

The First Church FAMILY

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

December 2014

WORSHIP:

7 Second Sunday of Advent

10:15 am Advent Pre-Service Music
10:30 am Sanctuary Service (Communion)
Post-service: Advent Study and Discussion Groups

14 Third Sunday of Advent

10:15 am Advent Pre-Service Music
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
Post-service: Advent Study and Discussion Groups

21 Fourth Sunday of Advent: Service of Lessons and Carols

10:15 am Advent Pre-Service Music
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
Post-service: Advent Study and Discussion Groups

24 Christmas Eve

5:00 pm Children & Family Service

7:30 pm "Music for Harp"
8:00 pm Candlelight Service
(Interpreted for the deaf and hard of hearing)

10:30 pm "Music for Harp"
11:00 pm Candlelight Service

28 First Sunday after Christmas

10:30 am Sanctuary Service

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

From the Pastor

Dear Friends,

We're in the season of Advent, a season of waiting and expectation. Many of the Advent scriptures and hymn texts are cries for help and expressions of deep desire. Isaiah cries out to God, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!" (Isaiah 64: 1). The Psalmist prays, "Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation" (Psalm 85: 4). And we give voice to our own longings when we sing, "Come, thou long expected Jesus."

Advent is about getting in touch with our deepest desires. We long for lives that are whole, and for a world to be healed. We ache for oneness, intimacy, completeness, harmony, peace, and justice.

But we're not alone. In Advent worship we gather as a community and *together* give voice to our longings. There is a rich biblical tradition of corporate lament in worship. We're not just whining about our own disappointments and hurts. We're coming together as a faith community to express the pain, hurt, confusion, anger, betrayal, despair, and injustice of the world. We go beyond our personal pain to consider how all creation groans to be restored to God. "Biblical lament is not complaint that goes nowhere," someone wrote. "It's the people of God planting seeds of hope in the soil of exasperation and despair, expecting that the Lord will come through in the end."

This longing tells us something about our souls, tells us something about who and what we are made for. Our longings help us get in touch with God's ultimate design for us and for our world.

Father Richard Rohr writes, "God will always give you exactly what you truly want and desire. So make sure you desire, desire deeply, desire yourself, desire God, desire everything good, true and beautiful."

In Advent especially, we aim to get in touch with our deepest longings and truest desires until they are all finally gathered up in our prayer to the one who is the "Dear desire of every nation, the joy of every longing heart."

Sincerely,

John Paarlberg

At Home with the WORD

**Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary
December 1st - December 31st**

Now available online at: www.rca.org/athome

1. Isaiah 40:1-11
2. Psalm 85:1-2
3. Psalm 85:8-13
4. 2 Peter 3:8-13
5. 2 Peter 3:14-15
6. Mark 1:1-8
7. Second Sunday of Advent
8. Isaiah 61:1-4
9. Isaiah 61:8-11
10. Psalm 126
11. Luke 1:46-55
12. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
13. John 1:6-8, 19-28
14. Third Sunday of Advent
15. 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
16. Psalm 89:1-4
17. Psalm 89:19-26
18. Romans 16:25-27
19. Luke 1:26-35
20. Luke 1:36-38
21. Fourth Sunday of Advent
22. Isaiah 61:10–62:3
23. Psalm 148
24. Christmas Eve; Psalm 96
25. Christmas Day; John 1:1-14
26. Galatians 4:4-7
27. Luke 2:22-40
28. First Sunday after Christmas
29. Jeremiah 31:7-14
30. Psalm 147:12-20
31. Ephesians 1:3-14

Christmas Offering

Every year, the Board of Deacons designates the recipients of our Christmas offering. The offering is split evenly between a local mission and a global mission. Our local recipient this year will be the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York. The Regional Food Bank supplies many of the food pantries in the Capital District including our own. In recent years they have expanded their services to include operating a farm so that more fresh produce is available to the hungry in our area. Our global recipient this year will be The Rev. Ken and Marcia Bradsell who will be serving as RCA missionaries in Muscat, Oman. Ken is retiring as executive director of the Reformed Church in America Board of Benefits Services and wants to return to parish ministry before fully retiring. Ken has served the RCA in various staff positions for 30 years. Prior to that, he served here at First Church as our associate pastor. In Oman, he will serve as lead RCA pastor of the Protestant Church in Oman, a joint mission sponsored by RCA Global Mission and the Anglican Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf. Thank you in advance for your support of our Christmas offering.

