
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

***December 1st**
1st Sunday in Advent
Communion Sunday with
Deacons' offering

***December 8th**
2nd Sunday in Advent

***December 15th**
3rd Sunday in Advent
Cantata Sunday



ADVENT WORSHIP SCHEDULE

***December 22nd**
4th Sunday in Advent

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

* Sunday Services begin at 10 a.m.

All Are Welcome

Other December activities include **"Parents' Night Out"** on Dec. 6th from 6 to 8 p.m., followed by **YOM's Yankee swap**. The **Christmas Potluck, Sing-along & Christmas Basket Assembly** will be held on Dec. 14th beginning at 5 p.m. and look for our annual **Cookie Walk** during coffee hour on Dec. 15th.

FROM THE PASTOR

For the last few Advents we have done a reverse Advent Calendar. Instead of getting a chocolate or reading, we asked you to bring in food for the food bank.

This year our food bank is still full from the cornucopia Outreach got from the Post Office collection. So, after a visit to a Habitat event, we decided to do an Advent calendar around housing. After all, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were homeless at Christmas time.

We know budgets can be tight around the holidays, so please do not feel any pressure to give until it hurts.

As the Outreach Committee went about writing the calendar, we found many ways to bankrupt ourselves. I discovered I own a lot of hammers

and screwdrivers. Others have a lot of paint. So we lowered the costs on the calendar. This calendar (attached within the Dec. *Tidings* email notification) is to raise money for housing charities, but the spiritual exercise is also important.

The spirit is to think about all the things we take for granted in our homes. Hopefully, we will feel more thankful for all the things we have.

So, if a day's collection seems too expensive, please feel free to knock the price down. Also, we ask that you not use all pennies, as the weight might get to be rather heavy.

We all hope you have a lovely, joyous time with lots of time for friends and family.

Pastor Brian

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 also give donations directly to Lori Stockhaus.

Thank you.



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

We would like to take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt appreciation to Stan MacPhee for his many years of service as resident chef at the monthly church suppers, and a tip of the hat to his right-hand gal, Sue, for all of her help as well. As with most anything that is done well, your faithfulness to the monthly church suppers has allowed many of us to go about our routines without much thought given to the church suppers. Month after month, year after year, the suppers were left in your capable hands. As a church, we have been blessed by your willingness to serve the church and its members through this fundraiser and we now pray that you enjoy a well-deserved season of rest and renewal.

Since all good things must come to an end, it is time to pass the baton. We are looking for several church members to come forward and volunteer to serve as head chef at our upcoming suppers. Hopefully, with enough volunteers, we can make up a rotation so that the responsibility doesn't fall on the shoulders of one person.

We need a few volunteers *to just be willing*. Church members who have organized suppers in the past will be happy to walk you through the process and calm any apprehensions you may have.

Need a little incentive? Over the last 5 years the church suppers have generated over \$14,000 for the church budget with a yearly average of \$2,800!

Thank you, Stan, Sue, and all who have worked behind the scenes giving of their time and talents to make this happen!

Please contact the church office, 508-832-2845 and let us know *you're willing* to help. Thank you!

Coffee Hour Hosts:

12/1 Memorial/Scholarship, Library & Nominating Committees
 12/8 Music Committee & Historian
 12/15 Board of Deacons
 12/22 Outreach Committee
 12/29, 1/5 Prudential Committee (2019)
 1/12 Historian & Music (2019 members)
 1/19 Board of Deacons (2019 members)
 1/26 Stewardship (2020 members)

**ATTENTION ALL
 COMMITTEES/BOARDS:
 ANNUAL REPORT SUBMISSIONS
 ARE DUE JANUARY 2nd.**

I want to thank Deb Pranaitis for all of her help during my accident and illness. We are so lucky to have her as our Parish Nurse!



*Sincerely,
 Barbara Soponski*

Thank you to everyone who helped with the Pumpkin Patch and the Pumpkin Patch Fair.

