

LOVE



*But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah...
from you shall come...
one who is to rule in Israel*

TRINITY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
2340 State Street, East Petersburg, PA 17520
717-569-1632

Website: www.trinityeastpete.org E-Mail: secretary@trinityeastpete.org

The Rev. Dr. Christopher M. Rankin, Pastor

The Rev. Harry G. Royer, Pastor Emeritus

The Rev. Dr. Carolyn Call, Covenanted Minister of Mission

Mr. Michael Slechta, Director of Music/ Sounds of Trinity Choir Director

Mrs. Christine Oetama, Organist

Mrs. Carmen Richards, Pianist

Mrs. Carol Kratz, Administrative Assistant

Mr. Sean McKelvey, Preschool Director

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT
10:30 A.M. SERVICE

Today's Theme: Cradle and cross are inextricably connected on the fourth Sunday of Advent. Between a lovely tribute to the little town of Bethlehem and Mary's magnificent song of praise, the letter to the Hebrews reminds us in no uncertain terms that Christ's advent is for "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." It is the kind of tension in which the church always lives as when in holy communion – with high delight – "we proclaim the Lord's death."

Prayer: *Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that binds us, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.*

Our guest organist, Sharon Levering, resides in Ephrata with her husband Lamar. She enjoys reading and working as a supply organist at various churches in Lancaster County. She also volunteers at the Historic Ephrata Cloister and is a singer with the Wheatland Chorale and Musical Associates , as well as a singer with the Ladies Chorus at Landis Homes Retirement Community.

PRELUDE

Watchman, Tell Us of the Night
Sharon Levering-Organist

Martha Sobaje

ANNOUNCEMENTS

(PLEASE STAND IF YOU ARE ABLE)

CALL TO WORSHIP

AFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM AND CALL TO WORSHIP

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Before the majesty of God, we gather to worship; in quiet expectation, we come to hear God's promises.

This is where we belong; here we are warmly greeted. Surely God will feed our deepest hunger.

Let us worship God!

CONFESSION OF SINS

CALL TO CONFESSION

John the Baptist calls us to repent, to prepare for the coming of God's reign.

Let us heed John's call and confess our sins in silent prayer.

(SEATED OR KNEELING)

SILENT CONFESSION OF SINS

CONFESSION OF SIN

Let us confess our sins to the one who welcomes us with an open heart.

God for whom we wait, in the presence of one another, we confess our sin before you. We fail in believing that your good news is for us. We falter in our call to tend to your creation. We find our sense of self in material wealth. We fear those different from ourselves. We forget that we are your children and turn away from your love. Forgive us, Blessed One, and assure us again of your saving grace. Amen.

KYRIE

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

(PLEASE STAND IF YOU ARE ABLE)

HYMN

Hail to the Lord's Anointed

1. Hail to the Lord's A - noint - ed, great Da-vid's great-er Son!
 2. He comes with suc-cor speed - y to those who suf-fer wrong;
 3. He shall come down like show - ers up - on the fruit-ful earth;
 4. To him shall prayer un - ceas - ing and dai - ly vows as - cend;

Hail in the time ap - point - ed, his reign on earth be - gun!
 to help the poor and need - y, and bid the weak be strong;
 love, joy, and hope, like flow - ers, spring in his path to birth.
 his king-dom still in - creas - ing, a king-dom with-out end.

He comes to break op - pres - sion, to set the cap-tive free;
 to give them songs for sigh - ing, their dark-ness turn to light,
 Be - fore him, on the moun - tains, shall peace, the her-ald, go,
 The tide of time shall nev - er his cov - e - nant re - move;

to take a - way trans - gres - sion, and rule in eq - ui - ty.
 whose souls, con-demned and dy - ing, are pre-cious in his sight.
 and righ-teous-ness, in foun - tains, from hill to val-ley flow.
 his name shall stand for - ev - er; that name to us is love.

(PLEASE BE SEATED)

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE/TIME WITH THE CHILDREN

As we gather around the Advent wreath today, we rejoice that Christmas is a time of prayer and of open hearts when we sing songs of joy.

Christmas is a time of worship—the moment when the busiest of us pause in wonder. Christmas happens when God comes to us in love through Jesus Christ and fills us with love for humankind.

