



Herald of Good TIDINGS

“Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’”
Isaiah 40:9

FROM OUR INTERIM PASTOR:

It’s snowing outside my house this morning. Or maybe it’s raining – it’s not really easy to see what’s happening. I’d like to think that the rain is a sign that there will be no more freezing weather, but I know it’s not true. (sigh)

It’s not time yet for spring, but my heart is ready for it. I’m glad we’re almost to Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. First, of course, it means we’re on the way to Easter, and more sunshine, if not really much more comfortable weather. And secondly, Lent is a time to focus more intentionally on our faith.

This year, we’re going to use a Lenten Devotional from the UCC to help us examine our faith more intentionally. I’ll be using one of the devotions each Sunday as a part of the sermon, and you can **get your own copy of the daily devotional book through the church office. They’ll be \$3 each.**

Just as we can stiffen up if we sit too long at our desks without moving, our church can stiffen up if we get into a pattern of doing what we’ve always done in the same way we’ve always done it. Can we bend? Can we change? Or will trying out change break us, or make us lose our sense of self?

We are in a time of transition in our church; a time when we are intentionally stretching or trying new ways. The interim time is intended to be a time to look around and see what’s needed in our community, and evaluate our need to adapt to a different world. This devotional will help us in that important interim work. I hope you’ll get a copy and be ready for Lent to begin on February 14.

Pastor Virginia

We Are Bent, Not Destroyed

Jesus modeled flexibility: hardship and persecution bent but didn't break him. Change and challenge strengthened his ministry. Impossible situations yielded to healing and release.

How many of us could benefit – not from a hard yank but from a stretchy bend, not from stiffness but from resilience?

Bending can be scary, of course. Responding to pressure with flexibility can be counterintuitive. Who knows what our limits are? Who knows if we might crack and break?

But bending can be a source of strength: Trees bend in the wind. Bows bend in order to release their arrows. The river bends around the mountain.

*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;
we are perplexed, but not despairing;
we are bent, but not destroyed.*
(2 Corinthians 4:8-10, adapted)

Take time in the Lent 2024 season to bend low and be renewed. From the Stillspeaking Writers' Group, the devotional *Bend* provides daily readings, reflections, and prayers for the Lenten season: Ash Wednesday (February 14) to Easter Sunday (March 31).



Mark your calendars. Lent begins on February 14th.

We will hold our **Ash Wednesday** service at 7 p.m. All are welcome.



SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS

We have several scholarships we would like to award to church members seeking to continue their education. Specifically, there are two scholarships dedicated to those studying within the medical field, and one scholarship gives preference to those who are musically inclined and, of course, we have several unrestricted scholarships as well. Please look for an application in fellowship hall or email the church office at secretary@auburnfirstucc.org or call 508-832-2845 to request an application.

JOIN US FOR OUR WEDNESDAY NIGHT LENTEN BIBLE STUDY 6-7 P.M.

Look for more information on the Bible study in our weekly Sunday bulletin. The study will include soup and sandwiches provided by the boards/committees listed below.

- 2/21 Stewardship & Outreach Committees
- 2/28 Board of Deacons
- 3/6 Board of Trustees
- 3/13 Board of Christian Ed (BOCE)
- 3/20 Music Committee

Ladies, please mark your calendars for the next **WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP MEETING** on Feb. 18th during coffee hour.



*Dear People,
Please accept my heartfelt thanks for your much appreciated Christmas gift. Generosity seems to be a part of the DNA of this congregation! May God bless you and grant you a good New Year.
With gratitude,
Paulette*

I am humbled by the thoughtfulness and generosity of our church family. Thank you so much for the year end bonus I received. It means so much that you all thought of me during the holiday season! May the Lord give you peace of mind in knowing I love our children and I will continue to support and teach them with the best of my abilities!

-Shannon

*Your kindness is greatly appreciated. Thank you for the lovely Christmas basket.
Barbara Soponski*

MORE BIBLE STUDY?

We have almost 20 people attending our Tuesday Bible study and we're having a great time exploring our Bibles, learning about using a study Bible, and getting together with each other.

But other folks have said that they'd also like to have a study – but they can't come during the day on Tuesday. I'd be glad to start another class at another time; if you are interested, let's talk? We can meet via Zoom in the evening, for instance.

What might we study? Well, the Tuesday class has been reading Anne Robertson's "What Is The Bible" – a six week guide to how Bibles came to be, how to find your way around them, and why a study Bible (a Bible with lots of notes, usually maps, and essays) can really open up the meaning of those beloved stories.

