

The First Church **FAMILY**

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

January 2015

WORSHIP:

- 4 **Second Sunday after Christmas**
10:30 am Sanctuary Service (Communion)
Post-service:
- 11 **First Sunday after Epiphany**
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
Post-service: Congregational Meeting and Pot-luck Brunch
- 18 **Second Sunday after Epiphany**
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
Post-service: The Way
- 25 **Third Sunday after Epiphany**
10:30 am Sanctuary Service
Post-service: The Way
 First Church Readers
 Trustees Meeting

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,

In the wake of grand jury decisions following the deaths of Eric Garner in Staten Island and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, people in numerous cities have been involved in demonstrations and protests, many of them organized around the theme, “Black Lives Matter.” Individuals, institutions and churches have made that phrase a rallying cry. Black Lives Matter. Of course they do. But wouldn’t it be more inclusive and the greater truth to say, “All Lives Matter”? Why specifically *black* lives?

I think there are a couple of reasons why it is particularly important at this time to affirm that black lives matter.

First, many black lives are under threat in ways and to a degree that white lives are not. There are multiple and complex reasons for this and we can debate the causes, but it’s hard to deny the evidence. Black life expectancy is four years shorter than that of whites. A *ProPublica* investigation (<http://www.propublica.org/article/deadly-force-in-black-and-white>) found that young black men are shot dead by police at 21 times the rate of young white men. The United States incarcerates a high proportion of blacks than apartheid South Africa did. Black families have, on average, only about 6 percent as much wealth as white households. Only 44 percent of black families own a home compared with 73 percent for white households. And at every stage of law enforcement and the criminal justice system – from where police patrol and who they arrest, to who is convicted and the length of their sentence – people of color and people from poorer neighborhoods tend to be treated more harshly. By almost every measure – economics, arrest rates, sentencing, life-expectancy, health – black lives are at greater risk.

Second, in the history of our nation we have repeatedly said “all lives matter,” but often blacks were not included in the “all.” The Declaration of Independence proclaims, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that *all men* are created equal.” But those words were written by a white slave owner and they were not intended to apply to black men or to women.

The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States begins, “We the people of the United States.” Did that mean all people? Not really. What that meant at that time was, “We the white men of the United States.” Most black people in the United States were slaves and had no rights. And black slaves, though they did not have the right to vote, were counted as 3/5 person as a way to enhance the political power of slave-holding whites in the southern states.

We have a long history of racism in our country and the effects of that history are still with us. That doesn’t mean that white people are necessarily racist. It does mean that many of us who are white have benefitted from a system that has exploited blacks and other people of color. Historically, black lives have mattered less.

We can say “All lives matter” and mean that sincerely, even passionately. But can we also recognize that when black people or Native Americans or gays or others who have been historically oppressed and marginalized hear “all lives matter,” they may wonder, “Do those words really apply to me?”

Recent events, tragic and disturbing as they are, have prompted serious conversations about race. That is a good thing, although engaging in such conversations can be difficult. We'll make ourselves vulnerable. We'll risk offending someone. We'll risk being misunderstood or hurt. We'll need to listen carefully and pay attention not only to what we say, but also to how our words are perceived.

But this is what the church is called to do. This is what the church is uniquely equipped to do. It's our business to be about the work of reconciliation. And reconciliation does not mean merely smoothing over differences, but working to right what is wrong. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.”

Centered in Christ, we commit ourselves to breaking down dividing walls and building a community where all are loved.

Sincerely,
John D. Paarlberg

At Home with the WORD

Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary

January 1st - January 31st

Available online at: www.rca.org/athome

1. Psalm 8
2. John 1:1-9
3. John 1:10-18
4. Second Sunday after Christmas
5. Genesis 1:1-5
6. Epiphany; Ephesians 3:1-12
7. Psalm 29
8. Acts 19:1-7
9. Mark 1:4-8
10. Mark 1:9-11
11. First Sunday after Epiphany
12. 1 Samuel 3:1-10
13. 1 Samuel 3:11-20
14. Psalm 139:1-6
15. Psalm 139:13-18
16. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
17. John 1:43-51
18. Second Sunday after Epiphany
19. Jonah 3:1-5, 10
20. Psalm 62:5-8
21. Psalm 62:9-12
22. 1 Corinthians 7:29-31
23. Mark 1:14-15
24. Mark 1:16-20
25. Third Sunday after Epiphany
26. Deuteronomy 18:15-20
27. Psalm 111:1-6
28. Psalm 111:7-10
29. 1 Corinthians 8:1-6
30. 1 Corinthians 8:7-13
31. Mark 1:21-28