We light this candle to proclaim the coming of the light of God into the world. With the coming of this light there is love. Such great love helps us to love God and one another.

Let us pray together.

We praise you, O God, for this wheel of time that marks our days of preparation for Christ's advent. As we light the candles on this wreath, open our eyes to see your presence in the lowly ones of this earth. Enlighten us with your grace, that we may sing of your advent among us in the Word made flesh. Grant this through Christ our Lord, whose coming is certain and whose day draws near. Amen.

THE WORD OF GOD

THE FIRST LESSON

Micah 5:2-5a

The prophet Micah, having pronounced judgment upon Judah, speaks of a future shepherd-king who, like David, will come from the small town of Bethlehem. (Ephrathah refers to the area around Bethlehem.) This king will restore Israel and bring peace. New Testament writers understood this passage to be referring to Jesus.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

THE PSALTER

St. Luke 1: 46b-55 (The Magnificat)

'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

THE SECOND LESSON

Hebrews 10:5-10

The author of Hebrews uses the image of religious sacrifice to convey the significance of Christ's coming. Through obedient acceptance of God's will, Christ allows his own body to become the greatest sacrifice of all, one through which we are made a holy people.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

(PLEASE STAND IF YOU ARE ABLE)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 1:39-55

We are presented with Elizabeth, John's mother, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, two women filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. In Elizabeth's inspired greeting and Mary's song of praise we hear of a saving God who remembers, scatters, lifts up, and fulfills all things.

Glory be to You, O Lord.

THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD

Praise be to You, O Christ.

SERMON

"God's Saving Love"

Pastor Rankin

(PLEASE STAND IF YOU ARE ABLE)

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became fully human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into

heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, and has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PEOPLE'S OFFERING

OFFERING DEDICATION

Thank you, God, for your mercy and protection, for feeding us physically and spiritually, and for caring for us like a shepherd. We present our offerings as an act of gratitude. What we can never repay we pause to appreciate. May these offerings do far more than support this congregation. We dedicate ourselves and these gifts to honor Christ through ministry in the world. Amen.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord!

Let us give thanks to God Most High.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Holy God, we praise and bless you for creation and the gift of life and for abiding love which brings us close to you, the source of all blessing. We give you thanks that in the fullness of time you sent Jesus, born of Mary, to live in our midst, to share in our suffering, and to accept the pain of death at the hands of those whom Jesus loved. We rejoice that in a perfect victory over the grave you raised Christ with power to become sovereign in your realm. We celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to gather your church by which your work may be done in the

world and through which we share the gift of eternal life. With the faithful in every place and time, we praise with joy your holy name. Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God, Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

(PLEASE BE SEATED)

WORDS OF INSTITUTION AND PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

THE PRAYER OF OUR LORD

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

COMMUNICATION

As this grain was once scattered in the fields, and has come together in one bread, so we, with different needs and hopes, come together as one, for we share one bread.

The Bread of Life, broken for us.

The cup which we share is the cup of the New Covenant written in our hearts and witnessed by Jesus.

The Cup of Blessing, poured out for us and for the many.

(Those who wish to come forward will be invited by the pastor. We will commune by each section. The pastor will give you the wafer and you will dip it in the chalice held by the assistant. Grape juice is in the chalice with the cross and wine is in the other chalice. If you need the pastor and assistant to come to you, please indicate that to someone near you or the pastor. If you do not wish to come forward, you are invited to use the packaged elements in the narthex and commune in your pew. The pastor will offer a blessing after all have received the elements.)

(PLEASE STAND IF YOU ARE ABLE)

POST COMMUNION PRAYERS

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all peoples and places that yearn for God's presence.

Nurturing God, you give us life and care for our every need. Use the church's gifts and ministries for your service, bringing your word to all who seek your transforming grace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Righteous God, you bring down the mighty and lift up the lowly. Strengthen those who seek justice. Bless the work of community organizers, activists, journalists, and all who call our attention to imbalances of power. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Compassionate God, you proclaim your love and mercy. Show your loving kindness to teen parents and those who are pregnant. Comfort any struggling with infertility and those who await test results, are in treatment and hospice care, and others in need. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Gracious God, you fill the hungry with good things. Bless the feeding ministries of this congregation and community. Guide us to share your bounty with those who hunger or live in poverty. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

SILENT PRAYER

Let us pray together.

