

January

2025

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 PASTOR:

Merry Christmas, church family!

Well, our cozy/casual/pajama Sunday was certainly a memorable event. I applaud any gathering where our community is willing to be honest, homey, and testify to where they have “lost and found” Jesus over the holiday season. Thank you for your willingness to try something new: singing Christmas carols, sharing our faith experiences, hearing favorite Christmas tales and scriptures, all while eating eggs and pastries! And, most of us were wearing sweats and pajamas, allowing us a different perspective. Yes, I heard the request to have more casual coffee-house-style worships, and we can consider quarterly worship experiences that are “outside the box,” if you find them meaningful and inspiring.

Our scripture from Luke, the only snapshot of Jesus’s childhood from the Gospels, has such importance; not only is it the rare window into Jesus’s life between birth and his adult ministry, it is also a critical lesson for us in our Christmas season. Believe it or not, Mary and Joseph somehow “lose” Jesus on their journey home from the Jerusalem Passover celebrations....not unlike many of us who so easily “lose” Jesus from our Christmas celebrations. Our conversation topic on Sunday revolved around this, the losing and finding of Jesus in our faith practice.

Many of us lost Jesus in the busyness of the holiday, the gifts and logistics, but found Jesus in the faces of those we love or the retelling of the familiar story. Others shared more dramatic stories of losing and finding Jesus in their lives, a return to faith after a long time away. If you have ever “lost” Jesus for a while, you know the great joy in finding him again.



While we are on that topic of “losing” Jesus, who has our Jesus doll? He was last seen at the Cookie Walk on December 22nd, lying on a table surrounded by cookies.

Our engagement with the nativity is not over yet – we are entering the luminous season of Epiphany, enjoying the story of the three wise men (or women, as is the case in our church) and everything about epiphany. The word epiphany means manifestation of the holy, and we will be an epiphanous people! I hope to bring Three Kings Cake to church on Sunday to celebrate, and other traditions from Christians around the world who celebrate Epiphany with more passion than Christmas. The legends of the three kings are varied and fascinating, and we will consider these brilliant astronomers and their quest to bask in the bright light of the newborn babe. Are we also following that bright star? Take time, look around at the sky – God is always sprinkling our night sky with dazzling stars.

Over January, we have a few ministries in the works....we are solidifying the Saturday Supper plan for a grand spaghetti and meatball feast in March, I will be holding an info session or two about the mission trip that you are generously supporting (and recruiting new missionaries for 2026), beginning the controversial “Gospel of Mary Magdalene,” and blessing the prayer shawls, homemade outfits, and all of our craft ministries.

FCC of Auburn, we are energized, and the new year is bringing new energy for us to fulfill God’s glory.

May you follow that star of wonder,
Pastor Julie

The Three Kings by [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#)

Three Kings came riding from far away,
Melchior and Gaspar and Baltasar;
Three Wise Men out of the East were they,
And they travelled by night and they slept by day,
For their guide was a beautiful, wonderful star.

The star was so beautiful, large and clear,
That all the other stars of the sky
Became a white mist in the atmosphere,
And by this they knew that the coming was near
Of the Prince foretold in the prophecy.

(Continued on page 7)

To the Members of the First Congregational Church of Auburn, Massachusetts.

You are hereby notified and called upon to be present for the Annual Meeting of the church on Sunday, January 26, 2025 immediately following the worship service.

You can also join the meeting by Zoom. Those using Zoom should remain connected following the service. A quorum of 40 members is required.

It is both a duty and a privilege of each member of the church to be available to transact the business of the church.

WARRANT ARTICLES

- Article I** To hear the report of the Nominating Committee and elect Officers, Board and the Committee members as provided for in the Constitution and By-Laws.
- Article II** To hear and act on the report of the Church Clerk.
- Article III** To hear and act on the reports of all Boards and Committees except Nominating, Trustees, and Stewardship.
- Article IV** To hear and act on the reports of the Financial Auditor.
- Article V** To see if the church will vote to act upon the budget deficit/surplus for 2024 and anything relative thereto.
- Article VI** To hear and act on the report of the Stewardship Committee.
- Article VII** To hear the report of the Trustees and to act on the proposed budget for 2025 and other matters pertinent thereto.

