

## 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

DECEMBER 2018

# THE TOWER

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL UCC/FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PC(USA)

*Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace*

## A WORD FROM PASTOR REBECCA

Hello Church,

In Advent, we wait. But we don't wait around in boredom, we wait with hopeful expectation, for we know a bit of what is to come. It's Jesus! And Jesus draws us toward peace, love, hope and joy.

Church, you know these things well and demonstrate them in all that we do. In case you missed this list in the stewardship letter, here are a few highlights of the last year:

- We celebrated our fifth anniversary of our federation with new hymnals (donating our old ones to the Gulf Coast) and crafted one baptismal font out of two.
- We put together a grassroots strategic plan where every ministry team set goals to keep our church moving towards God's vision.
- The Haiti Interest group raised enough money to give tools and farm supplies to 1,100 people and send over 50 kids to school in the community of Saut-d'Eau.
- Our Adult Ed classes covered prophesy during Advent, the Gospel of John during Lent, immigration, adolescence, poverty, fruits of the Spirit in Galatians and launched a new series introducing key theologians and key doctrines.
- Along with Rev. Matthew Johnson, Andy and I led a four-part Faithful Desegregation: Training to Dismantle White Supremacy for 14 churches and over 100 people.
- Our Lenten Worship experience revolved around the Book of Joy by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.
- We created an Earth Care Committee.
- We had a handbell concert raise money for Carpenter's Place and another for KFACT.
- We formed and followed the advice of the Building Ad Hoc committee to rearrange our "living space" in order to bring in a non-profit organization that is changing lives.
- We supported Jeremiah Development's Love Rockford Day where over 400 families received needed services.
- This list is so incomplete and doesn't touch on all the mission and ministry we do year after year that grounds us as a community of faith.

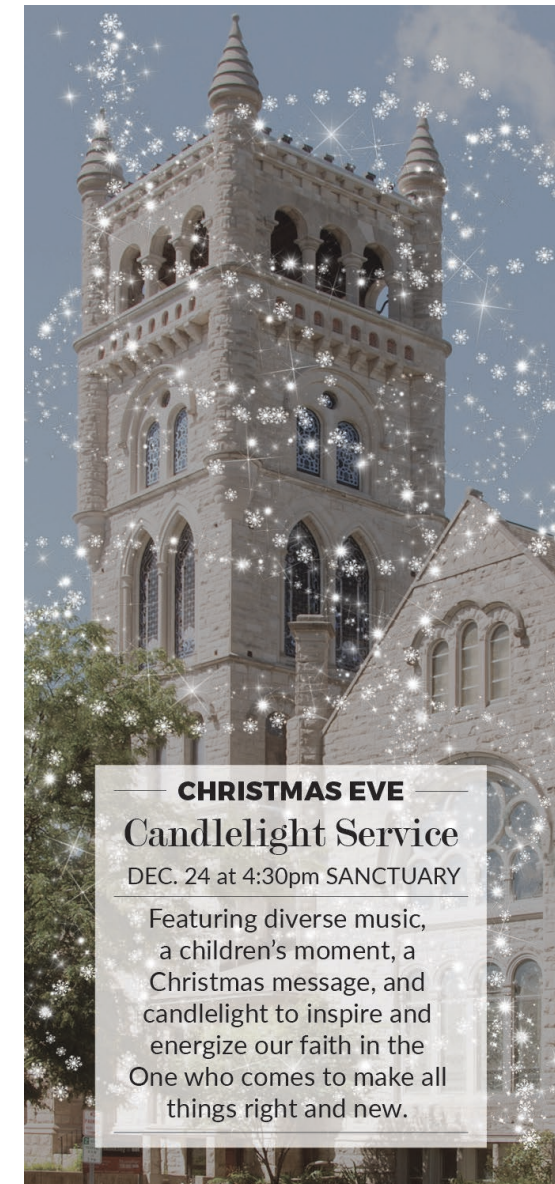
What a gracious and faithful congregation who loves with a big heart and serves with smart compassion. I am honored to be your pastor.

Peace,  
Rebecca

P.S. If the joy of this season is passing you by, please reach out. I would love to pray with you as would Pastor Becky or one of our deacons.

