

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)
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Rockford, Illinois

OCTOBER 2020

THE TOWER

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL UCC/FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PC(USA)

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace



THREE GREAT LOVES

The theme of this year's Stewardship presentations is "Three Great Loves." It engages all of us in faith-inspired work for a



more just world. Together, we change lives. This theme reflects the deep purpose, mission, and vision of our Christian movement. Our purpose arises from Jesus' greatest commandment: we will love the Lord our God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength; and our neighbor as ourselves.

Every congregation names its mission slightly differently, but we all share a common mission: united by the Holy Spirit and inspired by God's grace, we love all, welcome all, and seek justice for all. Our mission as disciples of Christ points toward a shared vision: a just world for all.

Many of us became church members because of this sense of purpose, mission, and vision. But we need to ensure we do more than speak words. We make our commitment real by embracing Three Great Loves:

- The Love of Neighbor
- The Love of Children
- The Love of Creation

Beginning October 25th leaders in your congregation will share stories of the ways our congregation and our wider movement live out these Three Great Loves. And then you will be asked to make a financial commitment to the work of our congregation and our wider United Church of Christ and Presbyterian USA affiliates.

We believe an entire Christian movement that is willing to engage in an extended time of mission to serve these "Three Great Loves" can change the world. We know that our part in this mission matters - no matter where we live or what size is our community.

Friends, the world needs our great love. Together, our love for the world can transform it.

Dave Jones, *Stewardship Chair*



IN-PERSON WORSHIP OUTSIDE IN FRONT OF THE MURAL UNTIL WE FREEZE

Outdoor worship is going 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.



NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST UCC OFFICERS SUPPORT CALL FOR JUSTICE FOR BREONNA TAYLOR



After a Louisville grand jury decided not to charge any police officers in the killing of Breonna Taylor, indicting one former detective instead on three counts of "wanton endangerment" for firing shots into her home, the national leaders of the United Church of Christ released this statement of support for the continued call for justice.

We, the Elected Officers of the United Church of Christ, write to affirm our support for the leaders and clergy of the Louisville Churches and the Indiana Kentucky Conference as you call for justice for Breonna Taylor.

Our hearts are broken as we acknowledge the grief and immeasurable pain of all who knew and loved Breonna Taylor. Her light was extinguished too quickly and with violence. We pray for all who continue to love her and celebrate her life. We too will continue to hold her memory and say her name: Breonna Taylor! [Read more: www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) IN A FRANK EXCHANGE, PASTORS DISCUSS THE PAIN AND TRAUMA OF THE TWIN PANDEMICS



COVID-19 and racial disparities are difficult enough alone. Taken together, they're brutal.

A nearly hour-long plenary to cap the second week of the Intercultural Transformation Workshops focused on the pain and

trauma clergy and lay people alike have been carrying for the past six months during the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice, including the killings of African Americans at the hands of police and Wednesday's grand jury decision on the role of police in the killing of Breonna Taylor of Louisville, Kentucky, on March 13 in her apartment. [Read more: www.presbyterianmission.org](http://www.presbyterianmission.org)

WE ARE GROWING AGAIN!!

by Becky Erbe

When COVID-19 hit we had to cancel Serious Soup. After careful planning we opened back up in August. We serve warm lunches out the dining room door. This past week we served 56 guests. It is so good to see old friends who come to dine with us.

Thank you to those who serve and volunteer each week. Donations are requested. We are accepting donations of ladies underwear in any size for our Resource Closet. Feel free to drop them off at the South Narthex door.



JEREMIAH DEVELOPMENT

As fall quickly approaches, it's a good time to take stock of the successes of the summer. What a summer it has been! Despite the stay at home orders and the inability to gather in a meaningful way, Jeremiah has managed to quickly "pivot" and deliver the services we have in the past in a new, creative way.

