



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!’”

2006



KEEP YOUR HOLIDAYS HOLY

As we enter the holiday season of Advent, Christmas and New Year’s please remember that there is a central connection to our Christian faith. Religion is in a severe competition with secularism and materialism for the hearts, minds and souls of Americans.

Secularism and materialism offer many gods for our worship and loyalty. While they do not pose as gods they demand similar commitment and obedience from their followers—consuming your time, talent and treasure. They promise you a sense of well being and security but often are unable to deliver on those promises. We have been exposed to those promises in the much touted release of the latest gadgets and games for which people wait long periods of time and pay high, high prices.

Many have lost touch with humanity’s need to worship something other than self so that the need pops up in strange and often destructive ways. Our society offers options in great variety. Choose the simplicity of the Christian faith to express your spiritual needs and to practice your spiritual journey. Put Christ back in Christmas, and may this holiday season become deeply meaningful.

God Bless,

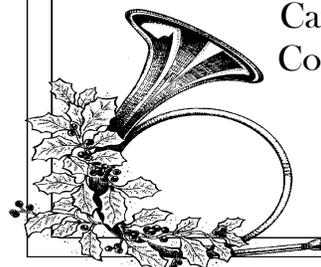
Rev. Dr. Kenneth E. Knox
Pastor



Please join us for
Christmas Eve Services

Family
Service - 5 PM

Candlelight
Communion - 11 PM



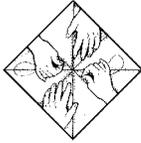
Happy Birthday

Lori-Ann Stockhaus 12/28

Donald Slongwhite 12/30

Pearl Morrill turned 101 on 11/17

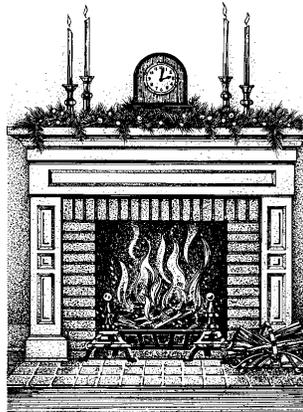
Next time you're in Fellowship Hall please look for the paper quilt hanging on the wall—it's a precious gift from the children at UMass Hospital in appreciation of their Project Linus blankets!



If you would like to honor the pastor with a monetary gift this season, please send your donations to the church with the note: "Pastoral Gift." Thank you.

**CHRISTMAS HOUSE TOUR, HOLIDAY FAIR and BRUNCH**

A holiday boutique/fair will be held on Sat., Dec. 9th from 9 am-3 pm in the Jr. High classroom adjacent to Fellowship Hall. The Boutique will feature a wonderful display of crafted items for your "one stop shopping convenience." For further information, including consignment information, you may contact Cindy Dube at 508-832-6646.



Both events will be held in conjunction with the Auburn Historical Society's Christmas House Tour. House tours will run from 10 am—3 pm. The tours begin at the First Congregational Church, 128 Central St., Auburn.

Tickets for the House Tour are \$12 in advance, or \$15 at the door. Tick-

The Women's Fellowship will hold a **brunch** from 9 am—2 pm. The cost is \$5. A Denver Omelet will be featured with fresh fruit and home-baked muffins. **A homemade dessert bar** and coffee will also be available. Volunteers may contact Marion Woodcock at 508-832-2160.

ets are available at the Auburn Historical Museum, the Auburn Public Library, at The Farmer's Daughter, or call Rosalie at 508-832-3198.

