



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 PASTOR:

The Problem of Evil

I think of the past year and think of evil. Classically, evil is thought of in 3 areas. There is personal evil; the sins we commit as individuals that hurt our fellow humans. There is systemic evil. The institution of slavery and Communist government are two examples, systems or institutions that allow or encourage the injury and death of people as a way to strengthen the institution or people in charge of the organization. Then, lastly, there are the evils of natural disasters.

People did horrible things this past year. We have people who kill for no good reason; people who lie, cheat, and steal. I often see people choosing the wrong path and their bad decisions hurt others. One person's evil deeds can hurt so many people.

Natural disasters killed many. I think of killer storms, volcanoes and earthquakes.

In America, these last couple of years, there was a lot of talk of systemic evil - police brutality, and a justice system that is often more theater than justice. The Church and Boy Scouts have had to deal with abuse by leaders. Other systems in America cause, rather than fix, issues. Solutions to problems seem rare.

“Easy solutions” often just make the problems worse. Defund the police and police-free zones resulted in a rise in crime, especially violent crime.

People accused one another of being evil. I think Americans fundamentally do not know what evil is and what to do when confronted with evil. Accusing your opponent in a Democratic Republic of being evil, a racist, a communist or fascist, just isn't going to make the government work better. It seems we no longer try to convince people to join our side. This is a silly, self-defeating strategy.

There are two great lies. The devil's greatest trick is making people believe he doesn't exist. The second

greatest trick of the devil is convincing people that anyone who disagrees with them is evil and deserves to die.

As of last year, Americans divide by party allegiance as follows: 26% Republican, 26% Democrat, 44% independent. Neither political party can convince a majority of Americans that they are good or that their opponent is evil. Independents are now the largest political group. The independents make it so no party holds and keeps leadership for more than an election or two. Each election the winning party changes. If Republicans win one election, Democrats are highly likely to win the next. The country is evenly divided and most national elections are 49% to 51%; there are few landslide wins.

I think politics are complex and neither party is more good or evil than the other. Rather, we can all be blind to the evil done in the name of our kind of politics.

Evil is with us. Evil is deceptive. We are often overconfident. We think we can solve problems easily; yet evil is cunning and can find ways to hurt when people think they are doing good.

Is it evil to send a person to jail for a crime, since our justice system is so flawed? Or is it more evil to let criminals go free to prey on more people?

There is a force in the world that enjoys hurting people. It is easy for our institutions to be subverted into doing more harm than good. But seeing the devil in the person who disagrees with us prevents working together to fix what we agree is broken.

May God keep us from temptation, and help us defeat the true evil ones.

Pastor Brian

New member classes will begin on January 16th and will be held in the “green room” located in the office wing. These informal classes are 15 to 20 minutes in length and will be held for 2 or 3 Sundays following the worship service. If interested, please speak with Pastor Brian or a Deacon for more information.



Important Notice

The Annual Meeting will be held immediately following the 10 a.m. worship service on **Sunday, January 23rd**. **This will be an in-person meeting with Zoom access for those who would like to participate remotely.**

(All committee/board end-of-year reports are **NOW** due.)

The All Committee Meeting (the first 2022 meeting of all committees and boards) will be held on Monday, January 24th, beginning at 7 p.m. At this meeting, committee chairpersons, secretaries, Church Council reps., etc. will be selected.

The Installation of Officers and Board Members will be held during the worship service on **January 30th**.

2021 Pledges

Please note that donations received **before** Jan. 1st will appear on your 2021 donation statement. Also, any donations received by mail **after** Jan. 1st may be included on your 2021 donation statement **if** the letter is postmarked on or before Dec. 31st. Any donations postmarked **after** Dec. 31st will appear on your 2022 donation statement. Thank you!

2022 Offering Envelopes

Please pick up your 2022 offering envelopes located at the church in the back of the sanctuary. If you can't find your envelopes, it means you did not make a pledge or didn't indicate that you wanted envelopes. Please see Lori Stockhaus with any questions.