- Our COVID Care boxes in May had much of the same educational information in them that would have been received at a LOVE Rockford or Jeremiah CARES event.
- The garden rebounded nicely and is once again providing food and education to those who pass through it.
- Over 300 newsletters continue to be delivered on each doorstep in the neighborhood with articles pertinent to the needs of the residents from various agencies, like Prairie Street Legal and HomeStart. There is a "Meet Your Neighbor" section that highlights a neighbor each month as well as a garden update.
- A wonderful woman donated 10 kid-friendly sprinklers in honor of her parents. They were distributed to families that were identified by our neighborhood liaison.
- In partnership with the City of Rockford Community Action Agency and the Coronado Haskell Neighborhood Association, we have begun lighting the night. Tyler, Scott, and Greg have installed 30 lights in August. Off duty officers with the Rockford Police Department will be installing more lights in September. If you'd like to assist with this project, contact Jeanine Wang jeanine@jeremiahdevelopment.org.
- We developed new partnerships with St. Paul's Resurrection church in the neighborhood and Oak Street Health.
- We were the recipient of the 81Thrive capacity building grant! This grant not only has a cash component, but even more importantly it provides a team of experienced professionals to work with our board as we continue the growth begun last fall!

Our neighborhood involvement continues to grow as the neighbors who became a part of JD reach out to their neighbors and spread the word about the work being done!

Follow us on our Facebook page for more updates! <https://www.facebook.com/JeremiahDevelopment/>



KFACT

Well it's officially back to school for the Lady All Star mentees! This new normal of remote learning do to COVID-19 has been extremely challenging for many students with remote learning and limited access to adult guidance and support, so KFACT had decided to serve as a learning pod for girls who desperately need direct academic guidance and support this during the school day from 10:00am-3:00pm at KFACT. We are offering limited transportation and light snacks! If you would like to help out academic programming by donating a snack, juices, water or perhaps offering some tutoring, please email us at info@k-fact.org.

PAUL'S HYMN STORIES (#2)

"Lord I Want to be a Christian" (#729, Glory to God hymnal)

We continue our series on hymns with *Lord, I Want to be a Christian*. As with *Standing in the Need of Prayer* (last month's hymn) this hymn is externally expandable: Lord, I Want to be _____ in my heart. As with the previous hymn, it is also a good example of call and response, yet the response is much shorter: leader/soloist - "In my heart" and response - "in my heart". I can imagine 'like Jesus', 'more holy', 'more patient', 'more loving' (etc.) used as the changeable text, but as always, congregational singing in traditions such as ours leads compilers of hymnals to choose a set, board-approved texts to fill the lacuna. As I suggested last month, perhaps one day we could ask congregant soloists to insert their own examples—do you think this would work?

A deeper understanding of this hymn is found in texts from historical editions that still exist today. A final verse, found in one hymnal, has the following line: "I don't want to be like Judas in-a my heart". This spiritual, like many others, can be seen through the lens of protest. "In my heart" likely referred to slave owners, whose actions clearly indicated that despite repeatedly citing the power and saving compassion of Christ, the Word had obviously not penetrated their hearts. In this way, this spiritual seeks power against hypocrisy. Slave owners often encouraged preachers to emphasize particular topics when speaking to slaves, yet it was clear that the brutal treatment they sanctioned did not align with what they professed. This hymn is a request for a life led with integrity. As in the case of *Standing in the Need of Prayer*, this hymn uses "I" as the expression of "we". As we learned last month, this old African philosophy acknowledged the individual's responsibility for the welfare of the entire community.

A NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT, ANDY NEWGREN



The passing of Ruth Bader Ginsburg affords us the opportunity to reflect on justice and wrestle with the various understandings of justice that exist in our society. In one class I teach, I ask students to reflect on authority, name its positive and negative manifestations, and collectively write a definition for justice. This activity is intentionally trying as some focus on issues of criminal justice, others on justice as meted out retribution, and others on contemporary frameworks of social justice. Bader Ginsburg had the words "Justice, justice you shall pursue," on her office wall. But knowing exactly what that means can be tricky.

These words come from Deuteronomy and are central and vital for the establishment of Israel. Hebrew Bible scholars have long pointed out how Deuteronomy elevates human dignity and creates a compelling vision for what is possible. It does not simply dictate procedures for ethical living or ground its basis on humanitarian ideals. The Deuteronomic call to justice was exclusively situated on the people of Israel being the people of God. Put another way, the measure of Israel's faith directly correlated to the well being of the poor and marginalized.

Bader Ginsburg stated that her Jewish identity enabled her to be "more empathetic to other people who are not insiders, who are outsiders." Deuteronomy was fiercely concerned about the plight of outsiders, such as the poor, the orphaned, the widowed, and the alien. The call to action was not charity, not intended to help out somebody down on their luck, but to be a, and perhaps the, defining characteristic of the community. It's a radical vision. Ruth Bader Ginsburg wasn't perfect, and there are reasonable arguments that reveal she wasn't a champion for all outsiders. We, of course, aren't perfect either, but keeping the Deuteronomic directive in mind is one way to better grasp the mystery of our faith and continue to press for the radical inclusion laid out in Deuteronomy.



