



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

As I write this, the weather people are predicting a snowstorm tonight. It feels like April has had more snow and cold wind than any other month this year. If it wasn't snowing (a GOOD thing) then there was gale force winds and torrential rains, with some sunny, warm days thrown in.

Also, we do not know when we will meet in person at church again. I was hoping for MAY Communion service, but I think it will be longer before we can gather again. It seems likely even if we open, there will still be people who will need to isolate; either because they are likely to get a bad illness, or because they are most likely to carry the virus.

Life will not go back to the way things used to be. But it would be crazy if it did. I had not realized how much I ate out, and thus how little I cooked at home. I was startled at how much of our national food supply is delivered by restaurants. The US Board of Labor in 2018 found an average of \$3,459 was spent on takeout, in-restaurant dining, and fast food meals, while \$4,464 was spent on food prepared at home. I think a lot of the shortages at grocery stores were from filling in that large amount of food prepared in restaurants. We eat so little at home compared to the “old days.” We do not know how much we need to feed everyone 3 meals at home. It is a big adjustment to be made.

I imagine there are more family meals. A time to share and talk. Have you ever shared a meal and kept quiet?

Sharing a meal brings a closer bond. In Psalm 23 it says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Can you imagine how horrible it would be to sit at a table and eat with our enemies?

I can make a good pancake after years of helping my mom make them, then making them for her. A lot of my memories of her involve food. My memories of her come easily when I make pancakes, Yankee pot roasts, or other of her favorites. I hope those of you at home with children are making food and memories with your young ones.

Remember, if you need relief, lots of people enjoy listening and talking to a young one over the phone. Being with kids can be overwhelming, then suddenly they are out on their own. So those of us past that stage would love to share some phone time with a kid.

Soon we will go out into the world. What needs to change from the way things used to be? What was better in the time of isolation?

Virtually everyone has had their life changed these past couple of months. People have closed businesses and lost jobs in hopes of saving strangers from disease.

The church is here to help. Let us know of anything you or someone you know needs. May we continue to help each other as things go forward.

Pastor Brian



²⁵ “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? ²⁷ Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

²⁸ “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, ²⁹ yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ³⁰ And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

³¹ “So don't worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’

³² These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.

³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Matthew 6:25-34 NLT

The following information was emailed to church members on the dates indicated (*due to space limitations, details pertaining to Lent were omitted*).

To: All Members

3/31/2020

We held a Church Council meeting last Thursday. Due to the restraints imposed by the current virus issues, we held the meeting online with Zoom. I am sending this update to all our members about the issues discussed, as well as what has been happening, and is planned at the church.

We have made the decision to continue to pay our staff for as long as possible through this crisis. As a church we do not contribute to the unemployment system, so our employees would not be able to collect unemployment insurance if they were laid off. In addition, we have contractual notice periods in their contracts. Hopefully, we will be able to begin meeting as a normal congregation again within a couple of months, but we will have to see when the virus is controlled.

With Here We Grow shut down, I expect there will be a slight reduction in their contribution next year since it is based upon their previous year's income. We will have to see what happens for the remainder of this calendar year, and when they can resume providing preschool services.

If you are in a position to keep your pledges up-to-date during this crisis, it would be greatly appreciated to help meet current expenses. My pledge is sent monthly by automated payments from my bank, or you could just mail a check to the church office. If you need support, feel free to contact us. As Denise mentioned in a previous email, the food pantry is available, we have the Pearl Morrill and Deacons' Fund, as well as donations from a fellow parishioner. Pastor Brian is available for spiritual or emotional support (cell: 605-350-3666). You can leave messages for Denise at the office, 508-832-2845.

Pastor Brian set up a Zoom account and it allows individuals to participate in video or audio meetings. He also is sending out links to music and sermons for each Sunday by email. Brian and Deb Pranaitis have reviewed the list of individuals they call on and are continuing to offer them support as best they can while respecting the limitations imposed by the crisis.

Brian and Denise have been going in periodically to the church to provide some coverage. Also the Outreach Committee has packed up bags of the donated food stored in the green room, and it has been distributed to aid Auburn Youth and Family Services.

