

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)
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Organization US
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Permit No. 3734
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NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
UCC LEADERSHIP LAUDS THE CHAPLAINS
AS ‘UNSUNG HEROES’ OF THE PANDEMIC

“They are unsung heroes working behind the scenes to help patients, loved ones who can’t visit them, and medical staff deal with grief, anxiety, anguish and loss. I give God thanks for everything they are doing to heal and make whole a wounded people.”
The Rev. John C. Dorhauer, UCC General Minister and President

In this country’s war against the coronavirus, there are hundreds of United Church of Christ clergy fighting on the front lines. They are chaplains, serving in hospitals, both large and small, in hospices, nursing facilities and V.A. health care centers. They minister in prisons, in the U.S. military on active duty, in the reserves and in the national guard. “I tear up every time I think about what our chaplains are doing,” said the Rev. John Dorhauer, UCC general minister and president. “They are unsung heroes working behind the scenes to help patients, loved ones who can’t visit them, and medical staff deal with their grief, anxiety, anguish and loss. I want them to know I see them, and I give God thanks for everything they are doing to heal and make whole a wounded people.” **Read more: www.ucc.org**

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)
‘IF WE WILL NOT FACE IT, WE
CERTAINLY CAN’T FIX IT’

The killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, recent attacks and ridicule of people of Asian descent during the pandemic and many other horrifying examples all point out why the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must be a Matthew 25 church, even as the coronavirus still keeps many Christians from worshipping and doing ministry in person.



“All that terror has laid bare what has always been there. It angers me,” the Rev. Dr. Diane Moffett, president and executive director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, said Wednesday during a Vital Congregations Zoom conversation on being a Matthew 25 church during the pandemic. “If we will not face it, we certainly can’t fix it.” **Read more: www.presbyterianmission.org**

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! Your Executive Committee has been hard at work, meeting weekly during these coronavirus times. We have reviewed the science and the best practices for churches. At this time, both our denominations recommend we continue to worship online. But we do have some opportunities for creative gatherings!

Here are our church plans for phase four:

- Meetings and Worship remain remote. Requests for meeting space in the church will be reviewed by the Executive Committee on a case by case basis.
- Members are allowed to schedule a time to enter the building one by one to either sit in the sanctuary or resume their stewardship of the church building. Masks are required at all times while in the building for those who can medically tolerate them.
- Outdoor gatherings are possible with social distancing measures taken and with Executive Committee approval.
- Serious Soup, Showers and other ministries to people in need will resume in limited and measured capacity.
- Office will be open and staffed Monday- Friday 8:00 – 4:00. Please call before coming into church (see bullet 2).

If you have any ideas, thoughts, questions, we would love to hear them. We pray that you are all safe and making good decisions about your physical and mental health...I know those two can conflict. As for your spiritual health, I hope you have been able to worship with us virtually Sunday morning and are joining some of our fellowship virtual gatherings. Please reach out if there is anything we can do for you.

Peace to you!
Rebecca



Planting has begun! We are grateful for the helpful hands that help beautify our church.

JOIN US FOR DIGITAL
WORSHIP ON SUNDAYS



Please join us every Sunday at 10am on Facebook! We broadcast our worship service through a Facebook Livestream. Please help us spread the word. While physically apart, this is an opportunity to come together!

You can find the Worship Order for each week through the weekly Facebook event page, or on our website: www.secondfirst.org/what-to-expect

If you cannot join us on Facebook Live, consider calling into the conference call line: Dial 630-580-1541 then use Access Code 205053.

CHURCH LANDSCAPE CLEAN-UP

The landscaping around the church needs much help in cleaning up around the church. Since we are still under stay safe restrictions, I am not calling for a general work day for cleanup. Therefore, I have put a list of areas that help. They are broken down so no one area is too large. I do not expect to do any plantings until some of the restrictions are lifted. If you would like to help in cleanup, decide on an area you would like to work and give me a call (Ron Schaad - 309-846-8230) and I will either meet you at the church or discuss over the phone. Make sure you will not be near other workers. Please follow all distancing guidelines. Of course, if you are working as a family distancing may not be a problem.

