

The First Church **FAMILY**

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

March 2015

WORSHIP:

- 1 **Second Sunday in Lent**
 - 10:15 am Pre-Service Music
 - 10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 - Post-service: “The Way”
 - 4:30 pm Journeys of Faith

- 8 **Third Sunday in Lent**
 - 10:15 am Pre-Service Music
 - 10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 - Post-service: “The Way”
 - 4:30 pm Journeys of Faith

- 15 **Fourth Sunday in Lent**
 - 10:15 am Pre-Service Music
 - 10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 - Post-service: “The Way”

- 22 **Fifth Sunday in Lent**
 - 10:15 am Pre-Service Music
 - 10:30 am Sanctuary Service
 - Post-service: “The Way”; First Church Readers
 - 4:30 pm Journeys of Faith

- 29 **Palm Sunday**
 - 10:15 am Pre-Service Music
 - 10:30 am Sanctuary Service

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

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From the Pastor

Beloved Congregation of Jesus Christ,

Have you heard about the church for atheists? Around the world there are several new groups for secular humanists, freethinkers, skeptics, atheists and agnostics who want a sense of community “without having to deal with any of the God stuff.” They often meet on Sundays and the gatherings include songs, readings, and even a moment of silence where congregants are left alone with their own thoughts. Some of the congregations intend to organize small groups, where a few people can gather to read books and discuss philosophy.

One 37-year-old atheist who led a group in Charlotte, North Carolina, said he really loved being in church when he was younger. But it wasn't the theology that attracted him. “When you walked in, it was family. There was singing. And the woman in back hugged your neck,” he said. “I want a person leaving religion to be able to come [to our group] and get that support they need for a life of ... free thought.”

Those of us in the Christian church might be tempted to make light of the “atheist church” and question whether a community without God can have much depth or endurance. But I also want to recognize that there is something good here. All of this speaks of the desire for community and the need to belong. It also parallels some important changes happening in Christianity.

Diana Butler Bass (*Christianity After Religion; The End of the Church and the Birth of New Spiritual Awakening*, HarperCollins, 2012) argues that for the past 500 years or so the typical pattern for becoming a member of a church was: believing, behaving, belonging. Religious commitment began when you assented to an organized body of doctrine. Joining depended on whether or not you agreed with its creed or a statement of belief.

That's changing. And for much of the history of the Christian faith, including the witness of the New Testament, that pattern was reversed: belonging, behaving, believing. Community first, practices second and belief as the result of the two. Jesus invited people to follow, to be a part of a community who began to practice his teachings which then led them to confess him as the Christ, the Son of God. Relationship led to the development of skills and behaviors which shaped belief—and a belief that was much more than intellectual assent to a body of doctrine; it was experiential.

Those kinds of changes are happening at First Church, too. “The Way” is a group for those who want to explore the Christian faith or for those new to the church. Agreeing to certain beliefs about God is not a requirement. Rather “The Way” is an invitation to be a part of a community. It's not a community “without any of the God stuff,” but we don't ask you to subscribe to a creed—simply be open to the possibility that God may be speaking

in scripture and in the events of your life. Come walk with us; let's listen and learn together. Community first, practices second, and— as the Spirit leads— belief may come later.

Pastor Susan Cox and Sandra Scudder have been leading a “Pilgrim’s Walk” group at the Beltrone Center. It’s a group for those who want to explore spirituality for the last third of life and it includes Christians, Buddhists, agnostics, and ‘nones.’ They don’t all share the same beliefs, but they all have a desire to explore the spiritual life and want to do so as part of a community.

These changes may make for a ‘messier’ church. The boundaries of membership may become less clear —and less important. The church may become less of an institution and more like a movement. It could also make for a livelier church, where faith is not merely an intellectual nod to God, but something to be lived and practiced in community.

Sincerely,
John Paarlberg

At Home with the WORD

Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary
March 1st – March 31st

Available online at: www.rca.org/athome

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| 1. <i>Sunday Second Sunday in Lent</i> | 17. Psalm 51:1-12 |
| 2. Exodus 20:1-17 | 18. Psalm 119:9-16. |
| 3. Psalm 19:1-6 | 19. Hebrews 5:5-10 |
| 4. Psalm 19:7-14 | 20. John 12:20-26 |
| 5. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 | 21. John 12:27-33 |
| 6. John 2:13-17 | 22. <i>Sunday Fifth Sunday in Lent</i> |
| 7. John 2:18-22 | 23. Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 |
| 8. <i>Sunday Third Sunday in Lent</i> | 24. Mark 11:1-11 |
| 9. Numbers 21:4-9 | 25. Isaiah 50:4-9 |
| 10. Psalm 107:1-3 | 26. Psalm 31:9-16 |
| 11. Psalm 107:17-22 | 27. Philippians 2:5-11 |
| 12. Ephesians 2:1-7 | 28. Mark 15:1-39 |
| 13. Ephesians 2:8-10 | 29. <i>Sunday Palm/Passion Sunday</i> |
| 14. John 3:14-21 | 30. Isaiah 42:1-9 |
| 15. <i>Sunday Fourth Sunday in Lent</i> | 31. Psalm 71:1-14 |
| 16. Jeremiah 31:31-34 | |

