

# The First Church FAMILY

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

**October 2016**

## **WORSHIP:**

- 2    **Season of Creation: Animal Sunday** (Communion)  
10:30 AM- Sanctuary Service Rev. John Paarlberg preaching  
Children & Worship (During Worship)  
Post Service: Christian Practices- *Food: Eating with Jesus*  
First Church Readers
- 9    **Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost**                      *Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-14*  
10:30 AM- Sanctuary Service Rev. John Paarlberg preaching  
Children & Worship (During Worship)  
Post Service: Changing the Conversation- Living and praying as cultural exiles
- 16    **Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost**                      *Jeremiah: 31: 27-34*  
10:30 AM- Sanctuary Service Rev. Susan Vincent- Cox preaching  
Children & Worship (During Worship)  
Post Service: Changing the Conversation- Where do we encounter the living  
God? Do we dare?
- 23    **Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost**                      *Joel 2: 22-32*  
10:30 AM- Sanctuary Service Rev. John Paarlberg preaching  
Children & Worship (During Worship)  
Post Service: Changing the Conversation- What is it like to be a Spirit-led  
church?
- 30    **Reformation Sunday**    *Habakkuk 1: 1-4, 2: 1-4*  
10:30 AM- Sanctuary Service Rev. John Paarlberg preaching  
Children & Worship (During Worship)  
Post Service: Changing the Conversation: What is our vision for the future?

**Our Sunday morning service may be found anytime at [www.firstchurchinalbany.org](http://www.firstchurchinalbany.org).**

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## From the Pastor

Beloved Congregation of Jesus Christ:

A recent study by the Barna Group, a research group that studies trends in religious belief and practice, reported that while a majority of Americans identify as Christian and say religious faith is very important in their life, a much smaller number of Americans actually *practice* their faith. When a self-identified Christian attends a religious service at least once a month and says their faith is very important in their life, Barna considers that person a “practicing Christian.” (A rather minimal standard!) And by this definition only 31% of U.S. adults are “practicing Christians.”

Barna tracks not only overall ‘churchlessness’, but also what proportion of unchurched adults are ‘dechurched’—that is, those who used to attend regularly but have not attended at all in the past six months—and what proportion are ‘never churched’—meaning they have never in their lives regularly attended a church. That report showed that in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy area 41% of the population is ‘dechurched,’ the 5<sup>th</sup> highest ‘dechurched’ metropolitan area in the nation.

Our congregation is not immune to these trends. One of the most disheartening and discouraging things about serving as pastor of First Church is the number of people who consider themselves church members, but who rarely or never participate in worship—some because they can’t; but others because they choose to be doing others things. The mainline church in North America is at a critical point. First Church Albany is at a critical point in its history.

But a crisis is both a time of danger and a moment of opportunity.

Several of us in the congregation have been reading and discussing *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*, by Anthony Robinson. He and others are saying that this is an opportune time for the church to think about its central purpose, and to re-discover and live into its original calling to “go and make disciples” of Jesus Christ.

The challenge for many mainline congregations, he says, is to shift from a “culture of membership” to a “culture of discipleship.” In the membership model the purpose of the church is to satisfy the needs of its members, providing them with religious goods and services. “The membership model cuts the nerve of mission and turns the church into an organization that exists to serve those who are already there.” In the discipleship model the point is helping people (members and non-members alike) to experience a spiritual transformation that leads them to more faithful following of Jesus Christ.

This also has implications for leadership. In the membership model the prevailing assumption is that the ordained ministers and church staff are primarily responsible for the spiritual health of the congregation. In the discipleship model all of us who are together in the congregation are responsible. Those who accept the call to be disciples are committed to the personal practice of their faith—daily prayer, weekly worship,

regular reading of the Bible, service to others, spiritual friendships (often in small groups) and generous giving. In the membership model the focus is on being part of an organization. In the discipleship model the focus is on practicing the spiritual disciplines and being formed in the Christian life.

