



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

Dec. 1st

1st Sunday in Advent
Communion Sunday with
Deacons' offering
& food pantry 10 a.m.

Dec. 8th

2nd Sunday in Advent

Dec. 15th

3rd Sunday in Advent
Cantata during 10 a.m. service

~ *First Congregational Church* ~



~ *All Are Welcome* ~

Dec. 22nd

4th Sunday in Advent
Christmas Sunday
Service 10 a.m.

Dec. 24th

Christmas Eve
5 p.m. Family Service
11 p.m. Candlelight
Communion Service

Other December activities include **"Parents' Night Out"** on **December 6th** from 6 to 8 p.m. followed by **Youth On a Mission's** party. The **Christmas Potluck and Sing-along** will be held on **December 14th** at 5 p.m., and look for our annual **Cookie Walk** during coffee hour on **December 22nd**.

The Christmas Fund 2013

The generous gifts of UCC congregations and individuals to the Christmas Fund enabled the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance program to provide some form of ministerial assistance to approximately 900 persons during the past year.

- **Christmas "Thank You" gift checks** were sent to 500 retired UCC clergy/lay church employees. This special gift at Christmas time reminds these Veterans of the Cross that they have not been forgotten.
- **Monthly pension supplementation** for 395 lower-income retired UCC clergy/lay employees. Our retired clergy/lay employees relied on this income supplementation for basic needs such as food, utilities, living and/or medical expenses.
- **Quarterly health premium supplementation** for 228 lower-income retired UCC clergy/lay employees. These funds subsidized premiums for the UCC Medicare Supplement Health Plan with Rx so that individuals could afford and receive quality health care.
- **Emergency grants** for 45 active or retired UCC clergy/lay employees. Grants assist in covering unexpected costs such as: large medical expenses or home damage resulting from natural disasters.



WHAT SHALL WE GIVE HIM?

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. Offering envelopes are enclosed in mailed versions of the *Tidings* and may be found in the church pews on Sundays in December. **Thank you** for your generosity.

As you have noticed, the “Pumpkin Patch” is closed for another year. When the truck arrived we unloaded 42,000 pounds of pumpkins. Of that, 2203 were large (bulk) pumpkins. The rest were smaller sizes and gourds. The average weight of a pumpkin was 19 pounds. We only had less than 120 left.

Total sales were over \$21,000.00. We gave \$1,000.00 to “Keeping Auburn Warm” (please see acknowledgement on [page 5](#)) and with our share, hot dog sales, and the change people gave us — our \$7,000.00 went into the Church’s General Fund.



We want to thank all of the people who manned the “patch.” Without you, we could not do this fundraiser. A special thanks to Denise. She went over and above for us. She and Judy were out there selling when we had no one to be there. They kept everyone up-to-date on the progress and schedule.

Once again, Bob Murray made sure we had the equipment we needed. Be sure to ask him about his “pig farm” adventures.

Thanks again for another very successful year.

Diane and Shirley



A huge thank you to Diane Moore and Shirley Hill for all their hard work resulting in yet another successful fundraiser this year!

AUBURN TOWN EVENTS



2ND ANNUAL TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY

FRIDAY, DEC. 6TH AT 6 P.M.

NEXT TO THE FIRE STATION,
47 AUBURN ST.

Event will feature a sing-a-long and caroling with the Auburn High School Band and the Community Players and a special guest appearance by Santa Claus.

HOLIDAY CRAFT FAIR

Presented by
Auburn Recreation & Culture

SATURDAY, DEC. 14TH
9 A.M. TO 3 P.M.

30+ Craft Vendors will help you get into the holiday spirit and Santa will be making an appearance from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. (so bring the kids!). There will be activities, food, raffle, face painting and so much more! Please support the concession stand run by F.A.M.E. (Friends of Auburn Music Education). Look for a schedule of events in the Auburn News or go to www.auburnguide.com. For more info please call 508-832-7736 or email: kpappas@town.auburn.ma.us



Holiday Craft Fair

Auburn’s 12th Annual Winter Coat Drive

For the 12th consecutive year, the winter coat drive will provide warm coats and boots to deserving children in Auburn. We currently have more than 30 children on our list looking for sponsors willing to purchase a new coat and/or boots. Please call Liz and Bill Gribbons, 508-832-9879, for more information on how you can help.

Coffee Hour Hosts:

- 12/1 Board of Education
- 12/8 Historian & Memorial/Scholarship & Nominating Committees
- 12/15 Board of Education
- 12/22 Outreach Committee
- 12/29 Personnel Committee
- 1/5, 12 Trustees
- 1/19 Music Committee



FROM THE PASTOR . . .

