

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)  
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Non Profit  
Organization US  
Postage PAID  
Permit No. 3734  
Rockford, Illinois

MAY 2020

THE TOWER

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL UCC/FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PC(USA)

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace



FROM REV. REBECCA'S EASTER SERMON...

Everything changes at the resurrection. Everything. Peter, who denied Jesus at his hour of greatest need, who said plainly he did not know Jesus, is brought back into relationship with him. It is Peter who will lead the disciples and build a coalition of people, who want to love, serve and bring the outcast and the brokenhearted into

community. Everything changes at the resurrection. Those who deserted Jesus are brought back. Those, who turned away when times got hard and suffering increased, are made pillars of the church. Those, who struggled to know what to do and how to have faith, are given the keys to the kingdom.

The meaning of Easter is atonement, which is a big fancy theological word when separated says at-one-ment. Jesus' death and resurrection make a way for us to be at one with God: for all that we have done and left undone to be forgiven, for all the ways we deny Jesus to be set aside, for all in us that we feel a little or a lot ashamed just doesn't matter to God who created us, loves us and calls us by name. The meaning of Easter is being willing to let all that threatens to hold us back, all the wrong-doing or the not-doing, all the shame and guilt, all the I-shoulda or I-coulda, anything that separates us from God and leave it at the foot the cross allowing Jesus to be raised in each of our hearts and in our community together so that we can be at one with God. Watch out, when we are at one with God, the world changes, positive stories explode all around us and signs of Spring point us toward the consistent and daily work of the Holy Spirit. You, no matter who you are or what you have done or left undone, can be at one, at peace, in love with and receive the love of the God of the universe who tenderly knows your name and calls you to come.

MINDFULNESS TOOLS

Mindfulness is a secular tool that helps calm our bodies and minds. As Americans, most of us do not know how to sit still. Mindfulness teaches us to be still, which is one of the ways we can hear God's still small voice. Sandy Williams, a local licensed clinical social worker and CranioSacral therapist, who focuses on holistic health recommends the following apps to help hone your mindfulness.

MINDFULNESS APPS FOR YOUR PHONE

- Adults
- Calm App (free for 30 days)
  - Headspace App (free for 30 days)
  - Insight Timer (free)
  - Smiling Mind (free)
  - 10% Happier (basics are free)

- Kids
- Stop, Breath & Think
  - Smiling Mind

NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

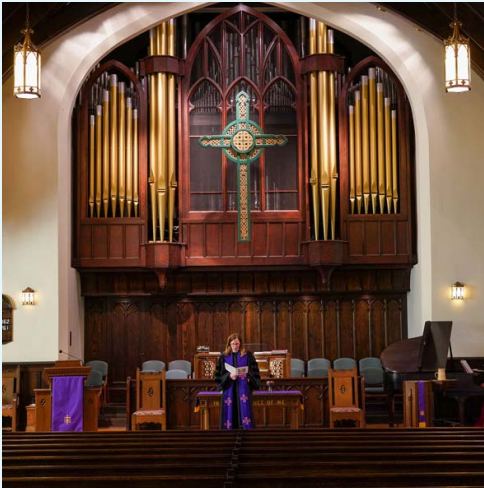
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
UCC TREE CAMPAIGN HELPING PLANET  
'RESTORE ITSELF,' EVEN DURING  
PANDEMIC



In Pennsylvania, a retired United Church of Christ minister saw his 100-tree donation as something he could do for God's creation while sheltering at home during the coronavirus pandemic. In Wisconsin, a congregation gave money to plant 200 trees to encourage its members to "do one thing" for the environment. In Colorado, a church chipped in enough for 200 trees as part of its "Whole Earth Church" ministry. The three are among hundreds of UCC donations received so far as part of the Three Great Loves Tree Planting Campaign. It's all in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, which is Wednesday, April 22. **Read more:** [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)  
THE DIGITAL CHURCH ARRIVES

