

The First Church FAMILY

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

December 2015

WORSHIP:

- 6 **Second Sunday of Advent**
10:15 am Advent Pre-Service Music
10:30 am Sanctuary Service (Communion)
Post-service: Advent Study and Discussion Group
- 13 **Third Sunday of Advent**
10:15 am Advent Pre-Service Music
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
Post-service: Advent Study and Discussion Group
- 20 **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 Group
- 24 **Christmas Eve**
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
- 27 **First Sunday after Christmas**
10:30 am Sanctuary Service

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 12207-2231

Hanging of the Greens



Advent is here!

Each year we put up decorations to celebrate the upcoming nativity of our Lord! As the carol says, *“Make your house fair as you are able, Trim the hearth and set the table....”*.

We will decorate for Christmas over two weekends.

Here's the schedule:

On **Saturday, December 5th** at 9:30 a.m., we will decorate the outside with wreaths and bows to make our newly-restored building resplendent for the season. We will also put up the trees in the sanctuary. Volunteers to help with this 1-2 hour project (starting at 9:30 a.m.) should contact Ian Leet (482-6612) or ian.leet@outlook.com. Or signup on the sheets in the lobby.

On **Friday, December 11th**, we will finish decorating the interior of the sanctuary with wreaths, laurel and of course, the big chancel wreath. We will also decorate the lobby. There will be a light pot-luck supper at **5:30 p.m.** and a short service after the decoration is completed. All will be over by **7:30 p.m.** We are especially looking for families to participate in this, **children encouraged!** We need many volunteers to get everything done on time. Contact Ian Leet or sign up in the lobby or on the [website](#).

At Home with the WORD

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

Now available online at: www.rca.org/resources/home-word

1. Luke 1:68-75
2. Luke 1:76-79
3. Philippians 1:3-8
4. Philippians 1:9-11
5. Luke 3:1-6
6. Second Sunday of Advent
7. Zephaniah 3:14-16
8. Zephaniah 3:17-20
9. Isaiah 12:2-6
10. Philippians 4:4-7
11. Luke 3:7-14
12. Luke 3:15-18
13. Third Sunday of Advent
14. Micah 5:2-5
15. Psalm 80:1-3
16. Psalm 80:4-7
17. Hebrews 10:5-10
18. Luke 1:39-45
19. Luke 1:46-55
20. Fourth Sunday of Advent
21. Psalm 148
22. Colossians 3:12-17
23. 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26
24. Christmas Eve; Isaiah 9:2-7
25. Christmas Day; Luke 2:8-20
26. Luke 2:41-52
27. First Sunday after Christmas
28. Jeremiah 31:7-14
29. Psalm 147:12-20
30. John 1:1-9
31. John 1:10-18

Christmas Offering

Every year, the Board of Deacons designates the recipients of our Christmas offering. The offering is divided evenly between a local mission and a global mission.

Our local recipient this year will be the Capital City Rescue Mission on South Pearl Street. The mission serves the homeless and needy of the Capital Region, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and caring for the whole person—body, mind and spirit.

The other part of the Christmas offering has been designated for refugee aid.

Over the past several weeks, the Reformed Church in America has supported mission partners and co-workers as they work with refugees across Europe and the Middle East. RCA mission coworker JJ Ten Clay is working with Waldensian colleagues and has recently visited refugees on the island of Lampedusa. Carolyn and Dick Otterness, who serve in partnership with the Reformed Church in Hungary, are ministering to refugees traveling through Eastern Europe.

Carolyn writes: *“This is a time for the whole world, not just Europe, to grapple with how to handle the needs of people who are seeking hope, security, freedom, and opportunities that they cannot find in their own homeland. This refugee crisis may well be the defining issue of this century. Jesus tells us to feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, welcome the alien, help care for the widows and orphans, and clothe the naked. How we do this is dependent on laws, efforts of citizens, civil discussions, and listening to those who are seeking refuge.”*

Thank you in advance for your support of our Christmas offering.

