



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*

JANUARY TIDINGS

Well, here we are in 2021. Does being out of 2020 make you feel better? I hope so. Anything that helps lighten people’s moods is a good thing.

The other danger of the virus was that isolating to stop the spread was hurting people’s minds. All year we have been bouncing between isolation to fight the virus, and isolation causing depression, anxiety, addiction, and even suicide. There was no good answer. We had to choose a middle ground based on which was more of a risk on a certain day. Was the virus a big risk? Or was mental illness a bigger risk?

But there is light at the end of the tunnel. We have multiple vaccines and a plan to get it out to those most in need, most in need without worrying about cost.

What did we learn in the year or so of COVID?

I learned I used to eat out ALOT. What will we keep from this time of pandemic? Will we eat at home more? Will we go out less?

What will not come back from the time before COVID? I think the “handshake” is gone. I either know you well enough to hug you or else you get a hand wave. Nothing in between.

We are in the time of increasing light. The darkest time, the longest night, is behind us. Each day the sun will be up a little earlier and go down a little later. Things are getting better.

As time passes, I hope and pray darkness will retreat from our lives. The spring is coming.

May God bless you this year.

Pastor Brian



JANUARY SERMON TOPICS

- 1/3 “To the Saints Who Are Faithful”
- 1/10 “Repentance for the Forgiveness of Sins”
- 1/17 **(Pastor Brian will be on vacation Jan.11 - 18)**
- 1/24 “God is Heard by the Wrong People”
- 1/31 “A Prophet”

Per the government guidance, we **strongly** advise people to not worship in-person the two Sundays following Christmas, December 27, 2020 and January 3, 2021.

We will have Zoom up for live worship both Sundays, plus we will upload to YouTube.

Communion Sunday will be moved to January 10.

The vaccine is coming soon, please stay safe.

May God bless you with a Happy, Healthy New Year!



Important Notice

The Annual Meeting will be held following the 10 a.m. worship service on **Sunday, January 24th**. This will be an in-person meeting with Zoom access for those who would like to participate remotely.

(All committee/board end-of-year reports are **NOW** due.)

Look for more information to come on how we will work the **All Committee Meeting** (the first 2021 meeting of all committees and boards).

The **Installation of Officers and Board Members** will be held virtually on **January 31st**.

2020 Pledges

Please note that donations received before Jan. 1st will appear on your 2020 donation statement. Also, any donations received by mail after Jan. 1st may be included on your 2020 donation statement **if** the letter is postmarked on or before Dec. 31st. Any donations postmarked after Dec. 31st will appear on your 2021 donation statement. Thank you!

2021 Offering Envelopes

Please pick up your 2021 offering envelopes located at the church in the back of the sanctuary. If you can't find your envelopes, it means you did not make a pledge or didn't indicate that you wanted envelopes. Please see Lori or Nick Stockhaus with any questions.



Happy Birthday to:

- Caleb Armstrong ~ Jan. 4th
- Lynn Largesse ~ Jan. 6th
- Lillian McPherson ~ Jan. 19th
- Cassandra Stockhaus ~ Jan. 23rd

We would like to feature your special occasion in the *Tidings*. Please complete the form below and return to the church office.

I give First Congregational Church permission to put my family member's birthday or anniversary in the monthly newsletter the *Tidings*.

Name(s)

Occasion

Date

Signature (adult only please)



Please return to Church office.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Happy New Year to all of you! I hope you all enjoyed a Christmas filled with love and happy times. As we begin this new year, let's focus on the love that we are showered with each and every day from God our Father. If we have learned anything from 2020, let it be that life is precious and family, of all forms, are invaluable and should be treasured.

As I write this, Pastor Brian and Michelle Bigelow are putting the finishing touches to our virtual pageant. Our hope was that this production would bring a smile to your faces and remind the kids that even though they can't be together in person, they can be together in spirit. The goal this year was just to keep the kids connected, and between "lawn Sunday school" and the pageant, I think we achieved that goal.

We do not know what the new year will bring, but we do know that our Father in heaven will be with us now and forever. I pray that this year will be filled with faith, joy, good health, and much happiness for you all.

Lord, I have no idea what's going to happen in this New Year. I pray that you will guide me. Please help me to look to you always, and through everything that I do, may I bring praise and glory to your name. I thank you, Lord, for another year. Amen.

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:3

Thank you for your gifts this Christmas. I truly appreciate them. The gifts of treats, cards, and the check from the church was greatly appreciated. This seems to have been a great year for Christmas cards as well. I was deluged with cards. I hope I sent a card back to everyone who sent me one. If I missed someone, I apologize.

