

The First Church **FAMILY**

*The First Church in Albany · Founded in 1642
Reformed Church in America*

April 2015

WORSHIP:

5 Easter Sunday

10:15 am Pre-Service Music
10:30 am Sanctuary Service (Communion)
(During Worship: Children & Worship)
Post-service: Coffee and Conversation

12 Second Sunday of Easter

10:30 am Sanctuary Service
(During Worship: Children & Worship)
Post-service: Coffee and Conversation
Noon Trustees (Parlor)

19 Third Sunday of Easter

10:30 am Sanctuary Service (Baptism)
(During Worship: Children & Worship)
Post-service: Coffee and Conversation

26 Fourth Sunday of Easter

10:30 am Sanctuary Service
(During Worship: Children & Worship)
Post-service: Coffee and Conversation
First Church Readers

Our Sunday morning service may be found anytime at www.firstchurchinalbany.org.

FAMILY is published eleven times a year by First Church in Albany, 110 North Pearl Street, Albany, NY 12207-223

From the Pastor

“Bless you!”

We often hear or speak those words in response to a sneeze. They are words we sometimes speak without thinking. But what if we really meant it? What does it mean to be blessed? What does it mean to bless others?

Apparently blessing another person is something we can actually do. In the mystery of God’s grace we can confer blessing or we can withhold it.

Jesus thought so. He took children in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). After his resurrection Jesus led his disciples out of the city and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. (Luke 24: 50).

Paul thought so: “Bless those who persecute you,” he wrote, “bless and do not curse them.”

Elizabeth thought so: “Blessed are you among women,” she said to Mary, “and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”

In Marilynne Robinson’s novel, *Gilead*, the Rev. John Ames, nearing the end of his life, reflects on his ministry. Writing to his young son he recalls a time when as a child he took it upon himself to baptize some cats.

“I still remember how those warm little brows felt under the palm of my hand. Everyone has petted a cat, but to touch one like that, with the pure intention of blessing it, is a very different thing. It stays in the mind. For years we would wonder what, from a cosmic viewpoint, we have done to them. It still seems to me to be a real question. There is a reality in blessing,... It doesn’t enhance sacredness, but it acknowledges it, and there is power in that. I have felt it pass through me, so to speak. The sensation is of really knowing a creature, I mean really feeling its mysterious life and your own mysterious life at the same time.” --Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), p. 23.

“There is a reality in blessing,... It doesn’t enhance sacredness, but it acknowledges it, and there is power in that.” Each of us has the power to bless another life. You can acknowledge the sacredness in another human being; you can call out what is good and true and holy in them; you can help them see and acknowledge the Christ that is already growing within them.

We are called to bless each other.

Each morning near the start of the day some of the questions that go through my mind are: “What must I do today? What do I need to accomplish? What challenges and obstacles will I have to face? Who will I encounter?” I suspect most of us ask questions

like that. But more and more I am trying to begin my day with another question: Who will I bless today? What lives can I touch in a way that will help them see the gift that is in them? How will I acknowledge the sacredness of the others I meet today? Who will I be able to tell today: "Blessed are you and blessed is the little Christ already growing within you."

To touch someone like that, with the pure intention of blessing him or her —that is a very wonderful thing.

Who will you bless today?

Blessings,

John Paarlberg

At Home with the WORD

Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary

April 1st – April 30th

Available online at: www.rca.org/athome

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. Hebrews 12:1-3 | 15. Psalm 4:4-8 |
| 2. <i>Maundy Thursday</i> ;
John 13:1-17 | 16. 1 John 3:1-3 |
| 3. Good Friday;
Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9 | 17. 1 John 3:4-7 |
| 4. John 19:38-42 | 18. Luke 24:36-48 |
| 5. <i>Easter Sunday</i> | 19. <i>Third Sunday of Easter</i> |
| 6. Acts 4:32-35 | 20. Acts 4:5-12 |
| 7. Psalm 133 | 21. Psalm 23:1-4 |
| 8. 1 John 1:1-4 | 22. Psalm 23:5-6 |
| 9. 1 John 1:5-2:2 | 23. 1 John 3:16-18 |
| 10. John 20:19-23 | 24. 1 John 3:19-24 |
| 11. John 20:24-31 | 25. John 10:11-18 |
| 12. <i>Second Sunday of Easter</i> | 26. <i>Fourth Sunday of Easter</i> |
| 13. Acts 3:12-19 | 27. Acts 8:26-31 |
| 14. Psalm 4:1-3 | 28. Acts 8:32-40 |
| | 29. Psalm 22:25-31 |
| | 30. 1 John 4:7-16 |

First Church Christmas Offering Ministry Update

A portion of the First Church Christmas offering was designated for the ministry of the Rev. Ken and Marcia Bradsell who are serving as Reformed Church missionaries in Oman. Last month Ken wrote about their ministry at the Protestant Church in Oman.

