

Herald of Good TIDINGS

February 2025

“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 PASTOR:

We are still in the height of the season of Epiphany, and I am working on one myself.

Every year, I choose a word, one word, to be my focus for the year, something to embody the way that I want the year to unfold, an intention. This year for 2025, my word is “relish,” and not relish as in the condiment, but relish as in savor or bask, truly dwell in a moment and celebrate it. As I reflected on this word choice, I realize that it is not an easy one to embrace while so motivated to energize, inspire, and continue building a church. Relish means not rushing or forcing. I am not sure that it means being still, not exactly, for truly indulging in a moment is not necessarily stillness, just a full presence. So, my epiphany is the importance of relishing it all, basking in all the goodness at FCC, Auburn for a while, and articulating a vision from there.

So, in the season of Epiphany, we are intended to keep the spirit of that word, an openness to the realization of Christ in our midst....and that isn't difficult to do at FCC, Auburn at all. This past week has been a planning one: relaunching the Saturday Suppers, mapping out the worship services of Lent, and focusing on the mission trip. We can anticipate a little flurry of activity around the Saturday Suppers – I have no doubt we will sell out our first one on MARCH 8th, a meal for community and connection (what a blessing that our scout leader is a professional caterer and can help us make it happen!). What a great partnership to begin, scouts and church working together on these meals that I have been hearing about, with great longing, from people around town.

The donations are impressive for the La Romana mission trip: there are stacks of beautifully colorful dresses made by the Auburn Comfort Blankets team, tools for our building projects, and all kinds of medications and bandages, plus supplies for the kids. I am looking forward to Outreach Sunday on February 16th when we will bless a sampling of the donations before I head off to the Dominican Republic. I also can't wait to share my slideshow with you of my last trip so you can see a snapshot of the sugar cane villages and the ways we are working with people there to ensure basic needs are met: nutrition, medicine, shelter, love.

And Ash Wednesday is on the horizon, always in that wintery, muddy time when we are aching for spring but not quite there. We have a special worship for that night, a time to remember all of our sins and brokenness, detailing the hurts in a time of prayer and music designed to address our darkest feelings as we move through a tough season of forgiveness. I invite you to try my tradition, which involves closing Ash Wednesday with a fire pit outside, and an opportunity to “burn” our sins and watch them engulfed in flames in the darkness, together. This ritualizes our journey of faith through all the loneliness, betrayal, and pain of our lives, knowing that we can't ignore or numb it, with the promise of Easter at the end. Lent will bring evening suppers and education, and a chance to grapple with our faith alone and together. Bring it on!

And so, I ask, will you relish it all with me, the fullness, and linger for a while? We have such divine goodness here, and after the Christmas rush, let's savor all the faith epiphanies around us and enjoy it.

Love,
Pastor Julie





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.

Applications are due by April 15th.

COFFEE HOUR 2025

- Feb 9 Outreach Committee
- Feb 16 Financial Secretaries / Treasurers
- Feb 23 Personnel Committee
- Mar 2 Stewardship Committee
- Mar 9 Board of Deacons

Mark your calendars:

Join us for our
7 p.m. service on
March 5th.



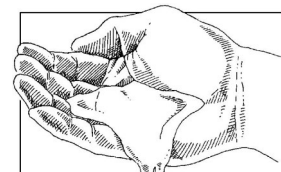
Ash Wednesday

Ladies, please mark your calendars for the next **WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP MEETING** on **Saturday, Feb. 8th, 9-11 a.m. in fellowship hall.**

*Dear Church Family,
Ted and I want to thank you for the awesome and beautiful basket of "goodies.." It is much appreciated! Once again, thank you for remembering us at Christmastime.
God Bless!*

Ted & Sue Steinhilber

On Sunday, January 12th, we celebrated the baptism of Emersyn Lynne Bradt, the 1½ - year-old daughter of Haley Berry and Kyle Bradt. We pray for God's continued blessing upon Emersyn and her family.



Recently Baptized

FROM PASTOR JULIE

While I am away in the Dominican Republic, we are considering worshipping with our friends at Pakachoag Church on March 2nd, with our very own lay preacher and readers leading alongside Rev. Dennis Knight on this Communion Sunday. Kindly let me know if you are curious and excited to worship at this location. There will be a children's program. I believe this will be another energetic collaboration between two town churches.

BIBLE STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

Tuesdays at 12:30 pm – Inevitably, we cover a mix of topics, always revolving around body, mind and soul....often weaving in “The Son of Man.” Continue reading the original texts, and we will learn more about “the woman who Jesus loved more than any other” and the hidden, mysterious knowledge she possesses.

Evening Bible study – We held our first evening Bible Study on January 30th and will meet again on February 13th at 6:00 p.m. Please read through page 15 in your Mary Magdalene book in preparation for our next class.