There's also a similar introductory book about the Old Testament, and one for the New Testament. We could read our way through a book of the Bible, or read and discuss the lectionary readings for the coming Sunday.

We could read a book together (a book study, not a Bible study) – to help us understand and respond to the issues of our society today. We might read about poverty in Barbara Ehrenreich's book *Nickel and Dimed*. We could learn about how to talk about identity, diversity and justice with *Say the Right Thing* by Kenji Yoshino and David Glasgow. We might try to figure out just why Revelation is in the Bible by reading *Armageddon* by Bart Ehrmann. Or it might be something totally different.

If you are interested in getting together to study the Bible, to talk about our faith, or just to read a book together, speak to me after church or send me an email at: InterimPastor@AuburnFirstUCC.org.

Message from the Treasurer

Greetings,

As we enter into the new year, I would like to remind everyone that any requests for reimbursements need to have receipts submitted whenever available. Also, I would like to remind everyone to make use of the Payment Authorization Forms that are in the conference room for all expenses that require reimbursement. Please have the appropriate person on the committee authorize any expenditures that are made. If the requestor (one seeking reimbursement) is on that committee already, please have a different member of that committee approve the reimbursement. This also applies to any purchases made on the Church's credit card.

Thank you for your understanding,
Nick Stockhaus, Treasurer

PLEASE NOTE: During times of inclement weather, we will post cancellations on WBZ –TV4, CBSBoston.com, and on the Church's Facebook page. We will also send out a church wide email and include information in the greeting message on the church's phone, 508-832-2845. However, please keep in mind that if weather is severe enough to result in area power outages, we may not have the ability to utilize these outlets. **So, you should always use your best judgment, exercising caution, when deciding whether to venture out to service during stormy weather.**



Here We Grow Preschool



Here We Grow has started enrollment for next year, and our four-year-old classes are filling up. Our traditional Open House this year will be March 21, 2024 from 9-11 A.M., and we are still offering tours in the evenings and on weekends, if you know of a friend, neighbor, or relative who is looking for a preschool.

When thinking about whether to send your child to preschool for the first time, keep in mind what you are hoping to get out of the experience. We start accepting children when they are 2 years, 9 months old and, for them, our focus is all about social/emotional growth, which means getting along in a group, taking directions from adults other than Mom and Dad, learning to share and learning skills to become independent. For children getting ready for kindergarten, we are focusing on more academic skills, learning about letters and numbers, and printing their names while still providing social skills.

We are also fortunate to be able to offer a class for young 4's. This class is designed for those children who may have already done a year of preschool and need an extra year because they do not make the kindergarten cutoff in their town. For more information about any of our classes, please feel free to stop in the office or call 508-832-8184.

For those of you who have participated in the past, we will be doing our annual calendar raffle giveaway; ticket sales will begin soon. We will leave some in the office with Denise. We thank you for your continued support.

Stay Healthy and have a great month!

Cristi Corey
Director

Here We Grow Preschool

The 2024 altar flower sign-up sheet through mid-April is on the clipboard in fellowship hall. If you "reserve" a date each year during this time period, please review the information listed and either indicate your approval by initialing by your name, or make changes directly on the sheet. Please keep in mind that, due to the changing nature of a calendar, we can't always ensure you will be the sole provider on any given Sunday, in which case your flexibility is greatly appreciated.

Since we aren't always able to determine who signed up first, **please be sure to indicate whether you would like a centerpiece or 3-sided arrangements in the brass vases** on the altar and we'll do our best to accommodate you.

FROM THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Dear Church members,

Please consider the following committee vacancies (# required by Bylaws):

Board of Deacons—4 vacancies

Board of Ed—1 vacancy

Stewardship—2 vacancies

Trustees—1 vacancy

Nominating—2 vacancies

If you have an interest in any of these openings, please reach out to Michele Schillinger, 508-259-2239, of the Nominating Committee. Thank you

FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Love is in the air!!!

Has anyone realized that Ash Wednesday falls on Valentine's Day? Talk about juxtaposition!! Although Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday and Holy Friday feel like dark moments in our Christian tradition, the ultimate goal is to feel the joy and celebration (and freedom) for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus suffered during the time leading up to His resurrection. That being said, it will be a little strange celebrating Valentine's Day when we are also contemplating death and rebirth. Just a little something to think about. I would love to hear your thoughts on this topic.

