

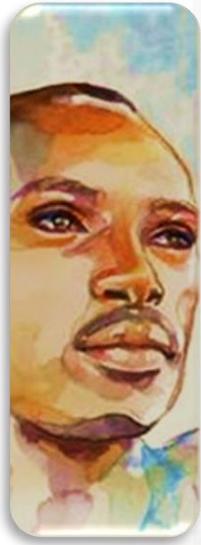
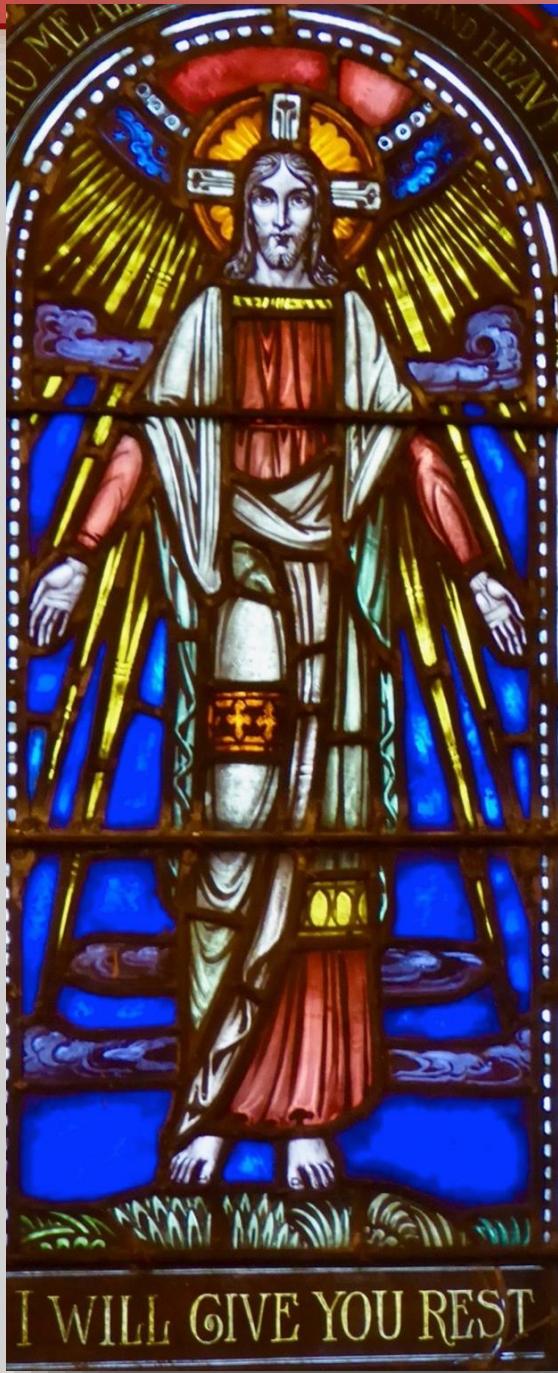


First Presbyterian Church

Albany, New York

REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS



Winter 2017-18

This issue features reflections on
the theme “Welcome!?!”





**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
Teboh Raphael
Leslie Roccaro
Peg Schalit
Gail Scott
Deb Shoup
Grace White
Barbara Woodruff
Margaret Zettle



A greeting, a question, and a mandate **Welcome!?**

By Richard Gascoyne, Managing Editor

Come unto me all that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matt. 11:28

These lines from the gospel appear on the stained glass window in the Stevens Memorial Chapel. Its entrance is through the door on the left front of the sanctuary.

A stranger enters church. You greet the newcomer by saying, "Welcome!" At coffee hour you wonder how the stranger feels – Welcome? You view the chapel window and feel the mandate – Welcome! A photo of the window is on the cover of this season's **REFLECTIONS**. The story of the history of the chapel is on p. 13.

The sonnet below appears on a bronze plaque on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, placed there in 1903. It was written in 1883 and donated to the "Art Loan Fund Exhibition in Aid of the [Bartholdi](#) Pedestal Fund for the Statue of Liberty" in order to raise funds to build the pedestal.

"The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus, 1883

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"



The theme of the winter issue of **REFLECTIONS – a photo-essay journal** is "Welcome!?" It has been a recurrent theme of biblical proportions, from the exile of Adam and Eve in the Old Testament to the announcement in the New Testament: "No room at the inn." The Jewish flight to Egypt, slavery, a heart-wrenching exodus and return to the "promised land" is the core of the Hebrew testament. Kindness to the stranger, the poor, the sick, the needy, is at the heart of Jesus' teaching in the Greek testament.

The following pages explore that theme from the perspective of our congregation at First Presbyterian Church, Albany. Read the story of some of our own immigrants (pp. 4-6, 8). Listen to what is happening to immigrants in our wider community (p. 3). Look at the photos of some of the special cultural events our brothers and sisters from other parts of the world offer to our community, our multi-cultural Christmas experience (p. 7), the theological underpinnings of welcoming the stranger (p. 12).

Reflect on these thoughts and images; come to some conclusions; and act on them in words and deeds!

What are we willing to sacrifice to truly love our neighbors as ourselves?

By Joe Paparone

Editor's note: Joe Paparone is the lead organizer at the Labor-Religion Coalition of NYS, and the Advocacy Coordinator for the FOCUS Churches of Albany. He is a member of Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration and ICE-Free Capital District. In his free time, he plays the saxophone in two local bands, travels with his wife Lesley as much as possible, and enjoys exploring the Adirondacks via foot, bike, and canoe.

There are a lot of lies being told about immigrants: They're criminals. They steal jobs. They abuse welfare.

None of these things are true, but the lies persist. It's important that we tell the truth.



The truth is, before Donald Trump ever rode an escalator and called Mexicans rapists and murderers, it was President Obama who earned the title "deporter-in-chief," for deporting more people than any president in US history.

Before Donald Trump ever talked about a wall that would destroy the economy if it worked, border "security" has been a bipartisan darling, receiving exponential increases in funding for over two decades. Hundreds of miles of border fencing and wall already exist, with construction initiated during the Clinton presidency. Much of this is strategically incomplete, forcing migrants into more dangerous terrain where they suffer and die from injury, exposure and dehydration.

Before Donald Trump ever talked about hiring thousands more Customs and Border Patrol, it was already the most heavily funded federal law enforcement agency.

The immigration "system," such as it is, is not "broken," it is in fact working exactly as designed. It is a nightmare, an atrocity, and a moral crisis. This crisis didn't start with Donald Trump and it wouldn't be solved by a different president.

