



The Bethlehem Star

February, 2012

38 Church Rd.
Selkirk, NY 12158
www.firstbethlehem.org
518-767-2243

Rev. Harlan E. Ratmeyer, Pastor

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REPLACING THE
PARSONAGE ROOF-
It only took two days!

From the Pastor's Study

Dear Members and Friends of First Reformed Church,

I've been thinking a lot recently about 'Sacred Space'. Going on the Web I found hundreds, if not thousands of ways of describing it, all the way from interfaith groups to yoga classes to retreats.



What has prompted my musings was an experience here at First Bethlehem two weeks ago, on a Friday night. The Acoustic Doorways music series held an event here, and Rena Graf, a Jazz, Folk and Gospel soloist was featured. In the middle of the first set she was belting out a lovely, sensuous ballad that had to do with kissing. In the middle of the ballad she stopped, shouted, "O my God, I'm saying these words in a church." People laughed and we encouraged her to go on. At the break she wanted to apologize again, but I stopped her and commented, "If we had more hugging and kissing, the world would be a lot better place than it is with violence and suspicion and distance between peoples."

Now I do not think the world would be better if we all merely kissed everyone, or encouraged unbridled erotic passion. But the reaction of our guest soloist, and the uneasy laughter it promoted at the time, tells me we really do have a certain definition of sacred that screens out much of the human experience. At least that is so in traditional main line Protestantism as I experience it.

This last week we hosted the local Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk Senior High Harmonics & Jazz Ensemble Community Concert. Passionate lively music flooded the sanctuary. The place was jammed, more than for any Christmas Eve or Easter service. And the cheering and chanting after each number was enormous. This is exciting gifted local talent, our very own young people.

In pondering the difference between that event and our usual services, I noted the following obvious conclusions: First, the music expressed a wide range of human emotions and conditions. Second, it seemed it could be celebrated, that the "audience" became engaged in foot tapping, hand clapping tears, and vocal appreciation. Third, the last concert was led by the teenagers from our own community and drew in their families. They came, perhaps out of a sense of duty, but when the music began, obligation was the last thing on their mind. We rocked!

I have been in many a discussion about holding sacred space. Too often these dialogues have been about what goes or doesn't go on the communion table or the pulpit. And I have agreed. But more and more I see this great divide as a tragic brokenness, a fracture between sacred and secular that removes the soul from worship. Even if not intended, the result sounds a bit on our part like the Scribes and Pharisees we love to beat up in our Biblical studies.

And the people who hunger to tap their toes, to hear expressions of their daily life in ways that touch the soul, turn out for a concert that addresses these life issues, and addresses them through the voices of their own children.

In general, people hunger for "spirituality" as I learn nearly every day in my "other job" at Albany Medical Center. Somehow we have managed to screen out of our communal life as a congregation the raw human emotions, the love life and toilsome life and the struggling life of the human condition. We may not have intentionally done this in worship, but they are too often missing. Two pastors recently lamented with me the rigidity of their dying congregations to permit even the slightest tweaks in the music they sing and the language they use for prayer.

So, with the sound of rich applause still ringing in my ears, and the memory of an enthusiastic crowd cheering great music, I am challenged to see the sacred in the common, the ordinary, the secular. All of life is holy, all space created by God is sacred. I'm pleased our congregation invited these gifted musicians into our space. I trust that, to use the words of another love song, "We've Only Just Begun".

Pastor Harlan Ratmeyer

GRATITUDE FOR OUR PARISH NURSES!

"To the Parish Nurses: A few weeks ago I had two problems. I talked to Harlan and he had a Nurse help me with that one.

A few weeks later, I had another problem and I called a Parish Nurse and she treated that problem.

We are blest to have these people in our parish as you never know when you may need help. THANKS TO ALL OF YOU!" - Glenn Rivenburg

ASH WEDNESDAY

On Wednesday, February 22, we meet at 7:00 PM for the Ash Wednesday Service. This is the beginning of Lent, a time of reflection and contemplation. We look forward to sharing in this service with the New Baltimore congregation.