Most High God, you have come among us at this table. By the Spirit's power, form us to be bearers of your word, sharing gifts of mercy and grace with all, through Christ Jesus, our host and guest. Amen.

CLOSE OF WORSHIP

HYMN

O Little Town of Bethlehem

#108

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns* Lani Smith
Sharon Levering – Organist



ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chancel Flowers are given by **Cherie Cataldi** in memory of my loving parents Bob and June Price. You are both greatly missed!

The Worship Aids are given by **John & Betsy Bailey** to honor and to thank Pastor Chris, the church staff & the volunteers who have given their time & dedication to keep Trinity “afloat” throughout this challenging year.

Greeting Ushers: **Dave Connor**, Hank Fox, Bob Bistline, Paula Dennes, Denise Huggins

Money Counters: Lee Bossert, Steve Shenk, Ron & Don Denlinger

Building Trustee: Pat Sensenig

Lector: Jeff Hackenberger

Happy Birthday!

Today – Sarah Paulukow

Monday – Marvin Lehman

Thursday – Hedwig Hunsicker, Jerry Richards

Friday – Penny Kilgore

Attendance for Sun., Dec. 12	8:00–33	10:30–51	TOTAL – 84
Sunday School	9		

This Week at Trinity Church

(Church Office Hours: Monday-Friday 9:00 a.m.-2 p.m.)

Today 2:00 PM—Outdoor Carol Sing

Monday 12:00 Noon – Lunch with Pastor

Friday 2:30 PM – Traditional Service with Holy Communion

6:30 PM – Family Christmas Eve Service

10:30 PM – Traditional Service with Holy Communion

Saturday 7:00 PM – Alanon

8:00 PM - AA

Sunday 8:00 AM – Eucharist

9:00 AM – Sunday School

10:30 AM – Worship Service

ADVENT DEVOTIONALS & CALENDARS: There are devotionals available for adults & children and Advent calendars for children on the table across from the church office.



LUNCH WITH THE PASTOR

Pastor Rankin is inviting members to take a break during the holiday rush and have lunch in Isenberg Hall on **Monday, December 20 from noon-1 p.m.** You bring your own lunch and enjoy the fellowship with your fellow church members. We will end our time with a brief devotional service.



We will consider streaming one of the services on our Facebook page. Look for more information in the weekly bulletins and emails from the pastor.

THE DECEMBER PARISH POST is available on both floors of the church building. The deadline for the January Parish Post is tomorrow!

CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTMAS CARD: Don't forget to sign the congregational Christmas card on the table across from the church office. There is a box for you to put a monetary donation for the Hempfield Power Packs Project. **TODAY IS THE LAST DAY!!!**

PRAYER CONCERNS: The family of Sam Minder, Jr., the family of Jerry Thompson (friend of Janet Harriger), the family of Kevin Zimmerman (brother-in-law of Gretchen & Chuck Leinbach), Ken Geib, Dolly & John Barr, Mary Witmer, Lee Bossert-Davis (son of Hillary Bossert Davis), Patrick & Mel (nephew of Marianne Gibble & his wife), the Martin family, Denny Eberly, Robert Richards (brother of Jerry Richards), Hillary Brennan (mother of John Brennan), Ann Wolf (neighbor of George & Sandy DeLong), Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, David & Ann Potts (friends of Brenda & Harry Himelwright), Pete & Nora Petrosky (friends of Dr. Cathy Hoshauer), Lynn Dull, Jill Otthofer, Paul Zirkel (son of Donna Zirkel), Ronald Himelwright (grandson of Brenda & Harry Himelwright), Barry Richards (son of Jerry & Carmen Richards), Tyler Miller (grandson of Iris DeMaio), Joan Kalbach (mother of Dr. Cathy Hoshauer), Donna Denlinger, Cathy Hoshauer, Pat Miller, Nancy Patton, Gary Reynolds (friend of Mike & Shelley Wagner), Rev. Bob & Nancy Musser, Phyllis Zimmerman, Donna Zirkel, Jose Arroyo (husband of Sandy & George DeLong's niece), Chris Rice (nephew of Diane Rice & Karen Olley), Jaimie & Aurora Commero (friends of Sarah Paulukow), Mark Zody (friend of Denise Huggins), Jim & Kathy Long (friends of Jerry & Carmen Richards), John Siebern (Bob Siever's brother-in-law), Carl Roth (Gretchen Leinbach's brother), Scott Summers, Rev. Frank Lantz, Lainie Christensen, Sandra Englert (niece of Betty Tyndall), Charles & Betty Booraem, Betty Tyndall and family, Dorothy Fasnacht, Jo Jo Richards & family (Carmen & Jerry's granddaughter-in-law), Bob & Marlyn Wible, Lily Kilgore & family, Barry Moore (Donna & Ron Denlinger's brother-in-law), Jordan Sensenig (grandson of Pat & Joan Sensenig), Judy Wisniewski (sister of Chuck Husted), Elaine Sturgis (friend of Sue Husted), Rev. Jere & Judy Chapman, Doris Leaman, Kelsey (Minnich) and Tom Burgo, Judie Bistline, Hilma Slechta, and the Bonilla-Rodriguez family (friends of Trinity Church).