The pumpkin patch sold \$20,107.00 in pumpkins! The breakdown is 35% or \$7,037.45 to FCC and 65% or \$13,069.55 to Pumpkins USA.

The pumpkin patch fair raised \$7,715.25!

These numbers represent efforts by numerous people. Thank you to **EVERYONE** who gave of their time and talents to make these fundraisers so successful.

Special thanks to Sheila Skog, Judi Taft, Debbie Mahlert, Linda Mahlert, and Sue MacPhee for organizing the patch and to Cindy Ryan and company (too many names to list here) for overseeing the fair!



Happy Holidays from **Here We Grow** Preschool

The last few weeks have been busy. In some ways it feels like the school year has just begun and, yet, we are entering December. We are happy the weather has been cooperative and we are still able to get outside; fresh air is so good for everyone. The children and staff are preparing for the winter holiday season, and with only 3 weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, it's going to be busy. I think we are up to the challenge.

Here We Grow was pleased to once again be able to donate turkeys and other items to the church to be delivered to families during the Thanksgiving holiday. It is always nice to watch the children placing their donations in the basket and to listen to the conversations about how the donations are helping those who may need a little extra during this time of year.

During the month of December, **Here We Grow** will work with the Auburn Police Department in the collection of unwrapped toys and items for children ranging from infant to sixteen-years-old. The police department will distribute everything collected to children living in Auburn. Our holiday programs will be on December 19 and 20; feel free to stop in on the morning of the 20th to listen to the children singing in fellowship hall. They work hard learning new songs and some old favorites. The children are hoping to get a visit from the man in red again this year.

We are also collecting gently used winter coats, snowsuits, and other outerwear throughout the winter to be given to Auburn Youth and Family Services. There is a box outside the HWG office for anyone wishing to help with this cause.

The school will be closed from December 23 - January 1. Our first day back will be January 2, 2020.

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

Cristi Corey, Director
Here We Grow Preschool

Join us on Tuesday, December 17th, for our monthly potluck and discussion group. This month we will be viewing the movie, *The Bells of St. Mary*, beginning at 5:30 p.m. **All are welcome!**

Father O'Malley (Bing Crosby) is transferred to the Roman Catholic inner-city school, St. Mary's, where he quickly falls into conflict with its headmistress, Sister Mary (Ingrid Bergman). Their primary disagreement has to do with the deteriorating school itself. Father O'Malley feels it should be abandoned and the children sent to other schools. Sister Mary and the other nuns, however, believe there is still hope, possibly in the form of charity from a wealthy business owner.



Again, this year, the Boy Scouts will be selling Christmas wreaths and cemetery baskets/logs on the Church lawn on Sunday, Dec. 1st and Dec. 8th. Your support is much appreciated. For delivery call 774-239-2240.

FROM THE BOARD OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH

Mary and Joseph were homeless the night of Jesus' birth. They knocked on doors and were turned away all night long. Until a charitable person gave them access to the barn. Charity, as understood in the Bible, is a way of bringing about hope. Hope is the light that shines through the darkness. Hebrews 13:2 reads "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing, some have unwittingly entertained angels." I love this passage because it reminds me to be kind to all people, not just the ones you are closest to. And although this time of year we remember the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we are inspired to be charitable, do so always! Do so every day. Be hospitable, be gracious, and be grateful!!!!

Your Outreach Committee works all year long (with a short summer break) to represent every member of this congregation. WE are the First Congregational Church of Auburn. This year we have helped so many people. Feeding and clothing the homeless in Worcester and Boston, feeding children from all over the world, giving hope and warmth to those suffering after a natural disaster, and not only bringing joy to youth, but also providing basic hygienic needs to those same youth! One selfless act of charity, will create more.

