



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*

***November 29th**
1st Sunday in Advent

***December 6th**
2nd Sunday in Advent
Communion Sunday with
Deacons’ offering

***December 13th**
3rd Sunday in Advent

* Sunday Services begin at 10 a.m.



All Are Welcome

***December 20th**
4th Sunday in Advent

December 24th
Christmas Eve
Christmas Carols on
the front lawn - 5 p.m.
8 p.m. Candlelight
Communion Service

***** PLEASE NOTE THE TIME CHANGE TO THE CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT COMMUNION SERVICE. THIS YEAR, TO COMPLY WITH THE CURRENT COVID RELATED 10 P.M. CURFEW, THE SERVICE WILL BEGIN AT 8 P.M. *****

FROM THE PASTOR

Well, just like the rest of the year, Christmas is going to be different. We have to think long and hard about what we are going to do for Christmas and Advent. Things like:

- What do we feel safe doing?
- What is safe for the people we love?
- What is too important to skip or cancel?
- What is just too much?

At the church, we have decided to cancel the potluck/ hymn sing/ Christmas baskets. We will make a video of some Christmas carols and post it on YouTube for you to play at your leisure. Instead of Christmas baskets, we will have a “card shower” for our shut-ins. We will have packets of cards put together that you can mail yourself or bring back to church to mail in a package.

We are moving our Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion service to 8PM, earlier in the night due to the curfew. We are also doing a video Christmas pag-

ent this year. We will do an outdoor carol sing-along on Christmas Eve at 5PM, if the weather cooperates. If the weather doesn’t, we will probably do a car “parade” instead.

We have also been asked if people would post Christmas greetings on our Facebook page so we can see our Church family. We will try to send them out in other ways for those not on Facebook.

All of this means Christmas will be different, but, hopefully, not lonely. This year we will make decisions that are not fun, but Christmas will still be joyful.

God bless you all, as we welcome the Christ child born in a manger.

Pastor Brian



If you would like to honor any of our church staff with a monetary gift this season, please make checks payable to the church noting who it's for in the memo section.

Thank you.



THE CHRISTMAS FUND 2020

"For Such a Time as This." Esther 4:14

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. Over the past nine months, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency financial needs of many who serve the church have increased dramatically.

We are grateful for the generosity of churches and individuals who contributed to the Christmas Fund in 2019. Your generosity enabled:

- monthly pension supplementation for 350 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,347,419),
- health premium supplementation for 144 retired clergy and lay employees (\$374,577),
- emergency grants for 69 individuals and families (\$123,727) and
- Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to 521 retired clergy and lay employees (\$260,500).

In such a time as this, the need for the Christmas Fund is more urgent than ever. United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. On their behalf we thank you!

The Pension Boards — United Church of Christ, Inc. and United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance

Offering envelopes are available along side the collection plates on the back table of the sanctuary. Please feel free to call the church office, 508-832-2845, to request that an envelope be mailed to you or simply make a check out to the church noting "UCC Christmas Fund" in the memo section and mail to the church: 128 Central Street, Auburn, MA 01501. Thank you for your support.

Boy Scouts' Annual Wreath Sale

The scouts will be selling Christmas wreaths and cemetery baskets/logs on the Church lawn on Sunday, December 6th.

Your support is greatly appreciated.
For delivery call 774-239-2240.



DECEMBER

Birthdays

Nathan Minor	~	Dec. 4th
Rebecca McPherson	~	Dec. 28th
Lori-Ann Stockhaus	~	Dec. 28th

ATTENTION ALL COMMITTEES/BOARDS:

**ANNUAL REPORT SUBMISSIONS
ARE DUE JANUARY 4th. Please discuss amongst yourselves who will be responsible for your report.**

FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Merry Christmas to you all! As we begin this very special season, my prayers for you are for good health and patience. This has certainly been a very different and sometimes difficult year. We are all fortunate that we believe in a loving God who will guide us through anything as long as we are open to listen.

On November 1 we had a lawn party, complete with costumes, games, and candy! I want to thank everyone who opened their trunk and contributed to the fun.

Due to the current health crisis, Christmas services will be different this year. First, we will be caroling on the front lawn (weather permitting) for the 5:00 family service. All are encouraged to attend. If you don't want to sing, you can sit in your car and share with your church family. The pageant will be a video that stars the church children and their families. More information will be coming in regard to viewing.



We are inviting the congregation to go to the church Facebook account to leave a message to share with the whole church family.

I pray that you all have a wonderful and blessed Christmas and New Year.

Through love serve one another. Galatians 5:13

Jean McPherson, Director of Religious Education



OUTREACH NEWS

The Board of Christian Outreach is looking for donations of **men's clothing** for CityReach, an overnight urban outreach program. You may recall that our past candidates for confirmation have participated in this program. The program gives young people the opportunity to learn first hand about homelessness.

