

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)
318 N. Church Street, Rockford IL 61101
(815)963-8431
www.secondfirst.org
www.facebook.com/secondfirstchurch/

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Organization US
Postage PAID
Permit No. 3734
Rockford, Illinois

DECEMBER 2020

THE TOWER

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL UCC/FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PC(USA)

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace



FROM REV. REBECCA WHITE NEWGREN

Hello Church,

We are about to embark on the strangest Advent and Christmas season we have ever known in our lifetime. Even worship is digital! I would not have believed you last year if you said that we would worship digitally for Christmas Eve this year. But we are, and like everything in 2020, we will make

the most of it. I'm excited about the line-up of music and messages and am certain God will use it to God's glory. In order to enjoy our glorious sanctuary dressed to the nines in Christmas adornments, please sign up for a time for our prayer and worship stations that week.

Before we get to Christmas, we will wait in the season of Advent; a waiting that will take on new meaning this year as we wait for the end of Covid, wait for a vaccine, wait for political transition. Our sermons in advent will take the form of a fireside chat. Pastor Becky and I will be coming to you from our living rooms to yours.

Church, thank you for sending in your pledge cards. As we dream for 2021, we will need to be as creative as ever, and your time, talent and treasures will set the course for what we do together. God has blessed us and will continue to do so.

I am grateful to be your pastor. Please reach out if you need anything.

Peace to you,
Rebecca



CHRISTMAS PRAYER STATIONS December 21 - 23

Times varied and spaced apart

Missing the sanctuary this Christmas Eve? Sign-up for your time to see the decorations and pray through the stations. Those who have come into the sanctuary after a time away have been stunned by its power to bring us before God. Come enjoy the decorations, music and be invited into prayer, confession and grace.

Email debbie.wise@secondfirst.org or call the church office 815-963-8431. Masks and hand sanitizer required and offered at the door.

NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST UCC PASTOR: WE NEED ADVENT MORE THAN EVER



I'll be honest; I'm in kind of a "place" right now. I'm not really in the mood to be perky about Christmas. Maybe I should pretend so that you will feel better. Maybe I should smile and be pastoral to lift you all. I put on Christmas music, but it's not really doing the trick. This year has been

hard ... for all of us. We opened up to have people in worship only to close again five weeks later. We have been so faithful, and everyone has done so very much to make our church thrive. And we have. It's really been amazing. We truly took lemons of 2020 and made something beautiful. I am so very grateful to you all and to God, I really am. But like you, I am just getting emotionally fatigued by the distance, the masks, the fear, the everything that 2020 has been.

Read more: www.ucc.org

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) A NEW TRADITION AMID BOTH JOY AND SORROW



After seeing the latest edition of Everyday God-Talk, the Rev. Dr. David Gambrell, associate for Worship in the Office of Theology and Worship, was filled with an

overwhelming sense of gratitude and rejoicing. "Wow," he wrote in an email to the guests. "What a joy to see and hear you all, not to mention your insightful comments. I'm ready for Advent. Thank you for this outstanding gift to the church." Gambrell was referencing the first ever virtual Advent Concert, presented by the Presbyterian Association of Musicians and the PC(USA)'s Office of Theology & Worship on Everyday God-Talk.

Read more: www.presbyterianmission.org



VIRTUAL CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP Thursday, December 24 on Facebook Live 4:30 p.m.

The lights will be twinkling, the music flowing and the word inspiring. Join together across the bounds of space and time to worship the Christ who brings new life and joy to us in this year we desperately need him. Music featuring Nannette Felix on harp, Valerie Blair on organ and piano, Julie Cook Ramirez on classical guitar, the SecondFirst Choir making its digital debut and Paul Laprade directing and creating. Grab your own candle to light and join us for a meaningful celebration of Christmas.

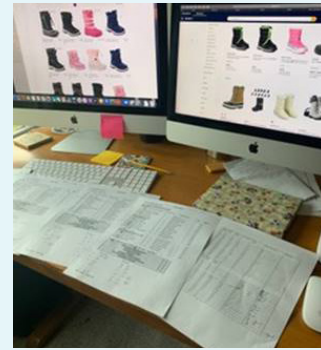
INVITATION TO 2021 STEWARDSHIP

With gratitude for all we are and have done as a church, with your pledge to give of your time, talent and treasures, we begin to dream of the possibilities for 2021. Thank you to all who have already returned your pledge card and to those who will do so in the days and weeks to come.



