



Herald of Good TIDINGS

“Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’” **Isaiah 40:9**

FROM THE PASTOR

Is the future coming fast enough? Probably not. As I write this, it is sunny and in the 50's. The second warm sunny weekend of the spring. A couple days ago the president and governor announced good news about the epidemic.

The president said he planned on a pretty normal 4th of July this year. The governor announced the schedule for all remaining adults to get the vaccine, The light at the end of the tunnel is brighter, and the light is NOT an oncoming train.

The next day I got scheduled for my first shot. Things are looking up. I should be happy, or at least feel optimistic. But on Saturday I was in a bit of a funk.

We should all be happy. I should be happy. Oops, I used a bad word, “should.” “We *should* feel happy” Not a good idea. We can only feel how we feel. We have less control over how we feel, than what we do. So try not to “should” yourself to death.

We are only human. My favorite quote about being human comes from Job 14:

“Mortals, born of woman,
are of few days and full of trouble.
They spring up like flowers and wither away;
like fleeting shadows, they do not endure.”

We should be gentle with ourselves. We can only do so much and no more. We do not have endless patience, strength, or endurance. We need to rest. We need a break. We need to be sad from time to time.

After the good news, little changed. The changes are still coming. We have to live into the change. Patience is called for. But I want the future to come faster.

But who has patience left? Is yours all used up? I hope not. But if it is, do what is needed to refill your tank. I know Covid has been deadly to our older people. It has been hard on restaurant people and store clerks. It has been exhausting for parents and lonely for kids. We have all given something. Many have given all. We can think we should be stronger because we had a better time of it. But life does not work that way.

It can be hard to be human. Our days are few but God loves us. As the Psalmist wrote,

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them? You have
made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.”

Life is God's wish for us. But life can be hard. It can also be filled with joy. I look forward to singing again. I look forward to having coffee after worship; that will be a joy. But only if it is safe to do so.

Paul writes, “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.”

Let us be open to doing what is best for the most vulnerable, with the understanding that at times we might be vulnerable and need the consideration and help of others.

The future will soon be with us.

God Bless,

Pastor Brian

~ All Are Welcome ~

Maundy Thursday Service will be held April 1st at 7 p.m.

Good Friday is April 2nd ~ The church sanctuary will be open from noon until 3 p.m. for one's own personal time of prayer and reflection.
Note: there will be no community Good Friday service this year.

Easter Sunday is April 4th ~ with our Sunrise Service at 6 a.m. at Hillside Cemetery and ONE church worship service at 10 a.m.



Happy Birthday to:Ernie Smith - April 9thHaydn McPherson - April 10th**Happy Anniversary to:**Tricia & Reno Gervasi who will celebrate their special day on April 26th.

Recently the Board of Deacons sent out a survey to the church community asking for some feedback on our church service. I would like to express the Deacons' and my sincere appreciation for the great response we received. We sent out 107 surveys and received 53 responses. Currently we are digesting the information and will be working to address any concerns that have arisen.

If you have not had the chance yet to respond, or would rather talk in person, please reach out to me at 508-450-8747 or andrew.sharr@gmail.com.

Thanks,
Andy Sharr

In March, visitors to the church's food pantry were blessed to receive a \$50 gift card to Price Chopper (generously donated by a church member). Below are two thank you notes that were sent in response to the gift cards and the church's ongoing generosity.



Just wanted to take a minute and thank you all at the First Congregational Church. What a wonderful surprise was waiting for us in our gift card amount. Your extremely generous donation is sure to help a lot, especially for all the necessary things that we need and usually have to do without, like paper towels and toilet paper. I've been buying one at a time of those things. How wonderful to go and get a six pack of paper towels!

I also had enough to stock up on things you use every day like butter, milk, eggs (I bought 2 dozen!) You guys at First Congregational are wonderful. God bless you all for all the hard work you do. Your pantry has so much variety and is so well run. Last time I even got cleaning supplies to stave off COVID. Last month I was surprised to find soap and coffee.

