

DECEMBER

2007

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!'"

We are entering the new Church year which begins with Advent, Sunday, December 2nd. It will be a very important and busy year in the life of First Congregational Church. The greatest gift you can give to the Christ Child for Christmas 2007, and for 2008, is your presence and participation. Worship is better in a full Sanctuary (and vestry). Church leaders will appreciate your support in the varied church activities. If you are in a leadership position, your full participation is essential. Spotty attendance and participation is demoralizing and undermines effective programming and leadership, literally the devil's work. The church needs every single person who has made the commitment of church membership. It is easy to choose from the multitude of competing activities and interests and skip church. It is harder to put the church first consistently, choice by choice, but the church especially needs you this year. So, as a gift to the Christ Child, through the church, and as a New Year's resolution for 2008, offer your consistent attendance and participation. Thank you.

God bless you all in this holy season.

Rev. Dr. Kenneth E. Knox

Dec. 2nd
1st Sunday in Advent
Communion Sunday with
Deacons' offering
& food pantry 10 a.m.

Dec. 9th
2nd Sunday in Advent
Children's Pageant
Baptism Sunday 10 a.m.

Dec. 16th
3rd Sunday in Advent
Cantata 10 a.m.



Dec. 23rd
4th Sunday in Advent
Worship Service 10 a.m.

Dec. 24th
Christmas Eve
5 p.m. Family Service
11 p.m. Candlelight
Communion Service

Dec. 30th
New Year's
Service 10 a.m.



to:

Rebecca McPherson ~ 12/28

Lori-Ann Stockhaus ~ 12/28

Donald Slongwhite ~ 12/30

The Equal Exchange Coffee Program has closed until the spring. In the meantime, you may purchase decaf coffee by calling Nancy MacLeod at (508) 865-9691.

We'd like to thank those of you who supported Fair Trade through this program, and we also want to thank the Board of Christian Outreach for bringing EEC to our church.
See you in the spring.

If you would like to honor the pastor with a monetary gift this season, please send your donations to the church with the note: "Pastoral Gift."

Thank you.



Pledge Reminder

If you want to receive credit on your giving statement for 2007, please make sure to get all regular and Sanctuary pledges in by the end of December.

There is an ongoing effort to collect items to ship to PFC Fred Orcutt. Fred is an M.P. in Iraq and has a room similar to a dorm, and he just got a microwave. So, he could use dried soup and veggies (no cans), microwaveable items in plastic containers, candy, cookies (not homemade as it takes a few weeks to get to him) easy mac 'n cheese, pudding cups that don't need refrigeration, etc. Perhaps you could think of other items that Fred and his comrades could use as Fred often shares with them. (Fred gave names of military personnel who would appreciate packages. The list is posted on the bulletin board in Fellowship Hall and outside the church office.) We really want to make this an effort that goes beyond the Christmas season. If you'd like to help please see Diane Moore and Avis Britton for more information. Thank you!



On Sunday, November 11th, we celebrated the baptisms of

Clara Malia Harrington and
Joshua Michael Clifford along with his mom, **Lynda Beth Clifford**.

Clara is 9½ months old. Her parents are Mark and Jessica Harrington.

Joshua is 5½ months old and was joined by his mom,
Lynda Clifford, in the sacrament of baptism.

May the Lord bless and keep you.

Library Tidings

by Gloria Whitehead

Are you wishing that you could make Christmas a little more special this year? Perhaps you feel that Christ hasn't been all He should be in your family's Christmas. Would you like to create a new Christmas tradition for those you love? A mixture of children's and adult books, you're certain to be inspired in some way by reading one of this month's suggested books. Ninety-two is the maximum number of pages, and one doesn't even have words!

A Certain Small Shepherd by Rebecca Caudell. An unhappy, mute, little boy in Appalachia bursts with joy when a teacher gives him the part of a shepherd to play in the Christmas Pageant. It's Christmas Eve—Oh, no—there is a terrible blizzard - the program is canceled! Delight turns into despair until Jamie's imaginative and loving nature finds a special use for his seemingly useless crook and shepherd's robe. This is a beautiful story. Once read, it will be remembered by adults and children every Christmas season.

The Spirit of Christmas by Henry van Dyke is a collection of writings that express the true meaning of Christmas. *The Christmas Angel* opens with the most powerful angel trying to figure out how to deal with evil on earth and the misery that people inflict on each other. It takes the lowest angel to reveal the news of a miracle that's about to happen. There's also a short sermon on *Keeping Christmas*, two Christmas Prayers— one for the home and the second for lonely folks, and a little essay entitled *Christmas Giving and Christmas Living*.