Saint Barbara

When I was in the Army, around this time we would be getting ready for Saint Barbara Day (traditionally December 4). A big banquet where all the Artillery Officers and Senior NCO's (Sergeants) would gather with their spouses. The women would go all out and the soldiers would wear their dress blues. (Tuxedos were made for the 1900 wedding of one of Queen Victoria's daughters to the German Kaiser. They were made to look like dress uniforms because civilian men were jealous of how good dress uniforms look.)

Saint Barbara Day celebrations were all out affairs, formal dinners with all the pomp an ancient fellowship could bring to the event. They could also sometimes be quite rowdy. I heard tell one feast had a motorcycle enter the Saint Barbara's Day banquet hall, after driving through the lobby of the hotel up an elevator and into the banquet hall. The budget for damages was quite high that year.

Saint Barbara is the Patron Saint of artillerymen, engineers, minors and anyone else who deals with explosives. Now the stories of saints vary. The one I like the best follows. (SPOILER ALERT: Like many saint stories what follows can be gruesome)

In the 200's AD the Church was growing, but also facing bloody persecution by the Roman government. In this time Barbara was born, the daughter of a rich pagan named Dioscorus. She was carefully guarded by her father who kept her locked up in a tower in order to preserve her from the outside world. Having secretly become a Christian, she rejected an offer of marriage that she received through him.

He commanded that a private bath-house be erected for her use near her dwelling, and during his absence, Barbara had three windows put in it, as a symbol of the Holy Trinity, instead of the two originally intended. When her father returned, she acknowledged herself to be a Christian. Her father called on the Roman Governor, a persecutor of Christians, to come to Barbara's tower. Dioscorus took Barbara to the roof of her tower and beheaded her with a sword he wielded himself. The Governor was there to witness the act, Dioscorus thinking this would advance his career. As he lifted his sword, a lightning bolt struck, killing the father and governor and leveling the tower that had been both Barbara's home and prison.

Now that is a story a young artilleryman can enjoy. There is nothing we artillerymen like better than blowing stuff up, especially if the explosion ends tyranny and spreads freedom.

Maybe on Wednesday, December 4th, think upon Barbara and those like her who were punished simply for following the Lord. Or, think of all the soldiers (and Marines) feasting that night to celebrate their comradery with a woman from long ago.

God bless —

Pastor Brian



Sermon Titles for December

12/1 ~ "How We Act"
 12/8 ~ "Shepherds"
 12/15 ~ FCC Choir presents: "Sing a Song of Christmas"
 12/22 ~ "Angels"
 12/24 ~ "Christmas Teaches Good Things" - 11 p.m.
 12/29 ~ "The Holy Innocents"

Children's Sermons:

12/1 Set-up Nativity
 12/8 "The Candy Cane"
 12/15 "The Feast of Saint Nicholas"
 12/22 "Cliff, the Herald Angel"
 12/24 "The Christmas Story" - 5 p.m.
 12/29 "Any Christmas Gifts Broken Yet?"

A Christmas Cantata

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

Sunday, December 15th, 2013 at 10:00 a.m.

Sing a Song of Christmas

by Michael Barrett & Joseph M. Martin

Prelude of Joy

A Song of Christmas

Come, Emmanuel

Prepare the Way

Call the Baby Jesus

Sleep, Little Lamb

Come, Hear the Music

In Bethlehem

Christmas Songs of Joy

The First Congregational Choir:

Minister of Music: Heather Moore

Soprano I
Lori Stockhaus
Pam Tentor

Soprano II
Sue Klaucke
Linda Mahlert

Altos
Lisa Cove
Carol Luther
Debbie Mahlert

Baritone
Alex Brownell
Ron Hanks

Narrator - Pastor Brian

Library Tidings by Gloria Whitehead

It was months ago that Wayne Prouty mentioned to me that he had just read an outstanding book we might like for the church library. Heavy sales made it unavailable at the time and my delinquency was salvaged when Connie included it with another book order. It's in LARGE PRINT and is a true story.

Slipping into the pages of *An Invisible Thread* there are 2 briefs. The first is to all the children, like Maurice, whose lives are harder than we can imagine. Never lose hope that you can break the cycle and change your life. And never stop dreaming because the power of dreams can lift you. The 2nd is an Ancient Chinese Proverb. An invisible thread connects to those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place and circumstances. The thread may stretch or tangle, but it will never break.

