



First Presbyterian Church

Albany, New York

REFLECTIONS

a photo-essay journal



Spring 2017

This issue features reflections on TRANSFORMATION



- TRANSFORMATION -**Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis****Times change, and we too change with them**

By Richard Gascoyne

Latin? Are you crazy? The Church gave up Latin centuries ago, part of the Reformation transformation. But the idea that times change and that we are forced to change too echoes thousands of verses in the ancient oral tradition that predate even the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* -- or the Bible. An ancient idea, both in thought and poetic form. The quote, however, comes from the Reformation "tradition." Yet the very term "reformation tradition" is an oxymoron. How can you reform (or transform) and yet retain tradition?

Recently a friend emailed me a series of six snapshots with a common theme: an Indian couple sitting together over a "Just Married" sign (Planning their Honeymoon), a group of four buddies basking in the sun (A Day at the Beach), four people in a restaurant together (Having Dinner with Your Friends), a mature couple sitting next to each other (Out on an Intimate Date), two girls sitting side by side (Having a Conversation with Your Bestie), three people sitting on a bench together in an art gallery (A Visit to the Museum). What did all the photos have in common? You guessed it; all 17 people were totally engaged with their cell phones. Not talking, mind you (isn't that what phones are for?), but poking the phones with their fingers. Times change, and we too change with them. How many "friends" do you have? Even Granny who uses Facebook knows what that means. Will books survive? Libraries? Newspapers? Have you been to a bank recently? There's an app for that!

Change! Spring is the season of transformation: caterpillars become butterflies; brown bulbs beneath the snowy earth become tulips, daffodils, lilies-of-the-valley; dead trees burst into life, forsythia, lilacs; the bitter wind of winter becomes the breath of spring; Jesus becomes the Christ.

Just like that? One day a carpenter's son, accused, convicted, crucified, and three days later God? Not quite, but in the history of the universe, yes! It all happened so fast, miraculously fast. And the whole empire worshipped him. Maybe it happened too fast; maybe the message was garbled in the transformation. The reformation tried to fix it. Is it fixed? "Are we there yet?" Theologian Karl Barth in 1947 refers to the Presbyterian Church as "reformed and ever to be reformed." He says it in Latin, of course, "*ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda*." The

medium is part of the message. How can we continue the "tradition" of transformation-reformation?

First Presbyterian Church does a good job. We hear the word of God in a church that welcomes the stranger, feeds the hungry, attends the lame, guides the blind, tutors kids, revels in the talents of its youth, eats together a lot, knocks on legislators' doors, marches with pride, and follows the spirit where it leads us to resist. Where else can you jive to rap music in the sanctuary, sway to the rhythm of an African American spiritual, hear the rafters vibrate with a Bach toccata, and applaud them all? Oh, and buy Fair Trade coffee (and chocolates!), gifts from Mayan Hands, and support the SERV initiative (Sales Exchange for Refugee Rehabilitation and Vocation), all while sharing coffee, tea and conversation with fellow worshipers? And worship outside in the fall, if it's not raining, and go to an art show and concert on the first Friday of each month? All this, in an atmosphere of traditional liturgy with robes, and candles, and the invitation to "bless oneself" from an alternate baptismal font in the back of the church, a remnant of the medieval baptistry? And communion every Sunday, or every other Sunday, depending on which service you attend. The work of transformation is never done. It's part of the tradition.

So, can we get used to not having a monthly newsletter, just a slight transformation? There is a list of alternate news sources on p. 12. They have already been in operation for a while. And what you are reading is part of that transformation: *REFLECTIONS – a photo-essay journal*. The plan is to publish it three times a year: spring (May), winter (January), and fall (September). Each journal will have a theme: this month, Transformation! It will be mailed to you either in black and white or in color. Bulk mail is inexpensive, and a certain minimum number of items is required to take advantage of it. But, it's better online, because it is always in color online. Show this to your friends and tell them about First Pres. This is part of our membership initiative. Only you can make change work.

Times change, and we too change with them. We are the agents of change; we always have been. Transformation is our tradition. It happens every spring; it happened one morning at an empty tomb. *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*.



**First Presbyterian
Church
Albany, NY**
Founded in 1763

**Dr. Miriam Lawrence
Leupold**
Dr. Glenn D. Leupold
Co-Pastors

Dr. Michael Lister
Director of Music

Trevor Kahlbaugh
Organist

Christy D'Ambrosio
Youth Director

Robert C. Lamar
Pastor Emeritus

Elders

Keith Barber
Carol Bullard
Gladys Crowder
David Hannay
Lee Helsby
Annette Johnson
Tara Lindsley
John Myers
Phillip Riddle
Mary Rogers
Roseline Takor

Deacons

Bob Willower
Moderator
Mirabelle Beck
Diane Cornell
Prudence Iyok
Ellen Kemp
Peter Kimuli
Judith Mark
Yousaf Mathias
Jerry Nathan
Ron Pettis
Kirsten Pruzek
Tebob Raphael
Leslie Roccario
Peg Schalit
Gail Scott
Deb Shoup
Grace White
Barbara Woodruff
Margaret Zettle

Generosity can be transformative

A sermon on Deuteronomy 15:7-6, 10-11

By the Rev. Dr. Glenn D. Leupold

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.'