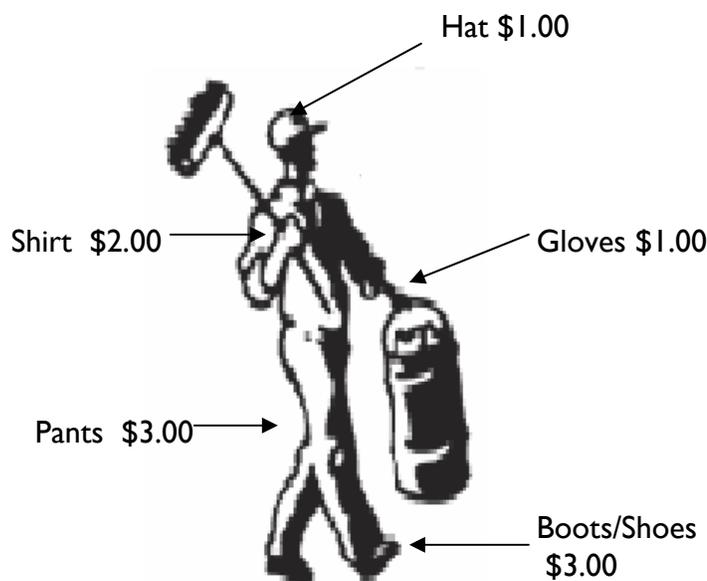
Do your holiday shopping, indulge in some home baked goodies, and enjoy visiting the beautifully decorated homes.

OFFERING LIGHT AND LIFE TO NEW ORLEANS

We want to thank everyone for dropping your donations into our paint buckets during church service. On Sunday, November 19th, you donated \$379.60—one bucket full (4 more to go!). You will be seeing our paint cans in the future.

As most of you know, the travel expenses for our trip to New Orleans will be paid by the U.C.C. Your donations will be used toward the purchase of supplies. Some of us will be rebuilding and will need hammers, paint, paint brushes, sheetrock, and whatever else we may need to do our jobs. Others will be working in schools where we will need to provide paper, pens, pencils, and books. **We will not know what we need until we arrive in New Orleans and then we will need to purchase supplies.**

Please join us in a little light-hearted fun while raising some money for a good cause. On Sunday, December 10th, we are asking that you share with us how you dress when you work around your home doing projects. Yes, we are asking that you wear these clothes to church! There is a catch, however. Each article of work gear has a price attached. Donations will be as follows:



Please feel free to wear all your work gear or only select pieces. If dressing in your work clothes is not what you want to do, please feel free to make a donation.

Thanks again for the donations already made, and we hope you'll decide to dress-up and join us in a little fun!

Your workers,

- Jen Bohn Shirley Hill
- Al Boucher Jean McPherson
- Cindy Dube Bill Storie

ATTENTION BOWLERS

The Church Bowling League is in need of 3 full time candlepin bowlers. We bowl every Friday night at 7:00 pm at the Mohegan Bowledrome in Webster. This is not a "money" league, but a "fun" league and all ages (10-110) are welcome to join. If interested, please contact Nick or Lori Stockhaus at 508-865-6439.



Coffee Hour Hosts

- Dec 3 ~ Financial Secretaries/Treasurers
- Dec 10 & 17 ~ Nominating/Scholarship
- Dec 24 & 31 ~ Deacons
- Jan 7 ~ Trustees
- Jan 14 ~ Deacons
- Jan 21 ~ Outreach

Stewardship



The Stewardship Committee would like to thank everyone who has submitted a pledge card for 2007. To date, we have received 138 responses of which 129 were pledges totaling \$125,647. Donations (rather than pledges) were also received; however, we do not have a tally of those at this time. We will continue to update you throughout the remainder of the year as our pledge campaign comes to a close.

Remember - Pledges can be either credit card submissions processed once a month (towards the end of the month) or you can receive offertory envelopes and present your pledge during Sunday worship service.

If you have yet to submit your pledge, or have not received a pledge card and would like to submit a pledge in support of First Congregational Church in Auburn, we invite you to do so at your earliest convenience. Pledge cards are available at the front of the Sanctuary, in Fellowship Hall, and in the Church Office. Envelopes are also available for your discretion. Completed pledge cards may be placed in the offering plate during worship service or mailed to the Church Office.

Stewardship: It's heart work. It causes us to examine the purpose for which we manage our money. When our purposes come in line with God's plan, our stewardship becomes a great blessing to God, others, and ourselves.

Again, thank you all for your commitment to First Congregational Church in Auburn.