All beds need these things done: Pull grass, pull all weeds, clean out last year’s dead plant material, add mulch if available.

NORTH SIDE OF CHURCH

SMALL BED BY HANDICAPPED PARKING: Pull mulch back from sidewalk. Lower soil along the sidewalk so mulch does not run onto the sidewalk. Edge along grass to provide a clean line.

LONG FLOWER BED: Pull mulch back from sidewalk. Lower soil along the sidewalk so mulch does not run onto the sidewalk. Edge along grass to provide a clean line.

BED EAST OF WALK RUNNING TO HANDICAPPED DOOR INCLUDING LINE OF SHRUBS: Trim dead branches, pull back mulch and edge along grass to provide a clean line. This is one of the larger areas.

BEDS AT NORTH EAST CORNER OF CHURCH
SMALL BED BY SIDEWALKS: Pull mulch back from sidewalk. Lower soil along the sidewalk so mulch does not run onto the sidewalk. Edge along grass to provide a clean line.

LARGE BED BY THE NORTH EAST CORNER OF CHURCH: One of the larger projects. Trim bush, cut shrubs back by sign, edge along grass to provide a clean line, pull mulch back and lower soil to provide a clean line.

EAST SIDE OF CHURCH

ALL SMALL BEDS ALONG EAST ENTRANCES: Cut shrubs back, pull mulch back and edge along grass where needed.

SOUTH OF BUILDING

FIRST BED SOUTH OF BUILDING: Move rose bush to island, dig daylilies and spread out, pull mulch back from sidewalk and dig soil down a couple of inches to prevent mulch from running onto sidewalk, prune trees, split one plant.

BED BETWEEN DRIVEWAY: Trim shrubs, pull mulch back from sidewalk and dig soil down a couple of inches to prevent mulch from running onto sidewalk

MEMORIAL GARDEN: Edge along beds, level memorial markers, install block edging if available.

SOUTH ISLAND: Trim roses, pull mulch back from the cement bumper and dig soil down a couple of inches to prevent mulch from running onto the parking lot.

NORTH ISLAND: Trim roses, pull mulch back from the cement bumper and dig soil down a couple of inches to prevent mulch from running onto the parking lot.

UP NEXT TO BUILDING: Remove dead shrub, trim trees and other shrubs.

WEST SIDE OF BUILDING

SOUTH WEST CORNER: Trim tree back, clean out bed.

BED NORTH OF SOUTH DOOR: Clean out everything except shrubs, edge along grass.

WATER GARDEN: Edge along grass, add length to down spout so it does not erode soil.

BED BY WATER BIBS: Clean out all growth, level soil. If more soil is needed the garden has some.

I know some of my descriptions may be hard to understand so feel free to call me, (Ron Schaad: 309-846-8230) Thanks for considering to help with the church’s landscaping needs.



“Flowers are the music of the ground. From earth’s lips spoken without sound.” - Edwin Curran

MUSICovid

There is an expectation that I might be able to provide an update about music in our church, as I write my monthly missive. I am not sure that I have the words to express my thoughts on the matter. There are two things at work at this time: waiting and creating in prayer.

We wait for the Lord. We are told to have faith and wait. When will the bells play again? Will the choir sing again? When will we return? The music team of Julie, Joyce, Val, and yours truly have worked hard to create a calendar for 20-21 that mirrors what plans we usually set in place for the following season. Silly? Not at all, as such a plan allows us to ‘jump back in’ should the current necessary restrictions change. Yet, we are in this time when waiting is the right thing to do.

The science is clear. Congregational (and therefore choral) singing is particularly dangerous, as the spread of aerosol from singing often projects 20-25 feet. The literature is a little less clear about the spread when people exert themselves physically, and that suggests that caution should be taken for meetings of bell ensembles. Churches that have been deciding to meet are not relying on anything but the CDC suggestion for a common distance of 6-10 feet are not considering the actual distance needed for ensembles under the best of circumstances (25 feet, not including other factors that must be discussed). It is no surprise that the news often reports of upticks in COVID cases due to church gatherings. SecondFirst is being caring with regard to our choice not to meet—it is the only caring solution in my opinion that is appropriate for this moment in time.

