



FEBRUARY

2010
2010

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 Mourn for Haiti

Reflections from your Interim Pastor, The Reverend Mark Seifried

There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. Luke 21:11

Like most of the world, I am struggling to make sense of the tragic loss of life and the devastation of Haiti in the wake of the earthquake. I can tell you that when I hear people like Pat Robertson say that God's hand was in this to judge the sin of human beings, I am ashamed to be lumped into the category of "Christian" with him. In my mind, any thinking about how God perceives this is from a place of mercy, compassion and grace. God's hand is with those giving assistance: medical and military personnel, relief workers, and the Haitian people who are finding strength to live through that hellish nightmare. God weeps with, and for, that poorest nation in our hemisphere - now more than ever.

If you've come to worship in the last few weeks, you know that the United Church of Christ, through various partnerships like Church World Service, already had missions active in Haiti prior to the earthquake, and thus were able to respond quickly. Because of so many demands on resources, we have collected a considerable amount of money, and will continue to do so through the end of February.

If you would like to participate in the relief efforts in Haiti monetarily, please send a check to the church office and make it payable to First Congregational Church with "for Haiti" on the memo line. You can also give via credit card or go to our church's web site and give electronically. All three of these giving methods will ensure that 100% of your contribution goes directly to relief efforts and not a penny to administrative costs.

One of my concerns at times like this is what to tell children, and how to tell them. My advice is always to be age appropriate, but also honest and direct. Most children heard something in school about the earthquake, so you should ask them what they know, and ask if they have any questions. Clear up any misconceptions and assure them of God's love for them and for the Haitian people. You might go further and say we can't do anything to prevent earthquakes (or hurricanes, blizzards, etc.) but we can do something about poverty, and we will. Talk to them about how you have given and any other way you may help out. Pray with them for the Haitian people and for the relief workers. Let them hear you give thanks to God that we can help. Let them hear you give thanks to God for our church who is helping in many ways.

It's times like this when children need to see, and hear faith being modeled. We all do. My faith says that our Lord will never leave us alone. I believe that is also true of the Haitians, both the living and the dead.

Because we are people of faith, we will work cooperatively with God to live out Jesus' self-missional understanding: "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

May we have the faith, the courage, and conviction to make all these things living reality: for the survivors in Haiti, in honor of those who perished, and out of our belief that we are the Body of Christ - the hearts and hands and voice of the One who came to save all people, especially those who need the good news the most.

Happy Anniversary to:

Donald & Carolyn Slongwhite who will be celebrating their anniversary on February 27th.

**Coffee Hour Hosts**

Jan 31	Board of Ed
Feb 7/14	Library
Feb 21/Feb 28	Stewardship
Mar 7	Girl Scouts
Mar 14	Outreach

**Library Tidings by Gloria Whitehead**

What a great feeling to have proof that people do read the library bit in the monthly *Tidings*. And, how's that? The pile of calendars on the adult library table has grown. Just remember that you can, and should, also take them for wherever they can be used.

Among the busiest authors of religious books today is Max Lucado. His book, *Traveling Light* (in large print) deals with releasing burdens you were never intended to bear. It's another interpretation of how to cast our care on Him for He cares for us. The table of contents lists eighteen burdens which can weigh us down. Notice how habitual or common place those being listed are:

1. The Luggage of Life;
2. The Middle C of Life – the Burden of a Lesser God;
3. I'll Do It My Way – The Burden of Self-reliance;
8. A Heavenly Exchange– The Burden of Disappointment;
17. God's Loving Pursuit – The Burden of Doubt.

Some of those not mentioned here are routine concerns. Cast your cares . . . “What do you say we take God up on His offer? We might find ourselves traveling a little lighter.”

A few months ago Helen Pierce gave *The Art of God – The Heaven and the Earth* by Ric Ergenbright to the church library. It is listed as a photographic celebration of the creation of a call for us to recognize and pursue Him for it and to faithfully obey His mandate to care for it.

The library has a large number of oversized books which house awesome and breathtaking pictures. This gift awakened us again to the fact that we should openly display such books on the table periodically. Remind us to do that! At present, Margaret Mead's book is on the stand with a panorama of life, worldwide for you to absorb in a few minutes. Do look - it's worth it. You can also borrow these big books for a month or so (not forever) to enjoy them to the fullest.

It may sound far fetched but, when the weather is warmer and it suits your mood, consider dropping into the tranquil sanctuary, selecting a book, pulling up the Florence LaPlante chair to the table where you've cleared a space, setting down your choice and yourself and enjoying some captivating leisure time. In cold weather chances are that the conference room will oblige. Remember when the church is open so is the library and you can always check in at the office for your personal comfort. Your library has life to give.

Dear Church Family Members,

Alpha is coming again!