A holy silence filled the cavernous sanctuary. The gilded organ pipes shone brightly from the lights hitting them. This morning, though, there would be no choir accompanying the bellowing pipes. The Rev. Dr. Donna Giver-Johnston, dressed in her Sunday best — doctorate robe, white collar and purple stole — stood in the center of the chancel. Taking a deep breath, she surveyed the empty pews, turned to the camera and smiled. **Read more:** [www.presbyterianmission.org](http://www.presbyterianmission.org)



GRADUATION SUNDAY DRIVE-BY PARADE

Join us for the "Only" Annual Graduation Parade. We have graduates among our church family and we want to help celebrate with them. Since our graduates will miss their big ceremony we will honor them with a parade. Help us celebrate and join us!

**DATE:** Sunday, May 17  
**TIME:** Meet at church at 12:30 pm. First home 1:00 pm. No one has to get out of their cars. Decorations optional.  
**HOW:** Send an email to [becky.erbe@secondfirst.org](mailto:becky.erbe@secondfirst.org) or [aubrey.barnett@secondfirst.org](mailto:aubrey.barnett@secondfirst.org) to sign up! Please let us know if you are graduating.





ROCKFORD OVERNIGHT CAFE

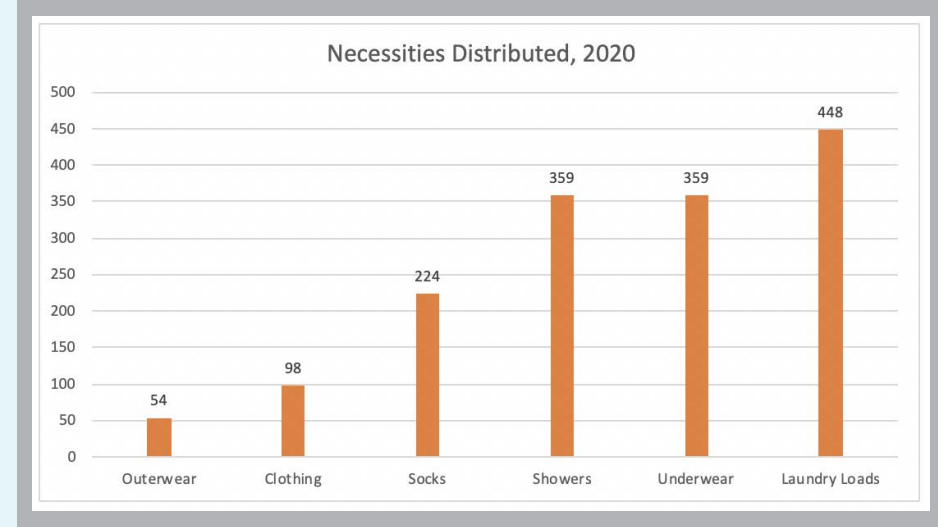
It has grown dark in downtown Rockford. The local social service agencies, the bus station, and the library have all closed for the evening. The streetlights have turned on and the busy streets have died down. Those working in the area have driven home to their cozy houses for the evening. You have no house to return to; you are one of the 281 people counted in Northern Illinois' Point in Time Count over the age of 18 who does not have a home and is not in transitional housing. The winds have started to howl and the temperature, already brisk, is falling. A slip on the ice earlier in the winter resulted in medical complications which make you ineligible to seek refuge from the cold at the shelter you normally frequent. Where will you go?

Three years ago, perhaps you would have taken shelter in the parking garage at the corner of Wyman and Elm under cardboard boxes and blankets. Perhaps, instead, you would have sought shelter at the hospital (you know the key words to say that will get you admitted for the night.) Now, however, you have a different choice. You start walking toward the corner of Church and Jefferson Streets. You will go to the Rockford Overnight Cafe at SecondFirst Church.