Generosity is both a Christian value and, I believe, a spiritual practice. It is also nearly universal, taught around the world by all major world religions. Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism all teach generosity as a core value and practice. Islam goes the farthest, making generosity one of its five pillars. In Western culture we do not immediately think of generosity as a spiritual discipline due to our tendency toward dualism, the belief that everything is either spiritual or physical; earthly or heavenly; and so all things related to money and earthly needs are "of the flesh" and inferior to what we think of as purely spiritual things, like prayer or worship. This duality worked its way into Paul's teaching, yet Mark and Luke have no trouble depicting a very earthly creation being visited by a very holy messiah at Christmas, a messiah that lives an earthly life, and then dies a very earthly death.

In our faith, being concerned about the earthly needs of others is a blessed thing; Jesus himself went around asking needy people, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus was generous with his time, his prayers, his healing abilities and with his very life. So when we think about generosity as a transformative spiritual practice, these are the various aspects of what we have – and who we are – with which God calls us to be generous.

The bible talks about being generous with various parts of what and who we are, like our time and attention, who we include and so on. It does also focus, in several places, on being generous with our money. There are verses that call us to give toward strangers, like Leviticus 19:33-34 and 24:22 where God tells God's people to 'share with the alien resident in your land.' There are some general generosity commands, best seen in the Deuteronomy passage above, where God calls us to help the needy around us. There are verses about financial generosity toward the church, like 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 wherein Paul encourages generosity within the Christian community because God loves a cheerful giver.

That reading from Deuteronomy to help the needy is quite striking. "Do not be hard hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbors..." I do not need to tell you the number of times we have seen policies promoted or elaborate justifications given for being hard hearted and tight fisted. I am continually amazed at the great lengths and extreme contortions some people will go to in order to justify selfish behavior. It is as if being selfish is ok as long as we justify it. No matter how much you try to convince me that the big dead fish sitting on the dock is not a fish, the stink of it confirms that there's a dead fish on the dock. No matter how many times those who really, really don't want to be generous refer to being generous

*Continued on p. 18, **Generosity**.*

Social Justice and Peacemaking Committee

Advocates for transformation

By Keith Barber

Twenty-one years ago we established a More Light Committee to lead in a more organized way our congregation's participation to assure the Presbyterian Church USA would become fully welcoming and accessible to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning) people. That was a big need then. Today we can celebrate the significant progress in our Presbyterian denomination and other faith communities and in civil society as well, and thus our More Light Committee -- at its own initiative -- has transitioned to become the Social Justice and Peacemaking Committee.

Here is the description of the new committee as authorized by Session:

Purpose: To advocate for peace, social justice, and human rights; to protect and defend marginalized people, targets of prejudice and injustice; to witness God's love for all, especially for the least of Christ's brothers and sisters [Matthew 25: 40].

Responsibilities:

1. *Develop, maintain and share with the congregation awareness of social injustice issues.*
2. *Working in cooperation with other bodies in the congregation and in the community, propose and execute remedies to social injustice and to promote just and equitable treatment of all.*
3. *Work cooperatively with appropriate groups FOCUS, the PC(USA), in the community, and regionally and nationally. This includes the former More Light Committee's links with such organizations as Presbyterian Rainbow, More Light Presbyterians, Covenant Network, Welcoming Congregations, etc.*
4. *Establish and maintain contact with elected and appointed officials and other policy makers, sharing concerns as appropriate.*
5. *As appropriate, participate in and encourage members of the congregation to participate in advocacy activities, including, but not limited to, letter/post card writing, phone call campaigns, rallies, demonstrations, marches.*
6. *Celebrate, preserve, and protect the enormous progress the PC(USA) has made in*

equality for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer people, the leadership role our congregation has taken, and the tremendous progress that has been achieved in the civic arena on these matters as well.

7. *Even as we work on other social justice matters, maintain vigilance to preserve and further LGBTQ justice and equality, responding appropriately as the need may arise.*
8. *Continue the responsibilities of the former More Light Committee to coordinate More Light Sunday, participation in Pride Fest, liaison with the Pride Center and other appropriate organizations. Continue invitation and welcome for LGBTQ people into the full fellowship of the Christian community.*
9. *Establish and maintain formal communication with the Mission and Outreach Committee.*

Without diminishing the efforts of others in the church, we hope to help First Pres become an even more significant presence in encouraging and advocating justice and peace locally and worldwide. Our church is already active in Albany's South End at Giffen School and the Wizard's Wardrobe, in working to narrow the income gap between rich and poor, in promoting fair trade, in feeding the hungry and providing assistance to the needy. Much is in cooperation with others, such as Crop Walk, Empty Bowls, the FOCUS Food Pantry and Breakfast Program. It's not as if we're not doing anything, yet more opportunities are evident.

Today we see families threatened with being broken up by deportation, marginalization of ethnic and religious minorities, hunger and nutrition programs threatened, a criminal justice system that is often unjust and threatens to become more so, and on-going economic injustice in many forms.

Independent of the new committee, some of us have begun participating in rallies, demonstrations, and marches on these issues, have turned out in organized accompaniments of undocumented people at immigration hearings, and are taking part in like minded efforts. Rifat Elkins, Director of Refugee and Immigration Support Services at Emmaus (RISSE) was our speaker at the April pot luck, giving us a description of that organization's work.

Continued on p. 19, Social Justice.

The transformation of a window

The Ascension

By Tim O'Toole

[Editor's note -- The Ascension of Christ marks the ultimate transformation and a pivotal event in the Christian story. It is with this event that it becomes clear that the work of God in Christ is our work. Here is the story of the transformation as it appears in the window that often goes unnoticed in the back of the sanctuary.]

In July of 2004, work began to repair our Lamb Studio window. First Presbyterian commissioned Cohoes Design Glass to remove the weathered and yellowed Lexan covers, then apply retaining rings to hold new plexiglass covers in place.

The firm carefully removed the "upper circular tracery" which had warped from years of summer heat (held in by the un-vented Lexan), then transported it gently to their Cohoes studio.

In October, First Pres Seniors visited the studio in Cohoes to review work in progress. The work table looked like a giant coloring book, waiting for the right crayons to fill in the spaces.

Segments of the window were spread out like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, with a "cheat sheet" underneath - since re-leading each piece of stained glass was enough of a challenge.

Nigel Johnson and his team were able to restore the window to its former glory, and return it to First Presbyterian in time for Easter 2005.

With the fogged plastic covering replaced by crystal-clear glass, the magnificent depiction of Christ's ministry, from Nativity to Ascension could be shared with our neighbors.

The Lamb Window memorializes six former members of First Presbyterian (from the Milne, Bull and McEwan families). Dedicated January 2, 1916, it was executed in the studios of J & R Lamb, NYC, under personal supervision of Frederick Stymetz Lamb.

This "American School of Glass" window gains its purity of color by overlaying two or three thicknesses of glass.

Five panels represent different events in the life of Christ, while three round windows represent (left to right) the Garden of Eden, the Ascension, and the City of Life.

The Tree of Life is represented in the border of the middle and largest round window. The Alpha and Omega represent Christ as the beginning and end of all things.

Church records indicate that at time of creation of the window, each piece was carefully selected and held against the light for review by the artist before being accepted into the selection.

(Thanks to David Wood, Church Historian for filling in the blanks in this story).



Technology revolution: a transformation From stained glass to Skype calls

By Bruce Brynolfson

*[Editor's note: A version of this article first appeared in the November 2013 edition of **SciTech†**, the journal of the Presbyterian Association on Science, Technology, and the Christian Faith.]*

Twenty years ago, when I joined First Presbyterian Church, the church secretary and the bookkeeper had stand-alone, single purpose computers that used word processing and commercial accounting software. An Internet connection enabled them to enjoy email and web access as well. Since then, we have grown to an administrative network of six staff computers and the commercial grade copier/printer/scanner and a second network of four Christian Education computers and a computer connected to the C.E. theater system. We replaced the software used to handle contributions with a full-function church management system, created the church website, deployed wireless internet access, and are experimenting with a Facebook presence (our youth are ahead of us in that area with their own page). Along the way we changed Internet Service Providers and web/email hosts. Our use of technology in worship remains limited to the sound system, although we now record the services on CDs rather than cassette tape, and provide copies to those who cannot attend, and separate direct-to-digital recordings of the worship service music are made available.

That march of technological change is substantial and not atypical for medium-size congregations. It brings concomitant escalating costs in both money and time, which some congregations find hard to justify. The church of my childhood, for example, has replaced its website (and hosting costs) with a Facebook page, and its email hosting (and costs) with Gmail. The large hidden problem with this technological change is managing it effectively. I/T professionals have developed a set of disciplines, collectively called Systems Management, to control and contain the inherent complexities of these systems. Systems Management encompasses the coordination of changes to minimize the probability of outages, a structured approach to problem determination and resolution to minimize user impact, the planning and testing of backup and recovery processes, and the implementation of effective security. Outsourcing would presumably provide these disciplines, but most churches I know do the best they can with congregational volunteers.

What technological changes does the near future hold for the local church? We see hints of it in some current practices:

There is a church that records its services directly to digital media and makes that recording or sections of it available nearly automatically and immediately on its website. A church in New York City streams its services live on the web and at the Passing of the Peace, the pastor suggests that remote worshipers greet loved ones via text or email). Some groups at First Pres Albany productively use Skype to include traveling members.

No doubt the local church will exploit the rapidly developing technology in new ways to retain ties to members who can no longer attend in person due to distance or other reasons. It will also surely deploy an Internet presence to attract new members, perhaps even purely online ones, moving beyond the label "local". And just as stained-glass windows were the visual aids of the middle ages for a predominantly non-literate population, and as projection systems today serve to motivate the faithful, usually in evangelical churches, the digital technology of tomorrow will find its way into the sanctuary. It has already been suggested, only partly facetiously, that our Sunday bulletin could be replaced by a smartphone or tablet application with links to scripture and anthem texts and supplementary study and reference material. Perhaps we are making baby steps into the brave and unfamiliar new world. Transformation happens, and we are part of that phenomenon.



My first protest demonstration Stop deportations!

By Susan Easton

On April 3rd I did something I've never done before. In my 70 some odd years, I had never participated in a political demonstration. On a chilly yet sunny morning at 9:30 am, I joined a group under the auspices of the *New Sanctuary for Immigrants of the Capital Region* at the Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement Building on Troy Schenectady Road in Colonie.

The group of about 25-30 people, all ages, sexes, and occupations, gathered together with signs. There was a variety of messages. Mine said "Stop Deportations." As we stood and waited, Ricky, an immigrant from Jamaica, who had come to check-in with Immigration, arrived and went into the building. He was accompanied by his wife, an American citizen, and his lawyer. It was an hour or so before he came out. While he was in the building, our group chanted slogans: "When immigrants are under attack, what do we do? -- Stand up, fight back." "What do we want? -- Justice for Immigrants! When do we want it? -- Now! If we don't get it? -- Shut it down! Shut it down!"

We had gone to support "Ricky" because his reporting schedule had been bumped up from yearly to monthly. Fearing that he might be a candidate for deportation, he requested the presence of a group such as ours for moral support..

After about an hour Ricky came out of the building, a sign he would not be deported this time and could now return home. A spokesperson from our group talked with him, and he relayed his thanks to us. Then it was over, after about two hours.

You may wonder what influenced me to choose to participate in such an event. First of all, I neither like nor respect the new administration. When he was elected president, I knew I would have to take action to oppose him whenever I could. There is a bewildering array of articles in the newspaper, on Facebook and on TV. I decided to follow and become active in two fields. One is immigrant deportation.

Second, it was Lent, a season during which we try to deepen our devotion to Jesus and his teachings. Welcoming the stranger is one of those teachings. Also, I remember the words of the German Lutheran pastor, Martin Niemoller, who wrote " First they came for the socialists..."

A hearty welcome! New members



Lillie McLaughlin is no stranger to First Pres. She was an active member and Deacon at First Pres when she lived in the area in the 80s and 90s. However she left the area and moved to Syracuse to work with the Thruway Authority. Upon retiring, Lillie moved back home to Albany where she has a lot of family. We are excited that Lillie is back at First Pres and appreciate Lillie's gifts of advocacy and faith.

Humphry Suimola

moved to Albany from the Cameroon in the fall. He grew up a Presbyterian in Africa and was always involved in his church. A singer and performer, Humphry enjoys gospel music. Currently Humphry is working at Hudson Park Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. His background is in government work. The first in his immediate family to come to the US, Humphry has a wife and 15 month old son in the Cameroon. We are glad to have Humphry joining First Pres and look forward to having him involved in our ministry.



We cannot allow a group of ethnocentrics divide our country into warring factions. "E Pluribus Unum!" We pride ourselves on being a melting pot. Our strength is in our diversity.

I thank my Pastor Miriam Lawrence Leupold for accompanying me on my first venture into political demonstration. She gave up a morning of her Sabbath observance to drive me and stood with me. Of course, she and her husband Pastor Glenn Leupold gave the sermons that helped inspire my actions.

I would like you to join me next time. Call me!

From a diverse and transforming community ...

Welcome to ALL

By Carol Bullard, Chair of Membership Committee

Many years ago when living in Italy, I picked up an Italian proverb which has stayed with me. Simply translated, it states: "Man proposes...and God disposes!" And so, while having initially proposed hanging our new banner by Christmas Eve, instead, a variety of unforeseen problems emerged, forcing us to wait until consistently warmer temperatures make its installation possible. Sorry for the delay!

What could be more perfect for First Presbyterian Church in Albany than an outdoor banner that boldly spells out "WELCOME, Immigrants & Refugees" along with an image of Joseph, Mary and their new-born son to remind us that even Jesus's parents were refugees fleeing to a foreign land. The addition of this sign does not reflect a new development since our church has a long history of reaching out to newcomers. Indeed, our earliest welcome "mat" was put out soon after our church was founded, back in 1763. For the rest of that century our first building provided a place of worship for the growing number of Scottish-Irish immigrants that were beginning to settle in Albany at that time.

Today the immigrant and refugee population is different as more people arriving in Albany come from Middle Eastern countries racked by war, but the goal is the same: to provide a safe haven where people of Christian faith can worship freely and safely; where various customs, foods and dress are respected; and where differences can be explored in a "free space" that encourages members in our congregation to learn and grow.

Deliberately encouraging people from diverse backgrounds to worship with First Pres is a fundamental and distinctive characteristic of our church—indeed, one might say, part of our essential DNA. The revised mission statement of 2004 that appears in the bulletin handed out at every Sunday service says it best:

"We welcome persons of differing abilities of all economic and ethnic groups, of any sexual orientation
To share with us
The joy, the power, the challenge
of God's good news in Jesus Christ."

Over the years the composition of our congregation has changed as our policy of inclusiveness has led to a membership of greater diversity. Today 22% of our members are non-white, with individuals representing Asian, African, African-American, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern heritages. A substantial number of our members also represent the LGBTQ community. Others worshipping with us are physically challenged in one way or another, yet fully participating members.

Slowly but deliberately our congregation is transforming itself, moving with the larger national demographic shift that demonstrates how our country's population is slowly becoming less white and more racially diverse. With these changes come opportunities for each of us to be personally challenged—and transformed—as we meet, greet and get to know new members whose backgrounds are very different from our own. Continuing to "grow" love and oneness among the diverse members of our congregation is what we are all about!

To help us sort out the many societal changes taking place in our world today, as well as in the life of our church, excellent adult education and high school programs are offered throughout the year. In January, for instance, a series of classes were created entitled A Month on Diversity: Disarming Hate." During Black History Month prominent black leaders provided perspective on a variety of global and local issues. This was followed in March by two conversations led by Dr. Keli Rugenstein on the difficult issue of speaking with and understanding Christians who live their faith differently.

At the April Potluck Dinner we heard Rifat Filkins, director of Refugee and Immigrant Support Services of Emmaus (RISSE) Methodist Church, speak about the many ways that RISSE supports refugees and immigrants, and how we can lend support to this worthy organization. From these kinds of discussions—as well as from simple one-on-one conversations with our more diverse family members—we learn, are inspired, and ultimately challenged to change ourselves.



Annual Youth Leadership Conference Theme: Islamophobia

By Christy D'Ambrosio, Youth Director

Youth and adults from churches all over NYS attended the annual United Nations Youth Leadership Forum, sponsored by the NYS Council of Churches, in February. Delegates from First Pres included Akap Takor, Arah-Tu Abunaw, Bate Egbe, Jordan Scarlett, Imani Elad, Jason Boucher and Danny Pfluger. We traveled by bus to New York, stayed at the Manhattan Hilton East, and attended seminars at the Church Center across the street from the UN. We arrived Monday evening and, after settling into our rooms, enjoyed a dinner at the Sinigual Mexican Restaurant.

On Tuesday we spent the morning in seminars entitled "Islam 101" conducted by Faiyaz Jaffer, Affiliate Chaplain, Global Spiritual Life at NYU and "Muslims in American Media & Pop Culture" led by Hussein Rashid, Academic, Speaker, Educator. In the afternoon we traveled by subway to the US/Pakistan Interreligious Consortium (UPIC) International Office for a seminar on "Using Dialogue to Break Down Stereotypes," led by a panel of speakers involved with this agency. After the day's seminars, the First Pres delegates plus some friends from other churches went to Times Square to eat dinner at Bubba Gump's Shrimp Co., followed by *Come From Away*, a Broadway show about the town of Gander, Newfoundland, where the planes landed after being diverted from NY on 9/11.

Wednesday morning began with a fun seminar conducted by Theatre Arts for Change: The Possibility Project. After our closing session with Jay Godfrey, Seminar Facilitator for the United Methodist Women's Seminars on National and International Affairs, we toured the UN, boarded the bus and rode home, a transformative experience for all of us.



Easter Sunday Breakfast

By Christy D'Ambrosio, Youth Director

It was a beautiful spring day. The Assembly Hall was awash in pastel colors. The food was extraordinarily good and plentiful. The youth, college age, high schoolers and middle schoolers were in attendance, ready to help, along with their parents. The Breakfast was a great success.

There is so much to be thankful for at First Pres. The congregation, generous and active, donating food as well as monetarily to the youth program. The youth, fun loving and industrious, ready to worship and volunteer on Easter Sunday morning. The beautiful services, inspirational music, and fellowship, all of this helps to make Easter at First Pres a particularly joyous day. Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed!

Adult Education Class Reacting to change

by Glenn Leupold

This fall brought a lot of anxiety and uncertainty to our nation. After the presidential election, Miriam and I started to hear a lot of fear from church members about how the next several months would play out as policies began to be enacted that put law above grace, the opposite of what Jesus did. He put grace and love above all things, including Jewish law. Jesus never spoke in favor of walls to separate people. He emphasized a personal preference for the poor, the downtrodden and for “setting the captives free.” We also heard a desire from some about supporting the president. With this as a backdrop for recent Adult Education classes, here are the topics we’ve addressed in the fall and winter.

The “academic year” began in September of 2016 with me sharing my experience at the General Assembly of our denomination. It met in Portland, Oregon. One of the highlights of the meeting was the vote to include The Belhar Confession in our Book of Confessions. As a class we looked at the central message of this South African created statement of faith. We also looked at the main themes of another entry in our Book of Confessions, the Confession of 1967, on the eve of its 50th birthday. At the end of October, Stephanie Kite led a “hands-on” class on Stewardship and we experienced what it means for us to be good stewards of what God has given us. December brought the annual Advent/Christmas themed series of classes.

In January the adult class was joined by the Senior High class for a series called “A Month on Diversity: Disarming Hate.” The class looked at four groups of people in our society that have suffered through years of discrimination and documented attacks. Various speakers represented Black Lives Matter, Islam, Transgender folk and LGBT folk. February was Black History Month and Greg Owen reviewed the history and importance of Black History Month.

We were brought up to date on the underground railroad and the Myers residence. Eric and Deb Fagans led a discussion of Deb Irving’s book, “Waking Up White.” The uptick in discrimination since the election was part of these conversations.

On March 12, Joe Paperone led an “advocacy in Albany” update. Joe is the Advocacy Coordinator for the FOCUS ministry. On March 19 and 26 Keli Rugenstein, professional counselor and founder of Eastern Door Counseling in Rensselaer, led a discussion of how can we interface with Christians who are on the other side of the law and grace divide? How can we communicate successfully with Christians on the other side of national policy issues? We follow the same Lord, right? Many church members have told me about an uncle or cousin with whom their relationship is now strained after the November election. We discussed some strategies for listening first, getting at the emotional state of being behind their position, while not feeling the need to be correct, right or vindicated. Jesus didn’t do that. Keeping lines of communication open is important as is allowing understanding to happen in its due course. It is always problematic to enter into conversations with the intent to win. And it is impossible to use social media to win arguments. It never happens. Social media allows one-way communication; “pot-shots” and retreat. Keli likened it to starting a slap fight and then retreating so as not to get slapped back.

April 2 and 9 we asked the question, “Is a budget a moral document?” We reviewed a few of the issues facing the Federal and State budgets and decided the answer was a resounding YES. Budgets have real world winners and losers. Jesus had a lot to say about that, declaring giving good news to the poor as central to his mission. He spent a lot of time reconnecting those on the margins to the new community he had called into being. We call it the church.



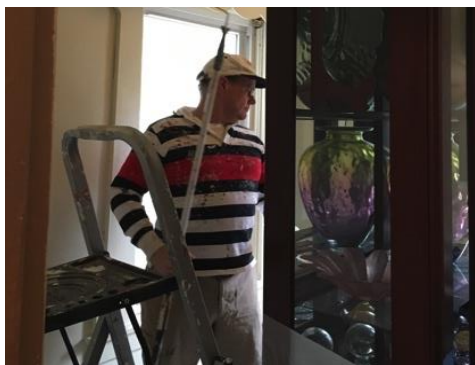
First Home Repair Project for 2017

By Christy D'Ambrosio. Youth Director

We made a great start on the transformation of the first floor of Chucky's home. Chucky shares a two-family home with Mattie Lee White in North Albany. Last year we painted the upstairs landing and two bedrooms. This year we started with the kitchen and dining room. There's just a bit more to do in these two rooms, and then we will move onto the living room and bathroom.

Our volunteers included Maggie Robinson, Arah-tu Abunaw, Bate Egbe, Leslie Cheu, Glenn Leupold and Christy D'Ambrosio. Not pictured, but working hard were: Jessica Lamson, Amy Robinson, Dwight and John Cheu.

Please join us for future home repair projects.



Where can I find notice of... ?

Upcoming events.....	Weekly Email News from FPC, Sunday Bulletin, website
Ushers' schedule.....	Personal email monthly & just before duty, Sunday Bulletin
Sunday Worship Readers, Prayers, Counters	Personal email as above
Communion servers	Personal email as above
Deacons' Flower schedule	Deacons' meeting notes
Flock in charge of coffee hour	Deacons' meeting notes
Weekly prayer concerns and celebrations	Email News from FPC
What's happening this week	Weekly Email News from FPC, Sunday Bulletin, website
Projects needing your help	Weekly Email News from FPC, Sunday Bulletin, website
Mission and Outreach projects	Weekly Email News from FPC, Sunday Bulletin, website
Youth activities and support	Weekly Email News from FPC, Sunday Bulletin, website
Fundraisers	Weekly Email News from FPC, Sunday Bulletin, website

Check the church website often: www.firstpresalbany.org
 For youth activities check Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/The-Youth-of-the-First-Presbyterian-Church-of-Albany-170249029728418/?fref=ts>
 Copies of electronic notifications and Sunday Bulletins will be mailed to you at your request to the church office (518-449-7332)

What is it?

Wizard's Wardrobe

By Deb Fagans

What is the Wizard's Wardrobe? Is it a big closet that contains a bunch of wizards hiding in the dark? Or is it a closet where a particular wizard stores his/her magical garments and paraphernalia?

Nope. It's an after school tutoring program started as another facet in our partnership with Giffen Memorial Elementary School. It resides in an Albany Housing Authority building at 20 Rensselaer Street, just one block from the school, so it is within walking distance for the students there. However, it is open to all children in the South End, even if attending other schools.

While still undergoing embellishments by our artists in residence, David Hinchey and Leslie Roccario, we have started our one-on-one tutoring with seven brave students. Four are students at Giffen, while the other three attend different schools.

The Wizard's Wardrobe is meant to be a creative place where the magic of reading and writing takes place, giving our students a new sense of achievement and a better self image than many have. They are challenging students, but we have grown to love them and want to see them succeed not only in academics but in life in general.

The program is for first and second grade students and will advance a grade each year, so the students who start with us can receive help all through elementary school. It is our hope that they will be well prepared to go on to middle school and will have attained the skills they need to succeed there and in high school.

If you are interested in being a part of this program, please contact Debbie Fagans, volunteer executive director (776-0664). There are many ways in which you can help. Tutoring is just one. Being on a committee, helping to raise funds, producing articles for our "store", working with the librarian are just a few. Get involved in solving the problems of failing literacy in our low income neighborhoods. Be part of a process of transformation. Wizard's Wardrobe is a new 501 (c) 3.



You are cordially invited
to attend the
OPEN HOUSE
for the

**Wizard's
Wardrobe**



Wednesday
June 7, 2017
7:00 - 9:00 pm
8:00 Presentation

20 Rensselaer Street
Albany, NY 12202

Light refreshments will be served

RSVP by June 1st to
christy@firstpresalban.org or 423-4763

Latham-Loudonville-Clifton Park Flock The fellowship of food and song

By Bob Willower

The Latham-Loudonville-Clifton Park flock gathering took place on March 18th at Tara Lindsley and Charlie Kite's residence in Menands. It was an evening of sharing stories from college days, sports, music and other adventures. We shared a meal together and the highlight of the evening was Nancy Frank playing party sing-along on the keyboard, while Kaylee and Mason Kite played bongos, and the kazoo respectively.

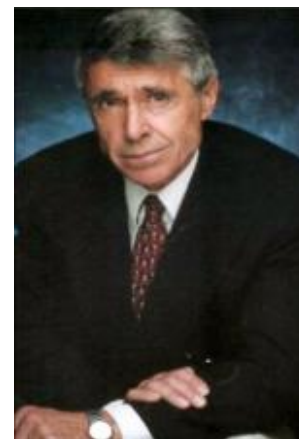
We sang familiar sing-along songs including "The Sidewalks of New York", "You're a Grand Old Flag", "A Bicycle Built for two", "The Band Played On", and "The Wiffenpoof Song". All who attended had a great time sharing and we hope to do it again and invite neighbors.