For my part, I am a member of several committees and organizations during this time ‘off’ that are meeting regularly to compile and scan literature specific to the risks and adaptive techniques that address ensemble performance. Some are statewide, some regional, one national. In this way, I can be privy to the newest and best information that is available with regard to music performance in our current situation. Thankfully, we are working on solutions, and have already tried over 36 programs that may lead to some type of partial solution should we return to a face-to-face environment in the near future.

Personally, I have been working many more hours than I usually do, as the planning for my university position, with contingency budgets, identification of equipment ‘work arounds’ for possible performance and rehearsals and more are needed. The very popular ‘virtual choir’ is an interesting situation that often arises in conversation both at the university and at our church. Due to internet latency (speed defined by the internet connection, internet service, server location, equipment used at each end, etc.) synchronous performance is never possible at this moment in time. Virtual choirs are often ‘created’ by asking each individual to sing perfectly into their phone/computer, assembling and ‘fixing’ each individual’s wrong notes, rhythms, diction, timing, and more via electronic manipulation (often removing the most difficult voices and doubling the voices of stronger individuals without telling them), adding reverberation and timbre adjustment, and then—after the coordinating of each individual with others is done—asking each member to mime a visual performance into their phone/computer so that a visual impression of a simultaneous choral experience is the created. The effect makes a performance seem that it is happening, but it is a product of a computer, much like a CGI rendering in a Marvel or Star Wars movie. No voices ever sing together. The average time needed for a very simple 3 minute piece with 10 people is 3 x 10 x 1.5 hours, or 45 hours for the most rudimentary of equipment. The result is something I could create with the powerful computers and programs at my university, but not something I can create with my personal equipment, but it is not community as much as it is a collage.

I look forward to the end of my semester’s work as department chair so I can experience the ‘time to breathe’ that I am hearing about. Except for the time I have with my sons—and that has its own unusual challenges with their own distance learning and a series of remotely taken AP exams—I am waiting for a different normal. A return to any normalcy or even to a ‘vacation at home’ would be a gift. And so, like you, I wait and pray with the aid of God’s patience and grace.

Creating needs space. Our gift as a music ministry is to offer support to the liturgy. And so, I revel in hearing the music that Val prepares each week for us, and for the gifts of others who have and will contribute their talents. (Jim Burright and Joyce Zartman have kindly done so.) I have always been uncomfortable with words, as french is my first language and the subtleties of english were not to be learned from a primarily francophone community. For me, praying through music is the most meaningful way to avoid my stumbling and speak my heart. With a choir, this is amplified, because prayer is magnified when many are joined to express the same prayer as one, and the joy and power of that experience and action is something I miss more than one can imagine. When ‘space’ arrives, I will be able to fully digest what has happened, and can perhaps be in touch with creativity once again.

The substitute, my weekly songs, are my act of giving and my nod to a creative life. I must admit that it is more comforting for me to create music as a conductor, because my introverted back is away from listeners. My candlelit face is what I can offer. Some days my previous time of review and practice allow me to create a video in relatively short time (20 minutes). In other times, the production is lengthy—a cat joins me, a book falls, the audio is distorted or absent (sorry, Andy!), a child needs something, an ambulance siren wails by during verse three, a voice cracks in the middle of a phrase, a light decides not to work, or even an intolerable mistake on my behalf appears. These things can make me feel that I really mustn’t have practiced at all! (One recent hymn took 19 ‘takes’.) I am sure that the same thing happens to each of us. We are fortunate that the many parts we all contribute can be combined into a service that still feels coherent and meaningful. Andy, Becky, Aubrey, Rebecca, Valerie, and all of you make this possible.

