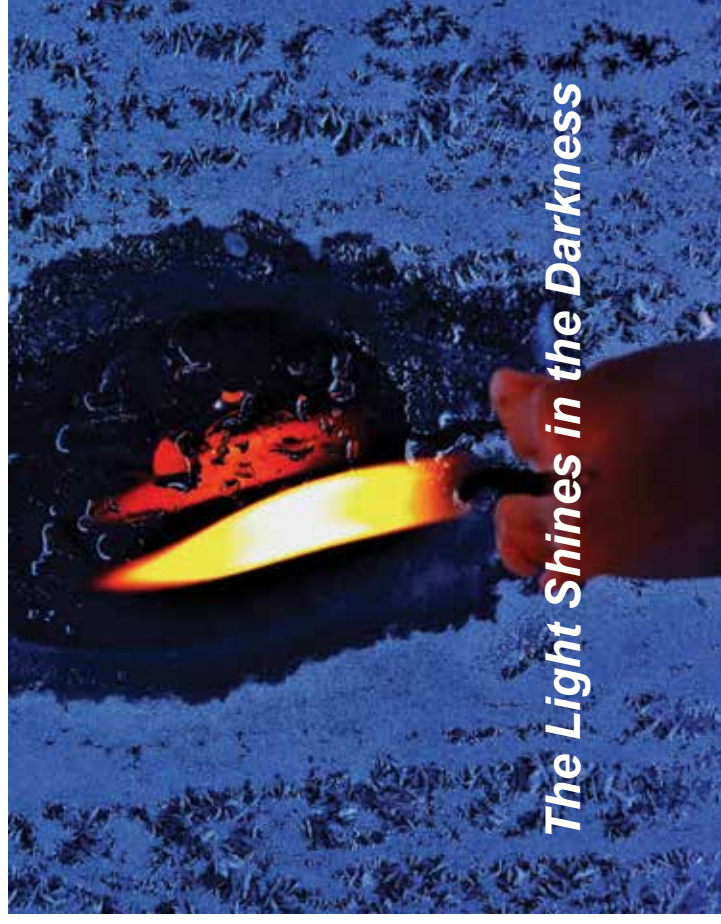
Because of the financial support she received from the Christmas Fund, Jane says, “I was able to pay off two credit cards. Although it didn’t solve everything, it was a huge relief.” It was also a relief to, in her words, “talk to someone who really understood the level of distress I was living with.”

“I’ve always been proud of the UCC that we’re open about all kinds of difficult things people face in life,” Jane added. “I’m even more grateful for our wider church that expresses that openness by providing understanding, compassion, and financial relief when people really need it. I experienced this as one of God’s commas where I had put a period. God is still speaking.”



# THE CHRISTMAS FUND

for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



*The Light Shines in the Darkness*

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In 2018, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled

- Small pension supplementation for 379 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,453,050)
- Health benefits supplementation for 174 retired clergy and lay employees (\$429,903)
- Emergency grants for 49 individuals and families (\$60,526)
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 401 retired clergy and lay employees (\$214,100)



