

Advent I—Hope

Jay Whitley
Keeping the Covenant



The Rev. James W. Whitley had served UCC congregations for 34 years, and in 2011 was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. He battled the disease for five more years while continuing to do ministry, eventually deciding to retire on disability in April of 2016. He preached his last sermon at Bethany UCC in Winston-Salem, North Carolina about "our covenant in the UCC and how it works for all of us. Little did I know how prophetic my sermon would be."

Jay and his wife, Cathy, completed the process of applying for disability benefits, and were initially determined to be eligible, but their eligibility was later revoked. With the help of Pension Boards staff, the benefits were reinstated. Even so, a gap in resources to pay insurance premiums for a three-month period threatened to undo the apparent resolution. That is, until Jay learned that an emergency grant from the Christmas Fund would enable the premium to be paid. "Those words made our day, our month, our year, our life!"

Jay relates that "after 39 years of faithful service to the United Church of Christ and keeping my part of the covenantal relationship, my beloved denomination came through for me in a crisis situation. Each church that I have served has been diligent in answering the call of the Pension Boards to give to the Christmas Fund. On several occasions, I have asked for assistance for other ministers. Little did I know that I would find myself in need of assistance through the Christmas Fund."

Parkinson's has afflicted Jay with memory loss, difficulty standing, walking, and writing, and ongoing tremors. Yet, he states with conviction: "When we find ourselves in crisis situations, the God who blesses us on our journey sees to our need by providing the right people at the right time. This is only part of my journey. My cup runneth over with blessings."

★ THE CHRISTMAS FUND

for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



In 2015, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Small pension supplementation for 464 retired clergy and lay employees - \$1,500,203
- Health benefits supplementation for 235 retired clergy and lay employees - \$452,561
- Emergency grants for 58 individuals and families - \$91,694
- Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to 528 retired clergy and lay employees - \$211,200

Your gift in 2016 will be combined with the gifts of others to continue this vital mission. Thank You!