Regarding our partnership with NFI, I would like to give a very special thank you to our Youth On a Mission. Our young ladies and gentlemen were given a task of choosing a small, thoughtful gift for the NFI youth. They were then asked to give a "show and tell" and explain why they chose this gift and how will it effect the youth receiving it. Both tasks are not easy for this age group, but I have complete faith in every one of them!!! Thank you also to all who have donated to our NFI box. We are changing lives, one toothbrush at a time!

For the month of December, Outreach has chosen to give a little financial respite to a local mom who is caring for her sick child. This mom has had to quit her job to care for her son who has cancer, as well as her other children. We were able to take away the burden of paying the December rent, so that she can focus on loving her babies and celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ!

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your incredible generosity. Without you, Outreach could not entertain angels.

May you embrace the spirit of this Christmas Season. Give Peace, Give Hope, and Give Joy!

Love,
Your Outreach Committee

**PLEASE LOOK FOR A SPECIAL
ADVENT CALENDAR
ATTACHED WITHIN THE
DECEMBER TIDINGS EMAIL
NOTIFICATION.**



Costume Jewelry Donations Wanted

There's been a great response to our Craft Club! On Dec. 11th, attendees will each be making a wall hanging of a Christmas tree made from repurposed jewelry.

By the time you read this, the 2 remaining spots in the class will most likely be full. However, we are asking **everyone** to please check their costume jewelry stash and see if there are items you are willing to donate. If so, please give directly to Cindy Dube or leave items (clearly marked for "craft club") in the church office. Thank you!

BELL CHOIR SCHEDULE

12/3 at 9:30: rehearsal at The Overlook in Charlton

12/6 at noon: lunch at The Overlook followed by short rehearsal

12/6 at 2:00 PM: concert at The Overlook (**This event is open to the public free of charge.**)

No other rehearsals or performances in December.

Organizational meeting on Sunday, January 12th, following the worship service.

DECEMBER SERMON TOPICS:

- 12/1 ~ Sermon: "Start of the Year"
- 12/8 ~ Sermon: "Angels"
- 12/15 ~ Cantata Sunday
- 12/22 ~ Sermon: "Weary God"
- 12/24 ~ 5 p.m. Children's Christmas Pageant
11 p.m. Sermon: "Silent Night"
- 12/29 ~ Sermon: "Winter All Year, but No Christmas"

**Children's Pageant****FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Merry Christmas to you all and Happy Birthday, Jesus!

As the weather turns cold and snowy (I hope!), I pray you will have time to sit with a warm cup of tea and reflect on this past year. We have all had good times and bad times, but we have also had God's love through it all. When we find ourselves in the hard times, remember that He will never leave us and God's love will sustain us. I also think we need to praise Him for the good times, and be thankful for those rays of sunshine in our lives.

Speaking of rays of sunshine, **Parents Night Out is scheduled for December 6, 6-8pm. PLEASE SIGN UP** in Fellowship hall on the YOM/Sunday school bulletin board. Following PNO we will have the YOM Christmas party. All attending are asked to bring a \$10.00 gift for the Yankee swap. We will end the party at 9:00.

We will have a Christmas pageant again this year at the 5:00 Christmas Eve service. Please try to attend and support the kids and all their hard work. Thank you to everyone who will participate in making this annual event so special.

Our pie fundraiser, as always, was a success. I do not have the final numbers yet, but we are very grateful for your purchases and hope you enjoyed your pies/cookies with loved ones.

Our next event is the **annual Cookie Walk on December 15** after service; as always, any and all donations are gladly accepted. We do ask that you label your donations and note if there are nuts included. If you bring your cookies in a container you need returned, please CLEARLY mark your name on it. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Youth on a Mission will be going to Monadnock Bible Ministries March 6-8. Please have the teens as well as Lillian, Shannon, and Fred, who will be chaperoning, in your prayers.

Well, another year has gone and we need to take time in prayer to thank our Father in Heaven for all the blessings we have. Rich and I would like to thank our church family for all the cards, hugs, and words of encouragement, but especially the prayers you have said on our behalf. This church family is the best gift we could have ever received.

