

Herald of Good TIDINGS

December
2008

"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,

From Your Pastoral Search Committee

The PSC has been meeting regularly as a group and with Pastor Mark. We are finding our time together most insightful. We are working hard to find out what is really important to First Congregational Church and what direction we want to go in the coming years before we put together our profile. This work takes time and we want to take that time and be sure we find the best possible pastor for all of us. One of the ways that each of you can help is to talk to us. Stop by the PSC table during coffee hour, call us, email us, pull us aside after a meeting, let us know what's important to YOU. Tell us what you liked about our church in the past. Tell us what you'd like to see in the future. We want to hear from you. We are also encouraging everyone to take part in the Monday night discussion group "Becoming a Blessed Church." We meet Mondays at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
PSC

Coffee Hour Hosts:

12/7 & 14 ~ Nominating/Scholarship
12/21 & 28 ~ Deacons
1/4 ~ Trustees
1/11 ~ Deacons
1/18 ~ Outreach

MONTHLY CHURCH SUPPERS

The Board of Trustees will be preparing our next Church Supper on Saturday, December 20th at 5 p.m.

On the menu: Roast Beef

Servers: looking for volunteers

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

Advent Worship Schedule

Nov. 30th
1st Sunday in Advent
Worship Service at 10 a.m.

Dec. 7th
2nd Sunday in Advent
Christmas Pageant
Communion Sunday with
Deacons' offering
& food pantry 10 a.m.

Dec. 14th
3rd Sunday in Advent
Cantata 10 a.m.



Dec. 21st
4th Sunday in Advent
Worship Service 10 a.m.

Dec. 24th
Christmas Eve
5 p.m. Family Service
11 p.m. Candlelight
Communion Service

~ All Are Welcome ~

Sanctuary Renovation Finances

With the successful completion of the Sanctuary, I would like to explain where the financing of this project stands. The total cost of the Sanctuary renovations came in at \$115,265. Last year, many members made a 3 year pledge commitment to this project that has enabled us to cover most of these costs. Since these pledge commitments run through the end of 2009, the Trustees needed to borrow \$23,800 from the Church's own Invested Funds to pay all of the bills related to the renovation.

We began paying principal and interest payments to the Invested Funds starting in November and will do so until the loan is paid back. As of the end of October, there was \$18,325 in outstanding Sanctuary pledges that we expect to receive over the next 13 months. This leaves a shortfall of approximately \$5,500 plus interest in the funding of this project that will have to be raised by some other means. We realize that these are hard economic times, but if anyone is able to increase or extend their Sanctuary Pledge or make an additional donation to the Sanctuary Repayment Fund, it would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your continued support, and may God bless you and your family this holiday season!

Nick Stockhaus
Treasurer

YOUTH ON A MISSION NEWS

Sunday December 14th YOM Annual Christmas party at the Bohn's 1pm – 4pm
There will be food, fun and a \$10 Yankee swap.

Sunday December 21st we'll be having our annual cookie walk during coffee hour. There will be a variety of different sized decorative containers at a variety of prices that you can fill with the homemade cookies of your choice. We would gladly accept donations of homemade cookies. Bring your donations to fellowship hall PRIOR to the church service on the 21st.

Sunday December 28th YOM will be participating in Worcester Fellowship on City Hall Common. We will continue to receive donations of new white cotton socks, t-shirts, hats, scarves, gloves and mittens up until that day. We will also be preparing a simple lunch for the group. We'll be gathering immediately after service and will be gone until approximately 3 p.m.

Sunday January 11, 2009 MANDATORY YOM PARENT AND MEMBER MEETING

If you are even thinking about being part of our summer mission trip you must be at this meeting beginning with our worship service at 10 a.m.

Also, we are hoping to sell Joe Corbi's pizza and cookie dough during the month of January. Time did not allow us to organize this fundraiser for December.

Please call Jen or Randy Bohn at 508-832-0428 if you have any questions about any YOM activities. Thanks.