Pastor Brian

2021 COMMITTEE NOMINEES STILL WANTED

Beginning in January at our Annual Meeting, Nominating will present their report with the new and re-committed nominees to Boards and Committees. There still remains a committee that may run into trouble with quorum meeting limits (typically via Zoom at this time). **NOMINEES: BOARD OF TRUSTEES** (short nominees) open two vacancies of 3 year terms and two vacancies of 2 year terms. **BOARD OF DEACONS:** Listed in our By-Laws there should be 12 Deacons; however, if one vacancy of 3 year term and/or one for 1 year term could be filled for meeting decisions; then, the Deacons would utilize age appropriate acolytes for church service only. **BOARD OF EDUCATION:** open one vacancy of 1 year term and one vacancy of 3 year term. **BOARD OF STEWARDSHIP:** open one vacancy of 3 year term. Member nominees committing to join or rejoin committees are most welcome and members currently serving terms on committees, THANK YOU! The Nominating Committee will continue to search for support throughout the year as long as there are vacancies open.

If you are a church member and interested in filling a nomination, please contact one of the following Nominating Committee Members or the church office. Contacts: Sue MacPhee @ ph: 508-832-9347 or email at susiemac2002@gmail.com. Judi may be reached at 508-341-4530 or email at jtaft01527@aol.com. Sheila may be reached at (978) 387-7705, sheilaskog@gmail.com.

January Tidings from Here We Grow Preschool



Happy New Year! We hope you all had a wonderful and relaxing holiday.

This has been such a strange year for all of us. We miss being able to have our parents in the building and doing all our traditional holiday activities. Even though we could not have a traditional "program" with the children, they still gathered in their classes and sang songs, which we recorded and sent home to the parents to view.

We made the tough decision to close school from December 21- January 18, due to the rise in COVID cases in the area. We are hoping that having the extra time off will help give everyone a chance to relax and slow the spread of germs. We feel truly fortunate that we made it this far into the school year without having to close a classroom due to exposure. Let's pray it continues.

Enrollment forms for next year have gone out for in-house registration and we are already filling spots. We will continue with in-house enrollment until the middle of February, then we will open it up to new parents and children. If you know of anyone looking for a preschool, we would love to hear from them. At this time, we are not sure if we will be able to host an Open House, but I am more than happy to meet with potential families in the evenings and on weekends.

In February, families will be selling tickets for our calendar raffle fundraiser. Beginning March 1st, we will be picking a winner every day for 31 days. If you would like a chance at winning some great prizes, please speak with a parent or staff member. Denise will have a sample calendar in the office. A big thank you to Katie Sharr for, once again, leading this fabulous fundraiser for us.

Stay safe everyone,

Here We Grow Staff

HERE WE GROW FUNDRAISER — Gotsneakers?

A sneaker recycling organization, Gotsneakers?, will pay Here We Grow for their donations of new and used wearable, reusable athletic sneakers and cleats. Acceptable items include: casual sneakers, walking sneakers, running sneakers, basketball sneakers, skateboard sneakers, sports cleats (rubber soccer and baseball ONLY; non-metal bottoms), and canvas sneakers (ONLY Converse All-Star brand canvas sneakers are accepted.) Please NO baby/toddler footwear.

Look for a collection box in fellowship hall or drop donations off to the church office, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thank you to all who have given so far and for any future support! This fundraiser is expected to run at least through the school year in June.

RECENT BAPTISM



On Sunday, December 13, we celebrated the baptism of Kasey James Bjorklund, the 2 ½ month old son of Chelsea and Ken Bjorklund, in a service held privately here at the church.

Proud grandparents are Bruce and Kelly Fant.

We pray God's continual guidance and blessing upon this precious little one and his family.



Happy New Year! I pray that everyone had a nice Christmas and that we all have a healthy New Year. Things certainly are different, and we are still trying to get through. Vaccines have been given to many, but they aren't an instant cure. We still have to take precautions with proper handwashing and wearing masks to cover the nose and mouth. The nasal passage is a part of your respiratory system and needs to be covered! Also, the masks need to be approved masks, not some piece of material that is stylish. We're all in this together. Let's do our part and help to get the upper hand on this virus.

January is Birth Defects Prevention Awareness Month, Blood Donor Month, Cervical Health Awareness Month, Glaucoma Awareness Month, and Thyroid Health Awareness Month.

January 24 - 30 is Healthy Weight Week.

January 31 is World Leprosy Day.

Please, stay safe and, I pray, healthy. Happy New Year! God Bless!

Deb Pranaitis, Parish Nurse
508-612-4521 (cell)

To my church family,

I would like to thank you all for my gift. This year has been tough for everyone and I am so blessed to belong to such a caring group of people. I pray for each of you to have a year filled with good health and much happiness.

God bless,
Jean McPherson, Dir. of Religious Ed.

During times of inclement weather, we have set up an account with WCVB - TV Channel 5 enabling us to report Church service cancellations. We also will post cancellations on Facebook. However, if weather is severe enough to result in area power outages, we may not have the capability to contact these outlets. So you should always use your best judgment, exercising caution when deciding whether to venture out to service during stormy weather.



Inclement
Weather
Policy

THANK YOU!

Shocked! That best describes how I feel as the recipient, once again, of your generosity. And, once again, it seems so inadequate to just say, "Thank you." This year, in particular, I am so humbled at how you remembered me at Christmas time. We live in very uncertain times, and yet you thought of *me!* Thank you to each and every one, from the cards to the gifts, I greatly appreciate your thoughtfulness. — Denise (Church Secretary)

To my Church Family,

Thank you so much for your generosity. Your thoughtfulness is much appreciated.