Please join us every Sunday at 10am on Facebook!

We will continue to 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

HAVE YOU MADE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THIS YEAR'S CROP HUNGER WALK YET?



Walk. Give. Change the world.

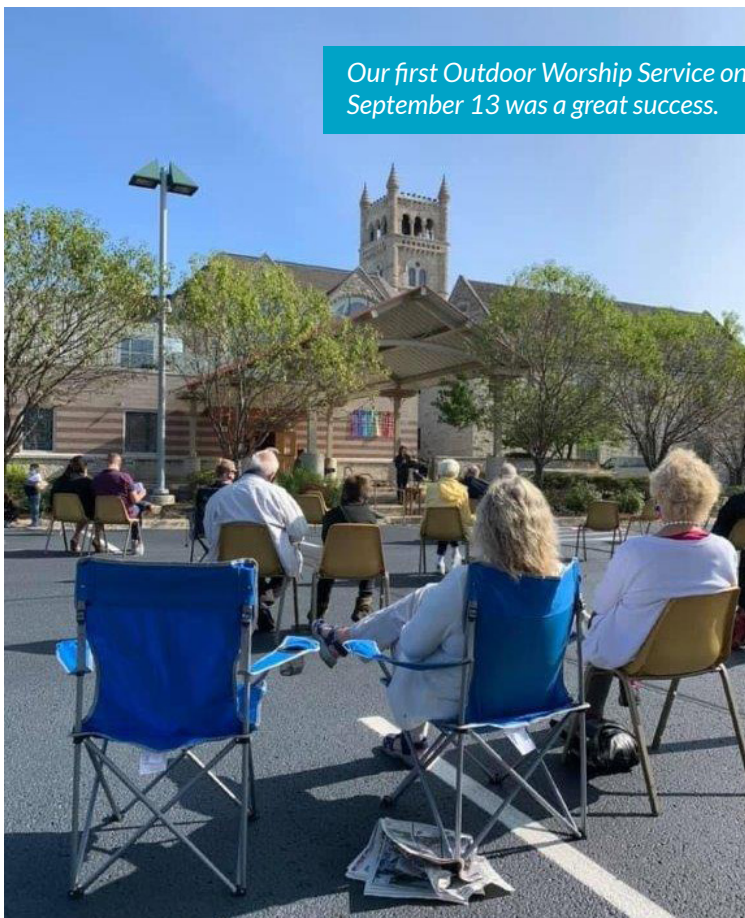
Because of the first pandemic in 100 years it is safe to say the need has never been this great for your contribution. The daily newspapers, broadcasts, and social media provide constant reminders of why this is true.

The Walk, like congregational worship, is virtual this year making it critical to give on Rockford's website. It is also your way to register as well and reach out to family and friends for their contributions. Visit: crophungerwalk.org/rockfordil/

Please give now to CROP Hunger Walk

Make your donation with a credit card or write a check to **Church World Service** and send it with our church name to Treasurer Jan Marlow, 3224 Ruth St. Rockford, 61103. Thank you!

Our first Outdoor Worship Service on September 13 was a great success.



FROM OUR 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.

CHURCH is not
A BUILDING YOU GO TO,
IT IS a family YOU BELONG TO

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.

GOVERNING COUNCIL

Hello, Church Family! I hope all of you are staying safe and busy during these interesting times.

Our congregation continues to serve our neighbors in many ways. Jim Delmore reminded me that we have a table on the lawn where people can either drop off or pick up fresh vegetables and fruit. This ministry is critical at any time, but more so when there is high unemployment and a lack of opportunities for work.

The council met virtually in August and discussed the formation of the ad hoc Personnel Committee. This team has begun to meet and will first be reviewing our Personnel Handbook in order to ensure that it is complete, accurate, and up to date. There was discussion about the request by the YMCA to use the building for remote learning on days when school is not in session. Since this has been determined to be a trustee issue, Felipe Campa can share more details in the future.

Our first outdoor worship was truly lovely and what many of us needed. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate so that we can safely gather before the cold weather arrives.