Safe Sanctuaries in the Reformed Churches in America

Safety in Our Youth Programs at First Church:
Children and Worship, Crib and Crawl, and Youth Group

At First Church it is of utmost importance that we are **good stewards** caring for those we serve. This past September, eleven of our church youth volunteer ministry staff (Children and Worship, Crib and Crawl, and Youth Group) completed a course, **“Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children”, a training program provided by the YMCA**. In this program we learned how to **prevent sexual abuse in organizational settings**. We learned specifically about policies that will reduce risks for abuse in churches.

Statistics in United States are tragic: 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused before their 18th birthday. As many as 60% are abused by people the family trusts. There are many psychological problems that result when a child is abused. So we must take this very seriously. Parents need to know when they leave their children in our care their children will be safe and protected.

At our training in September we learned 7 steps to protecting our children. One step was learning the facts and understanding the risks of abuse. Another step included minimizing opportunities of one child/one adult situations by requiring **open door policies** in classrooms. Also when a child uses a bathroom adults wait outside at the door ensuring that the child is safe. Added to these we learned if a child discloses a situation that sounds like possible abuse our staff members are to report this to one of our pastors who will follow this up with the child’s family. If a Child Protection Service Report is indicated, this will be initiated.

All eleven of our ministry staff members have received training and background checks. **As good stewards we answer to God’s call to love and care for one another. We pledge to be good stewards and provide loving worship in Safe Sanctuaries.** Our policies will soon be listed on our church website and in our worship and nursery center. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Rev. Susan Vincent-Cox or Rev. John Paarlberg.

Pot-luck Brunch



A pot-luck brunch and congregational meeting are scheduled for Sunday, January 11, following the worship service.

Please bring a dish to share and join us in fellowship.

First Church to Host Synod-wide Youth Lock-In

Come and See... Feed My Sheep is the theme of the January 30- 31 Lock-In at First Church. Students in grades 7-12 from Albany Synod congregations are invited to come together to explore their journeys as disciples of Jesus Christ who bids us “come and see” and then send us out into the world saying, “feed my sheep.” The lock-in will include games, workshops, small groups and midnight worship. On Saturday after breakfast the youth will participate in various service projects in the Albany area including preparing a meal at the Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless.

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’ll meet after Sunday worship on January 18 and 25. 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.firstchurchinalbany.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.

First Church to Host the Winter FOCUS Service

FOCUS is a coalition of six covenant congregations united in a common calling and cooperating in shared ministries with people in need in the city of Albany and beyond. The covenant congregations-- Emmanuel Baptist Church, Trinity United Methodist Church, Delmar Reformed Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church, First Presbyterian Church and First Church Albany will join in worship on Sunday, February 1, at First Church. The Rev. Dr. Paula Gravelle, Executive Director of the New York State Council of Churches, will be the guest preacher.

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.



Christmas Shoppe Thank you!

The Christmas Shoppe was a great success again this year!

Thank you to everyone who donated toys, mittens, hats and books for the 68 children we serve.

Also, to the best volunteers in Albany, working tirelessly setting up the toys, giving out the toys and cleaning up after two different days!

Thank you!

And to Noel... We couldn't have done it without him!

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, Doug Persons, David Bon-Keen, Peter Subers, and Joel Stewart, 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 12 at 6:00 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.

The Kibera Mission

The Kibera Mission had a good year for selling crafts from Kenya to benefit artisans and school children in the Kibera slum. Total Sales for 2014 were \$7,200 -- with sales for November-December alone reaching \$5,500. Fair Trade sales are becoming more popular in the region. This year, two new sales started; one in Schenectady and one in Saratoga Springs. Together with the Fair Sale in Delmar, these sales should help maintain our craft sales into the future for the benefit of our brothers and sisters in Kibera.

