

Susi Jacobsen tells the story of how she went to her 30th high school reunion in San Bernardino and ran into a man she had once dated. He had been a brilliant, but also somewhat troubled, youth. Now, 30 years later, he was clean and sober and working as a chef. Susi had become an elementary school teacher. They were both divorced, and each had two children.

By the time Susi married Stephen Jacobsen, he had developed a strong interest in religion that before long blossomed into a calling to ministry. Stephen's theological education was interrupted when Susi became ill enough to require a strict regimen of bed rest for about a year. He took a leave of absence to care for her. When Susi's condition improved, he returned to school. His first call after ordination was to a small, at-risk church in Southern California. Although challenging, soon there were children coming to services, and Stephen started a youth ministry. The church was very happy with its new minister.

Unfortunately, the church's financial difficulties meant that Stephen eventually had to seek work elsewhere. His chef's skills proved indispensable; he found a job running a nearby hospital's cafeteria and food services. In three months, he would have badly-needed health benefits.

A month later, Susi went out to run errands while Stephen stayed home. When she returned, the house seemed too still. Stephen had passed away. Susi's grief was compounded by financial hardship. Her medical condition did not allow her to work full-time, and since Stephen had still been in his initial probationary period at work, there was no health insurance coverage at the time of his death.

Susi misses Stephen and still faces daunting obstacles. Her teaching pension dwindles yearly. She volunteers with Youth Hope, a project that mirrors a dream Stephen had of a ranch for troubled kids. Susi is grateful for the monthly Ministerial Assistance support she receives. Recently, she sent a note in response to an increase in her small monthly grant. "When I got the renewal reply in the mail I felt a little reluctant to open it and afraid to read past the first line. I felt incredible when I read past the first paragraph...It was wonderful to be approved for a grant, but an increase was something I never expected. It reminds me that there are people who care and not just about me, but all others. I would say to people that your donation [to the Christmas Fund] is an investment in God's work."



The Second Sunday of Advent
December 4, 2011

Christmas Fund Gifts Provided...

The generous gifts of UCC congregations and individuals to the Christmas Fund enabled the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance program to provide some form of Ministerial Assistance to approximately 1,600 persons over the past year:

- Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks were sent to approximately 900 persons in **2010**. Of those who received checks, 20 are over 100 years of age. The oldest person is 107. One person has received Christmas checks continuously since 1976. The 900 gifts total \$270,000.
- Monthly pension supplementation is being provided to 434 persons. These gifts total \$103,401 per month. A significant part of the annual total of \$1,234,344 comes from the Christmas Fund. (**2011 Data**)
- Quarterly health premium supplementation is being provided to 267 families, totaling \$160,608 per quarter. All of the funding for health premium supplementation is derived from the Christmas Fund. (**2011 Data**)
- Emergency Grants totaling \$38,163.35 were provided to 24 individuals and families from January 1 through July 31, 2011.

These statistics reflect annualized projections as of July 31, 2011. The numbers of persons receiving assistance and the totals of assistance payments fluctuate on a monthly basis.