I pray you all have a Christmas season full of love and happiness. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

With His guidance we serve,
Jean McPherson, Director of Religious Education



December is Safe Toys and Christmas Celebrations Month.

December 1-7 is National Influenza Vaccination Week.

December 1 is World AIDS Day.

December 2-8 is National Handwashing Awareness Week.

Handwashing is still the best way to prevent the spread of germs and diseases. Sanitizers help when soap and water aren't readily available.

A reminder about the medical equipment: it doesn't matter who needs it, or for how long, please circulate it! I have a few things locked in the shed in back of the church if you don't find what you need in the closet.

Unused medication, except for liquid, can be taken to the police department and put in a bin in the lobby. If you're unable to take them, I will do it for you, but please give them to me. I can't have medication left at the church.

After the New Year, I will have the pharmacist come to give the second dose for the shingles vaccine. He is also willing to give the first dose to anyone who wants it.

I want to remind you that the holidays can be a difficult time for a lot of people for various reasons. Please remember them; just to visit, sit quietly, or share a meal will be appreciated.

Merry Christmas and a very Happy, Healthy New Year!

God Bless!

Debbie Pranaitis

Parish Nurse

Cell #: 508-612-4521

Message from the Nominating Committee:

January's Annual Meeting is just around the corner and there are still six nominee vacancies ready for your church spirit of volunteering.

Nominees from our FCC membership are still needed for filling the Board of Deacons (5 vacancies); and Board of Trustees (1 vacancy).

Sign-up sheets are in Fellowship Hall; or, please contact one of us.

We continue to count our blessings with the support provided by all members currently serving on a committee and to those who have chosen to be nominated in January 2020. Thank you.

Nominating Committee Contact info:

Sue MacPhee - (508) 832-9347 (or) Judi Taft - (508) 341-4530

Please continue in prayer for the Holt Family due to the recent passing of David Holt. (An obituary was not available in time for the November newsletter.)

David L. Holt, 71, of Sutton, peacefully passed away on October 26th, 2019 with his family by his side after a courageous 2-year battle with pancreatic cancer.

Born in Bedford, Ohio, David was the son of Howard and Eileen (Duncan) Holt. At age 7 he moved to Auburn. He graduated from Auburn High School and earned a Bachelors Degree in Electrical Engineering (summa cum laude) and a Masters Degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering from Clarkson University (Potsdam, NY). David was a member of the ROTC program at Clarkson University and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the US Army. He went on to earn a Masters of Business Degree from Worcester Polytechnic Institute and was a graduate of the Executive Program at Stanford University (Palo Alto, CA).

David was active in the community, becoming the first Eagle Scout in Boy Scout Troop 102 at Bethel Lutheran Church in Auburn. He continued to volunteer with the Boy Scouts well into adulthood. He was an involved member of the Auburn Congregational Church and Sutton Congregational Church where he served as moderator for many years.

David worked for New England Electric Systems for nearly 30 years, retiring from the company in 2000 as Executive Vice President and Chief Information Officer. He went on to be a founding owner and Principle at Energy Initiatives Group, continuing to provide expertise in power generation and distribution until his full retirement in 2010.

David is survived by his loving wife of 43 years, Kathleen (Winkels) Holt; his daughter, Christie Hudson, and her husband, Scott; his daughter, Julie Penterson, and her husband, Jeffrey; his four grandchildren: Connor Hudson, Anna Hudson, Brianna Penterson, and Matthew Penterson; his sister, Linda Nissly, and her husband, David; nieces and nephews.

A memorial service was held here, at First Congregational Church, on November 4.

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.’” — John 11:25-26 ESV



The Christmas Fund 2019

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” John 1:5

For over a century, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a way to ensure that a light of love and hope will always shine for faithful servants of our church who find themselves facing unforeseen financial need.

