



December 13, 2020

## From the Associate Conference Minister: Call for outreach

If you have been paying attention to the news lately, or just listening to what is going on in your community, then you know that many people currently find themselves in a place of great need. There were stories all over the country recently of families by the thousands standing in line, some for 5 – 6 hours, to get food for the holidays. Many food pantries are recording critically low inventories. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to financial hardships, and these hardships are felt most directly by those who were already living at the margins.

This is all happening at the same time when churches are not meeting for large worship gatherings and many are pondering how to engage a community of faith in this season. We are living in a Kairos moment to seriously consider the missional call of the church. If you are wondering how to engage your congregation right now, this is a perfect time to call the church to outreach, acts of mercy, and charity. With Christmas fast approaching, there will be families in our communities who are trying to figure out how to make it through the holidays. While we may not be able to invite them to an in-person Christmas Eve service, it might be more meaningful to ask how you as a church can help them feel the love of Christ as we celebrate His birth!

- Rev. Cean R. James

Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Development

"For Such a Time as This."

Esther 4:14

Rev. Cathy Barker

"My father, a UCC minister, died of cancer at age 54, just after Thanksgiving. I was fourteen; my brother and sister were grown and had to go back to their homes. Mom and I were lonely, confused about the future, and our financial picture was very shaky. Further, we faced a bleak Christmas . . . we didn't even want to think about that.

"Then came a check from the Christmas Fund. We were both deeply touched that our national Church somehow knew that we were in need and gave us this gift. It didn't solve all our troubles, but it made it possible for us to have Christmas. We felt the love behind the gift, and that was transformative.

"Throughout my mother's long life, she gave faithfully and gratefully to the Christmas Fund, and I have done the same through the churches I have served as pastor. I've often told our story, because I want people to know how important it is to reach out in this way.

"When the pandemic caused such upheaval, and an appeal came from the Pension Boards telling about the increased need for emergency funds, I sat right down and wrote a check. My husband and I are glad we could help."

In 2019, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 350 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,347,419)
- Health premium supplementation for 144 retired clergy and lay employees (\$374,577)
- Emergency grants for 69 individuals and families (\$123,727)
- Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to 521 retired clergy and lay employees (\$260,500)

**THE CHRISTMAS FUND**  
 For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund