


December
2021

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*

***November 28**
1st Sunday in Advent

***December 5th**
2nd Sunday in Advent
Communion Sunday with
Deacons’ offering

***December 12th**
3rd Sunday in Advent
CANTATA SUNDAY

* Sunday Services begin at 10 a.m.



***December 19th**
4th Sunday in Advent

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

9 p.m. Candlelight
Communion Service

* Sunday Services begin at 10 a.m.

Other December activities include **“Parents’ Night Out”** on **Dec. 10th** from 6 to 8 p.m., followed by **YOM’s Christmas party**. The **Christmas Potluck, Sing-along & Christmas Basket (plate) Assembly** will be held on **Dec. 11th** beginning at 5 p.m., and look for our annual **Cookie Walk** during coffee hour on **Dec. 19th**.

FROM THE PASTOR

There is something so powerful, so emotional, about a young woman being pregnant and possibly in danger. The story of Christmas is in part the story of Mary and Jesus being in danger. After Jesus was born, Herod decided Jesus was a threat to his power. Any threat to Herod’s power was met with murderous violence.

At first, Mary and her unborn son are in danger because she is an unwed mother. Mary’s baby was a sign she broke the law, a crime that could be punished by death. The world thought she had done something wrong and they were ready to punish her. But she was innocent.

Who do we punish? Who are we sure has done wrong? Is it possible that though we are sure of guilt, God knows they are innocent?

Women get pregnant, and men do not. So the sin it takes two people to commit, is blamed on one. Then somehow the child is shamed for the circumstance of their birth, like somehow they had a part in what the parents did. That is how it was with my mother, my brother, and me.

I wish the church had emphasized the unwed mother part of Mary’s story. The early church especially cared

for orphans, but it was less generous in how it treated unwed mothers.

On December 5, we will be having a special guest preacher. Nicole Bell is the leader of the LIFT (Living In Freedom Together) program. The LIFT website says, “Our vision is a world where systems of prostitution no longer exist and people no longer feel it is their right to purchase another human’s body. LIFT is led by and for survivors (of prostitution), we’re building a world where survivors are valued, equal members of the community. Their voice and choices are honored implicitly.”

Ms. Bell will talk to us about the needs of at risk women and what her organization does to help get women out of dangerous situations.

The Outreach Committee has planned a congregational meeting for December 12th to vote to give \$10,000 from the Sibley Fund to the LIFT program. The money would go toward a main floor bathroom in one of the two facilities that provides emergency shelter. Please make every effort to attend the special meeting to help ensure we have a quorum.

Thank you —

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 give donations directly to Lori Stockhaus or mail them to the church to her attention.

Thank you.



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

Coffee Hour Hosts:

Dec. 5 Deb Pranaitis & Bev Geddes
 Dec. 12 The Outreach Committee
 Dec. 19 Volunteers Needed
 Dec. 26 Volunteers Needed

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.

ATTENTION ALL COMMITTEES/BOARDS:

ANNUAL REPORT SUBMISSIONS ARE DUE JANUARY 3rd.

Get Your "From our Pumpkin Patch" Cookbook Here!!

Need a gift idea for the holiday season? Have you considered the church's cookbook? Each cookbook contains over 200 recipes. At \$15 each, they will make a great Christmas or hostess gift. Also, remember, this is a church fundraiser with a portion of the purchase price going to the church's general fund.

If you would like to purchase a cookbook, please contact Michele Schillinger at 508-259-2239 and leave a brief message, along with your name and phone number, and she'll be sure to call you back. You may also email her at library@auburnfirstucc.org. Please include "cookbook" in the subject line of your email.

PLEASE NOTE:

Due to an unforeseen shortage, the Boy Scouts will **not** be selling Christmas wreaths and cemetery logs on the church lawn this year. They have a very limited amount of Christmas wreaths and cemetery baskets/logs for those who have come to rely on the scouts for your Christmas greens.

Please call George Fournier at 774-239-2240, and he'll do his best to help you out. Thank you for your understanding during these unprecedented times.

BELL CHOIR SCHEDULE

12/5 Bell Choir Rehearsal 2:00 p.m.
 12/12 Bell Choir Rehearsal 2:00 p.m.

**12/19 Bell Choir Rehearsal at 9:15 a.m.
 BELL CHOIR WILL BE FEATURED DURING
 THE 10:00 A.M. WORSHIP SERVICE.**

Bell Choir Rehearsals will resume on January 9, 2022.