Thank you again. You are really angels and you do more to raise hope and to help us smile.

Love, Jean L.

(Editor's note: Jean is a sweet elderly woman who frequents the pantry monthly. She lost her husband several years ago and is always so appreciative of the items she's able to pick up at the church pantry to help her through each month.)

Thank you to all who donated toward the \$50 Easter gift card. This was a very nice gesture and very much appreciated.

Thank you, Shirley C.

(Editor's note: Shirley is a very petite, soft spoken, elderly woman who relies on the pantry monthly. She was so excited about the \$50 gift card because of its timeliness. She shared that her refrigerator had just broken down and she lost all of her perishable items.)

We'd like to express our heartfelt appreciation to Michele Schillinger for all her hard work in arranging for the beautiful display of flowers each year on Easter Sunday. There is much organizing that goes on behind the scenes to accomplish this . . . from contacting the supplier for pricing, tallying orders and rechecking for accuracy, arranging for the delivery, to unloading, labeling, and displaying the plants.

"Easter is a time when God turned the inevitability of death into the invincibility of life."
- Craig D. Lounsbrough

John 11:25-26: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'"



April is Alcohol Awareness Month, Irritable Bowel Syndrome Month, National Autism Awareness Month, National Child Abuse Prevention Month, National Donate Life Month, National Distracted Driving Awareness Month, and Oral Cancer Awareness Month.

The Auburn Pharmacy has not been able to get the vaccine for Covid-19. He offered us a great deal, and now he feels that he has disappointed us. He is willing and able to provide, but he's unable to help. There are more sites open to get the vaccine. If anyone needs help, you can call me or, if you get an appointment and need a ride, call me, 508-612-4521. Even after getting the vaccine, we still have to wear our masks, over the nose and mouth!!!!

Spring is here! Hopefully, with the warmer weather, we will be able to get outside more and our days will be better. It's been depressing with the cold and not being able to get together. When we start the lawn chair get together, please consider joining. I know it helped me to see some of my church family.

I just attended my Parish Nurse Seminar via webcam instead of 2 nights at the Franciscan Monastery in Kennebunk, Maine. Not quite the same, but it is what it is.

In the meantime, stay well, stay safe!

God Bless,
Deb Pranaitis, Parish Nurse, cell: 508-612-4521

APRIL SERMONS

- 4/4 **EASTER SUNDAY**
6 a.m. SUNRISE SERVICE AT HILLSIDE CEMETERY:
 "The Most Popular Hymn, *In the Garden*"
10 a.m. CHURCH SERVICE: "God Shows No Partiality"
- 4/11 "Jesus Is More Than 'Just' a Man"
- 4/18 "The World Did Not Know Him"
- 4/25 "We Know Love by This"



The Deacons would like to remind you about the Pearl B. Morrill Trust Fund. This trust was set up by Pearl Morrill for the benefit of the elderly members of the First Congregational Church of Auburn. The Trust has helped several members of the Church with meeting a variety of financial needs. Some things you should know about the Trust:

The Trust is open to elderly members of the Church. We have agreed that “elderly” is defined as age 55 and older.

The administrators of the Trust are the Board of Deacons and the Pastor.

The Pastor may have sole discretion of requests for funds up to \$500. The Pastor and Board of Deacons vote on requests over the \$500 amount.

Requests can be initiated by any Church member (do not need to be 55 or older) but must be for the benefit of elderly members of the Church. Requests can be for any number of needs such as financial hardships, medical bills, projects that benefit the elderly, etc.

The Prudential Committee is responsible for investing funds regarding the Trust. Some of these investments are non-taxable (municipal bonds) and some are taxable.

The Pastor and Board of Deacons are responsible for filing taxes and court documentation. To this end we have secured the services of an accountant to help us in filing taxes.

