

The First Church **FAMILY**

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

FEBRUARY 2014

WORSHIP:

2 **Fourth Sunday after Epiphany**
FOCUS Service at Trinity United Methodist
Sara Miles preaching

9 **Fifth Sunday after Epiphany**
John Paarlberg preaching
Post-service: Dr. Allan Janssen

16 **Sixth Sunday after Epiphany**
John Paarlberg preaching
Post-service: Care Callers

23 **Seventh Sunday after Epiphany**
Susan Vincent-Cox preaching
Post-service: First Church Readers

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

FAMILY is published eleven times a year by First Church in Albany, 110 North Pearl Street, Albany, NY 12207-2231.

FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Friends,

On Sunday morning from my vantage point in the chancel I can look out through the glass doors onto Pearl Street. One Sunday morning a city bus drove past. On the side of the bus printed in big bold letters was an advertisement that read: **MEMBERSHIP WITHOUT COMMITMENT.** (It was an ad for a tanning salon, I think.) The message was meant to be appealing, of course, offering all the benefits of membership with little of the cost. It implied no lasting entanglements: If it's not meeting your needs you can quit at any time. Receive what we offer, but if you don't like it you can leave, no questions asked. We make membership easy for you.

"Membership without commitment" is one thing for a tanning salon. But what about marriage without commitment? Parenting without commitment? Even being a member of a sports team without commitment? And (you already know where I'm going with this) church membership without commitment?

The truth is, genuine relationships, the kind of relationships that really matter, involve commitment. These relationships are not about receiving only, but about receiving *and* giving. Commitment is about making promises and keeping them. It means showing up for practice, maintaining the discipline, keeping the vows, making sacrifices. Commitment implies a disposition to work at the relationship, sometimes setting aside your own needs and desires for the sake of the others. Membership *with* commitment isn't cheap or easy. It's often costly-- and deeply rewarding.

In the Reformed tradition we identify the 'marks of the church' as the preaching of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and discipline. The latter is especially reflected in the role and responsibilities of the elders who are charged to "study God's Word, to oversee the household of faith, to encourage spiritual growth, to maintain loving discipline..." At each regular meeting, the board of elders is to ask whether any members of the congregation "are in need of special care regarding their spiritual condition or are not attending worship and participating in the sacraments" and is charged with the responsibility of "extending Christian ministry to such persons." That's from our denomination's *Book of Church Order*. That sounds pretty heavy, but the point is commitment matters, discipline matters. Love without commitment isn't really love.

Often, the phrase "to discipline" carries a negative connotation, implying punishment. But here discipline means maintaining a practice, learning a craft, following a regimen, such as a discipline of exercise.

I recently read the traditional “marks of the church” phrased in a slightly different way: “The Christian church is given form by the means of grace: word, sacrament, and *the mutual conversation and consolation among brothers and sisters.*” I like that. It recognizes that while “overseeing the household of faith” is the particular ministry of the elders, a commitment to the community is the shared responsibility of all the members.

When the New Testament speaks of being members of the church it rarely, if ever, means membership in an institution. The followers of Jesus are *members of the body of Christ* and therefore members of one another. “We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Romans 12:5). The members are to “have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:25-26). “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

“The Christian church is given form by the means of grace: word, sacrament, and *the mutual conversation and consolation among brothers and sisters.*”

That is membership with commitment.

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,
John Paarlberg

At Home with the WORD

Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary

February 1st - February 28th

Now available online at: www.rca.org/athome

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Psalm 15 | 15. Deuteronomy 30:1-9 |
| 2. SUNDAY Micah 6:1-8 | 16. SUNDAY Matthew 5:21-37 |
| 3. Ruth 1:1-18 | 17. Exodus 20:1-21 |
| 4. Ruth 2:1-16 | 18. James 2:1-13 |
| 5. Ruth 3:1-13; 4:13-22 | 19. Matthew 19:1-12 |
| 6. Psalm 112:1-9 | 20. 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1 |
| 7. Isaiah 29:1-12 | 21. Psalm 119:33-40 |
| 8. Mark 7:1-8 | 22. Matthew 7:1-12 |
| 9. SUNDAY 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 | 23. SUNDAY Matthew 5:38-48 |
| 10. Romans 11:2-10 | 24. Romans 12:9-21 |
| 11. 2 Corinthians 4:1-12 | 25. Hebrews 12:14-16 |
| 12. John 8:12-30 | 26. Psalm 119:57-64 |
| 13. Psalm 119:1-8 | 27. Philippians 2:19-24 |
| 14. 1 John 2:7-17 | 28. Philippians 2:25-30 |

Conversations on Belhar



The Belhar Confession has its roots in the struggle against apartheid in Southern Africa. This "outcry of faith" and "call for faithfulness and repentance" was first drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) which took the lead in declaring that apartheid constituted a *status confessionis* in which the truth of the gospel was at stake. The Dutch Reformed Mission Church formally adopted the Belhar Confession in 1986. It is now one of the "standards of unity" of the new Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).

