

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church
318 N. Church Street, Rockford IL
815-963-8431
www.secondfirst.org
www.facebook.com/secondfirstchurch

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Organization US
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Permit No. 3734
Rockford, Illinois



THE TOWER

Second Congregational UCC / First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace.

DECEMBER 2017

A WORD FROM REVEREND REBECCA

Stewardship Season was a success! This has nothing to do with our current pledge count. The first step in good stewardship is taking a step back to consider all the good gifts God has given us. Church, we are so blessed! God is certainly at work at SecondFirst Church. Check out this list we ran in the stewardship mailing of just a few of the things we have done in the last year:

- Vibrations Against Violence was our handbell concert for peace featuring our amazing choirs plus Dorothy Paige Turner and Rev. Ken Board of Pilgrim Baptist Church.
- Our middle and high school aged students went to snow camp with students from Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church
- We studied Ta-Nehisi Coates' 'Between the World and Me' for Black History Month.
- The Membership Ministry Team hung new way-finding signs to orient visitors.
- Our all-church multi-generational Wednesday worship in Lent focused on Nonviolent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg. We also offered mindfulness meditation midday Thursdays led by Sandy Williams.
- We worked with Jeremiah Development to host Love Rockford Day, where over 400 families received clothes, food and many other services.
- Our youth traveled to Broad Street Ministry in Philadelphia where they served that city's most vulnerable citizens and contemplated how to serve ours.
- Ms. Becky (Erbe) is now Pastor Becky! She was formally recognized by the Prairie Association as the pastor she has been for years.
- We have two new mission partners: KFACT has been snatching girls out of poverty and sending them to college for the last 6 years with a 100% graduation rate from high school. Just Breathe 815 is a new organization using our gym to reach homeless teens.

This doesn't include our 14 new members, our pop-up dinners in the parking lot, our partnership with Haskell school, opening our gym to midday walkers, or the day-to-day, week-to-week service and care so many of you give to this church and to one another.

Congratulations! We have much to celebrate as a church. God is alive and well, encouraging and shaping us at SecondFirst Church. We have much to be Thankful for in this holiday season.

Peace to you,
Rebecca

ADVENT WITH THE HEBREW BIBLE

This advent we will be looking closely at the texts from the narrative lectionary. These stories explore perseverance, assurance, and hope. Your insight, thoughts, and questions are welcome whether you know these passages well, vaguely recall them from your Sunday School days, or are seeing them with fresh eyes,

Dec 3rd: Daniel 3: The Fiery Furnace

Dec 10th: Ezekiel 37: The Valley of Dry Bones

Dec 17th: Isaiah 55: Come All Who Thirst

All sessions will be at 9:00am in the fourth floor chapel.

Contact andy.newgren@secondfirst.org with questions or comments



Peanut Brittle Party

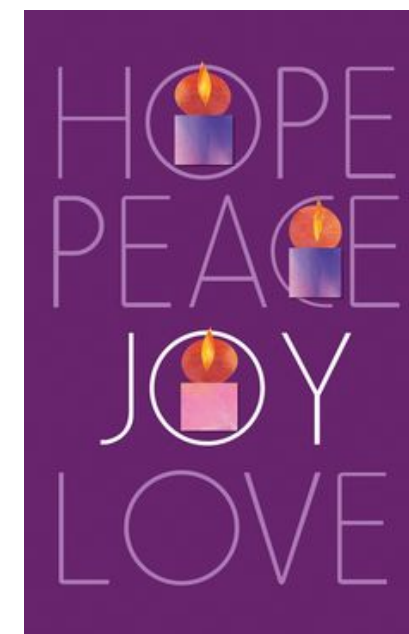


In November we opened our gym for lunchtime walking to many grateful recipients! Many thanks to our volunteers who made this possible. We will continue to build on its success. New Year's resolution, anyone?



