

The First Church **FAMILY**

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

January 2016

WORSHIP:

- 3 **Second Sunday after Christmas**
10:30 am Sanctuary Service (Communion)
 (During Worship: Children & Worship)
- 10 **First Sunday after the Epiphany: Baptism of the Lord**
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 (During Worship: Children & Worship)
Post-service: Pot-luck Luncheon and Congregational Meeting
- 17 **Second Sunday after the Epiphany**
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 (During Worship: Children & Worship)
- 24 **Third Sunday after the Epiphany**
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 (During Worship: Children & Worship)
Post-service: First Church Readers
- 31 **Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany**
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 (During Worship: Children & Worship)
12 Noon Trustees

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

From the Pastor

Dear Friends,

In July of 2004 Ms. Claudette Habesch, a Palestinian Christian woman from the Middle East Council of Churches, spoke at a luncheon hosted by our congregation. She told us about what life was like for Palestinians living under the occupation. After her presentation I asked, "What can we do?" She responded with a simple invitation: "Come and see."

Those three words turned out to be the beginning of a journey for me. I took the invitation to heart and a year later traveled to Jerusalem and the West Bank with Christian Peacemaker Teams. I saw and heard first-hand what life was like for people living under the illegal Israeli occupation. In 2010 Marilyn and I participated in another Christian Peacemaker Team delegation. And in 2012 I spent part of my sabbatical hiking the "Nativity Trail" from Nazareth to Bethlehem and again joined a CPT delegation for part of the time. I also chaired a denominational task force on Peace and Justice in Israel and the Occupied Territories and presented its report to the 2012 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

More recently I have been in conversation with colleagues in Albany Synod and with Rev. Marlin and Sally Vis, Reformed Church missionaries who regularly lead study tours to Israel/Palestine. We are planning a multi-faith (Jewish, Christian and Muslim) travel seminar to Israel and Palestine in February 2017. (Stay tuned! I hope some of you might consider participating in this study tour.) This trip will include visits to archeological and holy sites important to each of the three Abrahamic faiths, as well as visits with Christian, Muslim, Jewish and secular organizations engaged in non-violent resistance to the occupation. We want to explore such questions as: What do we share in common? Where do we differ? How can we work together for justice and for peace?

As part of my own preparation I will be traveling to Israel and Palestine this month with "Friends of Sabeel." Sabeel is an international peace movement initiated by Palestinian Christians, who seek a just peace as defined by international law and existing United Nations resolutions.

This trip will focus on meeting people at the grassroots and leadership levels of the "popular resistance" movement in Palestine. We'll be visiting villagers, farmers, professors, business people, peace activists, Jewish rabbis, Christian clergy, and Muslim leaders. All are working for justice and utilizing a variety of non-violent models.

The conflict in Israel and Palestine is not primarily a religious conflict. It is a political conflict over issues of land and security, of freedom and human rights. But people of faith both in Israel/ Palestine and here in the United States can play an important role—for good or for ill. Some have distorted faith and used it to foster division and hatred. But many others— Christians, Jews and Muslims alike, are working for justice and for reconciliation. Their work is long, hard and often discouraging. These are people who need our prayers and our support. These are the peacemakers who Jesus called “children of God.”

Sincerely,

John D. Paarlberg

At Home with the WORD

Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary

January 1st - January 31st

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

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 | 16. John 2:6-11 |
| 2. Ephesians 1:3-14 | 17. Second Sunday after Epiphany |
| 3. Second Sunday after Christmas | 18. Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 |
| 4. Isaiah 43:1-7 | 19. Psalm 19:1-6 |
| 5. Psalm 29 | 20. Psalm 19:7-14 |
| 6. Epiphany of the Lord; Isaiah 60:1-6 | 21. 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 |
| 7. Acts 8:14-17 | 22. 1 Corinthians 12:27-31 |
| 8. Luke 3:15-17 | 23. Luke 4:14-21 |
| 9. Luke 3:21-22 | 24. Third Sunday after Epiphany |
| 10. First Sunday after Epiphany | 25. Jeremiah 1:4-8 |
| 11. Isaiah 62:1-5 | 26. Jeremiah 1:9-10 |
| 12. Psalm 36:5-10 | 27. Psalm 71:1-6 |
| 13. 1 Corinthians 12:1-3 | 28. 1 Corinthians 13:1-7 |
| 14. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 | 29. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 |
| 15. John 2:1-5 | 30. Luke 4:21-30 |
| | 31. Fourth Sunday after Epiphany |

Pot-luck Luncheon and Congregational Meeting

SUNDAY, JANUARY 10

Bring a dish to share and enjoy a meal together as we give thanks for the year past and look forward to the year ahead. The annual church budget for 2016 will be presented for discussion and vote.