Friday, May 19 Potluck Supper The transformation of a mountain

By Judy Mark

As we begin to think about summer vacations, our wonderful national parks often come to mind. One of these parks is Mount Rushmore where you can see the figures of four famous presidents—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. Our



speaker for the evening, author Richard Cerasani, sees his parents, Arthur and Mary, and the heroic sacrifices they made and obstacles they overcame to work at this national landmark shortly before World War II. In telling his father's experience, Cerasani shares the tale of many workers on the mountain, some separated from family, all hoping for a future. Through old letters and photographs, we see the human side of the monumental struggle to create Mount Rushmore National Park. His book, *Love Letters from Mount Rushmore*, is available in our local libraries.

This should be a fascinating program detailing another human experience of sacrifice and perseverance.

Please call the church office with your reservation and what dish you will bring. Social hour is at 6 pm followed by dinner at 6:30. Bring your friends.



Covenant Group Sharing joys and sorrows

By Leslie Roccario

One of the best things that ever happened to us is what we call our "Group" - as in: "When is Group?" "Are we coming to your house for Group?" "Sorry, I have Group that day."

Shortly after Miriam and Glenn came to First Pres, we were encouraged to create Small Groups for study and fellowship outside of church. Our Group



consisted of Rachel Smith, Gloria Wood, Cris Blanchard, Freda Gardner and me, Leslie Roccario, ladies that are "over the river." When Rachel moved to Beverwyck (no longer on OUR side of the river!), we took on new First Pres members Cindy Winter and Diane Cornell. Cris joined a church in Averill Park because the ride into town for church at First Pres became more taxing, but we had to keep her with us of course. We take turns meeting in our homes on the first and third Mondays of the month. This has to be adjusted occasionally for vacations but mostly for doctors' appointments! We have studied many many books, but mostly we love our check in time.

We have been through many life altering occurrences together. Through hospitalizations, family illnesses and issues, hip replacements, the onset of aging, great joys, deep sadness and even moving, this group has supported each other through thick and thin. We have often said that Cindy and Diane were sent to be Freda's angels, and Cris and I make regular shopping forays that she can not manage on her own. We have an intimacy and a covenant with one another that is rare to find, and we love each other with all our hearts. I could only hope you could find a Small Group that would enhance your life as ours has. What a gift Group has been!

Lady Bug, the dog, is our mascot and a frequent attendee.

First Friday, May 5 David Carter, Zephyr Winds and the musicians of First Pres

By David Hinchey and Michael Lister

According to an on-line interview with Robert Vaughan, "David Carter paints portraits of artists, writers, poets, and musicians. Some are famous, others are outsiders. He is a master at envisioning the scope and angle, the temperament and scale. ... Often the subject is relatively expressionless, as if captured on canvas in spite of oneself. There is also mysticism apparent, and a spiritual quality to his work."

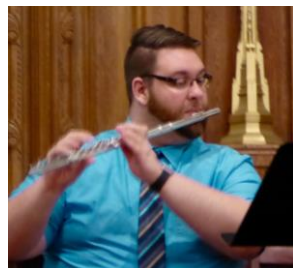
The music of the evening featured Zephyr Winds and the musicians of First Pres.

(For reflections on the previous two months of First Fridays, see p. 16.)

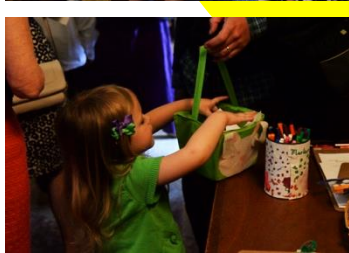
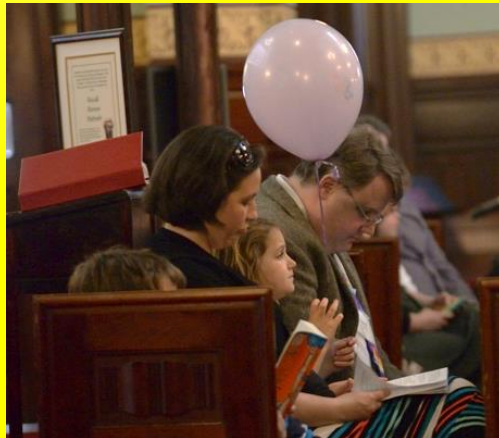




First Fridays



The joy and transformation of Easter



Generosity, continued from p. 4.

as a sign of weakness doesn't make it so. No matter how much those who are afraid to risk compassion say that compassion is for wimps; no matter how much misdirection is attempted, selfish behavior still smells, no matter how much perfume is dumped on it.

I like the way this passage essentially tells God's people the need for them to "open your hand to the poor" will never be taken off the table. And it is a command. It is not optional. God knew us hard-hearted types would need to be commanded.

Perhaps the best example in Jesus' ministry of generosity in action came in the miracle story of Jesus feeding the large crowd. He and the disciples were with a large group of his followers, and it was dinner time. Jesus blessed the small amount of food available from the few people around him—just a few fish and a few loaves of bread—and then handed it to the crowd. Yet rather than a miraculous creating of just enough food, there was a lot left over. Where did all the left-over food come from? An imprecise miracle? An overestimation of the attendance? Or could it be that those among the huge crowd who had food put it into the baskets, while those in need of food took from the baskets? Thus 12 baskets of leftovers. Sharing is an act of generosity.

