

The First Church **FAMILY**

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

JANUARY 2014

WORSHIP:

5 Second Sunday after Christmas

John Paarlberg preaching

Post-service: Taking down the Greens

12 First Sunday after Epiphany

John Paarlberg preaching

Post-service: Trustees Meeting

19 Second Sunday after Epiphany

Susan Vincent Cox preaching

Post-service: Congregational Meeting & Luncheon

26 Third Sunday after Epiphany

Paul Hoffman preaching

Post-service: Rev. Paul E. Hoffman, "Faith Forming Faith"
First Church Readers

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

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FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Friends,

In January we enter the season of Epiphany, celebrating the light of Christ which shines out in ever widening circles. The scripture texts for the season tell the stories of Jesus' healing, teaching, calling disciples, going throughout Galilee "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people."
(Matthew 4:23)

Isaiah had announced: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." That light shines preeminently in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, but is also reflected in those who follow him: "You are the salt of the earth," he told them. "You are the light of the world."

How can we be salt and light in our community? What does it mean for the First Church in Albany to be a church not only *in* the city, but also a Christ-like presence *with* our neighbors? How do we witness to the presence and love of Christ in our neighborhood?

Over the past several months the Community Ministry Team has been exploring questions like these and a number of things are beginning to take shape:

- The consistory recently decided to become a covenant church member of FOCUS. FOCUS is community of Christian congregations working together to understand and address the needs of our local community. They also join in ecumenical worship several Sundays each year. We will be officially welcomed as a FOCUS covenant congregation at a joint worship service on February 2, at 10:00 a.m. at Trinity United Methodist Church. A bus from the First Church parking lot will provide transportation so plan to come early! Sara Miles, author of *Take This Bread*, will be the guest preacher.
- After a post-service presentation in October by the principal of the Arbor Hill Elementary School several people expressed interest in exploring ways to support students, teachers and staff at the school which is just a 10 or 15 minute walk north of the church. We are thinking of providing a teacher appreciation breakfast. Some of us have also talked about helping with the preparation of teaching materials or offering to read with children. Contact Becky Hudak for more information.
- Deacon Chip Welge and I have attended some meetings of the Albany Food and Justice Coalition, 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. In February we 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.

Sharing the light of Christ also means helping others come to know and follow Jesus. Later in January First Church will host a 2-day Capital Region Theological Center workshop, *Forming Christians: Baptism and Beyond*. The Rev. Paul Hoffman, former pastor of Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church in Seattle, will lead the workshop. I've known Paul for more than 10 years and he is someone for whom I have great respect and affection. He has been a wise and caring a pastor and under his leadership his congregation was very effective in welcoming new Christians and forming them in the faith. In the process their whole congregation was renewed and revitalized for mission in the world. Paul will be our guest preacher on January 26 and we'll have opportunity to talk with him more about this ministry after the service.

“Arise, shine; for your light has come.” Sharing that good news is a high calling and a holy privilege. Introducing others to the life of faith and walking with them on their journey to Christ is a way to be who we are meant to be: the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

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/athome

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Psalm 8 | 17. Psalm 40:1-11 |
| 2. Psalm 72 | 18. Luke 5:1-11 |
| 3. Genesis 28:10-22 | 19. John 1:29-42 |
| 4. Exodus 3:1-5 | 20. Psalm 40:6-17 |
| 5. John 1:1-18 | 21. Isaiah 53:1-12 |
| 6. Matthew 2:1-12 | 22. Matthew 9:14-17 |
| 7. Ephesians 3:14-21 | 23. 1 Samuel 1:1-20 |
| 8. Ephesians 4:7, 11-16 | 24. Psalm 27:1-6 |
| 9. Acts 9:1-9 | 25. Luke 5:27-32 |
| 10. Acts 9:10-19 | 26. 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 |
| 11. Acts 9:19-31 | 27. Psalm 27:7-14 |
| 12. Matthew 3:13-17 | 28. Judges 7:12-22 |
| 13. Genesis 35:1-15 | 29. Luke 1:67-79 |
| 14. Jeremiah 1:4-10 | 30. Deuteronomy 16:18-20 |
| 15. Matthew 12:15-21 | 31. Deuteronomy 24:17-25:4 |
| 16. Galatians 1:6-12 | |

Small Groups at First Church

One of the most meaningful and supportive aspects of our church life is belonging to a small group. Whether it is in a group ministry serving others or it is a spiritual formation group, small groups are vital to congregational spiritual health and growth.

