

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

SEPTEMBER 2020

THE TOWER

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL UCC/FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PC(USA)

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace



A WORD FROM PASTOR REBECCA

Rev. Rebecca has been present at City Market on Friday night's to witness the scene and pray peace into the conflict. Here is what she said on Sunday August, 16. The entire sermon can be viewed on our website.

It's possible we are throwing our own prophets in jail in our very own town. And they certainly do not seem to care and keep preaching their same message. I've been at City Market the last two Fridays. And I have to be honest with you, I haven't participated in any of the protests in a long time because I am really annoyed with the protesters, as I'm sure many of you are, too, from multiple perspectives and reasons. We have a lot of work to do in the community in terms of racial equity and justice, like a lot. But yelling F the police into a bullhorn and calling for anarchy over the stability that our police system grants us, denying the sacrifice and love that our good officers give everyday... for me those are conversation stoppers. In fact, it is really not helpful for the Black Lives Matter movement and most large cities have seen the BLM folks move away from those types of sentiments because again, not helpful in the larger scheme of moving our society toward being more free and fair for all people. Also, I'm a downtown creature and I really like my City Market, so anything that hinders downtown progress makes me doubly annoyed.

Knowing that people had been arrested in past weeks, I went down to City Market assuming I would see young people acting a fool, doing stupid stuff, marring the good work that many are doing to move toward racial equity, because of all the reasons I have already listed. And I have to be honest when I got down there, first of all, I got my cookies and my cupcakes from the Gluten Free Girlfriend and the protest was so far away, I could have been blissfully ignorant that anything else was going on. (And I was able to safely social distance). But I moved toward the protest and met some great people. They are angry and yelling their anger into bullhorns, but they were peaceful, not harming anyone. They were chanting, singing and enjoying time together. It was boring actually. The arrests that I saw were because a few were walking in the crosswalks in a square and the traffic couldn't always get through. Charged with felonies, mob action. This last Friday most of the protesters stayed out of the crosswalk and didn't block traffic, though the few who were in the road were joined by retired teachers and college professors. I will not tell you what to think, because I don't know what to think, but I do know that there are two sides of every story. I do know that sometimes we are too quick to judge (I'm too quick to judge). And I am certain that we can both support the police, hold them to high standards of justice and move to racial equality, unlike the polarizing rhetoric and social media memes. I also know that the prophets of the Bible, Old Testament and New, graded on people's nerves, made them uncomfortable, and that it wasn't their responsibility to tell people what to do with the message, it is just their job to deliver the message.



Children are beginning a school year that looks different for many. It was a joy to offer blessings over their backpacks.



NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST REVERSING CLIMATE CHANGE URGENT 'BUT NOT BEYOND US,' UCC LEADERS SAY IN NATIONAL SUMMIT



Emphasizing the burden that climate breakdown places on poor people and people of color, and calling for action now, two United Church of Christ speakers took prominent roles in early sessions of this year's online American Climate Leadership Summit, still underway every Thursday in August.

"We refuse to believe there is no hope, no pathway to a healthy earth and a common bond between all races of people," said the Rev. John Dorhauer, UCC general minister and president, in his opening prayer for the national event. "We accept our responsibility as active participants in the unfolding future of green living and liberation from oppression. We embrace our agency as stewards of your handiwork and crafters of your justice." [Read more: www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) WHY 'PRESBYTERIANS AFFIRM BLACK LIVES MATTER'?



Since the uprising against systemic racism and police violence against people who are Black began at the end of May, Presbyterians across the country have joined in solidarity with their siblings of color in sermons and statements, by joining in peaceful protests, engaging in civic dialogue, and other actions.

While there is broad acceptance in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for most shows of support, one phrase has sparked debate: Black Lives Matter. [Read more: www.presbyterianmission.org](http://www.presbyterianmission.org)

A little bit from Pastor Becky...

August has been a blast! Each Sunday we rode the Rocky Railway. We sang songs, played with sciencey gizmos and learned to Trust Jesus. I had the pleasure each week to spend time with 12 of our kiddos. We even had virtual snowball fights! I am looking forward to spending more time with our kids as Fall Sunday School begins September 13.

Our Cooling Center is wrapping up Sunday, September 6. We had great volunteers and great staff working at the center. We received a lot of donations of water and snacks that were always appreciated.



