

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)
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THE TOWER

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL UCC/FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PC(USA)

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace

NOTE FROM THE MODERATOR

By Steve Showers

As I pass the peace, greeting friends, greeting new members, and greeting some for the first time I reflect on the things that we at SecondFirst are actually doing for each other, those of us in the pews.

I read the highlights for the week, address something that is not in the bulletin, and then go back and sit to listen and learn during the rest of the service. Little do we realize all that we are really doing beyond the walls of this church's walls. We help, support, or do something that touches the lives of so many, countless persons – actual people – that live and or work in the downtown of Rockford.

At the next time we share the peace, please not share the peace, but thank the person you are greeting to let them know that they are making a difference in the lives of someone we may never see or hear from.

GOVERNING COUNCIL

By Steve Showers

The Governing Council on December 20 discussed the 2019 Budget which has been completed by the Budget committee in record time. This will be presented to the congregation at the all church budget meeting in February. (Check on the date in future publications). We thank the committee for all the discussions, the swapping of e-mails, and the due diligence and timeliness of their work.

As you know, some work slows down in December and some work accelerates in December. Your Governing Council stays in working mode to help SecondFirst celebrate the Advent Season.

Special thanks go to Bill Hoff and the Foundation for the work he and they did in the razing of the St. Marks building. We, the church, are working to energize Rockford and beyond.

A WORD FROM PASTOR REBECCA

Hello Church!

Happy New Year! I think. The end of a year and the beginning of another year is a really strange time in our world. We put such pressure on ourselves for everything to be perfect, for all to be happy, for everyone to be singing "Fa la la la" in the shower. But why? We know the world is not perfect. We know our lives are not perfect. That is why we need Jesus to come, again and again and again, into the world and into our

hearts. But still the pressure is there. And whatever is not right, you are "supposed to" make a New Year's resolution to fix it.

Let's not do that anymore. Let's remember that Jesus comes to us to alleviate the pressures of this world, to set us free from binding social obligations, to help us see the love and beauty all around us, no matter who we are and what our circumstances bring. Jesus gives us a whole new parameter to which we measure ourselves: love, justice, peace, and joy. And those things are not for us, they are for us to share.

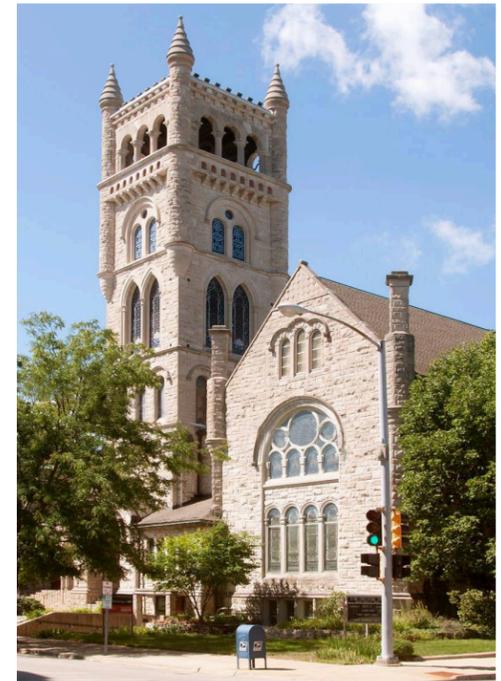
So I pray you do have a happy New Year, but I deeply hope we all (me included! as usual) will allow Jesus to come into our hearts and lives again to set us straight on our "should's" that come with cultural pressure and stress. Thanks be to God that Jesus does come, because we can't do this life alone.

I pray for you all always!

Peace,
 Rebecca

SAVE THE DATES

- Jan 4-6: Snow Camp
- Jan 13: Silent Auction after Church
- Feb 10: Budget & Foundation Meeting
- Feb 24: Family Bowling



Thank you to all who attended our beautiful Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. Nearly 300 people joined us for this special celebration.



MEMBERSHIP MINISTRY TEAM SPOTLIGHT

By Kim Craft

The Membership Ministry Team has been working hard for the church and community this past year. Below is a list of the things we have accomplished and are still working toward for the 2018-2019 year.

We welcomed new members to the church in May and November of this year!! We have put activities in the works for 2019 as part of the Strategic Plan being put in place. We had a table at Beattie Is, with color sheets for a possible Mural Project. We brought back Welcome Walkers and we're working on getting more advertising out there in the coming year.