The abundance of the universe is made known when we humans practice open-hearted generosity. Freely sharing what is ours to share, we participate in creating a world in which everyone's needs are met; a world in which there is always more than enough for all. Generosity is a demonstration of the kind of person you want to be, and the kind of world you want to participate in creating.

This points to some of the societal benefits of generosity. People thrive when we live out of love and trust and connection, rather than self-centered fear and separation. It is a pure and natural thing to open our hearts to give as we have received. Generosity helps create a world of abundance rather than a world of scarcity. Do you live out of a sense of God's abundance or out of fear for loss of what you have? Do you love God's blessings of grace and 'a purpose', or do you obsess over the looming specter of scarcity?

Generosity helps us to honor God's creation in declaring the oneness of humanity; our call to see others as family to embrace, not strangers to regard with suspicion. Generosity helps us to

honor God's creation in declaring the oneness of humanity; our call to see others as family to embrace, not strangers to regard with suspicion. Generosity helps create the type of kingdom that Christ envisioned, where the captives are freed, the poor receive good news, and the hungry are fed.

Generosity has a therapeutic quality. Research from the University of British Columbia and Harvard Business School shows that spending money on someone else — as little as \$5 a day — can significantly boost your happiness. Students who practiced random acts of kindness were significantly happier than those who were not given this task. In another study, college students were given money and directed to either spend it on themselves or spend it pro-socially, that is, on activities meant to benefit other people. Participants who spent it pro-socially were happier at the end of the day than those who spent it on themselves.

What if you adopted generosity as a life-long spiritual practice? Perhaps something like this would happen more often:

Earlier this winter, a homeless man spent several hours during a snow storm in Colorado pushing out cars stuck in snow. He just went from one to the next. One of these stranded folk set up a gofundme account that raised \$22,000 toward a place for this man to live. The man's generosity with his time and strength led to another type of generosity. You might say that generosity can "snowball."

A man was out Christmas shopping in December then went to lunch but when he went to the till to pay he was told his credit card had been frozen by the card company for too much activity. Christmas shopping can do that. As he was wondering what to do, the cook came out and covered the bill. The man repaid the cook later with a \$50 gift card, more than the meal cost.

A woman told her friends on Facebook about being in line at the grocery store. As she was about to pay the \$213 she owed, a woman stepped up — said "Pardon me," and swiped her card, signed for it, and left. She was stunned to tears. Several of this woman's friends on Facebook said they were going to try doing the same thing for somebody.

A 64-year-old man in Scotland is very generous. He has been donating pints of blood every three months for 30 years. Over that time, he's given about 120 pints. That's generous.

A woman was grocery shopping with her older son who was 3 at the time, and on the autism

*Continued on p. 19, **Generosity**.*

Generosity, continued from p. 18.

spectrum. He had a speech delay, so couldn't put into words what he wanted. He started to cry because his mom wouldn't let him get something as they stood in line to check out. An older lady in front of them yelled, "Be quiet!" at the little boy, which helped no one. Even if the woman wanted to take her sons and leave, her items were already on the conveyor belt to check out and being tallied. And they were essential groceries. When she finally checked out, she put her groceries in her car, put her sons in their car-seats, shut the door, and stood, leaning against the car, crying. An older woman came over to her and said, "I was watching you at checkout, and while I can't offer any advice, I *can* give you a hug," and she hugged the woman, who thanked her profusely.

I'll let the person affected tell this one herself. "I was a new mom. My son was maybe a month old. He had been up crying and crying. I took him to the [urgent care] by where I live. It has limited hours. We waited there for a good two and a half hours. They prescribed him some ear drops to relieve pain and help with an infection in his ear.

After we left the [urgent care] - that had already closed by then - I went next door to Walgreens to fill the prescription. My son is still crying from the pain. I get to the pharmacy window and they tell me that my insurance would not cover the ear drops; that it would be \$129 for them. I was a new mom so I had no extra money. They told me I could call the doctor and ask for something else but I told them they were already closed. I just stepped aside and started to call my mom to see if I could borrow the money from her; my son whimpering.

While I was on the phone, a lady came up to me with a bag, held it out to me and said, "Here, I don't want him suffering." She had paid for the ear drops. I asked for her address to pay her back. She just said, "Don't worry about it, just trust in God and pay it forward."

A generous offer of pet-sitting from a person with no other way to help. A generous act to stop the bullying of a transgender student. An offer to give a break to a primary caregiver with an ill partner.

See? Now doesn't generosity feel like a transformative spiritual practice?

Social Justice, continued from p. 5.

The tasks are spread out before us. As God's people, we have a lot to do but with confidence that God is with us. Through his prophet Isaiah, as translated by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*, God tells us:

*This is [what] I'm after
To break the chains of injustice,
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,
free the oppressed,
cancel debts.*

*What I'm interested in seeing you do is:
sharing your food with the hungry,
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,
being available to your own families.*

*Do this and the lights will turn on,
and your lives will turn around at once.*

Isaiah 58: 6-9a

There are many opportunities to put faith into action. Your participation is welcome and needed. If you'd like to be part of the committee and get in on organizing our activities, meeting night for all committees is ordinarily the first Tuesday of the month. We meet at 7:30, but check in advance to confirm that the meeting is on. Your support and participation in our advocacy and activities is welcome.

I am honored to be named chairperson of this committee and invite you to discuss your interests with me, Keith Barber (keith12210@gmail.com).

See **REFLECTIONS** on line and in color at



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