

The First Church FAMILY

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

February 2016

WORSHIP:

- 7 **Transfiguration Sunday**
10:00 am FOCUS Combined Worship (Communion)
 @ Westminster Presbyterian Church
- 10 **Ash Wednesday Worship**
7:30 pm Ash Wednesday Service
- 14 **First Sunday in Lent**
10:15 am Lent Pre-Service Music
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 (During Worship: Children & Worship)
Post-service: *Prospects for Peace in Palestine and Israel* (John Paarlberg)
- 21 **Second Sunday in Lent**
10:15 am Lent Pre-Service Music
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 (During Worship: Children & Worship)
Post-service: *Why Did Jesus Die?* (Dr. Allan Janssen)
- 28 **Third Sunday in Lent**
10:15 am Lent Pre-Service Music
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 (During Worship: Children & Worship)
Post-service: *Why Did Jesus Die?* (Dr. Allan Janssen);
 First Church Readers

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

From the Pastor: Meeting Anna TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

A few weeks ago at our Tuesday Bible study we were so pleased to have Amina Mahmood come visit and speak with us about her Muslim faith. For several weeks now we have been learning about the similarities and differences of the Christian and Muslim faith. We designed some questions for her around how we worship God or Allah, how we interpret scripture of the bible and the Qur'an, the place of war or violence in our faiths and the role of women in places of leadership or in worship. In our study of Islam, which was purchased from the **Thoughtful Christian** website, each member of our study group is in harmony with the following perspective:

“No argument is needed for the importance of understanding Islam. That great religion occupies the attention of the world as never before in modern times. The Thoughtful Christian seeks to get behind the sensational headlines, the biased stereotypes, and the polemics that so often characterize the treatment of Islam in the media. A Christian perspective on the subject will take into account what the people of Islam say about their faith and will seek humbly to understand how believers in Christianity and believers in Islam can best relate to one another.”

So we asked Amina to come and join us.

Amina is an acquaintance of Ian Leet's. They know each other from serving on the University of Albany Interfaith Chapel Board. She is a psychologist who is teaching at SUNY Albany and she attends weekly prayers/worship at a mosque in Schenectady, Masjid Ummat An-Nabwi (also known as the Islamic Center of the Capital District).

She was born in Pakistan and has lived in many countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Europe and eventually here in USA for the past 20 years. Her parents are both educators and enjoy full careers teaching in both Pakistan and neighboring countries. Amina is “30 something”, a warm and engaging person who was very respectful and kind to us. She came and gave very thoughtful answers to our questions such as: Could you tell us about your daily prayers? What do Muslim's believe about Jesus Christ and other OT prophets, What is jihad, What of groups like ISIS?

Amina was pleased to tell us some important facts that have been commonly distorted in our media. She told us that her definition of jihad is the personal process of coming to peace within oneself, confronting our own personal conflict between good and evil. In Arabic, the word jihād is a noun meaning the act of "striving, applying oneself, struggling, persevering". For people of her faith this word does not mean attack of others in defense of their faith. Amina pointed out that war or extremist attack by terrorist fundamentalists groups make up a very small percentage of the Muslim population. Some of the Muslim faith might agree with “just war” in defense of one's own life, but violent agendas of groups such as ISIS or the Taliban

are highly political and motivated for reasons that are most often not religious at all. People of her faith are appalled and mortified by groups like this and do not in any way support their actions. We lamented with Amina that there is such misperception right now in USA and increasing racism against her people or of people who look like they are from near eastern countries.

We learned that in her faith loving others and God is of the highest value and we share almost all of the same commandments. We were struck by the beauty and discipline of daily prayers as she described this foundational practice. She also clarified that women, especially in larger cities like Islamabad (capital of Pakistan) enjoy working and dress as women do in the USA. She also told us that for most women to wear the traditional naqab (veil) is done out of a woman's personal decision to express herself. Pressure to wear clothing such as this is rare in most Muslim communities. She told us in rural areas there can be more conservative practices that we typically encounter in the books we read or news. Amina is very concerned at how those of the Muslim faith are being betrayed in our country and she told us some very sad stories of people being persecuted and murdered and that these stories are not being seen on our news.

We parted in the joy of having met one another. Amina gave us a great gift of her time and thoughtful preparation. We pray for her and others of the Muslim faith that racism against them and others of color in our country will be diminished and someday soon will be no more. There is so much to learn and what a joy for us to have made a new friend, and a friend of such deep faith and commitment to God. She left us a reading list (see below) that she believes will be very helpful to our congregations.