Belhar's relevance is not confined to Southern Africa. It addresses three key issues of concern to all churches: unity of the church and unity among all people, reconciliation within church and society, and God's justice. As one member of the URCSA has said, "We carry this confession on behalf of all the Reformed churches. We do not think of it as ours alone."

In 2010 the Reformed Church in America adopted the Confession of Belhar as its fourth confession. What is the Belhar and might it mean for the American church? The First Church in Albany is sponsoring a series of luncheon discussions led by Dr. Allan Janssen, First Church's theologian in residence. The gatherings will be held three Monday noons: February 3, 10 and 24. The time will be 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. and will include a light lunch.

These conversations are open to anyone but please email or call ahead to let us know you are coming.

463-4449

firstchurch@verizon.net

Small Groups Starting this Winter/Spring at First Church

This winter/spring we will be starting a few new groups:

- **Pilgrim's Walk** (offered again for those 65 yrs. and older) We will explore two books The Gift of Years and Falling Upward and talk together of our personal experiences and our faith.
- **NVC** will continue as a practice group from January to June -- meeting one time per month. We would also like to offer **another 4-6 week class in the spring** for those interested in learning basic principles of NVC.
- **Lent Devotional Groups**

Ongoing groups include:

- **Care Callers**
- **Choir**
- **First Church Readers**
- **Adult Bible Study**
- **Kibera**

Please consider joining one or more of these groups to further engage your faith journey with others at First Church. It will be good for your soul.

Nonviolent Communication Class Update



On the roads to Jericho and the Dead Sea

Steve Andersen is traveling to the Mideast in February for a 9-day workshop in Non-Violent Communications (NVC).

For more information: http://www.cnvc.org/EcoMe-2014_MidEast_NVC_Training

Both Steve and Sue look forward to incorporating and sharing their learning with those who join on in our NVC small groups. We hope this spring to offer another class here at FC.

The Weathervanes to Meet February 5th



Join the Weathervanes for fellowship, lunch, and program on the first Wednesday in February, February 5th, at 12:30 p.m. in Zimmerman Hall. Bring a sandwich; coffee, tea, and dessert will be served. Come prepared to enjoy another one of John Bowen's great stories before he and Phyllis leave for their winter vacation in Florida. Please call Audrey Ming (456-5485) to let her know that you plan to attend.

Post-Service Program February 9

What does a theologian *do*? Theology is a craft and a profession. Theologian-in-residence, Allan Janssen, leads a conversation in which he shares how a professional theologian engages the church and the academy. The discussion will include the role of the "professor" within a Reformed communion. The Rev. Dr. Janssen is Affiliate Professor of Theological Studies at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and RCA General Synod Professor of Theology.

Festival choir will sing on February 16th.



Like to sing?

Can't find the time to join the choir?

The **Festival Choir** is for you! No Mid-week rehearsals! No Long-term commitment! Fun music! Just come at 9:30 AM on Sunday, February 16th to rehearse; then sing with the choir during worship. It's easy and it's fun! Talk to any choir member or Mary Bon for more information, or just join us.

First Church Readers meets February 23rd



The First Church Readers will meet February 23rd after worship to discuss *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck, a modern retelling of the bible story of Cain and Abel by one of America's best-known storytellers.

The book is available through the UPPER HUDSON LIBRARY SYSTEM. They have numerous copies available both as an ebook and in a hard copy. Come join us.

Upcoming books (available from the upper Hudson Library system) are:

March *The End of Your Life Book Club* by Will Schwalbe

April *Twelve Years a Slave* by Solomon Northrup

New books we are considering are:

In the Sanctuary of Outcasts by Neil White

If you have ideas for new books contact Mary Bon at 463-4449 with ideas or for more information.

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, with techniques which deplete the soil, and the farmers seldom receive a fair price for their crop.

For more information on cocoa production check out <http://fairtradeusa.org/products-partners/cocoa>

Today's minimum wage in inflation adjusted dollars is lower than when Martin Luther King organized his march on Washington 50 years ago. Just to keep pace with inflation over the last 50 years the minimum wage would need to be at least \$9.54. Develop a family budget for a month using the minimum wage salary of \$8.00/hr or \$320 per week for all your living expenses. To find out what is needed for a minimum living standard in our area go to <http://livingwage.mit.edu/>

Overflow Shelter Dinners for February 7th & 14th



In February we will be supplying back to back dinners to the Emergency Overflow Shelter at First Lutheran Church on Friday February 7th and 14th so we will be needing lots of extra help.

Our themes will be:

February 7th - Cold Weather Comfort Foods (mac 'n cheese? meatloaf? Cowboy Baked Beans? Whatever gives you comfort and extra calories in these cold months).

February 14th - HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY! (Make your favorite Valentines Day Dishes: Festive Casseroles? Pulled Pork? Shrimp Scampi? Special Cupcakes? Whatever would make the day feel special for the shelter guests).

Remember many of the shelter guests have dental problems so soft foods and foods that are easy to chew are a good idea. Sign up at the Hospitality Table to bring a dish or to help deliver. You can also sign up via email by emailing Mary Bon at maryebon@verizon.net. Bring your dishes Sunday after church or weekdays between 8:30 and 2:30 p.m. 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.

