



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 INTERIM PASTOR:

The church’s Advent season officially begins on Sunday, December 3, but the world’s Christmas season began the day after Thanksgiving... Most years, the two separate days are so close together that we don’t really notice that they begin separately, but this year, there’s over a week between the two.

In some churches, the difference between a season of preparing for the birth of Jesus, and a season designed to help us get through the darkness of December is really clear. But for most of us, the two have so much in common that the differences almost disappear.

This year, we’ll be observing Advent as usual, but we will be using Christmas songs to help us remember Jesus in the midst of all the December events. Through the season, we’ll move from the quieter carols like “I Wonder as I Wander,” to the full-scale “Joy to the World” on December 24.

Jesus came to save us from aimlessness and sin and to give us a new way to live, one which is built on our faith, our hope, our desire for peace, our intention to choose love as our guiding value. Like the two seasons of Advent and Christmas, our personal relationship with Jesus and the way we live out our lives in community are both separate and together. Neither one is complete without the other.

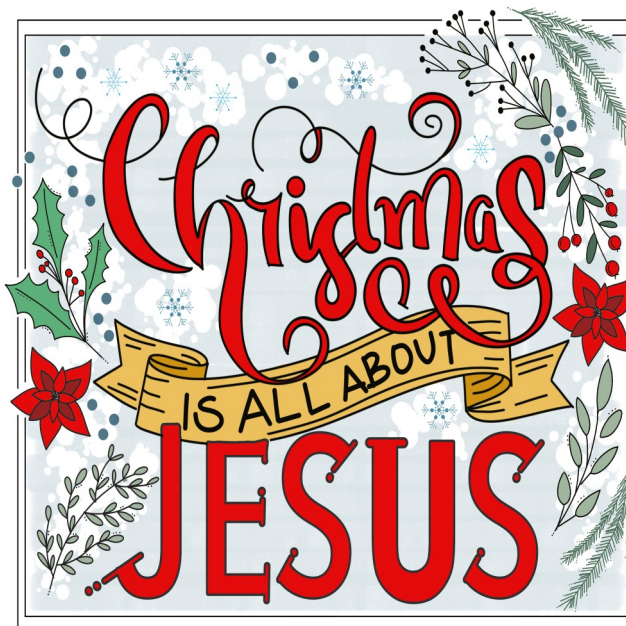
During this Advent/Christmas season, even in the midst of all we’ll be doing, let’s keep an eye out for the times and places when we can be a part of a better world. Build all the other joys on that foundation of love and welcome for all that Jesus teaches us. Be a force for good in your world.

Pastor Virginia

***December 3rd**
1st Sunday in Advent
Communion Sunday
with Deacons’ offering

***December 10th**
2nd Sunday in Advent
CANTATA SUNDAY

***December 17th**
3rd Sunday in Advent
featuring the Bell Choir



December 24th
4th Sunday in Advent
Christmas Eve —

10 a.m. Service with
Children’s Christmas
Pageant

5 p.m. Candlelight
Communion Service

* Services begin at 10 a.m.

All Are Welcome

HISTORY OF THE PUMPKIN PATCH

When we were driving on Route 28 in 2006 and saw a church yard full of pumpkins, we had to stop! The fundraiser coordinator was there and we learned about the fabulous way to help the Navajo Indians of New Mexico and our own church with no up front investment!

The Navajo Indians grow the pumpkins, gourds, etc. They then load a trailer truck and deliver them to our church yard. The only thing they ask of us is that we man the "Pumpkin Patch" until October 31st and send them a tally every evening of our sales.

After talking to the coordinator, my first call was to Shirley Hill. — Could we do this at our church? We decided, of course, we can. And so the fun began 17 years ago.

The first year we got a partial truck and counted every pumpkin we unloaded. No one knew what to expect. Would we find pumpkins rolled down the hill? No customers? It was out of our hands.

The first year, 2007, we started selling October 14th and our sales were \$4,511.16. Our percentage was \$1,127.79. The rest went to the Navajo Indians. Sixteen years later our profit was \$12,622.67!

We thank God we drove by that church! We have families that come every year, some take pictures each year. It is a community event.

We have earned over \$110,000.00 for our church! See you next year at the "Pumpkin Patch."

Thank you,
Diane Moore



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

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

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

COFFEE HOUR HOSTS:

Dec. 3	Michele Schillinger & helpers (Sue & Stu Campbell & Kathy Holt)
Dec. 10	VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
Dec. 17	Board of Trustees & Prudential
Dec. 24	Christmas Eve - NO coffee hour
Dec. 31	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.

Thank you so much to all who contributed to the food and coat drive for El Buen Samaritano (The Good Samaritan). The Outreach Committee has decided to accept ongoing donations of coats, hats, mittens, scarves and food. Gift certificates to Walmart, Target, etc. are also welcome.

Please look for donation boxes in fellowship hall.