We are grateful for the generosity of churches and individuals who contributed a total of \$2,539,471 to the 2018 offering, enabling us to provide pension supplementation, health premium supplementation, special grants for emergencies and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to over 1,000 individuals and families in need.

The theme of this year’s Christmas Fund Offering is “The Light Shines in the Darkness.” The recipients of these gifts are persons who have faithfully served the church for many years. And now, in their time of need, you can be the church to them. We invite and encourage you to join thousands of UCC members and congregations who will support this year’s appeal.

On behalf of the hundreds of clergy and lay employees and their families whose lives were touched by your support of the Christmas Fund Offering, we offer our sincere thanks for your generosity!

The Pension Boards — United Church of Christ, Inc. and United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance

Offering envelopes are located in the church pews or simply make your check payable to the church noting “UCC Christmas Fund” in the memo section and mail to the church office — 128 Central Street, Auburn, MA 01501. Thank you for your support.

From the Stewardship Committee

WITH GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE:
 HELPING EACH OTHER, OUR CHURCH, AND OUR WORLD

THANK YOU to everyone who participated in Consecration Sunday or returned a pledge card. As of November 16, First Congregational Church has received 83 pledges, payments, or donations for a total of \$121,064.

Our church has accomplished amazing things, with the help of God and His gifts... and you! Thanks to your contributions, we can all continue to expand the possibilities for ourselves, our children, our church, and our world.

If you have not yet returned your pledge card, please do so today, whether you're making a pledge or not, so that we can plan the budget for 2020. 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 also be changed at any time.

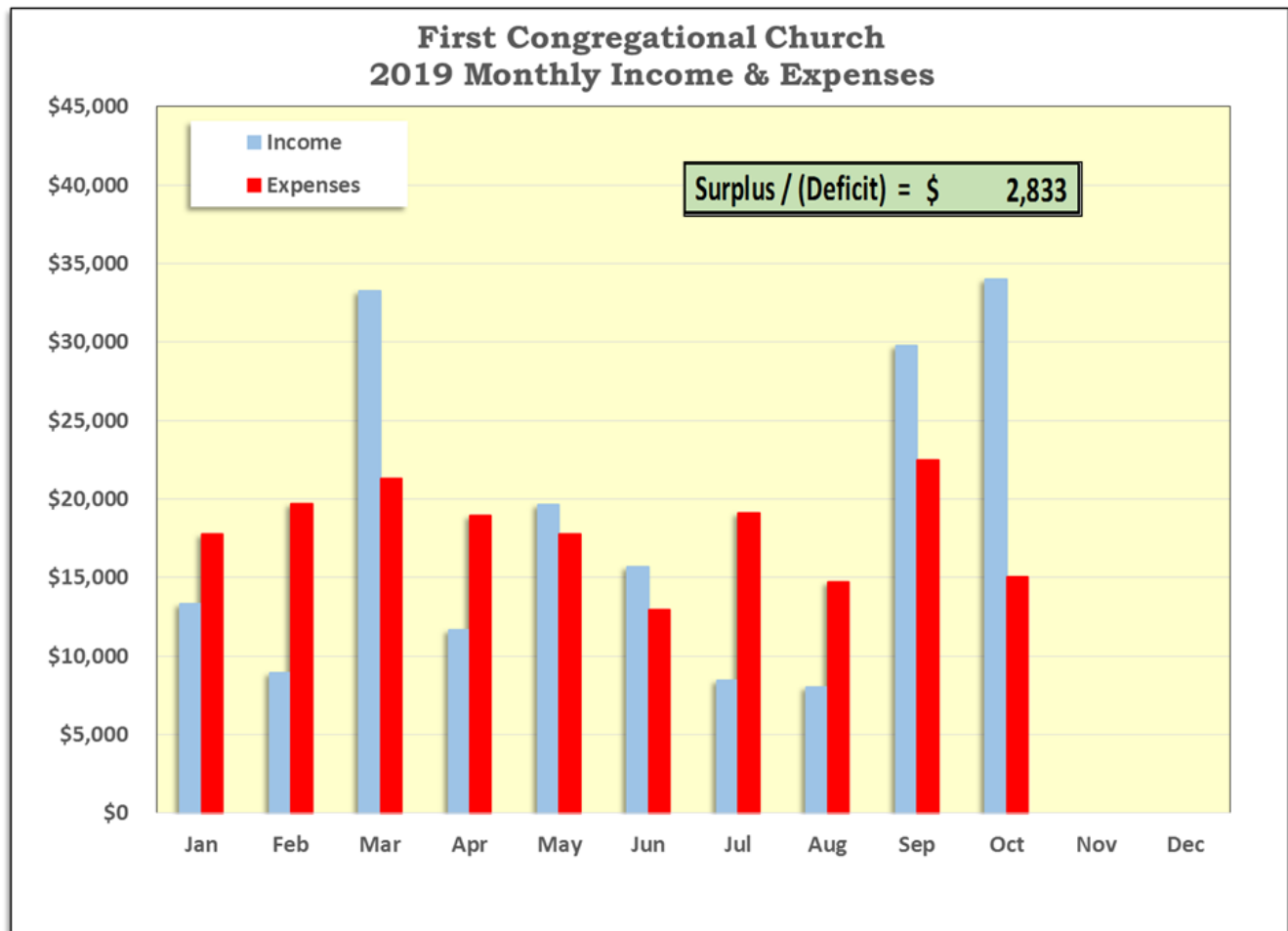
We appreciate your support.

