



# 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:

“Janus”

A new year has begun. It is January. Named for the two-faced Roman god of doors, archways, beginnings and ends. One face of Janus looks to the future, the other to the past.

That seems a good symbol for January. At this time, we express nostalgia for the past year, or good riddance to a bad year. At the same time, we look forward to the future with a mix of hope and worry.

It is strange that a new year starts in the middle of winter. Just a few days after the shortest day/longest night of the year. It is a horrible time to have a New Year’s party. It comes just a week after Christmas, way too close together, in my opinion. It is too cold to have much fun outside. The weather can make travel hard. There is a reason I think rational people should enjoy New Year’s Eve in their house watching *The Three Stooges* on what was channel 38.

But January 1st, with all its faults, is the best start of the year the West has ever used. The ancient Romans used January to start the year. The French and English kept time based on the year of their king. This meant each kingdom kept a separate calendar. If we still used this system,

what would England do with those months between Queen Elizabeth’s death and King Charles’ coronation in March?

The Church tried using Easter as the first day of the year, but Easter moves around and no “years” ended up being 365 days, let alone the 365.2422 days it actually takes the earth to orbit the sun.

So when Pope Gregory ordered a new calendar, they went back to January 1 for the start of the year. That calendar, the Gregorian calendar, is the one we still use. By “we,” I mean humanity.

The Jews and Muslims have their religious calendars. Saudi Arabia, the home of the two holiest sites in Islam, adopted Pope Gregory’s calendar in 2016. Everyday, everyone on earth uses Pope Gregory’s calendar.

I pray we all have a blessed New Year. A year filled with laughs. A time of joy with those we love. I pray we will use the days of this year wisely and well, to spread the love of God, and to strengthen our faith.

*Pastor Brian*

*Happy New Year* ♪ *Happy New Year* ♪ *Happy New Year*

## Sermon Titles

Jan. 1 Sermon: “A Time”

Jan. 22 “People Who Have It Hard, Will Be Rewarded”

Jan. 8 (Baptism/ New Member Sunday)  
Sermon: “Worthy”

Jan. 29 (Officer/ Board installation) & Baptism Sunday  
Sermon: “Blessed”

Jan. 15 Pastor Brian will be on vacation.

**2022 Pledges**

Please note that donations received **before** Jan. 1<sup>st</sup> will appear on your 2022 donation statement. Also, any donations received by mail **after** Jan. 1<sup>st</sup> may be included on your 2022 donation statement **if** the letter is postmarked on or before Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>. Any donations postmarked **after** Dec. 31<sup>st</sup> will appear on your 2023 donation statement. Thank you!

**2023 Offering Envelopes**

Please pick up your 2023 offering envelopes located at the church in the back of the sanctuary. If you can't find your envelopes, it means you did not make a pledge or didn't indicate that you wanted envelopes. Please see Lori Stockhaus with any questions.



**Happy Birthday to:**

- Caleb Armstrong ~ Jan. 4th
- Lynn Largesse ~ Jan. 6th
- Lillian McPherson ~ Jan. 19th
- Cassandra Stockhaus ~ Jan. 23rd

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**

**The Annual Meeting** will be held immediately following the 10 a.m. worship service on **Sunday, January 22nd**. This will be an **in-person meeting with Zoom access for those who would like to participate remotely.**

(All committee/board end-of-year reports are **NOW** due.)

**The All Committee Meeting** (the first 2023 meeting of all committees and boards) will be held on Monday, January 23rd, beginning at 7 p.m. At this meeting, committee chairpersons, secretaries, Church Council reps., etc. will be selected.

**The Installation of Officers and Board Members** will be held during the worship service on **January 29th**.

We would like to feature your special occasion in the *Tidings*. Please complete the form below and return it to the church office.

I give First Congregational Church permission to put my family member's birthday or anniversary in the monthly newsletter the *Tidings*.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Occasion

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (adults only please)



Please return to Church office.

## FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

What a glorious Christmas season here at our beautiful church! We had so many events to bring families together through the month of December. Starting with "Parents Night Out." With the help of Cristi Corey and the Here We Grow families, we had a full house with many happy little ones.

Our annual Cookie Walk (my favorite church event) was a huge success; thank you to all who baked for us!!!! It is always such a pleasure, for me, to be a part of the potluck caroling night. The deacon's baskets were beautiful and well-filled and Jackie, playing the piano with the children, are all part of this magical season.

The Christmas Eve pageant was so great. For this event, my measurement of greatness is in the faces of our children. Our children were full of joy on Christmas Eve! Their faces were bright and happy. I am so proud of them!! I am grateful for Paulette, who led the children with her piano playing, to sing their little hearts out! We made a great team that night. It was truly a blessing to be a part of it.