Our Committee hopes that each of you finds *Stewardship* a valuable addition to the monthly Tidings mailing. We welcome any comments and/or thoughts you might have regarding this publication or about Stewardship in general. Please feel free to speak with any one of us or send your comments via email to Stewardship@AuburnFirstUCC.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

In His Love,
 The Stewardship Committee
 John Rockwood (Chair), Michael & Michele Schillinger, Al Boucher, Todd & Donna Dube



LIVING NATIVITY AT OVERLOOK FARM - HEIFER INTERNATIONAL

The Christmas story will be re-enacted on December 9th and 10th from 1:00 to 5:30 p.m. at Heifer International's Overlook Farm, 216 Wachusett Street in Rutland, MA.

A live nativity, complete with animals, will be presented in the barn at the beginning of each hour.

Sleigh or hay rides will be available. There is no charge for this event, but we ask everyone to bring a plate of cookies to share. There will be an offering taken at the conclusion of each presentation of the nativity. This year the offering will be designated for the construction of Overlook's new livestock barn. Please call 508-886-2221 for more information.



December is Safe Toys & Gifts Month. December 3rd through the 9th is National Hand-washing Awareness Week. Hand-washing is known to be the best defense against germs and fighting the spread of disease.

I have ordered Care Notes about *Christmas Without a Loved One*, *Grieving at Christmas*, *Feeling Depressed at Christmas*, and other titles about the holidays. Please check out the display on the health table in Fellowship Hall and help yourself to any booklets you want. Christmas can be a sad time for some, and maybe one of these booklets can help to ease the pain.

I have asked a S.H.I.N.E. counselor to come on Saturday, December 16th at 3:30 p.m. to help with any questions regarding Medicare Part D. This is before the next scheduled church supper. If you think of any questions before then, write them down and bring them with you.

Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy New Year!

Debbie Pranaitis, RN



The Christmas Fund Offering (formerly Veterans of the Cross), one of four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ (UCC), is an important way of sharing our joy at God's renewing and life-giving grace. The Offering, which is administered by the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance of the Pension Boards on behalf of the UCC, is an expression of joy and gratitude to, and for, those who serve the church. 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 Gift checks to hundreds of annuitants.

The theme for the 2006 Offering is: "O God let your face shine . . ." (Psalm 80:3), a passage from a prayer-psalm seeking God's divine redemption for the people.

Your gifts are needed more than ever to help the growing number of retirees whose low-income annuities make it difficult to meet increasing living costs. This is your opportunity to participate in God's promise of renewal by enabling this ministry of compassion and care.

Please find an Offering envelope along with additional information enclosed in this month's newsletter. Thank you for your generosity.

JUNIOR YOUTH GROUP

Our Junior Youth Group will be meeting again on December 10th in the Junior High Classroom, immediately following the worship service. All 6th, 7th, and 8th graders are invited to join us!!!

Thanks to a few new volunteers, our teaching teams are complete! We are still looking for volunteers for the Cradle Roll. If you are interested in signing up for a Sunday, please see me at Coffee Hour.

Our Christmas Pageant will be on December 24th, at the morning service. We will begin rehearsals on December 3rd following the worship service.

God Bless,
Heather Zautner

FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

During the last few months, the trustees have been reviewing preliminary costs to refurbish the church sanctuary.

Further studies are required before ideas are presented to the congregation early next year.

Church Supper
Holiday Buffet on
December 16th
at 5:00 p.m.

Cost to be
announced

Servers will be:
The Outreach
Committee

OUTREACH NEWS

New Orleans Mission

Outreach had a great meeting with our New Orleans team members on November 8. Everyone is really excited about this trip! Slated to go in January are: Jen Bohn, Cindy Dube, Shirley Hill, Jean McPherson and Bill Storie. (Al Boucher plans to be part of a later trip in the Spring.)

About those paint buckets. . .

The paint buckets remind us of all the work still to be done in New Orleans: working with kids in the classroom as well as hammering nails, etc. They also symbolize the idea of “pitching in” and working together to make this trip a shared First Congregational Church experience.

You’ll be seeing a lot of the paint buckets as we strive to fill them with cash to share our good fortune with those who could certainly use some. Transportation on this work trip is taken care of thanks to our Sibley Fund Grant, and lodging is provided; so, everything you put into the bucket will go directly to help folks in New Orleans—additional supplies, gift cards to stores such as Home Depot, whatever is needed.

