

love shines through



“Mini Nativity” by Kate Cosgrove

★ 2015
THE CHRISTMAS FUND
for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

Offering Guide

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



The Pension Boards
United Church of Christ, Inc.

Partners in Ministry Since 1914

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“You are the light of the world.”

Matthew 5:14

Grace to you and peace in the name of the One who brings light to our world!

I am pleased to offer these words of welcome to this year’s **Offering Guide**, and for the opportunity to connect with the wider United Church of Christ in my new position as President and CEO of the Pension Boards. I am honored to build upon the good work of so many before me in helping provide for the needs of our clergy and lay leaders.

For 113 years, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a leading light in our mission. The Christmas Fund is one of the four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ and provides us with a means to directly assist those who have so faithfully and selflessly served and now find themselves facing unexpected financial needs.

Through the generosity of so many UCC congregations and individuals across the country, a total of \$1,538,531 was received in last year’s Offering. This enabled the Pension Boards’ Ministerial

Assistance program to provide, on behalf of the whole Church, Pension Supplementation, Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants, and Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks to individuals and families in need.

The theme of the 2015 Christmas Fund Offering is **Love Shines Through**, with a giving goal of \$1.7 million. In the spirit of love, I invite and encourage you to prayerfully consider and support this year’s appeal, and to spread the word so that others will join in this essential ministry.

We are pleased to again provide the resources in this **Offering Guide** to assist and inspire you in promoting the Christmas Fund in your congregation. These and other resources are also available online at www.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, I offer my sincere thanks for your generosity and love.

Faithfully,

Brian R. Bodager
President/Chief Executive Officer
The Pension Boards–United Church of Christ, Inc.



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.**

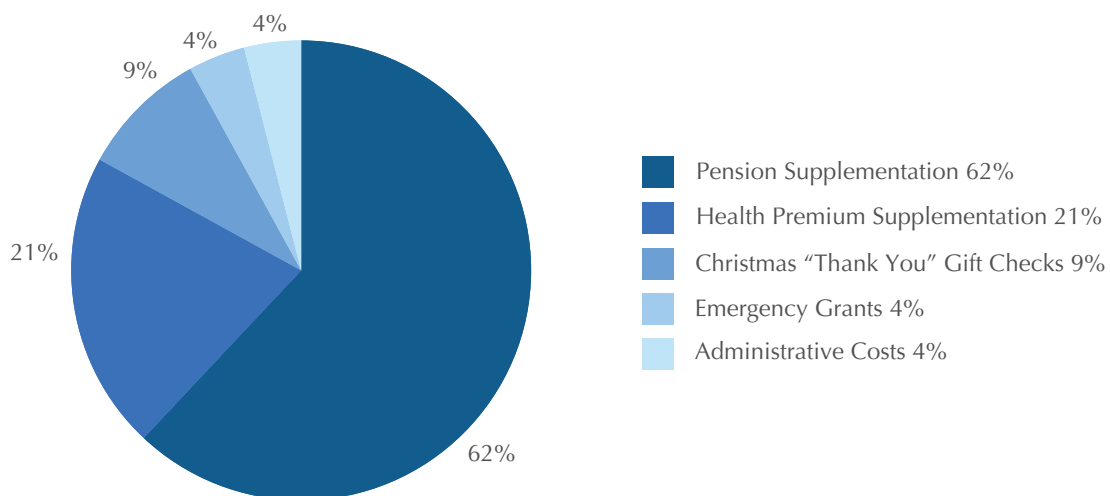
These funds subsidized premiums for the UCC Medicare Supplement Plan with Rx so that individuals could afford and receive quality health care. Assistance totaled \$495,856 in 2014.

- **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.





TOP GIVING CHURCHES TO THE 2014 CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING

From Hawai'i to Maine and all points in between, United Church of Christ congregations were inspiringly generous in their support of the Christmas Fund in 2014.

Total Dollars

Naples United Church of Christ
 Rock Spring Congregational United Church of Christ
 University Congregational UCC
 Plymouth Congregational Church, UCC
 The United Church of Christ in Keene
 The Bath Church UCC
 First Congregational UCC
 First Plymouth Congregational UCC
 Evangelical Reformed Church
 First Congregational UCC
 Christ United Church of Christ

Naples, Florida
 Arlington, Virginia
 Seattle, Washington
 Seattle, Washington
 Keene, New Hampshire
 Akron, Ohio
 Auburn, Massachusetts
 Englewood, Colorado
 Frederick, Maryland
 Greeley, Colorado
 Orrville, Ohio

Since 2006, the Naples United Church of Christ in Naples, Florida has led the way as the top total dollar giving congregation. In 2014, it gave over \$28,000 to the Christmas Fund! Thank you to each and every congregation!