It is a racialized program of labor exploitation and incarceration, and it has always been that way. It serves to maintain a disempowered labor force with fewer economic rights than citizens, so that industries can continue to generate their profits off the backs of poor and desperate people. Immigrants are then scapegoated by political elites, who pit other poor and working class people, who are also

victims of capitalism, against them.

This is not a system that can be reformed. It must be abolished. This is a tall order, and what's worse is that there is no legislative solution to this problem. There is no comprehensive immigration reform bill that will address this crisis. One existed a few years ago, and it was a terrible bill; anything produced today would be worse. The typical ways of making change -- lobbying, phone calls, voting -- aren't going to get what is needed. It will take a mass movement of solidarity.

There are some other lies that get told about immigrants. These are often told by well-meaning people, who want to help.

"They're uneducated." "Illiterate." "They can't do public advocacy or activism."

These lies are more insidious. They infect those of us who feel compassion and want to care for our neighbors. But regardless of our intentions, these lies are a poison to our goals. These lies set up relationships of privilege and charity, in which benevolent, wealthier, usually white people can share their largesse. These patronizing relationships are unequal, and they will not bring justice.

The truth is, movements for immigrant rights have always been led by those most affected by the abominable system we have. It was true for farm workers who organized with Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, it was true with the mass actions that took place in 2006 in response to the vicious Sensenbrenner Bill, and it's true today when undocumented youth risk everything to protest the end of DACA (which they organized for and won) and resist the deportation of themselves and their families.

Immigrants do not need charity, they need solidarity. What they need citizens to do is to see them, listen to them, trust them, and join them in their struggles; to recognize that our lives and our fates are inextricably bound together. If those of us in positions of privilege will pay attention, they will show us the way.

Continued on p. 23, What are we willing to sacrifice.

Where have we been? Where are we going? Who are we?

An individual, a blend, a mixture, the product of a culture, a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, a nation, a region, a political group, a faith group? Do we have a label, do we need a label, how do others label us? Welcome?! It is a greeting, a question, and a command. Maybe getting to know each other is step one. Here are some faces that you may think you know. Now hear “the REST of the story.”

Fadia Ghobrial

My name is Fadia Ghobrial. I was born and raised in Cairo, Egypt, and came to the United States in 1978. Back then, arranged marriages were common in Egypt and almost all Middle East countries. That is how I came to the US and married an Egyptian who was already an American citizen and living in the US.

My two sons, Peter and Matthew, were born in the US. How fortunate we are. Peter, my older son, graduated from Union College as an electric engineer, and then he joined



the Navy and served for six years. He is now working in a company that builds submarines for the navy.

Matthew, my younger son, graduated from Yale University and is now doing residency as an MD in radiology.

As for me, I entered the government work when I came from Egypt. My first few years were definitely difficult; the culture, the language differences, and being far from my family, were definitely hard. It took me a few years to get adjusted. But now I consider my family very lucky to have had the chance of living such a life of freedom and opportunity.

I thank God every day for the fortunate life we have here in the US, far away from the religious hostilities that were and are always going on in the Middle East.

Joining First Presbyterian Church in 1978 had a big impact on our life. The church community and the members made us feel very welcome and belonging, they became part of our family.

My two sons' involvement in church plays, and the mission-study trips made a great impact on their lives and gave them the feeling of connection and the feeling of being part of something important. I really believe that made a huge impact on their successful lives.

Michael Attwell

From British Tadpole to Proud American

American influences: Superman; Tarzan of the Apes; Archie; Lone Ranger; Daisy BB guns – all early introductions to America for this 12-year old lad in Cheltenham England, anxiously awaiting American pen pal's occasional packages of Dell Comic Books. Oh, and the Everly Brothers on Radio Luxembourg, too! English influences: Cheltenham Grammar School for Boys engulfed by the smell of yeast and malt from the Whitbread brewery next door; intro to Latin, French, German, and Spanish, piquing a lifelong interest in language; soprano soloist at St Matthews and the Parish Churches; cricket; avid trainspotter with sooty face from the coal-fired steam engines!



Unfettered delight when Pater (Father) announces we're off to America in June of 1960! Southampton wharves to Montreal docks. Arrival in Herkimer, NY. Streets not paved with gold! Harsh economic times, with Pater only occasionally working. Solace in Herkimer's Christ Episcopal Church, where I became a choir and altar boy, and in the Methodist Church which supported Scout Troop 2 where I found friendship and a lifelong love for Nature.

Attending SUNY of Albany, pursued twin loves of language (French and Spanish) and sports (X-Country and Track). Citizenship at 18! Frequent visitor to Chapel House on campus and St Peter's on State Street. While at the University of Nice, France, in 1968 became an altar boy at the "Eglise Anglicane," "slinging" incense weekly!

Started a lifelong Civil Servant career in '78 and joined First Pres in late 70's (Brenda Biggs helping a friend struggling with addiction, and I wanted to support him and his church attendance!). Was bitten by a spiritual bug named Bob Lamar and thrilled to his inspiring presence and often thundering and poetic sermons. Blown away by the music, too! Joined and served over the years as an elder and deacon; involved in Finance, Administration and Stewardship (many

stewardship "skits" with Elly Rice!). Eventually joined choir's tenor section. Also, inaugural member of the Thursday morning Bible Guys, my Spiritual Band of Brothers. I often struggle with my faith, my mortality, and my character defects, but I keep coming back to First Pres for my thinking, and for the solace that's in it and the home that it's become....

Yousaf and Neelam Mathias

At First Pres, I'm "Joe." In the early 1950s our relatives came to the United States for a better life and a good education. They sponsored our families' and we emigrated to the United States from Lahore, Pakistan, in 1969 and 1974. The legal immigration process was not difficult; however, compiling and submitting proper documentation took a long time. It wasn't easy for our middle aged parents to leave their jobs, country and loved ones behind to start a life in a new country. They were well aware of the problems and difficulties they would face; however, they also knew it was necessary to make sacrifices for their children's future.



In Pakistan, Neelam's dad passed away at a very young age, her mother, Lily Adiel provided care, love and education for their only daughter. Mrs. Lily Adiel was a school teacher in an all girl's mission school where she taught and lived in the school hostel with her daughter. Neelam received her high school education in the same school. Mrs. Adiel and Neelam arrived in the USA in 1969.