After discovering a leak in the bottom of the boiler, the Trustees made the decision to shut down the furnace for the sanctuary. They are currently reviewing options for short term and/or a long term solution with an engineering company.

We are also looking into remote access software for Denise's office computer, which will allow her, and the other individuals who need to use it, to have access from their home computers. (*Update: this software is now in place.*)

I hope you all stay safe, and remain well. — Stu Campbell, President, Church Council

To All Members,

4/16/2020

Since my last letter, the government passed the CARES Act and banks began accepting loan applications for the Paycheck Protection Program. The Small Business Administration oversees the process. The loans are two year loans that are used to cover payroll and some utility expenses. The program includes nonprofits such as churches. If we maintain existing staff and pay levels for two months following the full approval of the loan, we can apply to have the loan amount forgiven.

The Church Council approved looking into this program, and applying for the loan if it was feasible. Nick Stockhaus filled out the application and submitted it through the church's bank. He has received preliminary approval for a loan. If finalized, and funded by the government, this should help us cover the cost of continuing to pay all our employees.

I again encourage you to keep your pledges up-to-date over this difficult period, if you are able to. Also, if you have issues or needs, we have available resources. You can contact Pastor Brian at 605-350-3666 or Denise at the church office, 508-832-2845.

Please stay well — Stu Campbell, President, Church Council

Please be in prayer for the following families who have lost loved ones since the last printing of the *Tidings* in early March.

William Pranaitis, Debbie Pranaitis' brother-in-law, died on March 7th. Please pray for Joe and Debbie's family.

Paul Kosky, a former church member (and uncle of Bev Scobie and cousin to Joe Pranaitis), died on March 20th. Please pray for all of Paul's loved ones.

Please pray for the Annunziata-Wheeler Family on the passing of Carol Annunziata on April 4th. Carol's daughter, Karen Wheeler, is a former member of the church. Carol was also a close friend of Bev Geddes.

Pray for Michele and Michael Schillinger due to the passing of Michele's grandmother, Gloria, on May 5th.

Lastly, please pray for Linda and Debbie due to the passing of their mom, Phyllis Hardy, on May 12th.

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

John 11:25

A Note From Your Outreach Committee

God's Church in Auburn Center Doing Christ's Work in the World

As a long standing committee of our church, we are very accustomed to doing for others throughout the nation and the world. Reaching out to and providing for so many within this town and general area is a new game for all of us. As a whole, we have been so sheltered and are so fortunate to live in this country. As most of you know, the Outreach Committee held a food drive at the church over a 4 day period in April. We were overwhelmed with the generous support you provided. We were able to restock our pantry and share with AYFS as well. (See note from Sally on page 5 of this newsletter.) In addition to requested food items, we received cash, which we used partially to purchase deli meats and cheese for Denise to offer those who utilize our pantry. We also were given several Shaw's gift cards so individuals can purchase perishable items needed. Both were shared with AYFS as well.

WE CANNOT THANK YOU ENOUGH FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

In addition to the above, Outreach sent a gift of \$250.00 to Habitat for Humanity, MetroWest/Greater Worcester office. Quoting them from their thank you letter it reads,

"During this difficult time, your support is more important than ever. Thank you for stepping up so local families have the opportunity to build strength, stability, and independence through owning a safe, affordable home. We are very grateful to have your partnership in this work."

Outreach is exactly as you might think. Our mission is outside of our congregation's needs only. If you know of a need, please share it with one of us or with Pastor Brian. But let us remind you, as Pastor Brian mentions in all his correspondence, there are other ways the church can help if you need it.