Jennifer & Randy

Best Wishes to You and Yours ... for a Radical Advent

Reflections from your Interim Pastor, Rev. Mark Seifried

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 1:3-4

The passage above is from one of the texts prescribed for reading on the First Sunday in Advent. It was the sentiment that the apostle Paul used to greet one of the congregations he founded. I often greet the congregation with similar words on Sunday morning: "Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

When you stop to think about it, wishing grace and peace upon a whole group of people is a whole lot more meaningful than saying, "Hello." Wishing someone grace is offering forgiveness, good will, the love and favor of God. Offering someone the peace of Christ is even deeper. It is associated with the Hebrew concept of *shalom* which connotes deep, inner peace, but also interpersonal peace, world peace, peace in the home and a sense of deep contentedness. Combine these two, and the greeting is an offer of being in a different world – a world that is free of fear, oppression, prejudice, conflict, and suffering. This is a world of mystery and transformation.

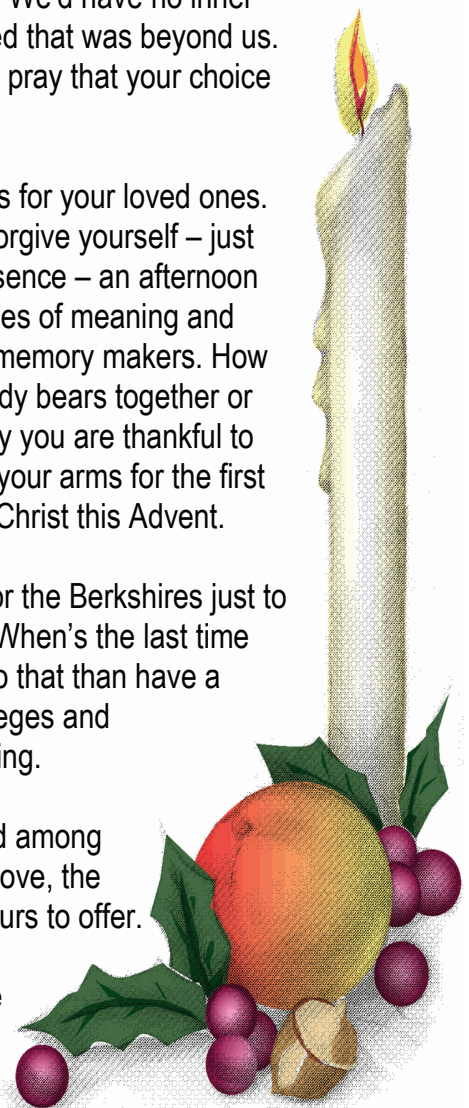
Christ offers us grace and peace every day, yet they often elude us. Can you imagine what would happen if we really allowed the incarnate love of God to take permanent root in our heart? We'd have no inner turmoil, no interpersonal conflict, no hard feelings, no fears, no intolerance, no need that was beyond us. We can, and do, choose either to accept or reject the grace and peace of Christ. I pray that your choice this Advent season is acceptance and that you start close to home.

With that in mind, I would like to offer suggestions for graceful and peace-filled gifts for your loved ones. A grace-filled gift might be forgiving a long-held grudge. Forgive others, but also forgive yourself – just as the Lord forgives. Offering grace might be sharing deeply of your time and presence – an afternoon with an aging relative to help organize photos and scrapbooks, time for telling stories of meaning and faith. Grace-filled gifts would not be found online. They would be flesh and blood memory makers. How about taking a niece or grandson to one of those places where you could build teddy bears together or decorate ceramic keepsakes? How about sharing with your favorite co-worker why you are thankful to be his colleague? You could tell your children about the magic of holding them in your arms for the first time or the pride you take in their life. Go out on a limb and be a gracious fool for Christ this Advent.

A peace-filled Advent would most likely be quiet or musical – say a trip to Boston or the Berkshires just to spend a few hours together. Maybe you could visit a museum with your spouse. When's the last time you did that? How about taking in a concert with your best friend? She'd rather do that than have a scarf! A tip: there are all kinds of inexpensive concerts around the holidays at colleges and universities ... and in many churches! Most are professional and emotionally moving.

My yearning for you this Advent is that the incarnate love of God is born in you and among your relations. Gifts from the malls will perish. The gift of yourself, the gift of your love, the gifts of Christ's grace and peace are eternal. They are yours to accept, but also yours to offer.

Rejoice! Rejoice in Advent blessings of grace and peace! I hope we get a chance to accept them together as we worship Emmanuel, God with us, this Advent and Christmastide, too.