Hanging of the Greens



Advent means preparing for Christmas, and one of the ways we do that is to participate in the Hanging of the Greens. Each year, we decorate our sanctuary with wreathes, bows, laurel ropes, Christmas trees and other decorations to celebrate the Nativity of our Lord.

Here's the schedule:

- **Saturday December 6th, 9:30 a.m. Decorate the Exterior**

Decorating the exterior of the Church. Bring your gloves, we're going outside! Put up Christmas trees, hang wreathes on the front doors.

- **Saturday December 13th, 8:30 a.m. Breakfast**

Join us for breakfast prepared by Ian Leet. We will then proceed around 9:30 to decorate the rest of the interior of the church: Put the big wreath up in the Chancel, decorate some of the lobby lounge tree, decorate elsewhere in the building. Put up the rest of the sanctuary decorations, including the wreathes and laurel, finish decorating the Lobby, Chapel, etc.

We want as many of you as possible to sign up and help us look festive for Christmas Eve. Children welcomed - encouraged! Sign up for as many of these events as you wish -- there'll be plenty to do!

Pre-Service Music Advent Sundays Beginning at 10:15 am December 1st

Each Sunday during Advent we have special music in the sanctuary starting at 10:15 am. Come to Worship early to relax, refresh yourself, and prepare again for the coming of Christ.

- **November 30** Organ Advent Hymn Preludes
- **December 7** Joel Stewart, trumpet
- **December 14** Music of Handel's *Messiah*
- **December 21** Hymns for Advent and Christmas with First Church's own musicians: Doug Persons, Joel Stewart, Trumpets; Peter Subers, French Horn; David Bon-Keen, Bassoon

Post-Service Study and Discussion Groups in Advent (November 30 - December 21)



From Longing to Receiving

An exploration of the Advent scripture texts led by Pastor John Paarlberg

The Biblical story is the story of Israel and God's great promise to mend a broken world through a great King. It is the story of a people who are waiting for that King and who are learning to live in light of his promised coming.

This Advent season we enter this story by giving voice to our own longings. We long for lives that are whole and for a world to be healed. This longing

tells us something about our souls, who and what we are made for. Our longings help us get in touch with God's ultimate design for us and for our world.

For an on-line or print copy of the study guide contact Pastor Paarlberg.



Thrill of Hope: The Christmas Story in Word and Art

A DVD-based study of the familiar story of Christmas as told in the gospels of Matthew and Luke led by Pastor Susan Cox.

Each scripture passage is illustrated and interpreted in the stunning artwork of John August Swanson along with commentary by some of America's premier biblical scholars.

John August Swanson paints in oil, watercolor, acrylic and mixed media. His unique style is influenced by the imagery of Islamic and medieval miniatures, Russian iconography, the color of Latin American folk art, and the tradition of Mexican muralists. His art reflects the strong heritage of storytelling he inherited from his Mexican mother and Swedish father.

Viewing the Christmas story through the creative lens of this gifted artist will offer us new insights and understandings of the good news of the child born in Bethlehem.

Handel's *Messiah* at St. Peter's Episcopal Church

3:00 pm, December 14th

On Sunday, December 14th at 3:00 pm, G. F. Handel's *Messiah* will be performed at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 107 State Street, Albany, with St. Peter's Choir (Neil Keen, conductor), soloists, chamber orchestra and organ (Mary Bon, organist). The concert is free, but there will be a free will offering.

The Lord's Supper at First Church

The Lord's Supper (Holy Communion or Eucharist) is celebrated the first Sunday of each month at First Church. The Supper is a celebration of remembrance, of communion and of hope.