## SAVE THE DATES

January 4-6: Snow Camp  
February 10: Budget Meeting



## 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.

FIND US ONLINE

STAY UP TO DATE BY VISITING  
WWW.SECONDFIRST.ORG



## A Furry Family Christmas

A HANDBELL CONCERT BENEFITTING CARE FOR PETS

Saturday  
December 8, 2018  
3:00 pm in the Sanctuary

Featuring the Martin Ringers, Carillons, Bellcantos, Tower Ringers, and Peanut Ringers, along with vocalist, Vanessa Nieva and speaker, Stephanie Hicks, executive director of CARE for PETS. After the concert, we will gather in the gym for a delicious dessert buffet, Christmas pet merchandise bazaar, and opportunities to learn more about CARE for PETS.

Admission is free. Donations will be accepted to benefit CARE for PETS.  
www.wecareforpets.org

## 26th Annual COOKIE WALK

A bake sale to benefit local church missions

FRIDAY  
DECEMBER 7, 2018  
10:00am - 1:00pm

Join us and enjoy elegant homemade cookies, frozen casseroles, and the world famous homemade peanut brittle! Come hungry for a delicious lunch. Carry out available. **BEST LUNCH SPOT IN TOWN!**



# SINGING CHRISTMAS CAROLS AN INVITATION

Even though Advent has not arrived, Christmas music is ringing through shopping malls and a few radio stations. Does it seem too early for you? It often does for me, but if you are a lover of new Christmas carols and music, you have a great opportunity to sing Christmas music right now!

Join our Sanctuary Choir for a limited time so that you too can sing music by Amy Grant, a classic carol from the 15th century, a new carol by famous composer Shawn Kirshner, a French carol from the 18th century, and much more, with wonderful people! This offer comes with an extra bonus that the malls and your car can't provide--singing these pieces with a live orchestra on Christmas Eve. Such a limited offer will go fast, so contact paul.laprade@secondfirst.org before the offer runs out!

# THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS IS TIMELESS, AND SO IS THE MUSIC FOR CHRISTMAS EVE AT SECONDFIRST CHURCH!

Our music will celebrate the birth of Christ through the rich history of Christmas music, beginning with Personant Hodie from the 14th century, excerpts from Handel's Messiah, spirituals, classic hymns and carols, and new music. Join our Sanctuary Choir, bells, strings, harp, woodwinds, Steinway piano, Whitechapel bells, pipe organ, and congregation in making a joyous sound in praise!

# CHRISTMAS IS COMING! AND THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT RETURNS!

This year we're doing a pop-up pageant and we hope to have everyone participate! This year, on December 16, come just a little early to get a costume. Then during the pageant part of the service you can hop up and take part. No rehearsals or memorizing necessary! We hope it will be a fun but meaningful part of Advent. Spirituals, classic hymns and carols, and new music. Join our Sanctuary Choir, bells, strings, harp, woodwinds, Steinway piano, Whitechapel bells, pipe organ, and congregation in making a joyous sound in praise!  
Contact: Jennifer Archer

# GIVING OPPORTUNITY THE CHRISTMAS FUND & CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING

On December 23, we will receive gifts to the UCC and PCUSA funds that support current and retired church workers in need. The funds are used to help with emergency situations, housing, long-term care, health care costs, and supplements to small pensions. In this season of giving, we extend our gifts to those who were called to serve our churches with love and faithfulness. Thank you.

# POINSETTIA SUNDAY December 16, 2018

We will be taking orders of poinsettias through Friday, December 7. The cost this year is \$12.50. 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.  
Contact: debbie.wise@secondfirst.org or 815-963-8431.

# "DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?"

Some of my favorite Christmas carols are not liturgically minded. When I was seven years old, my favorite Christmas song was "Little Drummer Boy"—I am still trying to find out where the drums and that boy are in the New Testament, despite the fact that they are mentioned frequently in the Psalms. When I was a teenager, my favorites became a little more liturgically sensible; "O Holy Night" and "Au Ciel (In Heaven)" (both in French) were the go-to songs that would thrill me at midnight Christmas services.

This year, the music of Advent will begin with the sound of cello, piano, and choir, and Christmas will end with the sound of organ, piano, harp, choir, clarinet, and strings. Julie Cook Ramirez, bell conductor, will lead bell ensembles on the second Sunday. A recurring theme in Advent will be the West Indian tune, "He Came Down", sung with djembe and piano throughout each of our services. As in previous years, we will sing a Christmas carol at the end of each Advent service in December.