Peace,
Ann

THE DEACONS TEAM WILL BE HOSTING A MONTHLY HAPPY HOUR

It will be the first Thursday of each month from 6:30-7:30 pm starting October 1. Have your beverage of choice in hand and join us via Zoom to share stories and laughs. Zoom Invite

VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS
Tuesdays & Thursdays: 10am - Noon

VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS

Rev. Rebecca White Newgren's Zoom Virtual Office Hours

- Thursdays from 10:00 am - Noon

Pastor Becky Erbe's Zoom Virtual Office Hours

- Tuesdays from 10:00 am - Noon

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.

SERIOUS SOUP

Monday's 11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Serious Soup has begun with some changes. A few tables will be set up outside for guests to sit as they eat. Lunches will be warm to-go bag lunches. Contact: becky.erbe@secondfirst.org

FILM SERIES ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Are you interested in participating in a film series exploring racial discrimination in the United States? Great! But we need to know more during this period when we're unable to physically gather together. Please complete the survey below if you are interested in watching films and participating in a discussion afterward. Contact Andy Newgren with any questions. Survey: <https://forms.gle/TUDwW7QtuajJt2jr8>

OCTOBER COFFEE CLASS

Coffee Class continues to gather weekly on Zoom. Below is the October lineup:

- October 4: Haiti Update led by James Casimir & Roger Greenlaw
- October 11: Thin Places led by Steve Williams
- October 18: Dorothy Day led by Andy Newgren
- October 25: Dialogue: Conversations on Current Events (topic TBD)

Contact Andy Newgren with questions or to receive the Zoom invite link.

YOUTH SECONDFIRST THIRD FRIDAYS AT THE NEWGREN'S

October 16, 6-8 p.m., Middle School and High School welcome! Pizza and an Outdoor Movie...social distance style, masks required. Bring a sleeping bag (or other warm gear), a lawn chair and a friend. Text Rev. Rebecca with your favorite (and age appropriate!) Halloween themed movie, most votes wins. Popcorn and Halloween candy will be plenty.

UPDATE ON "APPLES FOR EDUCATION"

This past week Second First Church resumed delivering apples to Haskell. The staff and kids at Haskell are very happy that we are able to continue this program and so are we!

Apples are now delivered in a contact free fashion at a time when no kids and few staff are on sight. So, for the time being the program will have a slightly different face than before the Covid-19 virus.

Thanks also to all who have participated by delivering apples (I hope one day soon to call on you again), for providing apples or donating money and for all the prayers that have been said for this mission.

There still is a need to fund this program so if you would like to donate please send your check to church and designate it for the "Apples for Education" program. Any size donation is welcome. Please contact me, Holly Beeman, for any questions or comments.

LAST JUBILEE SOUP KITCHEN FOR 2020

Saturday, November 21, 10:00 am

Do you have time and energy to help prepare To-Go lunches for the Neighborhood? On Saturday, November 21, we have the Soup Kitchen at the Jubilee Center. Mark your calendar now. Marge will coordinate and we need 2 people to help at 10:00 am and 2 at 10:30 am. We will be preparing To-Go lunches that will center on beef stew. Questions? Contact: Marge Maynard