As we share the bread and the cup we remember that during his earthly ministry, Jesus shared meals with his followers and sat at dinner tables as a sign of his acceptance of the sinner and the outcast. In the last meal before his death, Jesus took bread and wine, and shared them with his disciples speaking of these elements as his body and blood, signs of the new relationship with God brought about by his impending death and resurrection. As we share this meal we trust that Christ is present with us today. When we receive the bread and the cup in faith we receive Christ into our lives and we are drawn into his presence. This meal is also a joy-filled and hopeful celebration as we look forward to God's coming reign of justice and peace.

All who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are invited to partake of the Lord's Supper. Access to the Table is not a right conferred upon the worthy but a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance, and love. Even one who doubts or whose trust is wavering may receive the bread and the cup and be assured of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ.

In celebrations of the Lord's Supper at First Church the bread is gluten free and grape juice is used in place of wine.

"Ring Them Bells" At Worship on December 28th

The Sunday after Christmas

Come join us on December 28th - The Sunday after Christmas for a service filled with familiar carols and the joyful sound of bells. Ringing and singing with young and old, strangers and friends is fun. As we sing familiar carols, we rejoice again in Christ's Birth and spread the good tidings of Christmas with the joyous sound of bells. Bring your own bell or use one of ours. We'll have lots of extra bells available.

Christmas Shoppe

Each year through the ministry of the First Church Food Pantry we help parents provide Christmas gifts for their children. The Christmas Shoppe will be held on Tuesday morning, December 16, from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. in Zimmerman Hall. Volunteers are welcome to help set up the day before (Monday morning, December 15). Donations of new and gently-used toys, puzzles, games, books and children's clothing will be received until Monday, December 14th. For more information, or to volunteer, contact Lorraine Houk at the church (463-4449).

Mitten Box for Christmas Shoppe

The Giving Box: Located in the Lounge
Mittens, gloves, hats and scarves (children & adult sizes)
Needed for the Christmas Shoppe on Tuesday, December 16 from 9 am to 11:30 am

FOCUS Items

FOCUS Winter Breakfast has begun! Over 100 guests the first morning! The hours of operation are 6:30 am – 9:10 am on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday (half shifts also available). A key to its success is having an adequate corps of volunteers. If are interested in helping out, contact Beth at 443-0460 (bethg@focuschurches.net).

Inspired by the work of Robert Lupton (*Toxic Charity*) in the Atlanta area, FOCUS is exploring an alternative model to food pantries for addressing food security issues. It is built around collaborative groups of low income households who meet and manage the food distribution program. Each household pays a small fee at each meeting. The goals include community development and promotion of dignity and ownership for the participants. This would not replace the pantry, but provide another means of meeting part of family food needs in a specific geographical area in our neighborhood.

Hold the date: January 25, 2015. FOCUS and the Hunger Action Network of New York will hold their annual joint benefit **EMPTY BOWLS** at the Elks Club, 25 South Allen Street, Albany from 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm. Each participant will receive a handcrafted bowl and will be able to fill it with soup from the Chef's Consortium of the Hudson Valley, and have, on the side, some artisan bread from the Rock Hill Bake House of Glens Falls.

First Church will be hosting the February FOCUS Communion Service.

The Weathervanes Holiday Dinner & Christmas Party at Lunch Time



Join the Weathervanes on Wednesday, December 3rd, at 12:30 p.m. for our Holiday Dinner Party at Lunchtime at Zimmerman Hall. We will have a lemon chicken dinner, singing and stories. The cost is \$12 per person. Please make your reservations by November 16th with Audrey Ming (456-5485). We are also asking everyone to contribute \$5 or more towards the purchase of books for Christmas gifts for children of our Food Pantry clients.

No December Meeting for First Church Readers Group



There is no December meeting but we will meet in January when we will be discussing:

I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb

December NO BOOK GROUP

January *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb

These books are all available through the Upper Hudson Library System in either hard copy or ebook format.

Future books we are considering include:

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

The Book Thief

Unbroken

An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith

Help, Thanks, Wow

The Good Earth

Maya Angelou

Markus Zusak

Lauren Hillenbrand

Barbara Brown Taylor

Anne Lamott

Pearl S. Buck

Do you have an idea for a book for the reader's group? Want more information? Contact Mary Bon at maryebon@verizon.net or 463-4449.