As I began my work here many years ago at SecondFirst, I remember that Janine Solberg (Pastor Mike's wife) commented, "You clearly read the lectionary when planning the music we sing!" I have valued this position in many ways, but one of the ways I have valued it most is in the manner that I have needed to be responsible for the development of a deeper understanding of familiar passages from the lectionary in a different way. I have been only too aware that—even if it is the third verse of a hymn—the possibility that a selection can inform and amplify the Word is significant, and I must be sensitive to that possibility. And so, my favorite Christmas hymns have now changed again—they are the hymns which elucidate and amplify my (and hopefully your) understanding of the greatest Mystery. May we travel this musical journey together in December. - By Paul Laprade, music director



# HASKELL BOOTS SORTING PARTY Saturday, December 1, 8:00 am in the Sanctuary

As has been our December tradition for the past several years, SecondFirst Church will provide every student at Haskell (that's 298 kids this year) with snow boots. These boots are greatly appreciated by the students and staff at Haskell. The Mission Ministry Team is accepting donations for this project. Checks can be made out to the church with "Haskell boots" in the memo line. A "sorting" party will be held on Saturday, December 1 with delivery to the school late morning. Sorting and tagging of the boots will begin at 8:00 am in the sanctuary. Please sign up with Debbie in the office if planning to help with the boot sorting. Contact: Karen Olson kareno128@comcast.net, or 817-978-3480

# JOIN US FOR WASSAIL AND COOKIES Sunday, December 16 after service

The Fellowship ministry team invites everyone to stay after worship on December 16 to enjoy Wassail and cookies, and visit with church friends. Wassail is a traditional warm, spiced cider for the Christmas season for wishing a season of good cheer. Please join us!

## FELLOWSHIP MINISTRY TEAM SPOTLIGHT

The official description of the Fellowship Ministry team says that the team provides activities that promote fellowship among people who attend our church, members and visitors, through social events, special interest events, service projects, and other activities revolving around breaking bread together. A more fun way to describe our purpose is that we plan events for the church so you can visit and eat. Let me remind you of some of our events:

- The annual church picnic, with the delicious brats and all the wonderful potluck food.
- The Palm Sunday Potluck, lots of great potluck food and time with each other.
- The Pilgrim Potluck, which is a traditional meal, held on the Sunday before Thanksgiving to share a holiday meal with your church family.
- Cider and donuts in September as we head into the fall.
- Wassail Sunday, in December, another Christmas tradition to wish each other a season of good cheer.
- Corned Beef and Cabbage dinner in March.
- The Larson's potluck and fireworks in June, followed by Tower Hill in July.
- The turkey roast in September, and the annual pig roast in September.
- We do 2 work day service projects at Stronghold Camp and Pilgrim Park each year to assist with cleanup at each facility. These workdays are open to anyone who wants to help out. It's a great way to help these camps out and get to know each other.

Our goal this year is to try some new things. We've planned an outing to the White Pines Dinner Theatre on December 2 to see 'Scrooge'. Another outing is to see the Rockford Wind Ensemble on 2/24/19 at the Nordlof Center. Tickets are \$10 Adults, \$5 Seniors and Students. We look forward to seeing you at each event and sharing a meal and good times together. - By Linda Mohaupt

# PRESBYTERIAN GIVING CATALOG <https://presbyteriangifts.org/>

Give a gift that provides help, hope, and relief to people, families, and communities in need.

## NEIGHBORHOOD NUMBERS (as of November 18, 2018)

- 8 showers**
- 8 bus tokens**
- 1 person transportation to Chicago**
- Serious Soup Averaging 50 guests**



# CHRISTMAS CAROLING Sunday, December 16 1:45 pm - 5:00 pm

Come join the fun. Christmas Caroling to our shut-ins. We are asking everyone to arrive at the church between 1:30 to 1:45. From there we will take our vehicles to the different retirement homes in the area to sing to our members. Please, note members don't have to be in the choir to be a part of this event and if you can't sing, like me, no one really cares, they told me I could pretend like I do in church if I really wanted to, we really just need bodies, to make some Great People Happy. Contact: Troy Akerman 815 494 7487 or rta1@me.com.