Many of us at First Church have found small groups to be wonderful places where we can share our day-to-day struggles and joys, where we can explore more deeply our call to discipleship, where we can ask the more challenging questions about our faith, and where we can care for and support one another more fully.

Here at First Church our small groups are diverse in focus. Some of our groups focus on service to others such as Care Callers and our Food Pantry Ministry. Some of our groups are more devotional and include personal sharing, such as Pilgrim's Walk and Advent/Lent groups. Some of our groups focus on the study of scripture, such as our Adult Bible study. We also offer some groups that incorporate several different aspects of our faith life and teach skills for discipleship, such as The Way and Nonviolent Communication.

Our groups include:

- Care Callers
- Food Pantry Ministry
- Children and Worship
- Adult Bible Study
- Kibera
- Pilgrim's Walk (ages 65 and older)
- First Church Readers
- Advent and Lent Devotional Groups
- The Way
- Nonviolent Communication Class and ongoing Practice Group
- Choir

Some comments from our members who attend small groups:

"I join small groups because they help keep my faith life from going stale. I learn so much from others who are attending the small group - different points of view, different experiences, different ways of looking at scripture." **Pete Pagerey**

"I joined the nonviolent communication group because I was intrigued by the potential for learning skills that would help me in a variety of places in my life. The group has more than met my expectations. I have especially appreciated developing trusting relationships with the group members. I feel a deeper connection to my church community." **Becky Hudak**

C. Kirk Hadaway in his book ***Behold I Do a New Thing*** says the church that is most vital and Spirit-filled is the ***Incarnational Church*** and it focuses primarily on 2 things: worship and small group experiences. Both are foundational to the experience of the faith community. Groups nurture trust where members can share their experiences strengthening spiritual formation in discipleship. In worship we hear the Word and partake of the sacraments and celebrate with praise and gratitude our God and our faith journey.

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***
- ***The Way*** Paul Hoffman is coming to lead a workshop here at FC in mid-January

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

Steve Anderson who is one of our facilitators for NVC tells us:

“NVC is a way to build connections powerfully, compassionately, authentically, and with clarity. It builds the capacity to express ourselves in a language that doesn't involve blame or attack and shows us how to listen to the underlying values or needs which are important to people even when they express themselves in difficult or hostile ways. NVC then builds on the new connections and understanding that arise to explore solutions and strategies that address everyone's needs. Nonviolent Communication is being used in conflicts and settings worldwide by communities, institutions and organizations, activists, leaders, parents, educators, doctors, social workers, managers and others to improve their work and home life and bring about the changes they want to see in the world.”

In October Steve Anderson and Rev. Sue Cox co-led a 4 week class on the basic principles and skills of nonviolent communication as developed by Marshall Rosenberg. This class of approx. 12 members ran for 4 weeks in October and then members unanimously decided to meet an additional 2 weeks in order to learn more thoroughly NVC skills and principles. In January this group will transition into a practice group meeting for 2 hours one time per month through to June.

Both Sue and Steve have had training in NVC and plan to continue training in the New Year:

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

Rev. Sue Cox will be participating in a 3 day workshop “**Transform Your Inner Critic with Nonviolent Communication**” at Kripalu Center in Stockbridge Mass. in late February.

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 in January



Join the Weathervanes for fellowship, lunch, and program on Wednesday, January 15th at 12:30 p.m. in Zimmerman Hall. Bring a sandwich; coffee, tea, and dessert will be served. After lunch, John Hershey, a member of the Hudson Mohawk Bird Club and an avid photographer, will present a program of his favorite birds in Vischer's Ferry. Please call Audrey Ming (456-5485) to let her know that you plan to attend.

First Church Readers Group meets January 26th

Our January book is *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* by Rachel Joyce. Come join us.

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

- January *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* by Rachel Joyce
- February *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck
- March *The End of Your Life Book Club* by Will Schwalbe

Coming In February: Conversations on Belhar

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



Palestine Peacemaker Jonathan Brenneman to Speak at First Church in Albany 6 pm Wednesday January 8

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. Jonathan is from St. Marys, Ohio, and has a degree in history and philosophy from Huntington University in Indiana.