CHRISTMAS ARRANGEMENTS

made of fresh greens will, once again, be available for you to purchase **DURING COFFEE HOUR ON DECEMBER 10th**. All the greens are gathered locally, so there is no expense involved. All monies taken in will go to the church's general fund. Please 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



Cookie Walk

Our annual **Cookie Walk** will be during coffee hour on **December 3rd**. Your cookie donations will be greatly appreciated. Remember, this is a Youth On a Mission fundraiser. Thank you in advance for your support with cookie donations and/or purchases.

CHRISTMAS CAROL SING-ALONG & POTLUCK

As they've done in past years, the Deacons and Deb Pranaitis will be delivering Christmas baskets to members of our church family who may be less mobile and/or may be in need of a reminder that we're thinking of them.

We're planning to prepare/assemble baskets on December 16th as part of the Christmas carol sing-along and potluck get-together. **The potluck begins at 5:00 p.m.** and Jackie Knox will lead us, once again, in a fun time 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.

*** * * PLEASE NOTE THAT PARENTS' NIGHT OUT HAS BEEN CANCELED due to a scheduling conflict impacting student availability. * * ***

Thank you to all who participated in the Christmas song survey. Please be sure to join us at our 10 a.m. Sunday worship services so you may enjoy all your favorites. And, the winners are . . .

Angels We Have Heard on High

Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn

Away in the Manger

Carol at the Manger

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

I Wonder as I Wander

It Came upon the Midnight Clear

Joy to the World

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O Holy Night

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Oh, How Joyfully

Silent Night

What Child Is This

Who Would Think that What Was Needed





December 1-31 is National Impaired Driving Prevention Month

December 1-31 is National Safe Toys and Gifts Month

December 1 is World AIDS Day

December 1-7 is Crohn's, Colitis Awareness Week

December 3 is International Day of Persons with Disabilities Day, and

December 3-9 is National Hand Washing Awareness Week..... this should be every day! It's the best way to stop the spread of germs.

I hope you all have a very Merry Christmas! It's going to be difficult for some of us because we have family members who aren't here with us, but they are always with us. Take time to remember those who are less fortunate than you are. A card, or even a visit, can make someone's day better.

I hope you all have a Happy, Healthy New Year.

God Bless!

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

FROM THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Dear Church members,

Please consider the following committee vacancies (# required by Bylaws):

Board of Deacons—7 vacancies

Board of Ed—3 vacancies

Board of Outreach—1 vacancy

Trustees—2 vacancies

Music—1 vacancy

Nominating—2 vacancies

Stewardship—2 vacancies

If you have an interest in any of these openings, please reach out to Michele Schillinger (508-259-2239) or Sheila Skog (978-387-7705). Thank you.

COMPLETING YOUR 2023 PLEDGES AND DONATIONS

Please help our church's 2023 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 year-end reporting for 2023. Please be aware that any pledges or donations the church receives showing a post-mark “**after**” December 31, 2023, will be posted and reportable for next year's 2024 giving statement, and not for 2023. **All pledges and donations received before the deadline of December 31, 2023, will be reported on your 2023 giving statement.** Also, if you did not make a pledge in this current year, but would like a recorded 2023 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.**



There's an old *West Wing* episode that quotes the Bible in a very confusing way. President Bartlet asks, in a conversation with a religious commentator:

I wanted to ask you a couple of questions . . . I'm interested in selling my youngest daughter into slavery as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. She's a Georgetown sophomore, speaks fluent Italian, always cleared the table when it was her turn. What would a good price for her be?

. . . Here's one that's really important 'cause we've got a lot of sports fans in this town: Touching the skin of a dead pig makes one unclean. Leviticus 11:7. If they promise to wear gloves, can the Washington Redskins still play football? Can Notre Dame? Can West Point?

Does the whole town really have to be together to stone my brother John for planting different crops side by side? Can I burn my mother in a small family gathering for wearing garments made from two different threads?

Have you ever read the Bible and found a quote like these and wondered what was going on? Is it really true that the Bible condemns eating lobster? Or using gold jewelry? What about those stories of our Biblical role models who do the most offensive things? What does the Bible really say about Jesus, and about his ministry?

Come to an introduction to the Bible course beginning on Tuesday, January 9 at 12:30 p.m. Learn more about the Bible – what it really is, how we read it, where it came from and why we continue to read and study it. Pastor Virginia will be offering a basic *Introduction to the Bible* course. Please let us know if you are interested – send an email to the church office, secretary@auburnfirstucc.org or to Pastor Virginia, InterimPastor@auburnfirstucc.org or speak to her on Sunday.

Our basic text will be *What Is the Bible?*, published by the Massachusetts Bible Society. It's available in print or an ebook version from Amazon. In six weeks, we'll learn a lot about this foundational book which has so much wisdom to offer.



The Music Committee would like to acknowledge and express our heartfelt appreciation for Herb Mower's many contributions to the wonderful music of this church.

Herb gave generously of his time and talents, both on the organ and in looking for ways to enhance our musical offerings, such as restarting the bell choir.

He was both exacting in his own performance and endlessly patient with beginners; extremely talented and also playful. Regaling the bell choir members with stories and jokes, he also managed to teach them about music and guide them into performing.

A giving man of many talents, he will be missed!