# A NOTE FROM THE MODERATOR

Every Sunday during the Welcome and Announcements we are reminded that we are "Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace". These are not just words, but actions. In reviewing thoughts for this short note to you, I am reminded that we, the church, are doing these things - just look at the activities listed in the bulletin each Sunday. But behind those notices that you receive, there is much work by volunteers here at SecondFirst before the notice, and also after the notice, with the activity discussed. What I personally am trying to do in my coming and goings during the week is to keep this as my theme as I meet people that I know and also those that I am seeing just in passing. It is my hope that we all can do this. -By Steve Showers

# GOVERNING COUNCIL UPDATE

The Governing Council meeting is the best meeting of the month simply because we share what we all are doing for the good of the church. Most importantly for the chairs of the teams is to see and hear what the other ministry teams of the church are doing, taking that information back to their teams, and realizing that we are all working together for our one common goal(s).

This month we discussed the beginning process of the budget, always a "fun" time. This was followed by a discussion on Stewardship, also a "fun" time. We all understand that the church needs our financial support to continue the overall mission of the church as we talk about issues around keeping the doors open, keeping the programs for the members, and how we reach out into our community and beyond with God's grace. After those discussions, we shared the joys of the work that the mission teams are doing for our members and those we serve outside the doors of the building and our block in downtown Rockford where we reside. These sharing moments are truly uplifting to all. -By Steve Showers, Moderator



I am deeply troubled by the continued escalation and racist rhetoric against Central American migrants and others heading towards our border. The unbridled dehumanizing, demonizing, and racist assertions by our current president are now institutionally supported with expanded Border Patrol and Immigration Customs Enforcement law enforcement branches. These groups, along with the administration, have yet to be held accountable for the human rights abuses they enacted by separating children from parents, detaining asylum seekers in what amounts to prisons and concentration camps, and sending children to be adopted while parents are deported (amounting to human trafficking). Now, in a grand show of escalation and with no regard for the violence and abuses that continue, the US military deployed to the border because of the coming migrant caravan. My soul is deeply troubled within me. (Continue reading this article by visiting: [http://www.ucc.org/commentary\\_we\\_need\\_a\\_caravan\\_of\\_compassion\\_11162018](http://www.ucc.org/commentary_we_need_a_caravan_of_compassion_11162018))

Tracy Howe Whispelwey is Minister of Congregational and Community Engagement for the United Church of Christ. (source: www.ucc.org)



WELCOME OUR NEWEST MEMBERS!  
 (Pictured from left to right)

**Vernon Carter** is a volunteer at the literacy council. He is a retired Information System middle manager. He is married, has one daughter, and is a Vietnam Veteran. Vernon is an avid reader and enjoys attending our Adult Education classes.

**Jeff Reese** moved to the Rockford area from Missouri six months ago to be the CEO of Van Matre Rehabilitation Hospital. He remains a die hard St. Louis Cardinals fan and off the wall thinker. He and wife, Alicia, have two children who love our children's ministry.

**Alicia Reese** is from Columbia, MO and moved to the Rockford area for her husband's job. In Columbia, she worked at the United Way and she is currently staying at home with their two children. She is excited to be here and to be involved in the community.

**Jim Ozee** is a lifelong Midwesterner, father of one, and human resource professional. He values faith, family, and St. Louis Cardinals baseball, but not always in that order. Jim has been attending PCUSA and UCC churches for several years and is excited to be a part of the SecondFirst family.

**Maryann Rothman** recently moved from Shabbona, IL to Loves Park. Family, serving others and faith have always been important to her. She has worked the past eight years with individuals on the autism spectrum. She is happy to have found a church as inviting and energetic as SecondFirst.

**Donna Schaad** (pronounced "shade") and her husband Ron moved to Rockford this past April to downsize and live closer to their daughter and her family. Music as a part of worship has long been her joy, and she has already found a place in the choir.

**Ron Schaad** (pronounced "shade") and his wife, Donna, have twin sons, a daughter and eight grandchildren. They winter in Arizona for three or four months. Ron enjoys gardening and work projects for family and church. He was his church's project leader for Habitat for Humanity and has lead construction mission trips to Nicaragua, Honduras, Hawaii and Alaska.



KFACT, Rockford Promise, Alignment Rockford, and the YMCA joined together for a panel discussion on adolescence moderated by Rev. Norm Shirk, SwedishAmerican Chaplain.



Coming soon a monthly alternative worship service on Sunday afternoons in a rearranged chapel.

Yellow countertops and mustard-color carpet be gone! Our third floor is undergoing renovation to become a new kids zone.



YOUTH & FAMILY

A HOLIDAY GATHERING & SPAGHETTI DINNER FUNDRAISER

Wednesday, December 12, 5:30 pm

Do you remember getting out a needle and thread to make popcorn and cranberry garland? What about gluing popsicle sticks together to make an ornament? Let's do this as a church family!