In Peace

Rev. Sue Vincent-Cox

Suggested Readings on Islam

Websites:

www.islamicity.com

www.cair.com

www.suhaibwebb.com

www.bayyinah.com (good podcasts as well-Bayyinah Institute)

www.galamstitute.org (good podcasts also)

Books on Islam: (continued from page 3)

- **The Straight Path** by John Esposito (recommend other books on Islam by him also)
- **A Short History of Islam** by Karen Armstrong
- **No God but God** by Reza Aslan
- **Fundamentalism: Confronting Religious Extremism in the Age of Globalization-Reza Aslan Muhammad: A Prophet for our times** by Karen Armstrong
- **I Speak for Myself: American Women on Being Muslim**
Edited by Maria M Ebrahimji and Zahra T Suratwala
- **Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet** by Karen Armstrong
- **The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam** by Fatima Mernissi (other works by her are also recommended)
- **Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective** by Amina Wadud
- **After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Suni Split in Islam**
by Lesley Hazleton
- **Spiritual Gems of Islam** by Imam Jamal Rahman

At Home with the WORD

Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary
February 1st - February 29th

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

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|--|----------------------------|
| 1. Exodus 34:29-35 | 15. Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 |
| 2. Presentation of the Lord;
Psalm 84 | 16. Psalm 27:1-6 |
| 3. Psalm 99 | 17. Psalm 27:7-14 |
| 4. 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 | 18. Philippians 3:17-4:1 |
| 5. Luke 9:28-36 | 19. Luke 13:31-35 |
| 6. Luke 9:37-43 | 20. Luke 9:28-43 |
| 7. Transfiguration Sunday | 21. Second Sunday in Lent |
| 8. Deuteronomy 26:1-11 | 22. Isaiah 55:1-5 |
| 9. Psalm 91:1-2, 9-13 | 23. Isaiah 55:6-9 |
| 10. Ash Wednesday; Psalm 51:1-17 | 24. Psalm 63:1-8 |
| 11. Psalm 91:14-16 | 25. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 |
| 12. Romans 10:8b-13 | 26. Luke 13:1-5 |
| 13. Luke 4:1-13 | 27. Luke 13:6-9 |
| 14. First Sunday in Lent | 28. Third Sunday in Lent |
| | 29. Joshua 5:9-12 |

FOCUS Churches Joint Worship Service

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7

The covenant congregations of FOCUS Churches of Albany—Emmanuel Baptist Church, Trinity United Methodist Church, Delmar Reformed Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church, First Presbyterian Church and the First Church in Albany will join together in worship on Sunday, February 7, at Westminster Presbyterian Church. The new FOCUS executive director, Rev. Jim Ketcham will be preaching. Time to fellowship following service.



**Combined
Winter
Worship
Service**

www.focuschurches.net

Sunday, February 7
10 am

FOCUS
CHURCHES OF ALBANY

Westminster Presbyterian Church
85 Chestnut Street
Sunday, February 7
@ 10:00 am

Pre-Service music in Lent starts on February 14

Each Sunday in Lent beginning February 14 we will have 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 follow the Lenten road from cross to resurrection.

Choir Mardi Gras Supper

The choir is having an early Mardi Gras supper on Thursday, February 4 at 5:30pm. Come celebrate the end of Epiphany, the season of light, with the choir. Everyone is welcome even if you are not in the choir. Look for more details in the bulletin or talk to Mary Bon.

CDS of First Church Worship Services

CDs of some recent First Church Worship Services, including the Christmas Eve Service, are available on the table next to Denise's office - take one for yourself and one for a friend. If you would like a CD of a recent service, contact the church office or Mary Bon at 463-4449. You can also listen to some of our services at the First Church website.

Post-Service Programs

Post-Service Programs: *Why Did Jesus Die?* Christians have answered that question in a variety of ways. Dr. Allan Janssen, resident theologian at First Church will lead us in thinking about this question during post-service presentations on February 21 and 28.

Overflow Shelter Dinners

Scheduled for February 5th and March 4th

We are grateful to all the people in our First Church Family who have been providing food and doing deliveries for the Overflow Shelter Dinners at First Lutheran Church THANK YOU! The shelter, sponsored by the Capital Area Council of Churches, turns nobody away. You can learn more about the shelter at <http://www.capareacc.org/emergency-overflow-homeless-shelter/>

Our next dinners will be:

- February 5th Chicken and Chicken Dishes
- March 4 Chili and International Dishes

Sign up at the Hospitality Table to bring a dish or to help deliver. You can also sign up by emailing Mary Bon at [maryebon@verizon.net!](mailto:maryebon@verizon.net) Remember many of the shelter guests have dental problems so soft foods and foods that are easy to chew are a good idea. Bring your dishes Sunday after church or weekdays between 9 am and 2:30 pm or Thursday night between 6:30 and 7:30. We now have RECYCLABLE containers available at the hospitality table to make it extra-easy to contribute a dish. TAKE ONE EMPTY BRING IT BACK FULL. For more info contact Mary Bon at 463-4449. Thank you for your generosity.

First Church Readers Group Meets February 28th



First Church Readers February 28th

The First Church Readers will meet February 28th to discuss February's book is *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr.

