

December
2016

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

* **Nov. 27th** *

1st Sunday in Advent *

Dec. 4th *

* 2nd Sunday in Advent
Communion Sunday with
Deacons’ offering/food pantry

Dec. 11th *

* 3rd Sunday in Advent
* 10 a.m. Service *

Handbell Choir:

* *Antiphonal Noel* (with Choir) *

* *Amazing Grace* *

Advent and



*Christmas
Services*

* **Dec. 18th** *

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

Dec. 24th *

* Christmas Eve *
* 5 p.m. Family Service *

* 11 p.m. Candlelight
Communion Service *

* **Dec. 25th** *

* Christmas Day *
* 10 a.m. Service *

Other December activities include **“Parents’ Night Out”** on **December 2nd** from 6 to 8 p.m., followed by **YOM’s Yankee swap**. The **Christmas Potluck and Sing-along** will be held on **December 10th** at 5 p.m. and look for our annual **Cookie Walk** during coffee hour on **December 18th**.

The Christmas Fund 2016

For 115 years, the Christmas Fund, for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund, has been a tangible expression of God’s love. One of the four Special Mission offerings of the United Church of Christ, the Christmas Fund provides UCC congregations and members an opportunity to reach out in loving compassion, providing assistance to those who have so faithfully served our Church and who now find themselves facing unexpected financial needs.



In 2015, UCC congregations and members generously contributed \$1,528,481 to the offering. This enabled the Pension Boards’ Ministerial Assistance program to provide, on behalf of the whole Church, Pension Supplementation, Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants, and Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks to individuals and families in need.

The theme of the 2016 Christmas Fund Offering is “God’s Love Colors Everything.” Our goal is to raise \$1.7 million to help support these ministries of love and care. In the spirit of love, we invite and encourage you to prayerfully consider and support this year’s appeal.

On behalf of the hundreds of clergy and lay employees and their families whose lives were touched by your support of last year’s Christmas Fund Offering, we offer our sincere thanks to you for your generosity and for the love that colors everything in God’s name!

Enclosed in this month’s Tidings is an offering envelope. Please return it to the church — 128 Central Street, Auburn, MA 01501, and **thank you** for your generosity.



The pumpkin patch coordinators would like to thank all those who volunteered at the pumpkin patch. **\$21,029.25!** That's the total sales from pumpkins 2016! Our share with donations ("keep the change" transactions) works out to \$7,697.49!
Thank you to all who made this possible.

Debbie Mahlert, Linda Mahlert, Sheila Skog, Judi Taft

Please plan to join us on **Tues. Dec. 13th, at 5:30** for the movie, *Miracle on 34th Street*. This will be featured along with a potluck supper. Remember, all are welcome!

Coffee Hour Hosts:

- 12/4 Historian, Memorial/Scholarship Nominating & Library Committees
- 12/11 Music Committee
- 12/18 Outreach Committee
- 12/25 Christmas Day - No Coffee Hour
- 1/1 Music Committee

HANDBELL SCHEDULE

- 12/4 3:00 p.m. rehearsal
- 12/8 6:00 p.m. rehearsal for *Antiphonal Noel* with Chancel Choir
- 12/11 9:00 a.m. rehearsal for *Antiphonal Noel* with Chancel Choir
10:00 a.m. Worship Service: *Antiphonal Noel* and *Amazing Grace*
- 12/18 3:00 p.m. rehearsal
- 12/24 10:30 p.m. rehearsal for *Away in a Manger*
11:00 p.m. Worship Service: *Away in a Manger*
- 12/25 no rehearsal
- 1/1/17 no rehearsal
- 1/8/17 no rehearsal



From the Stewardship Committee

Once again we wish to thank all of you who have returned your pledge cards. If you have not yet returned your pledge card, please do so now. Without them, it makes it difficult for our Trustees to set the budget for the coming year. If you have misplaced your card, please call the church office at 508-832-2845 and we will gladly send you out another. *Remember, we need to hear from you even if you do not plan on making a pledge this year.*

The Stewardship Committee wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Joyous New Year.