During the pandemic, CityReach continues to offer clothing to unhoused guests who come to "shop" from among the donated items. They are requesting **men's apparel only** as 80% of the unhoused guests are male and even the women prefer men's clothing. Please bag your donations and indicate date of drop off (post-it notes are provided on the designated tables in fellowship hall). Recording date of drop-off is a precaution during COVID to allow time between bag handling. Items requested include **MEN'S**:

coats	sweatshirts
socks	blankets/sleeping bags
sweaters	handwarmers
pants	hats/gloves

At our November meeting, we decided to designate \$150 to CityReach to use at thrift stores/Salvation Army to purchase items listed above that aren't brought in through our collection. On December 9th, Pastor Brian, Shannon, Hendrix, and Elsa Hartmann will be delivering the collected items to CityReach in Boston. Therefore, **we are asking that all donations be dropped off here at the church by Sunday, December 6th.**

We still have some money remaining that we need to allocate before the end of the year. If you have any suggestions of worthy causes we should consider, please let us know.

Thank you,

Your Outreach Committee: Pat Bukoski, Cindy Dube, Joyce Ringgard, Kay Shapter, and Marion Woodcock



December 1st is World AIDS Day.

December 6-13th is National Handwashing Awareness Week. Especially with the Covid-19, everyone should be well aware of the importance of handwashing.

The holidays are approaching and coronavirus positivity rates, hospitalizations, and deaths are rising. A glimmer of hope is sparked as vaccines are being worked on. We are sad; we long for family celebrations! This is probably the hardest time to continue our efforts to protect ourselves and others by maintaining social distancing, wearing masks, and washing our hands frequently.

The most loving thing we can do is hold onto hope, stay connected at a distance, practice patience, and educate ourselves.

I'm always concerned about the people who are sad at the holidays and this year could be even worse. We need to remember those who are alone and reach out to them. A phone call means a lot. If you are feeling down, reach out to someone for help. We're all in this together and we need each other to get through.

God bless — Stay safe — Keep praying.
Debbie Pranaitis, Parish Nurse, 508-612-4521

NOMINATION OPENINGS for Church Members in 2021

Annually, our Congregational members come together to fill boards and committees. It's due to this faithful service that, in a big part, determines the welfare of our church. Whether in the past you were part of this commitment, are currently serving, or considering a new nomination, let us ALL praise you with thanksgiving.

The heart that beats strong within our House of God is due to the solidarity of every faithful servant. Alone, for some, it takes courage to join; but serving together increases the benefits to our church's history, its active and current needs, and the continuity for its future.

New terms for 2021 nominees will begin in January 2021 upon installation. The open position for Clerk Officer can be expedited upon the earliest Council meeting vote. All other openings (Board of Ed, Stewardship, Deacons, and Trustees) have been posted in the church bulletins, along with their terms.

NOMINATING CONTACT INFORMATION IS AS FOLLOWS:

Sue MacPhee — House: (508) 832-9347, Text/Cell (508) 864-2454, susiemac2002@gmail.com

Judi Taft — Text/Cell: (508) 341-4530, jtaft01527@aol.com

Sheila Skog — Text/Cell: (978) 387-7705, sheilaskog@gmail.com

NOMINATING VOLUNTEER SLIP - All vacancies are open to FCC "MEMBERS."

I'm interested in: _____ Committee/Board

My name is: _____ My contact number is: _____

Best time to call is: _____

Please turn the slip into the church or contact the Nominating Committee as quickly as possible. Thank you!



Happy Holidays from **Here We Grow** Preschool

The last few weeks have been busy. In some ways it feels like the school year has just begun and, yet, we are entering December. With so many programs around us having difficulties at this time, we are grateful for everyday that we get to be open. We have successfully completed our third month of school. We are thankful the weather has been cooperative, and we are still able to get outside; fresh air is so good for everyone.

Here We Grow was pleased to once again be able to donate a turkey and other items to the church to be delivered to families during the Thanksgiving holiday. We were also happy to be asked to be part of the CityReach clothing drive this year. Over the years, we have found our families to always be willing to help.

We have an ongoing fundraiser happening at this time; HWG is collecting new and used athletic shoes. We will be compensated from \$0.25-\$3.00 per pair of shoes donated. Usable shoes will be sent to underprivileged places and those that are not useable will be recycled into other items, such as playground mulch. There is a donation box in fellowship hall.

