

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:

“Fear and Reality”

I always get butterflies before the bell choir plays. I asked the kids, “Why am I scared? I am in no danger.” Yet playing bells worries me. Scares me, at least a little.

February is always my most disliked month. Even I, who generally enjoy winter, get tired of it as February comes around. We have more sunlight in February than in January, but it doesn’t seem to be better.

That is the problem; it doesn’t SEEM to be getting better. How things seem is more important to how we feel than how things “really” are. I imagine as you read this, Covid cases are down from when I write this.

The news is saying Covid cases peaked last week and are on the way down. How do they know? The amount of virus in the waste water.

The decrease of virus in waste water, I am told, will lead to less hospitalizations and death in the weeks to come. Do you feel better? Or do you have lingering worries and fears?

An old pre-pandemic worry was crime. Crime in the neighborhood. We have been more worried about crime, especially violent crime, at a time crime was at historic lows. We felt unsafe but were the most safe from violence of any humans in history. But we felt unsafe, so we acted like the world was going to hurt the most vulnerable amongst us.

We worry about our kids, our elderly. It is good to worry, if worry makes us check on those in need.

My worry in the pandemic is that it is harder to connect to people. We worry if we are hurting people by stopping by to visit. Yet, throughout history, human isolation has been used as torture. Isolation causes severe mental problems. Problems that start very quickly. But I do not think isolation makes good TV. Going to a hospital and talking to a doctor while filming an ambulance scene is much more compelling TV. We live in a time when the only stories we see are ones that look good on video.

Just like it is more exciting to show a shooting in a distant city that was caught on tape, than to say, “We are in the least violent time in history.”

Things are getting better. Do you feel it? We are through the worst. Are you feeling better?

May God calm our fears and help us reach out to those in need.

God Bless,

Pastor Brian



SERMON TITLES

Feb. 6 “Before I Formed You in the Womb, I Knew You”

Feb. 13 “Trust the Science”

Feb. 20 “Loving Our Enemies”

Feb. 27 “Transfiguration”

Pastor Brian is looking to hold a **Worship Planning Meeting after the worship service on Sunday, February 20 (with a snow date of February 27)**. This is a meeting at which we go over the details for our special services in the spring. All members are welcome at the meeting if they have input on our Easter, Holy Week, or Lenten services. In addition to Pastor Brian, Paulette, and Shannon, **representatives from the BOCE, Deacons, and Music Committee are expected to attend.**



February is American Heart Month, Age Related Macular Degeneration/ Low Vision Awareness Month, National Children's Dental Health Month, and National Cancer Prevention Month.

February 7-14 is Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week

February 12-20 is Heart Failure Awareness Week

February 4 is World Cancer Day

February 4 is National Wear Red Day

February 5 is Give Kids A Smile Day

February 14 is National Donor Day

February 22 is National Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day.

Have a blessed and healthy month.

God Bless!

Debbie Pranaitis, Parish Nurse

Dear People,

Thank you all for your gifts at Christmastime. Your generosity shows itself over and over in so many ways.

To be on the receiving end of such generosity is truly heartwarming. I am humbled and grateful to you.

May God shower his blessings on you in 2022.

Paulette

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH'S 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, of course, we have several unrestricted scholarships as well. Please email the church office at secretary@auburnfirstucc.org or call 508-832-2845 to request an application.

Applications are due by April 15th.



Mark your calendars. Lent begins on March 2nd.

We will hold our annual **Ash Wednesday service at 7 p.m.**



Greetings from Stewardship!

Our committee this year is:

Nan Johnson
 Ron Klaucke (Council Rep)
 Marilyn Kulesa
 Ellie Lowell (Chair)
 Lori Stockhaus

We look forward to serving First Congregational in the coming year.

We'd love to hear your suggestions--what did you like about last year's campaign?
 What could we do differently?

With your help, 2022 will be a banner year for our church. We look forward to exploring the many meanings of stewardship for all of us.