And finally I leave you with a quote I heard within the correspondence from Habitat. Speaker, songwriter, and recording artist Jana Stanfield says, *"I cannot do all the good that the world needs. But the world needs all the good that I can do."*

May God watch over all of us — Cindy Dube, Chairperson

Pat Bukoski, Shannon Hartmann, Joyce Ringgard, Kay Shapter Klaucke, Marion Woodcock

Note: Outreach continues to collect old pill bottles. Thank you to all who have donated or will donate. Matthew 25: Ministries accepts donations of empty plastic pill bottles for inclusion in shipments of medical supplies. Acceptable items include: prescription and over-the-counter pill bottles, large and small pill bottles, with and without secure caps (child-resistant). Please remove labels, leaving no glue or residue, and wash bottles in very hot water and dish soap. Rinse and dry thoroughly. Replace lids on clean, dried bottles and save for when church services resume.



I hope everyone is doing well! Ironically, May is Mental Health Month. I am not even going to mention the other awareness observances because this one, I feel, is most important for now.

There's talk about reopening the country and how to go about it. I have information from the CDC that might help.

KNOW HOW IT SPREADS: The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus.

EVERYONE SHOULD: Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (sing *Happy Birthday* or *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*) especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water aren't available, use a hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they are dry. Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

AVOID CLOSE CONTACT: Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Put distance between yourself and others; people without symptoms may be able to spread the virus.

COVER YOUR MOUTH AND NOSE WITH A CLOTH FACE COVER WHEN AROUND OTHERS: Everyone should wear a cloth face cover when they go out in a public place, such as the grocery store. Cloth coverings should not be used on children under age 2, or anyone who has trouble breathing, or has trouble removing the mask without assistance. **DO NOT** use a face mask that is meant for a healthcare worker. Do not allow a face covering to result in a false sense of security. Still maintain social distancing whenever possible.

CLEAN AND DISINFECT: Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily such as tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.

I know you have seen and heard about the above mentioned, but I can't emphasize it enough.

The situation has caused increased depression and other mental health issues. Please talk to someone who can help, even if it means calling 911. Call a friend, call your doctor or a counselor, but reach out to someone. Weather permitting, sit outside or go for a walk. Please talk to someone.

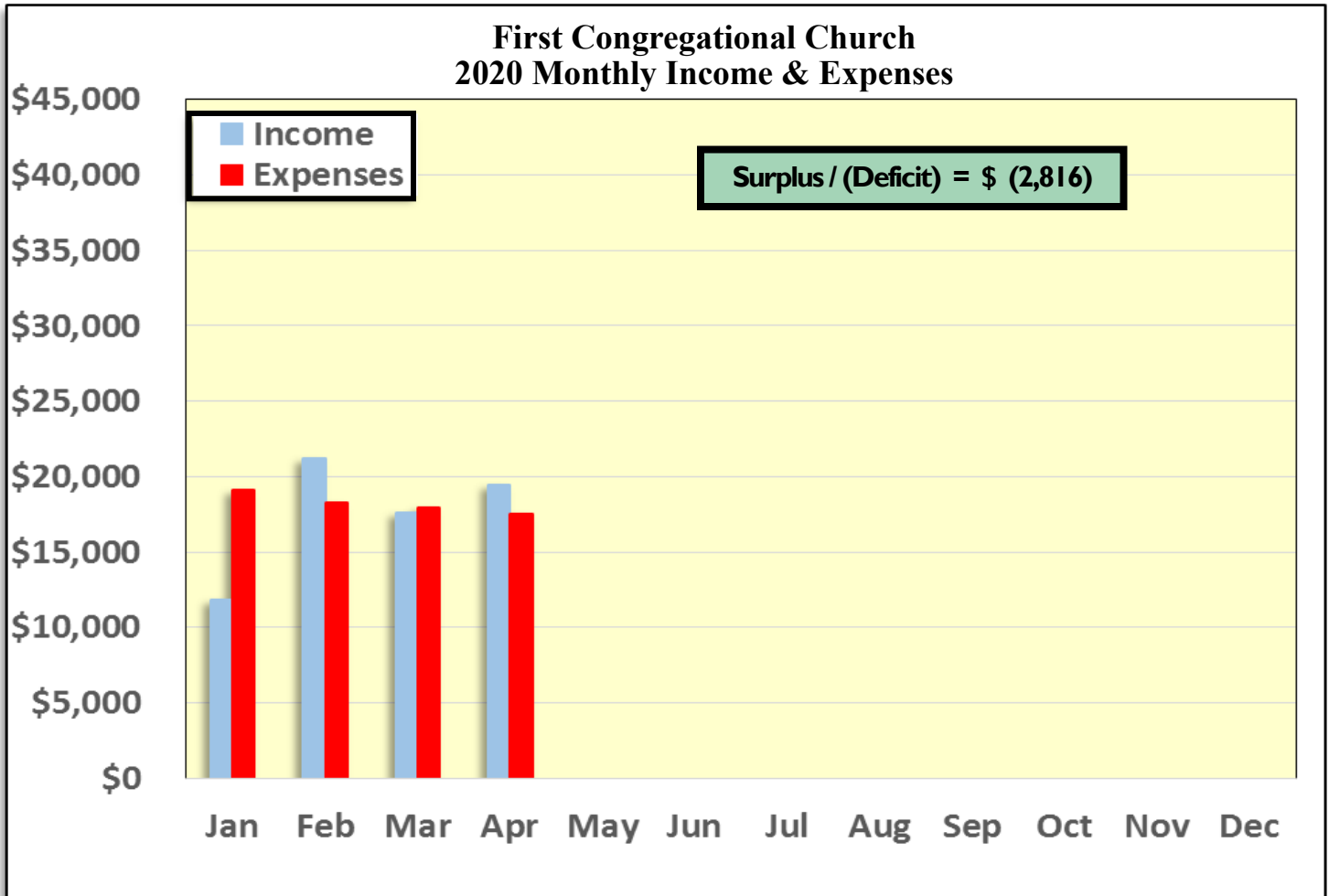
Please stay safe! God Bless! He will help us get through this.