A CHRISTMAS CANTATA

FEATURING: The First Church Choir
THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF AUBURN

Sunday, December 14th, 2008 at 10 a.m.

'Born a Savior, Born A King' by John Purifoy

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| I Born a Savior, Born a King | V Carols of the Angels |
| II Deliver Us, Lord! | VI He is Born Now the Prince of Peace |
| III Prepare the Way | VII Christmas Benediction |
| IV No Golden Carriage | VIII Born A Savior, Born a King Reprise |

The Cantata Singers

- | <u>Sopranos</u> | <u>Altos</u> | <u>Baritones</u> |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Barbara Allaire | Jo-Ann Derosa | Randy Bohn |
| Shantelle Anderson | Darshan Mahlert | Ron Hanks |
| Sue Klaucke | Debbie Mahlert | Gordon Mahlert |
| Linda Mahlert | | |
| Lori Stockhaus | | |
| Pam Tentor | | |

Clarinet - Gwendolyn Winkel
Readers - Pastor Mark Seifried &
Connie Whitehead Hanks
Minister of Music: Heather Moore



Forty Years a Grave Digger

Auburn loses veteran Bell Ringer and Sexton.
 "Uncle John Green Stone" who succumbs to death suddenly . . .

Auburn, - April 12, 1901 - At the age of 88 years, 7 months and 10 days, John Green Stone or "Uncle John" as he was familiarly called by the older residents of town, died suddenly in his home at Auburn Center at 10 o'clock of heart failure.

During the past few weeks he has been exercising in the open air. Yesterday morning he did some light work in the woodshed, and returned to the house to rest. He had been in the house a few moments, when Mrs. Charles E. Prouty heard him groan.

Hastening to his relief she saw at a glance that the end was near, and Dr. W.E. Barton was quickly summoned. When he arrived Mr. Stone was unconscious and breathed only a few times afterward . . .

John Green Stone was born in Oxford, September 1, 1812. At the age of 12 years he came to Auburn to live and here remained. On September 30, 1840, he married Miss Mehitable (aka Hittie) Bancroft of Auburn, with Reverend Miner G. Pratt performing the ceremony.

This same year Mr. Stone purchased the brick house and farm of his uncle Jeremiah Stone. (This house is located at 107 Central Street, currently called the Prouty House.) His wife died on September 4, 1893, aged 81 years. They had no children.

In 1846, the town bought a portion of Mr. Stone's farm for the establishment of Hillside Cemetery and appointed him sexton. He cleared the land of undesirable trees and stumps and built a heavy stone wall which enclosed the lots on three sides (this work was done by contract). He held the office continuously till 1866, when he resigned and Hosea Marcy was appointed sexton.

HE DUG ALL THE GRAVES, but three; his absence being occasioned by sickness. He also placed the foundation of every monument. After his retirement he continued to work in the cemetery, doing all the work for which the town appropriated money each year. Much of his work was done gratuitously, which aside from its natural beauty, contributed to make Hillside Cemetery one of the most picturesque rural cemeteries to be found.

John Green Stone was also District Highway Surveyor for many years, and built several highway bridges. He rang the church bell for nearly 30 years from 1860. At funerals the bell would be rung according to the number of years the person had lived. The gender was rung out in well-understood codes (this being common practice in rural New England). In many communities there were nine strokes for a man and six for a woman, and three for a child. A closely knit town would recognize, without question, for whom the bell tolled.

After the devastating church fire in February 1896, a new bell was hung in the belfry and was rung for the first time by Mr. Stone on June 5, 1897. On the bell is the inscription "A Tribute to John Green Stone."

Mr. Stone had always been a hard worker. In addition to his other work, he carried on his farm until he was 83 years old, when he disposed of it to Charles E. Prouty, with whom he made his home.

He was possessor of a broad, intellectual mind, a liberal heart and not a reproach could be brought against him.

The funeral was held at the Congregational Church, with Rev. A.H. Coolidge officiating.

This information was taken from the obituary of John Green Stone.

Submitted by
 George DuHamel and Paula Lubin, Church Historians



Happy Holidays from Here We Grow Preschool

Once again another year has gone by, and we are looking forward to the year 2009. Something I live by is, "Never put off till tomorrow what you can get done today." Our days seem to be going by way too fast, so my suggestion to all is to get as much done on each new day as possible. The children and staff are preparing for the holiday season and the time off it will provide.