In conclusion, we are working towards the growth of the church in many forms including numbers of those attending Sunday worship and those that attend church led functions. If you have any ideas that the Membership Ministry Team could be doing to reach out to the community or for growth please feel free to share with us. We would love to hear from you. Let's all continue to "Energize Downtown Rockford and Beyond with God's Grace."



HASKELL BOOTS

On Monday, December 3rd, 299 Haskell School students were presented with a new pair of boots thanks to your generosity. All students will be able to go outside for recess throughout the winter months and come in with dry, warm feet! This project would not happen without the support of many in our congregation. Thanks to all who helped with our sorting party Saturday morning in the sanctuary. We had toddlers, elementary, middle school and high school age children as well as adults of all ages. Thanks to Holly Beeman's family for making the name tags to label all the boots, to Marge Maynard for making the final shopping excursion and to Darlene Riddle for driving the van to deliver the boots to Haskell. But most of all, thanks to this congregation for supporting this project every year!

KID ZONE UPDATE

The painting is done. Closets are in the process of being cleaned out. Countertops, lighting and flooring are next on the list. We are all anxiously awaiting moving into our new space. We look forward to showing off our space when the renovations are completed.

CONFIRMATION

Our confirmation classes will continue to happen from 11:45 a.m.-1:00 p.m. on the scheduled days through the spring, leading to Confirmation Sunday. Students continue to grow in the engagement about who God is, both in our shared understanding as Christians, as well as to them personally.



YOUTH REFLECTION

By Aubrey Barnett, Youth Director

It is so exciting to report that every weekend since September 9th, youth have shown up before service starts to gather and be together. It seems to be more than the donuts they are craving! There is a reclaiming of shared community from the past, as well as a blossoming into a new identity as we grow together in making meaningful space for love to flourish. We have our mission trip booked for June: we will be heading to Nashville! We are looking forward to other shared outings to brighten up the gloomy winter months.

We anticipate another successful year of snow camp with nearly 15 adolescents from both SecondFirst and Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church attending. Students focus on the theme of Finding Joy and explore through the great outdoors and shared fellowship what it means to belong to the Body of Christ.

SNOW CAMP

We are so excited to be heading to snow camp in only a few weeks. There is still time to send in your money (\$102). Our theme for camp will be "Finding Joy" and we hope to do so, both with fun outdoor activities as well as some shared worship moments.

SILENT AUCTION FOR CHURCH ITEMS

Sunday, January 13 after worship, Emerson Hall

Stuff has a tendency to collect in our lives and particularly in our church. As we have been making these moves within the building, we have noticed a lot of stuff that hasn't been used in years. Please come make your bid, if you would like it have it. Otherwise it will be sold in our garage sale the following weekend. Want to help? Contact jeff.bryne@secondfirst.org



SERIOUS SOUP UPDATE

By Pastor Becky Erbe

When we decided not to offer meals on Wednesday nights, it never occurred to us that we would miss our neighbors who would join us. After some thought we decided to offer a meal on Mondays during lunch that we affectionately call 'Serious Soup.' We began on October 8 and had our last lunch for the calendar year this past Monday, December 10. We have some regulars that attend and meet some new guests each week. It is such a pleasure to meet our neighbors, many who come from the Jubilee Center. We ended with a bang, our highest number, 57 guests for lunch. Many thanks need to be shared, thank you to all who have generously made soup. Soup is the favorite part of our guests lunch! Thank you to Arlene Noel, Katy Paterson, Ann Boline, Vera Edmonds, Anne Stratemeyer, Alice Uphouse, Jean Herro, Julianne Toboldt, Merritt Matheson, Tim Carter and Kris Harden who made sure we had lunch each week. We will begin again on Monday January 14. We would love to have new faces join us in the kitchen or to prepare soup. Contact Arlene or Katy. We would also love to have you join us for lunch and share in the stories of our neighbors and see firsthand the community that has developed.

JOIN THE JUBILEE SOUP KITCHEN TEAM

Saturday, January 5, 10:00 a.m.

Start the New Year off on a positive note as a member of our Soup Kitchen Team! We will gather at 10 a.m. at the Jubilee Center (the building off the parking lot of Emmanuel Episcopal Church across Park St). Food will be prepared, tables will be set up, lunch will be served and we will clean up and finish around 1:15 p.m. If you can be a team member, Jean Herro would love to have you call her!

NARRATIVE LECTIONARY BIBLE STUDY

Resumes Tuesday, January 15, Noon - 1:00 p.m.

Join Rev. Rebecca to preview the coming week's Bible passage which will focus on the stories of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Bring a bag lunch if you choose. No Bible knowledge necessary.