I find all of this to be pretty sobering, a bit scary, and very exciting. I don't know where this will lead, but I am certain it will mean change, and very likely some pretty major changes in the life of the church. We cannot keep doing things as we've always done them before.

We'll be exploring this in the sermons and post-service discussions in October. In the sermons Sue and I will be following the Old Testament lectionary texts, which surprisingly, perhaps providentially, address the issues we've been discussing in *Changing the Conversation*: What is it like to be a church in exile? How do we get a new heart? How can we be a Spirit-led people? What is our vision for the future? After worship during the post-service time we'll invite your feedback and help us discern more clearly what changes this will bring to the life of our congregation. I hope that you too, will want to be a part of changing the conversation at First Church.

Sincerely,

John D. Paarlberg

## **At Home with the WORD**

**Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary** [www.rca.org/athome](http://www.rca.org/athome)

**October 1<sup>st</sup> – October 31<sup>st</sup>**

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| 1. Luke 17:5-10                        | 16. Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost |
| 2. Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost    | 17. Joel 2:23-32                         |
| 3. Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7                  | 18. Psalm 65                             |
| 4. Psalm 66:1-12                       | 19. Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22              |
| 5. 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15                 | 20. Psalm 84:1-7                         |
| 6. Psalm 111                           | 21. 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18               |
| 7. 2 Timothy 2:8-15                    | 22. Luke 18:9-14                         |
| 8. Luke 17:11-19                       | 23. Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost  |
| 9. Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost | 24. Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4                |
| 10. Philippians 4:4-9                  | 25. Psalm 119:137-144                    |
| 11. Jeremiah 31:27-34                  | 26. Isaiah 1:10-18                       |
| 12. Psalm 119:97-104                   | 27. Psalm 32:1-7                         |
| 13. Genesis 32:22-31                   | 28. 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12         |
| 14. 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5                 | 29. Luke 19:1-10                         |
| 15. Luke 18:1-8                        | 30. Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost |
|  | 31. Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4                |

## Small Group Gatherings this Fall at First Church

- **Nonviolent Communication Practice Group** **Wed. Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> 6-8 pm**

Beginning in October we will again meet monthly on Wednesday evenings. This year we will welcome some new members from the community after they complete Basic NVC Workshops at either the Albany Unitarian Universalists, First Church, or the FOCUS Volunteer Training for the Breakfast Program (FC provides a presentation each year). Becky Hudak will help co-lead this practice group. She will be teaching us practices called “presencing” and “compassionate noticing”. These are both ways that helps us observe more closely, without judgment, what is happening around us or within us, as we interact with others. Nonjudgmental Observation is a first step in practicing NVC. If you are interested in learning more about NVC and want to attend one of our workshops, please contact Pastor Sue Cox at the church office.

- **Prayer Shawl**

We will meet monthly on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month. Our meetings are for 1 ½ hrs. We have made and given over 40 shawls to those in need of comfort. When we meet together we enjoy fellowship, knitting, praying, sharing ideas and tips, and planning for our ministry. We are always open to new members joining us and welcome those who are “homebound” to join our ministry, too. If you can knit a shawl at home we can stay in touch together by phone or visit you for one of our meetings. Please join us!!

- **Pilgrim’s Walk**

Cheryl Gowie and Rev. Sue Cox gave an introductory presentation at Beverwyck Tuesday Aug 30th. They plan to lead a group there this fall. Sandy Scudder, Cheryl and Sue have provided these groups at Beltrone, Sheehy Manor and Beverwyck over the past 3 years. This is a small supportive group that builds caring community and provides spiritual support and direction. We hope to offer more of these groups to the greater community this upcoming year.

- **Tuesday Bible Study** **Tuesdays at noon**

We will again resume our study on the RCA Church Doctrines. Sounds a bit dry and outdated, right? After all they are just doctrines and they have been around for 100s of years: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort. The Belhar is a more contemporary doctrine we have recently adopted for our RCA compass. Let me tell you, we are finding there is nothing dry or outdated about them! Currently we are studying ***Body and Soul: Reclaiming the Heidelberg Catechism*** by M. Craig Barnes. This has been a study both highly thought provoking and rich in content. Join us if you can for this continued study. We would love to have you with us.