During the month of December, **Here We Grow** will work with the Auburn Police Department in the collection of unwrapped toys and items for children ranging from infant to sixteen-years-old. The police department will distribute everything collected to children living in Auburn. Due to the COVID virus we are unable to hold our normal holiday program for the families. So, we got a bit creative and will live stream very short programs to the parents from the individual classrooms. We will look forward to the feedback from our families about this.

The school will be closed from December 23 - January 1. Our first day back will be January 4, 2021. The **Here We Grow** staff and families wish all of you a safe and happy holiday season.

Cristi Corey - Director, **Here We Grow** Preschool

Dear Friends,

Christmas without singing together?! It just doesn't seem right!! And yet, here we are in a "singing lockdown" to prevent those nasty COVID droplets from infecting one another! Needless to say, this is a difficult time for everyone.

The great Augustine said: "Singing is praying twice." And we all know how we feel when we let loose and sing with all our hearts! So what to do...

I suggest you sing at home with your family — a favorite CD, the radio, TV, or with the music that Pastor Brian, Jackie Knox, and I are preparing to share with you. Sing in the car or when you're on a walk. We need to keep using our voices-- keep them ready for the day when we will be able to sing in church once again.

And remember what the psalmist said, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." So even if you think you can't sing well, just make that "joyful noise." It will give you and yours a boost, and you'll be ready for the day when we will all sing Alleluia! again.

May you have a blessed Christmas season filled with peace, hope, and love.



Paulette

WAMS (Worcester Area Mission Society) is partnering with The Boys & Girls Club of Worcester to purchase and collect 220 **new** winter coats for kids ages Pre-K to 18-years-old. The specific sizes needed by youth at the Club are:

- 20 – SM Size Boys & Girls
- 35 – Med Size Boys & Girls
- 40 – Lg Size Boys & Girls
- 20 – Sm Size Adult (Men’s & Women’s)
- 30 – Med Size Adult (Men’s & Women’s)
- 40 – Lg Size Adult (Men’s & Women’s)
- 20 – XL Size Adult (Men’s & Women’s)
- 10 – XXL Size Adult (Men’s & Women’s)
- 5 – XXXL Size Adult (Men’s & Women’s)

As an alternative, please consider sending a donation to WAMS to cover as many coats as you are able (\$100 buys 4-5 small coats or 2-3 large coats). Please specify Winter Coat Drive in the memo section of your check and mail to: WAMS, 6 Institute Rd., Worcester, MA 01609. Please call 508-755-2329 with any questions or to arrange a drop off time.

They are targeting Friday, December 11th, as the last day of the collection.

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. Thanks for your support!



2020 Christmas Poinsettia Order Form

We are, again, offering the opportunity to purchase poinsettias at great prices. In the past we've decorated the sanctuary with these beautiful plants. At the close of the Christmas Eve service, members are able to claim their plants and continue to enjoy them at home, or give them as gifts. You may dedicate your poinsettia in memory of a loved one, or in celebration of a special occasion. Dedications will be included as an insert in our Christmas bulletins. Please complete the order form below and include payment of cash or check with your order.



ORDER YOUR
Poinsettias



Poinsettia Given By: PLEASE PRINT

Name(s): _____
Include above name(s) in dedication? Yes _____ No _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

In Memory of _____
or _____

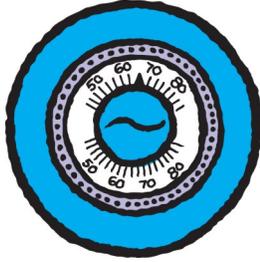
In Celebration of _____

We have decided to limit the color choice this year to one color **(red)** and only 2 sizes. Hopefully, this will reduce the amount of handling required when it's time to take plants home.

Sizes: **Single Plant Pot \$8.00** _____
 Double Plant Pot \$16.00 _____

_____ check here if you will **NOT** be taking your poinsettia home.
If you have any questions, call Michele Schillinger, cell # 508-259-2239.

↑ **ORDERS DUE BY SUNDAY, DEC. 6TH** ↓



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 by December 31, 2020.

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



Maybelle (Masterson) Stone passed away on October 29, 2020 after a full 97 years! She was pre-deceased by her husband Loring (Do) Stone in 2001. She was born in Auburn, MA, the youngest of seven children of which she was the last to leave this world. She graduated from Auburn High School in 1941 where she was active in tennis, track, basketball, and many clubs, as well as her sorority. May continued that level of activity throughout her life, enjoying skiing, sailing, horseback riding, golf, tennis, racquetball, swimming, writing, as well as yoga, book clubs, classes at Worcester State and Assumption, and travel in the US, Europe, the Caribbean, and Cuba. May practiced reiki, volunteered at hospitals, literacy programs, and taught and served as Commander at the Coast Guard Auxiliary. She and Do once manned the Boston Harbor lighthouse for a week.