Happy Birthday to:

- Caleb Armstrong ~ Jan. 4th
- Lynn Largesse ~ Jan. 6th
- Lillian McPherson ~ Jan. 19th
- Cassandra Stockhaus ~ Jan. 23rd

We would like to feature your special occasion in the *Tidings*. Please complete the form below and return it to the church office.

I give First Congregational Church permission to put my family member's birthday or anniversary in the monthly newsletter the *Tidings*.

Name(s)

Occasion

Date

Signature (adults only please)



Please return to Church office.



Linda M. Hardy, 66, a lifelong Auburn resident, passed unexpectedly on Saturday, December 11, 2021.

She leaves her siblings, Deborah A. Pranaitis and her husband, Joseph, of Charlton, and Dr. Russell I. Hardy and his wife, Joan McDowell, of Ukiah, CA; her nieces and nephews: Theresa Stone and her husband, Ryan, of Spencer; Stephen Dumas of Auburn; Rachel Dumas of Old Orchard Beach, ME; Eric Pranaitis of Syracuse, NY; Adam Pranaitis of Broadbrook, CT; Katherine Hardy and her husband, Eric Niehaus, of Denver, CO; and Sarah Hardy and her fiancé, Matt Biancuzzo, of Las Vegas, NV; her great-niece and nephews: Tyler, Benjamin, Michael, and Nathan Stone, Sydney Googins, and Peter and Isaac Smith; and her uncle, Roy F. Stone and his wife, Betty, of New Hampshire.

Born in Worcester, raised in Auburn, Linda was born to the late Frederick I. and Phyllis M. (Stone) Hardy. She was a graduate of Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School, before going on to become a CNA. Linda began her career at the former Hahnemann Hospital in Worcester, and worked there for ten years before its closure. She then worked at several area nursing homes, for many years, before retiring from Oakdale Nursing Home in West Boylston.

Linda enjoyed the annual luncheons that were held for the employees who worked at Hahnemann, for years after it closed. In her free time, she was an avid bowler and loved being on a team.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to our church (payable to First Congregational Church) and mailed to: 128 Central Street, Auburn, MA 01501.

Linda's funeral service was held on December 15, 2021, here at the church, followed by burial at Hillside Cemetery, where she was laid to rest with her parents. Please continue to pray for Debbie and family.

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;’” — John 11:25 (NIV®)

FROM OUR ORGANIST/CHOIR DIRECTOR

2021 is over. What a year of sorrows it's been for so many of us! For my family it was the death of Charlie, our beloved grandson, that broke our hearts into pieces. I know for so many of you the death of loved ones also shattered you. And yet, little by little, our hearts begin to mend. We start remembering good times, and so we go on, not without tears, but we go on.

One of my favorite hymns is “How Can I Keep From Singing?” If you have time some Sunday morning to open your hymnals to #424, I would ask you to read the words to this hymn. It puts the joys and sorrows of life right there in front of you. And then in the refrain it gives us the reason we must continue to live in hope: “No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging. Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?”

And so we continue as a community to sing ourselves back to faith and hope and love, through the grace that Jesus offers us.

May this coming year bring us all the blessing of knowing that God loves us through the good and bad that life brings. And so how can we keep from singing?! Thanks be to God!

Paulette

Thank you for your generous Christmas gifts and cards. I greatly appreciate your thoughtfulness. Blessings to you in the New Year. — Pastor Brian

Please pray for Pastor Brian while he's on vacation beginning after worship on January 2 through January 9.

January Tidings from Here We Grow Preschool



Happy New Year! We hope you all had a wonderful and relaxing holiday.

We made the tough decision to close school from December 23 - January 7, due to the rise in COVID cases in the area. We are hoping that having the extra time off will help give everyone a chance to relax and slow the spread of germs. We have been fortunate, again this year, to have minimal cases within our school community.