- **Children and Worship**

**Weekly worship October 2nd.** We hope you will invite children you know whose parent or guardian might be a neighbor, a friend, or someone you know at work. We will offer both a worship time for children ages 4-7 and 8-12. We hope you will visit our worship centers soon!

## **Like to sing? Join the Choir!**

Choir rehearsals have started, but there is still time to join the choir. We meet Thursdays at 7:00 pm in the choir room on the second floor of the education building. Come join us for fun, food, fellowship and song. You don't need to read music or have any special talent; just a love of singing. Make a joyful noise, deepen your faith and spread the good news with your song. Everyone's welcome.

## **Choir Night Out: October 27th**

The choir is having dinner together on Thursday October 27th at 5:30. Everyone is welcome - family, friends, spouses, partners, potential choir members! You don't need to be a choir member to come! Meet the choir members in an informal setting. Stop by just for a drink or to join us for a meal! Contact Mary Bon at [maryebon@verizon.net](mailto:maryebon@verizon.net) or 463-4449 for more information.

## **Church Library**

I am in the process of trying to set up and organize a library for First Church. I do believe this would be a wonderful addition to our church. What I need right now are some volunteers who would be willing to give me an hour or so of your time to help me get the books organized and on the shelves.

If you feel called to serve in this project and help me, please call me at [518 – 463-2547](tel:518-463-2547) or email me at [mew@nycap.rr.com](mailto:mew@nycap.rr.com) or you may speak to me at church.

Your help will be very much appreciated.

Yours in Christ, Mary Weijola

## **Weathervanes -- A Visit to Cuba**



Join the Weathervanes for fellowship, lunch, and a program on Wednesday, October 19th, at 12:30 p.m. in Zimmerman Hall. Bring a sandwich. Coffee, tea, and dessert will be served. After lunch, Peter Subers, will recently traveled to Cuba, will enlighten us about life in Cuba today with both stories and pictures.

Please telephone Audrey Ming (456-5485) to let her know you plan to attend.

## First Church Readers Meets October 2



Like to read? First Church Readers are people who love to read. We get together once a month in the post-service hour to discuss a book we have read in the past month. We will resume meeting again on October 2 when we will be discussing

- **October:** *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck  
The Pulitzer Prize winning story of a family in 1920s China under the last emperor.
- **November:** *The Nightingale* by Kristen Hannah  
How two sisters in World War II France find different ways to endure life in occupied France.
- **December:** No Meeting
- **January:** *Girl Waits with Gun* by Amy Stewart  
A novel based on the true story of one of the country's first female deputy sheriffs

Got a book you think would be an interesting read? Contact [maryebon@verizon.net](mailto:maryebon@verizon.net)

### CD Ministry Update:

For the past six years, the CD ministry, through the teamwork of Mary Bon and Dennis Kernahan, supplied CDs of our services to our home-bound members. It has also enabled us to post services on our website, and provide podcasts reaching out to the wider community.

Beginning last fall we suspended this ministry to our shut-ins. Since then we have had requests from both our shut-ins and those who used to listen to our services on the web for us to resume recording and distributing our Worship Services.

Mary is willing to continue to recording the services, and Dennis Kernahan has again offered to make copies of the CDs and mail them each week to many of our home-bound members and friends as he has done in the past.

**But we need someone to help assume the transfer and editing of the service.**

**Can you help continue this important ministry? It is straightforward and we'll provide on-the-job training!** Contact Ian Leet, Worship Commission Chair, or the Church Office at 463-4449.

## **Help First Church Provide Emergency Overflow Homeless Shelter Meals!**

Since 2008 First Church has been providing meals for the Shelter two Fridays each month from November to April.