My parents, my sister Rosemary and I also lived in Pakistan. My dad, Munir Mathias, an Army officer in the Pakistan Army, and my mother, Claudia, a trained midwife worked for the Pakistan Railways. My sister and I received our early education in government schools in Pakistan, since our parents were transferred to work in a different city every three to four years. My sister and I along with our parents arrived in the USA in 1974.

The first ten years of our lives in the United States were difficult. Adjusting to a new culture, learning the English language, and adjustment in schools was a challenge. Neelam's mom and my parents worked very hard to provide food, shelter and the best education for us.

After many years of hard work Neelam received her master's degree in Education from the college of Russell Sage in Troy, NY, and I received my Civil Engineering degree from Union College in Schenectady, NY.

In 1982 our parents announced our engagement and we were married on July 3, 1982 at the First Presbyterian Church. Our marriage ceremony was officiated by Rev. Bob Lamar. Neelam and her mom were already church members. My parents and I also became members of the church after we were married. Our daughter, Jessica, was born in 1983 and son, Joseph, was born in 1986. Both children were baptized in the church, attended Sunday School, and participated in church youth plays.

Currently, Neelam and I reside in Slingerlands. Neelam is retired from the Albany School District. I am a retired Professional Engineer from the New York State Department of Transportation. Our daughter, Jessica, is a school teacher with the Albany School District. She is married and the proud mother of twin babies, Olivia and Vincent. She lives in Ravana, with her husband, Jason Piacente. Our son, Joseph, is a Medical Doctor and he is currently finishing his Psychiatry residency at Berkshire Medical Center in Pittsfield MA. He is engaged to a wonderful young lady, Emilie Carsell from Pittsfield, and they are planning to get married in 2018.

Neelam, our children and I live in a beautiful country we call home with a sense of gratitude to our parents for the sacrifices they made for our bright future. As stated in the Declaration of Independence we are enjoying "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". God Bless the United States of America.

Wiesia and Jarek Szurek

Poland had broken away from the Soviet Union. Times were tough; job prospects were slim. Many were seeking work outside the country and sending money home. We were young, just out of university, living with parents. In the summer of 1996 we met a couple from First Presbyterian Church, Albany. The next summer we invited them to our wedding. We started writing and dreaming of our future.



My name is Wiesia Szurek (really Wieslawa); my husband is Jarek (really Jaroslaw) We came to the USA from Krakow in August 2001, just weeks before 9/11. Our new friends from First

Pres had helped to facilitate a scholarship in Information (Library) Science at the University at Albany for Jarek. Computers were becoming an integral part of libraries then.

Jarek was gone most of the time studying or working in the library. I wasn't speaking English at that time. With the help of our new friends from First Pres the whole experience felt like a great adventure. They helped us to rent an apartment on Willet Street, a block from the church, found ESL classes for me, and introduced us to their friends from First Pres. Soon, we were able to find our way – we met some other Polish students, we discovered museums, the Adirondacks, and other great places. I was fascinated by the beauty of the mountains, liked watching silly chipmunks in the park, enjoyed time with friends, and worked hard on my English.

November 17 was the first night that I spent alone in our tiny apartment. Jarek had gone on a retreat with the Bible Guys to Weston Friary in Vermont. That night I got a phone call with a message that my mom had passed away unexpectedly. I was in a truly dark valley. I started to pray so deeply like never before. We are Roman Catholic and our religion is very important to us. I felt great peace, and when I finally went to sleep, I dreamed about my mom. I still hold on to that dream when I start missing her.

We were not able to go to her funeral. It was the one time we did not have our passports with us – We had sent our passports to the Canadian embassy because we were planning to spend Christmas with my brother who had brought his family to Toronto a few years before, and we needed to apply for visas.

Thanksgiving is the feast that, to this day, brings all the memories of that first one that we celebrated with our Presbyterian friends sixteen years ago. I remember thinking at that time: how fitting that this holiday comes now – when I'm so thankful for these people, their family and friends and for their obvious love toward us.

The Christmas of 2001 was bitter-sweet to me. Bitter, because of my mom's death, and because we were on the other side of the globe, away from our families and friends; sweet – because we were with my brother – for the first time celebrating Christmas with his whole family at his house; and we knew that after coming back from Canada to the USA we had our new friends here. Life was good. Thank God.

[Editor's note – Wiesia and Jarek now live in Birmingham, Alabama, where Jarek teaches and is a music librarian at Samford University. Wiesia has recently completed her degree in nursing and works as a registered nurse at the University of Alabama hospital. They have two children, Daniel and Anna, and are now American citizens.]

Prudence Iyok

My American Dream

Working for a cable television company in Cameroon, I was exposed to foreign programs like CNN, BBC, "The Oprah Winfrey Show" and many others. This exposure, and the surrounding ambiance, fueled my dream of coming to America someday.



It remained a dream until 1999, when I met Larry, who is now my husband. After a short courtship, we got married and in 2001, had Arthur. At just seven weeks old, Arthur and I emigrated to the United States to join Larry.

I arrived in America in November, and the cold was the first thing

that hit me. And then came the difficulty of integrating. It wasn't cable TV. Contrary to preconceptions, it was difficult to join the workforce. Especially hard to accept was the realization that though I was a university graduate, if I needed a job that paid well, I had to start all over. Then came the discovery that credits from the University of Cameroon were not readily transferable. So, just like a high school graduate, I had to start over again at community college.

One of the most interesting things I found is that, in America, even if you don't write to people, you receive mail from them, mostly bills. So instead of having the glamorous life I envisioned, the money I earned went to paying bills.

Among the blessings, I have come to cherish, since coming to the United States, are that I eventually finished Pharmacy school and now work as a pharmacist, and I became a member of First Presbyterian Church.

This is a church where all of God's children are welcomed. There is friendship and warmth among members and with our pastors. They have a special one-on-one relationship with all church members. So, when I encounter challenges in the community, I am comforted by the fact that I have a sanctuary in FPC. This place has greatly shaped who I have become and how I guide my children.

Welcome to the talents and traditions of all . . .



Four new members of our church family

Welcome, Arah, Bate, Ngoh, and Metoke (Sean)

By Christy D'Ambrosio, Youth Director

Last year Bate Egbe and Arah-tu Abunaw joined the households of Heidi Iyok and David and Roseline Takor, respectively. This year, Bate was joined by Ngoh-Fende Mbongo and Arah was joined by her brother, Metoke Abunaw, whom we affectionately call "Sean."