LENTERN SOUP AND SANDWICHE SERIES

Beginning on that rare day, February 29, we gather at 6:00 PM for our annual Soup and Sandwich Lenten Study. This year we will focus on the theme HOW CAN I KEEP FROM SINGING: MUSIC THAT SUSTAINS US IN DIFFICULT TIMES AND SHAPES OUR FAITH. We meet each Wednesday through March 28. Mark your calendar now for these five Wednesday evening gatherings. We begin at 6:00 PM with soup provided, and sandwiches you bring with you. If you have a good soup recipe, you may wish to sign up to provide soup for one of the evenings.

.....

*“What lady is that, which doth
enrich the hand
Of yonder knight?*

Servant

I know not, sir.

ROMEO

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night

Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;

Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!

So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,

As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.

The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,

And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.

Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!

For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.”

.....



***Reformed Church in America
Following Christ in Mission***

**A Spiritual Retreat: Encouraging the nurture of a listening heart
March 6-8, 2012
Linwood Spiritual Center, Rhinebeck, New York**

Retreat guides:

Ellen Ratmeyer, ordained Elder, and Spiritual Director
Ella Campbell, ordained Elder, and Spiritual Director
Arlene Wilhelm, Minister of Word and Sacrament and Spiritual Director

**Cost: \$150.00 per person,
includes \$50 non-refundable deposit
meals Tuesday lunch through Thursday lunch
single occupancy lodging and program
(commuter rates available)**

To retreat is to step outside of our normal lives in order to reflect on where we have been and where we might be going; to catch a glimpse of how we might live differently; and to listen for the still, small voice of God that still whispers throughout the land. Using a variety of contemplative prayer practices we will nurture our desire for prayer, with a gracious rhythm of silence and sound, stillness and movement. Individual Spiritual Direction will be provided.

Rest will be honored...Renewal encouraged

Arrive at Linwood Spiritual Center after 10:00 am (in time for lunch at noon) on Tuesday, March 6, 2012. The retreat ends after lunch on Thursday, March 8, 2012.

To register, complete the registration form (see below) and mail to Linwood Spiritual Center, 50 Linwood Road, Rhinebeck, NY 12572 along with \$50 deposit (balance to be paid on arrival). ***Deadline to register is February 23, 2012 (registration is limited)***

For more information on special commuter rates, contact:
Arlene Wilhelm, sophiaarw@yahoo.com, 845-240-1690

For directions, check out Linwood Spiritual Center website:
<http://linwoodspiritualctr.org/>

Retreat Registration Forms are available in the Church Dining Hall, or call the FRCB church office 518-767-2243.

Christian Education News

On Sunday, January 8th, we settled back into our Sunday School classes following a two week vacation! It's so nice to be back.



from "Manga Messiah"

During the month of January, the Children and Worship class studied the following lessons together: The Boy Jesus in the Temple, Jesus is Baptized and Jesus in the Wilderness. We've discussed the many ways that we and other worship and express faith.

The KFC class continues to study from the Seasons of the Spirit curriculum. Since the beginning of January, we have learned about the baptism of Jesus, God's call to Samuel and Jesus' calling of his disciples. As we learn these biblical stories, we always try to relate them to what God is saying to young people---and to all of us---today. We keep asking what God is calling us to do to help others and show God's love.

With that in mind, we discuss and research where we would like to see our Sunday School offering go each month in addition to coming up with other concrete ways to act out our faith. For the months of January and February, our offering will be going to a local homeless shelter.

The Nursery is available every Sunday from 8:45-11:15 for infants through two year olds. During the Worship service, child care is available for children ages infant through second grade. These children will be split based on their ages: infants through three years in the Nursery, and four year olds through second graders in the Preschool room. **We are always looking for child care volunteers and would welcome your assistance on any Sunday!**

Anyone in the congregation is more than welcome to visit our Sunday School classes. We enjoy visitors, and would love to have anyone come observe, join in, and learn about our Sunday School classes. Please join us!

New students are always welcome to our Sunday School! Please let us know if you would like to enroll your child in Sunday School. We would be happy to share more information with you about our programs!