Debbie Pranaitis, Parish Nurse, cell: 508-612-4521

PLEASE HELP! The medical supply closet is **OVERFLOWING!**
Please refer family, friends, and neighbors to this resource.

For several years now, Christine Suprenant has generously donated hundreds of dollars' worth of annuals to our plant sale *EACH* year. She has well-stocked greenhouses on her property in Leicester with a good selection of annuals and vegetables along with some unusual varieties of petunias and geraniums. She is open every day until about June 10th. If you need to shop for plants for your yard or the cemetery, please check out what Chris has to offer. Her geraniums are awesome! To get there, take Rt. 56 out of Leicester Center towards Paxton. She is located on Whittemore St. in Leicester, which is a left hand turn off Route 56 shortly before Hot Dog Annie's, just past the high school. Her greenhouses are on the left, just a 1/4 mile from 56 next to a blue Cape; parking is across the street. If you go, please let Chris know you are from the church and thank her for her continued support. We can thank *Shirley Hill* for developing a relationship with Chris and making this possible for all these years!

Below is a financial “snapshot” provided by Nick Stockhaus, Treasurer.



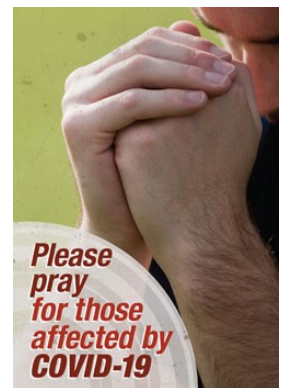
On May 1st, Cindy D. received this note from Sally D’Arcangelo of Auburn Youth & Family Services.

“Hi Cindy, just wanted to send you this while it is fresh in my mind. I can’t thank the Congregational Church members enough for the abundant food donation that was dropped off this week! Since the pandemic hit, we have been receiving increased calls from families whose lives have been turned upside down. They are experiencing job loss, furloughs, needing help with food, applying for unemployment, and needing a listening ear. Many have never used a food pantry before. Your donation, including the money and Shaw’s gift cards, has allowed them to have food items and make meals, lessening the worry about how they would provide meals. In a two week period in March, AYFS was able to help 111 households or 258 people in the Auburn Community. Last week, I counted more than 100 families that we either provided with curbside food or delivery. We are so grateful to you for this support!!”