Heidi Iyok performs quite a juggling act, getting her daughter, Imani Elad, off to Doane Stuart, her son Pharryll, off to the Menands School, and Bate and Ngoh off to LaSalle every morning. Roseline and David are the proud parents of Ekong, applying to law school; Ofu, intern in Washington DC, and Akap, Senior at Shaker, where Arah is also a Senior, and Sean is a Sophomore.

Roseline says that it is a pleasure having Arah-tu and Metoke staying with her family. "As teenagers, they are, in some ways, different from my own children who have spent their entire life in America. Arah and Metoke embrace the cultural value of always respecting their elders and not being too opinionated, but I can also see the difference compared to when I was a teenager. Like American teenagers they spend time on electronic devices, a big challenge to control. They are enthusiastic to learn and achieve, like most immigrant children. I really enjoy the fact that the children are adjusting to their new home and making friends. First Pres has been a great asset in the children's lives."

Heidi has found that integrating Bate and Ngoh into their new environment has been quite a challenge: immunizations, back to school clothing, and more. Even though both Bate and Ngoh were born here in the US, they left as babies and the culture is so

different than what they are used to. For example, in Cameroon tests occur at the end of the year. Here, the boys are constantly studying for tests and quizzes. Communicating with teachers is different. In Cameroon teachers are revered and less approachable than here in the States. It was even an issue for Bate to master the school bus system, but he is doing much better this year.

Why did they come to the United States? Arah, Bate and Ngoh both want better educations. Arah also wants to broaden her horizons. Sean and Ngoh's schools were also under attack in Cameroon even when they were in school.

Bate, Ngoh, and Sean report that their school work is easy. Bate believes there is too much homework and he is occasionally frustrated. Ngoh sadly reports that there is racism at his school. Sean, on the other hand, is finding it easy to make friends. Arah says that she has had both good and bad experiences. She enjoys the trips she has taken with the church youth, but is sad to report bad behavior in her school and a concern about the political atmosphere here in the US.

All report strong, loving family ties and friends. Sean characterizes his experience as "positive." Arah reports that in general she has been welcome, especially at church, but not always at school. Ngoh is still bothered by discrimination. Bate specifically mentioned his soccer teammates that he is close to. He says that they include him and he never has to sit alone.



Arah and Metoke (Sean)



Bate



Ngoh

First Pres welcomes these four wonderful youth into our midst. They are a blessing and their presence is valued. WELCOME!

Youth Musical RESISTANCE – Sunday, March 4, 2018

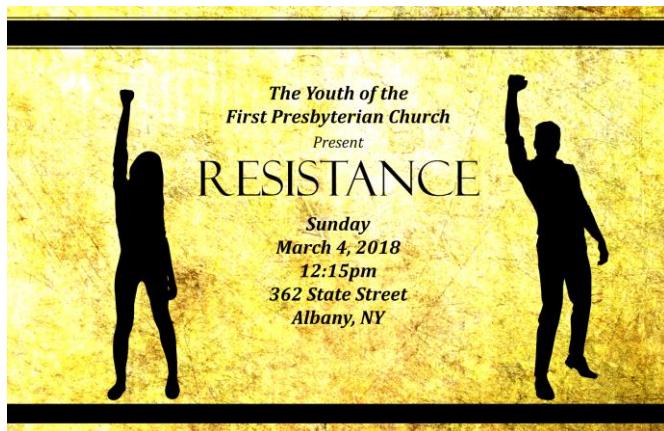
“Immigrants: We get the job done!”

By Christy D'Ambrosio

“Immigrants: We get the job done!” This is one of my favorite lines from the hit musical **Hamilton**, and one of the reasons for the creation of this year's musical, **RESISTANCE**.

Each year I try to couple the subject matter of the youth musical with the Christian Education youth curriculum. This year the curriculum focuses on resistance.

Hamilton is the current Broadway show about immigrant Alexander Hamilton and the American Revolution. My task was to adapt songs from the hit musical **Hamilton** to accompany some political poetry about today's issues of immigration, health care, discrimination, gun control, environmental sustainability, education, poverty, women's rights, homelessness and changing the status quo.



RESISTANCE, the musical, is funny, serious, exciting and promises to be thoughtful and entertaining. Be sure to mark your calendar and plan to stay after the second service on the first Sunday in March 2018 to be part of the **RESISTANCE!**

January - Combined Christian Education Classes for Adults and Youth Resistance

By Christy D'Ambrosio

The 2017-2018 youth curriculum is entitled, *Resistance*. Throughout the month of January adults are invited to join the youth in four sessions exploring some current issues that bear on the topics: education, immigration, homelessness, and poverty. A guest speaker will lead each week's discussion.

Sunday, January 7 - Education

Mrs. Kaweeda G. Adams, Albany School District Superintendent, is committed to providing diverse educational opportunities to meet the needs of all students, mentoring and coaching instructional leaders, and building quality instructional delivery systems combined with systemic progress monitoring, job embedded professional development, and effective, value-added supervision. She advocates “equity in education so that students of color, students of poverty, students of privilege, and students with special needs, can and will learn despite the challenges they face.”

Sunday, January 14 - Immigration

The Rev. Dr. Amaury Tañon-Santos serves as the Synod Networker of the Synod of the Northeast. A minister-member of Albany Presbytery, he has been the pastor of two congregations in Westchester County and Elizabeth, New Jersey, parish associate

of a church in Plainfield, NJ, and director of programs of continuing education at Princeton Theological Seminary.

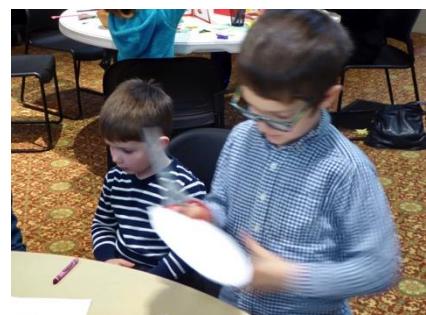
Sunday, January 21 - Homelessness

Elizabeth Hitt, Executive Director, HATAS (Homeless and Travelers' Aid Society)

Born and raised in New Orleans, Liz Hitt began her professional career as a soldier with the U.S. Army in 1984. After serving two enlistments, at one period in time she struggled with homelessness. It left a permanent mark on Liz and from that day forward, she pledged to end the nightmare which is homelessness. Entry into the homeless services sector began in the United Methodist Church in Bend, Oregon. She has been working in the field ever since.