Upcoming Overflow Shelter Dinners

Our next Emergency Overflow Shelter Dinners are December 5th and January 9th. Can you help provide a dish for one of these dates?

December's dates are: December 5th (chili) and January 9th (Italian).

Sign up to provide a dish to feed 6 to 8 people at the hospitality table, or on-line at www.SignUpGenius.com/go/20F0F44A5A82FA4F85-overflow/22999254.

Bring your dish to the church office during office hours or leave them in the downstairs freezer or refrigerator on Sunday, (labeled Shelter dinner). **USE NON RETURNABLE DISHES.** Questions? Contact Mary Bon 463-4449 or maryebon@verizon.net.

The Emergency Overflow Shelter at First Lutheran Church in Albany is sponsored by the Capital Area Council of Churches. It is a "shelter of last resort" when other shelters are full or for those who may not be eligible for other shelters because of addictions or mental health issues. It turns nobody away.

GROWING GREEN



This is part of an ongoing series on how we can "grow green." Each month we'll share a few tips on simple practices that we can do to increase our stewardship of God's good earth.

- Decorate with live plants, fresh greens and real Christmas trees. Living things (even cut down) are renewable, recyclable, and soak up CO2 while they grow. Skip the tinsel - trees with tinsel are hard to recycle.
- Save on wrapping paper: use and re-use old maps, comics section of the newspaper, children's artwork, a scarf, an attractive dish towel, or a bandana to wrap gifts.
- Think of alternative gift-giving: Many of us have enough "stuff" - give some away to homeless shelters or other social service agencies; give home-baked or home-made gifts or gifts of services like washing someone's windows or taking someone grocery shopping; make a gift to your favorite charity in honor of a loved one, or consider Fair Trade items or items from our Kibera cooperative.
- Decorate with LED lights which use 90% less electricity.



Prayer Shawl Ministry

Do you knit or crochet? Would you be interested in offering your gifts in a ministry to others?

In a prayer shawl ministry, the shawl maker begins with prayers and blessings for the recipient.

The intentions are continued throughout the creation of the shawl. Upon completion, a final blessing is offered before the shawl is sent on its way. Some recipients have continued the

kindness by making a shawl and passing it onto someone in need.

Shawls can be used during an illness and recovery, as a comfort after a loss or in times of stress; during prayer or meditation; to recognize commitment or marriage ceremonies; birthing, nursing a baby; bridal shower or wedding gift; graduation, birthday, anniversary, ordination, holiday gifts, or other occasions. Sometimes a blessing or prayer may be offered when the gift is presented. If you are interested in making prayer shawls come join us on December 9th or call Rev. Susan Vincent Cox for more information.

Orange Street Parking Lot Be Careful How You Park Vehicles

We need to make sure our vehicle are not over extended onto the sidewalk facing Orange Street. The people with disabilities need sidewalk space to walk or use their wheelchair without difficulties.

Christmas Eve Worship



5:00 pm	Children & Family Service
7:30 pm	"Music for Harp"
8:00 pm	Candlelight Service (Interpreted for the deaf and hard of hearing)
9:15 pm	Wassail Hour
10:30 pm	"Music for Harp"
11:00 pm	Candlelight Service

Christmas Poinsettia

Please send a note or call the church office by Friday, December 12th to order your Christmas Poinsettia. A minimum donation of \$10 per plant is requested. Make check payable to: First Church in Albany (marked:Poinsettias). After Christmas, the plants are shared with our homebound members.



The deadline for the December issue of *FAMILY* is **December 12.**



Congratulations

Congratulations to Emily Otto, former member of First Church. Emily is the new Director of Christian Education at the Presbyterian Church/New England Congregational Church of Saratoga Springs.

Memorials

In celebration of the Life of **Jim Vincent** a gift has been received from an anonymous donor for **Clee Park.**

In Sympathy

Our sympathy is extended to the Rev. Susan Vincent-Cox and family and friends on the death her father, Jim Vincent on October 26, 2014.

In Honor

In honor of what would have been **Edward M. Monthie Jr.'s 100th birthday on 10/24**, a gift has been received from Edward M. III and Katherine Monthie for the **Capital Campaign Fund.**



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