DATES FOR LENT

ASH WEDNESDAY WORSHIP

Wednesday, March 6, 6:30 p.m.

MINDFULNESS WITH SANDY WILLIAMS

Thursdays, March 14 - April 11, 12:10 p.m. - 12:50 p.m.

PALM SUNDAY WORSHIP

Sunday, April 14, 10:00 a.m.

MAUNDY THURSDAY WORSHIP

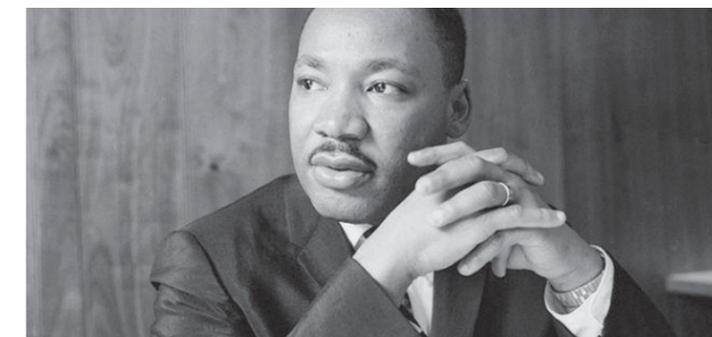
Thursday, April 18, 6:30 p.m.

GOOD FRIDAY WORSHIP

Friday, April 19, 12:10 p.m.

EASTER SUNDAY WORSHIP

Sunday, April 21, 10:00 a.m.



SECONDFIRST CHURCH TO HOST MLK CLERGY LUNCH

Friday, January 18, noon

The Rockford Ministers Fellowship, a traditionally all-African American clergy group, annually hosts a luncheon on the Friday before Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday. Graciously they invite all clergy to attend. The racial ethnic divide in this town runs as deep as the clergy, so this is special event to bring everyone together following the dreams of Dr. King. This year we get to host!



Handbell director Julie Cook Ramirez gives a beaming Stephanie Hicks, executive director of Care for Pets, a check for \$1,400 that was raised at A Furry Family Christmas handbell concert.

A "FURRY FAMILY" FLASHBACK

By Julie Cook Ramirez, Director of Handbell Ministries

What a fun and festive day! A record crowd gathered in the sanctuary on Saturday, December 8 for "A Furry Family Christmas," our handbell concert benefitting CARE for PETS. All five of our ensembles shared holiday tunes, with Vanessa Nieva, Paul Laprade, Terry Mohaupt, and Valerie Blair joining the Martin Ringers to close the show with a rousing rendition of "Feliz Navidad." As usual, the Peanut Ringers stole the show, with CFP's Executive Director Stephanie Hicks branding them "the most adorable thing I've seen in a long time."

Stephanie told the audience how CFP helps Rockford's underserved population keep their furry family members healthy and at home where they belong. A CFP volunteer and one of their clients also explained how the organization helps people and animals alike. During the concert, we honored Stephanie for her awesome leadership and surprised her with a wonderful "Cats & Dogs" cookie bouquet, donated by Cookies By Design.

After the concert, we moved the party to the gym, where guests learned more about CFP, talked to artist Michelle Dahl, who created the original painting for the posters and program, enjoyed yummy desserts, and did some Christmas shopping with a few of Rockford's best pet merchandise vendors. Most importantly, we raised \$1,400 to help CFP carry out their important mission.



MUSIC FOR JANUARY

Epiphany Jazz returns on January 6 with the SecondFirst Incidental Jazz Band, featuring Ken Stein on sax, Paul on jazz guitar, and a host of new faces! The Wood work Choir returns on January 13, and is joined by Elizabeth Leary and Bill Zartman, performing music by Brahms. On January 20, the Sanctuary Choir will return with a piece they have been working on for months: "Mary Don't You Weep" The Carillons bring ringing joy back on January 27th, with their inimitable version of "Syahamba". Join us in service, but think about this...wouldn't it be wonderful to sing or ring for the glory of God? Questions? Contact: paul.laprade@secondfirst.org

THE FIRST (MAYBE ANNUAL) POP-UP PAGEANT: A RAGING SUCCESS

By Family Christian Education Ministry Team

Want to know what it feels like to be 98 years old and part of a pageant even though you don't walk to the front? Ask Jane Phiffer, she was in tears. Jennifer Archer may have been the only one who knew how magical this event would be. With much advance preparation from Jennifer and the Family Christian Education Team, everyone in the congregation was offered a part. The catch? No practice. It was fun for all ages and offered joy to everyone. Jesus really is born in fun and lovely ways.