I am very thankful for all of you. It is a pleasure and joy to tune in to NBC (Newgren Broadcasting Church) and see your comments and reactions to the beautiful liturgy that binds us together as a church. Stay well.

In peace,
Paul Laprade, your music director

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: MURAL UPDATE
By Jim Delmore

Our church is now ready to mount the mural without doing damage to the gym wall. Thanks to Scott Hill. Scott came up with a plan to mount the mural without putting any screws in the steel wall panels that cover the West wall of the gym. The design required hollow aluminum square tubes be mounted to the wall. The tubes are 1 ¾ inches by 1 ¾ inches twenty feet long. They are attached to the wall using existing screws inserted in the same hole. Each tube is cut to the proper length; the chop saw can be seen in the foreground of the picture. Each tube has holes drilled to match the spacing of the screws on the side of the building.



First the proper size hole for the screw is drilled through the tube, then the hole on the outside of the tube is enlarged so the driver can be placed in the tube to insert the screw in the same hole in the wall it was removed from. Scott can be seen at the drill press drilling the holes in one of the tubes. Each tube is drilled to match the existing screw spacing for each tub location. When a tube is installed the existing screws are removed from the wall and put back in the same location. Many thanks to Scott Hill for his design work and for working to ensure the installation of the tubes was done correctly. A thank you goes to Charlie Fry for being there to help and taking the pictures.

STRONGHOLD UPDATE

Hello from all of us at Stronghold. We're still here for you!

As you all know 2020 has been a challenging year for all of us. These unprecedented times have had us on our toes to see how things will play out! In the meantime it has been a struggle to keep up with the maintaining of our 365 acres of property with just a few hands on board. At this time we are calling on our family of volunteers to come help support Stronghold in maintaining the beautiful grounds.



If you are interested in volunteering please call (815)732-6111 Ext. 613 for further assistance or you can email at reservations@strongholdcenter.org.

STRONGHOLD POOL UPDATE
OUR POOL WILL BE CLOSED THIS YEAR!

We would love to open our pool this year but the loss of income due to COVID-19 is making it very difficult to open it financially. We are seeking donations to get the pool open, if you or anyone else are willing to donate to the pool fundraiser please call (815)-732-6111 ext 613

THE FAMILY CAMPGROUND IS OPEN!

Stronghold is offering tent camping at our Family Campgrounds for Social Distancing challenges. \$10.00 per person per night no more than 10 people per site. We have pavilion sites to \$35.00 per day (comes with tables, trash cans & wood for the fire pit. Call to reserve your spot today! 815-732-6111 ext 613.

SAYING GOODBYE TO
OUR CHURCH MEMBERS

Since the Stay at Home orders, we have not been able to say goodbye to those in our congregation that have passed. Until we can gather again with more than 10 people, we will share here those we have lost. We will list members only.



James Owens

James Owens Jr. of Rockford departed this earthly life May 19, 2020. He was born in Rockford, January 28, 1955 the son of James Sr. and Dorothy Owens. James was employed as a material packer, many years for Growth Enterprise Company. He attended Rockford public schools, later to receive his G.E.D.

Wayne A. "Nick" Nicholson, 96, died of natural causes on Friday May 22, 2020 at Wesley Willows in Rockford. Wayne was born in Rockford on May 10, 1924 to Ahlex E. and Florence L. (Anderson) Nicholson. He graduated from East High School in January 1943 and enlisted in the Army that summer. During 1944 and 1945, in the Army Air Corps in California and Texas, he was trained to fly troop carriers. The war ended before he was deployed to the Pacific.



Wayne Nicholson

UPDATE ON MY HEALTH BY REV. REBECCA

Church, nine months ago I sustained my eighth concussion. It's been a while since I've updated you on my brain injury, partly because it is hard for me to understand. Currently, I am fulfilling 40% of my responsibilities as your pastor (the Presbyterian Board of Pensions will be paying for the other 60% of my salary for this time). For the most part, that means I am preaching, leading worship and guiding the staff. I miss out on almost everything other than that. And it's a lot.