Pre-Service Music Advent Sundays Beginning at 10:15 am November 29

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 29** Advent Organ Music of Johann Sebastian Bach
- **December 6** David Bon-Keen, music for bassoon
- **December 13** Peter Subers, baritone
- **December 20** Rose Hunsberger, soprano,
sings portions of Mozart’s Exultate Jubilate

As part of the pre-service music on December 13th, Peter Subers will premiere two movements of a new piece, Baroque Suite for piano and vocal solo, by contemporary NYC composer Tom Herman. As its title implies, this highly accessible work is inspired by the keyboard dance suites of J. S. Bach and his contemporaries - with the added fun of a vocal line over busy counterpoint in the piano.

Our Advent Journey

Two Tuesdays, December 8 and 15 in the Parlor, 6-8 p.m. Bring a dish to share. Enjoy fellowship and a meal together, some time for devotion and some time to explore together our Advent journeys. A resource will be recommended when you sign up. Sign up will be in the lobby or contact Denise or Rev. Sue Cox. Hope you will join us.

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

3:00 pm, December 13th

On Sunday, December 13th 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.

"Ring Them Bells" At Worship on December 27th

The Sunday after Christmas

Come join us on December 27th - 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. We'll sing familiar carols, rejoice again in Christ's Birth and spread the good tidings of Christmas. Bring your own bell or use one of ours. We'll have lots of extra bells available. "Ring Them Bells"

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 15, from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. in Zimmerman Hall. Volunteers are welcome to help set up the day before (Monday, December 14). 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 15 from 9 to 11:30 a.m.

Wayward Sparrow Brings Canned Goods to First Church Food Pantry



Early one Wednesday morning while looking in the direction of the bird feeders on our back deck, among the juncos, chickadees, nuthatches and titmice, I noticed an unusually marked (to me) sparrow. A quick check of the field guide told me it was **Harris's Sparrow**, a bird that breeds along the edge of boreal forest and tundra in north-central Canada and winters in the Great Plains, rarely venturing east of the Mississippi. This bird was way off course. Others might be interested in knowing about this, I thought. I had

recently learned of a birding website called [E-Bird](#), so I posted the information there. Little was I aware of the chain of events that would ensue. *E Bird*, apparently, has a lot of avid and avian-loving followers.

The local birding guru, Rich Guthrie, who has a call-in show on WAMC radio's *Vox Pop*, showed up with a couple of colleagues and confirmed the sighting. "A lot of birders are going to want to see this," he said. "Why don't I coordinate a schedule of visits? And as a way for people to say 'thank you' for allowing them into your backyard, I'll put out a box and suggest that birders bring some food donations for the church's food pantry."

"That's not necessary," I said. "But it's a nice gesture, so sure, go ahead."

Later that day and over the course of the next several days Harris' Sparrow admirers came from as far away as Long Island and Buffalo. Ornithologists from Cornell Lab in Ithaca paid a visit. At times our backyard was host to dozens of people toting binoculars, spotting scopes, cameras, and telephoto lenses—as well as canned goods and cash donations for the First Church food pantry.

It's not the first time a bird has brought food to the hungry. When the prophet Elijah was hiding from King Ahab, God commanded ravens to bring him a daily ration of bread and meat. (I Kings 17). In fact, this little sparrow has been instrumental in helping people obey a trinity of Biblical commands: "Look at the birds of the air" (Matthew 6), "extend hospitality to strangers" (Romans 12), and "share your bread with the hungry" (Isaiah 58).

As I write this, "Harry" is still in residence, although intermittently and elusively. You are welcome to come and have a look. Bring your binoculars—and a couple of cans of vegetables or boxes of macaroni.

--John Paarlberg

Photo courtesy of Curt Morgan

FOCUS – Thank You Rev. Deb Jameson

Earlier this year, Rev. Debra Jameson, the Community Minister and Executive Director of FOCUS Churches of Albany, announced that after 16 years in her position she had decided it was time to move on to other ventures at the end of 2015.