Early in April, Katie Hanks, wife of Ron and Connie Hanks’ nephew Jonathan, put out a request on Facebook for surgical caps for the UMASS COVID19 ICU Unit. Katie’s team were among the first to be assigned to the newly created unit. Masks and gloves were provided, but head coverings were in short supply.

Connie and Kelsea immediately got to work looking up free sewing patterns online. Denise sent out an email to the church family asking for volunteers to help meet the need. Many thanks to Gayle Farley, Marion Woodcock, Donna Dube, and Nan Johnson who all jumped right in to help. Within a few days we had 50 caps for Katie to bring in to work, and a total of 65 caps were provided.

The nurses greatly appreciated the love and support shown by our church members. In a world where approximately 1 out of 5 of your patients survive, we truly appreciate their dedication.



FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

I pray this finds you all well and adjusting to the "new normal." Who would have ever thought that March 8th would be our last service for awhile? I was in church the other day and realized I still had a St. Patrick's Day bulletin board up and the craft is still sitting on my desk waiting to be put together. I hope you were able to check out the website, do the activities, or bake the recipe I sent you a few weeks ago. I saw a post from the Webbs and it looks like they were having a good time making the "He is risen buns."

I again will be including some activities so you can have a little church time at home. In addition to the Webbs, the Grimshaws shared a beautiful picture that Elizabeth made for me; it really made my day brighter. If you would like to draw a picture or write a little note to a church member, I am sure it would be much appreciated. If you do not have a copy of the directory to obtain the address, please email me, Denise in the office, or Pastor Brian for the information.

I have been contacting some of our "Senior" members by phone to check in and it has been a welcome distraction for both of us. I don't always have time after church to "catch up" with people. So, with most people staying in, having a nice chat is more accessible.

Please know that through all of this GOD IS IN CHARGE and He knows our needs and will be with us always.

Please stay well, wash your hands, and "air" hugs do bring smiles.

IDEAS

For Grades 1 and up: you can quiz your family with the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20: 1-17 or page 88 in the *Adventure Bible*)

For Grades 3 and up, you should have an *NIV Adventure Bible* (that you received after completing 3rd grade). Turn to page 551 and complete the activity in the "Live It" section at the bottom of the page.

How about "living" in a tent for an entire day and write/draw pictures of how God has taken care of your family and given you a home to live in.

Lastly, below I've included a spiritual fitness test (taken from page 1265 in your Bible) that you and your family can do together.

Please be kind to each other and pray we will soon be able to "walk quickly" down the halls of First Congregational Church.

Remember, God has said:

Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. — Hebrews 13:5

Jean McPherson, Director of Religious Education

A Spiritual Fitness Test (taken from the *NIV Adventure Bible*)

Take this physical fitness test: 1. Do 5 push-ups. 2. Do 10 sit-ups. 3. Touch your toes 10 times. 4. Do 3 pull-ups. 5. Run around the outside (or inside) of your house 3 times without stopping. Do this every day, and you will probably stay physically fit.

Here's a spiritual fitness plan: 1. Read your Bible and think about what God says. 2. Spend time in prayer every day. 3. Pray for others who need special help. 4. Do at least one loving thing for someone each day. 5. Try to please God in everything you do.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Paul writes about athletes who train hard. The athletes don't just want to be fit. They want to win! Use the 5 spiritual fitness steps to train yourself spiritually.



Here We Grow Preschool

All I can say is, "Wow, what a crazy time we are going through!" **Here We Grow** has been closed since March 13, and today we found out that we are not going to be able to finish our school year. While we understand the reasoning behind it, and agree that it needs to be done, it still makes us very sad not to get to say a proper goodbye to the kids and families, some of whom have been with us for several years.

With that being said, we have been trying very hard to keep our families and kids engaged during this time and so I thought we would share some great ideas with you from the HWG staff. Some of our favorite websites for learning include: PBS kids, Starfall.com, and ABC Mouse.