ON A MISSION! LA ROMANA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Packing day is February 8th and all are invited to help the mission team sort piles and piles of medical supplies, clothing and donations for our trip...then pack it into huge duffle bags and weigh them for our flight. It's all happening at First Church, 6 Meetinghouse Hill Rd., Sterling – come anytime between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. **All hands on deck!**

You can also join First Church's long tradition of the Super Bowl Sunday auction on February 9th to support the cause and score yummy comfort foods for the game. It will be held in their Parish Hall 11:15am 'til 12:15pm. which will allow us to catch the tail end of the auction following our Sunday worship service.

We will have a mission trip themed worship on Sunday, February 16th with a video slideshow, testimonies and more.

Finally, all mission trippers are watching a documentary called, “The Price of Sugar,” to learn more about the sugar cane villages where we will be serving. If there are enough interested, we can have a movie night at church...let Pastor Julie know!

The 2025 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.

The Board of Trustees is looking for volunteers to help with office coverage (phones and buzzing visitors into the building) beginning February 10th. Please call the church office, 508-832-2845, or email secretary@auburnfirstucc.org if you would like to add your name to the list — thank you!

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 secretary's extension when you call the church's phone number , 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.**



Dear Church Family,

As I write this note, my last day as your Church Secretary is mere days away. And as I reflect on what parting words I would like to share, THANK YOU! is my immediate response. Thank you for the opportunity I have enjoyed in a job that I have truly loved for the past 18 years. I feel so blessed to be able to say that. I thank God for leading me to this position that has allowed me to serve Him among such a wonderful group of people. We have done life together. You were there for me in the loss of my sister and mother and your prayers, I'm sure, sustained me. And I have been privileged to share in your highs and lows — the celebrations of new births, baptisms, and birthdays, and in the hardships of illness and sorrow during times of loss.

I can't possibly thank you enough. Your love, support and countless expressions of appreciation have motivated me to try to be the best Church Secretary that I could be. I have been so blessed to have made lasting friendships while here and will always look back with fondness upon my time as Church Secretary. In closing, I pray the following scripture over you and yours.

Love, Denise

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” Numbers 6:24-26

It's not too late to join a committee or board! The Nominating Committee is still trying to fill 9 Board/Committee positions.

Vacancies include:

Board of Deacons (3), Stewardship (2), Board of Trustees (2) Nominating (1), and Music (1).

If you are a church member and have an interest in one (or more) of these openings, please contact Michele Schillinger at 508-259-2239 or email: chel061759@gmail.com. Thank you.



Here We Grow Preschool

I want to start this month by taking a moment to say best of luck to Denise in her future endeavors. We can't thank you enough for all you have done for Here We Grow through the years. From copies, to printing/editing our handbooks and programs, to listening to us complain about life, Denise has been a constant presence that we have all come to rely on. We are going to miss you.

Here We Grow has started enrollment for next year, and our four-year-old classes are filling up. Our **Open House** this year will be **March 20, 2025** from 9-11 AM, and we offer tours during the school day as well as in the evenings and on weekends. If you know of a friend, neighbor, or relative who is looking for a preschool, please send them our way.

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. 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 purchased Super Bowl Squares, thank you and good luck. For those of you who have participated in our Calendar Raffle Give-away in the past, we have pushed that back to later in the spring. Stay tuned for more information.

Stay healthy and have a great month!

Cristi Corey, Director, Here We Grow Preschool

FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

February is Encounter month!!!! I will be taking a group of 8 young ladies to our annual Monadnock Encounter weekend in Jaffrey, NH. Alongside me, Stephanie Sanborn and Theresa Stone will be joining us as chaperones this year. This camp has been functioning for over 50 years as a Christian camp, created to strengthen the bond between youth and adults while also strengthening the bond we have with God. Just like a really good preschool is able to teach through play, this weekend at Monadnock is set up to worship through play. While we do spend plenty of time in the sanctuary singing and praying and listening to our speaker, when we are not in worship, we are having so much fun!

Here are a few of the fun offerings at Camp Monadnock: snow tubing, gaga ball, ping pong, mini golf, indoor pool, snowshoeing, paint ball, frappes and a snack counter, and plenty of competitive group shenanigans. Our group stays in one big room, loaded with bunk beds so we can have discussions about the day. After each worship session, groups are encouraged to spend some quiet time together, reviewing the scripture and the sermon (and often the music). These are my favorite moments because the students allow themselves to be a little vulnerable and often share their personal experiences.

I love it when my students ask a lot of questions! Truth be told, most of the time I myself do not know the answer they are looking for. My response is often, "You know what? I do not know. Let's look it up together." Or, "That is a great question for Pastor Julie! We can ask her together." I have learned that it is not only okay to not know the answer, but it can be a good tool for growth when a student and teacher find answers together. Being a Christian, and trying to read my Bible regularly, I have questions all the time. In fact, the more I learn, the more questions arise. Questions are a good thing!!!! When a student of any age, asks questions, it shows they are curious and it shows the subject matters to them. This weekend is about learning and growing together.

The speaker for our weekend is Chelsea Erickson. I am very excited to have a woman pastor leading our worship because this year has turned into a "Girls' Trip!" We have only girls in attendance this year. Some are returning students and some are new to the camp. Chelsea has been a youth pastor in the New England area for over 13 years, including the First Congregational Church in Hamilton. This will be the first time in my experience to have a pastor with roots in a Congregational Church. Speaking of "roots," Chelsea is also a writer and editor for "Rooted Ministry," a ministry that specializes in reaching out to teens through conferences, blogs, curriculums and much more! Please take a few minutes to review their website.