Per Capita Giving

Lahuiokalani Ka'anapali Congregational Church
 First Congregational Church UCC
 First Congregational UCC
 Rolling Hills Congregational United Church of Christ
 Bethel United Church of Christ
 Community Congregational UCC
 Hawai'i Kai United Church of Christ
 La'au O Le Ola Congregational Christian Church of Samoa
 Federated Church of Sturbridge and Fiskdale UCC
 Douglas Congregational UCC
 Sunnyslope Church of the Brethren UCC

Lahaina, Hawai'i
 West Chicago, Illinois
 Pocatello, Idaho
 Salina, Kansas
 Cahokia, Illinois
 Los Alamitos, California
 Honolulu, Hawai'i
 Daly City, California
 Sturbridge, Massachusetts
 Douglas, Michigan
 Wentachee, Washington

These top per capita giving churches gave between \$25 and \$200 per member! How much would your congregation have to give to make this list?

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



TIMELINE FOR PROMOTING THE 2015 CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING

Resource materials are available online at www.christmasfund.org

Beginning **November 2, 2015**

- As needed, order additional envelopes or posters from UCC Resources, **1.800.537.3394** or www.uccresources.com.
- Work with your Missions Committee or Church Council to establish a goal for giving to the Offering in 2015. Look at last year's total and see if the congregation can increase it.
- Ask your Pastor and/or Worship Committee to promote the Offering by using the Christmas Fund worship resources available in this **Guide** and/or online.

Week of **November 22 – Begin your 2015 Christmas Fund promotion**

- Display Christmas Fund posters prominently throughout the church building.
- Promote the theme and images of **Love Shines Through** in your church's communications: newsletters, bulletins, social media, and worship announcements.
- Send a letter and Offering envelope to every household on your church mailing list, announcing the Offering date and goal amount.

Advent **Sundays (November 29, December 6, 13, 20)**

- Place additional Offering envelopes at each seat or pew.
- Distribute copies of the bulletin inserts (see p. 16) 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/partners) to reflect during worship on what it means to be remembered and cared for as a "Veteran of the Cross."
- Use the Advent Candle Lighting Resources provided in this **Guide** or online.

Sunday, **December 20**

- 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 (available in this **Guide** and/or online) when the Offering is received.

January 2016

- Have the Treasurer of the congregation forward the contributions received to one of the addresses listed on the back inside 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.

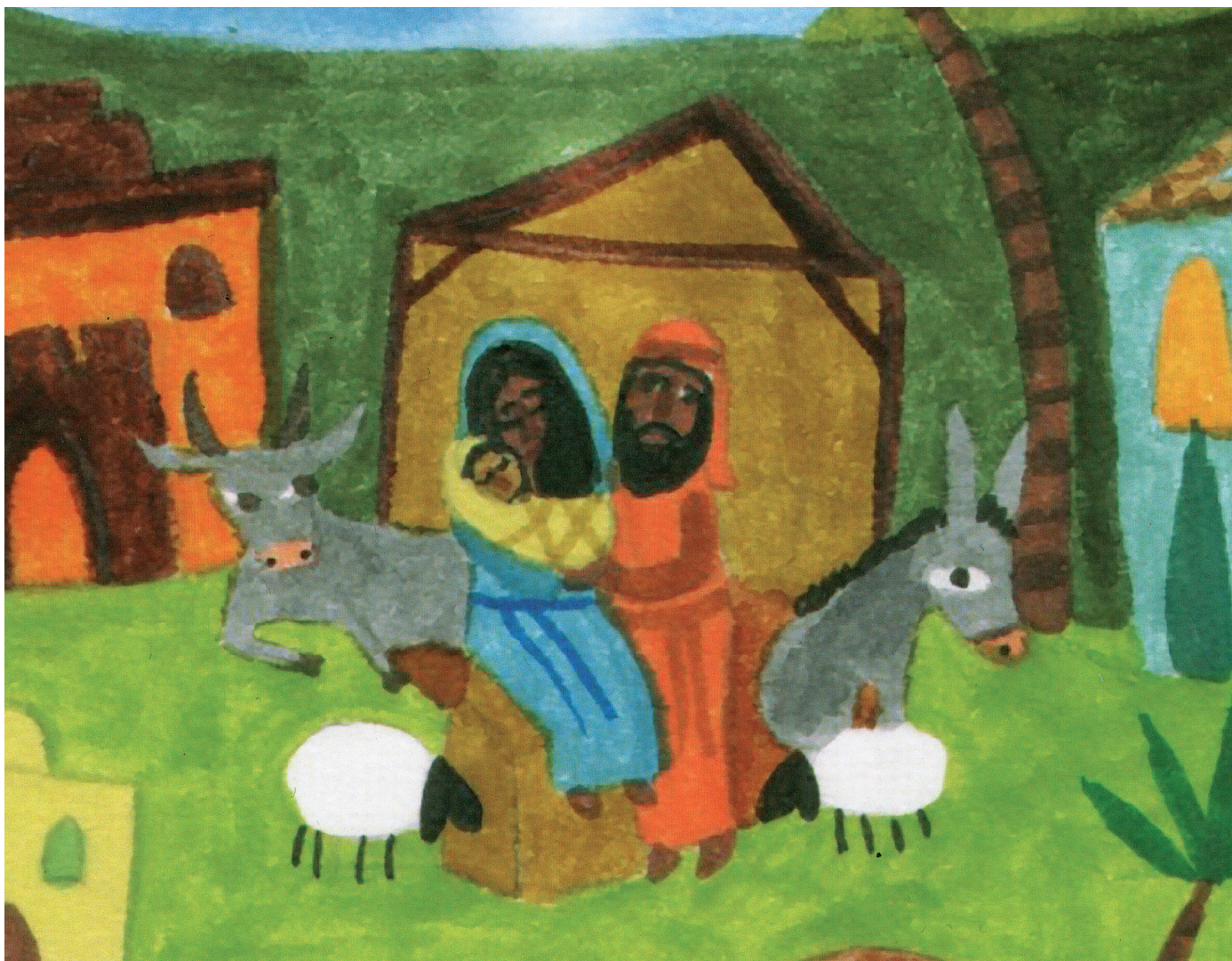


CHRISTMAS FUND GIFTS THAT KEEP ON GIVING

You and your congregation already believe in the mission of the Christmas Fund and support it each year. Many supporters of the Christmas Fund are choosing to endow their contribution by making a one-time gift which generates annual interest year after year. For example, if your annual Christmas Fund gift is \$250, a one-time gift of \$5,000, designated to the Fund for Ministerial Assistance/Christmas Fund, will generate \$250 each and every year (based on 5% interest). A \$2,000 one-time gift can similarly generate \$100 each year.

Such gifts to endowment can be made right now with cash or stock, or deferred by arranging for a planned gift—naming the Fund for Ministerial Assistance/Christmas Fund as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy or an IRA, or designating a bequest in your will.

Permanent gifts like these ensure that funds will always be there to care for and affirm the good work of clergy and lay employees. To endow a Christmas Fund gift or to learn more, please contact the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Lee, Philanthropy Officer, at **1.800.642.6543, ext. 2718** or **jlee@pbucc.org**.





WORSHIP RESOURCES

The theme for the 2015 Christmas Fund Offering is **Love Shines Through**. These worship resources have been developed around that theme using the Revised Common Lectionary readings for this year's Advent/Christmas season. 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.

We thank you for your willingness to use these worship resources and promote the important ministry that happens through the Christmas Fund!

ADVENT I – HOPE Isaiah 60: 2-3a; Luke 21: 25-26

Prayer of Preparation

One: This is the day we begin our journey to the Child, His Mother and the manger.

All: May we kindle God's light together as we journey on.

One: It is a journey shrouded in a fading sun and a growing uncertainty as the world turns cold. And we journey anyway.

All: May we kindle God's light together as we journey on.

One: We journey because we are drawn to God's light at the end: it is God's promise, borne into our lives.

All: May we kindle God's light together as we journey on.

One: This is the day we begin our journey. May we kindle God's light within us, together, as we journey on.

All: Amen.

Lighting the Advent Candle

One: We light this candle in HOPE. [The candle is lit.] We bring this light of hope with us, together, on this journey. Hope comes from the Child and our hope is dedicated to the Child lying in a manger. Seeking goodness only, for our neighbors and for ourselves, may we kindle God's light of hope within us.

The first verse of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" may be sung in response. Following the carol response, the leader may lead the congregation in this prayer.

One: Let us pray together.

All: Good and gracious God, God of darkness and light, God of hope and fear, help us take one step closer to you, toward the joy of unity with you. In this candle light, show us that the power of hope silences doubts and fears. Take this light, small but mighty, and magnify it within us until our hope chases away all shadows around our church, our community, our nations and our world. Amen.

Call to Offering *(for churches receiving the Christmas Fund Offering today)*

What does it mean to hope? It means to put your whole trust in God, believing that God's promises of blessing will be fulfilled. For those who devote their talents, skills and time to our churches in the United Church of Christ, both authorized ministers and lay leaders, hope is a muscle. During this Advent season, we receive a Special Mission Offering for the UCC Christmas Fund, and we do this to show our gratitude for all our leaders. This offering will help both active and retired clergy meet basic financial needs like health care and retirement income. Moreover, the Christmas Fund Offering provides emergency assistance in times of financial strife. This offering is our chance to strengthen our own muscles of hope and to keep lit its beacon for those who serve the Church. Let us receive this morning's offering.



Prayer of Dedication

One: Please join me as we dedicate our gifts.

All: Gracious God, bestow upon our gifts your great blessing. For those who need them most, may they be the symbol of hope we wish to bear into this world. In giving them, strengthen our hope as we anticipate the birth of all hope, grace, and glory. Amen.

ADVENT II – PEACE

Luke 3:1-6

Lighting the Advent Candles

One: We light this candle of peace,

All: Reflecting on the proclamation of John the Baptist more than 2,000 years ago and working to spread the good news today.