Children and Worship, TOO

What a joy to see more children coming to First Church Sunday morning worship gathering up front for our Children's Moments. And a joy it is to see ALL the children quietly leave the sanctuary to go up together to their own Children and Worship Centers.

We opened a new Center this fall for children ages 9-12 and have had several children attending regularly.

I was fortunate to lead the older children for a few Sundays this November. I was awe struck to see so many children in both Centers hearing God's stories and afterwards scattering about on the floors quietly drawing or sitting at the tables, writing in journals, making figures in clay, painting, singing, praying, and reading scripture together. It is quite striking to see so many children quietly and meditatively listening to God's voice in story, prayer and ritual.

In both worship experiences:

We begin with our Greeting (with signing)

We sing worship songs (with signing)

We hear the biblical story

The older kids hear and see and experience **one story** in different ways over 4 weeks.

The younger children hear and see a **new story each week** told with wooden figures and underlays.

Both are followed by wondering questions where the children share what they imagine when they hear the story.

In November the older children heard the story of Noah:

The first week of November this story was told with C&W figures, the second week the story was shown with no words only pictures, the 3rd week **the children** told the story using the figures and underlays. And the 4th and 5th weeks the children did echo pantomimes where the leader tells the story in paraphrase and the children repeat and act this out in hand and body motions.

After the story and the expression time that follows in both centers the children return to their circles, the Christ candle is brought out, lit, and the children hear the scripture that inspired the story (the older children take turns reading the scripture).

Prayer of Thanksgiving follows: once a month the younger children have a feast (crackers and juice) which helps them to prepare for communion in the sanctuary when they get older.

More singing

Benediction

Then each child is blessed for the upcoming week.

I have been struck again and again by the children's desire to know the holy presence of God. We hope to add new stories for the upcoming year, stories such as *Jesus Appears to the Disciples by the Sea*, *Jesus Feeds the 5000*, *God's Gift to the Holy Spirit*.

We also currently have new members training and joining our worship team. We welcome story tellers, Adrienne Pagerey, Kim Gattie, and Dory Foster. Greeters joining us this year include Norma McClement. We are still hoping new greeters will feel called to come and join us. Others who have been leading for the past 4 years include greeters Imani Brewer and Sue Hunter. Story tellers Deb Anderson, Sara Bonom Welge, Lauren Casullo. Thanks to Marilyn Paarlberg, too, who so faithfully supports this program with ongoing consultation and training.

Please join me in lifting your prayers of support, blessings and gratitude for all members of our worship team who strive each week to nurture the spiritual lives of our children.

Rev. Sue Vincent-Cox

First Church Bible Study on Tuesdays

For the past several weeks we have been exploring the tenets of the Muslim religion. We have been using digital studies, a text on Islam titled, *"Ishmael Instructs Isaac: An Introduction to the Qur'an for Bible Readers"* and other articles. This month we have also invited a young woman of the Muslim faith, who is a student at University of Albany and a friend of one of our members, to come visit us and share more with us about her religion.

We chose this study to have a more intimate understanding of our Muslim brothers and sisters. We also hope to visit the Islamic Community Center in Latham soon. In mid-December, some of our church members gathered and went to the Al-Hidayah Center here in Albany for a time of fellowship and conversation to help build bridges with Muslims and Christians and others in our community.

In our study we are focusing on such questions as:

Where did Islam originate? What do Muslims believe? What similarities and differences are there between Christianity and Islam? How can Christians and Muslims best relate to one another?

As some of our members have shared we have learned so much more about our own faith in this study, deepening our commitment to our Christian practices and principles. (It is amazing what openness to understanding others can do to increase your own acceptance and care for who you are).

We also wonder weekly about the violence we hear on our news. We are greatly saddened and confused at the misunderstanding in our own country of our Muslims neighbors, who like ourselves, do not uphold violence and strongly speak out against hurting others.

On July 28, 2005, the *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) Council of North America declared in Washington, D.C., "Islam strictly condemns religious extremism and the use of violence against innocent lives. There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism. Targeting civilians' lives and property through suicide bombings or any other method of attack is *haram*—or forbidden—and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not 'martyrs.'"

Islamic Horizons, *September–October, 2005*

We plan to continue our study for several more weeks. If you can, please feel free to join us Tuesdays at noon in the Parlor.

Shalom,

Rev Sue Vincent Cox

Reflections on Our Overflow Shelter Ministry

Mary Bon

When I last delivered food to the shelter I was overwhelmed. I was running later than usual and was feeling tired, harried and a bit discouraged. Often there are a few guests waiting at the door and I can strike up a conversation, but there was nobody about. When I rang the doorbell three of the staff hurried up the stairs to greet me. I was apologetic because I was late and we had less quantity and variety of dishes than normal. But I was blown away by the appreciation and comments of the staff:

"Oh great, it's First Church Fridays, again! ... You always bring so many choices! We won't go hungry tonight, they bring lots of food. WE LOVE IT when they do dinner." I'm sure there will be enough! Thank you! Thank you."