Cindy Dube, Linda Hardy, Marilyn Kulesa, Shelia Skog and Jacob and Lauren Webb

Thank you to everyone who donated to the Auburn Walk for Hunger. It was another successful year. \$2,545.63 was given to Auburn Youth and Family Services and \$283 was given to Kateri's Kitchen. Every dollar makes a difference! Here are the totals for each participating church. — Sue Campbell

Association	# of Walkers	Total
No. American Martyrs	7	754.00
St. Thomas Episcopal	1	62.00
AYFS	7	155.00
Bethel Lutheran Church	7	630.00
First Congregational	2	719.50
St. Joseph's Church	4	508.13
Totals:	28	\$ 2,828.63



Happy Birthday to:

- Rebecca McPherson ~ Dec. 28th
- Lori-Ann Stockhaus ~ Dec. 28th

FROM PASTOR BRIAN

White Christmas

With the little heard acapella prelude:

“The sun is shining, the grass is green,
the orange and palm trees sway.
There's never been such a day
in Beverly Hills, L.A.

But it's December the twenty fourth,
and I am longing to be up north.

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas,
just like the ones I used to know.

Where the treetops glisten and children listen
to hear sleigh bells in the snow.”

Is there a more beloved Christmas song than *White Christmas*? Bing Crosby's version of the song is still the best selling single of all time. It is said *White Christmas*, in all versions, has sold over 100 million singles. This, for a song first recorded in 1941, but still each year a new singer records the song. I am sure part of its initial popularity was due to all the men fighting in World War II, in far away deserts and tropical islands, wanting to be home.

Another reason for its popularity is *White Christmas* is also a secular song; it does not mention Jesus. It doesn't name Santa, though it does speak of sleigh bells. This makes the song popular to the people who do not celebrate the Christ part of Christmas. I know there is a war on Christmas and as Christians we are supposed to be against the secularization of Christmas. But for me, the secular song *White Christmas*, while not mentioning Jesus, somehow has a spirit of the holy to it.

Irving Berlin, the writer of the song, was born in Russia and came to America to escape the Russian persecution of the Jews. So America's most popular Christmas song was written by a Jewish immigrant. How American is that? VERY, the answer is VERY American.

But not everyone loves that song. During World War II, the 101st was surrounded at Bastogne. The commanding officer heard the news that they were surrounded as *White Christmas* played on Armed Forces Radio. So, to his dying day, General McAuliffe never again listened to that song as it reminded him of those hard days, when some feared the war was lost.

That is the power of song; it brings up memories. I hear a beloved song and I can be transported back in time. Songs carry memories.

The only thing that connects stronger to memory is smell. Can you still smell your Grandma's kitchen? I know I can. Her kitchen was filled with the smell of baking bread and frying ham on a wood stove. I hope the songs and smells of the season bring sweet memories, and may all your Christmases be white.

Pastor Brian

Sermon Titles for December:

12/4 ~ “The Former Scriptures Are Lessons”

“Candy Canes” (children's time)

12/11 ~ “Are Adults any Better?”

“Waiting” (children's time)

12/18 ~ “What Do We Punish & Why?”

12/24 ~ “The Christmas Story” - 5 p.m.

12/24 ~ “Mary” - 11 p.m.

12/25 ~ “In the Beginning”

During times of inclement weather, we have set up an account with WCVB - TV Channel 5 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, exercising caution when deciding whether to venture out to service during stormy weather.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Merry Christmas to you and yours! Another year has gone and a new one is on the horizon. I pray that this year has allowed you to experience more happy memories than sad. Take some time to reflect on this passing year and thank our Creator for blessing us with another year of life.