With that introduction let's slip into a busy sidewalk in a Manhattan business area. Can you picture an 11-year-old kid stopping our busy sales executive and author, Laura L. Schroff, to ask for spare change, but she passes on. Perhaps it was his sad eyes or that he said he was hungry that causes her to turn back and instead of giving him a quarter took him to lunch – the beginning of other simple rituals. There were weekly Monday meetings which involved going to Laura's apartment to study, make cookies, and eventually when Laura moved to White Plains, Maurice found a job as a messenger boy. Laura also would make sandwiches for school and the main request was that they be in a brown paper bag like the other kids. There are countless substitutions caused by poverty that create basic needs which Laura will supply, however, a bike on his 15th birthday was an unbridled surprise and joy to him. Trust has always been a virtue that was emphasized in their relationship. When someone asked to try his bike out he was reluctant, but then yielded to persuasion, but the bike never came back.

A dedicated friendship evolves between Laura and Maurice and in turn the vivid contrasts of the wholeness of life imposed by substance abuse is truthfully revealed. First hand experience and love as a prime feature is given in the closing pages. To be exposed to the brutal facts and have an evaluation of superior value is a gift. So, look in the Adult Library for *An Invisible Thread* by Laura L. Schroff and co-author, Alex Tresniowski.

A blessed Christmas from –

Jean McPherson, Debbie Pranaitis, Charlotte Steffen, and Gloria Whitehead

Lenten Soup and Sandwich Night (A Look Ahead)

We will again be having a Lenten soup and sandwich night followed by a discussion on Wednesday nights during Lent. We'll start at 6 p.m. and end around 7. So far VeggieTales videos have been suggested. If you have any suggestions for topics, please talk to Pastor Brian. For suggestions on menu items, talk to the church boards/committees as they will be signing up at "All Committee Night" (in January) to provide the meal.

Dear Pastor Grover:

We will never be able to adequately express our sincere gratitude to you and the members of your congregation for the extremely generous donations that we have received. We were so thrilled and appreciative of the first check for \$1,000 that we received from your church. Then, when the second check for \$1,000 arrived last week, we were left just speechless and incredulous at your gift.

The heating season is young, and we already have received several applications for assistance. The kindness of the folks at the First Congregational Church will help us help more qualified families right here in our own community.

Thank you again for your thoughtfulness and we extend our best wishes to you all.

Very truly yours,
Wayne C. Page, President, Keeping Auburn Warm

Happy Holidays from Here We Grow Preschool



The children and staff are preparing for the winter holiday season which is fast approaching. We look forward to the festive holidays and the excitement they bring.

Happenings which took place in November include the children of *Here We Grow* learning about the first Thanksgiving and the act of giving to others. They had the opportunity to bring in food items for the "Giving Basket." Denise and Judy were kind enough to sort the foods and Pastor Brian donated them to families in need throughout the area.

We sold holiday wreaths once again, 210 in all. Thanks to all who purchased wreaths this year.

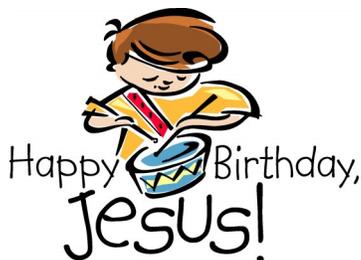
We celebrated our Thanksgiving feasts on Monday, the 25th, with the 4-year-old children and on Tuesday, the 26th, with the 3-year-old children. Both days went well with a lot of help from our parent volunteers. Our appetizer was cornbread made by the 3-year-olds, a friendship fruit salad and dip, vegetables, cold meats, cheese and crackers, and for dessert we had brownies made by the 4-year-olds and topped it off with cool whip.

With plans well on the way for the next holiday, the children have gone from Thanksgiving songs to singing songs for our winter holiday programs. During the month of December, *Here We Grow* will participate with the Auburn Police Department in the collection of toys and items for children ranging from infant to 16-year-olds. The police department will distribute everything collected to children living in Auburn. The holiday programs will be on December 19th and 20th. The children are hoping for a visit from the man in red. Keeping with tradition the 4-year-old children will sign and sing "Happy Birthday" to Baby Jesus. After the holiday program on Friday the staff will enjoy a relaxing lunch.



The school will be closed from December 23rd - January 1st. The *Here We Grow* staff and families wish all of you a safe and happy holiday season.