My brain is like a bunch of balloons floating in the sky. Each balloon represents something I could do, significant or insignificant: call my mom on her birthday, cut my toe nails, feed my children lunch, make a pastoral call, plan for worship, go for a run, eat chocolate. At any given time there are probably a couple hundred things I could do with no rhyme or reason, no value or order of importance. If you knew me at all before this, that confusion is not the way I typically operate.

I do continue to improve! I have many moments of clarity, and I use them to offer guidance for the church. Because only part of my brain is mostly affected, I usually know what needs to happen, I just can't make it happen. And I certainly can't follow through on the process. Because we have such a great staff and lay teams, you all have been able to make so much church happen! Thank you.

Just like an Alzheimer's patient who doesn't know her name but can play the piano, I can lead worship and preach easily. The brain is so cool! How I appear on Sunday mornings may or may not be an indication of how I am doing that day or that week.

All that to say, I know I have missed a lot and continue to. But I'm still here. I still love all of you. I am trying the best I can to use the little time and ability I have to serve the church. I am grateful for your prayers, amazed by your grace, and honored by your patience. Thank you for allowing me to be your pastor as imperfect as I may be.

Peace,
Rebecca

We Did It!!! Our congregation has received Blackhawk Presbytery's "Six for Six" Award for 2019. We thank you for your continued commitment to the Presbytery and the denomination as a whole.

The recognition is for churches who have:

- paid their per capita in full,
- contributed to all four churchwide Special Offerings of the Presbyterian Church (USA)
- supported Blackhawk Presbytery with a Mission pledge and giving.

For 2018 and 2019 we recognize: Ridgefield-Crystal Lake, DeKalb Westminster, Galena First, Galena Westminster, Geneva Fox Valley, Henry First United, Joliet Westminster, Sterling First.

New for 2019: Dixon First, Morris First, Rockford 2nd Congregational /1st Presbyterian, and Rockford Westminster.

A LITTLE BIT FROM PASTOR BECKY E...

Even though things are slowly opening back up, most of us are still sheltering in place. I don't know about you but my yard looks the best it ever has because there is nothing else to do!! Now, my kitchen floor, that's another matter.

We are trying to do some things for the life of the church. Deacons and Family CE hosted a graduation parade for our 2020 graduates. We had over 30 cars parading around Rockford, no easy task. The Deacons Ministry has been hosting a Human Library. Each Friday night in June we hear the life altering story of a "Human Book." Fellowship Ministry is hosting a Coffee Break on June 10 at 10:00 am and a Nightcap gathering on June 18 at 8:00 pm to allow for members to meet for fellowship via Zoom. Contact Debbie in the office if we would like to join in on any of these gatherings. We have a group of volunteers who deliver meals to the homeless that are staying in local motels. Fellowship has some late summer dates on the church calendar but we will wait to see if we can safely offer those events.

We are trying to keep up with members by telephone. We call our shut ins often until we are allowed to visit in person. Please if you know of someone in need or has fallen through the cracks, let Rebecca or I know. Sometimes the church is the last one to know.

Hang in there everyone. You are all in our thoughts and prayers. We are tough people, we SecondFirsters, we will get through this! Until we are together again, Peace be with you...

Thank you

During this pandemic and sheltering in place the city of Rockford has housed some of our homeless in motels in the area. Our church has been involved in bringing meals to the motels. Thank you to Anne Stratemeyer, Carolyn Greenlaw, Darlene and Tim Riddle, Paul and Jonathon Laprade, Phil Blair, Pastor Becky, Marge Maynard and Eric Lundin for volunteering!!

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, Jeremiah Development has been thrown several curve balls and successfully hit them out of the park!