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

To abide by our child protection policy, the Board of Ed has instituted a “floater” position to the Sunday school. This person’s job is to “float” amongst the classrooms and assist when needed. This usually entails showing someone where the bathroom is or bringing them to get a drink from the water fountain. Thank you to George Scobie for being our first guinea pig floater. Ideally we would like to have two adults in each classroom, but since that goal has been unobtainable, the BOE has come up with this viable solution. Anyone interested in being a floater, please see me or sign up with Shannon Hartmann. We are asking **ALL** parents who have a child in Sunday school to take **AT LEAST** one week per year. With that being said, I need to thank the teachers that have been coming week after week to provide consistency and structure to YOUR children’s lessons. Thank you’s go out to: Shannon Hartmann, Theresa Stone, Mike Schillinger as well as Haydn McPherson, Zachary Lazerick, and Trisha Gervasi who work as assistants and substitutes. We would not have a program without each and everyone of you, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Christmas Eve Service - 5:00 December 24th

The Confirmation class, along with the Sunday school kids, will perform the Christmas story. Please join us and get a warm feeling in your heart as you listen to the first Christmas story. Let’s remember the TRUE meaning of CHRISTmas.

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation this year consists of three young ladies, Paris Esposito, Caitlin Morrison, and Rebecca McPherson. Jen Bohn, “the crew” and I went to a teen girl event with Berea this past month. I will give more details in the next *Tidings* as we are preparing to go after the *Tidings* deadline. On Oct. 30th the group, along with Outreach, spent a beautiful Sunday on the common with Worcester Fellowship. The ladies did a wonderful job in assisting with the worship service and the lunch that they helped prepare. In February we will take a trip into Boston to experience City Reach. This program always leaves a lasting impression on all who participate.

YOUTH ON A MISSION

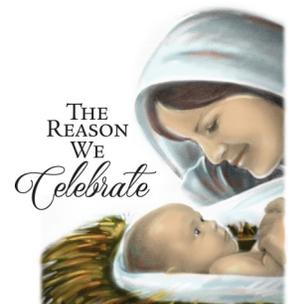
On Friday, **December 2, from 6:00-8:00** we again will offer “**Parents’ Night Out.**” For those of you who are new, this is a program that YOM puts on every year to give parents/grandparents a chance to have some “kid free” time before the holidays. We will provide pizza, juice, treats, a craft, and games and you provide the kids. It is that simple. What you do in that 2 hours is up to you. Our goal is to give the kids a good time and hopefully, for you, they’ll wear off some of that excess energy. We will have a free will donation with the proceeds going to YOM’s winter Christian Camp retreat. There will be a sign-up sheet on the Sunday school bulletin board in fellowship hall. Please inform us of any allergies and be sure to provide any special food. **Immediately following “Parents’ Night Out,” Youth On a Mission will have their annual Yankee swap from 8 to 9 p.m. Please bring a wrapped \$10 grab gift.**

Our **ANNUAL COOKIE SWAP** will be after service on **December 18.** Anyone wishing to bake, we would gladly receive your gift. We are truly blessed to have a family who will bake huge batches of cookies for us and then turn around and buy them back in order to support the youth. I wish you all could experience the energy that is felt during our retreat weekends when hundreds of teens get together to worship our Father. It is truly an amazing event and we thank you all for helping to make this possible through your support of fundraisers such as the cookie walk.

May your New Year be filled with special moments shared by loved ones. You are always watched over and loved by Our Father in Heaven. Merry Christmas to all.

Dear God,
Today I woke up.
I am healthy.
I am alive. — Thank you.

Jean McPherson, Director of Religious Education





Happy Holidays from Here We Grow Preschool

Can you believe the holidays are almost here? 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 are as follows: the children of Here We Grow learned about the first Thanksgiving and the act of giving to others. They had the opportunity to bring in food items for the Giving Basket. It was wonderful to watch children help their parents put the food into the basket and talk about how they were helping others. Denise and Judy were kind enough to sort the foods which were donated to families in need throughout the area.

We sold 182 boxes of handcrafted cards for our fundraiser; parents loved them!

We celebrated our Thanksgiving feasts on Monday the 21st with the 4-year-old children and on Tuesday the 22nd with the 3-year-old children and the afternoon young 4's classes. Both days went well, with a lot of help from our parent volunteers. Our appetizer was cornbread made by the 3-year-olds. We had trays of different fruits, vegetables, hummus and bread, along with cheese and crackers. 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 winter 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-years-old. The police department will distribute everything collected to children living in Auburn. The holiday programs will be on December 21st and 22nd. The children are hoping for a visit from the man in red. The 3-year-old children may catch a glimpse of him.