UPCOMING EVENTS

In-Person WORSHIP OUTSIDE in Front of the Mural Sunday, September 13 (and maybe more if all goes well!)

40% of those who responded to the church survey said they would be interested in an outdoor worship service, so we are doing it! Our Facebook Live virtual worship will still be primary, but if you want to gather, the opportunity is yours. We will place socially distant chairs (about ten feet apart) and masks are required. The row of parking spaces facing the grass will be reserved for those who want to stay in their cars. Children are welcome to bring a blanket and sit down front. We will continue to worship outside for as long as the weather permits... and Rev. Rebecca claims to be pretty hardy.



High School SecondFirst Third Fridays @ the Newgrens Beginning September 18, 6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Calling all high schoolers and friends. Come to the Newgren/White Newgren abode for a social distanced hot dog roast, smores, Jesus stories, and storytelling. We'll keep it short to keep it distanced. We'll stay outside to stay COVID safe, and we'll see how long into the Fall/Winter we can go! The February gathering might be really short, but we are doing it! Masks required. Looking forward to connecting with you all. For more information call/text Rev. Rebecca on her cell phone (see directory for number).

Stories of the Bible and the Stories of Our Lives Led by Rev. Rebecca on ZOOM

Tuesdays at 12:00 p.m. beginning September 8

The stories of the Bible are full of pain and joy, suffering and triumph. In some ways they mirror our own stories and in other ways they seem distant and far away. Using the Narrative Lectionary text for the coming Sunday, we will study the passage and use it to reflect on our own lives. All are welcome. No Bible experience necessary. (Call the office if you need help with Zoom). Register with Debbie in the office to receive the Zoom link. Questions? rebecca@secondfirst.org

Jubilee Soup Kitchen

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

It will be Labor Day weekend so perhaps you have time and energy to help prepare lunches for the Neighborhood Saturday Soup Kitchen at the Jubilee Center? Mark your calendar now and give Jean Herro a call. We will be making sack lunches again so 3-5 helpers will suffice. Thanks! Marge Maynard

Special UCC and PCUSA Offering Sunday, October 4

Opportunity for Giving: Neighbors in Need/Peace and Global Witness Offering. This month we receive a denominational support offering for both the UCC and the PCUSA. Neighbors in Need (NIN) supports UCC ministries of justice and compassion throughout our country: the Council for American Indian Ministry, and Justice and Witness Ministries. NIN funds projects that address systemic injustice. Peace and Global Witness (PGW) supports PCUSA programs in justice and reconciliation in cultures of violence, both locally and world-wide. Your support for this vital work is greatly appreciated. Checks can be sent to the church.

FOCUSING ON HYMNS

by Paul Laprade

The Old Testament tells stories of the people of Zion and angelic choirs singing praise. We often, especially around Christmas, imagine that these choirs would have sounded like ours, perhaps singing "Angels We Have Heard on High" or "A Mighty Fortress". The rise of multi-lined music seems to have occurred much later than the time of the Old Testament, as it first becomes notated and described in treatises from the 9th century. By that time, much choir music likely sounded like a drone or a like parallel imitation of a well-known melody or chant, sung simultaneously with the chant itself. It was not until Martin Luther's own reforms of church liturgy were adopted that the modern 'come all and sing' chorale would encourage and entice congregants to sing in church.

In the next few months, I will investigate not the origin of hymns, but rather the background of the hymns we sing in our church. And, as a means to help us better understand the 'why' and 'how' of some of this music. I will begin by focusing on spirituals and some gospel music. While much of the music we sing is heavily white and Protestant in its origin or influences, we do sing spirituals; it is important that we understand what underlies them in both immediate content but also in background if we are to sing these beautiful works with responsibility and sensitivity. I look forward to this journey with you.

Paul's Hymn Stories (#1): "Standing in the Need of Prayer"

This short article marks the beginning of a sporadic series of articles about the hymns we sing and value. Music is the product of an inner life that is expressed through sound. This series will begin to explore that inner life with examinations of several familiar spirituals from the rich African American tradition.

Call and response is the term given to a specific category of music that emanated from the slave experience. The "call" is an initial phrase of music, and the "response" is either a repetition of that phrase or an appropriate answer to the initial phrase. Responses were often sung by a group of people, responding to the call of a soloist or several alternating soloists. What is so engaging about the call and response form is that the call--unlike the printed version in our hymnals--was improvised. A leader would sing one's own choice of words, and the rest of the community would intone the response. Standing in the Need of Prayer is an example of this style of music, with a common response, seen in italics below:

Call: *Not my ___(add your words here)_____*

Response: *(I'm) standing in the need of prayer!*

In its original form, this song would have encouraged the inclusion of any number of people in the blank space, for example: (call) "not my...sister or my brother or my master Lord" with the response indicating that the singer (or singers) is (are) the person who need the prayer. The leader or caller could change the names, and the hymn is infinitely expandable. It was even possible for the role of the call to be passed from one soloist to another. This spiritual is the embodiment of an intensely personal and direct dialogue between the singer and God.

This hymn is also an example of a common category of spiritual, the spiritual of abandonment. This hymn, as with others in this category, addressed the psychological need for communal support during a time when one feels left behind or even ignored. It would likely have been sung during slave work; it has been long known to music professionals that the 'right way' to identify the tempo of many spirituals is to take the time to 'feel' the tempo of the work that might have been taking place. I have, as others have, tried to engage in heavy activity with an ax or shovel simply to see if a steady tempo of work can inform me about its tempo. It is always important to explore the context in which music is emanated to the extent that such a context can be researched or explored. (Another hymn of abandonment, I Want Jesus to Walk with Me, similarly expresses the need for help and company through struggles.)

To some, Standing in the Need of Prayer can appear to be self-centric and almost narcissistic in its focus on "it's me". I am concerned about this interpretation, for it is based on a fundamental misunderstanding. In African culture of the time, "I" was equivalent to "we". The individual was considered equally responsible for the well-being of the whole community rather than simply for oneself. This song indicates that prayer is needed and to be sought out. While hymnals need to standardize this for congregational singing, wouldn't it be interesting if we one day asked congregant soloists to insert their own examples in a call? Think about it. Post-COVID congregational singing could include a solo or two from the congregation during these hymns.



Please join us every Sunday for 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

CROP HUNGER WALK GOES VIRTUAL

Walk. Give. Change the world.



[T-Shirt Logo]

This year the Rockford Area CROP Hunger Walk will be a virtual one. In past years many who were unable to attend the event walked in spirit. This year everyone will be a spirit walker in our virtual CROP Hunger Walk. For the first time in two decades we will not gather at the Riverfront Museum Park on the third Sunday in October. Because of the Covid-19 virus October 18th will be devoted to your personal or small group walks or rides around your local community. You are encouraged to think outside the box of ways to demonstrate that SecondFirst Church is a Community Responding to Over Poverty, that is, a CROP community.

You are urged to seek donations by visiting Rockford's website: crophungerwalk.org/rockfordil/

Scroll down the page to find SecondFirst Church of Rockford. Follow directions for joining the team and reaching out to your family and friends. Last year our congregation raised \$7,574, of which \$1,894.50 went to the Rock River Valley Pantry Coalition. The rest has been feeding people through Church World Service. Worldwide hunger has never been greater than now because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, when you register to walk order your free t-shirt with our unique logo by emailing David Jones davidj6226@aol.com. Ask for your size from S, M, L, XL, XXL.

STRONGHOLD CENTER FUND RAISING CHALLENGE

The Stronghold Center, known for its amazing Summer Camp, has experienced over 200k of lost revenue due to COVID-19. Navigating the financial landscape has created opportunities for you and others to get involved. They have launched a new Fund Raising Challenge and are asking for our help. Visit their website to learn more and donate to this important cause: www.strongholdcenter.org



TWO WAY TRAFFIC ON CHURCH AND MAIN STREET

by David Noel

The City of Rockford has retained planning, traffic engineering and design engineering consultants to study two-way traffic on Church and Main Street. The city desires to improve vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian travel into and through the downtown area. The SecondFirst Church Board of Trustees submitted comments to the city and the consultants in the spring. The church concerns were the need to retain loading on the west side of Church Street for the dining room, Gordon Chapel and Emerson Hall. Also, the Trustees were concerned of the effect of proposed southbound Church Street (IL Route 2) on the south parking lot. Will a right turn lane onto Jefferson St. be required?

In July the consultants submitted a recommendation to the city and community that Main St, Napoleon St, Church St, Cedar St and S Main St be a two-way street and the alignment for Illinois Route 2 in the downtown. In the 300 block of Church Street parking would remain on both sides of the street. Bicycle lanes are proposed on Main St. The major concern of the church, loading and parking on Church St, is recommended to be retained.

