

MINUTE FOR MISSION

CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING HELPS ELDERLY COUPLE “FEEL THE ARMS OF THE CHURCH AROUND US.

I want to tell you a love story — a love story between Ralph and Mary Hamburger that began at a Presbyterian church when Ralph introduced himself to Mary after hearing her play the piano. Today, after 65 years of marriage, the love story continues at a Presbyterian retirement home.

Ralph, a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) minister since 1960, and Mary, his devoted partner, are able to live in dignity because of your gifts to the Christmas Joy Offering. The couple spent several years together in an independent living facility; however, Mary’s deteriorating health demanded that she move to the skilled-nursing unit. That move nearly depleted the couple’s savings.

Fortunately, gifts to the Christmas Joy Offering enable Ralph and Mary to continue living together in the skilled-nursing unit. Ralph says he “feels the arms of the church around us making our lives more comfortable at the end.”

These two people from diverse backgrounds share their love for one another and a devotion to their Christian faith. Ralph, a member of the Dutch resistance during World War II, spent the war years hiding Jews from the Nazi occupiers. At the war’s end, Ralph made his home in California where his U.S. sponsors lived and found his way to Hollywood Presbyterian Church, where he felt a call to ministry.

Mary, a native of Kentucky’s Appalachian region, was part of the large postwar migration to California, where she became involved in the Hollywood church’s thriving young adult ministries. Ralph and Mary fell in love, married, and served the church at home and abroad, largely behind the Iron Curtain. While supporting Ralph in his ministry, Mary managed their home and cared for their daughter Rachel, who is now a PC(USA) pastor.

“I am just an average, ordinary, C+ person who became a pastor,” Ralph says. However, he adds that “God touched me, tutored me, and opened doors for me.” Ralph still enjoys talking with Mary about their life together, though her dementia makes their conversations different these days. He is grateful that his wife is getting good care, and he is thankful for gifts that are given with love to the Christmas Joy Offering. “It’s wonderful that the church does not forget those who worked in Presbyterian ministries at home and abroad,” he says.

This is a love story. Not just about Ralph and Mary’s love for each other, but also about God’s love and the love we show with our gifts of time, talent, and treasure. Half of the Christmas Joy Offering goes to the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions to help current and past church workers and their families who are in financial need. The other half supports future leaders who attend Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color.

Let us pray,

*Generous God, you are the giver of so
many good gifts, from those leaders who inspire through faithful witness,
to the time, talent, and treasure we have to share, and we are grateful.*

*May our gifts honor the generosity you show
and respond to the grace you offer in Jesus Christ, the perfect gift.*

Amen.