During the month of November the children of *Here We Grow* learned about the first Thanksgiving and the act of giving to others. They brought in many food items for the Giving Basket which Pastor Mark and Denise were kind enough to distribute to families in need. We celebrated our "feasts" on Monday the 24th with all 4 year old children and on Tuesday the 25th with all 3 year old children. Both days went very well with help from our parent volunteers. We were treated to a yummy "friendship fruit salad." Thank you to Dave Sampson and Wayne Prouty for their help with carrying the tables and chairs to the vestry and back.

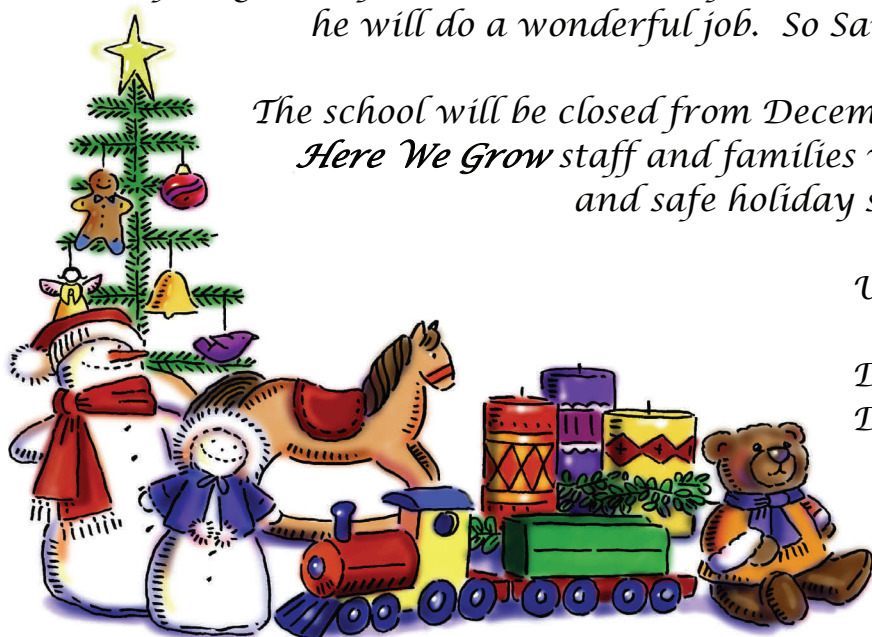
Also in the month of November the staff took the First Aid and CPR courses, and I am proud to announce that we are all First Aid and CPR certified for another year.

With the month of December already here, *Here We Grow* is once again participating in the Marines' "Toys for Tots" Campaign. The holiday programs will be on December 18th and 19th. The children are eagerly awaiting the arrival of Santa. If all goes as planned Bob Murray will be dressing the part of Santa. I know he will do a wonderful job. So Santa Bob, "Thank You."

The school will be closed from December 22nd - January 5th. The *Here We Grow* staff and families wish all of you a bright and safe holiday season.

Until 2009, Happy Holidays —

Dawn Murphy
Director, *Here We Grow* Preschool



Our first family activity was a success! All families that attended had a good time and made some awesome scarecrows. We have pictures up in Fellowship Hall on the bulletin board by the door going towards the offices.

Thank you to all who stepped up and donated to the Thanksgiving baskets the Jr. Youth Group is collecting. As of this writing we still have one more Sunday to collect more food items, but we are well on our way to filling our six boxes.

Upcoming Activities . . .

- 12/5 **Parents' Night Out** 5:30 to 7:30 at Pakachoag Church \$5/family
The Jr. Youth Group will be reading stories and making crafts with the children. Let me know by November 30th if you wish to attend.
- 12/7 **Christmas Pageant - Bethlehem Speaks** Please share in this beautiful story of the birth of Jesus. The children and adults have worked hard to bring this story to life.
- 12/14 **Live Nativity** at Overlook Farm in Rutland. This is a yearly tradition with Heifer International. The requested donation is a plate of cookies to share after the performance. Hay/sleigh rides and a gift shop are also available. We will have a bagged lunch at church and then leave at 12:30.
- 12/21 **Caroling** Again, we will brown bag it after service and go caroling with the Jr. Youth Group and anyone else who wishes to join us.
- 12/28 **No Sunday School** Pastor Mark will have a family friendly service. We ask that on this day the children return the banks they were given earlier in the month.