Quintillius—the Star that Shone by William B. Thielking

Pastor Thielking was walking home with his daughter one evening. The sky was an unusual blue and the star was brilliant. Holly asked, "Stars can't really talk, can they, Daddy?" "Well, I suppose that depends on what you mean," he answered, while thinking of the psalmists' words, "The heavens declare the Glory of God." As thoughts expanded and days passed, the Pastor found that he had the answer to a Christmas Eve service that would be meaningful and a little different.

The Boy of the Bells by Carly Simon

A young boy named Ben lived in a small village in the far north with his grandfather and his sister, Miranda, who hadn't been able to speak for a year. No one could explain why not. On Christmas Eve grandfather asks Ben to climb the tower to ring the bell each hour as the villagers slumber in the sleepy town. Suddenly, Ben wonders, if he rang twelve o'clock at eleven, he might be able to talk with Santa and he might be able to help Miranda.

You'll discover the answer as you turn through beautifully illustrated pages.

What Did You Lose, Santa? by Berthe Amoss

NO WORDS—just characters—little, whimsical Mr. and Mrs. Claus, and they're in a dither. Pick up the book to find out what they're about.

On That Night by Elizabeth Yates

It's a Christmas Eve Candlelight service almost like First Congregational Church in Auburn. Most find it a night of hope, but for a little girl, a thief, a harried woman, a widow, and a blind man—this night is one that fulfills one of the legends of Christmas Eve that on that night lost things are found again.

Christmas Is for Giving by Bettina Peterson

Upon hearing about Francis of Assisi and the first Christmas crib, eight year old Toby decides to make one for his parents. He and Pam, his younger sister, after much struggling, finish the crib and put it under the Christmas tree where, to his total surprise, Toby finds something that he thought was impossible.

All of these books will be on display in Fellowship Hall.

From the Outreach Committee

Outreach News

New Orleans

They're back! The New Orleans Team (Randy Bohn, Bruce Fant, Rich McPherson, and Bill Storie) got back on November 17th... apparently it was an exhausting but very worthwhile trip. Thank you, New Orleans Team!

Outreach is pleased to have provided additional support this month for the New Orleans efforts.

Heifer Project

Remember that the Living Nativity takes place on December 8th and 9th from 1 to 5:30 p.m. at Overlook Farm in Rutland. It's a 20 minute Living Nativity performance, complete with live actors and animals such as cows, sheep, goats, and a camel. Witness the arrival of wise men, shepherds, and Mary, Joseph, and the Baby to the stable. After the show, enjoy hayrides, Christmas carols, cookies, and hot beverages. There will be opportunities to donate to the farm, purchase alternative holiday gifts from Heifer International, and shop for fair trade crafts from around the world. **Admission:** Bring a plate of cookies to share. (www.heifer.org)

The Outreach Committee will be providing opportunities next year to support this wonderful project. Stay tuned for details.

Seafarer's Friend

Outreach is pleased to have made a donation this month to this excellent program.

On January 4, 2008, Seafarer's Friend will host a dinner in Boston to celebrate 180 years, to "share an evening of historic proportions looking back on the history of this ministry – one of the oldest of its kind in the country." (www.seafarersfriend.org)

Finally...

A huge THANK YOU to those who took part in Interfaith Hospitality, the New Orleans trips, YOM, Confirmation, book shipments, and everyone else whose support has helped First Congregational fulfill our mission of being a caring and sharing church, both locally and around the world. You are awesome!!

The Outreach Committee

Sue Campbell, Cindy Dube, Gayle Farley, Ellie Lowell, Alicia Schillinger, Ernie Smith



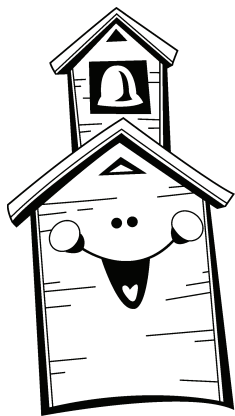
Wreath Sale

Boy Scout Troop 101 will be selling Christmas wreaths after the Sunday morning worship service on December 2nd and 9th. Home delivery can be arranged by calling Michael Fant at (508) 832-4153 or George Fournier at (508) 832-6717.

Please consider supporting the boy scouts in this fundraiser.