Please contact Debbie at 475-0824 or dera0326@yahoo.com or Tracey Waters at 462-9546 or Lteawaters@aol.com if you have any questions.

Blessings and Peace
Debbie Ennis
Tracey Waters

Love Wins!!



On **Thursday, February 16th at 7:30pm**, we will be meeting to discuss **chapter one** of the book "Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived" by Rob Bell. **Even if you were unable to join us at the first meeting, you are still welcome to join this group!** We will be meeting in Fellowship Hall at the church. **Please contact Ellen at eratmeyer@rca.org if you would like her to order the book and study guide to be used for this class.** Feel free to contact Tracey (Lteawaters@aol.com), Ellen (eratmeyer@rca.org) or Debbie (dera0326@yahoo.com) with any questions. We hope to see you on February 16th at 7:30pm!

Overview:

" Millions of Christians have struggled with how to reconcile God's love and God's judgment: Has God created billions of people over thousands of years only to select a few to go to heaven and everyone else to suffer forever in hell? Is this acceptable to God? How is this "good news"?"

Troubling questions—so troubling that many have lost their faith because of them. Others only whisper the questions to themselves, fearing or being taught that they might lose their faith and their church if they ask them out loud.

But what if these questions trouble us for good reason? What if the story of heaven and hell we have been taught is not, in fact, what the Bible teaches? What if what Jesus meant by *heaven*, *hell*, and *salvation* are very different from how we have come to understand them?

What if it is God who wants us to face these questions?

Author, pastor, and innovative teacher Rob Bell presents a deeply biblical vision for rediscovering a richer, grander, truer, and more spiritually satisfying way of understanding heaven, hell, God, Jesus, salvation, and repentance. The result is the discovery that the "good news" is much, much better than we ever imagined.

. ROOM FOR ALL RESOURCE-SHARING MOVIE NIGHT

-MONDAY, FEB. 27, 7-9 PM at the First Reformed Church of Bethlehem: The RfA regional group will offer a showing of "Through My Eyes," a compelling and deeply pastoral introduction to the experiences of young gay Christians. <http://www.throughmyeyesdvd.com/>
This 45-minute DVD presents their stories as they discuss their struggle to reconcile their faith and sexuality, their attempts to become straight, and the responses from parents and other Christians. It comes with suggestions and questions for use in discussion groups. Come and watch the movie and engage in feedback.

Birthdays

Dave Allen, 2/22
Carol Broderick, 2/23
Trisha Brown, 2/23
Richard Engel, 2/9
Jennifer Gannon, 2/14
Gabrielle Hurley, 2/1
Lucas Mack, 2/14
Gregg Mast, 2/7
Charles Stahlman, 2/22

Madison Bidwell, 2/26
Tina Brown, 2/13
Madiso Edwards, 2/2
Gene Everingham, 2/3
Canden Gorman, 2/24
Sarah Labunski, 2/18
Matt Mack, 2/10
Rebecca Northrup, 2/25



Will You Be My (Secret) Valentine??

Our Secret Valentine exchange is in full swing! We are enjoying the pleasure and delight of giving and receiving our gifts each week through February 12th. On February 19th, we will have a potluck lunch, games, and final gift exchange and Secret Valentine reveal following the worship service. Please bring a dish or dessert to share. Final gifts for the exchange need not to exceed \$5. You are welcome to join us for the luncheon even if you aren't participating in the gift exchange. If you have any questions, please contact Tracey! Happy Secret Valentine!

Parish Nurse Corner

***“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.”
Proverbs 4:23 NLT***

There is a misconception that cancer is the greatest health risk for women, especially breast cancer. In reality, heart disease kills more women than all forms of cancer put together. Minority women have the highest death rate from heart disease while the entire gender has a higher death rate from stroke than men. Part of the problem is that heart disease is displayed differently in women than in men so it becomes difficult to recognize in women if the observer doesn't know the difference in symptoms.

