



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:

Patron Saint

One of my favorite things to read was the old “Ripley’s Believe It or Not.” I especially liked the stories of the saints. Almost all stories of the saints are gnarly and metal to the extreme. I mean they involve fighting lions, being roasted alive, and saying to your torturer, “Turn me over, I am done on this side.”

When I joined the Army, I became an Artillery Officer. In early December the artillery branch celebrates our patron saint, Saint Barbara. Saint Barbara is venerated by Catholics who face the danger of sudden and violent death at work. She is invoked against thunder and lightning and all accidents arising from explosions of gunpowder. She became the patron saint of artillerymen, armorers, military engineers, gunsmiths, and anyone else who worked with cannons or explosives.

The story goes:

“Barbara, the daughter of a rich pagan named Dioscorus, was carefully guarded by her father who kept her locked up in a tower in order to preserve her from the outside world. Having secretly become a Christian, she rejected an offer of marriage that she received through her father.

Before going on a journey, her father commanded that a private bath-house be erected for her use near her dwelling. During his absence, Barbara had three windows put in it, as a symbol of the Holy Trinity, instead of the two originally intended.

When her father returned, she acknowledged herself to be a Christian.

Continued on page 3

“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.”

Matthew 2:2, ESV

*December 4th
2nd Sunday in Advent
Communion Sunday with
Deacons’ offering

*December 11th
3rd Sunday in Advent

*December 18th
4th Sunday in Advent
CANTATA SUNDAY

December 24th
Christmas Eve —
5 p.m. Family Service
Christmas Pageant

9 p.m. Candlelight
Communion Service

December 25th
Christmas Day Sunday
Service at 10 a.m.

All Are Welcome

* Sunday Services begin at 10 a.m.

DECEMBER Birthdays

Nathan Minor	~	Dec. 4th
Alyssa Gervasi	~	Dec. 15th
Rebecca McPherson	~	Dec. 28th
Lori-Ann Stockhaus	~	Dec. 28th

December Sermon Topics:

- Dec. 4 2nd Sun. in Advent
"There Is No Peace on Earth"
- Dec. 11 3rd Sunday in Advent
"Joy"
- Dec. 18 4th Sunday in Advent
Christmas Cantata
- Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Services:
5PM Family Service with Christmas Pageant
9PM Candlelight Communion Service
"Did Caesar Matter to Jesus, Mary and Joseph?"
- Dec. 25 Christmas Day 10 a.m. Service
"Baby Jesus"



made of fresh greens will, once again, be available for you to purchase **DURING COFFEE HOUR ON DECEMBER 11th** and, if any remain, on Dec. 18th as well. All the greens are gathered locally, so there is no expense involved. All monies taken in will go to the church's general fund. Please keep these in mind when doing your holiday shopping; they make lovely hostess gifts and most are suitable for a table centerpiece.

We enjoy making these and hope you will support this small church fundraiser.

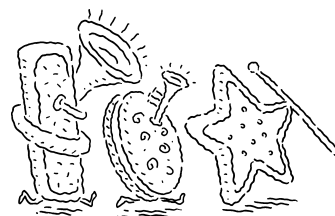
— Judy Murphy & Cindy Dube

Coffee Hour Hosts:

- Dec. 4 Kathy Holt & Michele Schillinger
Dec. 11 Lynn Largesse & Michele Schillinger
Dec. 18 **Board of Deacons**
Dec. 25 Christmas Sunday - **NO** coffee hour

If you would like to host an upcoming coffee hour, please sign up in fellowship hall or call the church office to have your name added to the list.

Our annual Cookie Walk will be during coffee hour on December 11th. Your cookie donations will be greatly appreciated. Remember, this is a Youth On a Mission fundraiser. Thank you in advance for your support with cookie donations and/or purchases.



Cookie Walk

ATTENTION ALL COMMITTEES: ANNUAL REPORT SUBMISSIONS ARE DUE JANUARY 3rd.

If you would like to honor any of our church staff with a monetary gift this season, please make checks payable to the church noting who it's for in the memo section. You may give donations directly to Lori Stockhaus or mail them to the church to her attention. Thank you.

CHRISTMAS CAROL SING-ALONG & POTLUCK

As they've done in past years, the Deacons, Pastor Brian, and Deb Pranaitis will be delivering Christmas baskets to members of our church family who may be less mobile and/or may be in need of a reminder that we're thinking of them. **We're planning to prepare/assemble baskets on December 17th** as part of the Christmas carol sing-along and potluck get-together. **The potluck begins at 5:00 p.m.** and Jackie Knox will lead us, once again, in a fun time singing Christmas carols (thank you, Jackie!).

