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**Minute for Mission**

**Living the Call to Connect**

As a lifelong advocate of the connectional nature of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Rev. Ben Franklin Whitfield never expected that this denominational doctrine would one day prove indispensable to him at his own time of greatest need.

Ben, honorably retired since 2007 in [the Presbytery](https://ourpresbytery.org/) of Wabash Valley, suffered a stroke in January 2021. After a hospital stay followed by a period of rehabilitation, he was released into the care of his loving wife, Helen, and allowed to return home.

Facing financial hardships after a lifetime in ministry serving primarily rural congregations with limited budgets, the Whitfields received support from the [Assistance Program](https://pensions.org/search?query=assistance+program%27) of the [Board of Pensions](https://www.pensions.org/), part of our Presbyterian connectional system. The Assistance Program provides need-based grants to help active and retired plan members and their families in times of financial crisis. The Whitfields received immediate help from an Emergency Assistance grant and long-term help from a monthly Housing Supplement for Retirees receiving Home Health Care.

The support the Whitfields receive is made possible, in part, by the [Christmas Joy Offering](https://specialofferings.pcusa.org/offering/christmas-joy/), a Presbyterian tradition since the 1930s, which distributes gifts equally to the [Assistance Program](https://www.pensions.org/your-path-to-wholeness/assistance-program) of the Board of Pensions and to [Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color](https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/racial-equity-womens-intercultural-ministries/leadership-development-leaders-color/schools-colleges-equipping-communities-of-color/).

Ben learned from an early age that the PC(USA) brings people together. During his seminary years, the Church connected Ben with the burgeoning civil rights movement in 1960s Chicago.

“Because the Presbyterian Church wanted to do something to be more relevant in the inner city,” he said, “they created this program where they would connect college students to come on board with churches in primarily Black communities. White and Black people were called to work together in these communities to develop the young people’s talents and skills.”

It was one of those very connections that brought the former Helen Simms, now his wife of 54 years, into his life. Already pioneers in the struggle for social justice as an interracial couple in the ’60s and raising four daughters, the Whitfields became accustomed to facing challenges that taught them enduring life lessons about gratitude.

As he recovers, Ben — who had earlier served as a teacher in the Chicago Public Schools — is currently working toward regaining enough strength to start tutoring out of their home.

“I admire Ben tremendously,” said Lucas McCool, Assistance Program operations manager. “I’m grateful that our Assistance Program, which embodies our connectional Church at its best, was there for him and Helen at such a critical time in their lives.”

Through our gifts to the Christmas Joy Offering, we honor and celebrate leaders — retired pastors, church workers and their families — who faithfully guided and led us but now find themselves in critical financial need because of changing health situations or emergency circumstances. Our gifts restore hope and stability. Please give whatever you can; for when we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

***Let us pray ~***

*Our God, our help in ages past, present and future, be our guide, our protector and our sustainer through all the changes, challenges and victories of our lives so that we may always give glory to you and serve you through them all.* **Amen**.