## ADVENT II

### A Donor's Story

The Rev. Dr. Walter Brueggemann

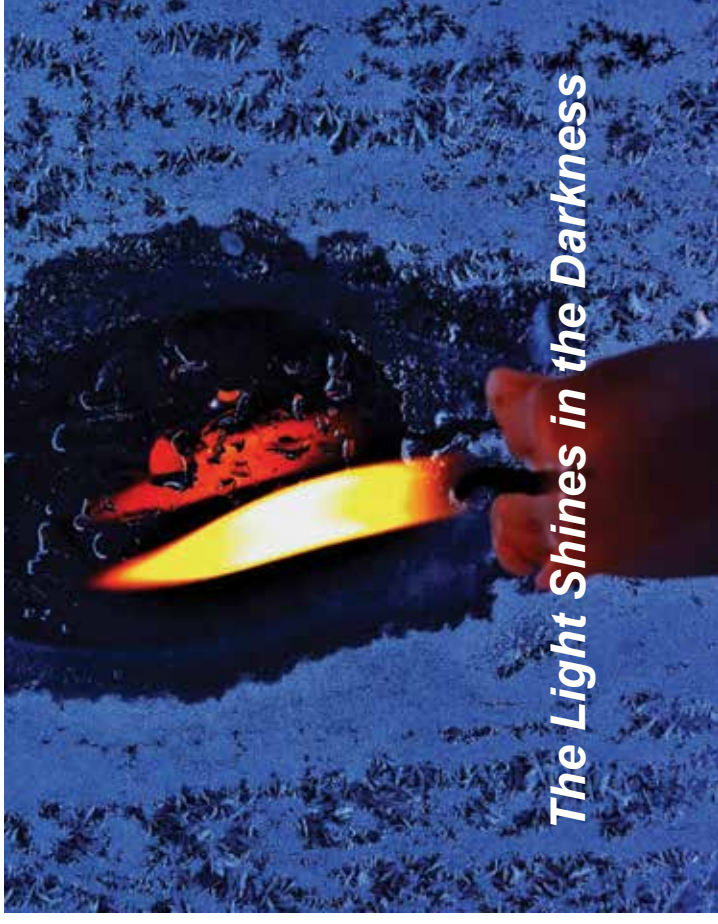
The Rev. Walter Brueggemann, a longtime and loyal contributor to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross, is well-known in the United Church of Christ. Widely considered one of the most influential Old Testament scholars of the last several decades, Walter served on the faculties of Eden Theological Seminary and Columbia Theological Seminary for many years, and is the author of numerous books, notably, *Theology of the Old Testament*, *The Prophetic Imagination*, and *Message of the Psalms*.

A graduate of UCC-related Elmhurst College and Eden Theological Seminary, Walter earned his Th.D at Union Theological Seminary in 1961. His father was a German Evangelical pastor who served in Tilden, Nebraska for many years. Walter speaks from experience when he notes that "There are many poorly paid pastors in the UCC not unlike my father was. When they retire, often with a spouse, they are left in some considerable need. When my dad died, my mother was left with the results of his low salaries. For that reason, I am a regular contributor to the Christmas Fund and deeply committed to it. The Christmas fund is a great boon for such folk who have served the church long, well, and faithfully."

Year after year, the Christmas Fund makes a difference in the lives of our United Church of Christ retired pastors and their surviving spouses, easing the anxiety of constant financial worries. "I commend the Christmas Fund," says Walter Brueggemann, "and hope that many others will sign on to support this concrete gesture of generosity and gratitude."

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## ADVENT III

The Rev. Dr. Dallas A. “Dee” Braunerger

2019 has been a difficult year for the Rev. Dr. Dallas A. “Dee” Braunerger. Her husband, Bob, died in February. “Bob and I married while we were both in seminary,” says Dee. “We had 52 years of married and professional life together.” Last summer, Dee was also diagnosed with cancer and was anticipating surgery in the fall.

In the early 70’s, Dee served a small community church in Boulder, Colorado, for five years. During those years, Dee and Bob fostered three teenage girls, adopted their son as a newborn, and then had a daughter.

Given their growing family responsibilities, the Braunergeres determined that they wanted to “parent half-time and pastor half-time” in rural parishes. In 1976, they moved to Nebraska where they found a church willing to accept this arrangement—a breakthrough for the time. “We broke ice all around,” says Dee.

Then in the late 1980’s, Dee began to experience loss of vision and soon required service dogs to help her navigate the world. She notes that, “although I could no longer see, couldn’t read, couldn’t drive, I had no trouble being accepted.”

Midway through her time at Hemingford, symptoms of Dee’s rheumatoid arthritis prevented her from preaching. Not inclined to stop communicating, she wrote daily meditations for *These Days* as well as “*Finding Voice*,” the ucc.org series about the Antoinette Brown Award recipients. She also edited the newsletter and launched the website of the UCC’s Disabilities Ministries, on whose Board she served for many years.

Looking back on her career in ministry, Dee recalls, “Bob and I chose to serve as co-pastors at small or rural churches throughout our long ministry in Nebraska. We were both able to extend our ministry to the broader church. Bob served on the World Board, making several trips to Ghana. We loved this ministry.