Preaching Series in Lent

March 1	Lent 2 "It Depends"	Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-19
March 8	Lent 3 "Words of Life: The Covenant at Sinai"	Exodus 20: 1-17
March 15	Lent 4 "Snake-bitten: The Covenant Broken"	Numbers 21:4-9 John 3: 14-21
March 22	Lent 5 "Inside Out: A New Covenant Coming"	Jeremiah 31: 31-34 John 12: 20-33
March 29	Palm/Passion Sunday "Upside Down: Subverting Empire"	Philippians 2: 5-11
April 5	Easter Sunday "The End Is the Beginning"	Mark 16: 1-8

Pre-Service Music in Lent

Each Lenten Sunday at 10:15 am we will have pre-service music in the sanctuary. Come early to pray, meditate, refresh yourself, or just listen to some beautiful music as we follow the Lenten road to cross and resurrection.

March 1	Music for Felix Mendelssohn
March 8	Couperin - Mass for the Convents
March 15	Cantata 82 " <i>Ich habe Genug</i> " of Johann Sebastian Bach with Peter Subers, baritone
March 22	Cantata 82 and St Matthew Passion - Johann Sebastian Bach with Peter Subers, baritone and Rose Hunsberger, soprano
March 29	Music of Mozart with Rose Hunsberger, soprano

The WAY: Walking Together on the Journey of Faith

Before the first followers of Jesus were known as Christians, they were called “People of The WAY.” Then, and now, The WAY refers to a style of life in which both believing and living are centered in Jesus Christ. The WAY is an opportunity for your faith to be explored, nurtured, and renewed, your commitment to Jesus Christ affirmed, and your walk as a disciple of Christ to be strengthened. The Way is especially for those new to First Church and for those who are interested in further exploring the Christian faith. We are meeting after Sunday worship for most of the Sundays in Lent, February 22 through March 22. We gather in the church parlor for a light lunch and then meet for 30-45 minutes in small groups for reflection and discussion of the scripture text for the day. For more information contact Pastor John Paarlberg.

CDS Available

Have you missed a service? Know of a neighbor or friend who would enjoy listening to our worship services? Or just want to hear that great sermon again? Our Worship Services are available, both on CD at the hospitality table, through the church office, and (for the computer savvy) on the church website at www.firstchurchinbany.org.

Thank you to Dennis Kernahan who helps keep the CD ministry to our shut-in running smoothly. He duplicates and mails CDs, as well as providing donations of homemade envelopes. If you would like a weekly CD of our worship service or know of someone who would appreciate one, contact the church office.

Lenten Devotions

Printed Lenten devotions are available on the table outside the sanctuary.

If you prefer to read your devotions online you have the options of signing up for them at the RCA website:

<https://www.rca.org/resources/lent-devotions>

or reading the FOCUS Churches Lenten Reflections 2015:

<http://focuschurches.net>

Supporting the Farmers of Palestine in the Struggle for Their Livelihood and Land.



Thank you for your purchases of olive oil and olive oil soap. Members of First Church have purchased over two cases of olive oil. Proceeds directly benefit Palestinian farmers and children living in occupied Palestine and help create awareness for peace in Palestine. Also, one dollar of each bottle sold will go to help support *Project Hope* an arts and education program for young people in Palestine. An additional amount goes to replant olive trees inside Palestine which have been destroyed by the occupation.

Prices are \$20 per one 750 ml bottle of olive oil and \$4 per bar of olive oil soap. Contact John Paarlberg or Mary Bon for more information or to place an order.

The Weathervanes: A Bell Program in March



Join the Weathervanes for fellowship, lunch, and program on Wednesday, March 18th, at 12:30 pm in Zimmerman Hall. Bring a sandwich. Coffee, tea, and dessert will be served. After lunch, Caroline Wirth, a Charter Member of the Adirondack Bell Collectors Association, will present a Show and Tell program of her extensive collection of 'Working Bells.' Please call Audrey Ming (456-5485) to let her know that you plan to attend.

First Church Readers Meets March 22nd

First Church Readers Group is a group of First Churchers who like to read and get together once a month to discuss a book they have been reading during that month. Everyone is welcome to join us.

Contact Mary Bon at maryebon@verizon.net or 463-4449 with ideas for books or for more information.