JOIN US FOR OUR CHRISTMAS CANTATA ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12, DURING THE 10 A.M. SERVICE



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 4,700 lbs. of soft goods, raising almost \$1,000.00. 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. This year 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 in age from infant to sixteen years old. There is a donation box outside the Here We Grow office. We will be collecting from December 1-15. The police department will distribute everything collected to children living in Auburn.

The school will be closed from December 23 - January 2. Our first day back will be January 3, 2022. The **Here We Grow** staff and families wish all of you a safe and happy holiday season.

Cristi Corey, Director, Here We Grow Preschool



December is National Safe Toys and Gifts Month

December 1 is World Aids Day

December 1-7 is National Handwashing Awareness Week

December 3 is International Day of Persons with Disabilities Day

December 6-12 is National Influenza Vaccination Week

Handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of germs. This was important before Covid 19 and is still very important. Flu shots can help prevent and/or minimize you getting sick with the flu.

Please remember that Christmas isn't always a joyous time. Reach out to others who are alone, or who have lost a loved one. A call, a note, or a visit is usually a great help. Stay safe and healthy.

God Bless!

Debbie Pranaitis, Parish Nurse, 508-612-4521

FROM THE BOARD OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH

We have been doing a lot of research about a young program in Worcester dedicated to women who have been living a life of prostitution and are looking for help in turning their lives around. Lots of information about LIFT, Living In Freedom Together, can be found on the internet if you want to learn more. We have met with Nikki, the founder of this program, and are extremely impressed with her and what she has accomplished in a relatively short time. Two of our committee members, Pat Bukoski and Cindy Dube, had the opportunity to visit and get a tour of one of their two facilities in Worcester.

We have received approval from the Church Council and will be moving ahead with proposing to the congregation that we support this program with a grant from the Sibley Fund. We are thrilled to be having Nikki speak to you during the service on December 5th and answer questions you might have. The following week, December 12th, we will be voting on whether or not to award them with a grant. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend on these two dates. We have some printed materials in fellowship hall for you to look at if you wish.

Please be sure to attend the special meeting on December 12, so we may be certain of a quorum.

Thank you.

Your Outreach Committee —

Cindy Dube, Pat Bukoski, Judy Murphy, Deb Pranaitis, Judi Taft, and Marion Woodcock



FROM THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

With the January Annual Meeting fast approaching, our committee finds itself lacking the support needed for nominees beginning 2022 terms. And still, with much gratitude, there are so many dedicated church members that continue each year to serve on church committees. Help is needed to fill 14 vacancies. All committees are important, but the following list is in order of most needed.

	<u>Term:</u>		
(9) <u>Board of Trustees</u>	(2 years)	2 Vacancies	
	(1 year)	2 Vacancies	
(7) <u>Board of Education</u>	(3 years)	2 Vacancies	
(12) <u>Board of Deacons</u>	(3 years)	2 Vacancies	<i>Note: two confirmands are involved with Deacons weekly during services until June 2022.</i>
	(1 year)	2 Vacancies	
(6) <u>Stewardship</u>	(3 years)	1 Vacancy	
	(2 years)	1 Vacancy	
(4) <u>Music</u>	(2 years)	1 Vacancy	
(3) <u>Nominating</u>	Continuous	1 Vacancy	

Needed requirement to join a committee is to be an adult church member, approved as a nominee at the Annual Meeting. However, don't let that stop you if you're not a member (yet); because we'll work with Council to expedite a membership (if you find it in your faithful heart to fulfill a nominating vacancy).

Nominating Contact info:

Sue MacPhee: (508) 832-9347

Judi Taft: (508) 341-4530

Sheila Skog (978) 387-7705; or, the church office, 508-832-2845.



Raise Some Dough to Benefit

Here We Grow Preschool

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

When: **Tuesday, December 14th, 2021**

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.

FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Thanksgiving is a few days away and, after spending the afternoon at Worcester Fellowship with our Youth On a Mission, I am finding gratitude in every corner. When you read this, the turkey holiday will be behind us and our focus will be Christmas. But the idea of a "Holiday Season" includes not only Thanksgiving and Christmas, but also Hanukkah and the celebration of New Year. All of which serve as a reminder to be grateful. Thanks be to God!

What will Christmas look like this year? Our Sunday School and YOM programs are almost back to normal. Although I have learned to live one day at a time, the future looks bright! We have our Cookie Walk, Parents' Night Out and Christmas Pageant to look forward to this December. We also have something new happening. Our children have been working hard on creating ornaments symbolizing the world's love for Jesus! In class, we have been discussing the history of Christians showing their love of Jesus even while facing horrendous persecution. We should remember them and be grateful for their fight!