The classic symptoms for heart attack are severe chest pain, a squeezing sensation in the chest lasting 5-10 minutes, pain radiating down the left arm or profuse sweating. Up to 50% of women who suffer heart attacks have symptoms that are considered atypical. These include shortness of breath, indigestion, pain in the jaw, shoulder, or back, sudden nausea or vomiting, unexplained fatigue, fainting, or even dizziness. Anytime a female experiences these symptoms, she should seek medical attention by calling 911. Even a slight hesitation could lead to severe consequences if she is having a cardiac episode.

Plaque buildup can be different in women also. In men it tends to be clumpy and irregular which responds well to angioplasty and stents that flatten out the plaque. In some women, plaque forms an even layer on the vessel lining which means drug therapy works better than angioplasty. Women also respond to aspirin differently. In women, it seems more effective in preventing stroke while in men it is more effective for heart attack prevention.

For a woman, the most important thing to do is talk to her physician. She should discuss her health history and determine potential risks for heart disease. The next step would be to create a plan to change or impact those risks and follow the doctor's instructions. Women are the same but different. It is important to find out individual needs and then address them. (Source: www.mayoclinic.com)

equinox inc.

Community Services Agency

95 Central Avenue • Albany, N.Y. 12206
(518) 434-6135

Transitional Living Program for Youth

- Long-term housing for homeless youth, ages 16-21
- Case management, medical & mental health care
- Counseling, social support, independent skills training, recreation, education & employment

Youth Outreach Center

- Afterschool and evening programming, snacks & evening meal for youth, ages 13-21
- Counsel & support, recreation, academic support, adventure-based programs
- Expressive arts & Nox Music Academy
- HIV/STD testing, prevention, education
- Support and street-based services to age 24

Equinox House for Youth

- Sole shelter for homeless youth, ages 13-17, in Albany County
- Case management, family reunification, re-connection to school
- Tutoring, recreation, social support, counseling, medical & mental health care

Equinox Counseling Center

- Outpatient chemical dependency services
- Individual, group and family counseling
- Specialized groups for women, adolescents, and persons with co-occurring disorders
- Psycho-educational, trauma-related and anger management groups

Domestic Violence Outreach

- 24-hour hotline: (518) 432-7865
- Advocacy in Albany County Family court and criminal court
- Counseling, support groups, assistance with transitional housing
- Elder abuse and college campus services

Domestic Violence Shelter

- Sole shelter (30 beds) for domestic violence victims and children in Albany County
- Case management, advocacy, counseling, support groups
- Linkage with Mohawk and Hudson River Humane Society to shelter pets
- Assistance with permanent housing

In 2010 Equinox, Inc. provided...

- Housing and care to 120 teens at the Equinox House for Youth
- Housing and care to 46 teens and 7 babies in the Transitional Living Program
- Service to 1,436 youth through our Youth Outreach Programs
- Shelter and support to 237 adults and 116 children in our Domestic Violence Shelter
- Services to 763 individuals through Domestic Violence Outreach
- Counseling services to 276 adolescents and adults
- Thanksgiving dinner for over 9,000 individuals

Equinox Community Thanksgiving Day Dinner

- Companionship, Community & Good Cheer!
- A Capital Region Tradition for over 40 years

To find out more about Equinox, Inc., please visit...



www.Facebook.com/EquinoxIncCommunityServicesAgency



www.EquinoxInc.org

Food Pantry News

A big thank you goes out to Boy Scout Michael Jones!! As an Eagle Scout project, Michael completely remodeled our food pantry. He repainted, put in new light fixtures, redid our floor and helped put up all of our new shelves. As part of his service project, he also raised all of the money to cover these costs. When the project was complete, he had \$300 left over which he promptly donated to the pantry to buy food. Thank you so much Michael for being a strong leader in our community and for helping out Venture Churches Food Pantry. We greatly appreciate the efforts of you and your Boy Scout troop!



You are always welcome to visit the Food Pantry and check out the AWESOME job Michael did on remodeling the Food Pantry space!

THE FIRST REFORMED CHURCH OF BETHLEHEM
38 CHURCH ROAD
SELKIRK, NEW YORK 12158

Not for Profit
Organization
**US POSTAGE
PAID**
PERMIT NO 5
SELKIRK, NY

Your February Newsletter
CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Thank you, Herb and Edna Strumpf