Join us for an ALL CHURCH Old Fashioned Christmas Party! Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser for Transit Youth Ministry will start at 5:30pm. There is something for everyone. Please RSVP to Debbie in the office by Sunday, December 9. Questions? Contact: [aubrey.barnett@secondfirst.org](mailto:aubrey.barnett@secondfirst.org) or [dyan.lofgren@secondfirst.org](mailto:dyan.lofgren@secondfirst.org)

Family Christian Education Ministry Team would like to thank all of those who made Trunk or Treat a success. Whether it was braving the cold and bringing your trunk or even purchasing candy, we could not have done it without you! So again many thanks for your continued support.

CONFIRMATION

The confirmation class of 2019 is underway and the conversation has been a delight. Both the December confirmation dates, Dec 2 and 16, will have an 11:45 am - 1:00 pm meeting time in the youth room with snacks served. Both sessions will take a deep dive into the Gospels to look closely at the call to compassion and justice we are to follow. Contact: [aubrey.barnett@secondfirst.org](mailto:aubrey.barnett@secondfirst.org)

SNOW CAMP

Flyers will be going out this weekend to families as we gear up for a weekend of worship and play. We will be sharing a bus and all traveling together for the ride and the cost is \$102, with the opportunity for scholarship if needed. We ask families to meet at church on Friday, January 4 at 4:30 pm and will plan on returning by 1:30 pm on Sunday the 6th. Bring lot of layers and warm weather gear. Students in grades 5th and above are invited to join us this year. Contact: [aubrey.barnett@secondfirst.org](mailto:aubrey.barnett@secondfirst.org)

ADVENT KOFFEE KASS SERIES: INVITATION

Sundays in Advent from December 2nd to December 23rd

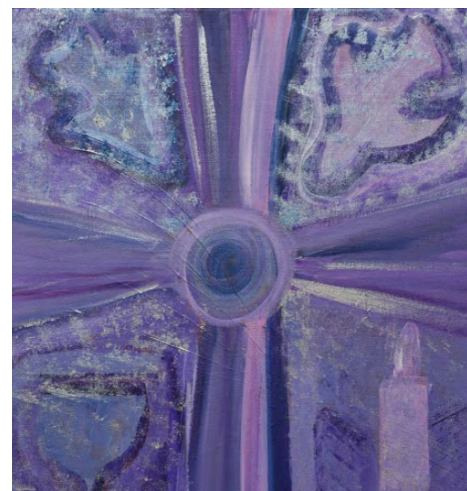
Oscar Wilde once quipped "Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations." You probably have a litany of invitations that spring to mind, whether powerful or funny, positive or negative, an invitation issued or accepted, or perhaps one that never materialized. Advent invites us to reflect on many things, and this season we will tread into those waters. Each week we will examine a different aspect of what the Christian life invites us into, using scripture as our guide, and the reflection of church members. This series will run Sundays in Advent from December 2nd to December 23rd. 8:30 a.m. Coffee and gathering | 8:45 a.m. Session begins Heritage Room Contact: [andy.newgren@secondfirst.org](mailto:andy.newgren@secondfirst.org)

NARRATIVE LECTIONARY BIBLE STUDY

RETURNS FOR ADVENT

Tuesdays, December 4, 11, 18, noon - 1:00 p.m.

Join Rev. Rebecca to preview the coming week's Bible passage which will focus on Advent prophecy, the promises that come with the birth of Jesus. Bring a bag lunch if you choose.



Pictures and poems that will adorn our Advent worship bulletins this year are by Andrew Weatherly, a talented young man with down syndrome.



# DECEMBER CALENDAR

**Saturday, December 1**  
8:00 AM – Boot Sorting Party  
10:00 AM - Bridge Clinic

**Sunday, December 2**  
8:30 AM – Koffee Klass  
10:00 AM – Worship Service  
10:20 AM – Sunday School  
11:00 AM – Fellowship Hour  
11:15 AM - Peanuts  
11:15 AM – Tower Ringers  
11:15 AM – Fair For All Shop  
11:45 PM – Confirmation Class  
4:00 PM – White Pines Theatre  
4:30 PM – Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center

**Monday, December 3**  
11:00 AM – Serious Soup  
5:00 PM - Love Rockford

**Tuesday, December 4**  
7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast  
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop  
9:30 AM – Free Showers  
11:00 AM – Gym Walking