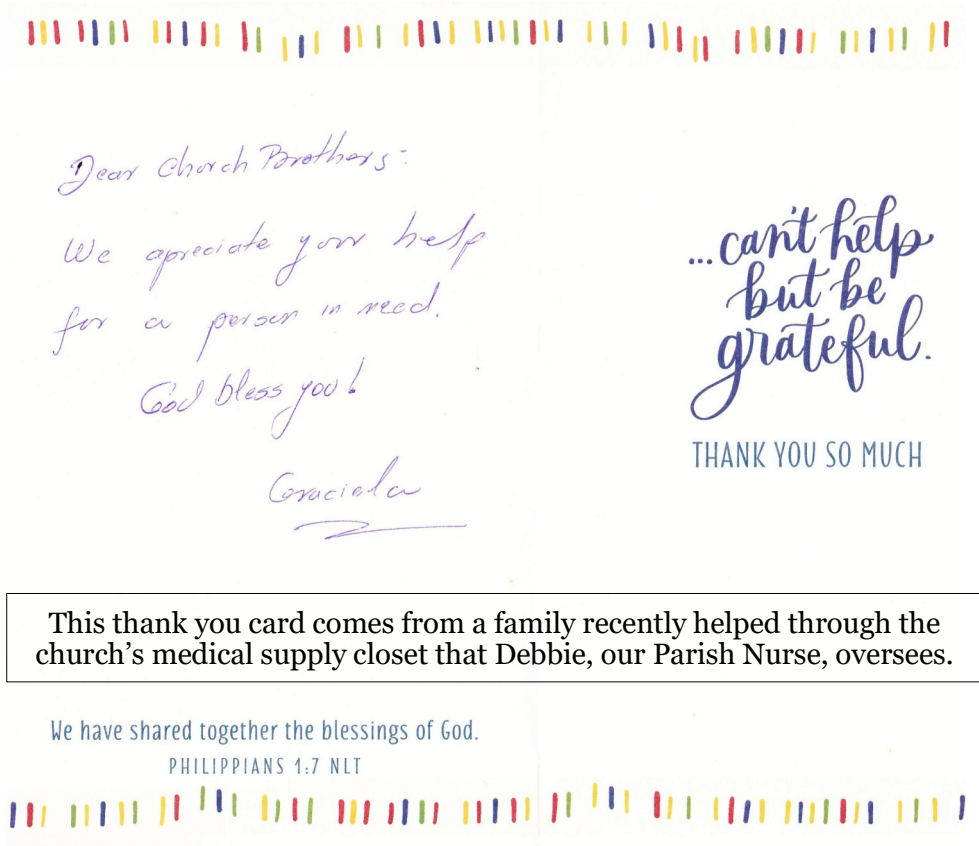
Administrative fees (Accounting / Court / Legal) and taxes are paid for out of the Pearl Morrill Trust itself with no impact to the Church’s general budget.

If you have any questions regarding the operation of the trust itself, please feel free to contact Pastor Brian, one of the Deacons, or one of the Prudential Committee members.

Pastor Brian and the Deacons continue to welcome requests and ideas for usage of this generous trust and would love to see it put to good use.

The Board of Deacons

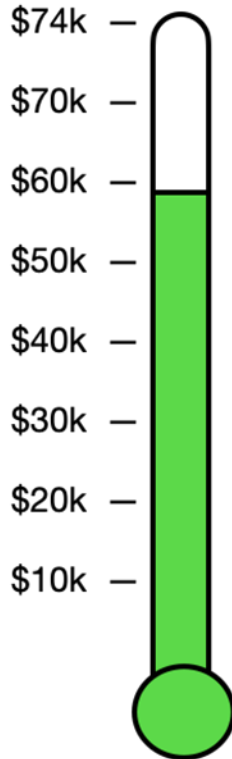
Please note: request forms are available by contacting the church office, 508-832-2845, or email secretary@auburnfirstucc.org. Completed forms should be returned to the attention of the Board of Deacons.



