

## 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/

Non Profit  
Organization US  
Postage PAID  
Permit No. 3734  
Rockford, Illinois

JANUARY 2021

# 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,

Happy New Year! If ever we all needed a new year, it was this one. I hope and pray that you are all are doing well. My guess is you are a little like my own house: one is flourishing, one is struggling and the others of us are somewhere in between depending on the hour. What a strange time we

live in. I am grateful to see you all reaching out for help and encouraging one another. We are being church!

Personally, I am thankful for your support, encouragement and grace as I recovered from a head injury. I'm happy to report, as I did in a letter/email to members, that I can return to my full responsibilities this month. Phew! That was a LONG road. Thanks to all of you for journeying with me.

With a vaccine on the horizon, it is both easy to hope we are almost through this pandemic and hard when it can also feel really far away in these winter months. Now is the time to draw together as a church. Please schedule a virtual time to meet with me or time to chat on the phone. Reach out to your church friends. Support your neighbors and offer help to anyone who might be lonely (yes, you can do this from the safety of your home). Do it because Jesus says to and it's helpful for those you serve. But serving is also a balm for your soul and guard against (non-clinical) depression. We were created to love others.

Friends, the Spirit guides us, Jesus challenges us and God provides a framework for our flourishing. We need each other to navigate this journey, so let's draw close to one another as the Christ child is revealed in our midst.

Peace to you!  
Rebecca



## ANNUAL BUDGET AND FOUNDATION MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

The Annual Budget and Foundation Meeting will take place February 14, 2021. Join us on Zoom at 11:00 am. Budget packets will be available February 7, 2021.

## NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

### UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST UCC NATIONAL SETTING CONTINUES PAID COVID SICK LEAVE PROTECTIONS THROUGH 2021



While the federal government let paid sick leave protections expire Dec. 31 with the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, the United Church of Christ national setting will continue them.

"This is important," said Alisa Lewis, UCC director of Human Resources. "We want to continue those benefits. COVID-19 is not slowing down, there is a new variant to the virus. Just because the government doesn't extend it, doesn't mean private employers can't." The two weeks of paid sick time and other emergency and medical family leave available to employees under the FFCRA will be extended proactively by the UCC national setting for reasons related to the pandemic. **Read more: [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)**

### PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) A WEBINAR ON COVID-19 VACCINES MAKES A MEASURABLE DIFFERENCE



Nearly 200 viewers say they're more likely to seek the vaccine following a discussion by medical experts.

Before spending an hour putting on a thought-provoking webinar with a panel of physicians who specialize in treating infectious diseases, the Rev. Liz Walker, pastor of Roxbury Presbyterian Church in Boston and a former television journalist, took a quick poll Tuesday of the 194 viewers. How many planned to roll up their sleeve to receive the COVID-19 vaccine? Seventy-four percent said yes, and 26% said no thanks.

By the end of the webinar, those poll numbers had improved: 89% said they planned to obtain the vaccine. Only 11% remained unconvinced. **Read more: [presbyterianmission.org](http://presbyterianmission.org)**



*Our Candlelight Christmas Eve service required adaptation and creativity, but we gathered (virtually) and celebrated the coming of Jesus. Thank you to everyone who had a hand in helping this service come together, and thank you to everyone who joined us!*



**A LITTLE BIT FROM BECKY E...**

(Posted on January 6) For the next 10-14 days I will be working from home. My immediate family and I have tested positive for the virus. No worries, my symptoms are nothing more than a bad cold. I have no fever or shortness of breath. We pass around a jar of Vicks Vapor Rub in the mornings to test our smellers. I can still smell and taste. Humor always helps.

Funny things happen. Just when you think you have everything planned and are in control, you are gently reminded otherwise. If I hadn't been at home, I would have missed the beautiful sight of the fog freezing on the trees. I would have missed the busy activity of the squirrels and birds at the feeders, driving the cat nuts. There is no place like home and I am very fortunate.

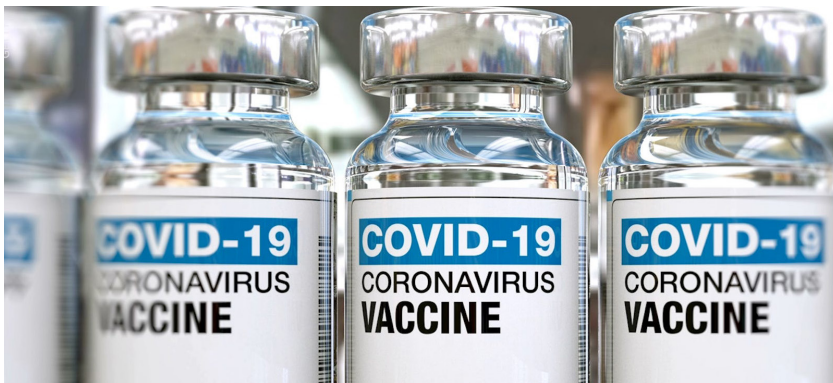
I will be participating in worship, remotely or pre-recorded. I am even more available for phone calls and chats. Please call, or at least before I call you! Be safe everyone. I am looking forward to when we all can be together again.