HASKELL BOOT PROJECT BY KAREN OLSON

248 pairs of boots have been delivered to Haskell School! Due to the uncertainty of the school year and the possibility of the district becoming virtual only, the boot delivery was made much earlier than in prior years. I often receive questions about the boots and what the process is like to make this delivery happen.



Every Haskell student receives a boot that is sized correctly for them. Their teachers do the sizing and submit a class list for us to use. When I receive the lists, the fun begins.

First, I have to determine how many boots of each size are needed, whether they are for boys or girls and then begin the online ordering. This requires multiple sheets of paper and multiple screens to make sure I get the best boot price possible. (Actually, this process starts in February as I always try to take advantage of those clearance sales!). Once delivered, the boots are stored in my garage until boot sorting day.



Jeff comes with his pickup truck and picks up the boots and then they are delivered to the sanctuary for sorting.



Sorting day has then arrived. We open the boxes, undo any wrapping, check for sizes.

The boots are organized by size on the pews.

The boots are sorted by classroom, a name tag applied, and placed together in bags for the teachers to distribute.

Bags of boots are loaded into the church van and delivered to Haskell School.



The children of Haskell are always excited about their boots and love to wear them outside in the snow. (To protect the privacy of the Haskell Students, we have substituted an "actor" but the happiness on the face is genuine.)

The Mission Ministry Team is still accepting donations for the boots. A check may be mailed to the church with the memo Haskell Boots. Thanks for your many years of support of this project.



CROP UPDATE BY DAVE JONES

I write to report that Rockford's CROP Hunger Walk has been a success. After raising more than \$30,000 in 2019 its organizers set a 2020 goal of \$35,000. It has almost been reached. Congregations like ours have raised nearly \$34,000. Our church is once more the biggest contributor. We alone raised more than \$8,000 thanks to the efforts of Bob Saunders, Jennifer Archer, Janet Hendricks and myself. We reached out to family and friends as well as other members like you.

SecondFirst Church is to be congratulated once again. Please visit my personal page: <https://www.crophungerwalk.org/rockfordil/DavidJones> to see the results.



Friends visit before outdoor service.

KFACT UPDATE

We are continuing to meet with girls in small groups both virtually and in-person and one-on-one mentorship! We are busy making sure our seniors are applying for post-secondary education! KFACT will be hosting our annual Holiday Pajama Party virtually and we are in need of new Pajamas and slippers/socks in various sizes and a \$10 Starbucks Gift card for each mentee. If you would like to donate please drop off at KFACT by December 12th! Don't forget to join us Tuesday, December 1st for our annual Giving Tuesday event on YouTube/KFACT and Facebook/KFACT live at 6:00 pm. See you there!

PJ'S FOR KFACT

KFACT's Christmas Holiday Party is soon, and each girl in the program needs a pair of pajamas and slipper socks. Our Mission Ministry Team agreed to promote their wish, and others in the Rockford area are helping too. If you would like to make the holiday brighter for a KFACT mentee, please bring to church or mail a pair of new pajamas and slipper socks by December 15th! Do not wrap the items. The needs & sizes are:

- All sizes are needed (XSmall, Small, Medium, Large) And the need is for 25 sets in each size. A pair of slipper socks, one size fits all, is requested with the pj's.
- \$10 Starbucks Gift card (Optional) Thank you for your kindness.

All donations are greatly appreciated! Help make spirits bright for KFACT girls! Purchase in town or online. Here is a link you may use if you wish! KFACT's wish list: <https://bit.ly/KFACT-wishlist> Thank you for your kindness.

Donations can be sent or dropped off to:
SecondFirst Church
318 N Church
Rockford, IL 61101
And please note "For KFACT" somewhere on your gift, especially if ordering online!

PAUL'S HYMN STORIES (#4)

Many African American spirituals were nearly lost after Emancipation. Former slaves did not wish to be associated for some time with the songs that sprung from their experiences, and many wished to forge a new life that would be culturally distinct from that difficult period. Interestingly, we owe much of our present knowledge of that music to Northern transcribers who, working as teachers in newly-'liberated' plantation areas, wrote down the music and lyrics that were sung to them. The repertory, shunned at first by American Americans, became a source of fascination and study in the North when their transcriptions appeared in print in the latter half of the 19th century. For many reasons, we can be thankful that the original transcriptions were quite literal and not organized by white professional musicians into prevailing 'learned' styles.