Until 2014, Happy Holidays to all —
Dawn Murphy, Director, *Here We Grow* Preschool



Happy birthday to:

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

Please plan to join us on **Tuesday, December 17th, at 5:30 p.m.** for the VeggieTales movie, *Jonah*. This will be featured in conjunction with a potluck supper.

So, mark your calendars, and we hope to see you there!

Christmas arrangements made of fresh greens will once again be available for you to purchase during coffee hour on Dec. 8th, 15th and 22nd. All the greens are gathered locally, so there is no expense involved. All monies taken in will go to the Church's general fund.



When doing your holiday shopping keep these in mind; they make lovely hostess gifts and most are suitable for a table centerpiece.

We enjoy making these and hope you will support this small fundraiser.

Judy Murphy & Cindy Dube

PLEASE HELP ST. JUDE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

In January 2014, I will be participating in Walt Disney World's Marathon Weekend by running in the half marathon. I am running to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where no child is ever denied treatment because of the family's inability to pay. Thank you so much to everyone who came out to the pancake breakfast fundraiser at Applebee's, and to everyone who has helped me meet my fundraising goal of \$2,500! It's not too late to donate, as I will be fundraising until the beginning of January. Please go to the website listed below to donate and THANK YOU SO MUCH EVERYBODY!

–Shannon Vayo

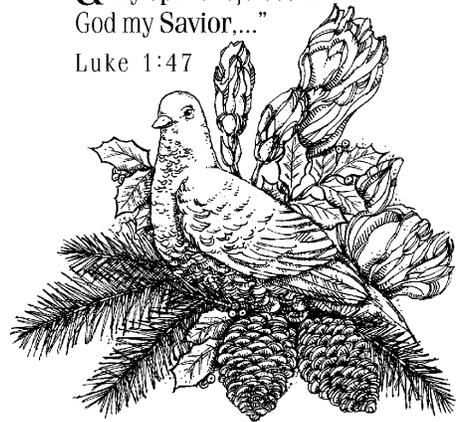
<http://heroes.stjude.org/ShannonVayo>

On Nov. 10th we celebrated the baptism of Cameron David Eckman. Cameron is the 2 year old son of Amy and Joseph Eckman.

On Nov. 17th we celebrated the baptisms of 9-year-old Joe, and 4-year-old twins, Coy and Eli Barnes, the sons of Joseph and Renee Barnes.

We pray for God's continued presence, guidance and blessing in these precious ones' lives.

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
& my spirit rejoices in
God my Savior..."
Luke 1:47



The family of Carole Sampson would like to thank the church family for all the cards, letters and phone calls during her time of illness. The many visits by Pastor Brian were very supportive to Carole and her family.

Also, our thanks to the church family for the collation provided at the funeral.

May Carole rest in peace knowing how much she was loved.



In the event of inclement weather, we have set up an account with WBZ - TV channel 4 enabling us to report Church service cancellations. However,

if weather is severe enough to result in area power outages, we may not have the capability to contact them. So you should always use your best judgment, using caution when deciding whether to venture out to service during stormy weather.

Auburn Historical Society announces the publication of the book,

Images of America — Auburn.

It is a pictorial history of Auburn from the 1800s to 1960. The book will be available on or about January 6, 2014 at the Auburn Historical Museum, 41 South Street. If anyone wishes to purchase this for a Christmas gift, we are offering a coupon (with a picture of the book cover) for \$22.00. The recipient can then come to the museum in January and pick up their book. We are open on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. year round. Otherwise, it will be on sale at the museum for everyone in January.

We have worked extremely long hours to put this together and hope the residents and former residents of Auburn will enjoy our efforts.

If you have any questions, call me at 508-892-0125, Dick Steelman, 508-832-5248, or the museum, 508-832-6856. Dick and I will also be at coffee hour with coupons.

Sonja Carr, Secretary and Art Director
Auburn Historical Society



December is Safe Toy and Gift Month. It is also the time to be careful in large groups about cold and flu. Hand washing is your best defense.

If you need medical equipment to borrow while visiting through the holidays, check the closet.

The holidays can be tough for those that have lost a loved one, especially recently. Please be aware of those around you, as not everyone is looking forward to the holidays. Have a safe and Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy New Year.

Debbie Pranaitis
Parish Nurse

FROM STEWARDSHIP:

Thank you all for your response to our "Delight in Giving" program. The current pledge total as of November 19 is **\$104,500**.

We have not yet received a response from everyone. If you haven't yet returned your pledge card, it is not too late! Please contact the church office or a member of Stewardship (Rufus Guilford, Sue Klaucke, Ellie Lowell, Rich McPherson, Cliff Peterson, Beverly Scobie). The more responses we get, the fewer follow-up letters we'll need to send out.