Supporters and Friends,

Our first weeks in Oman have been incredibly full and now-and-then complicated by the issues typical of "getting settled and acclimated" in a new country. Here's a sample of some early encounters:

- "I have to reload my cell phone account with a card with a scratch-off code I buy at the petrol station?"
- "Wait a minute, what's petrol?"
- "Thanks for the gas, I mean petrol, but I asked that you fill the tank. You did fill it? And it only cost RO 5.5 (\$14.29 US)? I've been driving this car for a week and a half."
- "Why do I need a second blood test to get a driver's license? I just had a blood test to get a residence card. Maybe you should be more concerned that I can't read those Arabic road signs."
- "You only want RO 1.5 (\$3.90 US) for that haircut, shave, upper body massage, etc., etc.? I'm going to bring all my friends here!"

We are settling and adjusting well to our new home and to the return after many years to life as a parish minister. I am enjoying worship leadership again -- doing what I set out to do when I was called to ministry! The parishioners in all of the congregations have been gracious, hospitable, and helpful. My two ordained colleagues, Rev. Chris Howitz and Rev. Michael Peppen are relieved that the new RCA guy has finally arrived to join the preaching and worship rotation. We alternate preaching and worship leadership (liturgist) responsibility.

We have four English language services on weekends in Muscat, three on Friday on our campus in the Ghala district of Muscat, and one on Sunday evening on our campus in the Ruwi district of Muscat. Friday is sabbath in Oman. We worship on Sunday evening at the Ruwi church because Sunday is the first day of the work/school week and our parishioners can't attend until evening. Attendance averages 700-900 weekly. Another 75-100 worship on Thursday evening in an Arabic service. And, 400 worship weekly on our campus 2-hours north of Muscat in the city of Sohar. Our Muscat based pastoral team currently rotates through the Sohar church (one English language and four Indian language group congregations).

We have just called a new Indian pastor to be based in Sohar. We anticipate his arrival sometime after Easter. We have also just retained a new pastor from Egypt to serve the Arabic congregation. He also will begin sometime in April.

Our congregations include Christians from Oman and across the globe. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the nations of northern Africa, Western Europe, Canada, the USA, the nations of South America, and of course, south and southeast Asia. You would not be able to find a more diverse RCA church anywhere on earth. The diversity is not limited to nationality. We are made up of professionals from many disciplines with a number of engineers assigned to the petroleum companies. We have lawyers, bankers, many teachers. a large number of medical personnel (many trained at the hospital and medical school in Vellore, India), and diplomats. We also have non-professional workers from the various trades with construction being a major industry in this rapidly expanding nation.

While worship is mostly done in English or with translation (Sohar and our Arabic ministry) Marcia and I intend to begin learning Arabic sometime after Easter. We believe it is essential to learn sufficient Arabic so we are able to communicate in the first language of the country even though English is widely spoken everywhere. Our colleagues and partners in ministry here in Muscat at the RCA's Al Amana Center, Rev. Doug Leonard and Rev. Justin Meyers, have also allowed me to audit a course being taught to their semester abroad students on Omani history and culture. This has provided a terrific orientation to our new home.

Oman is a neutral, peaceful, relatively crime free, and very forward looking nation. It prides itself on the quality and accessibility of education through college for all of its citizens. It has one of the best medical systems in the world with 56 hospitals throughout the capital district alone (where about 50% of the 4.1 million national population live). Other cities and the interior rural areas have numerous walk-in clinics and pharmacies. Well designed (and landscaped!) highways are numerous, well maintained, spotlessly clean and speed is monitored electronically at all times. Of course, speed monitoring doesn't seem to hinder the Omani drivers from exercising their right to go as fast as they want! Fines are assessed annually when auto registration is renewed. One never knows until renewal time how steep the cost for the previous year's aggression behind the wheel might be.