Last spring, Paul and I attended a ten-week program at Faith Baptist Church entitled **Alpha**. We attended another program there in the fall called **A Life Worth Living**. Steve and Karen Chirsky (the Murray's daughter and son-in-law) will be leading another Alpha session at the end of next month.

About ten people from our church attended last spring's session. Different people get different things from Alpha. It's not everyone's "cup of tea" and several people did not continue for the entire session. Most people continued to the end, possibly with differing degrees of satisfaction.

There is absolutely no pressure to attend the entire ten weeks, to speak out, or to attend church services there. Some of the things that we got from the sessions were a new sense of Christ walking with us, a new way of quiet prayer, a different awareness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was a wonderful experience to sit and talk with people about Jesus Christ as if He was going to walk in the door any moment. We've met some wonderful people who we would count as friends even if we never saw them again.

As for Paul and me, we were extremely pleased with both offerings and will be attending this next session. We would be happy to try to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,
Louise and Paul Powers

***Winter 2010 Offerings from the Kairos Spiritual Life Center
A Ministry of All Saints Church, 10 Irving St., Worcester***

Saturday February 20: "Leading Into Lent: Creating Lenten Prayer Books"

Lynn Penney, artist and leader of contemplative prayer groups, will lead us in bringing prayer and creativity together in new ways. With silence, singing, fabric, paper, poems, prayers and images, we will create small Prayer Books to use during Lent and listen for God's invitations to us in this holy season.

All Saints Church, 9:00 – 3:00, cost \$40.00 (includes lunch and supplies)

On-going Kairos programs will include:

***"Living with God"**: a year-long offering for spiritual community and nurture (monthly gatherings, offered at UCC Boxborough, St. Francis Church in Holden and All Saints Church in Worcester)

***Centering Prayer**: most 2nd Mondays of the month, 7:30 – 9:00, at All Saints Church
Feb 8, Mar 8, Mar 29 (Holy Week)

***First Friday Films** (1st Fridays of the month, 7:00 p.m. at All Saints Church; \$3 donation)

Feb. 5: The Story of the Weeping Camel **March 5:** Rails and Ties

For more information or to register for events, please contact the Kairos Spiritual Life Center at 508-752-3766, ext. 19 or kairoscenter@allsaintsw.org.

Stewardship Message

Buildings

“Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you.” Romans 15:7

In coastal Connecticut, where I currently live, February is a time alternately of freezing and mud. We are prone to sudden snow squalls or equally sudden thaws where just walking across a street can mean skirting mud puddles from melted snow and thawing ground. Often in February as I watch people enter the warm church building on a Sunday morning, I can actually see their shoulders drop and their bodies relax as they shrug off cold or wet and enter the welcome warmth of our sanctuary. For a little while at least, they can rest secure and dry before tackling whatever the elements throw at us on any particular day.

It occurred to me that during the week between worship services, many other people come into our building to find a place of safety and warmth. Twelve step groups of various kinds, a PFLAG group, two community choirs, La Leche, a community youth group, a program for those who have recently been released from prison, children practicing and playing recitals and others. Then there are the people who come seeking help, from food to counseling. Our presence on this busy city street corner has an impact on hundreds of people we often do not see on Sunday, whose names we do not know. They, too, have a place in Christ's Church. They, too, are part of our congregation, and our stewardship of this building is for all of us.

Let us pray for our congregations and their stewardship of God's resources, and also for everyone who passes through our church doors.

Rochelle A. Stackhouse is the Senior Minister of The Church of the Redeemer, United Church of Christ, New Haven Connecticut.

February 2010

God is still speaking,

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



This resource is a free service and is made possible by your gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission.

On Sunday morning, January 17, the beloved and historic West Cummington Congregational Church was destroyed by fire. The building was at least 170 years old. This is a loss felt not only by the members of the church but by the wider community as well. This was evident in the Sunday afternoon service led by the church's pastor, Steven Philbrick, in the congregation's parish house. The church members were joined by hundreds of others who shared memories of life's transitional moments that took place in the church and the depth of loss they felt. But there was also a strong spirit of hope in the room and recognition that while the fire destroyed more than the building, the church was still alive and well.

In the future we will know more about specific ways we can support the West Cummington Church. In the mean time please hold them in your prayers.

Shalom,
Peter

The Rev. Peter A. Wells, Associate Conference Minister
Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ

(The West Cummington Congregational Church is located about 25 miles northwest of Northampton. Look to the MACUCC website, www.macucc.org for more information as it becomes available.)

From The Choir Room

One of our most beloved anthems, *God Is There*, has a text that is so meaningful, comforting and uplifting that I've copied the words and kept it close at hand, as does another of our choir members. I'd like to share this with you; printed in a format accessible to hang on your fridge, mirror, or in the car.