We appreciate everyone's pledges, which help First Congregational plan the budget, and the time, talents, and treasure that you all contribute to help us thrive.

In His Love,
Your Stewardship Committee

Luke 6:38 - Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

From the Director of Religious Education

Happy Birthday, Jesus! Wow! I can't believe another year is behind us. As we spend time this holiday season with family and friends, let us say a prayer for all of those we have lost this past year. Let us be mindful that while this is a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus, it is also a sad time for some who are missing loved ones. Christmas is not about the gifts, but about the love that we are freely given each and every day from our Father in heaven. Seek out those who may be having a difficult time this year, and spend a few moments showing them that they are in our thoughts and prayers. A little cup of tea, and a conversation can go a long way.

What's Happening?

As for all of you, December is a busy month for the Board of Education and Sunday school.

Friday December 6 is our annual **Parents Night Out**. Youth On a Mission and leaders will entertain and feed your children while you get a few hours to yourself to shop, eat, or take a nap! Drop the kids off at 6pm, and we will feed them pizza and juice, and then have crafts and games for the next 2 hours. Pick up is at 8pm, and then YOM will have a Christmas party, if they are not too exhausted!

December 14 is the **Potluck Dinner and Christmas Carol Sing**. If you have never joined us, please come this year. Jackie Knox is our guest pianist, and all voice abilities are encouraged. We may even have a guest instrumentalist. (Yes, Marty, we are hinting at you joining us again.)

The COOKIE WALK is **December 22!** To help relieve the stress of making cookies for work/family get-togethers, come and let us help you. Purchase a cookie tin, and walk the dream street of Cookie Monster. We'll have a wide variety of cookies to fill your tin to the brim, or a little over. Then you are ready to impress everyone with the wide variety of homemade cookies you have to offer. Anyone wishing to contribute to the cookie walk can sign up on the Sunday school bulletin board.

Christmas Eve Family Service. Please come join us before you go out visiting, and help the children celebrate the birth of Jesus, and the true meaning for the season. The service starts at 5p.m. **All are encouraged to attend.**

My prayer for each of you is to truly enjoy this special season with family and friends, and feel in your heart the love we are all freely given by our Father every moment of every day of the year. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Jean McPherson
Director of Religious Education



WORCESTER FELLOWSHIP VOLUNTEER GATHERING

Save the date NOW for Worcester Fellowship's volunteer gathering on **Saturday, January 25**. We'll meet at Church of the Nativity, 45 Howard Street, in Northborough starting around 9am and ending by 2pm. Church of the Nativity is providing us lunch.

This celebration is for all those in your congregation that make Worcester Fellowship happen: sandwich makers, schedule negotiators, sock collectors, party planners, etc., plus, of course, all those who come out to serve lunch and share with our congregation.

Look for more details to come. RSVP to office@worcesterfellowship.org and include any special food needs you may have or restrictions.

-Liz
(The Rev.) Elizabeth M. Magill
www.worcesterfellowship.org



As they've done in years past, the Deacons will be delivering Christmas baskets/stockings to shut-ins. We're planning to prepare/assemble baskets on Dec. 14th as part of the Christmas carol sing -along & potluck get together. (Remember, the potluck begins at 5:00 p.m.)

Please look in Fellowship Hall for a list of items that are needed and a donation sign -up sheet, or call the church office if you would like to donate.

FROM THE TRUSTEES

We are looking to form a volunteer work party to re-light Fellowship Hall on Saturday, Dec. 14th beginning at 11 a.m. and completing by 2 p.m. Please contact the church office, 508-832-2845, if you're able to help. Thank you!

ATTENTION ALL COMMITTEES/BOARDS:
All budget requests are due immediately. Please place in Trustees' mailbox.

Once again the Boy Scouts will be selling Christmas wreaths and cemetery baskets/logs on the Church lawn on Sunday, Dec. 1st and 8th. They would very much appreciate your support.



Delivery is available. Please call George Fournier at 774-239-2240.

TIDINGS is a monthly publication of

**First Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ
128 Central St., Auburn MA 01501**

Phone: (508) 832-2845
Office Hours: Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Email: secretary@auburnfirstucc.org
or PastorBrian@auburnfirstucc.org

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

Web: auburnfirstucc.org



BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Non-Profit Org.
Permit No. 6
Auburn, Mass

December 2013

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

OR CURRENT RESIDENT