**Wednesday, December 5**  
9:00 AM - Deaconesses  
10:00 AM - Staff Meeting  
6:30 PM – Martin Ringers

**Thursday, December 6**  
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 – JD Board Meeting  
5:30 PM- Membership  
6:00 PM – Bellcantos  
7:00 PM - Choir

**Friday, December 7**  
10:00 AM – Cookie Walk

**Saturday, December 8**  
10:00 AM - Bridge Clinic  
3:00 PM - Christmas Bell Concert

**Sunday, December 9**  
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  
11:45 AM – Confirmation  
4:30 PM – Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center

**Monday, December 10**  
11:00 AM – Serious Soup  
5:00 PM – Deacons Ministry Team

**Tuesday, December 11**  
8:00 AM – Men’s Fellowship  
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop  
9:30 AM – Free Showers  
10:00 AM – Staff Meeting  
11:00 AM – Gym Walking  
5:00 PM - Trustees  
6:00 PM - DVT

**Wednesday, December 12**  
11:30 PM – Staff Christmas Party  
5:30 PM – Holiday Gathering & Spaghetti Fundraiser  
6:30 PM – Martin Ringers

**Thursday, December 13**  
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, December 14**  
1:00 PM – Horizons Bible Study

**Saturday, December 15**  
10:00 AM - Bridge Clinic

**Sunday, December 16**  
8:30 AM – Koffee Klass  
10:00 AM – Worship Service  
10:20 AM – Sunday School  
11:00 AM – Wassail  
11:15 AM – Peanuts  
11:15 AM - Music Ministry Team  
11:15 AM - Fellowship Ministry Team  
11:15 AM – Tower Ringers  
11:15 AM – Fair For All Shop  
11:45 AM – Confirmation Class  
1:45 PM – Christmas Caroling  
4:30 PM – Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center

**Monday, December 17**  
No scheduled activities

**Tuesday, December 18**  
7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast  
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop  
9:30 AM – Free Showers  
11:00 AM – Gym Walking  
5:30 PM – Just Breathe 815 Dinner  
5:30 PM – Missions Ministry Team

**Wednesday, December 19**  
10:00 AM – Staff Meeting  
6:30 PM – Martin Ringers

**Thursday, December 20**  
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, December 21**  
No Scheduled Activities

**Saturday, December 22**  
No Bridge Clinic

**Sunday, December 23**  
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  
4:30 PM – Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center

**Monday, December 24**  
4:30 PM - Christmas Eve Service



**Tuesday, December 25**  
Christmas Day – Office Closed

**Wednesday, December 26**  
Office Closed

**Thursday, December 27**  
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, December 28**  
No scheduled activities

**Saturday, December 29**  
No Bridge Clinic

**Sunday, December 30**  
8:30 AM – Koffee Klass  
10:00 AM – Worship Service  
10:20 AM – Sunday  
11:00 AM – Fellowship Hour  
11:15 AM – Tower Ringers  
11:15 AM – Fair For All Shop  
4:30 PM – Just Breathe 815 Drop In Center

**Monday, December 31**  
No scheduled activities

**STEWARDSHIP FOR 2019:** Many thanks to all who pledged their gifts of money, time, energy and/or prayers to the church in 2019. The results are still being tallied! Please pray for the budget committee as they figure out what mission and ministry we can do together in the coming year!

## JIM BURRIGHT STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Growing up in a farming community, much of my family’s activities centered around the church. We went to Sunday School and worship every Sunday. I sang in the choir and participated in youth group. I went off to college and then moved to Rockford to start my career.

I did not seek out a church home at first because I didn’t think there was a place for young single men. But after five years I realized my personal life was empty and I decided to return to my Christian roots. I attended worship services at a few churches, but when I walked into First Presbyterian, I felt like I belonged. The atmosphere was warm and friendly, the music was great and the service was meaningful. So, I joined, became active in the choir and soon discovered that there was a singles ministry. I attended one of their events where I met two women, Linda and Lucy, who I discovered were sisters. I started dating Lucy and within a year we were married. Four years later she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Within a year we lost her and I was left with a 3-year-old daughter. Linda stepped in and helped me care for her. We soon fell in love and were married. Through all this time our church family supported us, grieved with us, and celebrated with us. Through the years Linda and I served as Elders and Deacons, were charter members of the Mariners [fellowship group], and participated in soup kitchens and caroling to the shut-ins. I was privileged to serve on Session as the congregation was making the tough decisions regarding the future of First Pres. On that cold December morning as we walked out of our church building for the last time and marched up Park Avenue amidst ringing church bells to the waiting arms of our brothers and sisters of Second Con, I felt like a bride walking to her bridegroom and their new life together. Fast forward to today. I am proud to say that four generations of our family are worshipping together. Linda has received support through visits, cards, and prayers. Our two congregations have seamlessly melded into one. We have continued ministries that each congregation brought plus added new ones.