The Rockford Overnight Cafe has been helping the homeless in Rockford for the past two winters. The idea was originally conceived when the leadership of SecondFirst Church set about trying to identify the best way to help downtown neighbors who did not have homes. After hours of listening to city leaders, elected officials, local nonprofits, and medical professionals, we discerned that the best way to help the unhoused population of Rockford was to offer an overnight warming center during the winter months to prevent deaths due to cold exposure. Specifically, we learned that our overnight warming center needed to be a secular program that welcomed people aged 18 and older that were not eligible to stay in existing shelters: sex offenders, those identifying as LGBTQ+, those without identification, those with physical or mental health conditions, those involved in drug or alcohol use, those with pets, and those that arrived at other shelters after they were full.

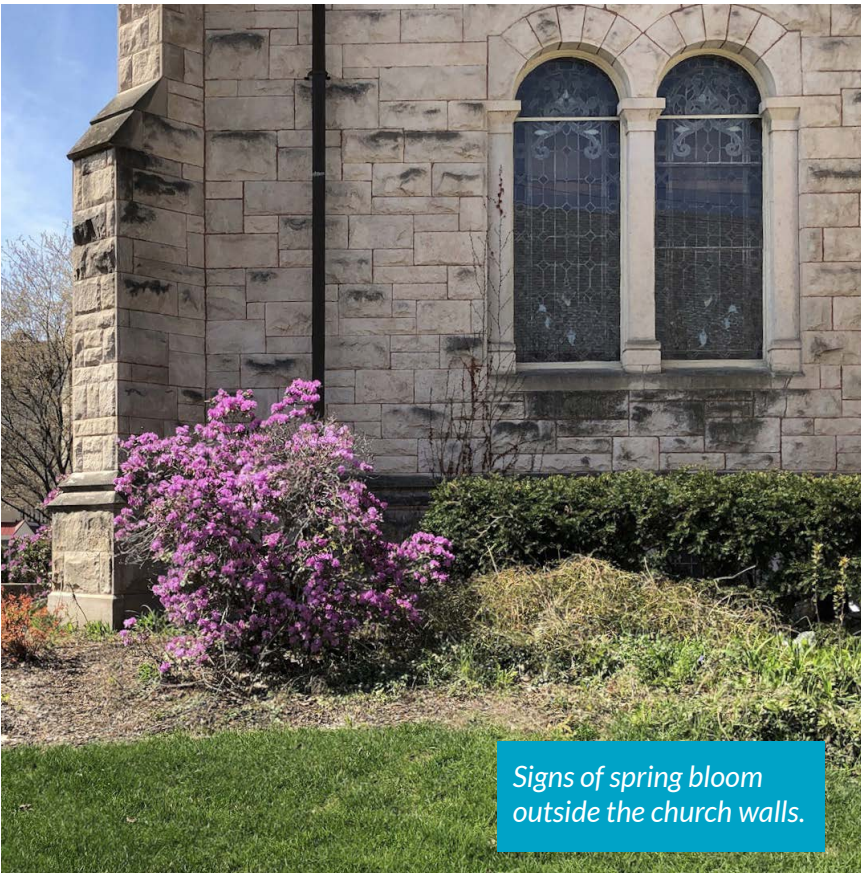
The Cafe opened as a pilot program during the six coldest nights of January and February in 2019 (including the polar vortex). During that time period, no unhoused person in Rockford died from cold exposure. The experiences learned during the pilot program laid the groundwork for the second year of the program. This year, the program was expanded to be open every night between January 6th and March 1st. During this time, 154 people spent at least one night at the Cafe. Many guests spent multiple nights and there was an average of 53 guests per night. On the coldest night, 78 guests stayed at the Cafe. Again, no unhoused person died from cold exposure this winter! This is in stark contrast to the estimated 700 unhoused people who die each year from the cold in the United States.

The decision to expand to a nightly program not only helped more people shelter from the cold, it also allowed the opportunity to help more guests acquire basic necessities during their stay:



Kenny recognized that he could have frozen to death in the outdoor temperatures. But he also recognized the multitude of services available at the Cafe. Although Kenny was included in the Point of Time Count, he is more than just a statistic. He is a regular at the Cafe and an example of the real impact this program is having on real people.