Remember the Jr. Youth Group is open to all children in grades 5 - 8. If you know of someone who may be interested, invite them to attend or contact me.

May this Christmas Season bring you joy and a New Year that brings your heart and mind closer to our God.

With His guidance we serve,
Jean McPherson, Dir. of Religious Ed

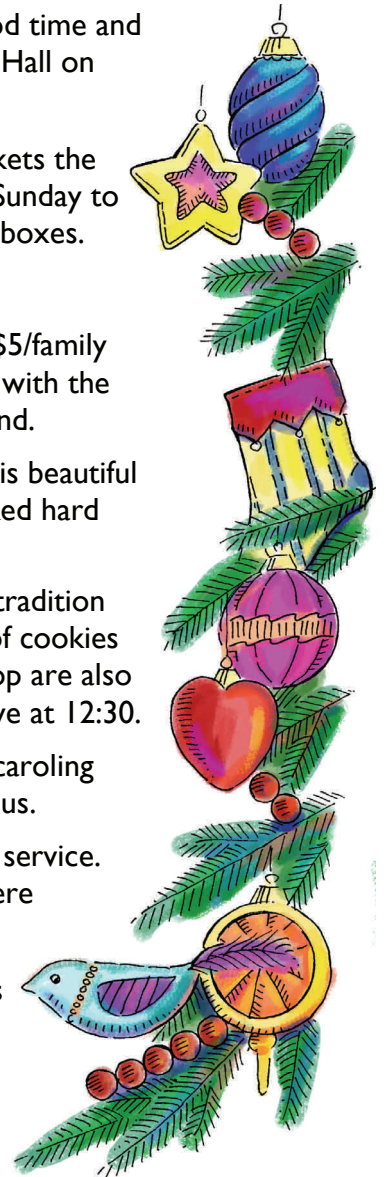
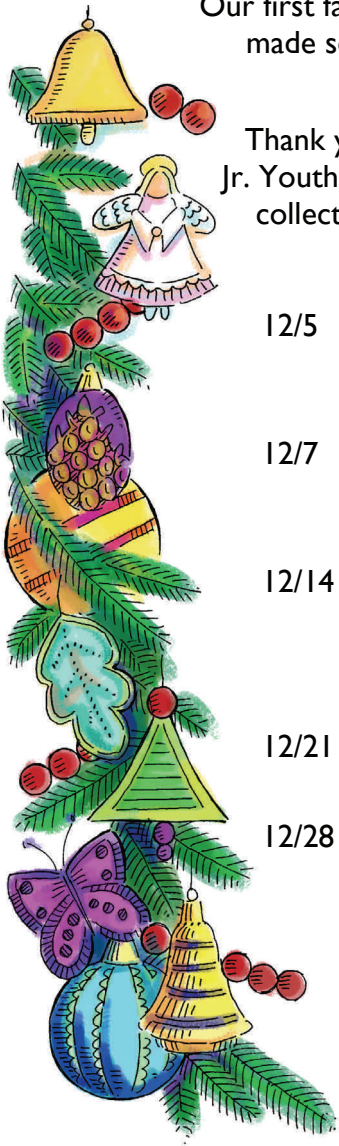
Bowling League Update!

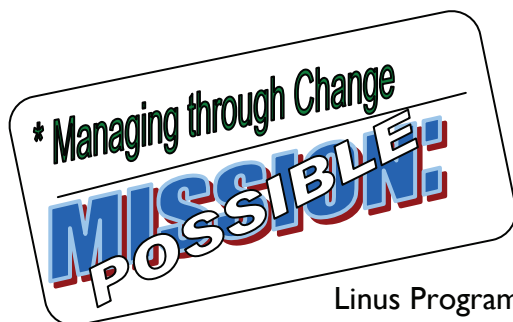
After 30+ years, the First Congregational Church Candlepin Bowling League had to be cancelled. We simply did not have enough bowlers to continue the league. We may attempt to start the league back up in January if there is enough interest. If anyone is interested in restarting the bowling league after the holidays, please contact Lori or Nick Stockhaus at 508-865-6439. We will also place a sign up sheet in Fellowship Hall for anyone who wants to bowl.

