

Advent IV – Love

Charles Busch

A Calling to the Small and Rural

Growing up in a small Congregational church in rural Nebraska shaped the life and ministry of the Rev. Charles Busch, though it was years before he realized just how much. He had been working in Manhattan in the business world and writing a novel when he went on retreat at a Carmelite hermitage in Nova Scotia for the quiet he needed to finish his book. It was there he encountered the words of Canadian theologian and humanitarian Jean Vanier, “If you want to meet Jesus, go where no one else wants to go.” This was Charles’ clear call to ministry: “For me, it meant small rural parish work. I’d been raised in a small parish. At the time, I was single, so it was an easy choice.”

After completing his studies at Harvard Divinity School, Charles was ready to start parish ministry. He first went to a UCC congregation of about 35 members in Tombstone, Arizona, which was about to close. But over the next six years, the church grew and thrived. Then, it was on to another small parish on the coast of Oregon, where he served for 14 years. It was there, following a bullying incident in the local high school, that Charles founded Peace Village (www.peacevillageinc.org), an educational experiment to teach nonviolence to children. Today there are Peace Village camps in 11 states across the country.

At the age of 65, after 20 years of active small-church ministry, Charles wanted time with his family. His wife was suffering with chronic illness, and their son with a challenging disability. He also continued his peace ministry by serving on the Board of Peace Village Inc., and founding “Fields of Peace,” an interfaith program to help busy clergy emphasize the message of peace and nonviolence according to their tradition. Retirement, though, was challenging: “There were ongoing medical bills. Most of my years in ministry we had been a one-income family. And of course, there wasn’t much in reserve from serving small parishes.”

Charles recalls meeting with his Annuitant Visitor and their conversation about how tight finances were with his reduced income and bills. Thinking Charles might qualify for assistance, the Annuitant Visitor connected with the Rev. Krista Betz at the Pension Boards, and Charles has received Christmas “thank you” gift checks ever since. “I remember taking the Christmas Fund Offering each year in my churches, and now I am the recipient of that heartfelt gift. The dollars matter, but even more, it is the impact of being remembered by my wider church family.”

HOW THE FUNDS ARE 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 325 lower-income retired UCC clergy and lay employees.**

Our retired clergy and lay employees relied 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 Fund for Ministerial Assistance. The amount of pension supplementation totaled \$1,418,105 in 2014.

- **QUARTERLY HEALTH PREMIUM SUPPLEMENTATION for 209 lower-income retired UCC clergy and 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 \$495,856 in 2014.

- **CHRISTMAS “THANK YOU” GIFT CHECKS given to 510 retired UCC clergy and 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 \$203,350 in 2014.

- **EMERGENCY GRANTS for 50 active/retired UCC clergy and 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 \$91,416 in 2014.

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