We’ll also be working to raise funds in other ways. We have a lot of creative ideas, so stay tuned!!! Let’s do our best to support those going out in our name to share God’s love with our brothers and sisters in New Orleans.

A Productive (exhausting) “Work Day”

HUGE thanks to Bob Murray, Dave Sampson, Wayne Prouty, Rev. Knox, and others for the “work day” - which turned into “work-all-weekend” for some—on October 28 and 29. The repairs to the mobile home were much more involved than anticipated, and everyone (especially Bob) worked like mad to get it done. (Due to the weather, the outside tasks that YOM and the Confirmation Class were slated to work on were postponed.)

Rev. Knox and Shantia Wright-Gray coordinated the effort, which included other workers and volunteers from another church who moved all the furniture. Sue Campbell and Ellie Lowell were the “refreshment ladies”, supplying drinks and Sue’s homemade snacks. Barnabas the Bear, our mascot, was there for a photo opportunity! The family home still has a ways to go, but it’s much improved thanks to all that hard work.

THANKS BOB!!!

Successful Coat Drive

THANK YOU to everyone who brought in a coat for our coat drive! And, a big Thank-You to Marion Woodcock for supplying a shopping bag full of beautiful handmade hats! Pastor Gary (of Aldersgate United Methodist Church) was very appreciative of our efforts, and the kids will be, too. Kudos to Jen and Randy Bohn for bringing this project to us.

HYMN OF THE MONTH:*“I Love to Tell the Story”*

A. Katherine Hankey—William G. Fischer 1866

This anthem is based on a poem written by Katherine Hankey, born 1834 in England. Early in life Kate became involved in religious work, teaching Sunday School and organizing a Bible Study for factory girls in London. She had a passion for foreign missions, and later in life devoted all proceeds from her writing to missionary work. One winter Kate became seriously ill, confined to bed for a full year. To occupy her time, she wrote a poem of one hundred stanzas entitled “The Old, Old Story.” The following year, at the international convention of the Young Men’s Christian Association; Major General Russel ended his powerful sermon by quoting from Kate’s poem, leaving the audience breathless. Composer William G. Fischer set a portion of the poem to music, becoming the hymn, “*I Love to Tell the Story.*”

FROM THE CHOIR ROOM

This December finds us with a wealth of musical offerings.

December 3rd, the choir will introduce a new anthem, “Breath of Heaven.” Words and music by Chris Eaton and Amy Grand; choral setting by Lloyd Larson. The subtitle is “Mary’s Song,” and the entire anthem is sung from Mary’s perspective. This expressive anthem opens with Mary, speaking (through song) to God. Her fear, and heartbreaking prayer for help overwhelm with intensity. This is one of the most beautifully written and powerful anthems I’ve come across in quite some time. Also that day, violinist Krzysztof Gadawski will be guest performing a Bach piece, “Come, Savior of the Gentiles.”

December 10th features the beautiful solo piece “Gesu Bambino” (The Infant Jesus) to be sung by Pam Tentor. This anthem by Pietro Young, tells the Christmas Story through soaring soprano melody.

December 17th the choir will present our Christmas Cantata, “Born a Savior, Born a King.” Rev. Knox will narrate and guest musician, Rolph Holly, will play trumpet. Note our beautiful program insert—thanks Tammy!

December 24th the service features our youth. In addition to the Christmas Pageant, Joyful Noyse will present two anthems: “Light One Candle,” a Christmas Eve song, and “Come Light of the World,” foretelling the birth of Jesus. The choir will present another new anthem, “How Quietly” by Joel Raney. This prayerful anthem incorporates “Away in a Manger” and speaks of, “This precious gift given for me, this Holy Child.”

On Christmas Eve, Joyful Noyse will sing at the 5:00 service, while the adult choir sings at 11:00 p.m. with guest organist, Kurt Blomstrom.

This is truly a month to come and experience the power and majesty of beautiful music.

Blessings,
Heather Moore
Minister of Music

- Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy;
they will sing before the Lord, for He comes . . .