**The Shelter opens in November and to continue the ministry we need people willing to provide a dish and help deliver the food.**

**Sign-up on the Shelter sheet on the Hospitality Table or talk to Mary Bon at 463-4449 or [maryebon@verizon.net](mailto:maryebon@verizon.net). It is an easy and rewarding way to serve!**

*The Emergency Overflow Shelter at First Lutheran Church in Albany, sponsored by the Capital Area Council of Churches, is a "shelter of last resort" when other shelters are full or for those not be eligible for other shelters because of addictions or mental health issues. It is open during the winter months and turns nobody away.*

### **Do you travel? Stay in a Hotel?**

The shelter can use single size toiletries. Many hotel chains provide shampoo, soap and conditioner. Pick up a few the next time you travel and donate them to the shelter box.

### **GROWING GREEN - CARING FOR CREATION**

*This is part of an ongoing series on how we can "grow green."*

*Each month we share a few tips on simple practices that may increase our stewardship of God's good earth.*



'Tis the season for great deals at local farmer's markets and market stands - it saves fuel and supports local farmers.

Compost your leaves (Mary Bon is always looking for leaves for her compost pile if you don't have a compost pile of your own.)

### **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](mailto:deschultz07@aol.com) or 518.429.1255.

## A First Church Welcome to Valerie



As we thank and bid farewell to Denise Lobdell who is retiring after serving our congregation for more than three decades as church coordinator and receptionist, we welcome Valerie Williams to First Church!

Valerie Williams has joined the First Church staff as the new parish administrator. Valerie has had administrative and supervisory experience in several different roles. She has most recently been employed as a child care counselor at the LaSalle School and has also worked as a dorm supervisor at Job Corps, a loan administrator, and an executive assistant at a charter school.

Valerie began her work at First Church on September 12, working alongside Denise for a few weeks. Please help us welcome her to the First Church community.

You may reach Valerie at the Church office at 463-4449.

Her hours are Monday through Friday: 8 am to 3 pm.



## Food Pantry

The Food Pantry couldn't operate without volunteers. If you would like to help, please call the church office or email Lorraine at [lorraineh@focuschurches.net](mailto:lorraineh@focuschurches.net).

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

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

Thank you!

## The First Church Food Pantry

Every Monday and Wednesday  
9 am to 11:30 am



### Food Pantry Request:

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

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

Please bring your items to the donation box in the church lobby.

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**The deadline for the November issue of *FAMILY* is October 14.**

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## Thank you

Art and Donna Schultz wish to thank everyone for their thoughts and prayers. As all of you know when you walk away from an automobile accident as serious as ours was, with minor injuries, someone from above was watching out for us. Art and I are very blessed to have so many friends at First Church. Thank you all and God Bless.

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## Congratulations

Congratulations to Alberta Fox who will be celebrate her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday on October 13<sup>th</sup>.

Congratulations to Maxine Wight who will be celebrate her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on October 28<sup>th</sup>.

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## Memorial

In celebration of the life of **Rev. Lynn T. Joosten**, a gift has been received from the Joosten family for the **Lynn T. Joosten Scholarship Fund**.

In celebration of the life of **Rev. Lynn T. Joosten**, a gift has been received from his son, Larry Joosten and family for the **Lynn T. Joosten Scholarship Fund**.

In celebration of the life of **Fred Haviland**, a gift has been received from Betty Pierce for the **Community Ministry Fund**.

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## In Sympathy

Sympathy is extended to Jane Ward and family on the death of her friend, Robert Licari on September 6, 2016.

Sympathy is extended to Peter and Ruth Pagerey on the death of Peter's, Dad, Paul Pagerey on September 16, 2016.

Sympathy is extended to The Rev Al Jassen, family and friends on the death of his mother, Henrietta Janssen on 9/23/16.

Sympathy is extended to Martha Ivins and family on the death of her husband, Rev. Wil Ivins on September 23, 2016.

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## Thank you

To All – Just a note of thanks for your many smiles, words of appreciation, cards, lunch get-togethers, flowers, the farewell luncheon and gifts. You were the highlight of my career with First Church. Now, with mixed emotions, it is time to say goodbye as I enter the next phase of my life, referred to by some as retirement. I would like to wish you all much peace and happiness in the years to come. Love, Denise





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