St. Joseph's Church—Auburn Holiday Bazaar

St. Joseph's Parish, 189 Oxford Street, Auburn is having their annual Christmas Bazaar on Saturday, December 8th, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Browse their "Attic Treasures" table, take a chance at over 75 raffle prizes, shop for Christmas items, homemade crafts, knitted items, pastries, and candy. Children can make a Christmas craft for gift giving. Come join us, share a cup of coffee, and have a great time.



Happy Holidays from Here We Grow Preschool

Once again another year has gone by, and we are looking forward to the year 2008. Something I live by is, "Never put off till tomorrow what you can get done today." Our days seem to be going by way too fast, so my suggestion to all is to get as much done on each new day. The children and staff are preparing for the holiday season and the time off it will provide.

During the month of November the children of *Here We Grow* learned about the first Thanksgiving and the act of giving to others. They brought in many food items for the Giving Basket, which Rev. Knox was kind enough to distribute the food we collected. We celebrated our "feasts" on Monday the 19th with all 4 year old children and on Tuesday the 20th with all 3 year old children. Both days went very well with help from our parent volunteers. We were treated to a yummy "friendship fruit salad." Thank you to Dave Sampson and Wayne Prouty for help with carrying the tables and chairs to the vestry and back.

Closing out the month of November, the staff took a CPR course and I am proud to announce that we are all CPR certified for another year.

With the month of December already here, *Here We Grow* is once again participating in the Marines' "Toys for Tots" Campaign. The holiday programs will be on December 19th and 20th. The children are eagerly awaiting the arrival of Santa. If anyone is willing to dress the part for an hour or two, give me a call.

On Sunday, December 2, *Here We Grow* had a small ceremony naming the playground "The Coby William Dick" playground at *Here We Grow* Preschool. There is a beautiful sign with a picture of Coby. Coby is the little five year old boy who drowned in Auburn while fishing with his dad in July of 2006. Please take a few moments to visit the sign. My goal is, hopefully, to remind families how precious children are, and how important safety is when dealing with children. One never knows what each day will bring or for how long each of us will be here.

The school will be closed from December 20th - January 2nd. The *Here We Grow* staff and families wish all of you a bright and safe holiday season.

Until 2008 - Happy Holidays,

Dawn Murphy

Director

Here We Grow Preschool

FROM THE CHURCH HISTORIANS

Taken from the Dedication of Chancel and Chancel Furnishings, Sunday, October 2, 1949.

“Symbols”

Ever since Christianity began with the Life, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord, Christian worshippers have embodied in the worship fitting symbols of these great events related to our Lord. In past renovations of our church, we have followed the practice of the earliest Christians in adopting some of these symbols, not as a form, nor for adoration, but as aids to the worship of God and his Son, Jesus Christ. It is our attempt to acquaint our congregation with the religious meaning and symbolism of our current chancel and its furnishings.

Part II - The Chancel

In the earliest Christian times, even in the catacombs, the Christians placed their altar, our communion table, in the East and faced the East in their worship, because the life, the death and the resurrection of our Lord took place in the East. The East symbolizes the dawn of the eternal Light into the world.

Facing East, the worshipper had on his right the South, the enlightened world of the Mediterranean, where laid the Christian churches, and from which came the great heritage of the Church, the Holy Scriptures. The south side was, therefore, called the Epistle side, where is placed the lectern from which the Scriptures are read. On the left of the worshipper lay the North or the heathen world of Europe, to which the Christian Church was commanded to preach the Gospel of Christ.

Since the Scriptures are the “Word of God,” the minister stands within the chancel for reading. But since the sermon expresses the words or ideas of man in expounding the Gospel, the pulpit is extended beyond the chancel and the minister stands outside the rail.

The choir stalls are in the chancel because the choir are ministers of music. They are placed parallel to the center aisle, rather than facing the congregation because theirs is to inspire and encourage the Christian pilgrim on his way to God, and not to entertain an audience. They lead us up to God in worship.

Church Historians

Annual Report articles are due by the end of December. (Early articles are greatly appreciated!) When submitting articles via e-mail always be sure you receive a confirmation that your article was, in fact, received. Also, due to all the preparation that Christmas and the approaching new year require, (Christmas programs, multiple bulletins, the annual report, etc.) **the *Tidings* deadline of December 20th** will be strictly enforced.

Thank you for your understanding.

HOLIDAY BUFFET



The next church supper will be on Saturday, December 15th at 5 p.m.