An informal gathering will take place on Wednesday, December 9, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm at the Albany Pump Station. The reception will be in the Mezzanine Balcony Lounge. Finger food and a cash bar will be available. FOCUS has experienced remarkable development during Deb's tenure. Her leadership and personal involvement in the missions of FOCUS have left a significant mark in Albany and beyond. We have been fortunate to be associated with her. www.focuschurches.net

The Weathervanes Holiday Dinner & Christmas Party at Lunch Time



Join the Weathervanes on Wednesday, December 9th, at 12:30 p.m. for our Holiday Dinner Party at Lunchtime at Zimmerman Hall. We will have a Chicken Piccata holiday dinner, singing and stories. The cost is \$14 per person. Please make your reservations by November 29th 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. In January, we will be discussing *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law*, the acclaimed memoir by Palestinian author and architect Suad Amiry. It's part of the second annual INTERNATIONAL READING CAMPAIGN, "One Book, Many Communities" sponsored by Librarians with Palestine, <http://librarianswithpalestine.org/onebookcampaign/about/>

- February's book is *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr
- March's book will be *To the Light House* by Virginia Woolf

Future books we are considering include:

Toxic Charity by Robert Lupton and *The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kobert.

Do you have an idea for a book for the reader's group?

Contact Mary Bon at maryebon@verizon.net or 463-4449

It's Overflow Shelter Dinner time again- Can you help?

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Since 2008 First Church has been providing two meals a month for the Overflow Shelter at First Lutheran Church in Albany.

Our first dinners of the season are:

- **December 4th (Italian)**
- **December 18th (Chili)**

We need your help with both food and delivering! Please:

- contribute a main dish, side dish or dessert for 6-8 people
- help deliver

SIGN-UP SHEETS ARE AT THE HOSPITALITY TABLE

Bring your dishes to church any day from 9:00 - 2:00 pm or Thursday evening from 6:30 - 7:30 pm. (Call ahead to make sure someone is at church to take your delivery.) We'll reheat dishes if necessary and deliver them to the shelter. Questions? Call or email Mary Bon (463-4449 or maryebon@verizon.net).

USE NON RETURNABLE DISHES – and THANK-YOU!

Sponsored by the Capital Area Council of Churches, the Emergency Overflow Shelter at First Lutheran Church in Albany, is a “shelter of last resort” when other shelters are full or for those not be eligible for other shelters because of addictions or mental health issues. It is open during the winter months and 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: - home-baked or home-made gifts, gifts of services like washing someone's windows or taking someone grocery shopping; a gift of a donation to a favorite charity or Fair trade items at local sales or on-line.
- Decorate with LED lights which use 90% less electricity.

375th Anniversary Committee

2017 will mark the 375th year that First Church has been doing the work of God in this community and we will be planning special worship, artistic and historical events to celebrate. A committee is being set up to coordinate these events, and we would like three members from the congregation to join in the planning. If you are interested in the history of the church or in just helping to plan the events of what will be a festive year, contact Ian Leet at 482-6612 or at ian.leet@outlook.com.

Year's-End Reminder From The Financial Secretary

- 2015 contributions must be received by Sunday, January 10th, 2016
- After January 10th, 2016, all contributions will be posted to 2016

If you any questions regarding this note or for anything concerning your donations, you can reach me at wsivaslian@nycap.rr.com or 518-495-6353.
Wayne Sivaslian, Financial Secretary

Christmas Eve Worship



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 (463.4449) by Monday, December 7th at 9:00am to place your order for Christmas Poinsettia memorials. A minimum donation of \$10 per plant is requested. Make your check payable to First Church in Albany (marked: Poinsettias). After Christmas, the plants are shared with our homebound members and friends.

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The deadline for the December issue of *FAMILY* is December 11.
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Rejecting Refugees – Rejecting Christ

An excerpt from an article by Stephen Mattson posted on *SoJoNet*, 11-17-15
<https://sojo.net/articles/rejecting-refugees-rejecting-christ#sthash.zASQgKRA.dpuf>

Imagine if Jesus limited his ministry based upon the conditions of comfort and security: There would be no traveling through Samaria — too hazardous. No interacting with foreigners — too dangerous. No helping strangers — too risky. No healing the sick — too unsafe. No attracting crowds — too insecure. No performing miracles — too perilous. No public speaking — too unprotected. No giving to the poor — too wasteful. No interacting with outcasts — too socially unacceptable. No disciples — too untrustworthy. No generosity — too wasteful. No grace — too weak. No forgiveness — too soft. No death on the cross — too painful (to say the least).

