

# The First Church

# FAMILY

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

**February 2018**

## **WORSHIP:**

- 4     **Fifth Sunday after Epiphany** (Communion)  
10:00 AM     FOCUS Churches of Albany  
                  Combined Winter Worship Service  
                  Delmar Reformed Church, 275 Delaware Ave., Delmar  
12:30 PM:     Empty Bowls at Delmar Reformed Church
- 11     **Transfiguration Sunday**  
10:30 AM     Sanctuary Service - with Nat Phipps Jazz Trio  
                  Rev. Lynn Carman Bodden preaching  
                  Children & Worship (During Worship)  
Post Service:     Coffee and Conversation
- 14     **Ash Wednesday**  
Noon             Prayer for the church - ashes available  
7:30 PM         Sanctuary Service
- 18     **First Sunday in Lent**  
10:15 AM     Pre-Service Music  
10:30 AM     Sanctuary Service Rev. Lynn Carman Bodden preaching  
                  Children & Worship (During Worship)  
Post Service:     Coffee and Conversation  
                  First Church Readers
- 25     **Second Sunday in Lent**  
10:15 AM     Pre-Service Music  
10:30 AM     Sanctuary Service Rev. Lynn Carman Bodden preaching  
                  Children & Worship (During Worship)  
Post Service:     Transition Forum with Soup and Bread Luncheon

**Our Sunday morning service may be found anytime at [www.firstchurchinalbany.org](http://www.firstchurchinalbany.org).**

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# From the Pastor

Dear Members and Friends,

February is a month full of special days: Groundhog Day, Valentine's Day, Presidents' Day. Frequently, it is also the month in which the church season of Lent begins, since 25 of the 35 days on which Lent *could* begin fall in February.

This year, Lent begins on Valentine's Day. Easter, if you read ahead in your calendars, comes on April Fool's. To me, this is a perfect union of dates! Lent is a great time for us to reflect on the ways we love God and, perhaps more significantly, the countless ways God loves us. And Easter is the day on which the power of God's love in the resurrected Christ makes a fool of death, of hopelessness, of injustice and human ideas of power.

I think God is inviting us this year not only to meditate on true love, but also to lift up the ways we currently do or easily could express that love inside and beyond the doors of First Church. Mondays and Wednesdays are easy: we open our Food Pantry to our neighbors in need. Sundays, we open our sanctuary and our hearts for worship. But in what other ways will we put flesh and bones on God's love?

Perhaps at home, as individuals and families, you will choose to keep a calendar to record the ways you personally share the love of God. I bet you do amazing things in everyday ways! You might also keep an eye out for how God's love is shared with you – by strangers as well as loved ones.

This Lent, let's think together as well about all the crazy ways that loving God, neighbor and self are not as foolish as an often cynical, often harsh world may think. In Christ, God constantly teaches us the power of an alternative way of living: a just, courageous, humble, merciful way. And in the Spirit, God invites us to be the Body of Christ in that same just, courageous, humble, merciful way.

It's who we are: loving fools for Christ! Thanks be to God.

Lynn

## **Nat Phipps Jazz Trio To Play for the February 11th Transfiguration Worship Service**

Sunday, February 11th is Transfiguration Sunday, the last Sunday before Lent. We are happy to welcome the Nat Phipps Jazz Trio, who will offer their musical gifts in worship. Nat Phipps is a jazz pianist well-known through-out the Capital District. Originally from Newark, New Jersey, he spent most of his early professional years playing in New York City and New Jersey. Joining him will be drummer Pete Sweeney and Pete Toigo on bass. The trio has joined us at First Church for several worship services in the past and also has played at the jazz vesper services at the First Reformed Church in Schenectady.

We are delighted that they can join us!