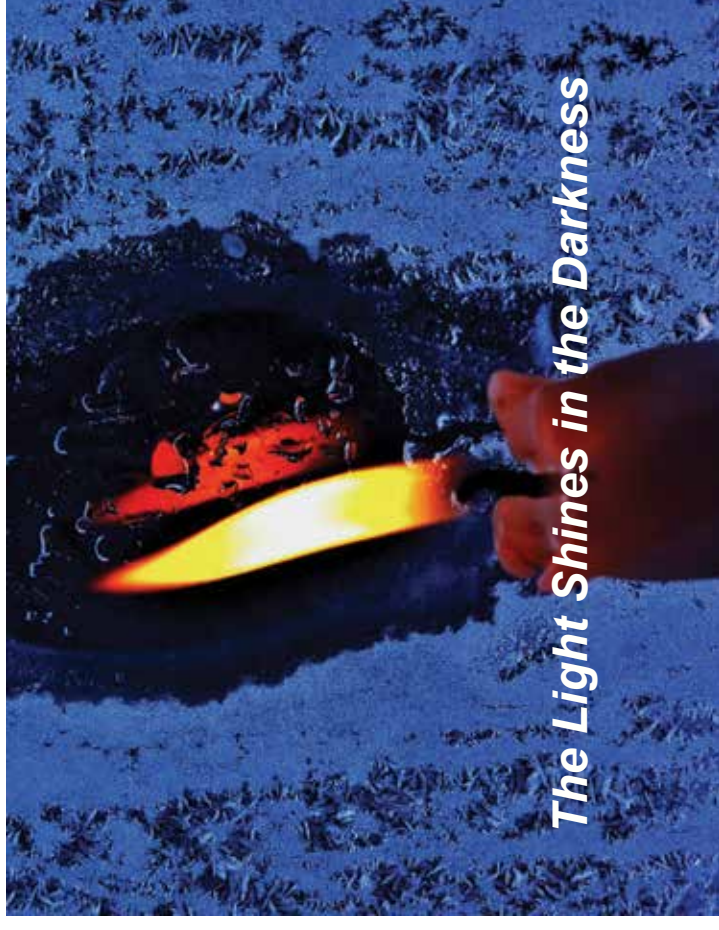
“Each year, we were amazed by the generous giving from our churches to the Christmas Fund. How unexpected that we would be recipients in 2018. Bob and I each received a \$500 gift before he died from Parkinson’s with Lewy-body dementia. The gifts helped with living expenses and care of my service dog,” says Dee.

Along with other recipients of much-needed financial assistance, Dee is grateful for the steadfast generosity of those who faithfully support the Christmas Fund each year with their gifts.



# THE CHRISTMAS FUND

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## ADVENT IV

“Your Help Means More to me Than You Know”

The Rev. Julia Proctor

“I really miss serving a church,” says the Reverend Julia Proctor, adding, “The only reason I retired was my health—it’s not the greatest, and right now I’m unable to walk.” A graduate of Bangor Theological Seminary and ordained in 1989, Julia served primarily small churches in Maine and New York. She also served as a Christian Education consultant for the Maine Conference for many years, working with churches in the Conference, conducting workshops on the national level, and doing extensive research on the history of Christian Education.

Originally from Syracuse, New York, Julia found a second home in Maine, where church members “used to tease me about my accent and the way I pronounced ‘God.’” During those years, Julia was the single parent of two young boys. “Those small churches helped me raise those boys,” she says, with evident gratitude.

“I loved working in small churches. I remember a day in seminary when I overheard a couple of students talking, saying that the thing to do was get a small church to start and then that’s your stepping stone to a bigger church. That’s when I decided I would always serve small churches. They deserve people with experience.”

Serving small churches throughout their career is a common reason retired pastors have insufficient retirement income, and this is the case for Julia. “I didn’t stop to think about the tiny annuity I would have at the time I made the decision to work with small congregations,” she says.