The **ALL COMMITTEE MEETING**, the first meeting in 2025 for all committees, will be held on Monday, January 27th at 7 p.m. in fellowship hall.



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

FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
**LOOKING TO FILL THE POSITION
 OF CHURCH SECRETARY**

For full job description, please contact the church office or contact Pastor Julie Cedrone at pastor@auburnfirstucc.org.

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.

Save The Date



For a service of installation for The Reverend Dr. Julie Cedrone as settled Pastor of
First Congregational Church of Auburn

Sunday February 2, 2025

3:00 pm

On a Mission!

Thank you so much, dear congregation, for supporting the mission trip to the Dominican Republic. I am so grateful to represent you, and suspect that some of you will join me in future years.

For those who are not aware, I am returning to the Dominican Republic in late February for my eighth mission trip. Through Central Mass Mission, this annual trip includes a medical mission, construction projects, a vacation Bible school for kids and more! We serve the Haitian refugees in the sugar cane villages, and have been able to do great work with a mission team of about 30 people each year (usually a third are teens, including a few of my own). For more information on the mission trip to La Romana, Dominican Republic, have a look at our website: <https://laromana.fcsterling.org/>

Thank you to all who have so generously contributed to the mission trip with medical supplies, school supplies, and crafts. There are bins in Fellowship Hall if you would like to help. Our team of 30 plus volunteers brings about \$25,000 with us each year to fund medical and emergency needs - every bit helps someone who is suffering.

Thank you again for this opportunity! I will be sharing more on this mission trip (on a date yet to be determined).

All the best,
Pastor Julie

BIBLE STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

On January 14 we will begin *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala* in our Tuesday Bible Study Group. We have a few books left, if you are interested in joining us. The study begins at 12:30 p.m. or bring a lunch and fellowship at noon, prior to the study. Pastor Julie will be starting a monthly evening Bible Study beginning at 6:30 p.m. on January 30.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

“I woke up this morning, smiled at the rising sun...” Actually I woke up this morning to the sound of rain falling down on my roof and immediately began to worry about my chickens. Then, Bob Marley’s song, “Three Little Birds” kept playing over and over in my head.

After taking care of my chickens, I proceeded to scroll through social media while drinking my delicious coffee. With the New Year on the horizon, there are many posts about starting fresh and saying goodbye to the old 2024 stuff, you know the content I am referring to. There was one post that I kept scrolling back to. It read something to the effect of, “no matter how bad this past year was, no matter how tough some of your days and circumstances were, **you made it through** not only those days, but the entire year!”

If you know me, you know that I believe God puts these little reminders together on purpose for us to acknowledge, think about and praise! I have referenced Bob Marley’s song in the past, but I want to resurface the words of this song because they are an important reminder of the messages found throughout the Bible. Here is a quick recap:

“Rose up this morning, smiled at the rising sun...” – Psalm 108:2-3

3 Little birds... Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Ephesians 4:4-6

“Don’t worry about a thing..” – Philippians 4:13

“Every little thing is going to be alright!” – Jude 1:2

Social Media post about making it through each day – Psalm 23:4

Take a moment to look up these verses in the Bible, share them with your children and grandchildren. This is your reminder that God wants to take our sorrow, our worry, our troubles. When we let Him remove these feelings from our heart, it makes more room for love.

Beginning in January, our Sunday School classes will be learning about the life of Jesus. Every lesson will refer back to Jesus’s words stated in Matthew 22:37-39. “Jesus said unto him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is, like unto it, thy shall love thy neighbor as themselves.”

So as we enter this new year, filled with new beginnings, I pray that you will all remember to give your angst to the Lord, so that you may lead your life from a place of LOVE!



Thank you to our church congregation and the families at HWG for your support in all the YOM fundraisers for the month of December. Your support and generosity help remove any financial burdens for our teens attending Monadnock in February, as well as future events for our students.

Thank you to Michele S., Stephanie S., and Carrie G. for sharing your gifts and talents with our children in Sunday School.