## ASH WEDNESDAY

On Wednesday, February 14, at 7:30 pm will be our Ash Wednesday worship service. The service this year will include a remembrance of baptism, the imposition of ashes, and a celebration of absolution. If you have never attended an Ash Wednesday service before, please join us. In God's presence, you are welcome to participate as you are comfortable: fully in each action, or as one present to watch and pray. If you are unable to be at the evening service, ashes will be available in the sanctuary at the noon prayer time.

### At Home with the WORD

Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary [www.rca.org/athome](http://www.rca.org/athome)  
February 1<sup>st</sup> – February 28<sup>th</sup>

- |                                       |                           |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. 1 Corinthians 9:16-23              | 15. 1 Peter 3:18-22       |
| 2. Mark 1:29-34                       | 16. Mark 1:9-11           |
| 3. Mark 1:35-39                       | 17. Mark 1:12-15          |
| 4. Sunday Fifth Sunday after Epiphany | 18. First Sunday in Lent  |
| 5. 2 Kings 2:1-6                      | 19. Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 |
| 6. 2 Kings 2:7-12                     | 20. Psalm 22:23-31        |
| 7. Psalm 50:1-2                       | 21. Romans 4:13-15        |
| 8. Psalm 50:3-6                       | 22. Romans 4:16-25        |
| 9. 2 Corinthians 4:3-6                | 23. Mark 8:31-38          |
| 10. Mark 9:2-9                        | 24. Mark 9:2-9            |
| 11. Transfiguration Sunday            | 25. Second Sunday in Lent |
| 12. Genesis 9:8-17                    | 26. Exodus 20:1-17        |
| 13. Psalm 25:1-10                     | 27. Psalm 19:1-6          |
| 14. Ash Wednesday; Psalm 51:1-17      | 28. Psalm 19:7-14         |

## TRANSITION UPDATE

On January 14, we held the last Cottage Meeting. In all, 48 people participated. We thank each and every one of you who offered your time, your insights, your questions and your love for First Church.

At the Congregational Meeting on January 21, Lynn Carman Bodden shared the interim time congregational goals identified by Consistory and Leadership. Five broad areas were named:

- Transition and Search
- Clarification of First Church's Mission
- Community Relations
- Financial Stewardship
- Program Focus

Specifics and questions to answer in each area are posted in the lobby. *(cont. p.4)*

On January 28, the group which led the springtime discussion of Anthony Robinson's book, Changing the Conversation, met to discuss next steps. Their prayer, study and conversation are helping with goal #2: Clarification of First Church's Mission. Your input is essential as we go forward, since consensus on who First Church is in 2018, and what God is calling you to do and be going forward is critical to successfully accomplishing goal #1: Transition and Search.

We thank you for your interest and covet your prayers.

**The Transition Team:** Joanna Brown, Ella Campbell, Monica Marsh, Jay Reohr, Lynn Carman Bodden

## **Cottage Meeting: People said what??**

Many thanks to all who participated in the Cottage Meetings in November, December and January. There were 47 people who shared openly and honestly in meetings, and a couple people who couldn't fit the schedule who made a point of offering their input to the five questions. Not everyone agreed about everything, and that may open new ways of thinking!

Here are some teasers about some of the things we learned:

- People appreciated John Paarlberg's ministry for a wide variety of reasons. They also had some good ideas about what the church might be looking for in a new minister.
- When asked, "If this church were a car, what kind of car would it be and how would you describe it?" it was clear people know the church pretty well – but that they see it from different angles: from Model T to Mercedes, bus to convertible. Age and energy and a need for some work are balanced by fit, comfort and potential.
- Traditions like the center communion table and candles on Christmas Eve are worth keeping, as are the Drive-in worship service, passing the peace and bible study. There is also interest in exploring some different practices, like flexibility in communion practices, the use of James Chapel sometimes instead of the sanctuary, and when to start the drive-in season.
- There is a great deal of energy around reaching out into the community, reconsidering the use of the building, more bible study and prayer and spiritual activities, and chances to have fun and build relationships together.