Although the Rockford Overnight Cafe ended for the season on March 1, the relationships formed during the program carry on throughout the year. At the beginning of April, David, a young man who had spent many nights at the Cafe returned to SecondFirst Church. Instead of seeking shelter, he had a different mission; if he could get home to Arizona and his mother, he would no longer be without a home during the COVID-19 outbreak. He sought out Pastor Becky Erbe, a person he interacted with regularly at the Overnight Cafe. Because Greyhound had suspended their bus routes and airfare was cheap, SecondFirst Church was able to arrange and pay for David to take an Uber to an airport hotel, spend the night, and take an early-morning flight to Arizona. Happily, David is no longer without a home!



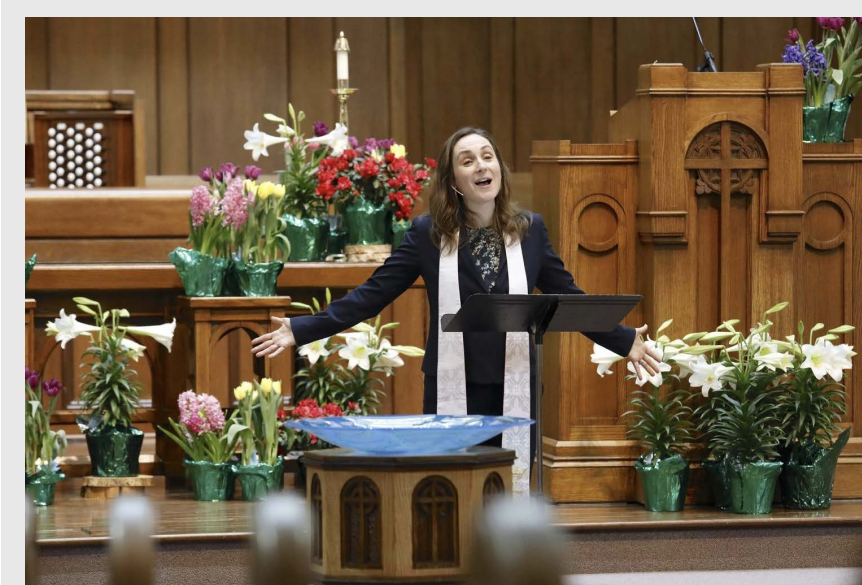
Signs of spring bloom outside the church walls.

CORONAVIRUS UPDATES

**PRAYER TEAM WARRIORS**  
Would you like to volunteer for a good cause without leaving your house? Join the Prayer Team. At least once a week through email we will pray for people and concerns. If you would like to join give me a call. If you were on the prayer team previously, we would love to have you stay on. Give me a call! Becky Erbe 815-222-4905

**QUARANTINED & CAN'T GET OUT?**  
Are you at high risk? Let us help! On Wednesdays from 12:00 pm-2:00 pm Jeff Byrne and Becky Erbe will pick up prescriptions or food staples if need be. Give Becky a call if you need help! Pastor Becky Erbe 815-222-4905

**DIGITAL WORSHIP CONTINUES**  
Sundays at 10am on Facebook Live.  
[www.facebook.com/secondfirstchurch](https://www.facebook.com/secondfirstchurch)  
Conference call in available for those unable to join on a computer. Phone: 630-580-1541  
Code: 205053 (no pin necessary)



**EASTER SUNDAY DIGITAL CELEBRATION**  
*We gathered together virtually and celebrated new life, new hope and new love. We all needed it! Thank you to everyone who helped make this beautiful service a success!*