2015 BOOK LIST

March 22, 2015

Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers
Anne Lamott

April 26, 2015

Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons
Lorna Landvik

May 31, 2015

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
Maya Angelou

June 28, 2015

The Boys in the Boat:
Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics
Daniel James Brown



Growing Green

Making things greener:

- Cleaning: Use vinegar and baking soda instead of bleach
- Cooking: Use a toaster oven or microwave instead of a regular oven
- Growing: Plant a garden or grow herbs in a sunny window

In March start onions and peas outdoors and tomatoes inside.



Do you knit or crochet? Would you be interested in offering your gifts in a ministry to others?

Join us monthly in the First Church Parlor to knit or crochet shawls or lap blankets. We pray as we create shawls, we assist each other in learning this craft, and we enjoy fellowship with one another. Each shawl we complete is blessed and then is given to those who could use extra support during the difficult times or transitions in their lives.

We meet next on Monday, March 16th at 11:30 am

If you are in need of more information please feel free to call:
Rev. Susan Vincent Cox @ 518-796-8793

Overflow Shelter Dinners Scheduled for March 13th and 27th

First Church in Albany will be providing and delivering food for the Overflow Shelter Dinner at First Lutheran Church on March 13th (Stews and Goulash) and March 27th (Your Favorite Dishes). Can you help by bringing a dish to serve 6-8 shelter guests or delivering the meal? Sign up at the hospitality table, on line or by emailing Mary Bon at maryebon@verizon.net!

Sponsored by the Capital Area Council of Churches, the Shelter provides food and shelter each night to about 20 men: the working poor who can't afford regular housing, those with mental health or addiction issues that make them ineligible for other shelters, and some just down on their luck in these hard times. A "shelter of last resort" they turn nobody away.



First Church Thank You for Hosting the Winter FOCUS Service

Many thanks to all of you who made the FOCUS Winter Service such a success! The six covenant congregations -- Emmanuel Baptist Church, Trinity United Methodist Church, Delmar Reformed Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church, First Presbyterian Church and First Church Albany worshiped together on Sunday, February 1, at First Church. The Rev. Dr. Paula Gravelle, Executive Director of the New York State Council of Churches, was the guest preacher; beautiful music from the combined choirs and a great reception in Zimmerman Hall





Food Pantry Request:

We are in need of “Personal Care” items for our Food Pantry guests. These products cannot be purchased with Food Stamps.

- Toothpaste
- Tooth Brushes
- Shampoo/Conditioner
- Deodorant
- Razors
- Feminine Hygiene Products

Easter Flower Memorials/Celebrations

Orders for Easter memorials must be received at the Church Office no later than Friday, March 20th. 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.

Sanctuary Sunday Flowers

The dedication/celebration of Sanctuary flower arrangements has increased from \$45 to \$50 for two vases.

We are in need of plastic gallon milk containers for our Sunday flowers to be distributed to our homebound/hospital.

Congratulations

Congratulations to Kelly and Shane Pilato on the birth of their daughter, Margeaux Elizabeth on August 27, 2014.

Congratulations to Danielle and Scott Gillespie on the birth of a son, Elio Thomas Gillespie on January 19, 2015. Cindy and Nelson Gillespie are the proud grandparents.

Congratulations to Sarah and Mike Kaiser on the birth of a son, David James on February 8, 2015. Bill Kendall is the proud grandfather.

Congratulations to Kim and Jonathon Russ on the birth of a daughter, Danielle Joy born on February 16, 2015. Diane and Larry Wuerstlin are the proud grandparents.

Thank You

Many thanks to all for the prayers, cards, calls, visits and gifts during my recent stay at Evergreen Commons. It was very uplifting and much appreciated. Blessings to all, Jane Ward.

Memorials

In celebration of the life of **Etheleen Williams** a gift has been received from an anonymous donor and Sandra Scudder for the **Music Fund** from Wilma Sheffer for the **Capital Campaign – Tower Fund**.

In celebration of the life of **Peter Recene** a gift has been received from Shirley Bone, Karen Beck, Carole E. Willis, Cindy and Nelson Gillespie, Sandra Scudder, J. Braun, J. Willis and Christine Dascher for the **Community Food Pantry**.

In Sympathy

Sympathy is extended to Patricia Thorpe and Family on the death of her mother, Etheleen Williams on January 20, 2015.

Sympathy is extended to Sandra Scudder in the recent deaths of her two cousins, Leita Rae Carney and Jack Rose.

Sympathy is extended to the family of William F. Rauh who passed away on January 22, 2015.

Sympathy is extended to Ella Campbell in the recent death of her friend, Anne Madden.

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Daylight Savings Time begins March 8, 2015.

The deadline for the April issue of *FAMILY* is March 13.

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