On February 25, after worship, come to Zimmerman Hall to learn more details. We'll host a lunch of soup and bread, and members of the Transition Team will share more of what was said and how the information will be used. We'll have some interactive activities to keep us moving toward the search. You won't want to miss it! Sign up in the lobby if you want to come – and your help in providing food is welcome.

## **Prayer for the Church**

On Wednesdays at noon for a half hour, the sanctuary is open for a weekly time of unstructured prayer the life and future of First Church. You are welcome to stay as long or as little as you have time for. If you are unable to be present physically, then join us by praying for the church wherever you are.

## **Liturgists**

If you have ever wanted to help lead worship as a liturgist, please speak with Lynn Carman Bodden, Sue Vincent-Cox or a member of the Elders.

## **Thank You, Jeanne!**

As many of you know, Jeanne Bianchine completed her work at First Church on January 25. Jeanne artistically assembled and edited our weekly worship bulletins, contributed ideas to and laid out the monthly issues of the Family, kept the online prayer card up-to-date, redesigned the website, and maintained a vital presence on Facebook. Jeanne was also the primary photographer and designer of the recently published 2018 Church Directory. We are grateful for the ways she shared her gifts with us these past four and a half years, and wish her well in her future endeavors.

## **Weathervanes – Nijmegen Tile for February Meeting**



Join the Weathervanes on Wednesday, February 21st, at 12:30 p.m. in Zimmerman Hall. At our February meeting Weathervane member Tom Allison will tell us about our Sister City, Nijmegen Holland, and how that came to be. He will also tell us the fascinating story behind our collection of Delft tiles and what they mean.

Please contact Audrey Ming (518-456-5485) to let her know you are coming.

## **First Church 2018 Directory**

The First Church 2018 Directory is now printed and ready for all to take home! If you have not yet received your Directory please contact Valerie Williams at the church office 518-463-4449.

## **Staff Responsibility Changes**

Effective February 1, 2018 the hours and responsibilities of Valerie Williams, Parish Administrator, have increased. Valerie will now be responsible for worship bulletins, the newsletter and administering the membership portion of the parish database. Questions, concerns, submissions to publications, and offers of help can all be directed to Valerie! We are grateful for her gifts and willingness to accept additional work and challenges at First Church during this time of transition as we move forward in new ways.

## Prayer Shawl Ministry Request for Scarves



In mid-January, Ian Leet, who volunteers for the FOCUS Winter Breakfast Program, told Jean Lamere, a member of the Prayer Shawl team, that the Breakfast program had run out of scarves. The need has been great. FOCUS' Breakfast Program is hosted at Westminster Presbyterian Church and is staffed by volunteers from the FOCUS Church congregations and other members of the Albany community. This program serves a warm breakfast (and hands out bag lunches) to over 100 guests/week during the coldest months.

Ian Leet and Leroy Sues are volunteers from our church serving guests weekly.

Ian reported back to our church there is a significant need for scarves as many guests who come are homeless, of very low income, or have other stressors making dress for the cold weather a challenge.

Jean and Ian had a conversation about the concern and quickly the Prayer Shawl Ministry was alerted and got to work. Scarves are needed for both men and women and they were glad to fill the need. We pray our neighbors will stay warm and fed.

## Join us for Choir Mardi Gras Party, Tuesday, February 13<sup>th</sup> at Ian Leet's home, 931 Myrtle Ave, Albany

The choir is having a Mardi Gras celebration on Tuesday February 13th at 5:30. at the Leet's home. The last day before Lent starts is often called "Shrove Tuesday" or "Mardi Gras." Mardi Gras literally is French for "Fat Tuesday." It's often celebrated with a Pancake Supper to use up your fats, and goodies before the season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. You don't need to be a choir member to come! Meet the choir members in an informal setting. Everyone is welcome - family, friends, spouses, partners, potential choir members or just lovers of music!