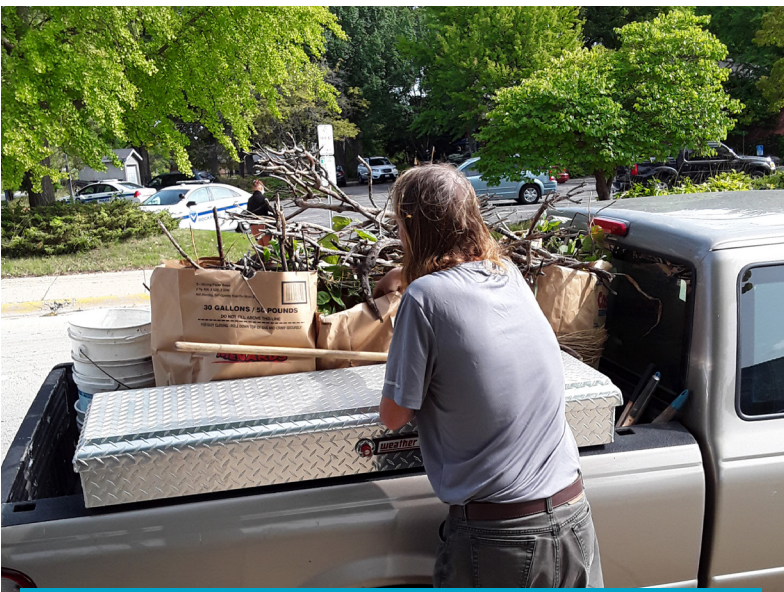


ROCK RIVER VALLEY FOOD PANTRY DRIVE-BY DRIVE

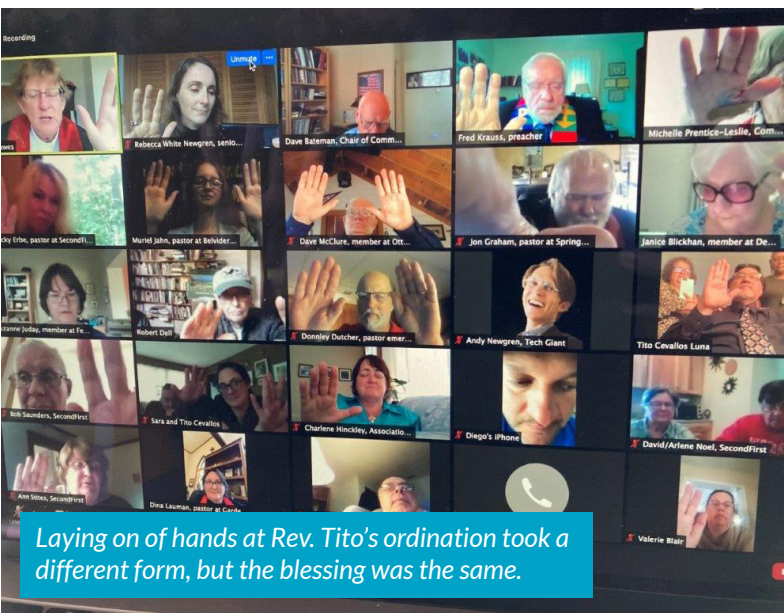
Sound confusing? It's not! On Sundays after worship, whether you participate in person or virtually, the Pantry Bin will be under the portico waiting for your donation. Any and all food items are welcome but we'd like to encourage you to bring breakfast items, which are in great need. We will be collecting through October 18. You can also shop Amazon and have your items shipped to the church! Thank you for your generosity in these challenging times. Questions? Contact: Marge Maynard, Mission Team Chair

OPPORTUNITY FROM THE MISSION TEAM

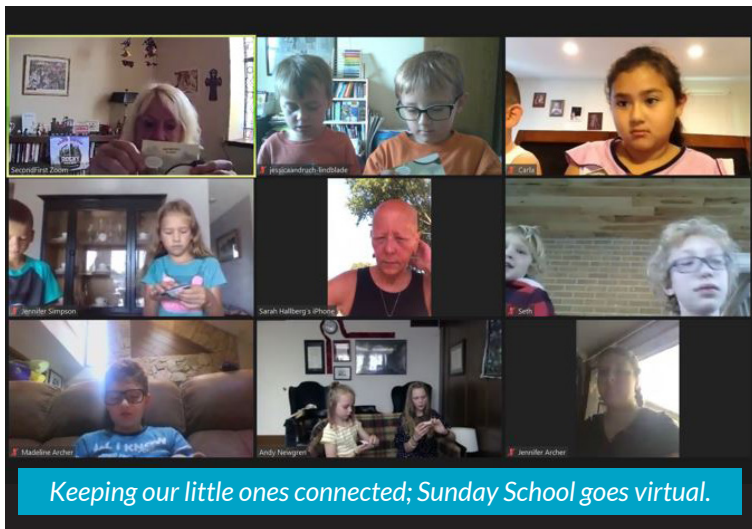
At the September meeting, the team agreed unanimously to offer all of you the chance to support Eliminate Racism 815's petition to recommend that the City of Rockford establish a Community Accountability Board (CAB). The goal of the CAB is to strengthen the relationship between community and police and improve accountability. We want Rockford's police force to be a model of effective community policing. The Mission Team asks you to prayerfully consider this petition. More information and the petition can be obtained at www.er815.org and you can contact Marge Maynard, Missions Team chair, as well.



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



Laying on of hands at Rev. Tito's ordination took a different form, but the blessing was the same.



Keeping our little ones connected; Sunday School goes virtual.



Behind the scenes for Outdoor/Online Worship, Sunday, September 27.



Our congregation gathers for Outdoor Worship on September 20 in front of the Community Mural.