Sunday, January 28 - Poverty

Melissa Krug joined the Fiscal Policy Institute team (SUNY) as the resident Poverty Analyst in July 2017. She works on state, local, and federal poverty policy issues, including safety-net programs, taxes, education, and healthcare. She worked as a student assistant at the NYS Division of the Budget on the housing team, and as an Entitlements Coordinator for the supportive housing programs at Unity House of Troy, culminating in extensive experience with all levels of government.





"There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried" -- Oscar Romero

You shall love the alien as yourself

By Glenn Leupold

Though migration across the U.S./Mexico border declined between 2000 and 2016, in 2014 Central American families and children arrived at the border in numbers never seen before. These extraordinary numbers inspired a strong emotional response from the population.

Some thought this was a sign that the U.S. border was too porous and saw the arrival of so many families and children as a threat to the U.S. Others saw their arrival as an indication that our neighbors to the south were living in more dire circumstances than we had realized. While the U.S. government sided with national security and started locking up these families in detention centers, many interfaith groups and social activists began organizing and taking action to welcome these migrants.

But what was behind this unprecedented spike in migration? What are the causes that push families and unaccompanied children to risk their lives on such a dangerous journey? Their story, which begins in their streets, homes, and businesses, is one of people who love their country but can no longer survive in their community. As we learned in the Adult Education classes in November, it is often U.S. international policy that drives people from their countries and forces them to try to enter the U.S. Economic and drug "interdiction" policies have made families decide that their children are actually better off risking their lives to travel through dangerous, drug cartel territory on the top of trains than to stay at home. Living in between shootings and all forms of violence pushes people outside their communities. The most vulnerable individuals — women, children, and minorities — are the easiest target.

The world is in the midst of its largest refugee crisis since World War II. Sixty-five million people are displaced from their homes due to genocide, persecution, and civil war. This includes people from the eastern hemisphere who will attempt to resettle in the U.S. through the refugee program and people who will migrate within this hemisphere to the U.S. seeking asylum. While our nation has historically been a part of relief and welcome for refugees, this nation has not always been as open to receiving those arriving at our borders and seeking asylum. Now we are in a time of moral crisis when forms of humanitarian relief are much maligned in the media

and by politicians. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been active in encouraging our government to resettle more refugees from abroad and to provide due process to those seeking protection at U.S. borders. Church members have been faithful participants in resettlement and welcome these newcomers. This fall, First Pres has been the church of choice of a refugee who was attacked by extremists in Pakistan.

Why should we care about foreigners? Because Jesus and the Bible tell us to care — otherwise we are not followers of Christ. In Jesus' famous parable of the sheep and the goats, it is the group that cares for the needy that is told *they were actually caring for Christ himself* when they did so. Deuteronomy 10:19 says, "So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt." Ezekiel 47:21-23 says to consider foreigners among us as part of us, even in matters of inheritance: "You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the foreigners residing among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe a foreigner resides, there you are to give them their inheritance, declares the Sovereign Lord." Leviticus 19:33f says, "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." And that's just the first few verses that come to mind. Our faith calls us to put love and compassion above our fears. Faith is what helps us actually do this. Look for ways to impact this issue by First Pres in the months ahead.



*The blessing of Quilts to be received by grateful
South Albany Baby Institute graduates*

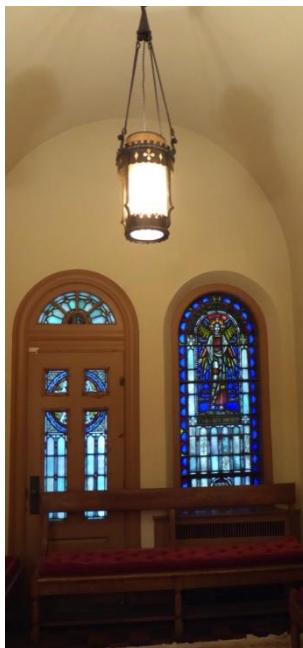
Come Unto Me ... The Stevens Chapel

By David Wood, Church Historian



Our current Sanctuary building was built in 1883-84 during the pastorate of Walter Nicholas (1880-1890). The space currently occupied by the Stevens Chapel apparently was the Pastor's office. It had direct access to State Street via the few steps up from the sidewalk, with the iron railing as a climbing aid. There is a mail slot (now blocked on the inside) in the door to the sanctuary beside the stairs to the chapel.

The Fort Orange Stables (founded in 1879) occupied 362 and 363 State Street, right next to our Sanctuary. In 1912 the owner retired and gave our Trustees first refusal rights to buy the land, which they did. In 1924 the last 59 feet of State Street was purchased, and construction of the Fellowship House [Christian Education building] began. The dedication of that building was celebrated with great ceremony on Jan. 17, 1926.



With all the new space available, the pastor's office was moved into the office area in what we now call the education building. The space vacated by the pastor was converted into a gallery where the oil portrait of Pastor John B. Romeyn, the prints of Pastor Eliphalet Nott, the images of several previous pastors and church officers, and other memorabilia were displayed. In the 1930s our current vault was built and

those artifacts were moved into more secure storage.

In 1938 Pastor Eugene Carson Blake spearheaded many changes in First Presbyterian Church. The most jarring to many was abolishing the sale and rental of the pews. From the construction of our first building in 1764, it had been the main source of income. Pastor and Mrs. Blake interviewed all the pew holders and got promises from all (or at least the majority) that they would increase their annual giving by at least the amount of their pew rental. On April 3, 1938 the church worship bulletin carried the announcement that all pews are freely available to any member or visitor.

In preparation for the 175th anniversary of our congregation in 1938, the sanctuary was remodeled extensively. One of the many memorial gifts acknowledged at the conclusion of the anniversary celebration on Nov. 20, 1938 was the dedication of the Stevens Chapel.

The plaque on the wall of the Chapel reads:

THIS CHAPEL GIVEN
IN LOVING MEMORY OF
ANNA L. VAN ANWERP STEVENS
BY HER HUSBAND
CLARENCE WINTHROP STEVENS
AND THEIR CHILDREN
1938

"Until the day break and the shadows flee away"

The names of their children were Anna Stevens McChesney, Winthrop P. Stevens and Gertrude Stevens Wilson. A direction that the Chapel was to be open 24 hours a day came with the gift of the Chapel. This was very popular during World War II, but fell into disuse as the character of our neighborhood changed.

When our stained glass windows were evaluated in 1998 by Cohoes Glass Studio, the windows in the Chapel were described, but the designer and studio were listed as "unknown." No records of the donor

Continued on p. 21, Stevens Chapel.



