



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!'"

What's in Your Spiritual Gift Bag?

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son ... and blessed each of us with spiritual gifts beyond our imaginations. Pastor Mark is inviting members and friends of the church to explore and refine some special gifts.

In our UCC tradition, we affirm the "priesthood of all believers." If you are lured to God through the ancient texts of scripture, if you like to read aloud, if you love drama, acting or storytelling or if you want to learn more about worship leadership, please join Pastor Mark on Tuesday, January 6 at 7:00 P.M. We'll talk about the art of reading scripture in public worship and more. This may be an opportunity to form a Worship Ministry to plan more creative, grass roots liturgy so that worship becomes more the work of the people. Please let Pastor or Denise know if you plan to attend.

If you like to listen to others, to tell stories, to pray, to sit quietly together, to read to others, to prepare meals, or to offer a compassionate word of hope ... God might be calling you to be a visiting minister.

Our congregation is composed of many people - about 30 of whom can't get to church on a regular basis because of declining health or other circumstances. In addition to the pastor and parish nurse's visits, we'd like to visit everyone on our "less-mobile list" at least once every couple of months. Pastor Mark is offering a time of discussion and training on Sunday, January 25, after worship in the Green Room (so we can break bread together). Please let Pastor or Denise know if you plan to attend.

YOUTH ON A MISSION (YOM): COME ONE, COME ALL TO A MANDATORY MEETING

Sunday, January 11, following worship.

Anyone who would like to participate in YOM throughout the year, or go on our summer mission trip must attend.

Parents are encouraged to attend, too.

If you have other commitments that prevent your attendance at this important meeting, please contact Randy and Jen Bohn in advance at 508-832-0428 so they know of your interest in YOM.



Coffee Hour Hosts

- | | |
|------|------------|
| 1/4 | ~ Trustees |
| 1/11 | ~ Deacons |
| 1/18 | ~ Outreach |



Winter Warmups
FRIENDS, FOOD, FELLOWSHIP

MONTHLY CHURCH SUPPERS

We are in need of a cook(s) for our monthly church suppers. If you'd like to be responsible for preparing one (or more) of the monthly suppers, please contact the Trustees.



To:

Lillian McPherson ~ 1/19/96

Cassandra Stockhaus ~ 1/23/99

2009 Offering Envelopes

Please pick up your 2009 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 or Nick Stockhaus with any questions.

LIBRARY TIDINGS

As you open a book to learn something new, whether it be for inspiration or relaxation, your church library is looking forward to being your resource for good reading. We hope you'll always share with us your thoughts on how we can do it best.

May God grant you many blessings in the New Year, including time to read.



FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Happy New Year! I pray you all had a blessed Christmas and wish you a New Year filled with love and laughter.

I want to thank everyone who was involved in this year's pageant, *Bethlehem Speaks*. You all did an amazing job! An update on the Thanksgiving baskets, we were able to fill 6 boxes and had 4 more filled with various staples that we restocked the church's pantry with and gave the rest to AYFS. Thank you to all who contributed.

Junior Youth Group News

The Junior Youth Group's "Parents' Night Out" went very well. We had 22 children ages 3 -10. The parents all enjoyed some "free time" for dinner, shopping or just relaxing. The kids made gingerbread houses, mitten ornaments and decorated gingerbread people. Look for it again next year. We plan to have a skating/sledding event later this month. The Jr. Youth Group will be participating in the *30 hour Famine* in February so watch for more information in future bulletins and the February newsletter. Also, look for a "snow" themed family activity later this month.

Everyone please check out the Sunday School bulletin board at the far end of fellowship hall for pictures of past events, and information and sign ups for upcoming events.

We are STILL in need of help in the Sunday School. Please speak to Shirley Hill or myself if you would like to help out.

With His guidance we serve,

Jean McPherson

Director of Religious Education

Where Were You?

Reflections from your Interim Pastor, The Reverend Mark Seifried

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me if you have this knowledge ...

Or who shut the sea in with doors when it burst out from the womb? –

when I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band ...

Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

*Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail?...Has the rain a father or who has begotten the drops of dew?*

From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?