That is what makes December such a funny month. I think all of us can say that it brings a mix of blessings and sadness. Joy and pain. It is a month that has us on an emotional roller coaster. Maybe that is the gift. Knowing there is sadness and feeling sadness, but knowing also there is hope. Hope that you can see the light through the darkness. Hope that peace and love are right in front of us. We celebrate the greatest gift from God this holiday. The birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior! We give and receive gifts with one another to represent that gift. Life is hard. We come across bumps and forks in the road all the time. Every single person on this earth faces them. My New Year's wish for all of you is that you see the gifts around you and use them to climb over those bumps and choose your path. Jesus has your back!

*"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."*  
John 16:33

With all the wonderment of Christmas behind us, I look forward to getting back into the classroom with our children. We kick off 2023 with the lesson, "If God loves the world, why does he let bad stuff happen?" This is a deep topic that many adults also struggle with. If this interests you, you are welcome to come down to our classroom to participate.

Thank You to Pastor Brian, Patricia Hilbert, Lillian McPherson, Michele and Michael Schillinger, our Board of Christian Ed. and all our wonderful volunteers for your help and support this month. Also, a special thank you to Denise!!! She works so hard to put all our activities into motion. We love and appreciate you so much!!!!

Thanks be to God!!!!

~ Shannon Hartmann, Director of Religious Education

### 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



## January Tidings from Here We Grow Preschool



Happy New Year! We hope you all had a wonderful and relaxing holiday. This is the first year since Covid that we haven't had to extend our vacation time due to illnesses. I am hopeful that we are finally reaching the end.

Now that the cold weather has settled in, we will be having all our gross motor time in the vestry. We feel so blessed to have this space available to us; most schools in our area do not have such a wonderful space.

Our 3-year-olds had their Christmas programs on December 22<sup>nd</sup> with a sing-along in the classrooms with family and friends. We were finally able to have the 4-year-olds' concert back on the stage in fellowship hall the morning of December 21<sup>st</sup>. It was so nice to see everyone enjoy the show, and parents were very generous with the goodies for our 4-year-old parties. We hope some of you were able to stop by and see the children perform; they work very hard learning new songs and singing some old favorites. A big thank you to Pastor Brian for playing Santa for the 3-year-old children and to my husband for coming to play Santa for the 4-year-olds; the children love to see Santa come to school.

This year we, again, collected toys in conjunction with the Auburn Police Department's "Secret Santa" program. Family support was great; we filled our large box multiple times and were able to help make the holiday special for some Auburn families.

Enrollment forms for next year have gone out for in-house registration and spaces are filling up. We will continue with in-house enrollment until the middle of February, then we will open it up to new parents and children. If you know of anyone looking for a preschool, we would be happy to hear from them. **Open House will take place March 7, 2023.**

In February, families will be selling tickets for our calendar raffle fundraiser. Beginning March 1<sup>st</sup>, we will be picking a winner every day for 31 days. If you would like a chance at winning some great prizes, please speak with a parent or staff member. Denise will have a sample calendar in the office.

Wishing everyone a Happy and Healthy New Year.

The Here We Grow Staff

### COFFEE HOUR HOSTS

Jan. 1 "The Golden Girls"

Jan. 8 **Volunteers needed**

Jan. 15 Mem'l/Scholarship, Nominating, Library (2022 members)

Jan. 22 Trustees/Prudential (2022 members)

The remainder of the 2023 schedule will be distributed at the All Committee Meeting on January 23.

### **From the Stewardship Committee:**

THANK YOU to everyone who participated in Consecration Sunday or responded to our mailings. We appreciate your support.

Happy, Healthy New Year to All!

In His love,

Your Stewardship Committee:

Pat Bukoski, Nan Johnson, Ron Klauke, Marilyn Kulesa, Ellie Lowell, Lori Stockhaus

Thank you to everyone who contributed a poinsettia to decorate the sanctuary and altar during the Christmas season. **Special thanks to Michele Schillinger** for all her hard work coordinating all the details, and thank you to all who helped unload the delivery and assisted with the marking and arrangement of the poinsettias.



### FROM THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

We're calling this our 25 day countdown until the Annual Meeting. There remains 10 positions to fill. Could it be that we missed someone who would like to be on a committee and is willing to contact us? Our committee vacancies include: Board of Deacons - *most needed* (5), Music (2), Board of Trustees (1), Stewardship (1), and Nominating (1). If you have questions about one or more of these openings, please contact the Nominating Committee Members, Sue MacPhee: 508-832-9347 (house) or 508-864-2454 (cell/text) or email: [susiemac2002@gmail.com](mailto:susiemac2002@gmail.com); or call Sheila Skog: 978-387-7705 (cell). Thank you!



Please keep church member Jane Williams in your prayers due to the sudden loss of her son, Mario Perkins, on November 29.

Prayers for the Orcutt Family are appreciated as well, due to the recent passing of Alberta's brother, James Francis Gervais.