In His Love,
 Your Stewardship Committee

We are constituted so that simple acts of kindness, such as giving to charity or expressing gratitude, have a positive effect on our long-term moods. The key to the happy life, it seems, is the good life: a life with sustained relationships, challenging work, and connections to community. - Paul Bloom

2022 COMMITTEE NOMINEES STILL NEEDED

At our Annual Meeting on January 23rd, the Nominating Committee presented their report with the new and recommitted nominees to Boards and Committees. **However, openings still remain.**

BOARD OF DEACONS: Listed in our bylaws there should be 12 Deacons; however, if two vacancies of 3 year terms could be filled, then the Deacons would utilize age appropriate acolytes for the church service only.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: two vacancies - one vacancy of 1 year term and one vacancy of 2 year term.

MUSIC COMMITTEE: two vacancies of 2 year terms.

BOARD OF EDUCATION: one vacancy of 3 year term.

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE: one vacancy of 3 year term.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE: one vacancy

THANK YOU to all who have already committed to joining one or more of our various committees and boards. If you are a church member and interested in filling a nomination, please contact one of the Nominating Committee Members. Sheila Skog may be reached at 978-387-7705 or sheilaskog@gmail.com. Sue MacPhee may be reached at 508-864-2454 or email susiemac2002@gmail.com. Or, call the church office at 508-832-2845. Thank you for your help!

Note: we continue to put forth a plea to church members to consider filling the role of clerk, a church officer position. Our thanks to Sheila Skog who is currently serving as acting clerk while a replacement is found.

FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Welcome to February! The coldest of all the winter months. It is the freezing temperatures outside that keep us inside to stay warm and close to our loved ones. February is also the month of love! We celebrate Valentine's Day with cards and chocolates, a fancy dinner and flowers, or maybe a snuggle and a kiss. The person with whom we choose to celebrate can be a spouse, a child or parent, a best friend, or maybe our favorite pet. Either way, the goal is to give and receive love.

This month's Sunday School lessons will be centered around love. February is a perfect month to reintroduce John 3:16 to the children. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

This verse is known as the cornerstone of Christian faith. The cornerstone of our faith is that God loves us so much, he gave us Jesus. His only begotten son! And then invited us to join him in eternal life. WOW! That is certainly a lot of love!!!!

There are many references to God's love in the Bible. It is imperative that we always remind our children they are loved, just as God reminds us! God also wants us to love him in return, and to love each other! The Ten Commandments, as well as many other verses, instruct us to love our neighbors as ourselves. God is love and he wants us to be love, too!

After a Sunday School hiatus for the month of January, I am looking forward to getting back to work with our youth. I hope they all feel the same way! If weather permits at all this month, I am happy to bring the kids outside. So be sure to dress appropriately! I am still in desperate need of volunteers to support me downstairs. I am asking for a 4 to 6 week commitment. I promise we will have a great time!

Thank you so much for thinking of me this Christmas. I am humbled by your generosity and grateful for your support.

I Love You,

Shannon Hartmann
Director of Religious Education



For God so lo**V**ed the world
th**A**t he gave his
on**L**y
begott**E**n
So**N**,
tha**T** whoever
bel**I**eves
i**N** him should not perish
but hav**E** everlasting life.

(John 3:16, NKJV)

ESTATE PLANNING?

Have you included the church in your will or estate planning? Please prayerfully consider if the Lord would have you remember your church when completing your will.

“One of the greatest missing teachings in the American church today is the reminder to men and women that nothing we have belongs to us.” Gordon MacDonald

Message from the Treasurer

Greetings, as we enter into the new year, I would like to remind everyone that any requests for reimbursements need to have receipts submitted whenever available. Also, I would like to remind everyone to make use of the Payment Authorization Forms that are in the conference room for all expenses that require reimbursement. Please have the appropriate person on the committee authorize any expenditures that are made. If the requestor (one seeking reimbursement) is on that committee already, please have a different member of that committee approve the reimbursement. This also applies to any purchases made on the Church's credit card.

Thank you for your understanding.

Nick Stockhaus, Treasurer

The 2022 altar flower sign-up sheets through April 10th are on the clipboard in fellowship hall. If you “reserve” a date each year during this time period, please review the information listed and either indicate your approval by initialing by your name, or make changes directly on the sheet. Please keep in mind that, due to the changing nature of a calendar, we can't always ensure you will be the sole provider on any given Sunday, in which case your flexibility is greatly appreciated.

If you are signed-up under the “first choice” column (which we may or may not be able to determine who signed up first) please be sure to indicate whether you would like a centerpiece or 3-sided arrangements in the brass vases on the altar. **If you are listed under the “2nd altar” column**, please list your preference (a centerpiece or arrangements in the brass vases) and we'll do our best to accommodate you.