~ from the 38th Chapter of The Book of Job

The excerpts above are some of my favorite sentiments expressed in scripture. The speech is God answering Job and his friends after they attempted every explanation they could concoct as to why people suffer. In the end, their best answer was pure rubbish. They tried to think like God. They tried to look at everything Job had done and pigeonhole his losses and grief as something God intentionally cast upon him ... even though, on the surface, he appeared to be a righteous person like most of us. Like most of us, he had his darker side, too, we can bet.

So often we approach God as if we were the pinnacle of creation. Perhaps we are, but I see myself as a tiny speck of dust in an unfathomable cosmos. I struggle with some of our Christian theology. I'm not important enough, I think, that God should sacrifice his only Son for me. My sins haven't been that bad – that God should send his Son to be executed. I prefer the questions and mystery of Job to the certainty of the sacrificial language in some of our Christian testaments.

What I do know is that God's ways are meant to be mysterious: the nature of the universe, the patterns of life and death, the reason one suffers and another prospers, salvation and nature itself. I don't think God would be God if we had all the divine ways figured out. God is holy, a being so very different from us that we will never have full knowledge of what was, is or shall be.

I finally got back to this realization in the third day of our recent power outages. A broken tree nearly totaled my car. The basement filled with water. The house was cold. I wanted a real bath and hot shave along with a cup of coffee made the way I've come to relish. I was just shy of shaking my fist at the heavens and asking, "Why God? Why?" I'm not important enough for God to answer, but I imagine God replying, "Where were you? ... Have you comprehended?"

What I do know is that I will remember the ice storm of 2008 for a long time. I don't understand why it happened any more than I understand how wild donkeys live in the cruel environs of the desert. (That's part of Job 38, too. Check it out!) It's beyond my conception. What I do know is that God's way is perfect and that way was set into motion way before my feet ever pitter-pattered on this beautiful planet. I believe there is a purpose for everything – even natural disasters.

I think, rather than asking, "Why do these things happen to people?" we might speak from a place of testimony: "I know that You, O God, can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted ... I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

I pray for a peace-filled New Year for you and our beloved church. More than that, I pray that we see the signs around us: the economy and the environment are precarious. Human activity has caused this. There are also abundant blessings and a world filled with goodness. Perhaps 2009 should be considered the year of humility when we return to the way of the Lord, when we reflect on what's really important, when we see that we are but specks of dust in the mysterious and awe-inspiring cosmos: perhaps jewels on the royal crown of our Lord, but just a few among many. Let us pray that, as we find meaning in worship and praise for the life and love that comes from God, our prayer and service might become infectious. Let us pray that this is the year of the Lord's favor.

I pray that we become that prayer together! With the help of our Lord, we can and we will!



Happy New Year! 2008 ended with some of us just getting our power back. It shows us how unprepared we are! There are lists available of things to keep on hand in case of situations like this, but most of us still aren't as prepared as we should be. I do have lists if anyone is interested.

January is Cervical Health Awareness Month, National Birth Defects Prevention Month, National Radon Action Month, Glaucoma Awareness Month, National Blood Donor Month, and Thyroid Awareness Month.

I have printed activity books about HAND WASHING. The children will be getting them. Hopefully, it will be a fun way for the children to learn the importance of hand washing, or to emphasize the importance of hand washing.

A reminder about the closet full of walkers, canes, crutches, etc. please help yourself. I think there is a car seat in there as well. If there's something you need and it's there, take it, please.

If anyone did stick with the "Get My People Going", I have surveys to fill out. I will have a few on the health table in Fellowship Hall. If you weren't able to keep up with the program, I hope the Bible verses were meaningful to you.

God Bless!

Debbie Pranaitis, Parish Nurse

**Important Notice for all Officers
& Committee Members:**

The annual meeting will be held here on **Saturday, January 17th at 2 p.m.**

The Installation of Officers and Committees will be during the **January 18th 10 a.m. worship service**, and the **All Committee Meeting** will be on **Tuesday, January 20th at 7 p.m.**

SPECIAL COFFEE HOUR

Please join us for a special coffee hour on Sunday, January 13th, as we gather to honor Carl and Lorain Johnson for their many years of service to our church through their dedication in overseeing weekly coffee hours. (Don't worry, they will continue to run future coffee hours; it's just an opportunity for us to let them know how much they're appreciated!)