In addition, we wish to give special thanks to Tom Allison for donating the proceeds of the sales of his book at the November Weathervanes meeting.

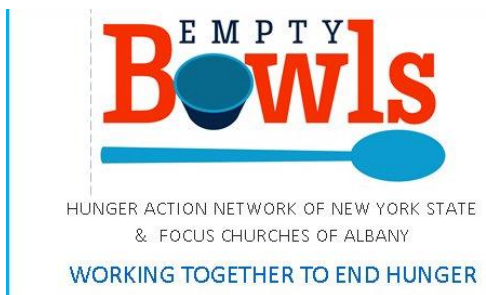
Supporting the farmers of Palestine in the struggle for their livelihood and land.



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.

FOCUS: EMPTY BOWLS: SAVE THE DATE



The annual Empty Bowls event is coming to Albany again on January 25, 2015!

Hunger Action Network of New York State and FOCUS Churches of Albany are teaming up for another special event to raise awareness on the issue of hunger in our communities. Come and be a part of this special event! Attendees are invited

to choose a hand crafted bowl, made by a regional artist. Then, enjoy the gourmet soup of local chefs who will bring their own creations for your enjoyment. See Becky Hudak for details and tickets.

The Weathervanes The View from the Top



Join the Weathervanes for fellowship, lunch and program on Wednesday, January 14th at 12:30 pm in Zimmerman Hall. Bring a sandwich. Coffee, tea, and dessert will be served. After lunch, Ian Leet will show pictures he has taken of the renovation work being done on the exterior of First Church—many taken by climbing up the scaffolding with the contractors and workers. Please call Audrey Ming (456-5485) to let her know that you plan to attend.

January Meeting for First Church Readers Group



The First Church Readers will meet on January 25 after worship to discuss *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* by Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb. First Church Readers is a group of First Churchers who like to read, and get together once a month after worship to discuss a book they have been reading during that month. This book is available from the Upper Hudson Library system as a hardcover book or an audio book.

February's book is *Unbroken* Lauren Hillenbrand

Do you have an idea for a book for the reader's group? Want more information? Contact Mary Bon at maryebon@verizon.net or 463-4449.

Upcoming Overflow Shelter Dinners

Thank you to all who have contributed food and time to our Overflow Homeless Shelter Dinners thus far. This month's dinners are the 2nd and 4th Fridays: January 9th - Italian dishes and January 25th - Casseroles and meatloaf. Sign up at the hospitality table or online at <http://tinyurl.com/padnczy> to bring a dish. Drop you food off Sunday after church, any weekday between 8:30 am and 2:30 pm or on Thursday night between 6 and 7:30. For more information contact Mary Bon at 463-4449 or maryebon@verizon.net. **USE NON RETURNABLE DISHES** and thank you!

Growing Green



How about some "growing green" New Year's resolutions? 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.cdfa.org/schedules.php>
2. **Spend more time outdoors.** It is good for you and helps you appreciate and value God's creation.
3. **Donate more.** If you haven't used something in the last year donate it.
4. **Volunteer.** It can help raise your spirits while helping others.
5. **Buy less/use less, eat less meat.** Meat production is expensive, uses energy to produce, is a major source of ground-water pollution, and green house gas emissions.
6. **Choose a cause** and resolve to write your representatives to advocate for it.



Prayer

Shawl

Ministry

Join us **Monday January 12th at 11:30 am in the Parlor** (First Church) to begin knitting or crocheting prayer shawls and lap blankets. At least 8 have signed up to meet Mondays one time per month to knit and crochet together, help one another with our craft, and to pray over these shawls. Upon completion each shawl will be blessed and then will be given to those in need of healing, comfort, and prayers.

Shawls are a wonderful tangible way of giving God's love and care to those in need. We look forward to this time in a new ministry where we will pray, be creative, and be in fellowship with one another.

If you would like to join us, just come on Jan. 12th or call Rev. Sue Vincent-Cox.