CARD SHOWER: Marvin Lehman will be turning 60 on December 20.
Marvin Lehman, Jr
2239 Olde Meadow Court
East Petersburg, PA 17520

WORSHIP VOLUNTEERS: We are looking for worship volunteers at the in-person worship services:

Greeters/Ushers: To welcome worshippers at the door and to seat them in the sanctuary (10:30 a.m. service only)

Lectors: Assist with the worship service or to just read the scripture lessons at the 8:00 a.m. and/or 10:30 a.m. services.

Please contact Pastor Chris or Carol Kratz if you are willing to volunteer.

We especially are in need of greeters/ushers and lectors for the Christmas Eve services.

WORSHIP SERVICES ON DECEMBER 26: There will be two services on Sunday, December 26: 8:00 a.m. Service of Word and Sacrament; 10:30 a.m. Service of Lessons and Carols.

DEVOTIONALS: The October-December edition of *These Days* can be found on both floors of the church building.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CLASSES: Christian Education classes will be held for all ages at 9:00 a.m. Here are the locations for the classes:

1. **Children's Class** will meet in the classroom on the first floor.
2. **Middle School/High School Class** will meet in the classroom on the second floor.
3. **The Combined Adult Class** will meet in Isenberg Hall.

There will be no Koinonia at this time!

2022 CHANCEL FLOWERS AND WORSHIP AIDS SPONSORS

Contact Carol in the church office to sign-up for chancel flowers and worship aids for 2022. We recently changed florists and so the new price for flowers will be \$60. The price for worship aids will remain at \$26. Chancel Flowers dates available are: **January 9 & 16**. Worship Aids are available **January 2, 9 & 16**.

If you have any flower cans from recent chancel flowers, please return them to the church!!!

2022 BUDGETS are available on both floors of the church building. This was approved at the November 14 congregational meeting.

2021 HOLIDAY SEASON @ ZION LUTHERAN (LANDISVILLE)

**Holiday Concert at Zion
Sunday, December 19**



3:00 p.m.



*Featuring the Hempfield High School
Chamber Singers*



85 E. Brandt Blvd.
(Off Main St. in Landisville)

717-898-2911



adminzelc@comcast.net



Zion Lutheran Hempfield



**Connecting with others
Connecting with God
Connecting others with God**
All are welcome!



The Lutheran Camping Corporation
of Central Pennsylvania
Kirchenwald, Nawakwa, & The Wittel Farm

*For more information about upcoming events and to register,
go to: <https://www.lutherancamping.org/upcoming-events/>*



ADVENT/CHRISTMAS IN A BARN

December 19

7:00-8:30 p.m.

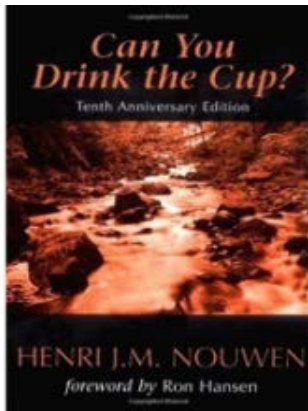
At The Wittel Farm

*Join us at the farm for our
4th annual
Advent/Christmas night.
Come gather around the
outdoor fire and have
cookies and cocoa in the
barn.*

Lights and decorations!

