

Advent I – Hope



Rev. Louise Marks*

The Rev. Louise Marks pastors a United Church of Christ congregation on the eastern seaboard, while her husband Paul is a small businessman, designing and installing water gardens. During Advent 2015, Paul hadn't been feeling well, but was able to carry on his daily routine. Eventually he consulted his physician, who recommended a catheterization procedure. While Paul was still lying in the exam room, "the doctor pulled me in and said, 'we have to take him right in to emergency surgery for a quadruple bypass.' It was quite shocking to be told that my husband would be undergoing emergency surgery for a life-threatening medical condition of which we were unaware." Thankfully, the surgery was fully successful, and Paul has since recovered and resumed the work he loves with his typical energy and enthusiasm.

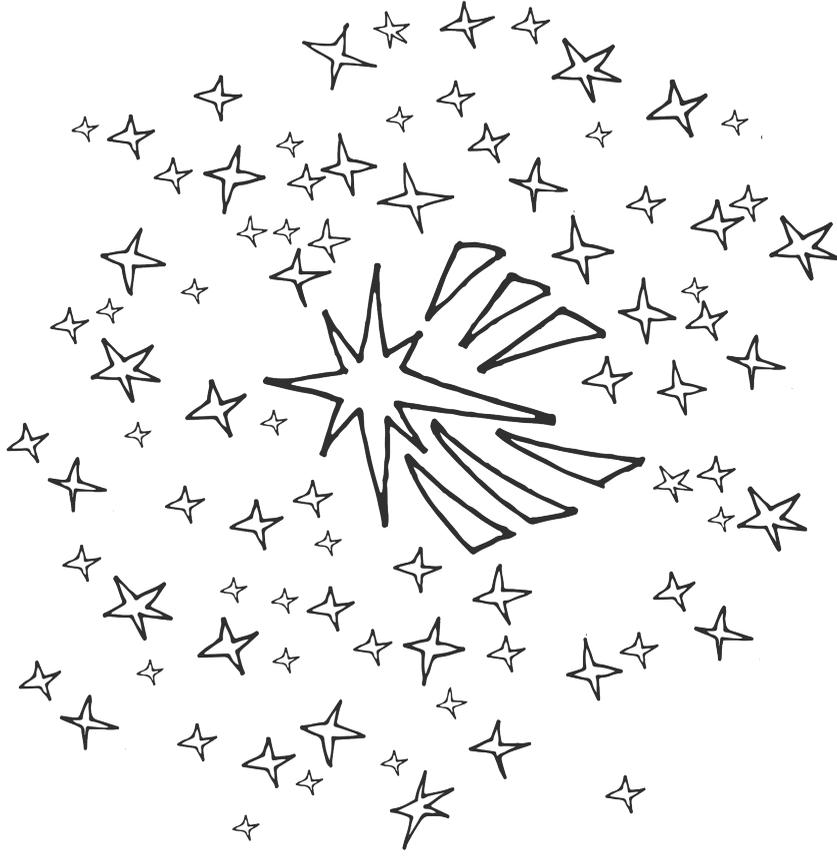
But, at the time, explains Louise, "Not only were we unprepared for the diagnosis and surgery, we were unprepared for the financial burden of the medical bills and lost wages." As a small businessman, Paul had a payroll to meet, but no money was coming in. At the suggestion of a Conference staff person, Louise reached out to the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance for help. Louise and Paul received an emergency grant, which they used to pay their mortgage, enabling them to "squeak through" until their financial situation improved. "Otherwise, the financial transition into January would have been extremely challenging."

Louise's gratitude for her husband's healing "is all the more strengthened by the support we received through the Christmas Fund. It has blessed us immeasurably, as has the knowledge that we have the support and caring of the wider United Church of Christ. It means more than you can ever know."

*a pseudonym

★ THE CHRISTMAS FUND

for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund



In 2016, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled

- Small pension supplementation for 448 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,507,787)
- Health benefits supplementation for 216 retired clergy and lay employees (\$487,338)
- Emergency grants for 50 individuals and families (\$90,927)
- Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to 503 retired clergy and lay employees (\$233,800)