Dear Families of First Congregational Church,

On behalf of our Board of Directors, staff, and most especially the children and families we serve, thank you for your generous food donation to Auburn Youth and Family Services, Inc. Holiday Giving Program.

For the Thanksgiving Holiday, we distributed 118 food baskets to Auburn Families. You have made a great difference in the lives of the families who received food through your donation.

Thank you once again. We wish you and your families a happy and healthy Holiday Season. We are blessed to have your support.

Sincerely,
Sally D'Arcangelo, Exec. Director

Happy New Year from Here We Grow Preschool



Welcome 2009! I guarantee I will continue to write 2008. I am totally convinced that the older one gets, time either flies by or I just move slower and forget more. Any tips on being less stressed throughout the holidays would be gratefully appreciated.

During the month of December, Here We Grow once again ran a successful Toy for Tots campaign. As in the past, the children and families were very thoughtful and giving at this busy time of the year. What a great concept for the children to learn, "the act of giving to others." This is one small way Here We Grow continues being an outreach program of First Congregational Church of Auburn.

Our holiday programs were held on December 18th & 19th with a visit from Santa "Bob". The children did a wonderful job on stage singing a variety of holiday songs and chants. Once again the 4-year-olds sang and signed "Happy Birthday to Baby Jesus." After the program on December 19th, the staff enjoyed their holiday luncheon at the "Pic", and swapped gifts with each other.

As of this writing I am still working on our third annual report to NAEYC. It seems to take longer and longer to do it. I will report any updates after I hear from them.

We are busy preparing for the upcoming school year of 2009-2010. We have seen many new faces visiting the preschool in the past few months. Here We Grow will be hosting an "Open House" on January 29, 2009 from 9:00-11:00; for any interested families looking for a preschool for their child.

With the holiday break over and done, I feel we can all settle down for the winter ahead and enjoy the rest of the school year of 2009. Until February, stay warm.

Sincerely,

Dawn Murphy, Here We Grow Preschool Director

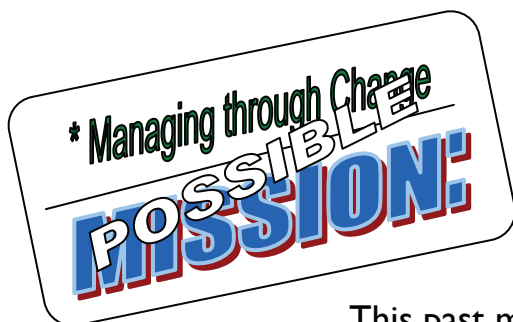
The Nominating Committee would like to thank everyone who has stepped up to the plate sharing their time and talents for various committees over the next three years. This is not a commitment to be taken lightly and we appreciate your servitude toward the Lord and First Congregational Church.

With that said, there are committees requiring more talent in order to meet with the requirements set forth in our Church's by-laws. The most needy of those being the Board of Deacons.

The Lord gave each one of us many talents in order that we can serve him. Are you ready to share your time and talents? If so, please see any one of the Nominating Committee members to find out more about how you can help serve within your Church. We are waiting to talk with you.

In His Love,

Your Nominating Committee: Marion Woodcock (Chair), Kay Shapter and Michele Schillinger



Managing through Change.... MISSION: POSSIBLE
 December and 2008 are winding down and as anticipated, we've completed our series of articles on the various ministries of First Congregational Church of Auburn.

This past month we reviewed the various ministries our Outreach Committee is involved in as well as the Sibley Fund and how that fund provides for many. We learned about the Linus Program and how they provide for needs of not only the little ones who are sick, but also siblings of those young patients. Our final article was on the wonderful sounds of song and instrument shared with us by the Music Ministry of FCC. We are blessed and thankful to have such talented folks within our church.

If you know of a ministry of our church which we missed - and we are certain there are some out there - or if you would prefer to dig deeper into a particular ministry you've read about over these past few months, please contact us via email at Stewardship@AuburnFirstUCC.org.

The Stewardship Committee would like to take a moment to thank all of you who have committed a portion of your treasures to First Congregational Church in response to our 2009 campaign pledge. In an effort to assist our Church in reducing expenses, please accept this as a formal Thank You for your participation. If, at this time, you still have not yet responded with your pledge for 2009, please take a moment to fill out the pledge card and return it to the church office, even if you cannot make a pledge at this time. We need to hear from you.