Nonetheless, revision and recasting are not always avoided. The refrain, "Go Tell It on the Mountain, over the hills..." (etc.) comes to us through the hand of arranger John W. Work III, who added the harmonies in the version first published in 1909. His collection, Religious Folk Songs of the Negro as Sung on the Plantation, also includes verses you have likely not seen:

(first verse/call) *When I was a seeker, I sought both night and day,
 I asked the Lord to help me, And he showed me the way* (response: Go Tell It...)
 (second verse/call) *He made me a watchman, Upon a city wall,
 And if I am a Christian, I am the least of all.* (response: Go Tell It...)

This song, therefore, was not a Christmas hymn, but was rather a song about being transformed from seeker to proclaimer. In the call and response form seen here, the verse would have been stated first, and the respondents would be telling the world to proclaim the existence of Christ. (By the way, a few researchers suggest that John Work himself might have been the author of this song, thereby disqualifying it from the traditional canon of what is considered to be a 'true spiritual'.)

What happened here? A publication from New York in 1940, American Negro Songs and Spirituals, seems to have recast the narrative, stating that "the original ones [words to the stanzas] could not be found". The work now was transformed into a retelling of Luke 2:8-20. In the new version, the singer now is practically assuming the role of the shepherd. The editor was likely Caucasian; it is important to note that African Americans of the time explained that few spirituals described Jesus as a child because the image of Jesus as a King was preferred.

We can talk about appropriation in cases where one culture assumes the cultural product of another, but Melva Wilson Costen, the composer/music minister who rewrote the text in our hymnal, is also African American. (She was Professor of Sacred Music at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta.) Such a complex investigation does not deserve the abbreviated discussion needed for this forum. Still, in this case, Dr. Costen may have maintained the recasting of the verses in order to simplify the narrative, thereby transforming the appropriate liturgical context in which this song should be presented. This is itself a common part of the tradition of this music: when transcribing plantation songs, white editors often noted that some songs had over fourteen verses but one refrain! The process of creating new verses during the call-response was quite common, as the call was often improvised as soloists would jump in at will. While Costen's approach was more methodical, we can still be thankful for her role of transforming a non-Christmas work into a favorite that encourages diverse worshipping Christians to share the light of Christ at Christmas.

Paul Laprade, your music director

MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

I hope you all are doing well, staying safe, and staying well. This unusual year will continue with Thanksgiving and Christmas looking different. Our family has chosen not to gather in order to stay safe and hopefully be together next year for these important holidays. That will be odd since we usually have a large group of family members and close friends. However, we will still be together in our hearts and minds.

Have you noticed how many announcements we have each week? They seem to have taken on a life of their own! Our mission teams continue to find creative ways to serve the church and the larger world while physically distancing and they also communicate the activities, how you can participate, and what they need. It is obvious that we don't stop doing church because we are apart.

Communication is key to our community. Not only do our teams and church leadership need to share what is going on, but we also need to hear from you. How do you think we can serve the community? What would you like to see done? What do you need? Please let us know so that we can continue to serve you and continue to thrive.

Grace and peace,
Ann Stites

COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO OUR COMMUNITY

GOVERNING COUNCIL - OCTOBER MEETING BY ANN STITES

Our council meeting included lots of discussion about issues we need to address, but nothing was voted on. Some of the items that we worked on included the Christmas Eve service, the YMCA usage of our building for school activities, converting the Music Ministry Team to a worship team, Boots for Haskell, and team priorities.

What will the Christmas Eve service look like? We brainstormed some ideas. Mary Spindler has promised that the sanctuary will be decorated, so

we know that it will be beautiful and will glorify God. Other details will be dependent on what phase we are in during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The YMCA agreement has been reviewed and looks good. SecondFirst Church is listed on their insurance so that helps protect us. There are signs that we need to place in and around the building and of course, we need state approval for use of the building. More to come at a later date.