Today, I am grateful for all of you! For all the support and love I am receiving as I have begun my transition as your new Director of Christian Ed. Jesus Christ saved us all when he died and was resurrected, as we celebrate in the spring. In a vulnerable moment, I must tell you all that you saved me! My mental health had struggled, living with this virus among us. Last year at this time was very dark for me. But in true fashion of the Lord, the people of FCC lifted me up and offered this incredibly important role as leader and mentor to our youngest members. I accepted graciously, knowing our Lord and Savior has a plan for me!

To understand the hugeness of how the past 20 months has affected our youth, is a gift. I will empathize with them, I will love them, I will inspire them, I will support them and I will always "have their back." I will do my best to teach them all the Word of God and guide them to be the very best people they can be! The beauty of working with our children is seeing their awesome potential!!

I ask the rest of the congregation to continue to have MY back! Together, our church will be a safe space for our children to come and feel loved! When we feel love, we flourish. Today, I am full of love. The love of God, the love of family and friends, and the love of my church!

Thank you again for all your continued support! May God bless us all as we enter this joyous season celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

Shannon Hartmann
Director of Religious Education

From the Stewardship Committee

THANK YOU to everyone who returned a pledge card.

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 2022.

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.

In His love,
Your Stewardship Committee

Nan Johnson, Ron Klaucke, Marilyn Kulesa, Ellie Lowell, Linda Mahlert

"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



Christmas Carol Sing-along and Potluck

As they've done in past years, the Deacons, Pastor Brian, and Deb Pranaitis will be delivering Christmas baskets (actually we'll be using plates this year) to members of our church family who could perhaps use a reminder that we're thinking of them. We're planning to prepare/assemble the plates on December 11th 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, once again, in singing Christmas carols (thank you, Jackie!).

CHRISTMAS ARRANGEMENTS made of fresh greens will once again be available for you to purchase **DURING COFFEE HOUR ON DECEMBER 12th** and, if any remain, on Dec. 19th 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 2021 PLEDGES AND DONATIONS

Please help our church's 2021 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 2021. Please be aware that any pledges or donations the church receives showing a postmark **"after"** December 31, 2021, will be posted and reportable for next year's 2022 giving statement, and not for 2021. **All pledges and donations received before the deadline of December 31, 2021, will be reported on your 2021 giving statement.** Also, if you did not make a pledge in this current year, but would like a recorded 2021 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

December Sermon Topics:

- Dec. 5 Guest speaker from LIFT
- Dec. 12 Christmas Cantata
- Dec. 19 "Price of Pride"
- Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Services:
5PM Family Service with Christmas Pageant
9PM Candlelight Communion Service
"Silent Night, the Not Perfect Christmas"

**MERRY
CHRISTMAS**

- Dec. 26 "Babies Grow So Fast"

We have learned of the passing of Norma Morgan on October 31st. Please keep her loved ones in your prayers. She is survived by her son, Lincoln Paine, and two daughters, Susan Maass and her husband, Mark, and Lynn Fontaine and her husband, Mark; as well as three grandchildren and one great-grandchild. She also leaves her brother, Daniel Robbins III, and his wife, Suzette; her sister, Beverly Bostwick, and her husband, Leslie; and her sister-in-law, Nina Morgan.

Members of the Auburn Congregational Church,
On behalf of my mother, Marjorie (Zimmerman), I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for the cards and notes you have sent. She has very fond memories of "her" church in Auburn. She recently turned 93 and, although she has some limitations, she was adamant that you be thanked for your kindness.

Gratefully,
Eileen (Zimmerman) Keller

Marjorie is currently in assisted living:
Christopher Heights of Webster,
338 Thompson Rd., Apt. 327
Webster, MA 01570

The Christmas Fund 2021



Good news . . . Great Joy . . . All the People! Luke 2:10

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 2020, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 276 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,180,187)
- Health benefits supplementation for 89 retired clergy and lay employees (\$274,008)
- Emergency grants for 96 individuals and families (\$214,649)
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 504 retired clergy and lay employees (\$252,000)

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
 Phone: (508) 832-2845
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 or PastorBrian@auburnfirstucc.org
*God’s church in Auburn Center
 doing Christ’s work in the world.*
 Web: auburnfirstucc.org



December 2021						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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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