Come join us! Contact Mary Bon at [maryebon@verizon.net](mailto:maryebon@verizon.net) or talk to any choir member for more information.

## THE MUSIC CORNER – Spirituals and Black History Month

February is Black History Month and we will be using African-American Spirituals for many of our musical offerings in before and during worship. James Weldon Johnson, author of the song *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, often called the Black National anthem, wrote:

"The African American spiritual (also called the Negro Spiritual) constitutes one of the largest and most significant forms of American folksong."

Born of great suffering, and drawing on both scripture and African roots, the spirituals express a wide range of emotions: joy, comfort in times of sorrow, sadness in hard times, and even outrage and secret defiance. They speak to us about our earthly pilgrimage - the joy of belief, the comfort of the scriptures and friends, the need to prepare and be ready for the journey, the longing for an end to earth's sufferings, and the sure hope of an eternal home in Christ.

As well as their scriptural dimension, spirituals like *Deep River*, *Steal Away* and *Ride the Chariot* often had a hidden message referring to the Underground Railroad. The chariot was the vehicle either literal or figurative for escaping slavery, either by worldly escape to the north or by death. Much of the terminology referred to the journey: waiting for "the chariot," (the underground railroad conductor or a boat run by sympathizers who would pick up slaves from the slavery side of the river and ferry them to free territory in northern States like Ohio); "steal Away" heading north to freedom, "crossing Jordan," (often the Ohio, the boundary between free north and slave south); always being "ready for the journey,"

The theologian, William B. McCain says:

"Singing is as close to worship as breathing is to life. These songs of the soul ... reflect the truth of an old African saying; *The spirit will not descend without song....* They speak of life and death, suffering and sorrow, love and judgment, grace and hope, justice and mercy. They are the most beautiful expression of human experience and faith this side of the seas."

## A Little Lenten Music

### Sunday mornings in Lent 10:15 am

Beginning February 18, we will have pre-service music in the sanctuary each Lenten Sunday 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.

February 18	African and American Organ Music
February 25	African American Music w/ Our Soloist
March 4	Mass for the convents – Louis Couperin

## Get Your Red on During American Heart Month



Provided by American Heart Association

The first Friday in February is always Wear Red Day, a day the American Heart Association has designated to raise awareness about heart disease in women. Across the Capital Region, many buildings will be illuminated red, and staff at area companies will wear red and donate to the American Heart Association.

The American Heart Association has many events planned during February, American Heart Month, to help raise awareness about heart disease and stroke.

Buildings will “glow” red to also raise awareness about cardiovascular diseases in women. On “Wear Red Day Eve, (Feb. 1)” at the Times Union Center at 4:45pm, led by County Executive Daniel P. McCoy, reps from local businesses will “flip the switch” to make the Capital Region glow red. FCA representatives are invited to participate.

There are some things in life you can't change – like genetics or family history. But if you are aware of them, and change the things you can, you have a chance of living a longer, healthier life. Why not use American Heart Month as a chance to renew your commitment to your own health? See your doctor and know your numbers – blood pressure, BMI, cholesterol, blood sugar – and make a plan to keep them in the healthy range. Add color to your plate – lots of fruits and vegetables, along with lean protein. And try to get 30 minutes of exercise per day!

For information about what your local American Heart Association is doing, visit [www.heart.org/albanyny](http://www.heart.org/albanyny)

## Food Pantry

In December our Food Pantry served 135 people in 126 households. The pantry was open seven days, offering 18 meals per person per visit.

### Thank you to all our volunteers.

This month, February, we will be collecting **soap**. Please bring your offering for our Food Pantry guests to church on Sunday, February 11<sup>th</sup> and lay it near the communion table. Soap, and the items listed for the coming months cannot be purchased with food stamps, and yet they are necessary for any household on a daily basis for good health and hygiene. We will dedicate this offering during our time of prayer. Thank you for reaching out to help your neighbors in need.