The school will be closed from December 23rd - January 2nd. Our first day back will be January 3rd.

The Here We Grow staff and families wish all of you a safe and happy holiday season. See you in 2017!!

*Gina Basili, Director
Here We Grow Preschool*

On November 20th we celebrated the baptism of Cayden Benjamin Peck. Cayden is (the now) 3½ month old son of Kimberly and Ian Peck. Proud grandparents are Pam and Marty Tentor. We pray for God's continued blessings upon Cayden and his family.



CHURCH COOKBOOK — Although we have had a wonderful response to our new cookbook project, it has become apparent that a January publication date is more realistic than trying to produce it in time for Christmas delivery.

So, please keep those recipes coming, whether you handwrite them or opt to enter them online, we encourage you to share your recipes. At this time we have approximately 50% of the recommended amount of recipes to complete our cookbook.

There is a pink and red floral box in Fellowship Hall where you can submit recipes. Also, you will find more detailed information about the cookbook project in the blue handouts located next to the recipe box.



Quick Tip: to enter recipes on your own, type *Typensave* into your internet browser, click enter...
Morris Cookbook Typensave login will be an option that comes up. Username is
ThePumpkinPatch (all one word); Password is garlic056

Please contact Michele Schillinger with any questions, 508-259-2239 or m_mschillinger@charter.net.

Dear First Congregational Church,

On behalf of my entire family, I wanted to extend my sincere appreciation to the church for the wonderful memorial window that was installed in memory of my dad. My mother and we could not think of a more appropriate gesture. For all the years of his ministry among you, he would look out that window on his way out of his office every night — many thousands of times. Every time I drive by, I can see his image in that window, and that is a precious gift.

The engravings of the Maine loon, and the steam engine that flank his name were two of his favorite things to talk about. I can't tell you how many times he would stop to wonder at those birds at Boyden Lake and explain to us all how they lived. The call of the loon, and the sight of them — vigilant in watching from a distance — brings each of us comfort that dad is similarly looking out for us.

The train was a lifelong passion of his, stemming from his grandfather's role as a fireman on the Boston & Maine railroad. He loved the memories that those massive steel horses would bring to him of his childhood.

Many people may wonder what the connection of those two items are to Reverend Knox, and I have been asked to write a more detailed explanation for the historical archives to explain that to future generations. However, anyone who knew him for a short while soon found the topic of conversation running to the loon or the train, and noticed the sparkle in his eye when that happened.

Thank you so much for the wonderful tribute to a man who loved this church so much, and felt gifted to be able to minister among you.

Stephen Knox, Jackie, and the entire Knox family

Christmas arrangements made of fresh greens will once again be available for you to purchase during coffee hours on Dec. 11th and 18th. All the greens are gathered locally, so there is no expense involved. All monies taken in will go to the church's general fund. Keep these in mind when doing your holiday shopping; 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





December is National Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month, International AIDS Awareness Month, and Safe Toys and Gifts Month.

A reminder about the closet with the medical equipment, it is on the left, just inside the door to the educational wing. If you need anything during office hours, Denise will let you in. If the item is there, help yourself. If it isn't, I'm sorry. The items come and go and I don't keep a record. If you have something to donate, same thing... bring it during office hours and Denise will let you in, or if you want, bring it on a Sunday.

Please remember that the holidays aren't always a happy, merry, joyous time for all. Please reach out to those who are lonely, sad, suffering during these times. Just a "hello" or sitting quietly with someone can make a difference.