**\$10 for adults
\$ 5 for children**



From the Minister of Music

Thanks to all who participated in the Praise Team on November 4th. A special thank you to David Mahlert for sharing his equipment and expertise with us. This music was well received with many people asking when we will do this again. Our next step would be to move this to the Worship

Service. This would only be done once a month, probably on the 4th Sunday. One of these praise songs would be sung as a hymn with the words printed in the bulletin. Anyone is welcome to come up and sing with the Praise Choir. Initially, we will repeat two of the more popular songs, quite often, so that everyone will have a chance to learn it. Our progress with the praise music will move forward as soon as we are able to install vocal microphones.

December Highlights:

On Dec. 9th the Choir sings a new anthem: *Long, Long Time Ago* by my favorite husband/wife team, Don Besig and Nancy Price. This toe-tapping anthem has a swing rhythm and incorporates the beloved Christmas song, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.

On December 16th the First Church Choir presents the Christmas Cantata titled *Touched by a Child, Touched by a King* by John Purifoy.

On December 23rd Joyful Noyse will sing *Light a Little Candle* by Joseph P.H. Martin. This anthem speaks of the candles representing peace, hope, love, and the joy of Christ's coming.

On behalf of all the Choir Members, I wish everyone a blessed Christmas!

Heather Moore

JOYFUL NOYSE REHEARSAL SCHEDULE:

12/2, 12/9, 12/16	11:15 a.m. rehearsal
12/23	9:15 a.m. rehearsal <i>Come, Light of the World</i> <i>Light a Little Candle</i>
12/24	5:00 p.m. - Christmas Eve Service <i>Come, Light of the World</i> <i>Light a Little Candle</i>

The Christmas Cantata will be held on Sunday, December 16th, during the 10:00 a.m. service.

Please see the enclosed flyer for additional information.





FROM THE PARISH NURSE

December is Safe Toys and Gifts Month. December 1st is World Aids Day, and December 2nd-8th is National Hand Washing Awareness Week. (It isn't just me advising people about the importance of hand washing!)

The holidays are upon us. This can be a very difficult time for many. I do have CARE NOTES on the Health Table in Fellowship Hall. Please help yourself. There are some about getting through the holidays after the loss of a loved one, and others that hopefully will give you some relief from the pain.

I wish everyone a safe and Happy Holiday season.

Debbie Pranaitis
Parish Nurse



Because the needs of retired and low -income clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ are year-round, your contributions to the annual Christmas Fund Special Mission Offering, formerly known as the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross, work throughout the year and not just during the Christmas season.

Dollars given to the Christmas Fund go directly to those who serve, or have served the church, in their moments of critical need. Currently, nearly 1,500 families have received either a one-time grant or are receiving continued assistance through your gifts to the 2006 Christmas Fund Offering.

Your generous contributions can and do make a difference in the lives of many. Please find an offering envelope enclosed, and thank you for your support.

Constitution & By-laws

The Board of Christian Education has accepted, with regret, the resignation of Heather Zautner as Director of Religious Education, effective December 31.

Heather has been welcoming students, encouraging teachers and teaching the 3, 4, and 5 year old class each Sunday. Although her title will change, Heather will continue to teach and be a presence in the Church School. Look for her Advent/Christmas plans on page 11.

The ad hoc committee appointed by the Church Council in the spring of 2006 to study and review the Constitution and By-laws has prepared recommendations for discussion and adoption at the Annual Meeting, January 19, 2008 at 2:00 p.m. Dual copies of the 1997 revision and the current proposal will be available at the church in Fellowship Hall. (Only one copy per household please.) For those who need "home delivery," a call to the office at (508) 832-2845 will take care of that.

Any questions? Please feel free to talk with any member of the committee.

Nancy MacLeod, chair, Barbara Allaire, Sue Campbell, Rich McPherson, Louise Powers, Wayne Prouty, Cindy Ryan, David Sampson, Ernest Smith, Dr. Knox, ex -officio



Slow Me Down, Lord

*Slow me down, Lord!
Ease the pounding of my heart
by the quieting of my mind.
Steady my hurried pace with a vision
of the eternal reach of time.
Give me, amidst the confusion of
my day, the calmness of the
everlasting hills.
Break the tensions of my nerves and
muscles with the soothing music of
singing streams
that live in my memory.
Teach me the art of taking
minute vacations . . .
of slowing down to look at a flower,
to chat with a friend,
to pat a dog,
to read a few lines from a good book.
Remind me each day of the fable of the
hare and the tortoise,
that I may know that the race is not
always to the swift;
that there is more to life than
measuring its speed.
Let me look upward into the branches
of the towering oak and
know that it grew great and strong
because it grew slowly and well.
Slow me down, Lord, and inspire me to
send my roots deep into the soil
of life's enduring values
that I may grow toward the stars of
my greater destiny.*