- Psalm 96: 12-13

Joyful Noyse Rehearsal Schedule

11/26	9:15 am rehearsal 'Come Light of the World'
12/3	11:15 am rehearsal
12/10	11:15 am rehearsal
12/17	11:15 am rehearsal
12/24	9:15 am rehearsal 'Light One Candle Christmas Eve' 5:00 pm service 'Light One Candle' & 'Come Light of the World' (No rehearsal before the 5 pm service)

LIBRARY TIDINGS

By Gloria Whitehead

The 20th, Tidings articles are due, and the only subject that comes to mind, of course, is Christmas. The libraries are blessed with a generous number of superb Christmas books for every conceivable taste and age.

The mail arrives. The first piece opened bears the title *Banning Christmas In America* and is an appeal which addresses the hunt, by some, for public nativity scenes, religious ornaments and displays, Christmas carols, public prayers, biblical references, and any other “offensive” form of free expression that violates the so-called separation of “church and state.” However, a survey in 2005 tallies that 95% of North Americans practice no restraint in saying Merry Christmas. What next?

Have borrowed a copy of *365 Windows* (2 minute meditations for daily use) by Halford E. Luccock. You’ll find a limited, but subtle link on page 336. It reads: “If Christianity is to win against the forces of evil, it will not be done by people fighting singly. One pastor has illustrated the need for working together in churches. A single light or two or even one hundred won’t do it, but the lights of a whole city will light a night sky . . . Prayer. In these days we need to stand together, all believers in God, all people in all churches, side by side. In the spirit of our Master, Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Yes, there’s a link, but what about Christmas? In an effort to pull all of this together, here are two books of many that carry its tender and potent Christmas message. Neither takes a long time to read and their message strengthens the celebration of this beautiful season.

#1 *Christmas Tapestry* by Patricia Polacco - a children’s paperback given by Sue Campbell. The author adapted this story from a tale she hears in homilies—once in the 60’s from Dr. Clarence Riedenbach of Oakland Ecumenical Council and once in the 90’s on Robert Schuller’s *Hour of Power*. Both were presented as true stories which were adapted for young readers, with the setting changed. No clues other than it brought tears of happiness.

#2 *The Golden Ring* by John Snyder - an adult book; new in 2001. A very special golden ring was given to Anna by her parents on her 9th birthday. Rather than in the ring itself, its true significance lies in the powerful lesson it teaches concerning the goodness that comes from giving. This book is also based on a true story and the print is medium-large.

May your most precious Christmas gift be
a sense of God’s love and peace within your soul.

The Library Committee



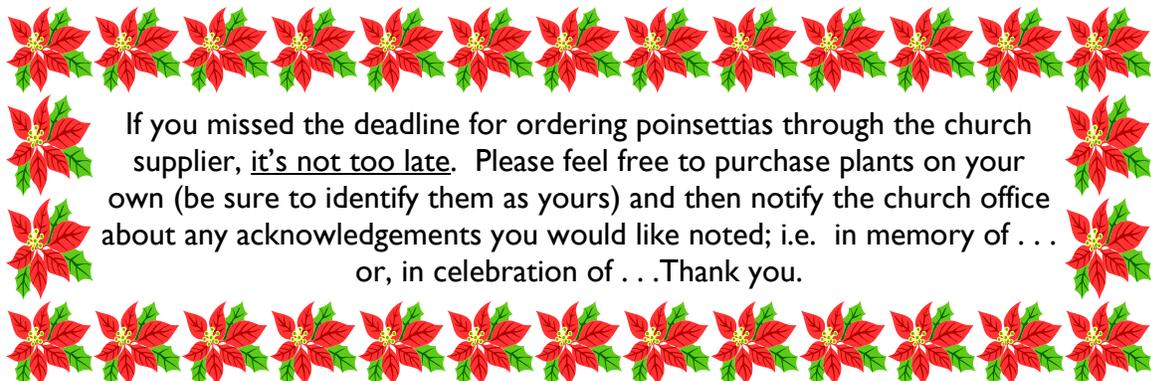
Our sympathies to the family and friends of **Donna M. Newman** who passed away on November 4th. She is survived by 2 sons, Joseph and Johnathan Simon and a daughter, Stacy Simon. She also leaves 3 brothers, Elmer, Dennis, and Roger Miller and a sister, Mona Lisa, wife of Garry Mahlert. A memorial service was held on November 7th at our church.