Palestine Peacemaker Jonathan Brenneman to Speak at First Church in Albany

6 pm Wednesday, February 19th



Jonathan Brenneman is a member of the Christian Peacemaker Teams' Peacemaker Corps, and lives and works part of each year in Hebron, the West Bank. Christian Peacemaker Teams is a broad-based ecumenical network of people from around the world who partner with nonviolent movements in conflict zones. CPT has been working in the West Bank for nineteen years. Jonathan will be discussing the struggles of nonviolent movements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the activities of the Israeli government, and what U.S. residents can do to help. You are invited to join us for a light supper and conversation at 6 p.m. on February 19.

To read more about Jonathan's struggles at the Israeli border, see this article from the Huffington Post:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daoud-kuttab/israel-denies-christian-p_b_3991512.html

Kibera Mission Update

The Kibera Committee continue to look for new ways to generate sales and new sources of support for our brothers and sisters in the Kibera Craft Community and the Sosep School outside of Nairobi, Kenya.

We will be participating in two upcoming sales. Please spread the word to let others know.

Sunday, February 9, 2014 9:30-12:30

Called "Making Ethical Choices" it is being held at Congregation Agudat Achim, 2117 Union Street, Niskayuna, NY 12309. There will be lots of different Kibera Craft items, Mayan Crafts, items from Ten Thousand Villages, fair trade chocolate and coffee tastings plus snacks.

Sunday, February 16, 2014 9:30-12:30 Unity Church, “Small Business Fair”

Since these events coincides with our own First Church Sunday worship service, we know most of us won't be attending; but we hope you will continue to support the work of the Kibera Committee and the Kibera Community in Kenya with your thoughts and prayers. We always appreciate your ideas for new sales venues and ideas to raise more revenue for the Kibera community. Just contact any Kibera Committee member: Diane Wuerstlin, Becky Hudak, Kate Wuerstlin, Marilyn Paarlberg, Steve Andersen, Mary Bon or email us at firstchurch@verizon.net

First Church to Host Community Dinner

5 pm Saturday, February 15th

The Albany Food and Justice Coalition is a coalition of organizations working together to build food security and access to healthy food in the Albany area, especially in the neighborhoods of Arbor Hill, West Hill and the South End. On Saturday, February 15, First Church will host a community meal organized by members of the coalition. Chef Yono from Yono's Restaurant and students from a cooking class at Arbor Hill Community Center will prepare a meal for 50 to 60 people from the neighborhood and talk about how to prepare healthy and inexpensive meals. There is room for a few more people from the congregation. If you like to help or join us at table, please contact John Paarlberg at the church office 463-4449 or email johnpaarlberg@verizon.net

Appreciation Breakfast at Arbor Hill Elementary School

Starting at 7:45 am Wednesday, February 26th

Some months ago a team of people from the congregation began meeting to explore ministry in the community. We wanted to find out what was happening in the neighborhood. We prayerfully considered where the Spirit of God was already at work and how we might join in that work. Some of us visited Arbor Hill Elementary School, just a 10-15 minute walk north of the church. Later the school principal, Rosiland Gaines-Harrell led a post-service discussion about challenges and hopes for the school which serves nearly 400 pre- K through 5th grade students. After her presentation several people expressed interest in exploring ways we could support the students, teachers and staff at the school.

On Wednesday, February 26, several members of First Church will be preparing and serving a surprise appreciation breakfast as a way of saying thank you to the dedicated staff and teachers at Arbor Hill Elementary School. We'll meet at the church at 7:45 am. If you would like to help, please contact Becky Hudak, 382-1807 or email beckyhudak@hotmail.com

Congratulations to the *High Road to Freedom* AA group

Congratulations to the *High Road to Freedom* AA group who celebrated their 20th anniversary last month. *High Road to Freedom* meets in the church parlor every Wednesday at noon.



The deadline for the March issue of *FAMILY* is February 14.



Christmas Poinsettia

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.

Congratulations

Congratulations to Christen Bryce Garzia and Nick Garzia on the birth of their daughter, Aylin Saige Garzia on December 10, 2013. Craig Bryce is the proud grandfather and Helen Bryce is the proud great grandmother.

In Celebration

In celebration of Natalie Parry's 90th birthday on December 23rd a gift has been received for the Clee Park Fund by a friend.

In Sympathy

Our sympathy is extended to Maxine Wight, family and friends on the death of her son, Scott Wight on December 11, 2013.

Sympathy is extended to David Rafter and family on the death of his wife, Marilyn Markus Rafter on 12/27/13.

Sympathy is extended to Kay McCann on the death of her dear friend, Susan Vam Vranken.

Memorials

In celebration of the life of **Scott Wight**, a gift has been received from Jeannette B. Hall for the **Capital Campaign Fund**.

In celebration of the life of **Dorothy Bemis**, a gift has been received from Shirley Bone and Family for the **Clee Park Fund**.

Thank You

Many thanks to all who helped organized and distribute our poinsettia flowers to our members who are homebound in hospitals or nursing homes. With your help we are able to let them know they are in our thoughts and prayers.



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