We also love activities that get the kids up and moving, so building obstacle courses, either indoors or outside, is a lot of fun and simple to do using everyday items. Dancing, just put on any music and get grooving, or play the freeze dance by randomly stopping the music and striking a pose; how silly can you get? You can also practice shape/letter or number recognition while walking around your house or neighborhood and making a list of what you find. Another fun movement game — write numbers/letters or draw shapes on the driveway and hop from one to another and call out the name of what you land on.

Some other less active activities that we love, playdoh! We make our own at HWG; it's great for increasing finger/hand strength as well as their imagination. Add some child-safe scissors to the playdoh and practice cutting. Getting a lot of junk mail? Let your little ones help rip it up. Show them how to use their pointer and thumb to grab the top of the paper and tear, such a huge lesson to learn, especially when it comes to opening juice box straws. I love washable markers and use them on my windows or sliding glass door. We play tic-tac-toe and practice letter/number formation, and it's so easy to clean. And, always Read, Read, Read — there is nothing better.

We hope some of these suggestions help you pass the time as we are all stuck at home. We will look forward to next year and we know that this too shall pass. In the meantime, as always, thank you for your continued support of **Here We Grow**.

Stay safe and healthy, and wash your hands.

Cristi Corey, Director, **Here We Grow** Preschool

CALLING ALL GRADUATES . . . As we do every year, we would like to celebrate our high school and college graduates in an upcoming newsletter. If you are aware of any students with ties to First Congregational who will be graduating this spring, please email Denise at: secretary@auburnfirststucc.org or call the Church office, (508) 832-2845. Please include where they're graduating from and details of their future plans, and list family members (parents/grandparents) who are known within the church.

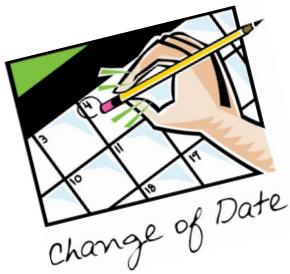


Congratulations to Lynda (formerly Clifford) & David Hammond on their recent marriage! Lynda and David tied the knot on February 20th in Maine. May the Lord richly bless you, Mr. & Mrs. Hammond!

Carole & Bob Murray celebrated their special day on May 4th. Paul and Diane Moore celebrated their anniversary on May 10th.

Happy Anniversary, Bob & Carole and Paul & Diane!





COMMUNITY YARD SALE POSTPONED UNTIL SEPTEMBER 12TH!

Due to the pandemic, we have decided to **POSTPONE** our annual yard sale until **Saturday, September 12th.**

So, please tell your family, friends, and neighbors about the NEW DATE for what is always a well-attended yard sale and how easy it is to participate.

Please continue to collect items to contribute to our "church table." This table will consist of items for sale donated by church members and friends of the church. The remainder of the participants in our yard sale will be members of the church and the community who rent spaces for the day to sell their items. **If you don't plan on renting your own space, please set aside things you no longer want and donate them to the church's table. PLEASE, NO VCR TAPES, CLOTHING, TVs, OR COMPUTER EQUIPMENT, INCLUDING MONITORS.**

As the date draws closer, we will be asking for a minimal amount of your time to help with this FUNdraiser. **So, please mark your calendars to lend a hand.**

If you have any questions about this event, contact me, Cindy Dube, at home, 508-832-6646, or call or text my cell, 774-238-0260. I am looking forward to another year working together and having fun while doing it!

TENTATIVE PLANT SALE DATE: We are hoping we will still be able to hold our **PLANT SALE** in June, but are awaiting word from Governor Baker on when outdoor gatherings will be allowed. So, our **TENTATIVE DATE** is **June 13th, 9-1:00.** Please look for updates via email in the weeks ahead, or check in with the church office, 508-832-2845. Our Plant Table Team is organized this year by Connie Hanks. If you are interested in becoming a part of this group, contact Connie at clwhanks@gmail.com or call her at 508-832-4227. Last year the plants alone raised \$975.⁰⁰ for the church's general fund; **SO WHETHER FOR JUNE OR SEPTEMBER, PLEASE SET ASIDE PERENNIALS TO DONATE. THANK YOU!**

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