Thank you,
Nick & Lori Stockhaus

Rebecca McPherson ~ Dec. 28th
Lori-Ann Stockhaus ~ Dec. 28th
Donald Slongwhite ~ Dec. 30th

Wishing You a
**Happy
Birthday!**





Managing through Change.... MISSION: POSSIBLE

As we move into December, we will continue and (maybe) complete our journey into the various ministries of our Church. Being constant in our faith and serving others through our ministries is one way in helping us to keep in step with our Lord.

This past month, rather than sharing articles in the weekly bulletins about the Linus Program, our Outreach Committee and its ministries and the Sibley Fund (Sorry! We decided to mix things up a bit), we heard about FCC being the meeting place for the local Scouts and home to the *Here We Grow* Program. We also learned about some of the ministries Worcester Area Mission Society (WAMS) is involved in within the greater Worcester area such as Habitat for Humanity and WAYS (Workday for Adults & Youth in Service). WAMS is also involved nationally with such programs as the Katrina Recovery Program. You can learn more about the *Here We Grow* Program and Worcester Area Mission Society by logging on to their websites: www.herewegrowpreschool.com and www.wamsucc.org.

Coming up over the next few weeks we will share articles focusing on the various ministries our Outreach Committee is involved in as well as the Sibley Fund and how that fund provides for many. We will also share with you the facts around the Linus Program and how they provide for the needs of little ones. Look for all of these and any other FCC Ministry we can think of. If you know of one we missed, and we are certain there are some out there, please contact us via email at Stewardship@AuburnFirstUCC.org.

All of these are ministries in which your Time, Talents and Treasures help provide for our own as well as others day after day, month after month, year after year. As 2008 comes to a close, we are reminded of how First Congregational Church of Auburn has remained very active and committed in its various ministries this past year.

In your prayers, remember to thank our Lord for all that He provides, and has provided over the last several months, so that we can remain faithful to Him.

In His Love,

Your Stewardship Committee:

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

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 7 at 7:00 PM. 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.

Come, all Ye faithful!

Library Tidings by Gloria Whitehead

It's time for Christmas - no matter what's scheduled on the calendar or otherwise, make up your mind that it's going to lead to a glorious celebration. Oh, Stars Almighty, there are gifts also! Hold on a minute. How many kinds of gifts are there? How's this for starters? There's the SERENELY PLEASANT, BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL "NEW" SANCTUARY, a gift partially made by you, in which you could celebrate this latest transformation at Thanksgiving and now Christmas. To cover our subject, skip past a lengthy list, to the libraries. Our thanks to all of you who have donated books in 2008 and the past. They are circulating.

Highlighted this December are children's Christmas books. What better way is there to calm down excited little folks who are anticipating a Christmas Pageant or Christmas Eve than to read together a well chosen Christmas story? Here's a list, and ages are variable: read to, versus independent.

The Miracle Dish by Opal Wheeler - It's the early 1900's in crystal showered Superior, Wisconsin. Moppet, the youngest of the Wheeler children, has been chosen to go on her first Christmas shopping trip with her mom. It's filled with hustle, bustle confusion and the realization that grown ups have high hopes, too. Even when discouraged, things can work out okay. It is a wonderful story for adults as well. Ages 5-9

The Scrawny Little Tree by Ed Mehler

*One Christmas Eve, some years ago,
A legend came to be,
A miracle, some people say,
And most others will agree*

The man laughed as a little boy in tattered clothing gave him a few coins for a very scrawny Christmas tree which had just a few needles. So what! He loved the tree and fell asleep feeling on top of the world. Read to learn how the greatest Christmas lesson was captured by a town from *The Scrawny Little Tree*. Ages 6-10+

Room for a Little One by Martin Waddell - You will be in awe of the illustrations. It's a fairly large book. The story is short, beautifully laced together and brief. It may even bring a tear to the eye. Ages 3-7

A Newberry Christmas - Fourteen stories of Christmas by award winning authors. Selected by Martin H. Greenberg and Charles G. Waugh. Just a listing of 4 of the stories:

The Christmas Fake by Lois Lenski

The Christmas Apple by Ruth Sawyer

Ramona, the Sheep Suit and the Three Wise Persons by Beverly Cleary

All Through the Night by Rachel Field - great for the family

Christmas After All - The Great Depression Diary of Minnie Swift by Kathryn Lasky - this book is from the Dear America Series. Minnie's diary explains day by day how life changed with the current events of 1932. Quoting from Nov. 25, 1932, "Everything is diminishing: our money, the light of day, and even the hours that Papa works. But in my heart I know we Swifts are tough — hardened off like seedlings. I just know that somehow, someday, this shall be a Christmas."