One: We light this candle of peace,

All: Working toward and crying out for a world where everyone’s basic needs are met.

One: We light this candle of peace,

All: Smoothing the rough ways and making paths in order to end discrimination and persecution.

One: We light this candle of peace,

All: Awaiting the arrival of Jesus Christ, light of the world. There is darkness everywhere. Be the light.

The two candles of Hope and Peace are lit.

Call to Offering *(for churches receiving the Christmas Fund Offering today)*

Presents and gifts are often on our minds during the Season of Advent. As we prepare to give our gifts this morning, let us take a moment to remember the many gifts that have been bestowed upon us. Gifts of love, time, education; gifts from our parents, our teachers, our pastors; gifts from God. During this season of Advent, our special offering will be used to support the Christmas Fund of the United Church of Christ. Our special offering this morning will benefit active and retired pastors and lay employees with health care, retirement income, and relief from financial emergency. Let us give graciously, in celebration of the many gifts we receive and in anticipation of the gift of God’s Son.

Prayer of Dedication *(for churches receiving the Christmas Fund Offering today)*

One: Will you please join me in prayer:

All: Gracious Giver, bless these gifts that are present before you. May they be used to provide for those who have given to us. Use them, we pray, that they may help your light continue to shine in a world that can often seem dark. We ask you this, in the name of your greatest gift, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

ADVENT III – JOY
Luke 3:7-18

Lighting the Advent Candles

One: This morning, hear anew the Baptizer's prophetic announcement of the coming of the Messiah and interpret it wisely.

All: We need not shrink from the challenge of repentance because when we've been truly rearranged on the inside, we will bear good fruit on the outside.

One: During these troubling times in our nation and around the world, the question from the crowds still persists, "What then should we do?"

All: Once again we humbly dedicate ourselves to kindness, to justice, and to fairness.

One: On this third Sunday of Advent, we light a candle of joy, as a visible symbol of these "fruits worthy of repentance."

All: Come let us be baptized with winds of the Spirit and refined by the fire of God's word.

Three candles of Hope, Peace, and Joy are lit.

One: Let us, though many, pray in one voice.

All: Gracious and loving God, as we await the coming of the One whom you sent, grant that our waiting might be the active kind. Give us the courage to meet the challenge of altering our thoughts and feelings about the world around us so that our actions might also be changed. Help us to keep our priorities straight, our passions properly pointed, and our eyes fixed upon the prize of joy. Remind us that you lovingly require evidence of our repentance – kindness, justice and fairness. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Call to Offering (*for churches receiving the Christmas Fund Offering today*)

Giving can be seen as a privilege rather than a problem, especially when we do so under the influence of joy. Mother Teresa described joy as a net of love by which souls may be caught. During the Advent season, in addition to our regular offering, we embrace a unique giving opportunity – a Special Mission Offering of the United Church of Christ called the Christmas Fund. This offering celebrates clergy and lay leaders who have shared their gifts and cast their nets on behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ. This Offering benefits active and retired pastors and lay employees with health care, retirement income, and relief from financial emergency. The Christmas Fund Offering represents a moment when we return a portion of the love we have received to those who have first loved and served us. Let us pour out our joy even as we are filled with expectation for the coming Messiah.

Prayer of Dedication (*for churches receiving the Christmas Fund Offering today*)

One: Please join me in prayer.

All: God of justice and joy, we make this special offering knowing that it is acceptable not only because there are those who need our gifts, but also because You have called us to be givers. Bless these donations and multiply them by your Holy Spirit so that they may bring assurance of your provision and grace to those who have faithfully served the United Church of Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

ADVENT IV – LOVE
Luke 2:1-14

Lighting the Advent Candles

One: Elizabeth was barren with no hope for a child, but then a baby filled her womb. The presence of new life filled her with hope.

All: May the light of Christ fill us with hope.

(Liturgist lights the Hope candle)

One: Elizabeth did not know why Mary came rushing through her doors, but the leap of her unborn child filled her with the knowledge of the Lord. The knowledge of the Lord filled her with peace.

All: May the light of Christ fill us with peace.

(Liturgist lights the Peace candle)

One: John the Baptist, while in the womb of his mother, expressed the joy of generations to come. The faith of Mary filled the unborn babe with joy.

All: May the light of Christ fill us with joy.

(Liturgist lights the Joy candle)

One: In a moment filled with hope, in a moment filled with peace, in a moment filled with joy, Mary opens her mouth to sing, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...” Mary rejoices in the God who loves the oppressed; Mary rejoices in the God who loves hungry. Mary a maiden, Mary unseen by the powerful of the world, is filled with the light and made powerful by a God bent on overturning the world with a teenage girl and newborn babe.

All: Like the first disciple Mary, let the light of Christ fill us with love.

(Liturgist lights the Love candle)

Prayer

One: Please join me in prayer.