First Congregational Church Boiler Fund

Pledge Goal: **\$74,137**

Pledge Total: **\$58,669**
79% of goal



Thank you, once again, to all who have pledged to the Capital Campaign so far. As mentioned previously, we are including in the monthly *Tidings* and weekly bulletins a moving thermometer to show our progress on this campaign. We are now looking for approximately \$15,000 to help return the borrowed funds to the church's invested funds.

Remember, you may pledge over the 3 year plan*, make a one time donation, or donate from your own invested funds to this project.

Thank you,
The Board of Trustees

* Please complete the pledge portion below if you would like to pledge over the 3 year plan.

Please complete this pledge form and return as soon as possible to church address below.

I answer the Trustees' call to support financially the New Boiler Project.

As part of my response, I will give \$_____ as my (circle one)

Weekly / Monthly / Quarterly / Annual contribution

for a total of \$_____ during 2021 through 2023.

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please return to: First Congregational Church, 128 Central St., Auburn, MA 01501

From Here We Grow Preschool



The weather is warming up, and we are so happy to be getting back outside with the children. We are so fortunate to have access to the vestry all winter long; not many schools in our area have an indoor playground like we do, but we are ready to go outside.

April looks like it is bringing some more normalcy to our lives. The children in public schools are heading back to in-person learning and more and more people are getting vaccinated. We are hoping this means we can return to having our families back in the building in September; we miss having special visitors in the classrooms.

This month we are looking forward to Neil Primeaux coming in, once again, to do our school pictures. He has been doing photos for the school almost since we opened.

Here We Grow will be closed on Friday, April 2nd, for Good Friday. We will also be closed the week of April 19-23 for vacation.

We still have availability in our 3-year-old classes and our afternoon 4-year-old classes for the 2021-2022 school year. If you know anyone looking for a great preschool program, please send them our way. Children can start school at 2.9 years old and do not need to be potty trained. We are still offering tours for families after 3:00 during the week and on weekends.

Thank you to everyone who purchased tickets for the calendar giveaway. We will begin drawing winners on April 1st. - Good luck to all!

Cristi Corey, **Here We Grow** Preschool Director

Gotsneakers?

Thank you to all who have already donated to the Gotsneakers? fundraiser. For those who may not have heard, a sneaker recycling organization, Gotsneakers?, will pay **Here We Grow** for their donations of new and used wearable, reusable athletic sneakers and cleats. Acceptable items include: casual sneakers, walking sneakers, running sneakers, basketball sneakers, skateboard sneakers, sports cleats (rubber soccer and baseball ONLY; non-metal bottom cleats), and canvas sneakers (ONLY Converse All-Star brand canvas sneakers are accepted). Please NO baby/toddler footwear.

Look for a collection box in fellowship hall or drop donations off to the church office. Thank you!

2021 COMMITTEE NOMINEES WANTED

At this time, vacancies still remain on the Board of Deacons, the Board of Trustees, and the Board of Ed. If you are a church member and are interested in joining one or more of these boards, please contact one of the Nominating Committee members, Sue MacPhee, Judi Taft, or Sheila Skog, at: Sue, 508-864-2454, or email her at susiemac2002@gmail.com; Judi, 508-341-4530, or jtaft01527@aol.com; and Sheila, 508-832-5649, or sheilaskog@gmail.com.

The Nominating Committee is also looking for a church member to assume the role of Church Clerk. Sheila Skog is currently serving as Acting Clerk. Clerk duties, as outlined in the Church bylaws, are listed below.

The Clerk shall take the minutes and keep the records of the Business Meetings of the Church, and the Church Council. The Clerk, with the assistance of the Church Secretary, shall keep a record with addresses of the members of the Church, dates and modes of their reception and removal, and a record of Baptisms, marriages, and deaths. The Clerk shall issue letters of transfer voted by the Church Council, preserve on file written official reports, give notice of all meetings when necessary, prepare all correspondence not otherwise provided for, and perform other duties as needed to facilitate maintaining the records of the Church.