"Thank you to everyone who participated in and/or enjoyed our 1st Pop-Up Pageant. We got many compliments and were very excited and happy with how it turned out. We hope it helped bring joy to this time of waiting for Christ's birth. We hope to do it again next year!" -Jennifer Archer



COOKIE WALK THANK YOU

What a Wonderful Cookie Walk! The Church Street Band Played and people from all over Rockford selected from over a thousand home baked cookies for their Christmas treats and enjoyed a fantastic hot lunch. We even brought a bus with ladies from a retirement community.

The benefit of our fundraiser is our commitment to the "Boots for Haskell" School Program. Many thanks to all who helped. From those who helped setting up tables, signs and reserving parking spots to those who decorated and baked and placed the cookies on trays, to those who planned and cooked the great hot lunch.

Many thanks to those who came and bought all our goodies! Thanks to all the helpers that cleaned up and to those who helped with the advertising. It was a great success, and we thank you all! -Women's Fellowship



Carolers bringing Christmas cheer to members of our community.



A handful of the carolers who went out to bless our friends! Pictured above are singers with Lois Calhoun. Thanks to Jim Burright for organizing this adventure.



Now you see it, now you don't! Many thanks to Bill Hoff and the Second Congregational Foundation for the hard work and determination it took to demolish the old St. Luke's Miracle Temple. Many thanks to the city for their help and support. Search WIFR and RRStar for the news clips.



JANUARY CALENDAR

Tuesday, January 1
New Year's Day (Office Closed)

Wednesday, January 2
8:00 AM - Park District
9:00 AM - Deaconesses
10:00 AM - Staff Meeting

Thursday, January 3
8:00 AM - Park District
9:30 AM - Carillons
9:30 AM - Free showers
4:30 PM - Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center
6:00 PM - Bellcantos
5:30 PM - JD Board Meeting
7:00 PM - Choir

Friday, January 4
8:00 AM - Park District
5:00 PM - Snow Campers Depart

Saturday, January 5
10:00 AM - Bridge Clinic
10:00 AM - Jubilee Soup Kitchen

Sunday, January 6
8:30 AM - Koffee Klass
10:00 AM - Worship Service
Children in Worship
11:00 AM - Fellowship Hour
11:15 AM - Tower Ringers
11:15 AM - Fair For All Shop
1:00 PM - Snow Campers Return
4:30 PM - Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center

Monday, January 7
5:00 PM - Love Rockford

Tuesday, January 8
7:00 AM - Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM - Thrift Shop
9:30 AM - Free Showers
10:00 AM - Staff Meeting
11:00 AM - Gym Walking
12:00 PM - Adult Education Ministry Team
6:00 PM - DVT

Wednesday, January 9
10:00 AM - Staff Meeting
5:00 PM - Trustees
6:00 - PM - Membership Ministry Team
6:30 PM - Martin Ringers

Thursday, January 10
9:30 AM - Carillons
9:30 AM - Free showers
11:00 AM - Gym Walking
4:30 PM - Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center
6:00 PM - Bellcantos
7:00 PM - Choir

Friday, January 11
1:00 PM - Horizons Bible Study

Saturday, January 12
10:00 AM - Bridge Clinic

Sunday, January 13
8:30 AM - Koffee Klass
10:00 AM - Worship Service
10:20 AM - Sunday School
11:00 AM - Fellowship Hour
11:15 AM - Tower Ringers
11:15 AM - Fair For All Shop
11:30 AM - Silent Auction
4:30 PM - Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center

Monday, January 14
11:30 AM - Serious Soup
5:00 PM - Deacons Ministry Team

Tuesday, January 15
7:00 AM - Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM - Job Fair
9:00 AM - Thrift Shop
9:30 AM - Free Showers
11:00 AM - Gym Walking
12:00 PM - Bible Study
5:00 PM - Missions Ministry Team
6:30 PM - Executive Meeting

Wednesday, January 16
10:00 AM - Staff Meeting
6:30 PM - Martin Ringers

Thursday, January 17
9:30 AM - Carillons
9:30 AM - Free showers
11:00 AM - Gym Walking
4:30 PM - Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center
6:00 PM - Bellcantos
7:00 PM - Choir