Please look in Fellowship Hall for a list of items that are needed for the Christmas baskets and a potluck sign-up sheet.

FROM THE PASTOR: *Continued from page 1*

Dragged before the prefect of the province, Martinianus, who had her cruelly tortured, Barbara held true to her Christian faith.

During the night, the dark prison was bathed in light and new miracles occurred. Every morning, her wounds were healed. Torches that were to be used to burn her went out as soon as they came near her. Finally, she was condemned to death by beheading.

Her father himself carried out the death sentence, on top of the tower that was her prison. However, as punishment, he was struck by lightning, the tower was obliterated, and his body was consumed by flame.

Barbara was buried by a Christian, Valentinus, and her tomb became the site of miracles. This summary omits picturesque details, supplemented from Old French accounts." (Wikipedia adapted)

The story of the saints, especially the martyrs, have death as a central motif. How a saint died is very important to their story. The saints could not throw their lives away for nothing, that would be a sin. However, death was not something the saint feared either.

Saint Barbara's celebration involved a fancy dinner

and ball of all the officers and men of the artillery units on post. It was crazy. At one dinner 3 sergeants drove their motorcycles through the hotel lobby, in the elevator, up to the banquet hall and proceeded to burn donuts in the middle of the banquet hall. The hotel then banned the U.S. Artillery from their hotel. Being wild seemed an appropriate way to celebrate the martyrdom of a woman God blew an entire tower apart to avenge.

I highly suggest that you look into a patron saint. The lives of saints tell the story of how God works in people's lives. I like the martyrs' stories; they remind us death is not a defeat, it can be a great victory.

You may like the stories of the mystics or the church fathers whose life work was writing the story of God in new ways, aimed at the people of their time. It might even help people's understanding in our time.

God's work did not end with the Bible. God continues to speak to people in every century and still speaks to people. God is still active. God is still doing miracles. That is what the saints mean to me.

Pastor Brian

Please be in prayer for Debbie Pranaitis and family due to the recent passing of Debbie's nephew, Stephen Dumas. Stephen, the son of Debbie's sister, Marjorie, was just 35 years old and leaves behind his sisters, Theresa and Rachel and their families.

From the Stewardship Committee

THANK YOU to everyone who said "Count Me In!" by participating in Consecration Sunday or returning a pledge card. Your participation is critical to our success. And it was so nice to break bread with our church family.

Many thanks to Michelle Bigelow for our beautiful posters. And to the Pierce family for the lovely flowers that we arranged on the tables for the brunch.

As of November 23rd, we have received 63 cards with 57 pledges for a total of \$114,224. This is a bit behind where we've been in past years, so we could really use your help.

If you have not yet returned your pledge card, please do so (whether you're making a pledge or not) so that we can plan the budget for 2023. Knowing who has responded also helps us reduce follow-up letters.

The Deacons or the church office can help you if you don't have a pledge card. No pledge is too small, and if your situation changes, your pledge can be changed at any time. Donations are also welcome!

Thank you.

In His love,

Your Stewardship Committee: Pat Bukoski, Nan Johnson, Ron Klauke, Marilyn Kulesa, Ellie Lowell, Lori Stockhaus

Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. — Teresa of Avila

Happy Holidays from **Here We Grow** Preschool



The last few weeks have been busy. I hope you all enjoyed the Thanksgiving holiday. We want to take a moment to say thank you to all who donated to our Savers clothing drive last month. We dropped off over 2400 lbs. of soft goods, raising almost \$500.00. A big thank you to Todd Dube for donating his time and van to help us load and deliver to Savers; we wouldn't have been able to get it all there without his help.

Here We Grow was pleased to, once again, be able to donate a turkey and other items to the church to be delivered to families during the Thanksgiving holiday. We celebrated Thanksgiving with our students with a "feast" in the vestry. We enjoyed pizza, thanks to our friends at Holiday Pizza in Auburn, as well as cheese and crackers and brownies donated by the parents.

During the month of December, **Here We Grow** will work with the Auburn Police Department's Secret Santa program in the collection of unwrapped toys and items for children ranging from infant to sixteen years old. There is a donation box outside the HWG office. They have told me, at this time, the greatest need is for the 8 to 12-year-old range. We will be collecting from Nov 28 - Dec 9. The police department will distribute everything collected to children living in Auburn. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

The school will be closed from December 23 - January 2. Our first day back will be January 3, 2023.