All: God of Love, we thank you for bringing the light of Christ into the world. May the love shared by Elizabeth and Mary serve as a beacon for our own affections. May we, like Mary, create love that exalts the lowly and makes low the proud. May we all bear the light that changes the world. Amen.

Call to Offering

One: Filled with the love and light of Christ, we now take a moment to recognize those ministers and lay employees of the United Church of Christ who work to maintain the love and light we feel. We have all experienced moments in which love and light feel far from our reality. In these moments, we are blessed with ministers and lay employees who take us aside to listen and offer support. The light of their presence helps us to rekindle our own light. Today’s special offering will support the Christmas Fund of the United Church of Christ. The Christmas Fund provides us with an opportunity to assist ministers and lay employees with support during retirement or in the midst of a crisis. When their wick burns low, we can serve them as they have served us. Please extend your generosity not only to the regular offering, but also to the Christmas Fund. In doing so, we show our love by supporting the current and future Veterans of the Cross.

Prayer of Dedication *(for churches receiving the Christmas Fund offering today)*

One: Please join me in prayer.

All: God of Love, we are grateful for these gifts of the congregation. Bless the lives of those who will be served by these gifts, for they have chosen a life of service in your church. May we be blessed by the giving of these gifts, knowing they will help support our Veterans of the Cross as they seek rest in retirement or solace in the midst of a crisis. In the name of the One who died so we may live, Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHRISTMAS EVE
Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20

Lighting the Advent Candles

As the liturgist approaches, the hymn, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" plays softly.

One: As night falls, and the shadows grow long, we wait in hopeful expectation for the coming light.

All: (sing)

**O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the child of God appear.**

(Liturgist lights the Hope candle while congregation sings)

One: As war and violence swirl around us, we watch for the coming Prince of Peace.

All: (sing)

**O come, desire of Nations, bind
all people in one heart and mind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease,
and fill the world with Heaven's peace.**

(Liturgist lights Peace candle while congregation sings)

One: As our we struggle amid the shadows and gloom, we drink deeply from the font of all joy.

All: (sing)

**O come, Key of David come,
and open wide your heavenly home;
make safe the path to endless day,
to death's destruction close the way.**

(Liturgist lights Joy candle while congregation sings)

One: As love seems a rare commodity in our world, we cling to the love that will not let us go.

All: (sing)

**O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
Love stir within the womb of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.**

(Liturgist lights the Love candle while congregation sings)

One: People of God, rejoice, for a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Mother, Prince of Peace.

All: (Singing)

Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel. (2x)

(Liturgist lights the Christ candle)

Call to Offering

When the shepherds met the newborn Christ, they immediately turned into preachers, choir members, and ministers. The text in Luke says, "The shepherds then returned to their fields glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard." When we encounter Jesus it is natural to want to sing, to dance, to laugh, to gasp, to give. True generosity flows not from duty, but from awe.



Tonight's offering will be given in whole to the Christmas Fund of the United Church of Christ. The Christmas Fund provides support for those who serve the church and are experiencing financial distress. Your gracious giving can be a light for those walking in shadows, it can be a hope for those in trying times, it can be love for those who feel forgotten. In the spirit of Christmas joy, please give as you are able.

Prayer of Dedication

One: Please join me in prayer.

All: Gracious God, we pray that you would richly bless and multiply these gifts. May all who receive these gracious offerings know that you are with them. And in our giving may we know that you are with us. We pray this in the name of Jesus the Christ, our Emmanuel, God with us, in our giving and our receiving. Amen.

WORSHIP IDEA FOR CHILDREN AT ADVENT/CHRISTMAS

Depending on the time, this idea can be done during Sunday School or during the Children's Message portion of the service.

Prep Time: 5-10 minutes, before the service

Tools: "The Other Wise Man" (Van Dyke, Henry (story); Pamela Kennedy (author); Robert Barrett (illustrator). The Other Wise Man. Hambleton-Hill Publishing: Nashville, 1989), envelopes for each child, and 2-3 strips of seasonal colored paper to fit into the envelopes.

Preparation: Cut the strips of paper and write one of the following phrases on each of the strips: "You are special!", "Thank you for all you do!", "Rock on!", "You are a blessing!"

- Activity:**
1. Seat the children comfortably.
 2. Ask the children if they have ever wanted something so badly that they would go to all lengths to have it.
 3. Ask the children what gifts they would give in order to receive their own desired gifts.
 4. Read "The Other Wise Man" aloud, showing the pictures.
 5. Talk to the children about the importance of perseverance and the long work of people in service to the gospel.
 6. In honor of the Christmas Fund offering, have each child give an envelope with strips of paper to key congregants (volunteers, staff, clergy, etc.). In a spirit of thanksgiving, honor those who work so tirelessly for the church.

RESOURCES FOR ANY TIME OF YEAR

Call to Worship 1

One: One: Lift your hearts. Lift your eyes. Lift your voices.

All: The living God, the moving Spirit of God has called us together – in witness, celebration, and struggle.