Blessings,

Heather Moore
Minister of Music

Joyful Noyse Schedule

2/7, 2/14 & 2/21 11:15 a.m. rehearsal

2/28 9:15 a.m. rehearsal
We Are Gathered Here

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

SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS

Applications are now available in Fellowship Hall, and in the church office for anyone interested in applying for a scholarship.

**Applications are due
by April 15th.**

"God Is There"

By Jay Althouse

Everywhere I go God is watching.
Everywhere I go God is there.
In my joy and in my pain,
Through rainbow and the rain,
God is watching.
God is there.

Everywhere I go God is watching,
Everywhere I go God is there.
When I'm filled with doubt and fear,
I know God's love is near.
God is watching.
God is there.

In God I place my trust and my devotion.
My faith is growing stronger every day.
For God alone is light with full and endless sight
That comforts me and guides me on my way.

When I need a friend and companion,
I can speak with God in my prayer.
When I'm in a time of need,
My God, alone, will lead.
God is watching,
God is there.

SAVE THE DATE

Please plan to join us on Sunday, March 7th, as we welcome the Rev. Dr. Jim Antal, Minister and President of the Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ, as our guest preacher.

In his role as Conference Minister, Rev. Antal seeks to:

- Connect congregations and pastors to the resources and opportunities offered by the Conference and the national setting of the church
- Serve as a prophetic voice in the Conference
- Provide leadership in ecumenical and interfaith relations
- Interpret the work and witness of the UCC to the press and in the public square
- Identify and promote strategies and practices that will enlarge the witness of the UCC in Massachusetts

Here We Grow Preschool



Happy Valentine's Day everyone. So far we have been lucky with the wintry weather, let's hope it keeps up. Spring will be here before we know it.

Here We Grow's open house will be on February 10, 2010 from 1:00-2:30. I have been doing one-on-one tours of the school since October and have already met with some wonderful new families whose children will join us next year. At this time we do have openings in the 3 & 4 year-old sessions. If you know of a friend, neighbor, or relative who is looking for a preschool, please send them our way.

Continuing into the month of February, **Here We Grow** will be busy with Valentine parties on February 11th & 12th. The children will have the opportunity to share cards and goodies with their friends and teachers.

Here We Grow will be running its final fundraiser for this school year. It will be Yankee Candle and it will run February 1-25. If you need or *want* anything I will leave a few booklets with Denise in the church office. Thank You for your support. All monies earned go toward field trips, special programs offered throughout the year, equipment for the classrooms, and enrichment classes offered to the children, (yoga, music, karate & aerobics).

The school will be closed for winter break from 2/15 -2/19. Hope everyone has special days with their children over this vacation.

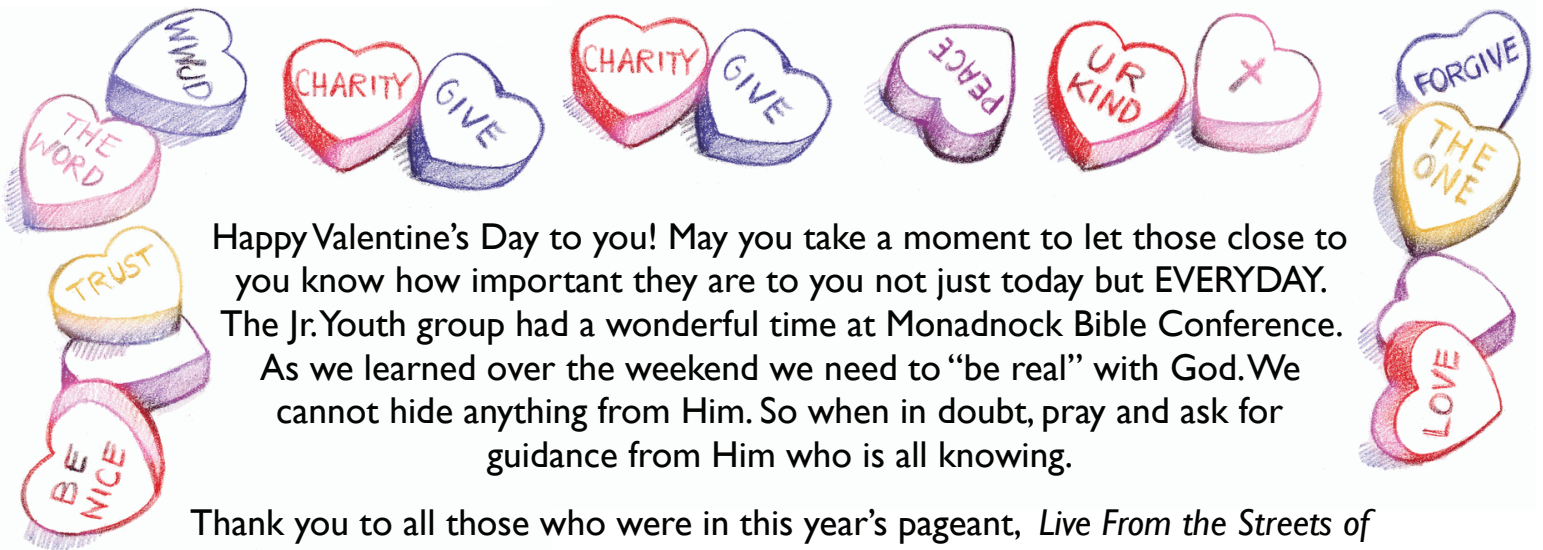
The **Here We Grow** Board of Directors will be hosting a training in March with Jeanine Fitzgerald, a behavior specialist. Her topic will be "Different Children, Different Needs". This training is being offered to HWG families and staff, and First Congregational families and staff. Jeanine has a way of making one laugh at all the "statements" we make to our children. If you come, be prepared for a night of information and laughter. Hope to see you there. (Please see additional information below.)