The **Here We Grow** staff and families wish all of you a safe and happy holiday season.

Cristi Corey, Director
Here We Grow Preschool

FROM THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating team is still trying to fill 9 Board/Committee positions prior to the fast approaching January Annual Meeting. The committee vacancies include: Board of Deacons (4), Music (2), Board of Trustees (1), Stewardship (1), and Nominating (1). As of 11/22/22, the Board of Ed and Outreach Committee have all their nominees. If you would like more info on one or more of these openings, please contact Nominating Committee Members, Sue MacPhee: 508-832-9347 (house) or 508-864-2454 (cell/text) – email: susiemac2002@gmail.com; or Sheila Skog: 978-387-7705 (cell).

PARENTS NIGHT OUT! - Friday, December 9th - 6-8 p.m.

Parents, are you in need of a break from the hustle and bustle of the season? We have the solution . . . Let our teens, with supervision from Pastor Brian and Shannon Hartmann, our Dir. of Religious Ed., engage your children in some fun activities while you enjoy a dinner out or catch up on some holiday shopping. Pizza and refreshments will be provided. **Look for a sign-up sheet in fellowship hall.**

Parents night out is a fundraiser for Youth On a Mission (YOM) so we are asking for a free-will donation.

Following Parents Night Out, we will have a YOM Christmas party that will include a \$15.00 Yankee Swap.





The first week of December, according to the National Health Observance Calendar, is National Influenza Vaccination Week and National Hand Washing Awareness Week. Most people have already gotten their flu shots and handwashing should be an ongoing thing. Even before Covid 19, I was saying that handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of germs.

This year we have been hearing about RSV, Respiratory Syncytial Virus. It is an infection of the lungs and respiratory tract that causes congestion, sore throat, fever, headache, and other cold-like symptoms. It is a virus, so antibiotics aren't usually effective. They may help with an infection, but it's another reason for good handwashing.

It's time for holiday celebrations and gatherings. Please be careful and stay healthy! I hope everyone has a wonderful Christmas and a Happy, Healthy New Year.

God Bless!

Debbie Pranaitis,
Parish Nurse, 508-612-4521 (cell)

COMPLETING YOUR 2022 PLEDGES AND DONATIONS

Please help our church's 2022 budget by completing your current pledges as early in the month of December as possible. By doing this, it becomes much easier to prepare the year-end reporting for 2022. Please be aware that any pledges or donations the church receives showing a postmark "**after**" December 31, 2022, will be posted and reportable for next year's 2023 giving statement, and not for 2022. **All pledges and donations received before the deadline of December 31, 2022, will be reported on your 2022 giving statement.** Also, if you did not make a pledge in this current year, but would like a recorded 2022 donation, please do so as early in December as possible. **All gifts are greatly appreciated** and checks should be made payable to: **First Congregational Church.**



On Sunday, November 13, we celebrated the baptism of Adalyn Mae Bjork, the 1½ -year-old daughter of Corey and Laura Bjork. Adalyn is Judy Bjork's great-niece.

On Sunday, November 20, we celebrated the baptism of Jane Melisia Williams. Jane is a new church member. She is also new to Auburn, moving here from Worcester, welcome, Jane!

We pray God's continued blessing upon Adalyn and Jane and their families.

FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

I am very much looking forward to overindulging in carbs, starch, sugar and butter as we enter what I like to refer to as the fat season! Food is an essential part of life, not just for sustenance, but also because food brings us to the table. Food forces us to take a break, to slow down and often to be with people we love! According to Google, the Bible mentions food 1,207 times!!!! Food is a gift from God. It is a tangible way to express love and unity.

I will forever stand by the frustration shared by Gra (my grandmother); that it is a shame Thanksgiving is overlooked in our society. Although it is not a Biblical holiday, it is a time for gratitude. Be grateful... Grateful that you live here in this country that stands for freedom. Grateful for the blessings that surround you. Grateful that you are forced to sit at a table with people you love, and who love you! Thanksgiving is a segue to the celebration of the birth of Christ!

Have you ever sat quietly with your own thoughts, and truly contemplated the greatness of God? I do! Especially often since I began my journey teaching our youth about the Bible and faith. Among many words, there is one that stands out the most to me, when I ponder His greatness.... FORGIVENESS! In our middle school classroom we just completed our chapter about forgiveness. To be honest, the children amazed me with their participation, expression and honesty about this topic. I would like to share with you some of the sentiments we covered in the past few weeks.