At this time, during this glorious holiday season, we ask the Congregation for its support and continued prayers during this critical time of need in our church and we pray that God will provide for us in the upcoming year just as He has in 2008. We are reminded that we are not solely responsible for our successes in life; God provides all of us with our talents and treasures and we sometimes forget that it is He who makes all things possible in our lives.

Happy New Year to you and yours and may the Lord continue to bless each and every one of you.

In His Love,

Your Stewardship Committee:

Michele Schillinger (Chair), Todd Dube, Mike Dube, Steve and Sandy Landry, Ron Klaucke

In an ongoing effort to reduce costs, we are asking members to consider subscribing to the electronic mailing of the *Tidings*. Currently we mail over 300 newsletters a month. We only need 200 to take advantage of the bulk mailing rate. If enough people commit to the electronic *Tidings* it is conceivable that we can reduce our bulk mailing costs by a third! (Please keep in mind that we save the email version of the *Tidings* in an 8 ½ x 11" format so you can easily print it out at home.)

If you would like to begin receiving the newsletter electronically, please contact Denise at 508-832-2845 or secretary@auburnfirstucc.org with your email information. Thanks!

Church Members

*Those who bring sunshine
to the lives of others
can't keep it from themselves.
Thanks for everything.*

*Thank you so much
for the lovely basket
of food you gave to me.
It was much appreciated.
Thanks again
Flavia Rose*

Thanks to all who contributed to the generous Christmas gift, which Steve Hill surprised me with in the middle of our 11:00 P.M. Christmas Eve service. (Despite appearances, I am rarely in charge of anything!) I am humbled and feel so very blessed to be serving among you. I have boasted to so many friends and colleagues that First Congregational UCC in Auburn is faithful, gracious and loving. Now I have even more fuel for that argument.

With gospel faith, hope and love for a blessed 2009,

Pastor Mark



BARBARA E. SHONBECK July 10, 1923 - December 2, 2008

We would like to extend our sympathies to the Shonbeck Family on the recent passing of Barbara Emma (Warren) Shonbeck who went to be home with the Lord on Tuesday, December 2nd. She passed away in Mary Lyon Nursing and Rehab Center in Hamden, after an illness. She is survived by her children: Susan Swenson, of Wales, Margaret Flynn of Cape Cod, Paul Shonbeck of Worcester and George Shonbeck of Milford. She leaves 10 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren. Her husband, Eric G. Shonbeck, died in 1987. Mrs. Shonbeck was born in Worcester and was a former resident of Auburn and member of our church and the Auburn Grange. Her funeral service was held here at the church on Saturday, December 6, 2008. Britton-Wallace Funeral Home handled the arrangements.

KEVIN P. NORDBERG March 10, 1976 - December 17, 2008

Please remember the Nordberg Family in your thoughts and prayers as they've suffered the loss of their loved one, Kevin P. Nordberg, who passed away unexpectedly on December 17, 2008. Kevin leaves his wife, Jennifer (Zyborg) Nordberg, of Charlton and his parents, Paul and Debra (Norwood) Nordberg, of Auburn. He also leaves two sisters, Susan (Nordberg) Kochling of Charlton and Amy (Nordberg) Foss also of Charlton, and their families. Kevin graduated from Auburn High School and attended Worcester Polytechnic Institute. For the past 7 years, Kevin worked as a Senior Manager for DHL. His funeral was held here at the church on Monday, December 22nd. Britton-Wallace Funeral Home handled the arrangements.

*"I am the resurrection and the Life. He who believes
in me will live, even though he dies." John 11:25*

JUNE IN JANUARY

Join us on Saturday, January 17th at 5 p.m. while we recall the warmth of the summer and enjoy a summertime picnic. We will be serving hamburgers, hot dogs and fixings and topping it all off with strawberry shortcake made from berries picked last summer at Silvermine Farm and fresh whipped cream from Cooper's Farm.

Adults - \$10 Children - \$5

On Jan. 4th, after worship, there will be a brief Women's Fellowship meeting to discuss this event. All women of the church are invited.

You may call Cindy Dube 508-832-6646 with any questions.



Thanks!



TIDINGS is a monthly publication of

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Phone: (508)832-2845

Web: auburnfirstucc.org



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