Welcome to First Friday in Music and Art in the Christmas Season





Welcome to First Friday in Music and Art in the Christmas Season



2017 in review

Home Repair Project

By Christy D'Ambrosio, Project Coordinator

It has been a very productive year for the Home Repair Project. We have worked in three areas of need in Albany, and we have come to know and respect our neighbors and work partners in a new way:

Arbor Hill/North Albany: The White family, three separate households, all living within a couple blocks of each other have received a great deal of help from the Home Repair Project crew this year.

Mattie Lee White is the matriarch of this extended family. She lives in a two family home that she shares with her son, Chucky. The Home Repair Project began work on Mattie's home last year and it will be completely done before the year's end. Crews have painted inside and out, Dwight Cheu repaired steps, banisters and ceiling damaged by a leaky roof. We have facilitated a grant from the Albany Community Development Agency to replace Mattie's roof and hired plumbers and electricians to restore light and running water in major portions of the house.

Mary White is Mattie's daughter and she lives in a two family home right around the corner. We supplied paint for Mary and she completely painted the interior of her home by herself. Dwight, Leslie and John Cheu repaired water damage to the kitchen ceiling after a plumber was called to repair a leak. Mary's home still needs more work: replace the deck, repair stairs and the garage roof, as well as another plumbing project for the attached





dwelling. All of this will, we hope, take place in 2018.

Johnny White, Mattie's son, lives down the street from Mary. His porch was about to collapse until John Myers and Lynn Ellsworth stepped up to analyze and rebuild the porch. This has been an expensive and difficult project, but the majority of the work will be completed this year and finalized in 2018.

South End: Ella Ferguson lives in the South End in a home that is in disrepair. Eric Fagans and Adam Sperry rebuilt a two-story staircase in the backyard. Eric is also on the board of the South End Improvement Corporation and has been working on accessing a grant for Ella so that she can address some of the more difficult and expensive home repairs.

West Hills: Christine Buchanan lives in a two family home that is in need of a new roof, plumbing, various repairs, plus interior and exterior painting. Once again, Dwight Cheu has stepped up to replace a sink, lighting fixture, bathroom cabinet, and several other issues that need addressing in the upstairs bathroom. The rest of the crew has painted the entire upstairs interior. A plumber has been hired to fix the plumbing, and Chris Buchanan is in the process of applying for a grant for a new roof from the Albany Community Development Agency. We will continue working on the Buchanan residence in 2018.

The Home Repair Project Volunteers are taking a well deserved "winter break," but, as you can see, 2017 was a very good and productive year. We will get back to work in the Spring of 2018. There will be many opportunities to volunteer. We hope to see you at one of our sites in 2018!



Educational Grant Recipients

By Kathleen Pruzek

First Presbyterian Church is assisting eleven students with individual grants of \$680, made possible through our 2017-2018 Educational Grant awards. The program has been providing educational funding to members of our church family since the 1950s. Earlier this year I contacted grant recipients, asking them to send me a "selfie" and a little bit about themselves and how their studies were going.

It's been fascinating and encouraging to learn about the diverse interests these students are pursuing. Interests range from a BS in Equine Management to a BFA in Metals; Cognitive Science/Computer Science; psychology and two studying political science. Other areas of study include Computer Engineering; a BA in Theater; an MA in International Affairs and Cello Performance and Italian Language, and for one individual, the grant provided assistance in covering conference costs.

Mia Robinson is our budding horse expert. Besides studying Equine Business Management at Cazenovia College, she is an officer of the Equine Ambassadors Club bringing miniature horses to library reading times and local nursing homes.



Eleanor Haase is studying Cognitive Science and Computer Science. This last semester she has had the opportunity to travel through many European countries, and credits the Educational Grant with helping facilitate this travel. She looks forward to seeing her church family at Christmas.



Annabel Lewis is in her senior year at Northwestern University studying Computer Engineering. She is finishing a 6-month internship rotation while working at a small software startup company to help utility companies anticipate and alleviate strain on power grids. Next semester she will complete



her Capstone project which will synthesize all of the subjects she has studied and build a modular telemetry system for a rocket! All this while staying active in her school's community by being a member of the NU Choral Society and Madrigal Singers. She credits her early appreciation for choir music to First Presbyterian Church.



Ofu Takor is studying Political Science at SUNY Albany, and this past semester has had the opportunity to intern at the National Women's Law Center on their child care team in Washington D.C. She said that she is extremely grateful for the grant that has allowed her to have her eyes opened to the importance of using one's voice to speak out for others. She notes, "This would not have been possible without the support of First Pres."

Glenn and Miriam's daughters are pursuing two different aspects of the art world, one with inanimate objects, the other through the exploration of life shown in plays.



Elizabeth Leupold is enjoying the world of metals and creating various projects in the studio, while pursuing her BFA in Metals at SUNY New Paltz.



Margaret Leupold is very busy in her last year of college at the University of Rhode Island, getting her BFA in Theatre with concentrations in Stage Management and Design/ Tech. Most recently she has been a stage manager of *Lady Windermere's Fan* by Oscar Wilde on one of the main stages at the University.

An Update from the Stewardship Committee

By Tara Lindsley, Stewardship Chair

This year, with your prayers and God's help, the Stewardship Committee encouraged every member and friend of First Pres to grow spiritually in their relationship with God by reflecting on the question, "What is God calling me to give each week?" Your response has been quite a witness!

To date, we have received 117 pledges from the 189 individuals, couples or families. So far, 57 members have increased their pledge compared to last year, and 7 pledged for the first time. We anticipate that once all who want to pledge have done so, our gifts will total about \$333,000 – an increase of 7% compared to last year. Thank you to all who give financially to the church as well as giving of your time and talent. God is calling us and there is much to be done!



Jon Rice used his grant money to fund his stay at a World Conference in Pennsylvania on the subject of Restorative Practices, the study of promoting community development/relationships and conflict resolution/healing, a timely study, indeed. For many years Jon has trained in this field. Recently he delivered his training in the NYS Office of Mental Health. He and his colleagues trained 28 staff within a school district

serving youth in a residential care/day treatment setting. The assistant Superintendent's response to this training was that it was "transformational" for their staff. Jon will be offering a brief introductory session in January for volunteers at the Wizard's Wardrobe to have them benefit from his learning.