Once again, please contact Sue MacPhee, Judi Taft, or Sheila Skog for more information on the Clerk position and/or committee/board openings at: Sue, 508-864-2454, or email her at susiemac2002@gmail.com; Judi, 508-341-4530, or jtaft01527@aol.com; and Sheila, 508-832-5649, or sheilaskog@gmail.com. Thank you!

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Happy Easter! I pray that while you read this, we are fully enveloped in spring weather and the yards are full of spring flowers.



I am happy to announce that starting April 18th we will begin to hold outdoor Sunday school on the lawn. The Board of Ed. and I met and decided that we will have crafts/games each Sunday and our focus will be on getting the kids together and just having some fun. In the event the weather is bad, we will cancel for the week.

June 6 will be Children's Sunday. This year, instead of having our usual cookout, we are asking families to bring a picnic lunch for their family, and we can all share time together in fellowship on the lawn.

I hope you are all well and we will be back together soon.

Jean McPherson, Director of Religious Education

From the Stewardship Committee:

We would like to thank everyone who made a pledge or donation to the church for 2021. We are blessed to have such a caring and giving church family.

This has been a challenging time for all of us. It is amazing how all of the committees had to think outside the box for the good of the church.

As more and more people get vaccinated, we are praying we will be able to do more in person meetings, and worshipping in church together.

Consecration Sunday will be on October 24th this year (never too early to mark it on our calendars).

Our theme this year is:

"Make a Difference, Share our Faith, Secure our Future "

Blessings,

Your Stewardship Committee: Nan Johnson, Ron Klaucke, Marilyn Kulesa, Ellie Lowell, Debbie Mahlert, and Linda Mahlert

I Corinthians 4:1-2

Dear Lord, You have given us the responsibility of being stewards for Your Kingdom here on earth. We pray that we will work purposefully under the direction of your Holy Spirit. So thank you for entrusting us with the task of being stewards, and we do not take it lightly. I pray that we will be good stewards of the mysteries of God and, in all things, we will be found faithful. Amen

SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS

We have several scholarships we would like to award to church members seeking to continue their education. Specifically, there are two scholarships dedicated to those studying within the medical field, and one scholarship gives preference to those who are musically inclined and, we also have several unrestricted scholarships.

Please contact Denise in the church office at 508-832-2845 or email secretary@auburnfirstucc.org to request an application. **APPLICATIONS ARE DUE BY APRIL 15TH.**

**COMMUNITY YARD SALE—PLANT SALE!!!
SATURDAY, JUNE 12TH ~ 8 A.M. TO 2 P.M. ~ RAIN OR SHINE**



Do you have an accumulation of things that are just too good to throw away, but you no longer need? Don't have enough to hold your own yard sale? Store those items and plan to join us on the Church lawn for **OUR COMMUNITY YARD SALE on June 12th!** As we've done in the past, we will rent spaces and tables, plus we'll do all the advertising and remember, our prime location can't be beat! We will also have a church table and will be accepting donations. Please **NO** computer equipment, TV's, clothing, or VCR tapes. Thank you.

Also, when separating perennials in your gardens, please keep the plant sale in mind and pot up a few to donate. The plants are a huge part of the church's profits.

Since we've all been cooped up for so long, we are expecting a large turnout. So, please mark your calendars and plan to support this church fundraiser by renting a space or volunteering to help at the yard sale - plant sale.

SPACES ARE \$20 FOR CHURCH MEMBERS & \$25 FOR NON-MEMBERS.

TABLES ARE AVAILABLE TO RENT FOR \$5 EACH.

Call Cindy Dube at 508-832-6646 or the church office, 508-832-2845, to reserve your spot!

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**First Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ
128 Central St., Auburn MA 01501**

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or PastorBrian@auburnfirstucc.org

*God's church in Auburn Center
doing Christ's work in the world.*

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OR CURRENT RESIDENT