We also want to remember **Sylvia Grace Post** (July 10, 1930-Nov. 10, 2006). Sylvia is survived by her husband of 53 years, Donald Post, and their 3 children Robert, Gary and Cynthia (Bertrand). She was active both as a volunteer and participant with the Joslin Diabetes Center. You may have known her from the Farmer's Daughter. A memorial service was held on November 13th at the First Congregational Church in Auburn.

Please remember both these families in your prayers.

Annual Report articles are due by the end of December. (Early articles are greatly appreciated!) When submitting articles via e-mail always be sure you receive a confirmation that your article was, in fact, received. Also, due to all the preparation that December and the approaching holidays require, (holiday programs, multiple bulletins, the annual report, etc.) **the Tidings deadline of December 20th** will be strictly enforced. Thank you.

I MAY NOT BE A "WISE MAN," BUT AT LEAST I NEVER GOT SO LOST I HAD TO ASK HEROD FOR DIRECTIONS.



Youth on a Mission

Thanks to everyone who has helped us this fall with our many fundraisers. The Joe Corbi's order will arrive on Friday, December 8th. We will try to deliver as many as possible on that day. Any that we are unable to deliver will be available during coffee hour on December 10th.

We will be having our annual **Christmas Cookie Walk on December 17th** during coffee hour. A variety of festive containers will be available for purchase ranging in price from \$6-\$15. Also, on **December 17th will be the YOM second annual Christmas party at the Bohns' at 1:00 p.m.** Anyone interested in coming should please bring a \$10 unisex grab gift.

We have chosen our location for our summer mission trip. Once again we have teamed up with Youth on a Mission out of Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Our group will be going to Corbin, Kentucky from July 14th through July 25th. We have also scheduled our annual auction for Saturday, March 24th. More details will follow shortly on both the mission trip and the auction.

Thank you and God Bless,
Jennifer and Randy Bohn



Congratulations go out to David Mahlert and Amy Trudeau on the birth of their son, Devin James Mahlert born on November 18, 2006. The happy grandparents are Debbie and Mark Mahlert. Great-Grandparents are Jean and Ed Brothers.

Also, a warm welcome to Hannah Elizabeth Sullivan born November 20th to Amy and John Sullivan. The proud grandparents are Cindy and Mike Dube.

Congratulations to all!!!!



COFFEE ANYONE?

Watch for the Equal Exchange coffee project coming to Coffee Hour this winter. Equal Exchange is a worker-owned fair trade organization. It is committed to small coffee farmers in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Purchasing coffee from Equal Exchange provides these poor farmers with fair prices, cooperatives, credit and ecologically sustainable farming practices, and develops trade partnerships.

This will be a chance to support Fair Trade and is sponsored at the First Congregational Church by the Board of Christian Outreach.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM *HERE WE GROW* PRESCHOOL

Once again another month is gone and we are at the end of the year 2006. Time is passing by too fast. The children and staff at *HWG* are preparing for the holiday season and the time off it will provide.

The month of November was a busy time for all. *Here We Grow* families and staff filled the "Giving Basket" (quite a few times), with a variety of food which Rev. Knox distributed to families throughout the community.

Here We Grow's feast days went well. Once again the three-year old classes made the appetizer: cornbread, while the four-year old classes made up the dessert: brownies. The families of *HWG* brought in a variety of fruits for the friendship salad and added cheese and crackers to complete the meal. Many parents stayed to help with cutting up the fruit, preparing cheese and cracker platters and then serving the children when they arrived in the vestry. I thank all the parents who did stay to help with the clean-up and the putting away of the tables and chairs. A special thank you to the Pranaitis boys for carrying all the tables and chairs down to the vestry on the Sunday before the feast.