In His love,

Your Stewardship Committee

Michelle Bigelow, Nan Johnson, Ellie Lowell, Debbie Mahlert, Linda Mahlert, Martha Pappas

“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





As they've done in past years, the Deacons, Pastor Brian, and Deb Pranaitis will be delivering Christmas baskets/stockings to shut-ins. We're planning to prepare/assemble baskets on Dec. 14th as part of the Christmas carol sing-along and potluck get together. Remember, the potluck begins at 5:00 p.m. and Jackie Knox will lead us in 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.

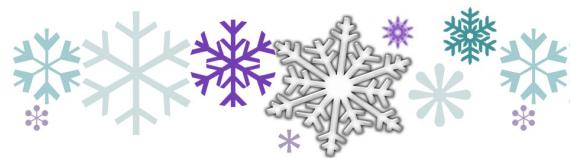
Christmas arrangements made of fresh greens will once again be available for you to purchase **during coffee hour on Dec. 8th** and, if any remain, on Dec. 15th as well. All the greens are gathered locally, so there is no expense involved. All monies taken in will go to the church's general fund. Keep 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

COMPLETING YOUR 2019 PLEDGES AND DONATIONS

Please help our church's 2019 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 reporting for 2019. Please be aware that any pledges or donations the church receives showing a postmark **'after'** December 31, 2019, will be posted and reportable for next year's 2020 giving statement, and not for 2019. **All pledges and donations received before the deadline of December 31, 2019, will be reported on your 2019 giving statement.** Also, if you did not make a pledge in this current year, but would like a recorded 2019 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.**

Bless you all for your pledges and donations, but most of all, for your shared faith, supportive talents, and communion fellowship. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Thank you,
Sue MacPhee, Financial Secretary
Lori-Ann Stockhaus, Assistant Financial Secretary



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, American Pastor & Teacher

During times of inclement weather, we have set up an account with WCVB - TV Channel 5 enabling us to report Church service cancellations. However, if weather is severe enough to result in area power outages, we may not have the capability to contact them. So you should always use your best judgment, exercising caution when deciding whether to venture out to service during stormy weather.

He it is
**who gave
himself
for us**
that he might
redeem us
from all
iniquity...

TITUS 2:14, NRSV



*Wishing you and yours
a blessed Christmas and
a Happy, Healthy
New Year!*

TIDINGS is a monthly publication of

**First Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ
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*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 2019

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