**MAKING AN ABOUT FACE TO OPEN THE ROCKFORD OVERNIGHT CAFE**

After several months of meeting with the CoC Homeless Workshop group, Pastor Becky and the Mission Ministry Team decided that the greatest need was for our church to be a daytime warming center. (Day or night our efforts would be in concert with the WCHD for COVID protocols).

Night time hours seemed to be covered. The Rescue Mission is expanding their efforts and the City is offering hotel vouchers to almost anyone who will take them. It appeared this would eliminate the need for the Overnight Cafe. But on Monday December 21, Carpenter's Place took a survey of their guests. Twenty! people had slept out in the cold in conditions not suitable for human habitation.

Every reason we opened the cafe in the first place was still holding true. There is a small group of people who are shelter resistant and even hotel resistant due to mental illness and many other factors. As church one of our greatest strengths is to be able move toward the greatest need and pivot quickly. There are still more questions than answers, but with the resources we have been given, we will serve our neighbors in need. We are able to initially open the cafe because we have received a \$16k grant from the Community Foundation (thanks Sarah Reinold!). We are seeking more funding from outside the church to keep it open. Stay tuned for COVID safe ways you might be able to help. Please keep the Café in your prayers.



**COVID VACCINE REGISTRATION**

The Winnebago County Health Department is asking area residents who wish to receive the COVID-19 vaccine to register in advance at [wchd.org](http://wchd.org).

Need Help Registering for the COVID Vaccine with the Winnebago County Health Department? Please don't fall victim to someone scamming for your information over the phone. Please call the church office and we will help get you registered online. 815-963-8431

**A QUESTION ANSWERED**

by Paul Laprade, music director

I deeply appreciate when members of our congregation contact me with questions about music at our church. Often, the questions are along the lines of "when will the choir/bells perform again" or "where did Val get that neat song?" Clearly, we are in what airlines call a "holding pattern" with regard to in-person music making. Lately, however, a single question has appeared again and again: "How long did that video of multiple Paul's take to put together?"

The short answer is that each takes a very different amount of time. The steps are: select a piece that MIGHT work in a video (based on liturgical needs: 10-35 minutes); conceive of an arrangement that can work for the work and count the number of Paul's needed (20-40 minutes); search for a grid that will reflect the arrangement (i.e., if two Paul's sing, two boxes should be larger, 5-10 minutes); estimate the running time of the complete work and which instrument should be the foundational "grid" for the piece (it is never the voice, 5 minutes); record tracks (5-20 minutes per track); if a collaboration, as with the wonderful Hayley Goetzche, send the basic version with a "guide track" then re record the track when she returns her part (5-25 minutes); render the result (5 minutes); add balancing and equalization to each track (15 to 30 minutes total), send to Andy Newgren (1 minute). The unfortunate part is that this particular technology does not allow one to edit sections of a track, so one unacceptable mistake at the 4 minute mark means choosing between extreme tolerance or a rerecording of the entire track.

I hope this answer is helpful. "Joy to the World", with 9 Paul's, took 5.5 hours!

**PRAYER STATIONS BROUGHT MEANINGFUL CHRISTMAS REFLECTION**





## MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

This has been a really difficult year for so many of us and for the greater world. We've experienced losses that we didn't even believe were imaginable a year ago, had to change the way we live our lives, worship together, meet, and spend holidays. However, God has always been with us and continues to be with us and guide us. That is our good news and promise.

My company has a tradition of hosting some pretty amazing Christmas parties, then our Irish colleagues return to Eire for the holidays with their families. This year, we still had amazing parties via Teams and Zoom, but very few people are returning home for the holidays. Instead, they are using a variety of technologies to be with their families, to attend Christmas Eve services, and to visit with friends. Yes, it will be different. However, God has always been with us and continues to be with us and guide us. That is our good news and promise.

How do you see God being with you and guiding you during these times?

No matter what it looks like, I pray that you find joy in this Christmas season.

Grace and peace,  
Ann Stites

## GOVERNING COUNCIL - BY ANN STITES

As it has in years past, the Governing Council combined its November and December meetings into one. Given the holidays, this is a good way to give a gift of time back to many of the people who serve the congregation.

Some (not all) items of note from the meeting include:

Music Ministry and Deacons will meet together again in January to work on developing a Worship Ministry team. The Nominating Ministry team will still work to fill positions on both teams as Music and Deacons continue to work on this new team.