Oman is a Muslim nation and the Muslim faith dominates all aspects of culture and life. My days of waking to NPR's "Morning Edition" have been transformed by the wake-up call to prayer at sunrise -- frankly, a refreshing and excellent discipline to begin the day with praise and thanksgiving rather than the morning's news! All levels of the government and all the Omanis we have met have been welcoming and hospitable to us. The Sultanate continues to be supportive of the work of the Protestant Church and has assisted in helping us improve and build new facilities at our Ruwi location (dedicated just one year ago). With 124 years of continuous ministry in Oman the RCA is highly regarded and a trusted presence here.

I will close out update with a very simple but heartfelt thank you to all of you, and all of the RCA congregations, who have provided the financial commitments that have allowed us to serve the church here. We are deeply grateful to each and all of you.

Blessings,
Rev. Ken (and Marcia) Bradsell



Anyone attending an orthodox synagogue today will see the men are all wearing prayer shawls. For centuries prayer shawls have been a very important part of Jewish life. The Tallith (Prayer Shawl) is a religious symbol, a garment, shroud, cloak which envelops the Jewish worshipper both physically and spiritually, in prayer and celebration, joy and sorrow. The Tallith (pronounced tal-eeet) is present at all Jewish sacred celebrations, (weddings, bat mitzvahs, burials). It protects the scrolls of the Torah when they are moved and the dead are wrapped in them when they are buried.

The wearing of the Tallith was commanded by God in Deuteronomy 22:12 and Num 15:37-40. The blessing of Berachah states, **"Blessed are You, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who makes us holy with commandments, and has commanded us to wrap ourselves in the shawl."**

Prayer shawls have taken on religious significance in our Protestant faith practice as well. In more recent years we have begun the practice of giving prayer shawls to those in sorrowful and difficult transitions and to those who are in times of joy.



Here at first church we started a new prayer shawl ministry on January 12th of this year. We have been meeting monthly in the Parlor. During this gathering we knit and crochet shawls together, visit with one another, bless shawls, and talk about giving shawls to those who could benefit. In our time together prayers and caring thoughts are woven into the shawls so that those who receive them are embraced by the warmth of the shawl and the love and hope threaded into them. We have given 7 shawls or lap blankets to date.

You also might have noticed at the doors of our sanctuary we have baskets filled with “Pocket Prayer Shawls”. These are made by our group for anyone who wishes to take one or a few along to give to others. There is a card placed with each one that sends a caring message from our church to those in need of God’s comfort and blessing. There are 9 of us taking part in this ministry right now. We also have members who cannot attend (due to physical limitation) who make shawls at home and send them to us to bless and give to others. Anyone is welcome to join us at 11:30 am one Monday each month. Dates will be listed in our bulletins or newsletters. Also feel free to give Denise a call for specific dates.

Easter Offering

The Easter offering has been designated for two ministries: The Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless and the Kibera artisans cooperative and Sosep School outside of Nairobi, Kenya.

The Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless is on Sheridan Avenue just a few blocks west of the church. IPH provides a variety of services including a drop-in center, an emergency shelter as well transitional and permanent housing for both individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Recently youth from First Church and other Albany Synod churches prepared and served lunch for the residents at IPH.

For the past several years, First Church has helped support an artisan’s community and a school in Kibera, a large impoverished community outside of Nairobi, Kenya. In addition to marketing some of the community’s hand-made crafts we have also made direct contributions to support both the work of the artisans and the Sosep School.

Pre-Service Music

Each Sunday from Lent through Easter there is special pre-service music in the sanctuary at 10:15 am. Come early to pray, meditate, refresh yourself, or just listen to some beautiful music as we journey from cross to resurrection.

March 29 **Palm/Passion Sunday**: Jacqueline Wright, Flutist; Rose Hunsberger, Soprano
April 5 **Easter Sunday**: Music for String Quartet

Ecumenical Good Friday Worship

The Capital Area Council of Churches is sponsoring a Good Friday worship service, *In the Green Wood and the Dry: A Way of the Cross* at noon on Good Friday, April 3, at the Church of Saint Vincent De Paul, 900 Madison Ave at Partridge Street in Albany.

No Choir Rehearsal April 9th

The choir and soloists have been working hard this Lent to prepare and present special offerings of music both during the Pre-service time and in the worship Service and they will be resting the week after Easter. We are blessed to have these dedicated people who illuminating our worship through their faithful witness, hard work, and beautiful music. Thank-you!

Our Last Overflow Shelter Dinners is April 10th

Can you bring a dish (Cook's Choice) or help deliver? Sign up at the hospitality table or online. Drop you food off Sunday after church or any weekday between 8:30 and 2. For more information contact Mary Bon at 463-4449 or maryebon@verizon.net. **USE NON RETURNABLE DISHES** - And a great big THANK YOU to all our delivery people and those who contributed food and time to our Dinners.