At home she did knitting, quilting, jewelry making, painting, wine making, stenciling and baking for all the fundraisers.

After their marriage during WWII, she and Loring lived in the neighborhood that they built on family land. They were hosts for many parties there and, for years, May organized the neighborhood Christmas caroling with the kids. She lived there until the last day she could.

She was a lifelong member of the First Congregational Church of Auburn, spending many hours as a Sunday school teacher, a trustee, a worker, and chair of the holiday fair. She also helped to redecorate the sanctuary and to bring the Interfaith Hospitality and the Pumpkin Patch to the church. May reached out to connect with everyone she met.

She leaves three daughters, Paula Shugrue (Don), Diane Moore (Paul), and Andrea Pichette (Skip/Art). Her children, 5 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren were loved unconditionally by May and will continue to be inspired by her love for all their lives.

The family will gather for a celebration of May's life as COVID allows. In her honor, please do a good deed.

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.’” — John 11:25-26 ESV

To the Members of the Congregational Church of Auburn,

I'm sorry that this was mailed so late, but I wanted to thank everyone for the generous scholarship. It was very helpful in allowing me to pursue my educational goals at UNH. So far, going to college during a pandemic has been very challenging. I'm looking forward to when things return to normal.

Take care and be safe,

Caitlin (Morrison)

During times of inclement weather, we have set up an account with **INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY** 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.



From the Board of Deacons:

Due to the pandemic, we've been forced to reconsider the way we typically celebrate the holidays. This includes finding creative and resourceful options to accomplish our faithful Christmas traditions and still adhere to the current safety standards. That being said, the Deacons have decided to refrain (this one year) from delivering Christmas baskets/stockings and, instead, with your help, to bless our church family with a "card shower." Beginning November 29th, we have made available a collection of Christmas cards, bagged, and ready for pick up after the worship service, or during office hours at the church. With your participation, once cards are returned, they will be sorted and mailed collectively to each of our church recipients. Feel free to add an encouraging message along with your signature. We are requesting that cards be dropped off to the church by December 13th in order to allow time for addressing and mailing them for Christmas. Of course, if more convenient, you may feel free to mail cards directly. (Our thanks to Debbie Pranaitis for addressing many of the cards and bagging them.)



Also, you may recall that in recent years the Deacons' baskets were assembled at our annual potluck and Christmas carol sing-along led by Jackie Knox. While this fun time will certainly be missed, Jackie and Paulette are combining talents to create a virtual sing-along. As Christmas draws near, look for an email with a link to this special song time. We will also post the link to the church's Facebook page.

COMPLETING YOUR 2020 PLEDGES AND DONATIONS

Please be aware that any pledges or donations the church receives showing a postmark **after** December 31, 2020, will be posted and reportable for next year's 2021 giving statement, and **not** for 2020. **All pledges and donations received before the deadline of December 31, 2020, will be reported on your 2020 giving statement.** All gifts are greatly appreciated and checks should be made payable to: **First Congregational Church.**

Bless you all for your pledges and donations during this most challenging year. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Thank you,
Sue MacPhee, Financial Secretary
Lori-Ann Stockhaus, Assistant Financial Secretary



Christmas arrangements

made of fresh greens will once again be available for you to purchase. This year, the arrangements will be sold **before and after the worship service on Dec. 13th**. Arrangements will also be available to purchase on Saturday afternoon, Dec. 12th, from 3-4:00. If you plan on stopping by, please call me, Cindy Dube (774-238-0260), so I know who to expect. We will need to socially distance and wear masks.

As you may recall, we gather all our own greens, so there is no expense involved. All monies taken in will go to the church's general fund. Keep these in mind when doing your holiday shopping; they make lovely hostess gifts and most are suitable for a table centerpiece. We enjoy making these and hope you will support this small church fundraiser.

— Judy Murphy & Cindy Dube

2021 PLEDGE CARD UPDATE: As of November 19th, we have received pledge cards totaling \$123,890. Thank you to all who have returned their 2021 pledge cards. Pledges help the Trustees in preparing the 2021 budget. **Please return your pledge card even if you're not pledging so we may avoid costs associated with a follow-up mailing.** Thank you.

DECEMBER SERMON TITLES

Dec. 6	"Comfort My People"
Dec 13	"Always Seek to Do Good to One Another and to All."
Dec 20	"The Announcement"
Dec 24	8 P.M. Communion Service "Mary Treasured These Things"
Dec 27	"God is Good"



Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

TIDINGS is a monthly publication of

**First Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ
128 Central St., Auburn MA 01501**

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Email: secretary@auburnfirstucc.org
or PastorBrian@auburnfirstucc.org

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

Web: auburnfirstucc.org



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

December 2020

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

OR CURRENT RESIDENT