Additional educational grants recipients and their course of study:

Helen Lewis, SUNY Fredonia, BA in Cello Performing/ Italian Language

Katharine Myers, SUNY Binghamton, Psychology

Mackenzie Robinson, Syracuse, MA International Affairs

Sam Rogers, American University in D.C., BA Political Science

Aligning resources and joining forces

By Keith Barber, Social Justice & Peacemaking Committee

If we let our minds fill the gaps in Matthew's Gospel account of the Nativity, it's easy to imagine a kind innkeeper doing what he could for Mary and Joseph. They arrived late, the inn was already full, Mary was very pregnant. But rather than turn them away he offered them the stable. It wasn't much but it was enough to become the site of the greatest miracle the world has ever seen.

We are given challenges and opportunities every day to do as the innkeeper did. We are challenged beyond giving to becoming allies. Your Social Justice and Peacemaking Committee has been working through the multiple challenges, working toward bringing to our congregation opportunities for service as allies. Even before this committee was formed, several members of First Pres were volunteering at the FOCUS Food Bank and

One point of view White Privilege

By Katherine Henrikson

White privilege must mean different things to different groups of people. My definition comes from three incidents in my life, all involving African American men: the jogger, the dogwalker, and the rugby player.

In the early nineties, I was working in the Empire State Plaza. My car spent the workday in a state parking lot about a 10 minute walk away, downhill towards the river. One cold and dark winter afternoon, as I was walking to my car along Grand Street, I was thinking about ordinary things – what would tomorrow be like at work, what would we have for dinner, what would the weather be. Something caught my eye over my right shoulder, perhaps a sign for a new restaurant. I turned to get a second look over my right shoulder; in a flash, a young black man came jogging up on my left side. As he went by he said, "I'll just get out in front of you so you won't think you're about to be mugged." I was devastated, for getting mugged was the furthest thing from my mind. Imagine the anger and disgust that young man must have felt, believing that he was living in a world that thought of him first as a violent criminal, only because of his color.

Much later in life, we moved to the Beverwyck retirement community in Slingerlands. Beverwyck covers 65 or so acres, with suburban developments on both sides, and plenty of foot traffic. One day in 2012, as I was out for a walk, I caught up with a short, trim, 40ish black man walking a small dog. I spoke to

Breakfast Club, with the Equinox Thanksgiving Feast, at Giffen School and Wizard's Wardrobe, in Fair Trade sales, and numerous other allied efforts.

Recently we have connected with the Poor People's New Movement for a Moral America, led by Rev. William Barber II, seeking a society where the wealth and convenience of the few is not dependent on the suffering and poverty of the many. We have become involved with Sanctuary Congregations locally to seek ways to be allies with people affected by immigration matters and are working through FOCUS Advocates on many other opportunities. With Lillie McLaughlin's leadership, we solidified our alliance with people who are food insecure by conducting a highly successful Bread for the World campaign in October. As part of our effort, Rev. Amaury Tañon-Santos of Synod of the Northeast led an outstanding two-part adult education forum.

"Whenever you did...[for] someone, overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me." Matthew 25:40b

him as I was going by and to my surprise he engaged me in conversation. We talked about nothing in particular -the weather, exercise, how long we'd lived in the neighborhood. After two or three blocks we parted ways. It's doubtful that a white man would make such effort to establish a contact. I believe this man felt obliged to show me that he belonged in the neighborhood, and he was not a threat to me or anyone else. He must have assumed that most white people would consider him a danger to the neighborhood.

In that same summer, of 2012, we were with a group of mostly retired people up in Saranac Lake, kayaking for a week. We stayed in a dorm at North Country Community College, where it was our habit to collect before dinner on the lawn in front of the dorm. One afternoon late in the week, we noticed a group of young men moving in to an adjacent dorm. Our group of six or eight that day was mostly women. In short order, two of these young men, one black and one white, both big, broad shouldered, and very fit, came over to talk to us. As it happened, Saranac Lake hosts the Canadian-American Rugby Tournament every summer and these men were part of the RPI Alumni Rugby team, in town for the tournament. They talked to us for five or ten minutes – just long enough to reassure us that they were not a threat.

All three of these incidents involve black men demonstrating that they are not dangerous. White men simply don't do that; it probably never occurs to them that anyone would consider them threatening. That black men do this indicates that they are never sure of their reception in white society. It's the absence, in white men, of these feelings of uncertainty and hesitation (and anger?) that define, for me, white privilege.

Stevens Chapel, continued from p. 13

or maker of the windows are known. Such records might be in our vault, but the papers are not indexed. Consequently it is unknown whether the windows were part of the construction of the chapel or were installed at some earlier time. (The major stained glass windows were installed between 1914 and 1928.)

In 2003, Mrs. Shirley Stevens French, a granddaughter of Clarence Stevens, visited the chapel and decided it needed to be "spruced up a bit." She gave some money to the Property Committee for this purpose, and the Committee installed an oriental carpet, which is still in the chapel. In the intervening years, there have been some periods when the space was used for temporary storage, but most recently our pastors have decided to encourage use of the chapel by installing some improved lighting and by leaving open the door to the sanctuary on Sunday mornings. This has made the Stevens Chapel much more inviting.

Welcome!

By Judy Mark, Membership Committee

Editor's note: Membership Committee will periodically introduce and highlight a recent member of the church family.

Mary Kelly joined First Presbyterian Church about a year ago, having relocated to Albany from Glenolden, PA, near Philadelphia. She recently retired from a mutual fund administrative position and wanted to be closer to her son and daughter. Since moving to our area, Mary has purchased a home which she is in the process of refurbishing.

Mary had been a member of the Holmes Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania and began to look at churches around Albany. "What I really liked about First Pres," said Mary, "was the mix



of generations and how welcoming you were." Mary has already become an active member of our congregation, volunteering at the Wizard's Wardrobe, participating in one of the women's Small Groups, and agreeing to serve on the Board of Deacons. Say "hi" to Mary when you see her. She is often helping with the Coffee Hour after the 10:45 service.



When you are next in the Sanctuary, step into the Chapel and admire the windows; the central portion of the major window is shown on the cover of this publication. While there, please pray for all the immigrants and refugees of the world, and particularly for those who have a connection to our church.

Welcome, new members!

Maria Qualtere and Lucas Rogers joined the church this fall. They came before session on November 28 and were welcomed into membership in worship on December 3. Lucas was also baptized.

Maria is a fifth grade teacher in the Bethlehem Central School District, and Luc is a Policy Analyst with Albany County. With strong sense of feeling called to serve others, they were drawn to FPC and look forward to getting involved in activities. They are planning a July wedding.