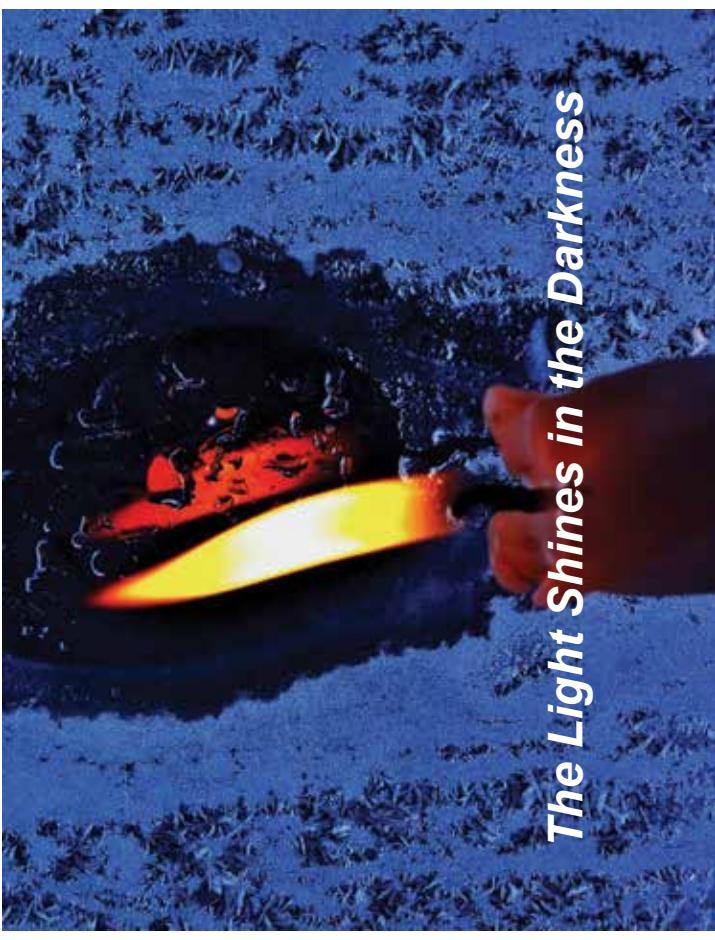
“But the Pension Boards is really helping me with a monthly annuity supplementation. They’ve been very good to me. It is so wonderful to know that I can now buy healthy food and not have to go to food banks—and will be able to buy Christmas presents for my grandchildren. There were many years when in order to buy Christmas presents, I cut back on food spending.”

Gifts to the Christmas Fund are the source of the pension supplementation Julia and many other retired pastors and lay workers receive monthly—and depend upon. “Since I am disabled,” Julia says, “your help with the money you are sending me means more to me than you know.”

Your gifts are needed more than ever to help the growing number of retirees whose low-income annuities make it difficult to meet increasing living costs. This is your opportunity to participate in God’s promise of renewal by enabling this ministry of compassion and care.

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## WHERE TO DONATE

Thank you for your gifts to the Christmas Fund! You may remit your offerings to:

—Your Conference office

-or-

—Directly to:

The Pension Boards-United Church of Christ

Christmas Fund

75 Remittance Drive, Suite 1637

Chicago, IL 60675

-or-

—By making a secure online donation at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).

## ORDER SUPPLIES

Extra supplies of envelopes, posters, and coloring books are available by calling **800.537.3394** or visiting [www.uccresources.com](http://www.uccresources.com).

## FURTHER ASSISTANCE

If you have any questions regarding how the Christmas Fund is used, please contact the Rev. Krista L. Betz, Director, Ministerial Assistance, [kbetz@pbucc.org](mailto:kbetz@pbucc.org). If you would like to learn about how to make a major or planned gift, please contact the Rev. Dr. Jonathan B. Lee, Philanthropy Officer, [jlee@pbucc.org](mailto:jlee@pbucc.org).

## 5 WAYS TO SUPPORT THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

**UCC Basic Support:** Provides funding for Conferences and the national ministries of the United Church of Christ – Wider Church Ministries, Justice and Local Church Ministries, the Office of the General Minister and President, and the Pension Boards.

**UCC Special Mission Offerings:** These four Offerings are opportunities for congregations and individuals to meet people at points of critical need in their lives:

### **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, 2019/December 20, 2020**

### **One Great Hour of Sharing**

Channels resources for international programs in health, education, agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries, and both international and domestic disaster response; administered by Wider Church Ministries, Global Sharing of Resources. **March 22, 2020**

### **Strengthen the Church**

Strengthen the Church funds efforts to reimagine and build the future of the United Church of Christ. Shared at the Conference and national levels, Strengthen the Church largely supports youth ministries and full-time leaders for new churches in parts of the country where the UCC voice has not been heard. **May 31, 2020**

### **Neighbors in Need**

Supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of Neighbors in Need funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry. Two-thirds of the offering is used by the UCC’s Justice and Witness Ministries to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. **October 4, 2020.**

To order promotional resources, including offering envelopes,  
call **800.537.3394** or go to [www.uccresources.com](http://www.uccresources.com).