We look forward to seeing you.

A Year's-End Reminder from the Financial Secretary:

- Offering envelopes for 2015 are available on the table in the lounge.
- 2014 contributions must be received by Sunday, January 11th, 2015.
- After January 11th, 2015, all contributions will be posted to 2015.

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.

Growing Deeper in Love:

A reflection by Father Richard Rohr.

Jesus said the whole law (and there were about 897 of them at that point) and the prophets, too, are summed up in the two great commandments: "to love God with your whole heart and your whole soul and to love your neighbor just as you love yourself" (Matthew 22:37-40). It's almost too simple, and yet as you well know, it's almost too hard. It's sadly easier to just obey laws and to live inside of an always defeating reward/punishment system. Somehow a win/win worldview where God wins and the soul wins too—is largely unbelievable...until you experience and allow God's grace.

True spiritual encounter changes you at a deep and unconscious level. Henceforth, the most important thing is to grow deeper and deeper in love. What spurs you on in that journey into love is actually the constant experience of your own un-love. You can now see your impatience, irritation, or self-centeredness. Paul called these the "thorns in the flesh to keep me from getting too proud" (2 Corinthians 12:7). You will have them until the end of your life. They allow you to love God and others by reason of a Larger Love flowing through you, not because "you" are doing it right or even know how to love!

Francis of Assisi granted all of reality, even elements and animals, an intimate I-Thou relationship. He called all things “sister” and “brother.” This could be a definition of what it means to be a contemplative, which is to look at reality with much wider eyes than mere usability, functionality, or self-interest, but with *inherent enjoyment for a thing in itself as itself*. Remember, as soon as your loving needs or wants a reward in return, you have backed away from divine love, which is why even our common notion of a “reward in heaven” can keep us from the actual love of God or neighbor! A pure act of love is its own reward, and needs nothing in return. Love is shown *precisely in an eagerness to love*.

Francis moved beyond the world that most of us inhabit. He rebuilt the spiritual life on “love alone” and let go of the lower-level needs of social esteem, security, self-image, and manufacturing of persona. Remember, when your only goal is love, especially love of God, you really cannot fail.

Fr. Richard Rohr, adapted from *The Art of Letting Go: Living the Wisdom of Saint Francis*, disc 6 (CD); and *Franciscan Mysticism: I AM That Which I Am Seeking*, disc 4 (CD, MP3 download); and *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*, pp. 116, 242-243.

Fr. Richard Rohr is a Franciscan friar and an ordained priest in the Roman Catholic Church. He is the author of numerous books including, *Yes, And...: Daily Meditations*, *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*, and *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. He serves as the Founding Director of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The above meditation was one of his daily e-mail meditations sent free to subscribers. To sign up go to <https://cac.org/sign-up>

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

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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.

Congratulations

Congratulations to April and Jamie Meracle Jr. on the birth of their daughter, Piper Ann on November 25, 2014. Susan and Ted Hunter are the proud grandmother and grandfather.

Memorials

In celebration of the Life of **Kay Mc Cann** a gift has been received from Norma McClement, an anonymous donor, Dr. Robert McCabe, D.P.M., Richard Hirsch Sr. and Kathleen A. Hirsch, Kit Jackson, Jean G. and James R. Burns, Caroline G. and Carl R. Wirth, Ms. Mary L. Mcwhorter, Ms. Rae Clark, Doris Neese, Philip F. and Rose-Ellen M. Luther for the **Music Fund** from Shirley Joosten for the **Lynn Joosten Scholarship Fund**.

In Sympathy

Our sympathy is extended to Deborah Anderson on the death of her good friend, Jane Wasula on November 22, 2014.

Our sympathy is extended to Nancy "Betsy" Messercola and family on the death of her mother, Kay McCann on November 30, 2014.

Our sympathy is extended to Art and Donna Schultz on the death of his uncle, Fred Schultz on December 3, 2014.

Our sympathy is extended to family and friends of Marion Cridge who passed away on December 9, 2014.

Sympathy is extended to the family and friends of Jackie Miller who passed away on December 12, 2014.



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RETURN SERVICE REQUIRED