UPDATE FROM SAUT-D'EAU, HAITI

BACK TO SCHOOL FOR THE CHILDREN OF SAUT-D'EAU, HAITI

We are happy to hear from James Casimir with the up to date news about our friends in Haiti. The Pandemic has brought changes to the entire world including Rockford, Illinois and Saut-d'EAU, Haiti. Last year our Church provided funds to send 52 Haitian children to school for a year in Saut-d'EAU. The academic year was half completed when the Covid-19 guidelines forced the Haitian schools to close with 4 months of the school year incomplete. The schools of Saut-d'EAU have now reopened and the students are completing the months missed during the closure.

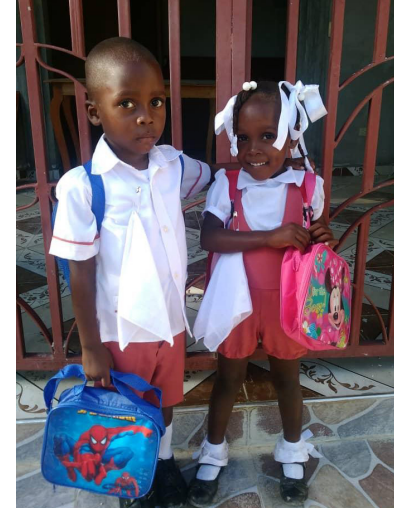
The new school year begins October 1, 2020! We would like to once again send tuition for the children we sponsor in Haiti so they may continue on in their education. Sadly we lost one of our children who died this year, we send our sympathies to the family and the community of Saut-d'EAU. Three new children have been added which brings our total to 54 children this year.

The cost of school tuition for each child is \$250.00 for an entire year. This amount provides: Tuition, Back Pack, Lunch, School Uniform and all school supplies. This year we have 54 students so we need \$250 X 54= \$13,500 to send each of our sponsored children to school.

The Mission Ministry Team has offered to donate \$1.00 for every \$2.00 we raise. Thank you Mission Team. If you would like to contribute to our Saut-d'EAU, Haiti Education fund you may send a contribution to the SecondFirst Church office with a memo line to the Haiti Education Fund.

This is wonderful teamwork our SecondFirst Church does with the Casimir family, the Pouky Board Members and the Haiti Interest Group. A big thank you to all involved.

If you would like to join our Haiti Interest Group at SecondFirst Church or have questions about this outreach program please contact Roger or Carolyn Greenlaw. Help us as we spread God's Grace in downtown Rockford and beyond....all the way to Saut-d'EAU, Haiti.



HAITI INTEREST GROUP AT SECONDFIRST CHURCH

The James Casimir family, natives of Haiti and members of our church were unable to make their annual summer trip to Haiti this year due to Covid-19. In February James made an emergency trip to Saut-d'EAU to join the search for his lost brother who suffered from dementia. After an unsuccessful search, James was stranded, unable to return to the USA as flights were cancelled from Port-O-Prince. He was able to return to Rockford last month.

During the 6 months in Haiti he made the best of the situation. James went to work on new projects while his family carried on here in Rockford. These are the highlights of his work:



- Powerlines were lengthened to reach his home and neighborhood to supply needed power for projects in the future.
- Garbage and trash pickup do not exist in Saut-d'EAU. James organized a group of boys, purchased 6 wheel barrows and 12 shovels with dollars left over from 2019 SecondFirst Church fundraisers. The boys use the wheelbarrows and shovels to clear the streets and gutters on a regular basis now and wheel the trash to a dump.
- James supervised the planting of 5 acres of land. Neighbors worked the land with tools and seeds from SecondFirst Church, and received a major share of the crops. A bountiful harvest continued throughout the spring, summer and into fall, consisting of rice, corn, beans, squash, sweet potatoes, and fruit.
- It takes 20 people cutting rice, 3 people beating rice to loosen the grains, and 5 people to clean and bag the rice.



The Haiti Interest Group at SecondFirst Church was formed 3 years ago to support the people of Saut-d'EAU. Our congregation has provided 1400 tools and seeds to 1100 people, 6 hospital beds to the local hospital, school tuition and supplies for 52 children, along with wheelbarrows and shovels for a boy's neighborhood garbage collection team. Our focus this fall 2020 is providing financial support for 54 children to return to school in October. Roger Greenlaw: Cell 815-262-1776