First and foremost, forgiveness is really hard! But, when we give our hearts to God, he forgives us effortlessly, because He loves us. It is easy for Him, well, because He is God! Humans are imperfect! Forgiveness is a journey for us, it is not a switch to simply turn on or off. The second important lesson about forgiveness is YOU ARE NOT ALONE! We are in this together! As humans, we are sinners and we make a lot of mistakes. All of us! The Bible suggests that we talk to the people that hurt us. Sometimes that person cares less about your pain, sometimes it was an accident or oversight. That brings me to the final lesson of forgiveness. Forgive and MOVE ON! Harboring all that anger and hurt does absolutely no good at all. But when you forgive the people that caused that pain, you can release it from your heart and make room for the Lord's blessing. Let go of disappointment and accept love. Let go of sadness and accept the gift of joy. Make room in your heart for the Holy Spirit.

If you would like to learn about this topic, talk to one of our middle school students. It is important to have conversations about difficult concepts with our youth as we bring them into our fellowship. We are a church family and lessons should not stop in the Sunday School classroom.

I would like to leave you with a blessing that was part of our curriculum. Carry this with you when you find it hard to forgive. May you be bold in forgiving others – even when (or especially when) you do not feel like it. May you forgive others as God has forgiven you! And may they know that the power they feel in being forgiven is the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through you. BE BOLD!

Happy Thanksgiving! I look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus with you through this wonderful season.

Peace and Love Always!

Shannon Hartmann, Director of Religious Education

Trying to think of that perfect gift for someone special??

*For \$15, you can purchase **Our Pumpkin Patch Cookbook** for that special cook in your life... Our church cookbook contains recipes from church members, friends of the church and our favorite "in memoriam" recipes copied from 2 previously published church cookbooks (with permission from the families, of course!). It also contains special tabs with cooking tips and is ring bound with an added "pouch" so your special cook can collect all their personal favorites in one place!*

If you are interested in purchasing one, or would like to see one before making your decision, please call Michele Schillinger at 508.259.2239 or contact the Church office.



RAISE SOME DOUGH!

Here We Grow

Preschool

**will earn 20% of all qualifying sales
from orders placed on December 14th.**

When: Wednesday, December 14, 2022

Time: 4:00 P.M. – 9:00 P.M.

Where: 459 Southbridge Street, Auburn

Phone: 508-832-6583

- When you place your order, tell us you support this fundraiser! Hand us this flyer or show it on a mobile device for your organization to get credit for your order.
- Online orders: Enter code 19 at the payment screen and then click apply.
- **Fundraiser orders are only valid with regular priced menu items and cannot be paired with coupons or deals. Fundraisers are not valid on third party orders.**
- Flyers cannot be handed out in or around the Papa Gino's restaurant on the day of your event.
- Flyers made by the organization will not be accepted for the fundraiser event.
- **RESTAURANT ONLY - Ring in this sale using the POS button 19: Fundraiser.**

Valid for all Dine-In, Carry Out, Online & Delivery orders!

View menu and place online orders at: www.papaginos.com

The Christmas Fund 2022

“Overwhelmed with Joy!”

“The Magi set out and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.”
Matthew 2:9-10

For all the sacrifices that clergy and lay church workers have made in our congregations, over 100 years ago the Pension Boards of the United Church of Christ created the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, to help support them in retirement and during times of emergent need.

The Christmas Fund provides supplementation of small pension payments for retired clergy who often served small congregations throughout their careers. It provides supplementation of health premium costs, to help ensure their wellness throughout their lives. And the Christmas Fund provides emergency grants in the form of Christmas “Thank You” gift checks for retirees and those facing unforeseen financial hardship.

A gift to the Christmas Fund is your opportunity to join with others in the United Church of Christ to bring good news and great joy to those who have given so much to our church.

In 2021, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 231 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,104,479)
- Health benefits supplementation for 87 retired clergy and lay employees (\$177,600)
- Emergency grants for 53 individuals and families (\$150,338)
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 509 retired clergy and lay employees (\$254,000)

Enclosed is an offering envelope. Please return it to the church office — 128 Central St., Auburn, MA 01501, or place in the Sunday offering plate. Make checks payable to the church with “Christmas Fund” in the memo. **Thank you.**

TIDINGS is a monthly publication of

**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.*

Web: auburnfirstucc.org



BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Non-Profit Org.
Permit No. 6
Auburn, Mass

December 2022						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

OR CURRENT RESIDENT