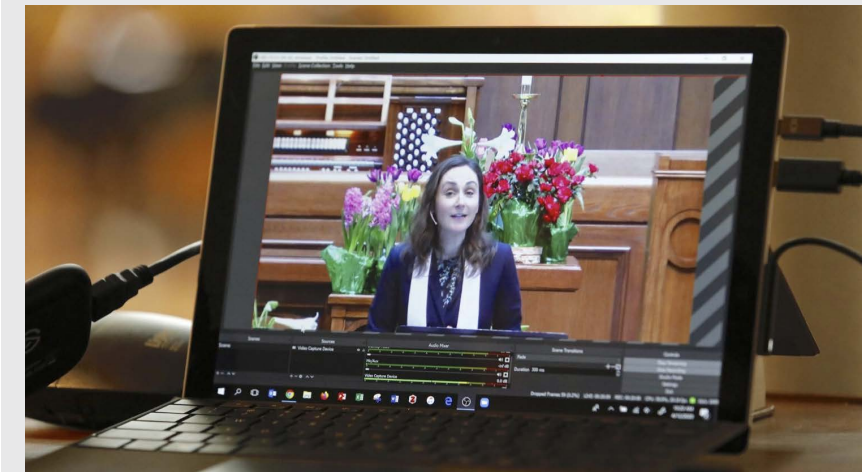


Photo credit: Rockford Register Star





MAY COFFEE CLASS

Coffee Class continues to gather during this period as we foster community and faithfully reflect on topics important to our lives. All sessions are held on Zoom and participants can join by computer, tablet, smartphone, or phone (no “smart” technology required). Reach out to Andy Newgren for details on how to connect.

- May 3:** Special Guest, Andy Greenhow: Andy is a friend of Rebecca and Andy and currently at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.
- May 10:** Surprise Special Guest and friend of the congregation
- May 17:** “Resiliency” led by Sandy Williams
- May 24:** Dialogue: Conversation on Current Events: COVID-19, part 1
- May 31:** Dialogue: Conversation on Current Events: COVID-19, part 2

NEW ANNUAL MEETING DATE!

Sunday, June 14, 11:00 am

Greetings Sisters and Brothers in Christ!

We hope and pray that you are doing well as you practice physical distancing. This is a strange and difficult time for many of us. However, we are all together even if we can’t see one another.

The leadership of SecondFirst Church has decided to delay the annual meeting in order to extend the opportunity to participate in it to as many members of the congregation as possible. In mid-May, you will be receiving three documents either by email (or mail for those who request it or don’t have email):

1. The Annual Report
2. The report of the Nominating Committee and a ballot so that you can affirm the nominees or recommend other nominees
3. A space for questions that you would like to have asked at the Annual Meeting

You will also receive a return postcard/digital survey so that you can return your ballot and questions before the Annual Meeting.

The Annual Meeting and celebration will be held using Zoom which is a virtual meeting tool. You will receive an invitation for the meeting in your email that will include the phone number and password to join the meeting. Please look for that invitation and make sure to have it available for the meeting.

The Annual Meeting will be held after worship in mid June. If you can’t join the Zoom meeting, please send your responses in as soon as possible. If you can join the meeting, please do not return the ballot as you will be voting in person. We will have a couple practice Zoom meetings to help you get online if needed. Details coming soon!

Please feel free to contact Reverend Rebecca, Jim Delmore, or Ann Stites if you have any questions.

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you this day and always,

- Ann Stites, *Second Vice Moderator (until June)*



ROCKFORD OVERNIGHT CAFE (CONT'D)

The Rockford Overnight Cafe has a direct impact not only on lives of the guests at the Cafe, but also helps to alleviate the strain (and cost) on the healthcare system in Rockford that nonmedical visits cause. Instead of going to the emergency room, unhoused guests who can not stay at other shelters can now go to the Cafe.

In an article on STAT’s website, Dr. Jay Baruch describes the difficulty of sheltering unhoused people in emergency rooms as he describes the case study of Mr. Green, an unhoused person seeking shelter from the cold, “If there were plenty of beds in the emergency department, we could attend to patients with acute medical problems and make space for those with social ones. But there aren’t. So making a compassionate decision for Mr. Green means making a risky decision for patients in the waiting room. Crowding and prolonged waits in the ER have been linked to higher inpatient mortality, longer length of stay in the hospital, increased medical errors, more harmful cardiac outcomes, and delayed treatment for pain.” The existence of the Rockford Overnight Cafe means that doctors in Rockford no longer have to make the difficult decision of choosing between whether an unhoused person will be without shelter for the night or a person with a medical condition will have a longer wait.