Though ages have been noted, the message in these books will appeal to many. Also, there are countless more treasures in the children's and adult libraries. Just writing about the preceding books has stirred and softened my heart. You, too?

Pastor Mark has given several books along with the suggestion of others which the library has purchased. These are outstanding and diversified with guidelines, ideas (core and fresh) et al, especially during this time when we're searching for a new Pastor. During the Christmas season they are on display in Fellowship Hall. Don't miss scanning them and then making a selection.



December is Safe Toys and Gifts Month. December 1st is World AIDS Day, December 1st to the 7th is National Aplastic Anemia Awareness Day, and ****December 7-13 is NATIONAL HAND WASHING AWARENESS WEEK*****.

I can't emphasize enough the importance of hand washing. There are so many germs out there now that we need to be more aware and more careful. If we got an infection, we'd go to the doctor and get an antibiotic to get rid of the infection. Now these germs are stronger than the antibiotics and it is much more difficult to get rid of some germs. Now, instead of coughing and sneezing into your hands, it is better to cough and sneeze into your sleeve. These germs are all over. They were considered hospital acquired and now are called community acquired. Hand washing is the best defense against the spread of these germs. Sing "Happy Birthday", "Twinkle, Twinkle", "ABC's", or time your hand washing for at least 15 seconds. That's what it takes.

The holiday season is here and it can be a very joyful season for some and it can be a very painful season for others, especially after the loss of a loved one. I have several CARE booklets on the Health Table in Fellowship Hall. Please help yourself.

Merry Christmas and A Happy Healthy New Year to all! God Bless!

Debbie Pranaitis, Parish Nurse

"Get My People GOING!!" - An invitation to Wholeness

A Pyramid for Everyone

The children of Israel were blessed with manna and quail in the desert, and were glad to leave the land of pyramids and get to the land "of milk and honey." Did you know that there are several food group pyramids to help you eat a more healthy balance of nutrients? These include the Vegetarian Diet, the Mediterranean Diet, the Asian Diet, the Latin American Diet, and the Mayo Clinic Healthy Weight Pyramid. All of these can be found online at www.mayoclinic.com. Just type "food pyramid" in the SEARCH box.

You can also find the revised food pyramid developed by the United States Department of Agriculture at www.mypyramid.gov. Both the Mayo Clinic and MyPyramid will let you enter your height, weight, age, and gender into a simple program and will give you recommended daily caloric input for weight maintenance or weight loss.

Don't forget, all healthy diets require moderation in portion size, and exercise as part of a balanced lifestyle.

Blessings on the journey!

We are looking to gauge the level of interest in assembling a bell choir. If this is something you may want to be a part of please contact Cliff Peterson to express your interest. You can reach him at (508) 797-1457.

Joyful Noyse Schedule

12/7, 14	11:15 a.m. rehearsal
12/21	9:15 a.m. <i>Come, Light of the World</i>
12/24	5:00 p.m. Service 4:45 warm-up <i>Come, Light of the World</i>
12/28	11:15 a.m. rehearsal



Fred R. Niles, of Tinker Hill Rd., Auburn, died November 19, 2008 at the Rose Monahan Hospice in Worcester.

He was born in St. Albans, Vermont. Fred was employed by Massachusetts Electric Co. for 38 years as a Stationary Fireman.

His family includes a wife of 62 years, Barbara (Huban) Niles, 2 daughters, Susan Fournier of Hillsboro, NH and Gayle Niles of Auburn. He was predeceased by a son, Donald, and a daughter, Elizabeth Gervais.