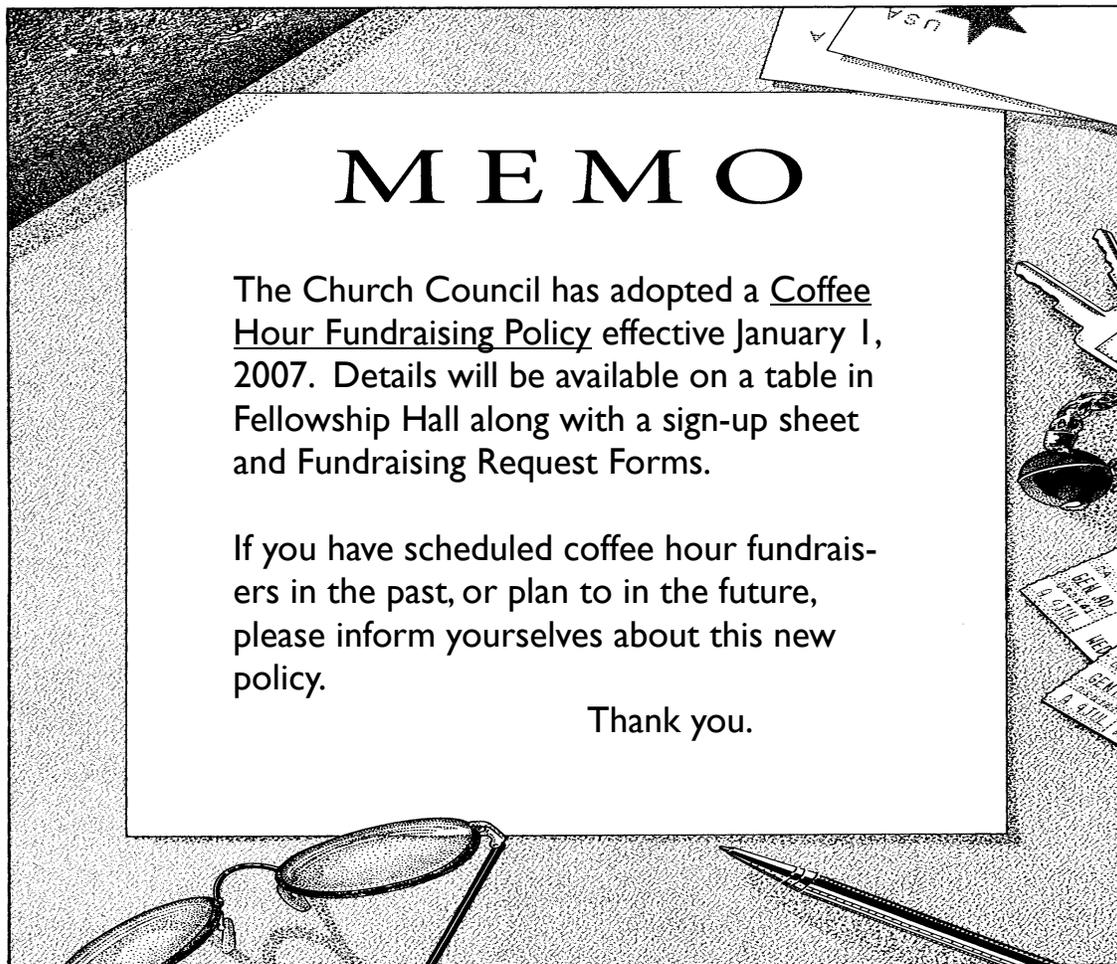
Highlights for the month of December: *HWG* will be collecting for "Toys for Tots" which will be picked up by the Marines on December 19th. Our holiday programs will be December 20th & 21st. The children are eagerly awaiting a visit from "Santa." *Here We Grow* will be closed from December 22-January 2, 2007.

The *Here We Grow* staff and families wish all of you a joyous and safe holiday season.

Until 2007, Happy Holidays.

Dawn Murphy
Director, *Here We Grow Preschool*





MEMO

The Church Council has adopted a Coffee Hour Fundraising Policy effective January 1, 2007. Details will be available on a table in Fellowship Hall along with a sign-up sheet and Fundraising Request Forms.

If you have scheduled coffee hour fundraisers in the past, or plan to in the future, please inform yourselves about this new policy.

Thank you.

TIDINGS is a monthly publication of

First Congregational Church
 128 Central St.
 Auburn MA 01501

Phone: (508)832-2845

Web: auburnfirstucc.org



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

December 2006

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