The Music Ministry Team is working with other teams to determine what work best fits with a worship team rather than in the teams that work now resides. It will be a change and will be done deliberately and with careful thought.

Boots for Haskell will look different this year. The sorting process needs to change so that everyone is protected. Karen Olson is working on a plan and we know that it will be a good plan!

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
- 1 Kings 19: 11-13

It's at the edges where we find uncertainty. This year we have all been living at the edges. The balancing we have been doing to stay there has been exhausting. The staff and board of Jeremiah Development would like to thank you for helping us as we stepped away from the edge this year to find new ways to meet the needs of those living and working in the Coronado Haskell Neighborhood. It has been your help that has made this a successful year. Your time, talent, and prayers have kept us from falling off the edge as we have continued to meet the needs of the neighborhood. God has opened a path for Jeremiah in 2020. Thank you for walking that path with us. My prayer is that the quiet being thrust upon us by the pandemic re-centers us so we can all remember what we are doing here.

Sue Kanthak - Executive Director, Jeremiah Development

A little bit from Pastor Becky E...

I have had this song from Cyndi Lauper in my head for days now, Money Changes Everything. But instead of the word Money, I am replacing it with COVID!! Two projects we have been working on may look a bit different due to COVID.

FIRST- OUR OVERNIGHT CAFÉ

We have been in talks with the City, the Health Department and a few other agencies. Plans are still in place to help our homeless population. The biggest need from our church may be in the form of a daytime warming center rather than an Overnight site. As we continue to be in discussion, we will keep you informed.

SECONDLY - YMCA

We are still hoping to work with the Y in case the schools go to complete distance learning. This would entail opening some of the 3rd floor classroom space for children in need to do remote learning through the Y. Again as this project moves forward, we will keep you informed.

Sometimes we are up, sometimes down and sometimes side to side. 2020 has been a true lesson in flexibility!



POINSETTIA SUNDAY Sunday, December 20

We will be taking orders for poinsettias through Tuesday, December, 8. The cost is \$14.00 and you can call or email Debbie with your order. Please mail your check to the church and note Poinsettia. Please let us know if you want the poinsettia to be in memory or in honor of a loved one.

COULD OUR CHURCH SEND 54 CHILDREN BACK TO SCHOOL IN HAITI?

This is the third year our church will be providing school funds for children in Saut-d'eau, Haiti. We have learned from James and Odette Casimir that there is no free public school, therefore each family must pay \$250 per child to provide for tuition, supplies, backpack, uniform and lunch.

Our Mission Team has offered to donate one dollar for every two dollars given by the congregation. There are 54 children we are hoping to sponsor and at this time we still need \$3,740 to make it happen. If you would like to contribute to this project you may make a donation to SecondFirst Church with Haiti Education Fund in the memo line.

This project sends a message of peace, justice and joy to children who live far away but are in our thoughts and deeds. If you have questions, suggestions, or would like to join the Haiti Interest Group at SecondFirst Church, please contact Roger and Carolyn Greenlaw at csgreen52@aol.com or James and Odette Casimir at casimir0401@gmail.com.

GIVING OPPORTUNITY: THE CHRISTMAS FUND/ CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING Sunday, December 20

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.

MEET OUR NEW CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COORDINATOR

We are excited to announce Rachel Huffman will be the new Children and Families Coordinator at SecondFirst. Rachel is a life-long UCC member who was born, baptized, and confirmed at Second Congregational Church. As a youth she participated in choir, hand bells, pageants, and all of the activities the church had to offer. She lives in Rockford with her fiancé Matt, two dogs, and five cats. She spent the last 4 years earning her Bachelor's degree in Health Education and Promotion through the University of Massachusetts distance learning program and hopes to put her knowledge to use serving the Rockford community. Rachel is excited to share the love of God with the youth of the congregation and build relationships with the church family during this challenging time in new and creative ways.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!! Wednesday, December 16

We will be holding a Virtual Event for Families and Children. The fun begins at 6:15 pm. Stay tuned for more information. Contact: Becky Erbe



STORIES OF THE BIBLE AND THE STORIES OF OUR LIVES Tuesdays at 12:00 noon (no meeting Tuesday, December 29)

Led by Rev. Rebecca on Zoom
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. Register with Debbie in the office to receive the Zoom link. Questions? rebecca@secondfirst.org



Trunk-or-Treat was a drive-through affair this year; still sweet as ever!