Welcome, babies, into baptism!

Eliza Ruth and Lydia Joy Clermont were received into the church in November through baptism. They are the daughters of Aaron and Sarah Clermont.



Part II

Climate Change: the great moral issue of our time

By Kendra Smith-Howard, Ph.D

Editor's note: Kendra Smith-Howard, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of History at the University at Albany, whose focus is on environmental history. This is Part II of "Climate Change: the great moral issue of our time." Part I appeared in the spring issue of REFLECTIONS on the theme "For the Beauty of the Earth."

Part 2

Planting Seeds of Hope on Climate Change: Not Doomed to Failure

I'm cognizant that solutions to climate change can appear very abstract and impossible to achieve. So I wanted to suggest some very concrete actions to fellow congregants, to help you see that we can act in small, yet meaningful ways. What if we acted together, to intentionally build a community in which creativity and skills of reuse, repair, and elegant simplicity are valued more than mindless consumerism? What if we thought more about incorporating climate in the work we are already doing?

By shifting the ways we act as a community, we can recenter our attention to the issue of climate change within our walls and in our work.

What does that mean?

1. Let's eat the leftovers.

The message many of my students have received over the past 5-10 years is that sustainability requires lots of cash. "I can't afford to buy organic," they tell me, "so I guess I can't really do much to change the food system."

But one of the biggest contributors to climate change is the food we waste—up to a third of the food-supply worldwide. As *National Geographic's* Roff Smith put it in 2015, "If food waste were a country, it would be the world's third largest emitter of greenhouse gases, behind the U.S. and China." And roughly 1/3 of that food waste comes from consumers who buy too much and throw it away.

Even a college student on meager funds can do better about eating what they buy, but often we don't have a clue how to use a stale piece of bread or wilting basil. In the nineteenth & early twentieth century, cookbooks were full of recipes using leftovers—but starting in the 1960s, leftovers began to be thought of as garbage in a nation where middle-class Americans were becoming

more affluent and food was abundant. Open up recipes on food.com or epicurious, and you'll see stuff that starts with all new ingredients. (My friend Helen Veit has a great essay about this up at the *Atlantic*.) So I've started to require students to read some of these old recipes and to imagine how to use them to tackle their own refrigerators. It's something that takes practice, and is something that those who have lived on the economic margins know lots about. Along the same vein, a plant-rich diet uses fewer resources than a meaty one, and can cut costs, too. In his new book, *Drawdown*, Paul Hawken ranks reducing food-waste and adopting a plant-rich diet as the third and fourth most effective ways to reduce total atmospheric CO₂. Giving up meat entirely can be difficult for some folks, but reducing its presence is certainly feasible.

What if we had a church potluck with the requirement was that you should craft something from what you already had? Or a vegetarian-only potluck so you can try out the recipe you are curious about, but afraid your family or roommate won't like (thereby reducing the risk it goes wasted)? Or a recipe cookbook full of your favorite recipes for things that started as something else? Or use coffee hour for a food swap where you can get ideas, or a willing taker, for your extra tomatoes? I respect and understand that sharing food is a way to show hospitality and offer fellowship—but it can also be a place to showcase our values of simplicity and solidarity.

2. Glory be to the Property Committee.

Let's be honest. In the summer, we swelter in the sanctuary. In the winter, we sometimes shiver through Sunday school. Praise be to God! For the shifting temps of our building allow us to re-set our collective thermostat and remember the world's climate is not controlled, or entirely within our control. Our country's AC-heavy ways are an aberration in the world, and so the next time you sweat or shiver your way through the service, try to imagine yourself sitting in solidarity with brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world! Or think of how grateful you can be to be part of a congregation that is showing by example—tempering our expectations, and learning to make small sacrifices for the world's future. (I swear, the property committee had absolutely no influence on this point, though I am afraid now I will be appointed to join them.)

3. Think of the repair projects in the South End as ways to build resilience. As youth learn how to maintain and repair, we also model becoming stewards of resources rather than waste what has been given to us. Some projects might even equip these homes to better withstand the climatic effects in the years to come.

The sources of the problem of climate change, and its solutions—like God's love—will extend beyond my time on the earth, and so working on this issue is in many ways an act of faith. As a historian, I know that people look to the past to find the sources of contemporary problems. And as a mother, I cannot bear to imagine my children looking back and wondering why people, why I didn't try to do more. And so, I act, and I pray for our nation and the world.

What are we willing to sacrifice Continued from p. 3.

On the day the repeal of DACA was announced, 34 people, including 9 undocumented youth, were arrested in an act of civil disobedience outside of Trump Tower in New York City. As I write this, undocumented youth are holding a five day fast outside of Marco Rubio's office to demand a DREAM Act that will protect them and their families, and others are protesting and being arrested in Washington D.C. Faith communities across the country have opened their doors to house and defend immigrants at risk of deportation.

Solidarity means recognizing that we all rise or fall together. It means we welcome the stranger, love our neighbors as ourselves, and refuse to consent to oppressive policies and regimes that would deny our neighbors dignity and respect. Solidarity requires a deep commitment and willingness to suffer and sacrifice on behalf of our neighbors. For those of us who believe in an idea of 'Sanctuary', in values of hospitality and welcome, we have hard questions to ask ourselves. What price will we pay, what are we willing to sacrifice, to truly love our neighbors as ourselves?

Welcome to Equinox Thanksgiving Dinner at First Pres

By Annette Johnson, Outreach and Mission Committee

Once again, FPC was a partner with Equinox for one of this area's most important Thanksgiving Day events, the 48th Annual Equinox Thanksgiving Community Dinner. It is a welcoming tradition and the opportunity to celebrate giving thanks, a time when the Capital Region community offers welcome to those who would otherwise be alone or unable to enjoy fellowship and friends on this day.

Volunteers began working in the church four days in advance to create a festive and warm atmosphere. They donated time and energy to prepare our space for all to feel welcome on Thanksgiving Day. Volunteers came to share their day and serve as hosts for our guests. We had volunteers who have been preparing, serving, and welcoming for more than forty years. Many are now second and third generation participants!

Next year it's your turn. I would encourage all our First Pres family to put Equinox Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner on their holiday "To Do" list. You will find it a rewarding and uplifting experience. It is First Pres at work in the community.



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Please notify the church office of any change in
address.
Recordings of the worship service are available from the
church office.