Our 3-year-olds had their Christmas programs on December 21. We videotaped the program and sent it home to the parents. The 4-year-olds had their concerts on December 21 and 22. A great time was had by all. The children worked very hard learning new songs and singing some old favorites. A big thank you to Pastor Brian for playing Santa for the children this year.

This year we again collected toys in conjunction with the Auburn Police Department's "Secret Santa" program. Family support was great. We filled our large box multiple times and were able to help make the holiday special for some Auburn families.

Enrollment forms for next year have gone out for in-house registration and we are already filling spots. We will continue with in-house enrollment until the middle of February, then we will open it up to new parents and children. If you know of anyone looking for a preschool, we would love to hear from them. At this time, we are planning to host our Open House in March. Hopefully, that won't have to change.

In February, families will be selling tickets for our calendar raffle fundraiser. Beginning March 1st, we will be picking a winner every day for 31 days. If you would like a chance at winning some great prizes, please speak with a parent or staff member. Denise will have a sample calendar in the office. A big thank you to board members Nicole Vecchio and Kevin Carlo for organizing this event for us.

Stay safe everyone,

Here We Grow Staff



From the Stewardship Committee

THANK YOU to everyone who participated in Consecration Sunday or responded to our mailings.

We appreciate your support.

Last year was a very challenging year for all of us, and coming together and supporting each other and First Congregational is so important.

We believe that everyone has received our theme slogan gift (the fridge magnet). If we missed you, please let us know.

Happy, Healthy New Year to All!

In His love,

Your Stewardship Committee
(Nan Johnson, Ron Klaucke, Marilyn Kulesa, Ellie Lowell, Linda Mahlert)

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Happy New Year!

My prayer today is that 2022 brings an abundance of health and joy to all the families in the world!

The busy season of Christmas has come and gone. With the quiet that follows, and then leads up to the New Year celebration, I cannot help but think about this past season. Taking "stock," if you will, on all the happenings. I certainly learned a lot in my position! We had to make some tough decisions and overcome the disappointment of canceling Parents Night Out and our potluck Christmas celebration. On the other end, we had a very successful Cookie Walk with Youth on a Mission!

Cookie Walk 2022 was an incredibly successful fundraiser for YOM. We could not have done it without the support of our church! Thank you to all who donated delicious treats and thank you to all who purchased boxes of cookies. I would love feedback on what your thoughts are regarding bakery boxes, as opposed to our usual tins. (I personally love the tins, but times are changing and we need to be flexible to change... or so I have been told!) We raised over \$500 for Youth on a Mission!!!!

Thank you to Pastor Brian and Paulette, who led the children in the Christmas Pageant this year. Although I missed the big show, I can say with confidence that the children worked really hard, and are always super cute anyway!!! Thank you to the children, the families, and to all for the extra help and support!

Thank you also to Pastor Brian and Michele Schillinger, for helping to create the most beautiful Christmas tree in our sanctuary. The children are all artists in their heart and I am so proud of them. They learned a little history and art, in creating our tree!

Thank you to Sheila Skog for being by my side, every Sunday since I started, in the Sunday School classrooms!

As we enter 2022, it is time to buckle down and really consider the best way to educate our children, with the constantly changing attendance in our Sunday School program. I welcome any recommendations on both science based projects that connect our Christian faith and any physically active games that also connect the children with God's love! My door is always open and I love hearing everyone's ideas!

Thank you all for the incredible support and love.

~Shannon Hartmann, Director of Religious Education



THANK YOU!

We continue to live in uncertain times and, yet, once again, you remembered me in your Christmas giving. I wish there was a new way to convey my appreciation for your thoughtfulness and generosity. "Thank you" seems so inadequate. Wishing you and yours a blessed New Year.

Denise (Church Secretary)

To my Church Family,

Thank you so much for your generosity. Your thoughtfulness is greatly appreciated.