Until next month, stay warm and be healthy.

Dawn Murphy
Director, **Here We Grow** Preschool

Different Children, Different Needs Workshop Monday, March 29th at 7 P.M. in Fellowship Hall

"Children are not things to be molded, but people to be unfolded." This workshop, hosted by *Here We Grow* Preschool and the *Here We Grow* Board, will explore the unique pattern of influence upon a child's behavior and development with particular detail on the inherited temperament. Together, we will explore the concept of "goodness of fit" between the child's traits and those of the adult caregiver. This workshop is uplifting, empowering, and fun and is being offered to *Here We Grow* families and First Congregational Church members. Please contact Denise in the church office, 508 -832-2845, or email her at secretary@auburnfirstucc.org if you would like to attend.



Happy Valentine's Day to you! May you take a moment to let those close to you know how important they are to you not just today but EVERYDAY. The Jr.Youth group had a wonderful time at Monadnock Bible Conference. As we learned over the weekend we need to "be real" with God. We cannot hide anything from Him. So when in doubt, pray and ask for guidance from Him who is all knowing.

Thank you to all those who were in this year's pageant, *Live From the Streets of Bethlehem*. The mix of younger and older actors truly made it a church wide effort. Everyone did an amazing job and I appreciate you all coming out on such a miserable day. Hope to see you next year.

Thank you to Karen Wheeler for supervising cradle roll for January, and to Stan and Sue MacPhee who have volunteered for February. Thank you also to Connie and Ron Hanks who have volunteered to take the Middle School class for January. That will free up one teacher to assist in another class or actually attend the whole service for a while. Shirley Hill has stepped down as the PreK-2 teacher and we are in need of a replacement. At the very least we need a floater to cover any situations that may arise while classes are going on so I can cover her class. If you are interested please contact me.

Welcome to the new Board of Ed members Jen Bohn, Ron Hanks, and Cindy Dube. Thank you to Michael Schillinger and Shirley Hill for the time they spent on BOCE; your enthusiasm will be missed.

The cold outside cannot dim the warmth of His love for us.



God Bless,
Jean McPherson
Director of Religious Education



**Our next church supper is planned for Saturday,
February 20th, at 5:00p.m.**

Join us for a delicious Roast Beef Dinner

Adults \$10 Children \$5

Chef: Jen Bohn Servers: Outreach & BOCE

On March 14th the Worcester Sharks will be featuring "Faith Night" at the DCU Center!!! Tickets for lower level seating at the 4:00 p.m. hockey game are \$10 for ages 16 & under & \$14.50 for adults.

There will be a Christian Rock Band before, during & after. Please see/call Jean McPherson by Feb. 21st, 508-832-5677.



February is American Heart Month and the 5th is National Wear RED Day. It is also National Children's Dental Health Month. The 1st-7th is World Salt Awareness Week. On the 5th, it's Give Kids a Smile Day. February 7-14 is Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week and the 7th-14th is Burn Awareness Week. February 14th is National Donor Day.

Our next babysitting classes will be held during February school vacation, on Wednesday and Thursday the 17th and 18th from 10 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. Please call Pam Sheeran at (508) 334-5474 for more information and to register.

I have been to hospitals and doctor appointments with people that have their Health Care Proxies all set. It is so much easier for patients and families if this is discussed ahead of time rather than at the time of an emergency. We have HCP paperwork at the church, if you need it.

I spoke with Chief Whynot from the Auburn Fire Department and he thinks the defibrillator training will start around the middle of February. If there is anyone who would like to be on the list that didn't sign up before, please let me know. I will let you know the dates for training as soon as I find out.

God Bless!
Debbie Pranaitis, Parish Nurse

TIDINGS is a monthly publication of

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128 Central Street,
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Phone: (508) 832-2845

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

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February 2010

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