*For more information & to register, go to:
<https://www.lutherancamping.org/event/christmas-in-the-barn-2021/>*

MONEY BOXES: The children's Sunday School class has been learning about sharing God's gifts with others. They created boxes to collect coins to support a mission project or the work of our Christian Education ministry. Look for the boxes on the table across from the church office. Talk to Anne Rankin for more information.



JANUARY BOOK STUDY

Pastor Rankin will be leading a book study via Google Meet on January 17, 24, and 31 from 7-8 p.m. We will be reading Henri Nouwen's *Can You Drink the Cup?*

This question---one that Jesus asked his friends James and John---"has the power to crack open the hardened heart and lay bare the tendons of the spiritual life," explains world-renowned spiritual writer Henri Nouwen.

The cup, a powerful image in the human experience, a symbol used to celebrate a wide range of human endeavors, becomes for Nouwen a doorway opening on the spiritual horizon.

"Drinking our cup to the bottom is seen as the expression of the full freedom of the sons and daughters of God," he writes. His goal is to make the question Jesus posed pierce our hearts so that a personal answer can emerge from it.

Please sign-up by contacting Carol in the church office. **The deadline to order books through the church is December 27.**

PINOCHLE FELLOWSHIP: Mark your calendars now because the



Pinochle Fellowship will meet again on January 14th at 7:00 PM. There is no December meeting. Look for more information in the December Parish Post. You can respond using the electronic version that Carol already sent via e-mail

or on the website under Ministries! Speak with Karen Olley for more information!

THE CHRISTMAS TREE IN THE NORTH WINDOW is given in memory of Leon L. & Ethel Gruber by son Greg, daughter Sharon Armstrong, and granddaughter Jessica.

THE CHRISMON TREE: The Chrismons on the small tree in the stairwell were made by the late Edythe Geib. Several people have asked about the Chrismon tree. The term "Chrismon" comes from the Latin "Christi monnogramma" which simply means "monogram of Christ". Therefore, a Chrismon is a Christian symbol that represents Christ. There is a descriptive list of the various Chrismons next to the tree.

THE ADVENT CANDLES AND CHRIST CANDLE are dedicated to the Glory of God and in loving memory of Grace M. Dodson (mother) and Dolores A. Dodson (aunt) of Donna Wolf, given by the family and friends. The candle stand and wreath are in memory of S. Leona Wolf, mother of the late John Wolf.

THE PEW CANDLE HOLDERS, made by John Barr, were given by John and Dolly Barr.

THE NATIVITY SCENE ON THE FRONT LAWN was made by Mike Wagner.

THE CRECHE ON THE LOWER LEVEL BY THE ELEVEATOR was made by Mike Wagner.

Come, Follow Me Retreat



Mark your calendars for a church retreat to be held at Trinity Church February 18-20, 2022. The retreat will be led by Pastor Rankin and Rev. Dr. Dave Bushnell, Pastor Emeritus of Hamilton Park U.C.C. and author of the retreat.

Here is what Dr. Bushnell says about the retreat:

The Come Follow Me retreat seeks to invite people to experience being the body of Christ in our own time and place. This corporate identity, this “we”, can open us up to others, even to all creation. It invites us to experience others as I/Thou relationships (to use the Jewish scholar Martin Buber’s language).

In order to experience being the body of Christ today, the Come Follow Me retreat uses worship as its basic paradigm. The retreat follows the essential elements of worship from being called, to confession, then moving on to a unique experience of Jesus Christ, exploring how Jesus’ spirituality can help shape our own. The retreat includes a time of sharing deeply with one another remembering the waters of baptism. Then, after seeing the church as a community of abundant Christian practices, we will work to envision what our incarnational ministry will be like. Finally, we are sent out into the world, into “the long emergency” with solid “next steps” to follow.

Contact the church office to register for this retreat!!!

CHURCH COVENANT IN THE MIDST OF THE PANDEMIC

As an individual who attends Trinity United Church of Christ I covenant to work with my fellow church members, family and friends to keep our community safe and healthy.

I covenant to. . .

Wear a face mask as a symbol of love and care for others.

Sit six feet apart from others, leaving room for God to work in the in-between spaces.

