

# The First Church FAMILY

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

**December 2019**

## **WORSHIP:**

- 1     **First Sunday of Advent** (Communion)  
10:15 am     Pre-Service Music  
10:30 am     Sanctuary Service Rev. Dr. Mashona Walston, preaching  
                  Children & Worship (During Worship)  
Post Service:     Coffee and Conversation  
                  Holiday Card signing – Zimmerman Hall  
11:45 am     Deacon’s Meeting  
12:00 pm     Children & Worship Team Meeting  
1:00 pm     Mother’s Group Meeting
- 8     **Second Sunday of Advent**  
10:15 am     Pre-Service Music  
10:30 am     Sanctuary Service Rev. Dr. Mashona Walston, preaching  
                  Children & Worship (During Worship)  
Post Service:     Coffee and Conversation  
11:45 am     Holiday Card signing – Zimmerman Hall
- 15    **Third Sunday of Advent**  
10:15 am     Pre-Service Music  
10:30 am     Sanctuary Service - Rev. Dr. Micah McCreary  
                  Children & Worship (During Worship)  
11:45 am     Holiday Card signing – Zimmerman Hall  
3:00 pm     Installation Service for Rev. Dr. Mashona Walston
- 22    **Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
10:15 am     Pre-Service Music  
10:30 am     Sanctuary Service Rev. Dr. Mashona Walston, preaching
- 24    **Christmas Eve**  
7:00 pm     Music of Harp  
7:30 pm     Candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols with Choir &  
                  Instruments  
8:45 pm     Wassail Hour
- 29    **First Sunday after Christmas**  
10:30 am     Sanctuary Service with Carols (bring a bell)

## FROM THE SENIOR MINISTER

Greetings Cohorts and Friends,

Thank you all for a warm and lively welcome to First Church and the Albany community. I am enjoying getting to know each of you. This is certainly a new beginning for me and my household. Every day the capital district offers a new discovery. When asked what life has been like for us thus far, I say, “like a roller coaster”. Roller coasters start off slow and quickly pick up speed as they ascend higher and higher. There are stops, starts, jolts, laughter and lots of screaming. I’ve noticed that certain people really know how to enjoy the ride. These are the people who raise both arms in the air and live in the present moment. These expert riders know how to trust that they are safe. They trust that the harness or belt will hold them tightly in place.

Many of you can relate to the feeling of a roller coaster ride. First Church in Albany has gone through the process of working with an interim pastor, conducting a pastoral search, and welcoming a new senior minister, all while navigating the demands of church in this present age. Now after all those twists, turns, stops and starts the ride is not over. There are more loops to experience!

I invite you to join me on this leg of the ride. Lift your hands in surrender and praise. Together, let us trust that God has hold of us. The sun will not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. We can smile in cautious anticipation as we slowly pick up speed. We can feel each stop, start, and jolt knowing that we are safe and held tightly by a God who has moved heaven and earth for the saving of our souls. God is not through with First Church as a community and God is not through with you as an individual. Trust God and enjoy the ride!

*Pastor M’s Highlights*

### **Listening Tour:**

During my first 90 days I am on a listening tour. I hope to meet and listen (no judgement) to each of you. So, make an appointment to come by the office on Thursday afternoon, call, write, or let’s meet in a coffee shop. Your history, your feelings, your hopes are important, and I would like to hear from you.

### **The Month Ahead**

Please save the date for December 15, 2019 for the **Pastor Installation Service** at 3 pm. We are honored to have The Rev. Dr. Micah McCreary President of New Brunswick Theological Seminary bring the message!