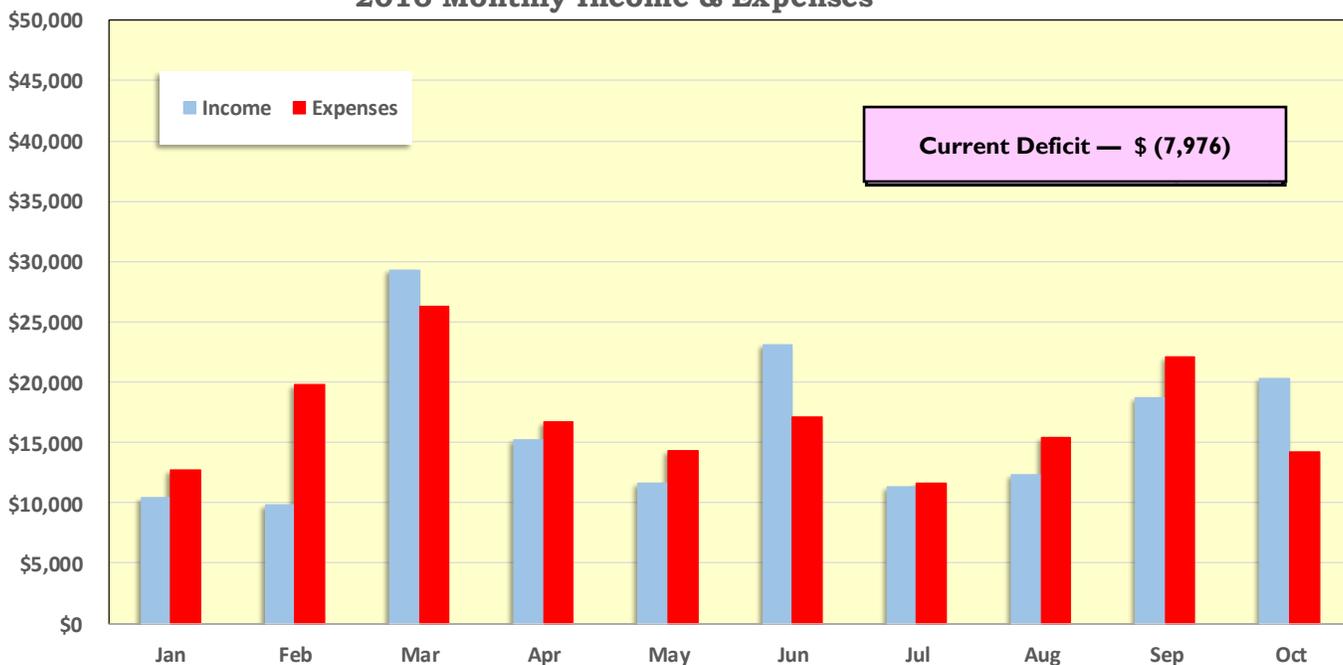
Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy New Year!
Debbie Pranaitis, Parish Nurse

Please be in prayer for Florence LaPlante's loved ones. **Florence Irene LaPlante**, 92, died peacefully in Palm Gardens on November 11, 2016 in Vero Beach, FL. She is survived by her three children: Carol LaPlante, Linda Graham (and her husband, Dick) and Allen LaPlante. She is also survived by three grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild as well as several nephews and nieces. She was preceded in death by her husband, Leroy LaPlante, and siblings — John Allen, Mortimer Allen, Ronald Allen, and Marion (Allen) Hickey.



Florence was born on May 30, 1924 in Berlin, MA, the daughter of Walter and Ruth (Munyon) Allen. She graduated from Hudson High School in 1942 and the David Hale Fanning Trade School for Girls in 1944. Florence enjoyed bowling, genealogy and rooting for the N.Y. Yankees. She was an active and dedicated member of our church prior to moving to Florida in 2005. A memorial service in Massachusetts is planned for 2017.

**First Congregational Church
2016 Monthly Income & Expenses**





As they've done in years past, the Deacons and Pastor Brian will be delivering Christmas baskets/stockings to shut-ins. We're planning to prepare/assemble baskets on Dec. 10th as part of the Christmas carol sing-along and 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.

ATTENTION ALL COMMITTEES/BOARDS:

All budget requests are due by Dec. 11th.
Please place in Trustees' mailbox.

ANNUAL REPORT SUBMISSIONS ARE DUE JANUARY 3rd.

Once again the Boy Scouts will be selling Christmas wreaths and cemetery baskets/logs on the Church lawn on Sunday, Nov. 27th and Dec. 4th. Your support is much appreciated.



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**

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*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 2016

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
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25	26	27	28	29	30	31

OR CURRENT RESIDENT