Clean up after myself in the spaces I use because germs are everywhere I go too!

Honor and respect the sacredness of each person in this space and to stay home if I don't feel well or have been around someone who is waiting the results of a COVID test, knowing God is with us wherever we are, whether inside or outside the walls of the church.

Work together with my church family in creating a safe and healthy space to gather for worship, fellowship, or church activities as one body, united in God's love.

Acknowledge the hard work ahead, and the commitment to care for one another.

Together, we as the church, covenant to care and love one another in new and different ways as we:

- Share God's love with our community
- Serve God's children
- Bring healing and wholeness to those in need
- Share the Gospel in liturgy, music and study

ADVENT ENVELOPES: The Board of Deacons decided to give all contributions from the Advent Envelope to the U.C.C. Christmas Fund. We will learn more about the Christmas Fund next week. Last year we sent \$2,467 to the Christmas Fund. We were the third highest congregation in Penn Central Conference.



John and Anne McKinstry—“Veterans of the Cross”

In the United Church of Christ, through the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, we take care to express our love and gratitude for our retired ministers. One of the ways we do that is through the Annuitant Visitors' Program, which coordinates visits by often younger retired UCC clergy to older retired ministers (annuitants) across the country. The purpose of these visits is to check in, see how they're doing, find out if they have any needs that can be addressed, and thank them for their “years of service to a grateful church.”

One such visitor, now retired, is the Rev. Richard L. (Rick) Floyd, of Pittsfield, MA, who wrote of a visit to the Rev. John and Anne McKinstry of Great Barrington, MA, who are, in Rick's words: “indeed Veterans of the Cross, having served small country congregations throughout their ministry (and they really did share the ministry as ‘old school’ minister and spouse).”

John McKinstry's last pastorate ended with an unfortunate forced resignation from a church that was leaving the United Church of Christ. This left John and Anne—close to retirement age—with neither home nor equity, having lived in parsonages their entire adult lives.

That was over 20 years ago. Since then, the McKinstry's have been able to manage with generosity from friends and with supplements and gifts from the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance through the Christmas Fund. John teaches guitar and dulcimer; Anne writes hymns (two of her hymns are in *The New Century Hymnal*, which can be found in UCC pews across the country).

“I was proud that our church, through the Christmas Fund, could help these lovely people in retirement,” Rick says. “I think it meant a lot to them that I could hear their story. When I ‘thanked them for their years of service from a grateful church,’ I thought they were going to cry.”

In 2020, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 276 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,180,187)
- Health benefits supplementation for 89 retired clergy and lay employees (\$274,008)
- Emergency grants for 96 individuals and families (\$214,649)
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 504 retired clergy and lay employees (\$252,000)

The Christmas Fund

For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



“God is still speaking . . . to me!”

Every year, the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance receives dozens of letters, cards, emails, and phone calls saying “thank you” for much-needed financial assistance funded by your gifts to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross.

Donations of any amount to the Christmas Fund truly do bring “great joy” to so many people, year after year. The assistance and connection provided by your gifts lets these servants of the church know that they are not forgotten. Here are excerpts from just a few of the notes of appreciation we have received:

From a retired pastor in Chicago . . .

I do not have words adequate to express my appreciation for the Christmas gift from the Christmas Fund. My prayer is that those who contributed to make this gift possible experience God’s manifold blessings.

From a retired pastor who received assistance to purchase hearing aids . . .

Thank you for the gift from the church. I had no idea such help was available, especially to that extent. It gladdens my heart to know the church still cares. Sometimes, we don’t always get that affirmation while in the midst of doing ministry. But, God is still speaking . . . to me. Thank you so much!

From a pastor’s spouse in North Carolina . . .

My husband and I thank you so very much for the ministerial assistance that was provided for us. It was so helpful and took a lot of stress from us, so we could concentrate on my husband’s medical care and treatments. We never thought we would need ministerial assistance, but believe me, we are thankful for our national church and all those who give.

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The Christmas Fund

For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

DECEMBER 19, 2021

(C)

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

FIRST LESSON. Micah 5:2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

SECOND LESSON. Hebrews 10:5-10

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God' (in the scroll of the book it is written of me)." When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

GOSPEL. Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.")

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