One: Reach out toward each other!

All: Our God reaches out toward us! Come, let us worship God!



Call to Worship 2

One: Though the way is long and the road is tough,

All: We do not travel alone.

One: Though the shadows loom and the wind will rise,

All: We find strength together.

One: Though our feet ache and our muscles strain,

All: We can make it home only with the help of each other.

One: We are a pilgrim people.

All: No one gets left behind.

One: And as we travel, may we remember the God who has promised to travel with us.

All: Come let us sing praises to this God, our companion on the road.

Call to Offering 1

A Veteran of the Cross is a term historically used by the United Church of Christ Christmas Fund to describe clergy and lay employees who have served and are serving the church. Although we may experience our ministers and lay employees as tireless, the truth of the matter is they need rest. Although we may be unaware of the hardships and trials of our ministers and lay employees, unexpected deaths, illness, and disasters regularly occur in their lives.

The Christmas Fund provides emergency grants for clergy and lay employees during the unexpected times of financial need. Further, the Fund provides monthly pension supplements to more than 400 lower-income retired UCC clergy.

Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks are also issued to over 500 retirees. We may not be in the Christmas season, but we can participate in the spirit of the season by giving to the Christmas Fund. Today, we have an opportunity to show our gratitude by providing financial support for those who have ministered to us week in and week out.

Prayer of Dedication 1

One: Let us pray together.

All: Creator God, we are gathered in this space of worship, which was built with earthly materials and through the spiritual gifts of our Veterans of the Cross. Bless these gifts and be with those who will receive these funds in retirement and in emergency situations. We are thankful for the opportunity to give back to our church leaders, from whom we have received so much. In the name of the Son of God, who modeled a life of service, so that we could follow his example, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Call to Offering 2

We all have our strengths to donate to our community. The authorized ministers and lay employees in the United Church of Christ have donated their time and energy to guide us to spiritual heights and have served us when we were spiritually empty. We receive a Special Mission Offering during this time of year to show our gratitude for all our leaders. This Offering helps both active and retired clergy meet basic financial needs like health care and retirement income, and in times of financial strife, the Offering provides emergency assistance. This is our chance to strengthen our community's commitment to those who serve. Let us receive this morning's Offering.

Prayer of Dedication 2

One: Please join me in prayer as we dedicate our gifts.

All: Gracious God, bestow upon our gifts your great blessing. For those who need them most, may they be the gratitude we wish to show, and may they be the symbols of grace we wish to bear into this world. In giving them, strengthen us through the power of their leadership and work in the Spirit. Amen.



Call to Offering 3

Answering God's call is rewarding and challenging. Those called to ministry give their time, talents and love continuously, often without anything in return. Today's Special Mission Offering will support those who have faithfully served the United Church of Christ and its mission. Today's Offering will assist authorized ministers and lay employees with support during retirement, during times of crisis, and in subsidizing health care costs. Let us give as they have given, freely and generously, without expectations of what can be gained.

Prayer of Dedication 3

All: Generous God, we ask that you use these gifts to support those who have so generously supported us. May they be a token of our appreciation for their countless hours of service and dedication to you and your work. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, whose path we long to follow. Amen.



AUTHORS OF WORSHIP RESOURCES

Our special thanks to the following students and professor at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Massachusetts for creating the 2015 liturgical resources. Andover Newton, one of the seminaries of the United Church of Christ, was founded in 1807 and is “deeply rooted in the Christian faith and radically open to what God is doing now.” To learn more, visit www.ants.edu.



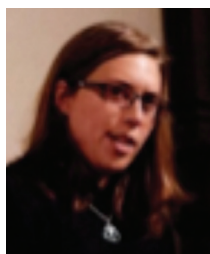
Jack Farrell (Advent I) is a recent graduate of Andover Newton Theological School. He is focusing on a ministry of chaplaincy work, and he is invested in working within an educational ministry environment for all ages. Jack currently lives in rural New York and has been dividing his time

between pulpit supply preaching and working on any of his many creative writing projects – another lifelong pursuit and joy. Jack hopes to complete his ordination requirements in the coming year, as he continues to discern his call by God.



Fredd Ward (Advent III) serves as Associate Pastor at the Congregational Church of Naugatuck, Connecticut with licensed standing in the Naugatuck Valley Association of the United Church of Christ. He has served in the national setting of the UCC as a member of the Justice

and Witness Ministries Board of Directors and the Executive Council. He lives in Hartford with his wife, Sandy, and is the father of two children, Nathaniel and Cassidy — ages 16 and 10. He expects to graduate from Andover Newton Theological School in December 2015.



Casey Guet (Advent IV) is a third year Master of Divinity candidate at Andover Newton Theological School. She served as Student Association President during the 2014-2015 academic year. Casey is serving as the Student Minister at First Church Somerville, UCC in Massachusetts for the 2015-2016

academic year.