Pilgrim Potluck

**Advent is the
season before
Christmas where
we WAIT on the
Lord to come.**



UPCOMING EVENTS AND VOLUNTEER & DONATION OPPORTUNITIES

25th Annual Christmas Cookie Walk - December 1, 10:00 am

Mark your calendars for Friday, December 1. Elegant homemade cookies, frozen casseroles, and the world famous peanut brittle will be available to purchase. Come hungry for a warm lunch. The Church Street String Band will provide entertainment. Doors open at 10:00 am close 1:30 pm. Contact: Mary Young 815-877-8113

La La Land - December 6

Join us for Dinner and a Movie on December 6. We will be viewing the movie La La Land. It's the story about love and ambition between an aspiring actress and a frustrated jazz pianist. The movie stars Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone. It won the Academy Award for Best Picture last season.

A Yuletide Gathering - December 13

Do you remember getting out a needle and thread to make popcorn and cranberry garland? What about gluing popsicle sticks together to make a sled ornament? How about decorating Christmas cookies with your family? Let's do this as a church family! Join us on December 13 for an all church Christmas Party! Garland making, cookie decorating, and a cake walk! There is something for everyone. Dinner and dessert will be served. Please RSVP to Debbie in the office by Sunday, December 10th. Contact Courtney at courtney.jonsson@secondfirst.org or Dyan at dyan.lofgren@secondfirst.org for more information.



Christmas Caroling to Shut-Ins - December 17

Come and join us as we spread some Christmas cheer to our church family members! Singers (and instruments too) will meet at 2:00 pm at the church to receive lists of people who would welcome caroling. Contact Jim Burrig at 815-877-1066 if you plan on singing or playing.

Poinsettia Sunday - December 17

We will be taking orders of poinsettias through Wednesday, December 6. The cost this year is \$12.50 and you can send or drop off your check to the office. Let us know if you want the poinsettia in memory or in honor of your loved ones.

Caring for Creation

Interested in making the world a greener place? Join our new green team! Starting in January 2018, our committee will meet monthly to plan and participate in environmentally friendly activities that help make our homes, church building and neighborhoods more earth-friendly. Interested? Contact Linda Mohaupt: 815-509-5853

Join the SecondFirst Green Team

SecondFirst is starting a green team to become an Earth Care Congregation (a program of the PCUSA). We will work together to help our congregation be more green, living into how God calls us to love creation. If you are interested in joining the team or want more information. Contact: Linda Mohaupt at 815-509-5853 or mommoh54@gmail.com.

Snow Camp 2018

We will be trekking up to Silver Birch Ranch on January 5th until January 7th. We are so blessed that Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church will be joining us for the second year in a row! If your child is in fourth grade through twelfth grade, they are more than welcome to join us. The cost is \$125 per student. Please register by December 10th. Please contact Courtney for more information at courtney.jonsson@secondfirst.org.



FROM THE MODERATOR, SARAH REINOLD

My nephew Jacob, two at the time, and being told to be patient while his pancakes were cooking, said, "Jakey no like patient." I feel this same way as we head into December. It's hard for me to be patient for all of my favorite church activities to occur. Luckily, I don't have to wait too much longer! I've already had a chance to enjoy some of the amazing peanut brittle that is made and sold each holiday season. I'm looking forward to the annual Cookie Walk and all of the delicious treats that come with it. I'm excited about the bell program's concert, "Home for Christmas" and the special dinner they will host afterwards to benefit Carpenter's Place. I'm anxious to experience the Sunday worship services that have been carefully planned to make the Advent season meaningful. I hope you have a great holiday season and have a chance to enjoy some of the great activities at SecondFirst Church!

NOTES FROM THE OCTOBER 26 GOVERNING COUNCIL MEETING

The October meeting began by approving the September minutes and presenting the church report. The treasurer stated that we are over budget primarily due to unforeseen building expenses such as repairs to the air conditioning and alarm systems as well as an increase in insurance premiums. In new business, a motion was passed to authorize the Clerk of the Session to sign the 2017 year-end reports for SecondFirst Church for the General Assembly of PC(USA) and the Blackhawk Presbytery. In unfinished business, the draft of the strategic plan was discussed. Town-hall meetings for getting feedback from the congregation on the four strategies will take place on November 5th and 12th. Members from every ministry team will gather on January 25th from 6-7:30 to work on specific goals of the strategic plan. This year's Stewardship Campaign was also discussed. Highlights of the campaign include stewardship moments during the worship service and new pledge cards. The next meeting of Governing Council will be Thursday, December 21 at 5:30 in the 4th floor meeting room. Everyone is welcome to attend.