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. After joining CPT in 2012, Jonathan moved to Hebron and was active in the effort to protect Masafer Yatta, an area of the South Hebron Hills in which eight Palestinian villages are threatened with eviction by the Israeli government, which is attempting to use the land as a military training ground. Earlier this year, after returning to the United States to see his family, Jonathan was denied re-entry into Israel. During three attempts to re-enter over the next several months, Jonathan was questioned for hours at a time, asked to trace his family lineage (Jonathan has Palestinian heritage), asked to prove his religion, strip-searched, and informed that his work with CPT (well-recognized in Israel and elsewhere) was preventing him from gaining permission to cross the border.

Jonathan is responding to these events by organizing speaking tours throughout the United States, where he discusses 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.

Jonathan will speak the First Church in Albany, Wednesday, January 8. You are invited to join us for a light supper and conversation at 6 p.m.

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 Black Friday Sale at Delmar Reformed Church nets over \$2000 for the Kibera Cooperative.

Thanks to the hard work of Diane Wuerstlin, Becky Hudak, Kate Wuerstlin, Hennie Kohut, and Steve Andersen, the Kibera Committee made \$2326 selling Kibera crafts during this year's Black Friday Sale at Delmar Reformed Church. Although the sale was a success, we took in \$1000 less than at last year's sale. Event organizers speculate that, because this is the 4th year of the event, and there was no media coverage, fewer people attended. We will need to explore ways of bolstering these sales or finding other events in the future to make up the revenue shortfall which helps support the artisans of the Kibera Cooperative, The Kibera Sosep School, and many other projects in the Kibera, Kenya.

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.



Christmas Shoppe

Many thanks to all who made the Christmas Shoppe a great success. Through this ministry of the First Church Food Pantry we were able to help parents provide Christmas gifts for their children. With help from Toys for Tots and your donations of new and gently-used toys, puzzles, games, books and children's clothing, 79 children in our community had a very nice Christmas.



The Weathervanes Donate Books for Children

Thank you to the Weathervanes whose gift of \$280 brought many new books for the children in our community who received gifts from the Christmas Shoppe.



Overflow Shelter Dinners January 10th and 24th

Help provide dinner for the Emergency Overflow Shelter dinner on January 10th (Casseroles and Stews) and 24th (Chicken). Each month we participate in providing meals for the Emergency Overflow Shelter at First Lutheran Church in Albany, sponsored by the Capital Area Council of Churches. It is a "shelter of last resort" when other shelters are full or for those who may not be eligible for other shelters because of addictions or mental health issues. It turns nobody away.

We need main courses, sides and desserts for each dinner. Can you provide a dish to feed 6 to 8 people? Sign up at the hospitality table. Bring your dish during church office hours or leave them in the downstairs freezer or refrigerator on Sunday, (labeled Shelter Dinner). **We also need helping delivering dinners on Fridays.** There are also containers available at the Hospitality table for your convenience. **TAKE ONE EMPTY - BRING IT BACK FULL!** Contact Mary Bon 463-4449 or maryebon@verizon.net. For more info or if you've got questions- and a heartfelt **THANK YOU.**

Congregational Meeting & Luncheon

Sunday January 19th

Our congregational meeting will be held Sunday January 19th after the worship service. Join us for lunch and a presentation of the 2014 budget as we celebrate the year past and look forward to the year ahead.

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.

Jim Folts and Joline Mondore
Coordinators

Notes from the Financial Secretary

- Contributions for 2013 must be received no later than Sunday, January 12th, 2014, and please mark these contributions “for 2013”.
- After Sunday, January 12th, 2014, all contributions will be posted to 2014.
- Please try to use your member/envelope # on all checks, pre-printed forms, envelopes, etc.
- Instead of using multiple checks to donate to more than one ministry or program, you may simply use just one check, remembering to clearly note how your donation is to be split.

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The deadline for the February issue of *FAMILY* is January 16.

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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 Kokese J. Ballou and Lawrence J. Lowe, II who were married by John D. Paarlberg at First Church on November 30, 2013.

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.

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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110 North Pearl Street
Albany, NY 12207-2231
518.463.4449

www.firstchurchinalbany.org

email: firstchurch@verizon.net

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