The Reader's Group will not meet in March.

April's book will be *To the Light House* by Virginia Woolf

May's book will be *Hudson River Steamboat*

Catastrophes, Contests and Collisions by our own congregation member, Tom Allison.

Future books we are considering are *Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help* and *How to Reverse It or Charity Detox: What Charity Would Look Like If We Cared About Results* both by Robert Lupton and *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* 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

Growing Green



For Valentine's Day –

Buy organic fair-trade chocolate - Commercially grown cocoa bean is: one of the crops most heavily treated with pesticides, often grown using child or slave labor, uses techniques which deplete the soil, farmers seldom receive a fair price for their crop. For more information on cocoa production checkout <http://fairtradeusa.org/products-partners/cocoa>

When you are out and about take a visit to a Wegmans grocery store. Here is an example of how their napkin and cutlery dispensers offer you a choice to conserve.

FOCUS Empty Bowls

Celebrate Valentines Day afternoon with friends at the FOCUS fundraiser. Enjoy great soup, get an artisan bowl and help raise money for those who struggle with hunger. The cost is \$25 per person. Please call the FOCUS office: 443-0460 to register or make your reservation at the FOCUS Worship Service on Sunday, February 7th at Westminster.



HUNGER ACTION NETWORK OF NEW YORK STATE
& FOCUS CHURCHES OF ALBANY

WORKING TOGETHER TO END HUNGER

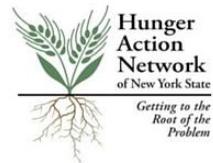
Sunday, February 14, 2016 from 1 to 3 pm

Reservations Requested: Call FOCUS 443-0460 or HANNYS 434-7371
or sign up on 2.7 at the FOCUS Worship Service at Westminster



FOCUS
CHURCHES OF ALBANY

Location: The ELKS Club
25 S. Allen Street
in Albany (free parking)



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 Ave. in Albany. Anyone can join us starting at 12:15 and stay until you wish to leave. We all pay for our own. Contact Donna E. Schultz at deschultz07@aol.com or 518.429.1255.

The Weathervanes Another View from the Top



Join the Weathervanes for fellowship, lunch, and program on Wednesday, February 17th at 12:30 p.m. in Zimmerman Hall. Bring a sandwich. Coffee, tea, and dessert will be served. After lunch, Ian Leet will show final pictures of the Renovation Project now that it has been completed. Along with his pictures, his commentary always makes the viewing more interesting and understandable. Come and Enjoy! Please call Audrey Ming (456-5485) to let her know that you plan to attend.

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.

A Reminder:

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

Parking Lots: Important Information-Snow-tow warning

If you are parked in either First Church parking lot when the church offices are closed (after 5 or weekends), and the plowing company comes to clear the snow, you will be TOWED whether you display a First Church permit or not.

Easter Flowers

Orders for Easter memorials must be received at the Church Office no later than March 21st, Monday at 9:00am. A donation of \$10 or more per plant is requested. Please make your check payable to "**First Church in Albany**" (marked: lilies). After Easter, the plants will be distributed to our homebound members.



The deadline for the March issue of *FAMILY* is February 12.



Congratulations

Congratulations to Harriet Sinclair who celebrates her 99th birthday on February 3rd.

Congratulations to Sarah and Mike Kaiser, Jr. on the birth of son, Grant Michael, born on January 12, 2016.

Thank You

Betty Pallone wants to thank First Church family and friends for the prayers, cards, calls, and Rev. John Paarlberg and Rev. Susan Vincent-Cox for their visits during her recent hospital stay and while recuperating at rehabilitation. The beautiful aquamarine prayer shawl received from the Prayer Shawl Ministry made me feel the love and blessings around me. It was very uplifting and much appreciated.

Memorial

In celebration of the life of **Nathan Joosten** a gift has been received from Shirley Joosten for the **Lynn T. Joosten Scholarship Fund**.

In celebration of the life of **Helen Bryce** a gift has been received from Elizabeth Smith-Eisenhauer and Donald A. Eisenhauer for the **Music Fund**.

In celebration of the life of **Kay McCann** a gift has been received from the Kate Allard Group for the **Music Fund**.

In Sympathy

Our sympathy is extended to the family and friends of David and Marilyn Bradley on the death of his sister, Ann Donigan on December 29, 2015.

Our sympathy is extended to Caroline Wirth and family on the death of her good friend, Mary N. Starr on January 12, 2016.

Our sympathy is extended to Suzanne Clayton and Gregory Clayton, family and friends on the death of husband/father, Dan Clayton on January 12, 2016.

Our sympathy is extended to Dollie and Larry Underdue, family and friends on the death of Dollie's aunt, Anna Dabbs on January 17, 2016.

Our sympathy is extended to Cindy Gillespie, family and friends on the death of Cindy's mom, Eleanore House on January 20, 2016.



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