Seems we are unique in our donations. Many donors provide one large main dish and one dessert but we provide a variety of individual offerings from many hands to make our much appreciated meal. Know that both the guests and the staff very grateful for your contributions. Thank you!

We talked a bit about the shelter start-up and how it was going. Usually the first month or so is slow as they get rolling, but this season it is already very busy. The staff mentioned that it has been an especially challenging start because they don't turn away people with impairments and that sometimes means additional challenges for the staff and other guests. I know they would appreciate your thoughts and prayers as they do this difficult and important ministry.

"I saw a stranger yestreen; I put food in the eating place, drink in the drinking place, music in the listening place, and, in the name of the Triune, he blessed myself and my house, my cattle and my dear ones, and the lark said in her song often, often, often, goes the Christ in the stranger's guise."

Irish Rune of Hospitality

Upcoming Overflow Shelter Dinners

We need food and deliverers!

This month's dinners are the 2nd and 4th Fridays:

- January 8th - Meatloaf
- January 22th - Stews and Comfort Food

Can you help provide a dish for one of these dates or deliver the meal to the shelter on Friday?

Sign up at the hospitality table. Drop your food (labeled Shelter dinner) off Sunday after church, any weekday between 8:30 am and 2:00 pm (call before you come), or on Thursday night between 6:30 and 7:30. For more information contact Mary Bon at 463-4449 or maryebon@verizon.net

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

NOTE: Use non-returnable dishes (available at the Hospitality table or in the choir room) Clearly label dishes with pork products as some guests do not eat pork. Some guests have trouble with foods that are difficult to chew. Soft food are greatly appreciated.

A Special Thank you to our Choir!

A heartfelt thank-you to our choir for their beautiful music during the Advent and Christmas season! We appreciate all their hard work. We are fortunate to have such a talented and dedicated group of people enriching our worship together. A special thank-you to our soloists, Peter Subers, Rose Hunsberger and David Bon-Keen and our instrumentalists who have graced so many of our worship services with their special musical offerings.

The senior choir is having an early Mardi Gras supper on Thursday, February 4th (the last Thursday before Lent starts) at 5:30 PM. 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 and February family or talk to Mary Bon or any choir member for more details.

First Church Readers Group Meets January 24th

Come join us on January 24th when we meet after worship to discuss *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: 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



How about some “growing green” New Year’s resolutions? How can we be good stewards of our world? Here are some ideas:

1. Use your car less. Leave it at home once or twice a week and carpool, walk or take the bus. <http://www.cdta.org/schedules.php>.
2. Substitute poultry, eggs and beans for red meat. While a Vegan diet is the most climate friendly, poultry and eggs use only slightly more energy and produce far less ground-water pollution, and green house gas emissions than red meat.
3. Choose a cause and resolve to write your representatives to advocate for it.

Christmas Shoppe – Thank You



On Tuesday, December 15, The First Church Food Pantry’s Christmas Shoppe made it possible for 88 children to have a Christmas present, stocking stuffer, crafts, books, hats and mittens. Thank you all!

Thank You

A special thank you to all who helped in so many ways to make the Wassail Hour such a wonderful experience on Christmas Eve.

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 Ice Harvesting



Join the Weathervanes for fellowship, lunch, and program on Wednesday, January 13th at 12:30 p.m. in Zimmerman Hall. Bring a sandwich. Coffee, tea, and dessert will be served. After lunch, John Bowen will present a program on Ice Harvesting on the Hudson and other areas. Please telephone 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.

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

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.

Sunday Flower Date Available

January 17th and January 31st are available for the dedication of sanctuary flower arrangements. The cost is \$50 for two vases. Please call the Church Office (463.4449) if you are interested.

FOCUS Combined Worship on February 7

As one of the six member churches of FOCUS we have made a commitment to worship together with the other covenant congregations several times each year. On **Sunday, February 7**, we will join the other FOCUS congregations in worship at Westminster Presbyterian Church. There will not be a worship service at First Church that Sunday.



The deadline for the February issue of *FAMILY* is January 15.



Congratulations

Congratulations to the Rev. Wil and Martha Ivins who celebrated their 69th wedding anniversary of December 31st.

Memorial

In celebration of the life of Mrs. Walter Smith a gift has been received from Shirley Bone for the **Clee Park Fund**.

In Sympathy

Sympathy is extended to Erica Zetterholm-Bliss, family and friends on the death of her grandmother, Helen Zetterholm on December 1, 2015.

Sympathy is extended to Tulla Pangburn, family and friends on the death of her husband, The Rev. Donald Pangburn on December 7, 2015.

Sympathy is extended to Theresa Brewer, family and friends on the death of her brother, Richard Emory on December 9, 2015.



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