The fall clean-up crew did a wonderful job keep the grounds of our church beautiful!



We welcomed a new garden shed to store tools on-site.



The last outdoor worship service of the season was a beautiful autumn day. We were thankful for these in-person (socially distant & masked) gatherings.



The pumpkin bar drive-through was a great success!

A THANK YOU TO SECONDFIRST CHURCH FROM 'POUKY' POU KINAM YO, NFP FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLE OF SAUT-D'EAU, HAITI

Greetings from 'Pouky', a local 501c3 support group for Saut-d'Eau, Haiti. Our Name, Pou Kinam Yo translates as 'For My People'. Our Purpose: To bring resources, opportunities and hope to the people in the vicinity of Saut-d'Eau in the Central Highlands of Haiti. Our Mission: To provide support for the development of self-sufficiency and wellbeing of the people in Saut-d'Eau, Haiti. Our Vision: The people in Saut-d'Eau are becoming self-sufficient and prosperous through assistance in the development of food resources, housing, education and health services. Plans are developing for community renewable energy production. International relief and development organizations are expanding their work to include Saut-d'Eau.

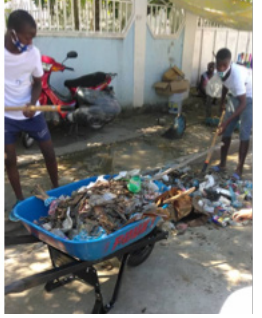


SecondFirst Church has supported the people with two years of raising money to purchase and distribute tools and seeds for planting gardens. With your funding 1,100 people received 1,400 tools and seeds to plant gardens. These tools are shared with others. These Heritage seeds can be saved and planted the next season. For three years now, the harvest is coming in and people are developing food security through your gifts.



Education is a path out of poverty and SecondFirst Church has supported education for the children with fundraising. Each child must raise \$250 to attend 'public' school in Haiti. For the third year now, Pouky can provide Tuition, Uniforms, Backpack, School Supplies, and Lunch for over 50 kids to go to school, thanks to your efforts! Thank YOU from the children and their grateful families.

During the Pandemic, when schools were closed, Pouky used some residual funds (\$1,580) to buy wheelbarrows and shovels, that the youth (boys & girls) use to clean trash from the neighborhood streets and wheel to the city dump. They are developing pride in their neighborhood and in themselves.



Other projects being considered by Pouky for Saut-d'Eau include:

- Hospital beds and older medical equipment being retired by Rockford Hospitals.
- A Grain Mill setup as a community (not for profit) Co-op so people can grind their Rice into Flour and their Corn into Cornmeal, etc. People now have to travel over an hour to grind their grain and have to pay too much for it. This project will keep provision of their food local, and they can sell a portion of their goods in the local market.
- Building a road to an outlying area of Saut-d'Eau with no water supply, so a well drilling rig (truck) can get to the community, and goods and services can reach the market in town. Also, transportation can get people in need to the hospital (i.e., Complicated childbirth).

Thanks to the Haiti Interest Group at SecondFirst Church for your work over the past three years in organizing education programs, bulletin board displays, Sunday bulletins, newsletter announcements and photo testimonials that created and supported the fundraising for the money sent via Pouky directly to projects in Saut-d'Eau. Over time we will keep you all informed through photos and testimonials of the results of your efforts to 'Energizing downtown Rockford and Beyond with God's grace' ... all the way to Saut-d'Eau, Haiti.



Thank You from the Pouky Board of Directors: James Casimir, Bob Canfield, John DeWaters, Roseva (Rosey) Massenat, Phil Blair, Richard Larson and Roger Greenlaw. And thanks to James' team of volunteers on the ground in Saut-d'Eau that make sure our efforts are carried out with care and respect.



6 Wheelbarrow	\$126	=	\$756
12 Shovel	\$11.50	=	\$138
3 Moss-stone	28	=	\$84
12 Pickaxe	\$12.25	=	\$147
10 RoTeau	\$9.00	=	\$90
Transportation	\$145	=	\$145
Food service	\$180	=	\$180
			\$1340
Use for my car	\$40	=	\$40
Left -	\$20	=	\$1580
			\$20

James Casimir