Thank you to my dear friend and sister in faith, Denise. You are one of a kind and I am so grateful to have had your love and support over the years. I love you!!!!

Thank you to Pastor Julie for your commitment to our church and to our people!

Thank you so much to my church family for the generous gift this Christmas. It means so much that you all believe in me and believe in my message to our students.

Happy New Year ~ I love you all so much!!

Shannon Hartmann



Happy New Year! January is National Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, Glaucoma Awareness Month, National Blood Donor Month, and National Birth Defects Prevention Month. It is also National Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

In June, at my Parish Nurse Seminar, we had a speaker who had been trafficked for 5 years. Her story was amazing. She was able to save money by putting it in a baggie and hiding it in the soil of her plants until she got \$2,000.00. Every Sunday, we're reminded to pray for Brittany T. I hope that she is safe and will have a positive outcome. January 11 is wear blue day for Trafficking awareness.... please pass this on and keep them in your prayers.

I hope and pray you all have a healthy month.

God Bless!

Debbie Pranaitis, Parish Nurse, cell: 508-612-4521

FROM THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating Committee is still trying to fill 9 Board/Committee positions prior to the fast approaching January Annual Meeting. The committee vacancies include:

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

If you are a church member and interested in one of these openings, please contact Michele Schillinger, 508-259-2239.

We received the following note in December.

A warm thank you to Pastor Julie and Deb Pranaitis for their hospital visits, prayers and support.

A big thank you to my church family for all the cards and continued prayers and well wishes. I am truly blessed.

*Thank you,
Barbara Cowden*

Barbara A. (Booth) Cowden, 83, of Auburn, passed away peacefully on Friday, January 3, 2025 after a courageous fight with cancer, with her loving family by her side.

She leaves her daughter, Dr. Wendie Holland and her husband James; and her two beloved grandchildren, Hannah Rose and Casey Holland. She also leaves her sister-in-law, Judith Booth; a niece; and two nephews. Barbara was predeceased by her sister, Virginia Groccia; and her brother, Warren Booth.

Barbara was born in Worcester, daughter of the late Allard and Ruby (Chapman) Booth. She graduated with honors from Auburn High School. Barbara worked for 32 years as an Executive Administrative Assistant to the owners of The Fair Department Stores. Barbara was an active member of our church. She was also an active member of Auburn Assembly #68 IORG. Barbara travelled extensively both within the U.S. and internationally.

A calling hour will be held here at the church from 10 – 11 AM on Sat., January 11 with a memorial service to follow at 11 AM.

Please remember the family in your prayers.



January Tidings from Here We Grow Preschool

Happy New Year! We hope you all had a wonderful and relaxing holiday. Winter is really here, and we feel so blessed to have the vestry available to us. Most schools in our area do not have such a wonderful space, and the children need the opportunity to run around every day.

Our 3-year-olds had their Christmas programs on Dec. 16th and 19th with sing-alongs in the classrooms with family and friends. The 4-year-olds' concert was on the stage in fellowship hall the morning of Dec. 20th. It was so nice to see everyone enjoy the show, and parents were very generous with the goodies for our 4-year-olds' parties. We hope some of you were able to stop by and see the children perform. They worked very hard learning new songs and singing some old favorites. A big thank you to my husband for playing Santa for the children again this year and to Matt Gour for stepping in and playing Santa for the M/F 3-year-old class. They all love to see Santa come to school.

This year we again collected toys in conjunction with the Auburn Police Department's "Secret Santa" program. Family support was great; we filled our large box multiple times and were able to help make the holiday special for some Auburn families.

Thank you to Pastor Julie for helping to organize a "Jingle Bell Parade" at Auburn Life Care Center. We had several families join us to sing, hand out candy canes to the residents and spread holiday cheer to the residents.

Enrollment forms for next year have gone out for in-house registration and spaces are filling up. 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 be happy to hear from them. **Open House will take place March 20, 2025, 9-11 AM.**

If you participated in our cookie fundraiser this year, thank you! I hope you enjoyed them.