### **Prayer & Meditation During Advent**

- Join us each Tuesday morning prayer with Pastor Mashona during Advent at 6:30 am for morning prayer. Dial (425) 436-6200 Access Code: 586376
- Join us each Wednesday at 12 Noon to 1 pm for Centering Prayer in James Chapel.
- Children’s Story and Prayer Call: Let the small children in your family know that each Friday during Advent they can call for their own call where a short devotional story will be read. Children can dial in at any time on Friday to listen to the story. The story will run from Friday to the following Thursday. They can listen as many times as they like. Ages 3 to 12 years old. Dial (425) 436-6200 Access Code: 586376

## Connections & Outreach

Have you noticed the new faces around the church? They are our guest missionaries who are committed to spreading the gospel in the Albany, NY area. Our friends are from Good News Church and have been in the United States for about eight months from South Korea. These missionaries are working night and day to host a Christmas Cantata at the Palace Theater on the evening of January 5, 2019. Their mission is to tell people about Jesus Christ and then move to the next city. For more information: [www.christmascantata.us](http://www.christmascantata.us)

Blessings,  
Pastor M

*Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace—  
in peace because they trust in you.  
Trust in the LORD forever,  
for in the LORD GOD  
you have an everlasting rock (Isaiah 26:3-4)*

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## AT HOME WITH THE WORD

Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary [www.rca.org/athome](http://www.rca.org/athome)  
December 1<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>st</sup>

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. First Sunday of Advent  | 17. Psalm 80:1-7                                       |
| 2. Isaiah 11:1-10          | 18. Psalm 80:17-19                                     |
| 3. Psalm 72:1-7            | 19. Romans 1:1-4                                       |
| 4. Psalm 72:18-19          | 20. Romans 1:5-7                                       |
| 5. Romans 15:4-13          | 21. Matthew 1:18-25                                    |
| 6. Matthew 3:1-6           | 22. Fourth Sunday of Advent                            |
| 7. Matthew 3:7-12          | 23. Isaiah 63:7-9                                      |
| 8. Second Sunday of Advent | 24. Christmas Eve; Isaiah 52:7-10<br>Psalm 148         |
| 9. Isaiah 35:1-4           | 25. Christmas Day; Luke 2:1-14<br>1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 |
| 10. Isaiah 35:5-10         | 26. Psalm 148  |
| 11. Psalm 146:5-10         | 27. Psalm 72:1-7                                       |
| 12. Luke 1:46-55           | 28. Hebrews 2:10-18                                    |
| 13. James 5:7-10           | 29. First Sunday after Christmas                       |
| 14. Matthew 11:2-11        | 30. Jeremiah 31:7-14                                   |
| 15. Third Sunday of Advent | 31. Psalm 147:12-20                                    |
| 16. Isaiah 7:10-16         |  |

## REV. CAMERON MONTHLY BRUNCH

Rev. Bill Cameron began gathering a group for lunch on the first Thursday of the month. The group continues to meet each month at the Gateway Diner, 899 Central Avenue in Albany. Anyone can join us starting at 12:15pm and stay until you wish to leave. Each person pays for their own meal. Contact Donna E. Schultz at [deschultz07@aol.com](mailto:deschultz07@aol.com) or (518) 429-1255.

## FINANCIAL SECRETARY UPDATE

*“Our church budget both income and expenses reflect the dreams of the people of the church. It is a practical tool for clarifying who we are, and accomplishing what we wish to do...as a church. Not everything we do in church costs money - some of the most significant things that happen here are absolutely free. But none of them would be happening if the church were not here in the first place, and it costs money to have a church. The budget is the heart of the church because without it we would not have this place in our lives to experience God’s grace.... The church budget is not a necessary evil or a mere tool; it is a celebration of organized generosity....”*

As of November 28, 2019, we received 39 pledges totaling \$ 121,499.00, @94% of our \$140,000.00 goal. We need \$8,501.00 more in pledges to meet budget.

Thank you, Wayne Sivaslian

THANK YOU to all who have pledged already. Remember: *Should your personal situation change at any time, either in increased resources or because of financial downturns, your pledge can be adjusted simply by contacting Wayne Sivaslian, Financial Secretary, [wsivaslian@nycap.rr.com](mailto:wsivaslian@nycap.rr.com).*

## REMINDERS

- Remember to complete your Offering Pledge for 2019, if not already fulfilled.
- All 2019 contributions must be received by Sunday, January 12, 2020.
- These contributions must be dated 2019.
- After January 12, 2020, all contributions will be posted to 2020 regardless of the date on your check.