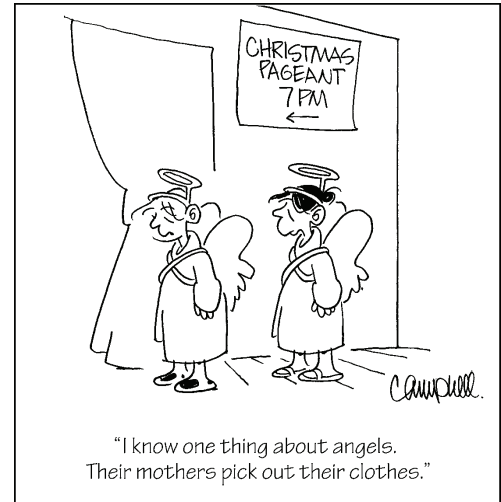
A service for Fred will be in the Spring at the Hope Cemetery at the convenience of the family.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the V.N.A. Rose Monahan Hospice, 10 Judith Road, Worcester, MA 01602.

Notes of consolation may be sent to:

Barbara Niles, c/o Life Care Center of Auburn,
14 Masonic Circle, Room 170B, Auburn, MA 01501.

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



From the Board of Trustees

Please note: budget requests from all committees need to be submitted to the Board of Trustees prior to our next meeting on December 18th.

Delegate Report: Massachusetts Conference, UCC

The 209th Annual Meeting of our MA Conference met over the weekend October 31 and November 1st. The setting was here in Worcester, as opposed to previous years we have attended in Holyoke at Mount Holyoke College. The activities were spread between The United Congregational Church and the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

Friday afternoon began with a Clergy & Lay Leader Gathering in the Crowne Plaza. The presentation and discussion was titled *"Hearing God in History: The Congregational Way and the Practice of Discernment."*

Saturday began the Plenary sessions held in the Sanctuary of United Congregational as well as the Keynote Address on Discernment by the Rev. Martin Copenhaver, following which the members split into small groups to practice the discernment process. The afternoon allowed time for us to attend Workshops at the Crowne Plaza.

The theme of this year's Annual Meeting is about faithful behaviors, and particularly the art of Communal Discernment, its history, and its place in decision-making in the UCC today. In discernment, persons sift through the many spirits that vie for our attention to hear the One True Spirit. Discernment may be described as a means to: recognize and acknowledge what God is doing and what God desires; to see a situation from God's perspective; listen to the Holy Spirit, who prays within and among us; to hear God's voice.

Peggy & Ernie Smith

Christmas Fund 2008

Gifts to the Christmas Fund help provide pension and health premium supplementation to low income retirees, emergency



assistance to the families of clergy and lay employees and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to hundreds of annuitants each year. The offering which is administered by the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance (UCBMA) of the Pension Boards on behalf of the UCC, is an expression of joy and gratitude to, and for, those who serve the church.

The 2007 Christmas Fund received \$1,571,050, providing assistance to nearly 1,500 families.

Our goal is to be able to provide at least \$1,650,000 in assistance from the 2008 appeal.

Your gifts are needed more than ever to help the growing number of retirees whose low income annuities make it difficult to meet increased living costs. You'll find an offering envelope enclosed.

The Pumpkins Are Gone!

We thank all of you who made this year's Pumpkin Patch so successful. Thank you to everyone who volunteered to sit in the patch—making new friends, enjoying the beautiful fall weather, and selling pumpkins.

The pumpkins are delivered to our church from New Mexico. Many years ago the Navajo Indians had a bumper crop and a small church needed money (sound familiar?). They joined together and started the "Pumpkin Patch Fundraiser." There is no investment on our part. It is all done on the honor system and working together on faith. The "Patch" determines our selling potential, by area, location, etc. sending us 845 large pumpkins this year (ranging in price from \$3 to \$18) wee bees, spookies, minis and gourds totaling over 2,000 pieces. The only request is that we call each night with our total daily sales. We do not reduce the prices and anything that is left over is given to food banks, shelters, children's homes, and the like.

Our profit is a percentage of the sales. The more we sell, the higher our share. Last year we earned 25%, this year 30%. At the end of the fundraiser we send them their share.

We look forward to another fun and profitable year in 2009! Please join us, if you haven't yet, and have some fun helping the church!!

A special thank you to Youth On a Mission. Without their help, enthusiasm, energy and ideas this fundraiser would not be possible.

Thank you,
Shirley Hill, Jen Bohn and Diane Moore

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December 2008

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