Wishing everyone a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Here We Grow Staff

From the Church Secretary —

Words cannot adequately express my appreciation for your kindness shown to me this Christmas. Your generosity, in its various forms, be it cards, goodies or gifts, has, once again, blessed me beyond measure. With heartfelt gratitude — Denise

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

**Imagine
Together**

To date, 65 pledges have been reported for a total of \$126,500! This will allow our trustees to set a budget for 2025 that moves our church forward with the needed funds for salaries, funds for needed maintenance, new community projects and outreach. Your response to God's goodness has increased our ability to make our vision into a reality: **livestream worship, outreach community**

meals, teen programming, mission trips at home and abroad, quality worship services, education and workshops for all ages, collaboration throughout our town to bring healing and love to the places where it is needed.

"To whom much is given, much will be required." — Luke 12:48

Stewardship Committee: Nan Johnson, Ron Klaucke, Lori-Ann Stockhaus



The Three Kings by [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#)
Continued from page one:

Three caskets they bore on their saddle-bows,
Three caskets of gold with golden keys;
Their robes were of crimson silk with rows
Of bells and pomegranates and furbelows,
Their turbans like blossoming almond-trees.

And so the Three Kings rode into the West,
Through the dusk of the night, over hill and dell,
And sometimes they nodded with beard on breast,
And sometimes talked, as they paused to rest,
With the people they met at some wayside well.

“Of the child that is born,” said Baltasar,
“Good people, I pray you, tell us the news;
For we in the East have seen his star,
And have ridden fast, and have ridden far,
To find and worship the King of the Jews.”

And the people answered, “You ask in vain;
We know of no King but Herod the Great!”
They thought the Wise Men were men insane,
As they spurred their horses across the plain,
Like riders in haste, who cannot wait.

And when they came to Jerusalem,
Herod the Great, who had heard this thing,
Sent for the Wise Men and questioned them;
And said, “Go down unto Bethlehem,
And bring me tidings of this new king.”

So they rode away; and the star stood still,
The only one in the grey of morn;
Yes, it stopped—it stood still of its own free will,
Right over Bethlehem on the hill,
The city of David, where Christ was born.

And the Three Kings rode through the gate and the guard,
Through the silent street, till their horses turned
And neighed as they entered the great inn-yard;
But the windows were closed, and the doors were barred,
And only a light in the stable burned.

And cradled there in the scented hay,
In the air made sweet by the breath of kine,
The little child in the manger lay,
The child, that would be king one day
Of a kingdom not human, but divine.

His mother Mary of Nazareth
Sat watching beside his place of rest,
Watching the even flow of his breath,
For the joy of life and the terror of death
Were mingled together in her breast.

They laid their offerings at his feet:
The gold was their tribute to a King,
The frankincense, with its odor sweet,
Was for the Priest, the Paraclete,
The myrrh for the body’s burying.

And the mother wondered and bowed her head,
And sat as still as a statue of stone,
Her heart was troubled yet comforted,
Remembering what the Angel had said
Of an endless reign and of David’s throne.

Then the Kings rode out of the city gate,
With a clatter of hoofs in proud array;
But they went not back to Herod the Great,
For they knew his malice and feared his hate,
And returned to their homes by another way.

Thank you to everyone who contributed a poinsettia to decorate the sanctuary and altar during the Christmas season. **Special thanks to Michele Schillinger** for all her hard work coordinating all the details, and thank you to all who helped unload the delivery and assisted with the marking and arrangement of the poinsettias.

We also want to recognize Michele for all her efforts in organizing and assembling the *beautiful* Deacons’ Christmas baskets and stockings!

We received a thank you card with the following handwritten note.

Thank you for your kindness during this very special holiday season.

With every best wish for a healthy and Happy New Year — Pat Bukoski

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP NEWS

Be sure to check out our **Puzzle and Magazine Bookcase** in the back of the sanctuary (to the left of the choir room entrance). Feel free to take a puzzle and/or magazine to enjoy at home during your leisure time.

The next Women's Fellowship meeting will be held on Saturday, January 18 at 9 a.m. in fellowship hall.

JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE

SCOUT SUNDAY

DURING OUR WORSHIP SERVICE ON FEBRUARY 2ND.



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.*

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19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

OR CURRENT RESIDENT