The Weathervanes: Program for April



Join the Weathervanes for fellowship, lunch, and program on Wednesday, April 15th, at 12:30 pm in Zimmerman Hall. Bring a sandwich. Coffee, tea, and dessert will be served. After lunch, Cheryl Gowie will share photographs she took of polar bears while on a trip to Hudson Bay and of Atlantic puffins she took in Maine. Both trips were sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation to learn about climate change and its effect on polar bears and puffins. Please call Audrey Ming (456-5485) to let her know you plan to attend.



Kate Allard/ Young Adult Rummage Sale

Drop Off: Saturday 4/18, 2-4pm

Rummage Sale: Friday, April 24th 9:30am -3pm & Saturday, April 25th 9:30am-12 Noon.

110 North Pearl St. Albany, NY 12207

Call 463-4449 for more information.

First Church Readers Meets April 26

The First Church Readers are a group of people who love to read. We read a book each month and meet once a month during the post-service hour to discuss the month's book.

Everyone is welcome. **April's book is *Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons* by Lorna Landvik.** Contact Mary Bon at maryebon@verizon.net or 463-4449 with ideas for books or for more information.



2015 BOOK LIST

May 31, 2015

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Maya Angelou

June 28, 2015

The Boys in the Boat:

Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics

Daniel James Brown

Growing Green



This is part of an ongoing series on how we can "grow green."

Each month we share a few tips on simple practices that may increase our stewardship of God's good earth.

Grow Something! Try a pot of lettuce; a collection of herbs; or start your own garden. April is a good time to plant early vegetables like peas, spinach, broccoli and kale. You can also grow your own tomatoes if you start seeds indoors in early April.

The nice weather is coming! Get out and enjoy it by walking, biking or taking the bus.

Drive-In Worship

Begins on May 3rd

CROP Hunger Walk Sunday May 3

The 2015 Albany CROP Hunger Walk will be held on May 3, at the First Lutheran Church on Western Avenue in Albany. The CROP Hunger Walk is an annual community - wide event sponsored by Church World Service and organized by local volunteers to raise funds to help end hunger globally and locally.

The walk will begin at 1:30 pm, preceded by registration at 12:30 pm. Walkers can follow a 3 mile loop or a shorter one mile loop.

Cindy Gillespie (439-4188) or Diane Wuerstlin (373-3271) will be available during coffee hours after worship for the month of April to provide information and for you to sign up.

Last year First Church raised \$2,360 by 22 walkers. Come walk with us....

Spring Fling Concerts

Coming Wednesday in June at 12:30 pm

We are planning a series of noon-time concerts in our sanctuary Wednesdays in June from 12:30 PM to 1 PM. We'll have special music from our soloists as well as guest instrumentalists. Watch your May Family and bulletin for more information.

Food Pantry Request:



We are in need of "Personal Care" items for our Food Pantry guests. These products cannot be purchased with Food Stamps.

- Toothpaste
- Tooth Brushes
- Shampoo/Conditioner
- Deodorant
- Razors
- Feminine Hygiene Products

Easter Flower Memorials/Celebrations

A reminder: If you haven't made a contribution for your Easter plant you may make your check payable to "First Church in Albany" (marked Easter plants) in the amount of \$10 or more a plant.

Thank You

I would like to thank my First Church family for their prayers and kind, compassionate words during Peter's last hospitalization and following his passing.
God bless you all.
Joyce Recene.

Memorials

In celebration of the life of **Peter Recene** a gifts has been received from Roberta A. Deyo for the **Community Ministries Food Pantry Fund**, from David and Marilyn Bradley for the **Capital Campaign Fund**.

In celebration of the life of **Etheleen Williams** a gift has been received from David and Marilyn Bradley for the **Capital Campaign Fund**.

In celebration of the life of **Kay McCann** a gift has been received from David and Marilyn Bradley for the **Capital Campaign Fund**.

In celebration of the life of **Helen Mendleson** a gift has been received from David and Marilyn Bradley for the **Capital Campaign Fund**.

In Sympathy

Sympathy is extended to Barbara Andrews and the family on the death of her father, Wesley Allen on February 22, 2015.

Sympathy is extended to the family and friends of Helen Mendleson who passed away on March 3, 2015

Sympathy is extended to Norma Jean Ballou and the family on the death of her brother-in-law, George Miller on March 10, 2015.

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The deadline for the May issue of *FAMILY* is April 15.

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