— Judy Bjork

FROM YOUR NOMINATING COMMITTEE

January is certainly not the only month in 2022 to start your involvement with a church committee/board; *HOWEVER*, it's definitely the best time to begin. If you or someone you know believes they could share in the fellowship and responsibilities needed within any of the following slots, please don't hesitate to contact one of us in hopes to update our elections. While Nominating has been attempting to fill 27 openings, we now have **13** nominees who have proudly committed to being elected or re-elected on Sunday, January 23, 2022; and still, there are **15 OPEN VACANCIES** that need extra prayer to fill.

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

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. (***Please leave a message when calling any of us.***)



Happy New Year! I am looking forward to a Happy, Healthy New Year and I pray that you all will have one as well.

January is Cervical Health Awareness Month, Birth Defects Prevention Month, Glaucoma Awareness Month, Radon Action Month, and Winter Sports Safety Awareness Month.

Hopefully, everyone gets their annual health check ups. This is a good time to make your appointment if you haven't already.

I will be away for 2 months, but I'm available by phone or email if you have any health related questions. I will try to keep up with the latest on the Covid situation and relay any important news back to you. I'm still in touch with the Health and Wellness Ministry with the UCC of Southern New England.

Stay safe and warm. God Bless!

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



*Thank you for all the love, support, and prayers through this very difficult time.
Linda's untimely passing has affected all of us, and the support is helpful.
With love and thanksgiving for this amazing church family,*

Debbie, Joe, Eric, and Adam

*To my Church family,
Thank you for the Christmas goodie bag.
It is so great to have such a caring Church family.
Thank you,
Charlotte (Steffen)*

*Dear Board of Deacons,
I would like to thank the Board for the wonderful Christmas package for shut-ins.
I also want to thank Sue MacPhee for the personal delivery and all of you for "making my day."
Sincerely,
Wayne Bloomquist*

*I would like to thank everyone for the Christmas cards that Sam and I received in the mail from church members. It was unexpected but so appreciated and a thoughtful thing to do. Hope you all have a blessed and Merry Christmas and wishes for a healthy New Year.
Love and thanks again. Jeanne and Sam (Avallone)*

*To my Church family,
I wanted to thank you for the Christmas gift I received. This church has been such a strong presence, not only in my life, but the lives of my family. Watching the pageant this year brought back so many memories when my kids were up there as sheep and Mary. I pray the New Year is filled with good health and happiness. God bless you all.
Jean (McPherson)*

*Dear First Congregational Church in Auburn,
I am writing to express my sincere gratitude to you for your scholarship. I was thrilled to learn of my selection for this scholarship and I am deeply appreciative of your support.
Sincerely,*

Emma Shorette (Emma is the great-granddaughter of Marion Woodcock and received a scholarship from the Florence I. Munger Scholarship Fund during the service on November 7, 2021.)

JANUARY SERMON TITLES

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1/2 "Young and Old Will Dance" | 1/23 "The Spirit Is upon Us" |
| 1/9 Pastor Brian will be on vacation. | 1/30 "Before I Formed You in the Womb, I Knew You" |
| 1/16 "Vindication" | |

Tidings 2022 — Subscription Renewal Form

In an effort to offset the cost of publishing the monthly *Tidings*, we are asking for members and friends to support a **voluntary** subscription.

Your participation is entirely optional and will not affect whether or not you receive the *Tidings*.

Annual Renewal - (10 issues, no July or Aug. issue)

Please enclose a check or money order for \$10 payable to: **First Congregational Church**. Please write "**Tidings**" in the memo section.

Thank You!

Please call the Church office with any questions, 508-832-2845.

Mail to: First Congregational Church
128 Central St., Auburn, MA 01501

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____



Thank you to everyone who contributed a poinsettia to decorate the sanctuary and altar during the Christmas season. **Special thanks to Michele Schillinger** for all her hard work coordinating all the details, and thank you to all who helped unload the delivery and assisted with the marking and arrangement of the poinsettias.

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



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OR CURRENT RESIDENT