Wednesday night fun



Transit youth group enjoying Laser Quest

STEWARDSHIP THANK YOU

by David Jones

Sunday, November 19, was Stewardship Sunday. Dozens of our members brought forward in worship their cards making a financial commitment to the 2018 budget of our congregation. What a wonderful sight it was to watch this personal act of support by so many for our mission and ministry.

As chair of the Stewardship Committee I thank everyone who has submitted her or his pledge or who will do so in the coming weeks. Your act of gratitude for the blessings we cherish in the Christian fellowship of this church assures another year of joy filled service in Christ's precious name.

PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION OF THE ILLINOIS CONFERENCE UCC FALL MEETING

The Prairie Association of the Illinois Conference United Church Of Christ fall meeting, November 4th at Rollo Congregational Church UCC, Earlville, was the first in a series of 4 sessions on the Four Fold Path for Nurturing, Flourishing Communities. Leadership is from Advocate Health Care, Chicago. Attending the meeting were Pastor Rebecca, Audrey & Linda Miller and Bob & Sue Saunders. The next Prairie Association IL Conf. Of the UCC will be Saturday, April 28, 2018



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CHRISTMAS EVE

Candlelight Service

DEC. 24 at 4:30pm • SANCTUARY

Featuring diverse music, a children's moment, a Christmas message, and candlelight to inspire and energize our faith in the One who comes to make all things right and new.



Christmas Eve is a Sunday!

Our main Christmas celebration will be at 4:30 p.m., but join us at our regular worship time 10:00 a.m. for Advent Hymns and Prayers.

DECEMBER CALENDAR

Friday, December 1, 2017

10:00 AM – Cookie Walk and Luncheon

Saturday, December 2, 2017

10:00 AM - Bridge Clinic
11:00 AM – Just Breathe 815 Teen closet

Sunday, December 3, 2017 Communion

9:00 AM – Koffee Klass
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:00 AM – Cake Reception for Kurt Riplinger
11:15 AM – Fair For All Shop
3:00 PM - Just Breathe815 Teen Drop-in Center

Monday, December 4, 2017

9:30 AM – Free Showers
6:00 PM – Adult Ed

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
5:00 PM – Membership Ministry

Wednesday, December 6

Prime Time

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
5:30 PM – Dinner
5:30 PM - Tower Ringers
6:30 PM – Adult Education
6:30 PM – Martin Ringers
6:30 PM – Youth Group

Thursday, December 7, 2017

9:30 AM – Carillons
9:30 AM - Deaconesses
9:30 AM - Free Showers
12:00 PM – Spanish Class
12:30 PM – Executive Meeting
1:30 PM – Budget Meeting
3:00 PM - Just Breathe815 Teen Drop-in Center
6:00 PM – ARC Open Gym
6:00 PM – Bellcanto
7:00 PM – Choir

Friday, December 8, 2017

1:00 PM – Horizons Bible Study

Saturday, December 9, 2017

10:00 AM - Bridge Clinic
4:00 PM – Christmas Vibrations
A Concert for Carpenters Place
11:15 AM – Fair For All Shop

Sunday, December 10, 2017

9:00 AM – Koffee Klass
9:20 AM – Wee Worship
9:20 AM – Teen Worship
10:00 AM – Worship Service
11:15 AM – Fair For All Shop
3:00 PM - Just Breathe815 Teen Drop-in Center

Monday, December 11, 2017

9:30 AM – Free Showers
5:00 PM – Deacons Ministry Team

Tuesday December 12, 2017

8:00 AM – Men's Fellowship
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
6:00 PM – DVT

Wednesday, December 13

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
11:30 AM – Staff Christmas Party
5:00 AM - Trustees
5:30 PM – All Church Christmas Party

Thursday, December 14, 2017

3:00 PM - Just Breathe815 Teen Drop-in Center

Friday, December 15, 2017

Saturday, December 16, 2017
Bridge Clinic

Sunday, December 17, 2017

9:00 AM – Koffee Klass
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:00 AM – Fellowship Hour Wassail
11:15 AM – Fellowship Ministry
11:15 AM – Music Ministry
11:15 AM – Fair For All Shop
3:00 PM - Just Breathe815 Teen Drop-in Center

