

DEAR SWEETWATER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH FAMILY:

As I'm writing this, I realized we are now inside of 3 months until Christmas morning! Maybe that means we are close to the end of 2020 and closer to the end of the many struggles this year has brought. We can always hope, right?

Most of you know, for the last 17 years, our congregation has participated in a program called Santa's Helper. This program supplies Christmas presents to disadvantaged children here in Monroe County (and for our church specifically here in Sweetwater) with a Christmas that would otherwise be impossible for the adults in their lives to provide. This effort is headed by our local United Way and in conjunction with our school systems, local churches, businesses, and other civic organizations.

The applicants are carefully vetted and income levels are verified to make sure this assistance goes to the most deserving families. It is not even necessary to say that this year, needs will be much greater, and funds for the program will be more severely limited.

In past years our congregation has been an invaluable contributor to this program by providing gifts for at least 70-80 or more children's Christmas. In many cases, this is the only gifts they will receive. **SO** many of you have gone over and above to provide a wonderful Christmas morning to these children with clothing, toys, etc .

Our normal procedure has been to make available paper angels with a specific child's needs and wants listed. Individuals would then shop for this child and return these gifts to the church by early December to be packaged and handed out to families before Christmas. This year, with COVID-19 ramifications, we cannot hand out paper in our church so we need to rethink how we can be involved with this program.

Another concern is that many in our congregation may be unable or uncomfortable going into stores to do the needed shopping. Our solution at this point is to put together a small group of people who would be willing to do the actual shopping. What we most need from the congregation are the funds to shop with!

Our request to you is, if you have participated in this program before or would be willing to this year, would you please consider a monetary contribution? **ANY** amount given will be a tremendous help toward our goal. We estimate in the past, most folks have spent an average of \$50 to \$100 per child. If you would be willing to sponsor the same number of children you have shopped for in the past that would be awesome!

Since this cause is not listed in our online giving, any donations would need to be placed in the Sunday offering or mailed/dropped off at the church office with "Santa's Helper" listed in the memo line or on the envelope. These amounts will be accounted for on your yearly church giving statement. Please, please do not circumvent your regular offerings to our church for this effort! This is an 'above and beyond' community outreach. We hope to have funds in hand and start shopping by Nov. 1!

Thanks in Advance!

Beggy & Robert Hickey

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