If you have any questions regarding this note or for any matters concerning your donations, please contact me at [wsivaslian@nycap.rr.com](mailto:wsivaslian@nycap.rr.com) or 518-495-6353.

Thank you.

Wayne Sivaslian, Financial Secretary

## DEACONS CORNER

Deacons visit **Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless** (Shelter) on Sheridan Ave

On Nov 18<sup>th</sup> three of our deacons, Andy Mondore, Deb Anderson and Erica Zetterhom-Bliss visited and learned more about this neighboring program, only a few blocks from First Church. Deacons took this tour in order to find how to effectively help those who come to our church needing an immediate meal and a safe place to stay.

Deb Anderson set up the tour and we were greeted by two welcoming and energized staff members who took us through the building. With its polished wood floors, freshly painted walls and homey atmosphere we were told that up to 30 guests can stay at a time. We were also glad to hear the director and staff want to do their utmost to dignify their guests.

Look for more information about the Deacons work in the next month or two.  
Rev. Sue Cox

## CHILDREN AND WORSHIP



Children and Worship for older children (8-12)

Last summer our team talked with our interim pastor and the Worship Commission about very low to no attendance in our 2018-19 program.

All agreed we would offer this program through the fall 2019 and then agreed it is time to do something new for these children. For December, children ages 8-12 will meet with the younger children to hear the Advent Story of Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus.

More will be announced as the pastors, Worship Commission, and congregation clarify what new program will be best.

Our existing C&W team will focus on our younger program (ages 4-7) going into 2020. This program will meet every Sunday except in early February when we worship with Focus Churches and Easter.

A new program will be offered soon. Look for information to come.

In Christ's Peace,  
Rev. Sue Cox



## Speaking of Music . . . and looking to the future

The Music Task Force was asked to do a self-study of the congregation's experiences and preferences in church music as we envision our future at First Church. We desire to build on our rich heritage while being open to varied and different approaches. Please take some time to read and ponder the questions in this edition of the Family. We have scheduled a post-service discussion for January 12, 2020.



### Experiences and Preferences in Church Music

1. What was your best experience of music at (any) church?
2. What kinds of music move your spirit?  
Specifically, what was the music? When was the experience?
3. What enhances your experience of the sacred? Do you have specific examples?
4. In worship, what music really “works” for you?
5. What music do you like? At home? In church? What is the ringtone on your phone?
6. In what ways does music inspire you to come to church services?
7. What do you like most about our music? (Circle all that apply.)
  - Hymns    Jazz trio    Soloists    Instrumentalists\*
  - Concerts (e.g., noontime)    Choir    Organ
  - Sacred music\*\*    World music\*\*\*    Spirituals    Piano

NOTES: \*for example, violin, harp, percussion, brass, bassoon, flute, cello, bagpipes;

\*\*anthems, sanctus, doxology, responses;

\*\*\*African, Spanish, Taize, Iona, Caribbean.

# FESTIVAL of SPIRITUALS

AND WORKS BY  
AFRICAN AMERICAN COMPOSERS



***EACH MONTH WE'RE CELEBRATING AN IMPORTANT  
AFRICAN AMERICAN COMPOSER***

**December's composer is Dr. Andre J. Thomas  
(born August 15 ,1952)**

- American composer, conductor, clinician, expert in African American Spirituals.
- Author of numerous articles and videos on conducting and the book, *Way Over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual*.
- Grew up in Wichita Kansas with his two sisters and mother.
- His mother sang in church choir and that initiated his fascination with music.
- Predominantly self-taught during childhood; picked out tunes on toy piano.
- 30 years as professor of Choral Music Education at Florida State University and director of choral activities.

***In his own words***

“I was an impatient young man. I was 12 and walked over to the University of Wichita, where I saw a door with a piano painted on it. Inside was a professor, who, when I told her I wanted to learn... took me on.”