Richard Cardinal Cushing





Notes from Youth On a Mission and Confirmation Class

It's hard to believe another year has come and gone in the life of our church and the lives of our youth. It has been a busy and exciting year with the high point of our mission trip to Pikeville, KY this past July. With all that faces our youth on a daily basis, the pounding of the media and the constant peer pressure, we should all be proud of the young people that make the choice to participate in YOM. We have already begun fundraising and planning for our 2008 summer mission trip.

It is with some sadness I announce that my mom, Judy Murphy, and I will not be teaching the Confirmation Class starting in September 2008. I started confirmation class 10 years ago just to "check it out" and report back to the Deacons. Since then it has been my honor to serve as a Confirmation Class teacher. Spending time with the youth of our church is truly a labor of love, and I hope that someone will prayerfully consider being a confirmation teacher in September. The youth need adults who care, and I promise you will receive and learn much more than you give and teach.

Please keep the following items in mind and mark your calendars:

YOM meeting for December 2nd has been changed to December 9th

December 16th during coffee hour is our annual cookie walk. Donations of cookies will be gratefully accepted on that day.

December 16th from 1pm to 5pm we'll be having the annual YOM Christmas party. Please bring a \$10ish grab gift. Food and refreshments will be served.

Bring donations of WARM clothes, new socks & underwear and backpacks for our January 25th trip to Boston to participate in City Reach.

Anyone planning on participating in the Camp Berea in February needs to have their \$50 deposits in NOW.

Please call Jen or Randy at 508-832-0428 if you have any questions.

God Bless and Merry Christmas!

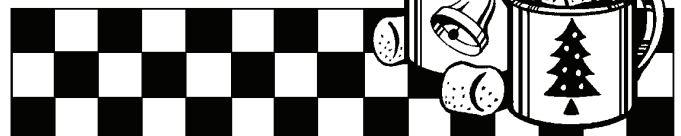
Jennifer

A pastoral search committee will soon be appointed by the Church Council because of the pending retirement of Reverend Knox. Anyone interested in being on this committee, or who thinks that they know of someone who might be a good candidate, should submit their name, or the name of that person, in writing to the President of the Council.

Steve Hill
Council President

Coffee Hour Hosts

12/2	~ Music Committee
12/9, 12/16	~ Nominating/Scholarship
12/23, 12/30	~ Deacons
1/6	~ Trustees
1/13	~ Deacons
1/20	~ Outreach



Notice of Sanctuary Renovation Update

After many months of meetings with various contractors, the church Trustees are prepared to display plans for the Sanctuary renovation.

We plan to discuss the details after the worship service on December 9, 2007. We promise to be quick, yet will answer every question, and will address each concern.

Please plan to attend. Your interest and support are needed.

Thank you,
Trustees, First Congregational Church

Join us for our annual Sunday School Christmas Pageant on December 9th during the 10 a.m. service. We will be presenting "The Advent Tree."

Also, Sunday School is in need of some caring teachers! If you are interested in helping, please see Heather Zautner. Thank you!



Who would have guessed working at a Pumpkin Patch would have been so much fun —and such a successful fundraiser for our Sanctuary Fund?

From October 14th, when we unloaded 735 pumpkins and hundreds of assorted gourds, until Halloween, we had volunteers selling, visiting, and just enjoying our front lawn and meeting people. Some of our church members sat in the sun and read, some knit, some made door decorations from the stock.

The fundraiser brought in over \$1,200.00. We would like to hear if people are interested in doing this again next year. We would hope to start a week earlier, but need volunteers.

Thank you to all of the people that did volunteer. A special thank you to Jen and Randy's group (Youth on a Mission). They were so wonderful unloading all of the stock and selling every weekend - we couldn't have done it without them!

Thank you,
Shirley Hill, Jen Bohn & Diane Moore



*May God bless you &
yours this Christmas
and in the coming
New Year.*

*TIDINGS is a monthly
publication of*

**First Congregational
Church
128 Central St.
Auburn MA 01501**

Phone: (508)832-2845

Web: auburnfirstucc.org



**BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
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Permit No. 6
Auburn, Mass**

December 2007

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