Monday, December 18, 2017

9:30 AM – Free Showers

Tuesday December 19, 2017

7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
5:30 PM – Missions Ministry

Wednesday, December 20, 2017

No Prime Time
No Staff Meeting

Thursday, December 21, 2017

3:00 PM - Just Breathe815 Teen Drop-in Center
5:30 PM – Governing Council

Friday, December 22, 2017

Saturday, December 23, 2017

No Bridge Clinic
10:00 AM – Carillons

Sunday, December 24, 2017 Christmas Eve

9:00 AM – Koffee Klass
10:00 AM – Worship Service
No Sunday School
11:00 AM – Fellowship Hour
11:15 AM – Fair For All Shop
4:30 PM – Christmas Eve Service

Monday, December 25, 2017

Christmas Day Office Closed

Tuesday, December 26, 2017

Office Closed

Wed., December 27, 2017

No Prime Time
No Staff Meeting

Thursday, December 28, 2017

9:30 AM - Carillons
9:30 AM - Free Showers
12:00 PM – Spanish Class
3:00 PM - Just Breathe815 Teen Drop-in Center
6:00 PM – Bellcanto
7:00 PM - Choir

Friday, December 29, 2017

Saturday, December 30, 2017

10:00 AM - Bridge Clinic

Sunday, December 31, 2017

9:00 AM – Koffee Klass
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:00 AM – Fellowship Hour
11:15 AM – Fair For All Shop

Monday, January 1, 2018

New Year's Day Office Closed

SAVE THE DATES

Jan 5 - Snow Camp
Jan 21 - Celebrate 5 year Anniversary of
SecondFirst Church
Feb 11 - Budget and Foundation Meeting
Feb 14 - Ash Wednesday

"COME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS" AT SECONDFIRST

by Julie Cook Ramirez, Director of Handbell Ministries

The comforts of hearth and home take on heightened importance at Christmastime. Sadly, many in our community don't have a home in which to welcome family or simply escape the harsh winter weather. For nearly 20 years, Carpenter's Place has responded to that need by serving Rockford's homeless adults. In addition to providing them a safe place to enjoy a much-needed meal, shower, and change of clothes, Carpenter's Place gives these individuals the support they need to get their lives back on track through employment training, mental health services, and an array of housing arrangements.

Please join us on Saturday, December 9 at 4:00 pm as we present "Home For Christmas: A Concert for Carpenter's Place." Our five handbell ensembles will perform a variety of fun, festive, and moving selections, as we prepare for the birth of Jesus, while honoring Carpenter's Place and raising funds for their critical mission. After the concert, we will gather in the dining room for a time of food and fellowship, as we share a delicious meal with our friends and neighbors. Admission is free, so save the date and come home for Christmas. Contact: julie.cookramirez@secondfirst.org

JEREMIAH DEVELOPMENT NEWS

We are excited to share news of comings and goings here at Jeremiah Development. Our Executive Director, Michelle Ryan, has been with Jeremiah Development in various capacities over the last several years. As Executive Director Michelle provided the leadership to undertake the Coronado/Haskell rehabilitation program, the creation of Love Rockford, and strengthened our connection with the Arts corridor. However, Michelle will be departing us for new opportunities in China. Please join us in thanking Michelle for her dedication and service over the years and wishing her well in her new endeavors.

With this change, we are excited to introduce Melissa Ridgeway to the Jeremiah Development family. Melissa will manage our flagship program, Love Rockford. Melissa brings a wealth of experience in community organizing and has a passion for making Rockford an even better place to live. We are confident that Melissa will be an excellent addition to our executive team.

TEMPORARY CHOIR MEMBERS NEEDED!

By Paul Laprade, music director

The Sanctuary Choir is a fun group whose motto is "what happens in choir stays in choir". Yet, as Christmas approaches, we would love to invite more of our church family to sing with us. Do you love Christmas music? We are practicing Christmas music for our Christmas Eve service every Sunday morning (9am) and Thursday evening (7pm) in December. We are singing gospel music, beautiful new settings of "The First Noel", a "classical" work by Benjamin Britten, and more wonderful and moving works. Please think about joining the thrill of A Choral Christmas for the month of December.