“I love bringing people together... and that’s what choral music is, bringing voices together as one. This brings me joy”

“You know, early on I hated Negro Spirituals. The dialect in which they were written sounded like something from an old minstrel show. It seemed demeaning. But two things happened... A wonderful mentor showed me that in African tribes, certain sounds do not appear. When the slaves began to use English, what we hear now as dialect, was really an...African accent. And then there was my trip to Benin on the west coast of Africa.”

Thomas says that when he exited a 16th-century Portuguese castle via its ‘chute’ to the beach where thousands of slaves had embarked on the journey to the Americas, he was greeted with the sound of an African choir that was pure beauty, hope and triumph.

“I at last connected with a past beyond slavery, the time before it. And I feel such great pride in the heritage and strength of the people who came before me.”





# Finding a Voice

Celebrating women composers

**Each Month we'll celebrate a different women composer.**

## **Dr. Mary Elizabeth Caldwell (1909 - 2003)**

- Distinguished American composer.
- Displayed an unusual gift for music at an early age.
- By age ten, she had already composed numerous short piano works.
- Educated at UC Berkeley.
- Studied at the Munich Conservatory and the Juilliard School.
- A church organist for over fifty years.
- Many hundreds of published works various choirs ranging from youth to adult.
- Numerous solo works including sets of songs for Christmas and Lent.
- One of the first composers to explore the rich folk carol tradition.
- Listed in Who's Who of American Women since 1967.



***We'll be singing your music in December!***

## CELEBRATING COMPOSER ANNIVERSARIES

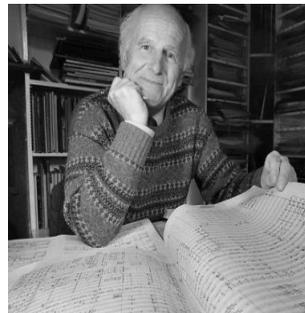


### HAPPY 100<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY

Sir David Willcocks

December 30, 1919 September 17, 2015

- Renowned British choral conductor, organist, and composer.
- Began his musical training as a chorister at Westminster Abbey from 1929 to 1934.
- Organ scholar at King's College, Cambridge.
- Served in World War II, British Infantry soldier.
- Won the Military Cross in 1944 awarded for "an act of exemplary gallantry during active operations against the enemy on land"
- Held the post for which he is probably best-known, Director of Music at King's College, Cambridge from 1957 to 1974.
- Served as the organist of Cambridge University, conductor of the Cambridge University Music Society, and as University Lecturer.
- Numerous recordings with choirs; television and radio appearances.
- Director of the Royal College of Music.
- Commander (CBE) of the Order of the British Empire, knighted in 1977 in the Queen's Silver Jubilee Honours List.
- Particularly known for his choral arrangements of Christmas carols, most of which were originally written for the Service of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's or the Bach Choir's Christmas concerts.



*Hear his carol arrangements on Christmas Eve*

## FOCUS CHURCHES OF ALBANY

**FOCUS**  
CHURCHES OF ALBANY

**VOLUNTEERS  
NEEDED!**

**WINTER BREAKFAST  
STARTS ON NOV. 5TH:**

**PREP COOK - TUESDAYS @ 6AM**

**BREAKFAST VOLUNTEERS -  
WEDNESDAYS @ 6:30AM**

**PLEASE CALL BELINDA:  
518-443-0461**

**THANK YOU!**

**TOGETHER WE CREATE A  
BETTER WORLD BY  
SERVING PEOPLE IN NEED.**



## FOOD PANTRY

In November, our Food Pantry served a total of 144 households. The Food Pantry was open 8 days in November, and our staff and volunteers provided a total of 3,906 meals! Thank you for supporting the Food Pantry ministry with your financial gifts, food donations and prayers.

## THANKSGIVING BASKET DISTRIBUTION



Thank-you to our volunteers and to the congregation for putting together the packages Sunday, November 24, 2019.

On Tuesday, November 26<sup>th</sup> our wonderful, dedicated First Church volunteers distributed 57 Thanksgiving packages to our pantry guests. They received potatoes, onions, apples, carrots, stuffing, pie filling, veggies and other assorted goodies plus a \$10.00 gift card to Price Chopper.