The staff of JD spent many hours debating and then planning how our agency could meet the current needs of the residents of the Coronado Haskell neighborhood and still comply with the guidelines set by the State of Illinois and the CDC during the stay-at-home orders and as Illinois moves through the phases of reopening. Since it seems it will be quite a while before we will be able to gather together in groups of more than 400, it was decided to postpone LOVE Rockford and Jeremiah CARES until 2021. This decision created a hole in our ability to link residents with needed services. And thus the “Boxes” were born! For the first time, every program that Jeremiah runs came together to fill and deliver 400 boxes with envelopes containing information and contacts for agencies and services in the Rockford area that can help with Covid-related emerging needs. These boxes included face coverings, hand sanitizer, bar soap, toilet paper, dish soap, craft supplies and much-needed food. The JD and LR committee oversaw the project while the neighborhood committee and garden committee delivered and provided input for the box contents and much needed support. With over 50 volunteers, most from the community, we filled and delivered 400 boxes in 3½ hours on Saturday, May 30th. The Rockford Register Star wrote a great article. Two news stations came to report on it and the local NPR affiliate had a story on its website. There may have been more that I missed. In the space of six weeks, a grant was written and the project was completed! Thank you to SecondFirst Church for providing the gymnasium and parking lot to make this happen.

For the month of June, I will include program updates within this report. The work done throughout the month and in the different programs are as follows:

THE MOVE

- We are no longer housed at the Mendelssohn Performing Arts Center. The building was unsafe and it had to be vacated by all. Thank you to Court Street United Methodist Church and Pastor Cal for opening a huge space for us to store our stuff on short notice.
- For the time being, I will be working from home. If there are items needed from CSUMC, we can access them either through Pastor Cal or Jeanine Wang.
- We received donations to pay Two Men and a Truck to do the physical move to CSUMC.

JEREMIAH CARES AND LOVE ROCKFORD

- After many meetings and sleepless nights, the decision was made to postpone these events until 2021. LOVE Rockford is tentatively scheduled for July 24th, 2021. We are still working on a date for Jeremiah CARES.
- How do we meet the needs that LR and JC met during these times of physical distancing? Boxes!!!!

THE GARDEN

- Essentially, the garden is the one program that has been mostly unaffected from the Covid-19 guidelines. With the exception of wearing a mask, our gardeners were able to open the garden and begin working it as usual.
- We received a \$1,200 grant from the Community Action Agency of Boone and Winnebago County to support and improve the garden. This includes updating the irrigation system.
- For the first time, all the beds have been planted before June 1st. This was quite an accomplishment.
- We continue to have neighbors volunteer to work the garden. Thank you to the volunteers from Emmanuel, SecondFirst and Court Street!

COVID CARE BOXES

- In an attempt to meet the immediate needs of the residents of the Coronado Haskell neighborhood, 400 boxes were delivered to every doorstep within its boundaries.
- We received a \$5,000 grant from United Way's Emerging Needs funds, \$1,500 from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois, and \$3,423.40 to cover the remaining costs of the boxes.
- Each box contained – fresh produce and snacks, hand sanitizer, a bar of soap, dish soap, a journal, an envelope with information from the CDC as well as Illinois Employment Services, the insurance marketplace, HomeStart, Prairie State Legal services, health information and mental health contacts and much more. Through some very generous donations, we were able to provide face coverings, crayons, construction paper, activity sheets, bread, 113 boxes of food from NIFB, small toys, toothbrushes, bar soap, toothpaste, encouragement notes, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper and 400+ banana boxes.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

- June 20th is the Great American Clean-up. We will meet at 9 am at the Jubilee Center parking lot if you would like to join us.
- The Neighborhood Safety Night has been postponed until we can gather in large groups again. The applications for the lights have been distributed to the neighborhood.
- A creative placemaking project continues to be developed.

Many thanks to everyone who helped with the move and the boxes. The support from Court Street United Methodist Church, Emmanuel Episcopal Church and SecondFirst Church allows Jeremiah to continue to serve the community during this time. Thank you to the members of those churches and our community partners! These are interesting times and together we are fulfilling our mission!

Volunteers sort and organize COVID Cares Boxes for distribution.



Volunteers from Emmanuel, SecondFirst and Court Street work on the garden.



In an attempt to meet the immediate needs of the residents of the Coronado Haskell neighborhood, 400 boxes were delivered to every doorstep within its boundaries.