We have successfully added a new classroom in the Sunday School wing. Thank you to Lilly who set that up for us. She is doing a great job, as expected, with our littlest students. Michele has also been a tremendous help as a Sunday School teacher this year. I am so grateful to have (2) reliable, intelligent, faithful, and strong women as part of our team! Further, I am grateful to the team of women who are willing to step in and support us whenever we need it. We have a wonderful church family!!! (We welcome any of the men to join us anytime!!)

Our YOM (Youth On a Mission) are getting ready to head up to Monadnock Mountain for our annual Berea adventure. A huge thank you to our church for supporting our fundraisers this year. With the price of everything increasing regularly, it means a lot to the families of our students to get a little relief with regard to the cost of this trip. (The cost is \$210 per person. We have multiple families that send more than one student.)

Here are some of the topics that we are covering in Sunday School and Confirmation Class. Please feel free to talk to a student about any of these lessons.

- The 3 wisemen
- Genesis – The creation story
- Why should we go to church?
- What is “the church?”
- The traditional Christian statements of Faith (Nicene and Apostles Creeds)
- What is YOUR statement of faith?

Thank you so much for all the love and support you give to not only our youth, but also our teachers and our BOCE (Board of Christian Education). The church is the people and our people are awesome!

Just to name a few:

2 Corinthians 6:16 “We, believers, are now the temple of the living God!”

Hebrews 10:25 “God calls believers to meet together for encouragement.”

Ephesians 2:10 “God created us to do good works.”

1 John 4:7 “We show His love by loving others”

I love you,
~Shannon

Shannon Hartmann, Director of Religious Education



February is American Heart Month, National Children's Dental Health Month, Age Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)/Low Vision Awareness Month, and National Cancer Prevention Month.

February 7-14 is Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week.

February 11-17 is Heart Failure Awareness Week.

February 11-17 is Sepsis Survivor Week.

February 2 is National Wear Red Day.

February 2 is Give Kids A Smile Day.

February 4 is World Cancer Day.

February 14 is National Donor Day.

February 22 is National Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day.

Please keep these dates in mind and stay safe.

God Bless!

Debbie Pranaitis, Parish Nurse

Please join the BOCE (Board of Christian Education) on SATURDAY, February 17, for a potluck and trivia night! The potluck starts at 5pm with the game starting at 6. Please sign up in fellowship hall! We hope to see you there!



***** BOY SCOUT SUNDAY ON FEBRUARY 4TH! *****

In 2024, our Boy Scouts, Troop 101, are celebrating 100 years of scouting! And, the scouts and their leaders decided to show their appreciation to the church members with a **COMPLIMENTARY THANK-YOU BREAKFAST** on Boy Scout Sunday, February 4th. The breakfast will be held prior to the church service on the 4th, beginning at 8 a.m. Thank you to all who signed up for this special event.

We hope you can join us for the worship service that day as we acknowledge our boy scouts and cub scouts and celebrate 100 years of scouting!

Papa Gino's

PIZZERIA



Here We Grow Preschool

will earn 20% of all qualifying sales
from orders placed on February 27th.



Tuesday, February 27, 2024

4:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Auburn • 459 Southbridge Street • 508-832-6583

- **Walk-in or phone orders:** Mention this fundraiser when you place your order for the organization to get credit for your order.
- **Online orders:** Enter code 19 at the payment screen and then click redeem.
- **Fundraiser orders** are only valid with regular priced menu items and cannot be paired with coupons or deals. Fundraisers are not valid on third party orders.



Valid for all Dine-In, Carry Out,
Online & Delivery orders!

View menu & place online orders @ papaginos.com

Our thanks to you all for the sock donations we received in November! We appreciate your support for our folks in much need of simple items like these socks!

Blessings to all,

Sue Pellerin

Worcester Fellowship

Join us on Sunday, February 11, as we welcome Mari Gonzalez of El Buen Samaritano (The Good Samaritan). Mari will be sharing with us during the 10 a.m. worship service.

El Buen Samaritano (EBS) is a community-based, grassroots non-profit dedicated to providing relief to families who are looking for a helping hand. While primarily operating as a food pantry that distributes boxes of groceries to households, regardless of background, EBS also provides clothing and other resources to families in need.

EBS has been working in the Piedmont and Main Middle neighborhoods of Worcester for over three decades and has a vision of a community where everyone works together to fight against poverty and eliminate hunger for all.

As you may recall, last fall the Outreach Committee made us aware of the work of EBS and we were happy to help EBS with food and clothing donations just in time for Thanksgiving last year. This has resulted in an ongoing collection. Thank you for your continued support!

TIDINGS is a monthly publication of

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

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