Adam Hearlson (project editor and Christmas Eve) is the Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship, and Director of Wilson Chapel at Andover Newton Theological School. Originally from California, Adam received his B.A. from Vanguard University and his Master of Divinity and Ph.D

from Princeton Theological Seminary. He has also served congregations in Costa Mesa, California; at the Princeton University Chapel; and in Warren, New Jersey. Adam is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ.

Currently, Adam’s research interests include the role of worship in social resistance, how the visual images are being incorporated into the preaching moment, and the role of food in Christian ritual. Adam is fascinated by the myriad ways in which people live out their faith. When he is not leading worship or teaching, he enjoys NBA basketball games or cooking for his family.



Sarah Krhla (Advent II) serves as Director of Faith Formation at the Church of Christ, Congregational UCC in Goshen, Connecticut while she pursues her Master of Divinity at Andover Newton Theological School. The married mother of three children, ages 10, 8, and 6, Sarah received her undergraduate

degree in early childhood education at Stonehill College in Massachusetts.

ARTIST OF "MINI NATIVITY"



Kate Cosgrove is the artist who created *Mini Nativity*, our 2015 Christmas Fund image. Kate describes that to her, "Christmas is such a lively and exciting holiday, but many of the illustrations depicting the Nativity are sleepy winter scenes. When I drew *Mini Nativity*, I wanted to capture the vibrancy and spirit of the season that I have felt since childhood through the use of bright celebratory colors and whimsical shapes." Ms. Cosgrove was an Individual Artist Grant Recipient from the Arts Council of Greater Lansing. Her art has been featured in books, magazines, albums, and a Hollywood film. She has also exhibited in galleries and online, with collectors across the United States, Australia, Canada, Colombia, England, France, Switzerland, and Ukraine.

For more information about the artist and her work, please visit katecosgrove.com.



Advent I – Hope

Chuck Yoak

Hope Renewed

At 77, the Rev. Chuck Yoak feels that he's just getting started. The son and grandson of pastors, Chuck began his ministry at the young age of 18, while still an undergraduate at Grinnell College in Iowa. "I was able to put myself through college and seminary by being a student minister. My first call was to a congregation that was a four-hour bus ride from school, but I loved it." Chuck went on to serve three more parishes while a student, including two in Chicago. After his studies at Chicago Theological Seminary, Chuck was called to churches in Nebraska, Iowa, and then in St. Paul, Minnesota, "where I spent 7 years helping to rebuild that congregation. Our membership grew, our budget increased, and we became even more vital. That was my most satisfying ministry."

Over time, though, the demands of the institutional church began to wear on him and Chuck knew he needed a break. He worked in secular employment for awhile, but by 2000, Chuck had some major financial reversals. The churches Chuck had served were small, most not contributing to the Annuity Plan. Despite coming out of retirement to work again, at one point Chuck had monthly bills exceeding his income by \$900.

An article in the Pension Boards' *News & Views* newsletter reminded Chuck about the possibility of assistance through the Christmas Fund. "Every Christmas Eve in churches I served we took the Offering. I never dreamed that someday I would benefit from it." He receives a monthly grant, a supplement to his pension, and a Christmas gift check. Until recently, Chuck chopped wood to supplement heating his home each winter, but needed hip replacement surgery—and so in 2014, he received an emergency grant for fuel and medical expenses. He describes the support of the Pension Boards as "nothing short of a life saver. Since that first assistance check, things really started working out for me. I gradually caught up financially and now things are much better."

Chuck is convinced those years of hardship served to deepen his faith and character, and recalls the words of Paul: "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong." His faith renewed, Chuck found his way back to church, became fully immersed in the ministries of his neighborhood church, and today belongs to the Amery Congregational UCC of Amery, Wisconsin. "I'm revved up and ready to go as a retired person. I've been so terribly grateful for all the Pension Boards has done for me. The assistance programs give real hope to people like me who may have given up hope at some point."

HOW THE FUNDS ARE USED

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ADVENT I – HOPE

Advent II – Peace

Beverly Weinhold

Bringing Beauty from Brokenness

“Some stories are painful and hard to hear. Mine is like that,” says the Rev. Dr. Beverly Weinhold. “In 1997, my life was turned upside down in a moment.” Married for 20 years with teenage twin daughters, Beverly suddenly found herself alone and financially vulnerable. “By the grace of God, I was hired as a part-time lay minister of a United Church of Christ congregation. Witnessing to God’s call in my life, I was urged to pursue ordination.” Graduating from Andover Newton Theological School in 2000, Beverly pastored four churches and team-taught boundary awareness training for clergy.

Relocating from Massachusetts to Kentucky in 2008, Beverly was discerning a coalescing call to combine theology and psychology. A board-certified and licensed clinical counselor before her marriage, she realized that not only could unhealthy boundaries compromise clergy, but they can also create conflict in church communities. Wanting to write a curriculum for churches on this subject, Beverly did doctoral work at Louisville Seminary, graduating in 2011 with a D.Min. in Pastoral Counseling. She retired from pastoral ministry to pursue clinical practice, specializing in adult survivors of abuse. Diagnosed with mononucleosis at 66 and exhausted from recovery, Beverly contracted a serious bacterial infection that kept recurring and forced her to downsize her work to part-time.