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands." - Psalm 100

Bev Scobie, Ellie Lowell, Patricia Hilbert

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. As of this writing, I do not have our total delivery amount, but I'll let you know when I get it. 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.

We celebrated Thanksgiving with our students with a "feast" in the vestry this year. We enjoyed pizza thanks to our friends at Carlo's 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 from infant to 16 years old. There is a donation box outside the Here We Grow office. They have told me at this time the greatest need is for the 8 to 12-year-old range. We will be collecting from Nov. 27- Dec. 8. The police department will distribute everything collected to children living in Auburn. Thank you in advance for your generosity.



Toy Collection

We will be having another **Papa Gino's night on December 7** in Auburn from 4-9 P.M. **Please look for the enclosed flyer** required for crediting 20% of your purchase to Here We Grow.

Our Holiday program will be held on Wednesday, December 20, at 10:30 in fellowship hall, if you would like to stop in and listen to the children sing.

The school will be closed from December 22—January 1. Our first day back will be January 2, 2024.

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

Cristi Corey, Director
Here We Grow Preschool

Trying to think of that perfect gift for someone special??

*For \$15, you can purchase **Our Pumpkin Patch Cookbook** for that special cook in your life... Our church cookbook contains recipes from church members, friends of the church and our favorite "in memoriam" recipes copied from 2 previously published church cookbooks (with permission from the families, of course!). It also contains special tabs with cooking tips and is ring bound with an added "pouch" so your special cook can collect all their personal favorites in one place!*

If you are interested in purchasing one, or would like to see one before making your decision, please call Michele Schillinger at 508.259.2239 or contact the Church office.

FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Who is ready for the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season?
Me...???? As I raise my hand reluctantly.

Let's take a pause on the hustle and bustle part and focus on the Christmas part. Why do we celebrate Christmas? We are taking the time to acknowledge the birth of Jesus and to give him praise. Was Jesus born on December 25th or December 24th? Probably not. There is nothing in the gospels that states when Jesus was born. But we do know he was born! And we also know that after a lifetime of miracles and lessons and love, he suffered terribly on the cross, taking all our sins and offering us forgiveness. I think it is fair to say that Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are symbols of the birth of Jesus.

Why is the Christmas **season** so long and why is there this element of stress and anxiety that comes with it? Why does the stressful part of this season seem to get worse each year? You know the answer, but I will say it anyway... greed! Greed has become a stronger agent since, first, TV and then the internet and most recently social media. (Black Friday has forced Thanksgiving into the shadows.) Manufacturers of goods have brainwashed us into believing that the one with the biggest pile wins. The one with the most grandiose décor and most fabulous tree wins. Whoever has the busiest schedule wins! If you are not feeling the pressure, you are not doing it right! BAH HUMBUG! Let's put all that competition and expectation in a box for a moment.

For the sake of time and space, let's focus on gift giving. The greatest gift we have ever received, came from God. It is the proverbial "gift that keeps on giving." You can find that in John 3:16. Jesus is THE GIFT! It makes sense that we remember and celebrate Jesus' birth by giving gifts to people we love. Matthew 2:10-11 tells us that the Magi brought gifts to Jesus:

"¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."

So I say, give the gift! But also, like the Magi, bow to the Lord! Tell people that they are loved. God loves you, and I do too! **BUT**... please keep the stress to a minimum. The message surrounding this season of celebration is love and forgiveness. Those are the true gifts from God, given to us through Jesus Christ, our Savior. (And, hey... a little gold isn't bad either! Wink)

Please join our children in celebrating Jesus' birthday at the family service, Christmas Eve at 10:00 A.M.

Leading up to that, we have our annual cookie walk (Dec 3rd), YOM holiday party (Dec 12th) and arrival of butter braids (Dec 13th).

Merry Christmas to all of you. May the Lord bless you with love and peace this season and into the New Year.

Thank you for all your support!!!

~Shannon

Dear Church Family,

We received a request for help with transportation for an elderly woman in need of a ride to Sunday church services. She and her family were very active in the church in the 60's and 70's but eventually moved to Florida. She has now returned to the area and lives at Eddy Pond. If we have several people willing to bring her each week, perhaps we could create a rotation. So far we have 2 volunteers.

If this is something you would be interested in, please call the church office, 508-832-2845.

Thank you!



It's a Girl!

We are pleased to share the news of the birth of Ivy Marie Deso, daughter of Olivia and Joel Deso. Ivy made her appearance on November 9th, weighing in at 6 lbs., 15 oz. Proud grandparents include Karen and Stephen Chirsky and great-grandparents Carole and Bob Murray. Congratulations to all!

The Christmas Fund 2023

“Grace Upon Grace”

“From Christ’s fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” from John 1:16

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 2022, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 218 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,042,726)
- Health benefits supplementation for 86 retired clergy and lay employees (\$181,389)
- Emergency grants for 55 individuals and families (\$138,022)
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 479 retired clergy and lay employees (\$278,500)

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**
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*God’s church in Auburn Center
 doing Christ’s work in the world.*
 Web: auburnfirstucc.org



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