Friday, January 18
12:00 PM - MLK Clergy Luncheon

Saturday, January 19
10:00 AM - Bridge Clinic

Sunday, January 20
8:30 AM - Koffee Klass
10:00 AM - Worship Service
10:20 AM - Sunday School
11:00 AM - Fellowship Hour
11:15 AM - Music Ministry Team
11:15 AM - Fellowship Ministry Team
11:15 AM - Tower Ringers
11:15 AM - Fair For All Shop
4:30 PM - Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center

Monday, January 21
11:30 AM - Serious Soup
5:30 PM - Mission Ministry

Tuesday, January 22
12:00 PM - Bible Study
6:00 PM - Earth Care Committee

Wednesday, January 23
10:00 AM - Staff Meeting
6:30 PM - Martin Ringers

Thursday, January 24
9:30 AM - Carillons
9:30 AM - Free showers
11:00 AM - Gym Walking
4:30 PM - Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center
5:30 PM - Governing Council
6:00 PM - Bellcantos
7:00 PM - Choir

Friday, January 25
No scheduled activities

Saturday, January 26
10:00 AM - Bridge Clinic

Sunday, January 27
8:30 AM - Koffee Klass
10:00 AM - Worship Service
10:20 AM - Sunday School
11:00 AM - Fellowship Hour
11:15 AM - Tower Ringers
11:15 AM - Fair For All Shop
11:45 AM - Confirmation Class
4:30 PM - Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center

Monday, January 28
11:30 AM - Serious Soup

Tuesday, January 29
7:00 AM - Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM - Thrift Shop
9:30 AM - Free Showers
11:00 AM - Gym Walking
12:00 PM - Bible Study

Wednesday, January 30
10:00 AM - Staff Meeting
6:30 PM - Martin Ringers

Thursday, January 31
9:30 AM - Carillons
9:30 AM - Free showers
11:00 AM - Gym Walking
4:30 PM - Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center
6:00 PM - Bellcantos
7:00 PM - Choir

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NEW YEAR, NEW FOCUS...

AN OVERNIGHT WHAT? By Rev. Rebecca White Newgren

Three people died in the cold last winter, which is three too many, as we can all agree. (One had a home so maybe we couldn't have done anything about that.) There are a handful of folks each night in Rockford that don't fit into the mission and try to bear the winter elements in a tent or other temporary structure. Where to do people go when weather gets really cold? The justice center is even closed at night now. If you suffer mental illness, are a registered sex offender, are transgendered, physically weak or follow a religion other than Christianity, nowhere.

We have a warm gym (with showers!) that sits all night. Maybe the answer is an overnight café: one with tables and chairs, coffee and soup, bright safe lights and loving nonjudgmental staff and volunteers. It wouldn't be the cushiest place to spend a night, but it would keep people from dying in the cold. And perhaps we could connect people to the social services they need.

There are more questions than answers at this point, but we are working with the city to find funding, staffing and other partners to put together a warm hospitable place that is safe for all people. We are still working to find answers, but if you have questions, please reach out to the Discernment and Visioning Team. And please pray for the people on the streets this winter and pray God directs the church in making these important decisions.



ALTERNATIVE WORSHIP SERVICE COMING SOON By Rev. Rebecca White Newgren

Our Sunday morning worship is great. We have an excellent choir, talented organist and wonderful lay worship leaders. We relish old favorite hymns and try out new faithful songs. We get creative with our prayers and allow our children to have a voice. Within a traditional framework, we offer our praise to God with energy, intelligence, imagination and love.

We have an opportunity to do something new, to attract a group of people who are not drawn to worship in a traditional setting. We have an opportunity to bring people across racial and socio-economic boundaries to worship together. We have an opportunity to reach out to the members of our church who grew up here, but do not attend.

So, thanks to the support of the Governing Council, once a month we will worship on Sunday afternoon, in the newly re-arranged chapel (many thanks to Scott Hill) with a completely different form and feel. Joshua Patterson, a local realtor and executive director of Wabongo Leadership Council, is putting together a worship band and choir. There will be storytelling and mission making. There will be communion wandering and prayer stations. There will be jeans and coffee drinking. Everything revolves around the Table, now in the center of the room. There is no "up front." All people participate in making worship.

If this sounds odd to you, it means you are more suited for beautiful traditional consistent worship. And I still love you! A new worship service gives us another opportunity to energize downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace.

NEIGHBORHOOD NUMBERS

- 8 for showers (which also includes a hygiene kit, new socks and underwear)
- 2 housing needs
- 6 clothing and coat needs
- 3 bus tokens
- 109 combined total for Serious Soup

Communion Table extends to pizza table at a practice of our new alternative worship service.