If Jesus used the same stipulations for love that we do, the gospel never would have existed, because almost every single experience Jesus put himself in required risk, sacrifice, and vulnerability. And instead of being fueled by fear, Jesus was fueled by hope.

If Jesus used the same stipulations for love that we do, the gospel never would have existed.

Jesus wants *us* to have a similar mentality and calls *us* to bravely embrace a similar vulnerability. Christianity isn't meant to be a religion of passivity and inaction, where we cynically seek out worst-case scenarios or see an obvious need right in front of us and do nothing. Instead, God wants us to follow God's example, even if it means giving things up — possibly even our own lives.

The Christian solution to the refugee problem isn't going to be the easiest, or most efficient, or most plausible, or most popular — but it should be the most *loving*.

By rejecting refugees, we are rejecting Christ, and we're condemning millions of people — deeply loved creations of God — to more misery.

It may cost us wealth, comfort, time, energy, and even our sense of well-being, but this is what following Jesus means: to love our neighbors as ourselves, to love *refugees*.

Dear Friends and Supporters,



The world's attention has been focused on the wave of refugees fleeing the Middle East and northern Africa towards Europe, the area where they hope to find hope, peace, safety, and jobs... Hungary has become a major transit country right in the middle of the land route refugees take on their trip through Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Austria, and finally to Germany and Sweden, where most refugees seem to be headed. And many of the boiling points have occurred here in Budapest, the city in which we live.

The Hungarian government has not been overtly welcoming towards the refugees.Images fill our minds and hearts of refugees crossing through the razor barbed wire fence that the Hungarian government put up on its border with Serbia; images of people living en masse at the train stations in Budapest; the attempts of police to detain the refugees in the terrible conditions found in the refugee detention centers..... These images haunt our minds as European people struggle with the question of how best to respond.

But other stories can be told too--stories of some police assisting refugees to move on, instead of arresting them for entering Hungary illegally. The Reformed Church in Hungary's diaconal services arm (Reformed Church Aid) visits the government's refugee camp in eastern Hungary every day to provide medical care, and several days a week they go to play games with children, and to support the families in the midst of their confusion and anxiety. When masses of people started walking from Budapest towards the Austrian border, Hungarian Reformed Church Aid provided water bottles along the route.



Our congregation in Budapest, St. Columba's, which is within walking distance of the train stations, has been set up as an overnight shelter with comfortable mattresses, supper and breakfast, games for children.

St. Columba's, is an international ministry jointly shared by the Church of Scotland and the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH). The RCH has a refugee mission that does long term development work with refugees who live in Hungary. This mission has helped hundreds, if not thousands, of refugees learn language, find housing, get children into schools, supervise refugee children who arrive here without family, and help with job prospects. The refugee mission very recently lost its refugee community center in Budapest, and has now relocated to St. Columba's Church.

We ask for your prayers, first of all, for the refugees that they find safety, security, and a new home wherever they may be. We ask for prayers for refugees in Budapest, that they can trust us and find a wee bit of comfort along the way. We pray that the outpouring of Christian compassion will change hearts and minds as these people who are fleeing terrible conditions and inhumane activities encounter the magnificent love of Christ. We ask for prayers for our church—St. Columba's and for the Reformed Church in Hungary, as we struggle to discover and enact our convictions regarding our Christian responsibilities for our brothers and sisters. We also ask for your prayers for the Ten Clays who are working with refugee mission in Italy, and for other churches, organizations, and governments to determine a holistic, humane, and caring response to these hundreds of thousands refugees.

Thank you for your prayer, emotional, and financial support of our ministry here. We also thank you for your support as you give to the RCA in their response towards this human crisis.

Blessing and peace to you, now and always,

Richard and Carolyn Otterness

Congratulations

Henry and Alberta Fox will be celebrating their 70th wedding anniversary on December 15th. Happy Anniversary!

Memorials

In celebration of the life of **Ruth Reiners** a gift has been received from Shirley Joosten and Betty Pierce for the **Lynn T. Joosten Scholarship Fund**.

In celebration of the life of Thomas W. Carroll a gift has been received from his parents, William F. and Arlene E Carroll for the **Clee Park Fund**.



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