Council approved the establishment of an Ad Hoc Audio/Visual Review Team to receive a report from our sound vendor on how to stream worship and other events effectively. The anticipated length of time this team will be active is 6 months. If you

are interested in joining this team, please email Debbie in the office so that she can let the team know.

The 2021 budgeting process has begun and several teams have already submitted their budgets. Others plan to complete them in January so that the Governing Council can approve them on January 28 and the annual budget meeting can be held the second Sunday in February.

COVID worship discussion was thoughtful and thought-provoking. Some congregations have continued in person indoor worship. Council did not formally vote, but was in agreement that remote worship is the safest option for our congregation at this time given that there is an anticipated surge in the virus after holiday gatherings. Both the COVID team and Council will continue evaluating the situation and make

decisions following best practices and guidance from health departments.

Karen Olson shared a thank you note from a Haskell student for the boots. This project continues to change lives not only of the students, but also of our members.

Fellowship is planning our church picnic which will be held on August 15. They are also working on our Palm Sunday potluck!

Rachel Huffman led her first Sunday School class and will be moving toward leading the Early Word in January.

A huge thanks to Arlene and Dave Noel for making the wonderful pumpkin bars and to those who distributed them under the portico.

Have a joyous Christmas, and a safe, happy, healthy New Year.

## VIRTUAL DINNER PARTIES WITH REV. REBECCA

It's been a long time since I've seen you and I want to check in with you and spend some time with you....for now, it has to be virtual. So grab some other friends and let's enjoy dinner, lunch, coffee, whatever together. Call, text or email Rev. Rebecca to schedule.



## A NIGHT WITH TIA RICHARDSON: A SNEAK PEAK VIEWING OF ROCKFORD TAKING FLIGHT, THE FILM SHOWING THE CREATION OF OUR MURAL

January 27 at 7:00pm

Please register with Debbie in the office for the Zoom link. As a big thank you to all who supported this community changing mural, Tia is releasing the film to those of you who made the project possible. Please join together to view the film and then ask questions of the artist. Grab your favorite beverage, sit on your own couch and witness the beauty of the film and the art that brought Rockford together.



## A STEWARDSHIP THANK-YOU

By David Jones, Stewardship Chair

Our 2020 Drive-By Stewardship Sunday completed a month of messages from members and mission partners. Your response has been renewed commitment of your time, talent and treasure to the congregation we call our home church. Your Stewardship Committee thanks all who have pledged or who will do so in the coming weeks. As our community awakens from our long isolation, one from another, your decision to support our church mission assures another year of service in Jesus' precious name.



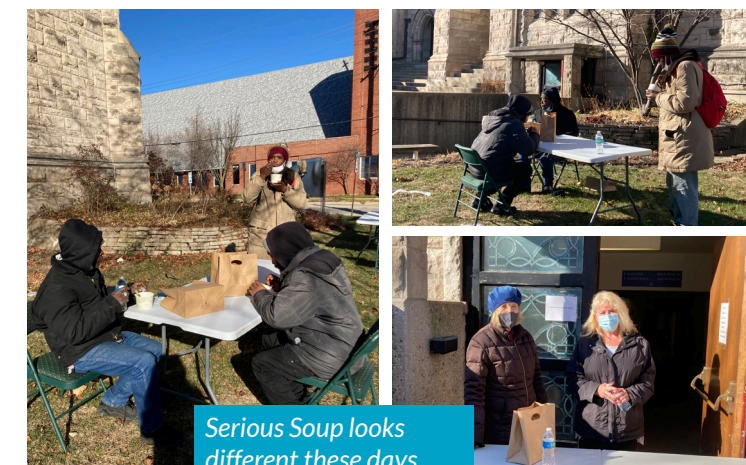
## FEEDING OUR NEIGHBORS!

By Marge Maynard

On Friday, January 22, under the sponsorship of the Missions Ministry Team, we will be hosting the Northern Illinois Food Bank truck! They will provide packages of foods to over 250 people in a drive-through setting. YOU can help! We need 10-15 volunteers from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm to make this event proceed smoothly. In our area, 1 in 11 children struggles with hunger; the need, especially in this time of COVID-19, is great. Please offer your time and energy and call the church office to let us know that YOU can help on this day. Questions? Please contact Pastor Becky. See you then!

## JUBILEE CENTER SOUP KITCHEN

We will be preparing sack lunches at the Jubilee Center on Saturday, Jan 23. We look forward to giving out Italian Beef sandwiches! Can you be part of the team? Marge Maynard is looking for 3-4 assistants to work from 10:00 to around noon. Call her (815-980-5304) or email her (mtm.home@me.com).



Serious Soup looks different these days, but is still very welcome within the community.