LOOKING FOR A UNIQUE CHRISTMAS GIFT?

We are getting new hymnals for our sanctuary to mark the 5th anniversary of the federation of Second Congregational Church and First Presbyterian Church! You can make a donation to this project in honor of a special person in your life and receive an honor card that can be given as a Christmas present. You can also donate a hymnal in memory of a loved one. Hymnals cost \$20. Please visit the Music Ministry Team table after the worship service or contact Debbie in the office.

CELEBRATING KURT'S RETIREMENT ON DECEMBER 3



We hope you received our letter about Kurt Riplinger's upcoming retirement. Kurt has been taking care of this big old beautiful building for the last seven years and is looking forward to some time with friends and family. We will celebrate Kurt and his good work on Sunday, December 3 during coffee hour after worship.



WHAT THIS CHURCH MEANS TO ME!

by Peter Joachim

Without this Church I wouldn't be here. You might laugh but let me explain.

My first wife, at the time I met Peggy, was an Assistant Minister at Second Congregational Church. She actually hooked us up when I was bringing one of my daughters to see her mother at Christmas. I fell in love with Peggy and six months later I came to Rockford. Since Peggy was a member of Second Con I naturally went to Church where she was a member. The story is longer but I only have three paragraphs.

The second reason I am here is that I read "Pillars of the Earth". When I first read the Book, I was only 23 years old and I dreamed of being able to build like Peter did in the Ken Follet Book. Seeing this church I was awed by its size and grandeur and thought I was not named Peter for nothing. God had plans for me as I identified with "Peter the builder." I was always looking to repair old houses and now I could repair our church as much as possible. When our two churches joined I was so sure that God was guiding me. I was able to bring over the cross from First Pres and hang it on the wall for all to see. It was an emotional time for all of us and I cried tears of joy as many of you also did.

Thirdly, I volunteered to be on the search Committee to look for a new Pastor. It was a long process, with many meetings and discussions but we finally found the person whom we felt we needed to help our Church grow, namely the Reverend Rebecca White Newgren. During the last 20 years I have met some wonderful people. When First Pres joined with us and I started to attend the Men's breakfast group on Tuesday mornings I felt this Church had become my home. I think God was looking after me all my life and I didn't know it until I joined our Church.

SOME OF MY VIEWS ON STEWARDSHIP

by Joyce Pogue

One dictionary meaning of stewardship is "the job of supervising or taking care of something"; one biblical definition of stewardship is the very first verse in the Bible—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1) Our Creator has absolute rights of ownership over all things, and to miss starting here is like misaligning the top button on your blouse or shirt, nothing else will ever line up! Stewardship defines our relationship to God—God as owner and manager. God made us his co-workers in administering all aspects of our lives. "We are God's fellow workers—we are God's field, God's building." (1Corinthians 3:9)

What does stewardship look like our lives today? Many of us today only associate the idea of stewardship with sermons we have heard about Church budgets and building programs. For me, there are a couple of quotes from one of my favorite authors, Maya Angelou, that sum up my interpretations of stewardship in my life, "I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands; you need to be able to throw something back."---And, "my mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style."

I believe that all of us are stewards (owners, managers, caretakers, teachers, servants). We should all be called upon to be accountable on how we have administered everything we have been given, including our time, money, information, wisdom, relationships and authority. Owners have rights; stewards have responsibilities. We all have rights and responsibilities.

Sources: Bible & life experiences & observations, Writings of Hugh Whelchel, Writings of Randy Alcorn, Maya Angelou

WHAT THE CHURCH MEANS TO ME

by Kris Harden

I have been at this church for over 5 years, and love how over the years the church has grown in people! When I'm at Church I'm just about automatically redirected when in a (colorful) angry mood. Being around Positive people in this church helps me keep in mind that people are not the enemy, the devil is. SecondFirst Church to me means I can come here and have peace, and recharge positively from life's negativities. To me, the church means one of my main ways of getting help through life's journey, until I reach heaven.