- February 11 – Soap
- March 11 – Shampoo
- April 8 – Razors
- May 13 – Sanitary pads

## Our next Homeless Shelter Dinner is February 9th

We are grateful to all the people in our First Church Family who have been providing food and doing deliveries for the Overflow Homeless Shelter Dinners at First Lutheran Church.

Our next dinner will be Friday, February 9<sup>th</sup>.

- Meatloaf and hamburger 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). Many of the shelter guests have dental problems so soft foods and foods that are easy to chew appreciated. Also, since some of the guests don't eat pork, label all dishes containing pork.

Bring your dishes Sunday after church, weekdays between 9 am and 1:00 pm or Thursday night between 6:30 and 7:30. For more info contact Mary Bon at 463-4449.

Thank you for your generosity. You can learn more about the shelter at <http://www.capareacc.org/emergency-overflow-homeless-shelter/>

## 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 on December 7<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:deschultz07@aol.com) or 518.429.1255.

## First Church Readers Group will meet February 18th



The First Church Readers will meet February 18th after the worship service to discuss *Lily and the Octopus* by Steven Rowley “An authentic, keenly insightful, hilarious and heartbreakingly poignant tribute to the purity of love between a pet dachshund and its human.” Booklist (starred review)

Upcoming books are:

- March – *Beartown*: A Novel by Fredrik Backman
- April – *Less*: A Novel by Andrew Sean Greer
- May – *After Long Silence*: A Memoir by Helen Fremont

Other Books we are considering:

- *The Beauty of Impermanence*: A Woman’s Memoir by Frances Barnhart
- A Dictionary of Mutual Understanding by Jackie Copleton

If you have ideas for books for the reading group pass them on to Mary Bon at [maryebon@firstchurchinalbany.org](mailto:maryebon@firstchurchinalbany.org) or [518-463-4449](tel:518-463-4449).



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

WORKING TOGETHER TO END HUNGER

Sunday, February 4, 2018  
from 12:30 to 2:30 pm



Reservations Requested:  
Call FOCUS 518-443-0460 or HANNYS 518-434-7371

Location: Delmar Reformed Church 386 Delaware Ave. Delmar



## PLEDGE UPDATE

We have received pledges from 52 individuals or households for 2018 totaling \$140,650. Thank you to everyone who is reaching out in faith to invest generously in the ministry and future of First Church. This amount is \$4350 short of the \$145,000 goal hoped for by your Joint Boards. If you have not yet pledged and would like to, or if you are able to increase your pledge by any amount, all gifts are welcome!

**Flower donations:** Please note that effective January 1, 2018, the Enchanted Florist prices increased from \$25.00 to \$32.50 per flower pot and \$65.00 for both.

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## Thank You

- Thank you once again to all who shepherded the events and gifts of the 375th Anniversary. This month, we offer special thanks to Jeanne Bianchine, Shirley Bone and Joyce Recene who created and helped distribute the 2018 Pictorial Directory.
  - Thank you to the steadfast participants in the Changing the Conversation study and discussion group (Rev. Sue Vincent Cox, Ross Westhuis, Jay Roehr, Cheryl Gowie, Jim Folts, Monica Marsh, Joeanna Brown and Erica Bliss). After revisiting their conversations with Pastor Lynn and Ella Campbell of the Transition Team on January 25, this group has handed off next steps to the Transition Team and the congregation to concisely articulate First Church's purpose statement and ministry direction for the future, and for the Pastoral Search.
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## In Sympathy

Our prayers and sympathy go out to Ruth & Peter Pagerey on the death of Ruth's brother, Harold MacMurray.



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110 North Pearl Street  
Albany, NY 12207-2231  
518.463.4449

[www.firstchurchinalbany.org](http://www.firstchurchinalbany.org)

email: [info@firstchurchinalbany.org](mailto:info@firstchurchinalbany.org)

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