The city and consultants will submit the recommendations to IDOT for review and approval prior to proceeding with final design engineering. The intersection design of Church and Jefferson St will be part of the IDOT review. Improvements are several years away, and will be based upon IDOT approved plans and city improvement priorities.

FROM THE MODERATOR ANN STITES

Hello, Church Family! It is such a joy and blessing to see many of you on Zoom or read your comments during our Facebook Live worship services.

Many thanks to Jim Delmore and so many others who led the congregation this past year. There were countless challenges that were handled with grace and wisdom. This has been quite a summer and I hope that all of you are doing well as you safely distance yourselves from others, wear masks, and wash your hands constantly. Even though our building has been closed with a few exceptions, we continue to serve our community in many ways.

Serious Soup has begun again with some modifications. We have had two meditations at the mural since it was installed. Sunday School was in a VBS format during August and Pastor Becky led the children in an adventurous journey. Worship has been offered in a remote format and there have been many folks in attendance. Virtual cocktail hour was a rousing success! We worked with many community partners to open a cooling center in a ridiculously short period of time. The ministry teams are meeting virtually and continuing their good work.

Many of my pastor friends remind me that the church is really the people, not the building and I truly believe that we have proven that to be true. May we all continue to be the church in these difficult times and be blessed by God's grace.

KFACT SUMMARY FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER

By Shamika Williams

KFACT has been focusing on gearing up for the new way of doing life and mentoring for girls in the Lady All Stars Mentoring Program! COVID-19 pandemic has changed so many lives and we recognize this life altering change and will be doing the following for the month of September at KFACT!

Hosting a virtual program kickoff online for all mentees and to share updates about programming.

Facilitating one-on-one mentor sessions at KFACT by appointment.



Assata will be attending Rust College in Mississippi to major in Education.

Hosting small groups of 10 girls for tutoring and college prep during this remote learning opportunity for Rockford Public Schools and Lutheran High School students who are in our mentoring program. The groups are scheduled tentatively for Tuesday and Thursday nights!

We also have new faces at KFACT this year as part of KFACT's staff. Tara Williams Dickson will be the new Educational Director and replacing Rachel Robinson. We also have Fabbie Williams back from Atlanta who will be conducting the FIT Girls program and teaching dance classes this fall!

If you need to reach anyone at KFACT please email us at info@k-fact.org or reach us by phone at (815) 708-8430 Tuesday-Friday 10:00 am-3:00 pm.

We have two new college girls leaving for school this week! COVID-19 hasn't stopped the importance of education for KFACT girls and we are so proud of them. Both girls have unfortunately lost their mother's. Please help us congratulate Kayla and Assata as they transition from high school to college life! Empowering Girls!

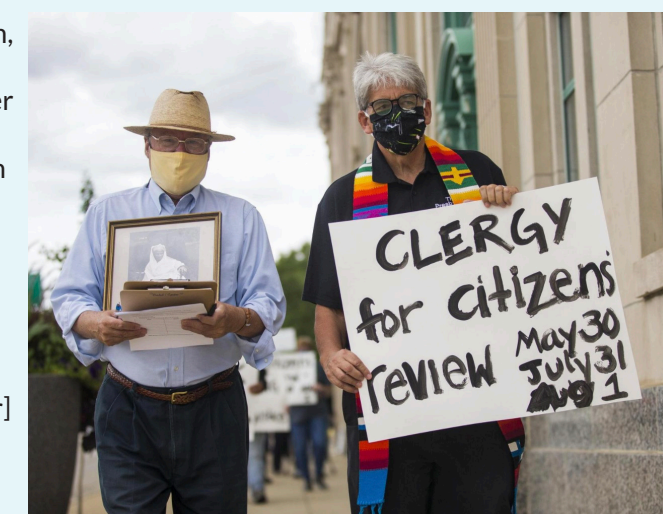


Kayla will be attending University of Illinois Springfield to major in Nursing.



“The Rev. Rebecca White Newgren, pastor of SecondFirst Church, helped organize Wednesday's prayer march by Rockford-area clergy around City Hall. They prayer march was intended to show support for the NAACP and Eliminate Racism 815 and to call for a Community Accountability Board to review violent encounters between residents and law enforcement.”