The Rockford Overnight Cafe also helps in the criminal justice realm. First, many of the guests at the Cafe have criminal records. In fact, people who have been incarcerated are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public. Depending on the charges, these guests may not be eligible to stay at other shelters in Rockford. Next, the Cafe has a direct impact on preventing unhoused people from being charged with criminal trespassing as they attempt to shelter from the cold. One officer from the Rockford Police Department noted that there were not as many criminal trespassing charges this year because the Overnight Cafe was open. Finally, the Cafe assists people who are currently in the court system. Three different individuals were given bus tickets this winter so that they could return to other states for court appearances.

While the Rockford Overnight Cafe only wrapped up four weeks ago, we are already busy evaluating the efficiency of the program and planning for next year. Based on our evaluations, we have decided to maintain our program model with the following modifications:

- Open the Overnight Cafe at 7:00 PM (two hours earlier than 2020). Opening two hours earlier will decrease the time between when other places used as shelter close (such as the library) and when the Overnight Cafe opens.
- Cook and serve a more substantial dinner and breakfast each day. Healthy and hearty meals will allow the guests to get through the day better and help to improve their overall health.
- Employ a case worker from 5-7 AM who will be available to guests before they leave in the morning. Logistically, it has been difficult to have a case worker from a partnering organization be at the Overnight Cafe so early. By employing our own case worker, we can ensure that a familiar case worker is present each morning, which will increase rapport with guests and increase referrals for needed services.

We are ready to work to help improve the lives of unhoused people in Rockford, consequently keeping them out of the emergency room for nonmedical issues. This will help the hospital both with cutting costs and cutting crowds. It will also help people who are already involved in the criminal justice system and reduce the chances that others will become involved. Although the brutal Midwestern nights seem far off now that the sun is setting later, the trees are budding, and the temperatures are getting warmer, we know that the bitter temperatures will return next winter and there will be homeless people in Rockford who need shelter.

ROCKFORD OVERNIGHT CAFE  
BY THE NUMBERS



Statistics represent guests served between January 6, 2020 and March 1, 2020



# MANY PEOPLE ARE ASKING “WHAT IS JEREMIAH DOING DURING THIS TIME?”

By Sue Kanthak, Executive Director

Things we are currently doing:

- 1. Connecting organizations that call with resources to organizations that need those resources
- 2. Planning the garden which will be planted as soon as the weather cooperates (physical distancing is easy in the garden)
- 3. Participating in a committee planning how neighbors in need of social interaction can connect through phone, email, text, etc.
- 4. Maintaining our Facebook page with important updates from the city, RPS205, Community Action Agency, educational resources and things to do with the kids while at home, and anything else I can find that is helpful to get through this.

When physical distancing is lifted, Jeremiah Development will be needed more than ever. We will have a community that will need to reconnect and work through what we have all experienced. Jeremiah will be able to provide a vehicle for this through the very programs we have scheduled. The need to process the grief and celebrate coming together again will be essential to rebuilding the community. We are planning for that day and we are ready to jump in with both feet when the time comes.

Currently, the City is pushing-out United Way’s 211 program and we support that message, therefore we are taking a lower profile so as to have a consistent source of information. That said, the 211 program is not new and clearly does not fill all of the need in our community, highlighting the need for Jeremiah to continue. We are preparing for the future, marshaling our resources and readying for action when we are able to gather together again.

Stay home if you can. Wash your hands and stay well!

## CONSIDERING TWO QUOTES

By Paul Laprade, Music Director

Two Old Testament passages have been knocking on my mind’s door in the past few weeks.