Ray J. Litman, 14, beloved Auburn student, passed away unexpectedly on Monday, January 10, 2022.

He is survived by his loving Nana and primary caretaker, Alice M. Litman, of Auburn; his siblings, Janet Kennard, Teresa Walker, and Brian, David, and Jonathan Judkins; and many cousins.

A funeral service was held on Thursday, January 20, 2022 at Faith Church in Auburn.

Please keep Alice and family in your prayers.

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;’” — John 11:25 (NIV®)



Here We Grow Preschool

Here We Grow has started enrollment for next year, and our four-year-old classes are filling up. We are pleased to be able to host a traditional **Open House** this year in March. We are still offering tours in the evenings and on weekends, if you know of a friend, neighbor, or relative who is looking for a preschool.

When thinking about whether to send your child to preschool for the first time, keep in mind what you are hoping to get out of the experience. We start accepting children when they are 2 years, 9 months. For these younger children, our focus is all about social/emotional growth, which means getting along in a group, taking directions from adults other than Mom and Dad, learning to share, and learning skills to become independent.

For children getting ready for kindergarten, we are focusing on more academic skills such as learning about letters and numbers, and printing their names while still providing social skills. We are also fortunate to be able to offer a class for young 4's. This class is designed for those children who may have already done a year of preschool and need an extra year because they do not make the kindergarten cutoff in their town. For more information about any of our classes, please feel free to stop in the office or call 508-832-8184.

We delayed our return to school after the new year, just in case families attended gatherings over the holidays. Our hope was that any illnesses would be gone by the time we returned to school. It seems to have been successful, and we have been very fortunate to have avoided any major Covid related closures. We added an extra week to the end of our school year to make up for being closed the extra week in January.

For those of you who have participated in the past, we will be doing our annual calendar raffle give-away; ticket sales will begin soon. We will leave some in the office with Denise. We thank you for your continued support.

Stay healthy and have a great month!

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

New Coffee Hour Plan:

We are looking for volunteers to host the first two Sundays monthly and committees and boards will host the third and fourth Sundays monthly. In months with a fifth Sunday, we will ask volunteers to sign-up to host. We will continue to request volunteers to cover the summer months. Please see the sign-up sheet in fellowship hall if you would like to volunteer to host an upcoming coffee hour. A committee/board assigned coffee hour schedule was distributed at the All Committee Meeting in January.

Note: there are plenty of funds to reimburse anyone for purchases they make for coffee hour. Just complete a payment authorization form, located on the table in the conference room, attach any receipts, and place in the treasurer's mailbox (top left) slot. Mailboxes are located at the top of the stairs leading to the church offices.

On January 16, 2022 we celebrated the baptism of Averi Elizabeth Monahan in a private service here at the church. Averi is the 4½ month old daughter of John and Nikole Monahan.

We pray God's continued blessing upon Averi and her family.





Raise Some Dough to Benefit

Here We Grow Preschool

We will earn 20% of the Sales from our Families & Friends during this time!

When: Wednesday, February 16, 2022

Time: 4:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Where: 459 Southbridge Street, Auburn

Phone: 508-832-6583

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

- When you place your order, tell us you support this fundraiser! Hand us this flyer or show it on a mobile device, in order for your organization to get credit for your order.
- Online orders enter code 19 at the payment screen and then click 'apply'.
- Papa Gino's will donate 20% of the total pre-tax sales from all the guests that present your flyer during the fundraiser.
- **Fundraiser orders are only valid with regular priced menu items and cannot be paired with coupons or deals.**
- 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 this sale using the POS button 19: Fundraiser.**

**Beer & Wine, and Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream
available in select locations.**

During times of inclement weather, we have set up an account with WBZ Channel 4 enabling us to report Church service cancellations. Be sure to check their website: <https://boston.cbslocal.com/closings>. We will also post cancellations on Facebook and will include information in the greeting message on the church's phone, 508-832-2845.

Please keep in mind that if weather is severe enough to result in area power outages, we may not have the capability to contact these outlets. So you should always use your best judgment, exercising caution, when deciding whether to venture out to service during stormy weather.



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 doing Christ's work in the world.*
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OR CURRENT RESIDENT