Boots for Haskell Academy

Remember playing in the snow as a kid? Give the gift of those memories and dry feet to a kid at Haskell school. The Mission Ministry Team is accepting donations through December. \$20 buys at least one pair. Boot Sorting Party, Saturday December 16, 8:30 - 2:00 p.m. Questions? Karen Olson 815-978-3480

JUST BREATHE 815 NEWS

Just Breathe 815 is collecting backpacks for a good cause! Just Breathe is hoping to collect 200 or more backpacks to be filled with basic needs and a small Christmas gift. If you would like to donate please drop backpacks off at the gym office in the South Narthex. They will be collecting backpacks through December 5.

CROP WALK THANK YOU

Thank you, church! Over \$25,000 was raised with SecondFirst raising \$5,718 so far.

JOURNEY OF NEW BEGINNINGS

by Andrea Akerman

As always beginnings can be new, scary, exciting, riddled with change or possible rejection. Much like putting pen to paper, we don't know where we will land.

I spent my whole small town childhood anticipating the day when I was free to make my own choices and decisions when no one was my keeper. Of course my mother was right... I discovered that I still need that guidance or sound board to help me choose the best path. Unfortunately, both my parents passed when I was young, so I couldn't take it back or plead for that all-knowing wisdom. (joke) I took it upon myself to cherry pick the best parts since it was my own choice. As we all know how it worked out for Tom Hanks in Big, I woke up one day and realized I was sad, isolated and lonely. My fearless guide was a fraud and I was trapped in a locked box.

I am grateful I grew up knowing that I could always restart, humble myself and ask God for help. A rewind to that new beginning thing. (skip or back for our younger friends) I had once before but we will share that another day. It's hard to trust your courage, ask for help and embrace the change. You have to admit that your way didn't work and that you just might not know the answers.

On my 8 year journey of new beginnings I came home, started a new life, have a mutually respectful marriage, a great step son (whom I sometimes refer to as my gift with purchase) but something was missing. I attended my family's church yet I didn't feel at home. I went to my Great Great Uncle's church and I didn't feel at home there either, so I prayed on it. Shortly After, I met Sarah at one of our boys swim meet. We became friends and Facebook friends. Suddenly there were pop up dinners, and bell choirs across my feed. Low and behold, I noticed that little bitty symbol of the UCC church in the back ground. HUH! Here is your sign! It's amazing how that works! The truth is simple...We are all on God's time.

At SecondFirst I have made great friends, engaged in new experiences, met some folks I already knew and extended my talents to help others. When I asked for God's help, I found a church full of open minds, excellent advice and new twists in my old religion practices. I embrace the fact that all of our differences makes us a whole people. Life isn't cherry picked perfection at all. It is a collage of texture and color, personalities and personal challenges, growth and compassion, a home, a church family. It is a safe place to strive to be a better person than I was the day before. It supports me to be the person I am and encourages me to grow it more.

I don't know about you but I always, somehow, someway receive the answers I need to hear On Point! It's crazy!! Maybe someday Reverend Becky will let me see that special direct phone line to heaven. What? It cannot hurt to ask, right? :)

WE PROMISE...

Or maybe that should be "wee" promise. Church, our kids need us. When our children are baptized, the Pastor asks the congregation, "Do you, who witness and celebrate this sacrament, promise your love, support and care to (name) who is about to be baptized as they live and grow in Christ?"

The congregation's response is to say together, "We promise our love, support and care." Our kids need us to fulfill this promise. Family Christian Ed is in need of Sunday School helpers. We have two classrooms of children each week, pre-K through 1st grade and 2nd- 5th grade. We have teachers for most but not all classes through the end of November. We are looking to add a helper in each of the Sunday School rooms. It's not too difficult, just be an extra set of nurturing hands. You can do this once or twice a year or more often if you desire. We would love to introduce you to our Sunday School program as a helper, with no pressure to teach. It's fun and wild but it would be so much better if you joined us! Please contact Karen Olson (kolson128@gmail.com) or Dyan Lofgren (dyan.lofgren@secondfirst.org) if you can help. Fulfill that promise!

Neighborhood numbers as of 11-27
11 people for showers
2 in need of diapers
3 clothing needs
11 bus tokens