[Scott P. Yates/Rockford Register Star] www.rrstar.com/news/20200805/clergy-march-for-police-accountability-board



THIS IS YOUR SANCTUARY

Call Debbie in the office to reserve a time to “be still and know that I am God.” (815)963-8431

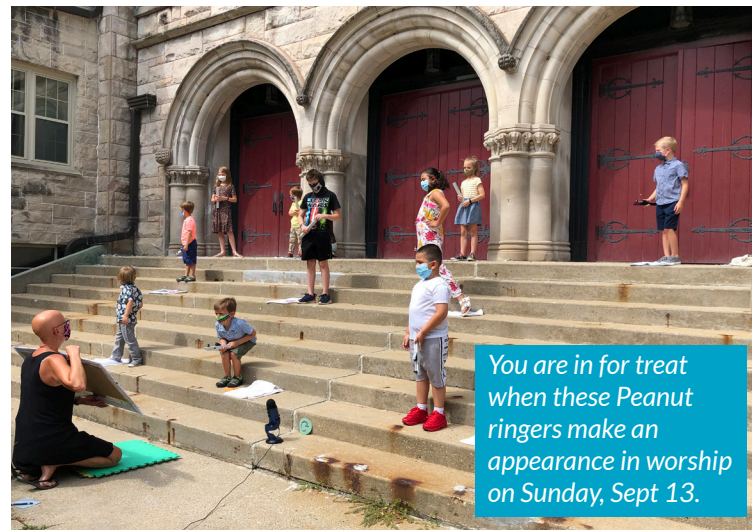


OUTDOOR MINISTRIES FUNDRAISER

Please consider a monetary gift to help Outdoor Ministries past this “exceptional” year where they find the loss of campers and events have stressed their financial resources. Your gift is not “just” a donation, it is a prayerful statement to help change someone's life. You can donate directly at this link: <https://outdoorministries.campbraingiving.com/>



The golden rays of a setting sun illuminated the community mural on Thursday, August 20 during Meditations at the Mural.



You are in for treat when these Peanut ringers make an appearance in worship on Sunday, Sept 13.



Volunteers work hard to weed and maintain the grounds of the church. We thank them for their service and dedication.



More scenes from the prayer march that took place on Wednesday, August 5. [Photos from Rockford Register Star]



Watch the mural unveiling: www.secondfirst.org/rockford-community-mural-unveiling-naming-ceremony/



SERIOUS SOUP "THINGS LOOK A BIT DIFFERENT"

We are back in business serving our guests a warm meal each Monday. Due to the pandemic we are running a bit different. We have a small contingency that works in the kitchen. Warm lunches are placed in Chinese food containers. A warm meal, water, dessert and chips are bagged up and passed out through the dining room door. We keep meals warm and temperatures are taken until served. Tables are set up outside for a few guests (socially distanced) to sit and eat if they wish. We have some workers who set up and take down the tables and help bag the lunches. We served 42 guests on Monday, August 17 and the numbers are going up. Even though we are called Serious Soup, we are NOT serving soup yet. Hopefully when we can have guests back in the building, we can offer soup again. Our guests miss the soup the most!

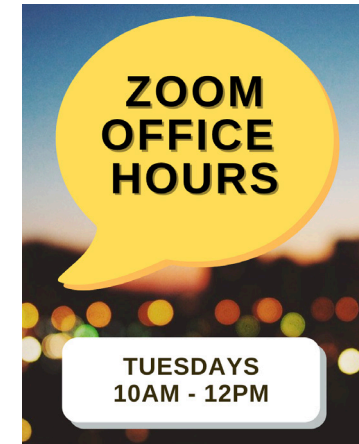
TITO'S ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL AND ORDINATION DATES

Our friend, colleague and pastor, Tito Cevallos is preparing for his ordination. Tito's ecclesiastical council is Sunday September 13 at 3pm via Zoom. His ordination will be the following week Sunday September 20 via Zoom also at 3pm. We hope you save the times and dates and the Zoom invite and more information will be following soon.



PASTOR BECKY ERBE'S ZOOM VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS

Office Hours will be Tuesday mornings from 10:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. beginning Tuesday, September 8. If you want to pray, talk about something particular or chat about the weather, call the office 815-963-8431 to set up a time and receive the Zoom invite.



A behind-the-scenes look at what goes in to bringing you our virtual service each Sunday morning. It's a team effort!