Thank you to everyone for your generous donations to help make our guests' Thanksgiving tables memorable and full of delicious food!

## MITTEN TREE FOR CHRISTMAS SHOPPE

Mitten  
Tree



### MITTEN TREE FOR CHRISTMAS SHOPPE

The Giving Box: Located in the Lounge

Mittens, gloves, hats and scarves (children & adult sizes)

These will be given to the children at the Christmas Shoppe.

## ADVENT – PRAYER & MEDITATION



### Prayer & Meditation During Advent

Join us every *Tuesday morning at 6:30* for a prayer call with Pastor Mashona during Advent. Dial (425) 436-6200. Use access code: 586376

Join us each *Wednesday from Noon to 1 pm* for Centering Prayer in the James Chapel at First Church.

For the small children: *Join us Fridays during Advent* for a Children's Story and Prayer Call. Children can dial in at any time on Friday to listen to the story. The story will run from Friday to the following Thursday. They can listen as many times as they like. Ages 3 to 12 years old. Dial (425) 436-6200 Use access code: 586376

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## PRE-SERVICE MUSIC ADVENT SUNDAYS

**Beginning at 10:15 am December 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

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

**December 1** – Advent hymns voluntaries for organ

**December 8** – Music for trumpet and organ with Doug Persons

**December 15** – Selections from Handel's *Messiah* with our soloists

**December 22** – Caroling for all

## HANDEL'S MESSIAH AT ST. PETER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

On Sunday, December 8th 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 organist Mary Bon, organist. The concert is free, but there will be a free will offering.

## CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA MEMORIALS



Please send a note or call the church office (518.463.4449) by **Friday, December 6th** 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.

## OVERFLOW HOMELESS SHELTER MEAL SCHEDULED FOR DECEMBER 6

For more than ten years First Church has been providing meals for the **Overflow Homeless Shelter** from November to April.

**Our next dinner is:** Friday, December 6 - Chili

**Can you help provide a dish - main dish, side dish, dessert?** This year many of our regular contributors are no long able to help and we need your help to continue this ministry.

There's a Sign-up sheet on the Hospitality Table or talk to Mary Bon at 518-339-5460 or [maryebon@verizon.net](mailto:maryebon@verizon.net).

It is an easy and rewarding way to serve!

*The Emergency Overflow Shelter at First Lutheran Church in Albany, sponsored by the Capital Area Council of Churches, 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 turns nobody away.*



## HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

The Hanging of the Greens, which makes our church look so beautiful during the Advent and Christmas seasons, is scheduled for December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Come at 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. for a cooked breakfast of eggs and (who knows?) other goodies.

After 9:30, we will adjourn to the sanctuary where we will decorate the building for the first time with new artificial greens, given to us by a generous grant from the estate of Thora Paton.

We've made a switch from live to artificial greens for several reasons, one of which is our ability to decorate the church earlier in Advent. (Cost, safety and easier cleanup were other reasons.)

Also, the Albany Downtown Business Improvement District is conducting its first ever Downtown Albany Hot Chocolate Stroll (Noon - 2 p.m.), and the church will be open for people to wander in and watch us decorate or see the decorated church. First Church is happy to be open for this event.

We think that you will be thrilled by the results. The new greens will represent a fresh new look to the church at the beginning of our fresh new pastorate under Dr. Walston.

Sign-up sheets are available in the lobby.

## WEATHERVANES – CHRISTMAS PARTY



Join us for the annual Christmas party on Wednesday, December 11<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 p.m. in Zimmerman Hall. There will be a chicken marsala dinner, singing and entertainment. Cost is \$15.00 and reservations and money are requested to be in to Audrey Ming (518-456-5485) by December 1<sup>st</sup>.

We will also be collecting money to buy books for the children of food pantry clients. Suggested donation is \$5.00 or more.