It was then that the Pension Boards’ Christmas Fund stepped in to supplement Beverly’s pension and Medicare premium. “Words are wanting when I try to express what this meant to me. A solo person with nowhere to turn, I didn’t expect such generosity. But because of this gift arising out of United Church of Christ congregations, I have been able to make ends meet. Beyond money, your partnership has given me dignity to see myself as more than my problem.”

Beverly reflects on the support offered to her: “A mentor of mine said, ‘most pastors I know have crosses to bear.’ We all do. That’s why Christ calls us to ‘take up your cross and follow me.’ But thanks be to God for faithful partners on the way that, in the words of the American writer Margaret Wheatley, are ‘brave enough to bear witness and turn toward and not away from our struggles.’ This counterintuitive move made all the difference to me. It brought beauty from brokenness. And by God’s grace, I bring it to others who sit in dark places.”

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ADVENT II – PEACE



Advent III – Joy

Lydia Morrow

A Donor's Story

The Rev. John W. Morrow was a United Church of Christ pastor for 40 years. He served churches in Westminster and Marlboro, Massachusetts, and was Senior Minister at Plymouth Bethesda UCC in Utica, New York, for 20 years. John retired in 1995 and he and his wife, Lydia, built their retirement home in Easton, Maryland, so he could pursue his love of sailing on Chesapeake Bay. When John developed a malignant brain tumor shortly after moving to Easton, "all our dreams vanished." John died within the year.

Lydia was left alone in an unfamiliar town, without any family or social support. Since John had always handled the finances, she found learning to manage money a daunting task. The maintenance of a large house and yard, and the endless decisions required for daily life without John's guidance, was both challenging and lonely. Finally, after living by herself for seven years, Lydia sold the house and moved to an apartment in an active retirement community in Annapolis, Maryland.

During the years in Easton, Lydia joined a small church where she was befriended by Nell, a lovely, older lady who was the widow of a UCC pastor. Nell had been struggling for 12 years on a very meager income. Lydia admired Nell's dignity and resolve in coping with her limited finances, and decided that eventually she would help other widows of UCC pastors.

Lydia contacted the Pension Boards' United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance and began making annual contributions to the Christmas Fund earmarked for supporting widows and clergy families. In 2004, Lydia arranged for a charitable gift annuity that established the John and Lydia Morrow Fund for this specific purpose. Each year, Lydia continues to make as generous a donation as possible to the Morrow Fund, and has included a bequest in her will to benefit the Fund as well. "As I have been blessed, I hope that the income from this fund will be a blessing to the many faithful servants in the United Church of Christ—especially widows and clergy families—in perpetuity."

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ADVENT III – JOY



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.”

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ADVENT IV – LOVE



IS YOUR CHURCH 5 FOR 5?

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.

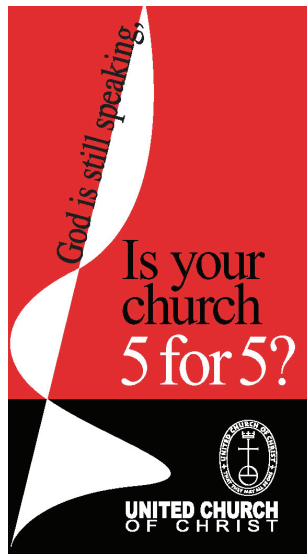
This recognition program says “thank you” to congregations for their faithful and generous giving, and it strengthens their relationship with the wider Church. It also helps those congregations teach about mission and the ways their gifts are being used beyond the local church. Finally, the program serves 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.com**

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: *Remembering Those who Serve Our Church*

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 20, 2015/December 18, 2016

One Great Hour of Sharing: *Giving Help, Hope and Life*

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 6, 2016

Strengthen the Church: *Faithfully Building the Body of Christ*

Strengthen the Church funds efforts to reimagine and build the future of the UCC. Shared at the Conference and national levels, STC 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 15, 2016

Neighbors in Need: *Justice and Compassion Like a Mighty Stream*

Supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM). Two-thirds of the offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants.

October 2, 2016

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.

EXTRA SUPPLIES

Order extra offering envelopes or posters from UCC Resources,
1.800.537.3394 or www.uccresources.org.

FURTHER ASSISTANCE

If you have any questions regarding how the Christmas Fund is used, or how
to make a major or planned gift, please contact:

Rev. Krista L. Betz, Director Ministerial Assistance, kbetz@pbucc.org
Rev. Dr. Jonathan B. Lee, Philanthropy Officer, jlee@pbucc.org



www.christmasfund.org



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



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THE CHRISTMAS FUND

2015 Offering Guide