“In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.” (Proverbs 16:9)

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” (Psalm 46:10)

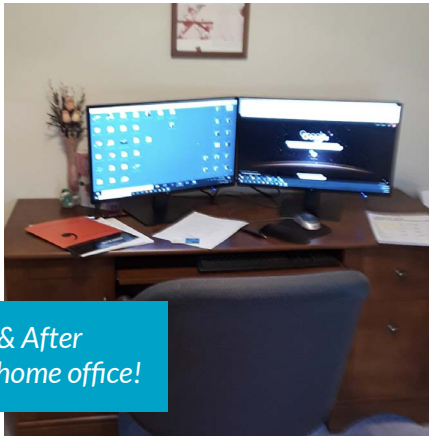
When I read the Bible or recall a verse, a musical score often accompanies my contemplation of what I am reading. These two passages have their own musical score. When reading these words from Proverbs, my mind races to Glenn Burleigh’s amazing Gospel song, “Order My Steps.” (a lovely version of it can be heard on YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_f8xbViv6I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_f8xbViv6I)). The choral interpretation of this verse reverses one element of the original: it requests God’s guiding hand in ordering one’s steps. The effect is moving, and the intense lyricism of this setting reflects the steadiness found in the path opened by God’s ordering.

While I turn only to one musical accompaniment for the Proverb, Psalm 46:10 brings to mind several settings. The hymn “Be Still My Soul” (with music from Sibelius’ Finlandia) may be related to this Psalm, as is the more direct setting by David Conte. But all of these pale to my mind in light of the extraordinary setting by Brahms “Sei Stille” from his Geistliche Lied, Op, 30. Some composers seem to fit liturgical texts to melodies that simply sound good, without the challenge that reflecting the text would offer. Brahms limits the melody of this work to a compact, narrow melody which seems itself still. Throughout this work, a calmness is observed by Brahms’ introductions of a single voice merely preparing subsequent overlapping solos, all imitating the original tune in one respect or another. Yet, to me, the masterpiece is Brahms’ isolation of “Sei stille!” (‘Be Still’), when it is repeated a number of times, as if to remind us and urge us. (The music and a good recording can be found on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp6lAefCCjI>)

So, we will stay still. Our Lenten plans now have become longer-range contingency plans. Our musical choices will be based on everyone’s health and our wish to bring diverse music to all of you. I am fortunate to be a member of such a dynamic team, and I hope you may ask your friends to tune in.



Before & After  
Debbie’s at-home office!



The Lindblade boys  
adapting to their  
“new normal”.

# JEREMIAH DEVELOPMENT’S LOVE ROCKFORD EVENT

If one of the things you are doing while stuck at home is cleaning closets, please consider donating clothing (especially winter clothing) for this event in September. There will be a clothing room as usual. While we cannot accept your donations yet, please set them aside and when we have space available, we will let you know. For any questions, please contact Darlene Riddle at [driddle88@gmail.com](mailto:driddle88@gmail.com) or 815-988-3573. Thank you.



## JEREMIAH DEVELOPMENT T-SHIRTS

They’re Here!!! Buy your Jeremiah Development t-shirts at <https://rockfordartdeli.com/products/jeremiah-development!> For every shirt sold Jeremiah will get \$10. Support Jeremiah Development and wear a really cool shirt! Since our main fundraiser has had to be postponed until fall, this will help fund the programs we have planned for this summer. #HereForGoodRKFD



## JUBILEE SOUP KITCHEN

Saturday, May 23 10:00 am

We will be putting together to-go lunches and so fewer workers will be needed, maybe only 5 of us. If you can participate, let Marge Maynard know. [mtm.home@me.com](mailto:mtm.home@me.com) Thank you!

# FROM THE MODERATOR

This prayer teaches us how we can live like Jesus Christ and serve those around us.

## THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is sadness, joy;  
O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

The plaque hangs in the main entrance to our church and is in memory of Lois Pauline Quisenberry Gayle. This prayer was Lois’s favorite and is so true today. It is for all who serve to help others. The doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, staff workers along with the police, paramedics and fireman and women that serve all of us. They made a commitment to serve putting others needs first. We don’t have to look very far to see people willing to help. A limited kitchen staff has made certain that a meal is handed out on Mondays. Our church staff has not stopped serving us making certain that our spiritual needs are taken care of. To all of them I say God Bless You.  
- Jim Delmore, Moderator