*The First Church in Albany*

*invites you to join us as we celebrate the*

*Installation of Our New Senior Minister*

*Rev. Dr. Mashona Walston*

We will celebrate this historic and ground breaking occasion with a message from

The Rev. Dr. Micah McCreary  
President of New Brunswick Theological Seminary  
New Brunswick, NJ

Sunday, December 15, 2019 at 3:00 pm  
110 North Pearl Street  
Albany, NY 12207

- Meet and greet with light reception will be held immediately following in Zimmern Hall.
- All clergy are asked to robe with red stoles.
- All are welcome.

Please arrive early for parking.

## CHRISTMAS SHOPPE- TOYS FOR TOTS



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 the week of **December 16<sup>th</sup>**. The Christmas Shoppe will be held from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. in Zimmerman Hall.

## BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE



### **First Church in Albany's Blue Christmas Service December 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm**

“Blue Christmas” is a service of worship during the Advent season that invites people who may be living with grief, loss, illness, underemployment or financial struggles, or other challenges to enter into God’s presence as they are.

In readings and silence, with singing and candles, through prayer and action the meaning of Christ’s birth is opened in the reality of our lives with hope.

## READERS NEEDED CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

If you would like to be a reader at the Christmas Eve Service, please talk to Pastor Mashona. Thank you!



## CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT WORSHIP

Christmas Eve Is  
MAGICAL at  
**First Church  
in Albany**

**CANDLELITE SERVICE:**  
7:00PM - HARP  
7:30PM - LESSONS, CAROLS &  
CANDLE LIGHTING  
8:45PM - WASSAIL HOUR  
(REFRESHMENTS)

110 NORTH PEARL STREET ALBANY, NY  
[WWW.FIRSTCHURCHINALBANY.ORG](http://WWW.FIRSTCHURCHINALBANY.ORG)

## CHRISTMAS OFFERING



The Christmas letters will be sent out soon with the Board of Deacons 2019 designation for the Christmas offering for 2019. It will also be announced in worship. So, stay tuned!



## “RING THEM BELLS” AT WORSHIP ON DECEMBER 29TH



### The Sunday after Christmas

Come join us in worship on December 29th as we celebrate Christmas with the joyful sound of bells. Ringing and singing with young and old, strangers and friends is fun. Bring your own bell or use one of ours. We'll have lots of extra bells available. “Ring Them Bells”

## FIRST CHURCH READERS WILL MEET JANUARY 26TH



First Church Readers will meet January 26th after worship to discuss *The Hamilton Affair* by Elizabeth Cobbs.

Everyone is welcome

Books we are considering for future months:

- *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer
- *In the Hurricane's Eye: The Genius of Washington and the Victory at Yorktown* by Nathaniel Philbrick
- *The Women's Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote* by Elaine Weiss
- *Founding Faith: How our Founding Fathers Forged a Radical New Approach to Religious Liberty* Steven Waldman
- *The Line becomes a River: Dispatches from the Border* Francisco Cantu
- *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood* by Trevor Noah

## **FIRST CHURCH FACILITIES ARE USED AND AVAILABLE FOR USE**

First Church has a large facility with various spaces that are convenient for groups of various sizes, with ample parking and a convenient location in downtown Albany. Each year several groups receive permission to use our facility. Such requests are approved by the Building Use Committee, composed of members of Leadership and the Treasurer. First Church charges fees to cover out-of-pocket expenses, though the fees are waived for an RCA or FOCUS-related event. A higher fee schedule applies to for-profit organizations. In addition, tours are offered to groups that are interested in First Church's history and architecture. And many individual visitors from places near and far come to First Church unscheduled, and are welcome to take a self-guided tour of our historic sanctuary.

If you know of a group that would like to use our facility, please refer them to Valerie Williams, Parish Administrator, for further information. Making our facilities available for varied uses and groups is part of good stewardship and our outreach to the community and city of Albany.

## **THANK YOU!**

- Shirley Bone for your monetary gift to the First Church Food Pantry Thanksgiving Baskets.

## **IN SYMPATHY**

- Our sympathy and prayers are with Angelika Harrington, the family and friends of Gerald Harrington, who died on November 25, 2019.

**The deadline for the January issue of *FAMILY* is December 16.**