— Judy Bjork

From the Stewardship Committee

Thank you again to everyone who participated in Consecration Sunday or returned a pledge card.

It was very different to not have everyone sharing in person and having a meal together. Nevertheless, we appreciate your giving spirit.

We will be mailing or dropping off our thank-you gift to the families that were not in church on Consecration Sunday to pick one up.

We appreciate your support, and we are looking forward to seeing you in 2021!

In His love,

Your Stewardship Committee

Nan Johnson, Ron Klaucke, Ellie Lowell, Debbie Mahlert, Linda Mahlert (Outgoing: Michelle Bigelow -- Many thanks for your wonderful collages!)

"None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful." - Mother Theresa

In His Love,

Your Stewardship Committee

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH

Your response to our clothing drive for CityReach in Boston was overwhelming. I was so touched to find the package of 6 new blankets left at the church door overnight on December 5th. We were able to fill the bed of a pick-up truck with warm clothing, blankets, and new white socks, and socks, and socks! As I was sorting and bagging items, because there were so many, I decided to start a bag of socks only. A big black trash bag. By the time I was finished I had filled the bag. I'm sure whoever had to bring that bag out to the truck will attest it was full, **and heavy**. I wish I had counted them, there must have been 200 pairs or more! Our committee was unable to shop at Salvation Army as planned, but we did purchase 80 pairs of hand warmers that were also delivered to Boston. A special thank you goes out to former Outreach member Shannon Hartmann and her children, Hendrix and Elsa, for delivering the donations to Boston, and to Pastor Brian for his help with loading Shannon's truck.

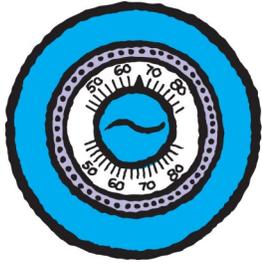
As I write this, Outreach has one more meeting in December and about \$1,000.00 left in our budget. It was an unusual year in regards to requests for donations. It was quieter, a result of the pandemic I guess. I'm thinking I will suggest we purchase more handwarmers to be distributed to the homeless in the Worcester area and check in with Sally from Auburn Youth and Family Services to see if they have any specific need at the end of the year.

We will be saying goodbye to Joyce Ringgard and Kay Shapter, as their terms on this committee have been completed. We have become a tight knit group and I speak for the remaining members when I say we will miss you.

As we begin a New Year, grateful that 2020 is now behind us, I pray that the vaccine is effective and available to all; that as a group we are safe and healthy. I look forward to singing in church again, coffee hour, breakfast out with my "church friends", and so much more that was taken from me. I pray you are able to pick up the pieces as well, and get back to life as you knew it before COVID.

Stay safe, my friends, all the best for 2021 —

Cindy Dube, Chairperson



Capital Fund Drive for HEAT

As you know, the steam boiler which heated the sanctuary and vestry had to be shut down in March due to its deteriorated and unsafe condition. The hot water boiler was also old, and the Trustees decided to replace both with new high efficiency hot water boilers. The congregation voted on September 13th to use invested funds to get this project started as soon as possible.

To date, we have spent \$149,770 on this project. As was voted upon at the special meeting in September, \$87,000 was approved to borrow, interest-free, from our invested funds. Through a capital campaign, we hope to replenish these funds over the next 3 years, 2021-2023, with support from our parishioners.

If you would like to pledge from your personal invested funds, please speak with Bob Luther or Connie Whitehead Hanks (co-chairs of the Prudential Committee) for help in doing so.

Please prayerfully consider making a contribution. Each gift, no matter how large or small, will help ensure a warm, both physically and socially, and loving environment at the First Congregational Church of Auburn for years to come.

Thank You,

Board of Trustees

Please complete this pledge form and return as soon as possible to church address below.

I answer the Trustees' call to support financially the New Boiler Project. As part of my response, I will give \$_____ as my (circle one)

Weekly / Monthly / Quarterly / Annual contribution

for a total of \$_____ during 2021 through 2023.

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please return to: First Congregational Church, 128 Central St., Auburn, MA 01501

Tidings 2021 — Subscription Renewal Form

In an effort to offset the cost of publishing the monthly *Tidings*, we are asking for members and friends to support a **voluntary** subscription.

Your participation is entirely optional and will not affect whether or not you receive the *Tidings*.

Annual Renewal - (10 issues, no July or Aug. issue)

Please enclose a check or money order for \$10 payable to: **First Congregational Church**. Please write "**Tidings**" in the memo section.

Thank You!

Please call the Church office with any questions, 508-832-2845.

Mail to: First Congregational Church
128 Central St., Auburn, MA 01501

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____



Thank you, once again, to Michele Schillinger for her dedication in organizing, picking up, delivering, and displaying the poinsettias this year. Your attention to this tradition is greatly appreciated.

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.

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or PastorBrian@auburnfirststucc.org

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

Web: auburnfirststucc.org



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OR CURRENT RESIDENT