I will definitely NOT be hiking any mountains on this trip, but I will find a hill to stand on top of, to shout, "THANK YOU!!!!" to all the members of our church, and families of our students, for your continued generosity and support for me and our Youth On a Mission!!!! From participating in our fundraiser, to cash donations, to words of encouragement and much more, this trip would not be possible for us without you. Being a long standing tradition here at FCC Auburn, most of you know what a beautiful experience this trip provides us with.

We have our 3 classrooms running strong in the Sunday School wing, but we are always looking for more volunteers and teachers. Find me in church, or feel free to give me a call if changing the lives of our youth is something that entices you!!!! Special thanks to Michele, Stephanie and Carrie for giving time to our students. Thank you to our BOCE (Board of Christian Education) for all your hard work and support.

Denise...This is the final *Tidings* article I will be sending to you. I want to publicly express my gratitude for not just your unwavering support, but your friendship. I have never met anyone who embraces the love of God, the way you do. You have nurtured the seed of faith in me, that many times I could not find! You have become a mentor to me, in my faith journey! There were times in my personal and professional life when I felt lost and confused, and you helped me to focus on the Lord. You reminded me that I am never alone. God is with me. God is cheering me on, and He will always love me! Thank you!!!! You will be missed!!!

~Shannon



February is American Heart Month, Age Related Macular Degeneration Awareness Month, and National Children's Dental Health Month.

February 7 is National Wear Red Day.

February 14 is National Donor Day.

February 24-28 is National Eating Disorders Awareness Week.

Be safe, COVID is still around. Good handwashing is critical! Be aware of crowds.

God Bless!

Debbie Pranaitis

Parish Nurse, cell: 508-612-4521

OUR CHURCH SUPPERS WILL RETURN ON SATURDAY, MARCH 8TH AND WE WELCOME YOUR INPUT!

Our next **Church Supper planning meeting** is at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, February 6th.

Come on over to help us mobilize, advertise, and bring our community together.



We continue conversations about virtual worship, online safety, and how to best share our message AND do so while respecting the privacy of our children. Please

Speak to Pastor Julie if you would like to join a team working on safety and social media concerns.

Looking ahead, our weekly Lenten series will be on Thursday evenings (3/13, 20, 27 and 4/3,10) with a meal and educational programming. All are encouraged to engage in this spiritual journey with our church family.

PLEASE NOTE:

Beginning in March we will no longer be mailing the monthly *Tidings*. If you would like to receive an electronic copy monthly, please email

secretary@auburnfirstucc.org

with your email address. There will be a limited number of printed copies available at church each month.



Dear People,

Here it is the beginning of February already! Where does the time go?! Only yesterday it was Thanksgiving!

December was a very busy month for the two choirs – the Chancel Choir and the Bell Choir.

We had the Cantata on December 8th with Skip Bigelow and Alyssa Gervasi as narrators, and the Bell Choir played on the 15th. Then the Carol sing with Jackie Knox at the piano – thank you, Jackie! -- and the two Christmas Eve services – whew!

And, of course, the music doesn't stop. It goes on week after week!

In January we began a new season of praise and thanksgiving for the gift of Jesus in our midst.

I want to thank the choirs for their consistent hard work and faithful service to this community. Our services are so much richer for their presence and the gift of their music.

Once again, the offer to join either choir is open. Speak to any choir member or me when you're ready to jump in for the adventure.

Peace,
Paulette

Message from the Treasurer

Greetings,

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

Southern New England Conference, United Church of Christ (SNEUCC) Super Saturday: I Love to Tell the Story - March 8th at First Congregational Church in Shrewsbury, MA

Bishop William J. Barber II, a highly sought-after speaker known for his leadership of the *Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival*, will be the keynote speaker.

Church friends, if you haven't attended the United Church of Christ Super Saturday event before, I (Pastor Julie) encourage you to sign up for this day of workshops and worship and great people! I will be there through lunch, and hope you can join me! Yes, it is the same day as our Saturday Supper, and perhaps a great way to stretch your theological imagination before feasting on spaghetti and meatballs.

<https://www.sneucc.org/eventdetail/18794786>

The Cure for It All

by Julia Fehrenbacher

Go gently today, don't hurry or think about the next thing.
 Walk with the quiet trees, can you believe how brave they are—how kind?
 Model your life after theirs.
 Blow kisses at yourself in the mirror especially when you think you've messed up.
 Forgive yourself for not meeting your unreasonable expectations.
 You are human, not God—don't be so arrogant.
 Praise fresh air, clean water, good dogs. Spin something from joy. Open a window,
 even if it's cold outside. Sit. Close your eyes. Breathe. Allow the river of it all to
 pulse through eyelashes, fingertips, bare toes. Breathe in breathe out. Breathe un-
 til you feel your bigness, until the sun rises in your veins. Breathe until you stop
 needing anything to be different.

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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