### FROM THE CHURCH SECRETARY

Dear Church Family,

As point of contact for the church's food pantry, I recently approached Pastor Brian and Debbie Pranaitis, co-chair of the Outreach Committee, to discuss my concerns about the food pantry. Beginning with the onset of Covid in 2020, there has been a steady decline in visitors to the food pantry. At that time we went from 10-12 families per month to a handful of families. This remained the same until recent months, at which time, due to various circumstances (loss of transportation, health issues and renewed concerns about Covid), we have seen, once again, a drop in visitors to the pantry. Out of a concern that your generous donations to the food pantry would expire before reaching those in need, I brought this matter to Pastor Brian and Debbie's attention.

This led to the Outreach Committee making the difficult decision to close the church's food pantry. Sheila Skog, an Outreach Committee member, contacted the North American Martyr's food pantry, Kateri's Kitchen, and has made arrangements for the existing food pantry donations to be transferred to their food pantry in the new year.

We will continue to collect food pantry donations on Communion Sundays, the first Sunday of the month. All donations will then be delivered to Kateri's Kitchen for distribution to the Auburn community.

Thank you to all of you for both your past and future donations. Rest assured that they will continue to help meet the needs of those who rely on your generosity.

Blessings,  
Denise Jobin  
Church Secretary



*To Our Wonderful Church Family and Dear Friends,*

*What an unexpected surprise we experienced during worship on Sunday, December 4! Thank you to all who had a part in honoring us for our Christian service to First Congregational Church of Auburn for the past 48 years.*

*As we move to New Hampshire to be closer to our biological family, our love for this church family--past and present-- will remain in our hearts.*

*In Christian Love,  
Bob and Carol Luther*

*Thank you to my church family for my Christmas gift. You have always been very special to me, especially through the last three years with my mother's death during Covid, so no funeral in the church as she wished, then Linda's unexpected passing last year, and then my nephew Stephen in 2022. Your love, support, and prayers have been a huge help to get me through. Now your generosity is unbelievable. I can't imagine my life without you. Thank you again.  
Love, Debbie*

*As we continue to live in uncertain times and experience rising costs everywhere we turn, you humble me, once again, in your generosity shown me at Christmas time. And, once again, "Thank you" seems so inadequate. I hope and pray that somehow you realize how much I appreciate you and your thoughtfulness. Wishing you and yours a blessed New Year. With gratitude, Denise  
(Church Secretary)*

*To my Church Family,  
Thank you so much for your generosity. Your thoughtfulness is greatly appreciated.  
— Judy Bjork*

*Thank you for your generous Christmas gifts and cards. I greatly appreciate your thoughtfulness. Blessings to you in the New Year. — Pastor Brian*

**Please pray for Pastor Brian while he's on vacation beginning after worship on January 8 through January 15.**



Happy New Year! I hope everyone had a nice Christmas and is now ready to start a refreshing new year. What has happened in the past will always be in our memories, but it's time to start new memories. Covid, the flu, and RSV have been with us and may still be around for awhile. It's important to always wash your hands, and avoid crowds.

January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, Glaucoma Awareness Month, National Birth Defects Awareness Month, National Blood Donor Month, and Thyroid Awareness Month. Please continue to get your regular medical check ups. Dental and vision are equally important to keep up with.

I will be away until March 21, but I'm available for phone calls or messages. When I get back, I'm usually available for rides to appointments if needed.

God Bless

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

### **ALTAR FLOWER SIGN UP SHEET**

**The 2023 altar flower sign-up sheet (with scheduling through Easter Sunday) is 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.

Providing this information ahead of time is a huge timesaver for me when preparing the bulletin.

Thank you,  
Denise



During times of inclement weather, you should always use your best judgment, exercising caution, when deciding whether to venture out to service.



Happy New Year! May the best day of  
your past be the worst day of your future.

God bless you and yours!

## Tidings 2023 — Subscription Renewal Form

In an effort to offset the cost of publishing the monthly *Tidings*, we are asking for members and friends to support a **voluntary** subscription.

Your participation is entirely optional and will not affect whether or not you receive the *Tidings*.

Annual Renewal - (10 issues, no July or Aug. issue)

Please enclose a check or money order for \$10 payable to: **First Congregational Church.**

Please write "**Tidings**" in the memo section.

*Thank You!*

Please call the Church office with any questions, 508-832-2845.

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

*TIDINGS is a monthly publication of*

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

Phone: (508) 832-2845

Office Hours: Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Email: [secretary@auburnfirstucc.org](mailto:secretary@auburnfirstucc.org)

or [PastorBrian@auburnfirstucc.org](mailto:PastorBrian@auburnfirstucc.org)

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

*Web: [auburnfirstucc.org](http://auburnfirstucc.org)*



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

### January 2023

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

**OR CURRENT RESIDENT**