I am excited to be part of our mission to reach out to our neighbors. We are making use of our building and other resources to help and strengthen them. A big thank you goes to the Governing Council and ministry teams, Pastors Rebecca and Becky and staff. Together we will continue to be a big presence in downtown Rockford and beyond.

## SANDY WILLIAMS STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

My faith has been an intimate part of my being since I was a child. I grew up with the pastors of our churches being family friends. I often asked the not-so-politically (or faithfully)-correct questions. Being involved in church-life was a way of being that was demonstrated for me. Having a real faith was also allowed. I remember being very mad at God one afternoon and my mom told my brother to let me be, it was okay. I was involved in leadership in our church denomination even as a youth and got a minor in religious studies in college.

2013 was a difficult year with a number of trials that culminated in us needing to leave our church of 13 years. This was a separation that was painful. Steve and I took a break from the institution of church and then transitioned into worship while remaining somewhat anonymous. We then were ready to find a new church family and one that would be a much better match with our spiritual beliefs and where we could be completely authentic. As we were exploring local churches, I was impressed with SecondFirst’s merging. I thought, “Wow, what must these

congregations be like, that they are not so bound by their traditions that they can grow and re-create themselves?” I am somewhat astounded and impressed with the realness here. SecondFirst is not perfect; that is more than okay for me – I am not perfect either. SecondFirst is a place that allows each individual the room to have different opinions and actually state them even if it’s uncomfortable. I am still absorbing this behavior that is an uncommon trait in most communities.

Early in our attendance at Koffee Klass, Andy asked something like, “What would it mean to take away our faith?” I was quite emotional. I believe I said something like, “My faith means everything to me. I would have no hope without it.” Recently, Jim Roberts came to Koffee Klass and shared just a glimmer of his faith being “an experience with Jesus” and not a doctrine. I agree. I am not really a Presbyterian or UCC member. SecondFirst is just that to me, SecondFirst Church. To me, SecondFirst Church is a sacred place with imperfect, wonderful people who gather and share, at the core of their beliefs, the Divine and Jesus.

## JEAN REESE STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

This is the first time I have spoken to the entire congregation since I was about 4 years old. It was “Children’s Day.” I stood on the platform and said: “crocus in the grass peeping out today-my, my what a lovely day.”

I have been involved at this church since childhood. Sunday School was a regular until I went off to college. I look back on those years as real learning years at first giving money. Every Sunday in our classes we gave money. Probably it was a nickel or a dime but it was giving monetarily.

There are so many good memories. There were requirements to earning our Bibles: Learning the Books of the Bible, The Ten commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer and other parts of the Bible. I made many good and lasting friends during Confirmation. Our Senior High class met in the Tower Room which was a special treat. My belief in God was formed during these years.

After college I began teaching first grade in Rockford. I Married Page Reese and we had 3 children. We became active in the church in various ways. Congregators, (a married couples group of probably 40 people), Junior Deaconesses, Bell Choir, etc. Another of my beliefs was established then. Giving of time and money, which I really think are learned behaviors, that I was fortunate to learn from this church and my family.

Those who know me are aware of the major change that happened in my family. Page, my husband, developed M.S. and became totally paralyzed. “As he used to say, “I didn’t plan to retire at 38.” I went back to teaching but we didn’t give up on church. In fact, our deep faith, and comfort from the church are what sustained us. We came every Sunday. The children were active here and participated, developed friendships, and were Confirmed. But obviously we had to stop volunteering.

During all the years I have been a member here, there have been numerous changes: the fire, changes in ministers, which at times have caused real ugliness in our congregation, loss of members to other churches, societal changes, and our wonderful merger with the Presbyterian Church to name a few. But I am still here. My deep faith in God began in this church and continues to grow. Without my faith, my life would have been entirely different. No matter how much a person can give in money or time is not the answer. It is that each of us gives as much as we can. I believe everyone in this room has faced some problems and challenges in life, but our faith in God sustains us and we are all blessed.