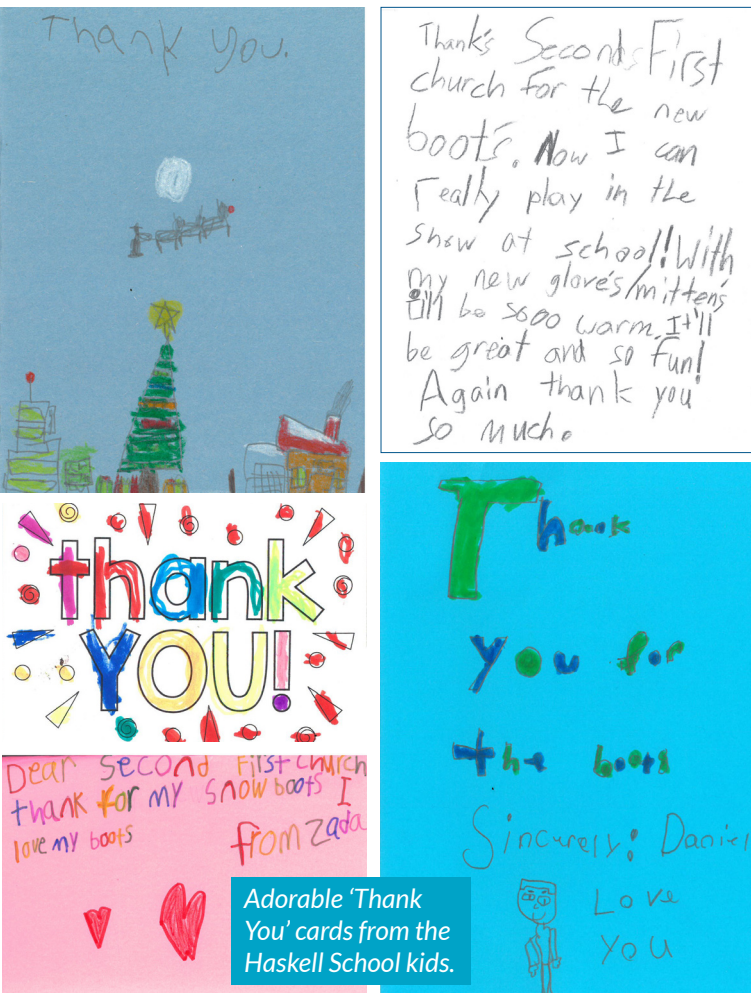


Ms. Rachel meeting some of our children at the virtual Christmas party where the kids each made their own advent wreath and the raced around their houses doing a virtual scavenger hunt.



Delicious Christmas cookies were wrapped and distributed to shut-ins to help spread holiday cheer!





Our Christmas Pageant adapted to the times and was bursting with an abundance of creativity from our children.



Happy 100th birthday to Jayne Pheiffer!! Thanks to all who participated in the drive-by celebration. With that big Jayne smile, she said it was one of the best moments of her life.



### JEREMIAH DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Jeremiah Development is excited to report that we have completed installations of 76 exterior solar lights during the fall of 2020. We still have over 40 lights yet to install, but that will happen when the weather warms up this spring. We have made a significant difference in the neighborhood. Landlords have been inspired to add their own exterior lighting and have contacted us to say they will be doing what they can to help keep the neighborhood safe. Neighbors who have received the lights have contacted us to tell us how much safer they feel going out at night to walk their dogs or sleeping a little easier knowing that it's hard for crime to hide in well-lit areas. HUGE thank yous to Jeanine Wang and Charmaine Logwood for organizing this project, Mary for being our neighbor contact to get the registration forms filled out, collecting them, and spreading the word, and last but not least to Tyler Hillman and Scott Garwick for climbing the ladders and installing the majority of the lights. Thank you to Greg Cox for doing the legal footwork and helping install and to the Rockford Police Department for loaning us several officers to install lights and be a presence in the neighborhood. Finally, we are grateful to the Community Action Agency of Boone and Winnebago County for purchasing 125 lights to be installed.

This was a huge project that could not have been accomplished without the help of so many!

On Feb. 13, 2021 Jeremiah is partnering with Emmanuel Episcopal church to provide 750 food boxes to the Coronado Haskell neighborhood. The drive-up food giveaway, along with bags with winter gear and stay-at-home activities, will begin at 10 a.m. and finish at 11:30 a.m. This is a huge undertaking and we hope to have many volunteers to make this a smooth event. If you would like to help, please email [jeanine@jeremiahdevelopment.org](mailto:jeanine@jeremiahdevelopment.org).

Our newsletter continues to be delivered to 300 doors throughout the winter months. We have a dedicated group of volunteers willing to brave the cold to ensure our neighbors get much-needed information during the cold months of winter. Stay tuned for exciting 2021 updates!

### KFACT UPDATE

Thank you Second First Congregation and leadership team for your generosity of over 50 pairs of new PJs!

KFACT staff have plans to bloom this Spring with new programming and structure to continue to provide vital mentorship for girls in Rockford! One of our new initiatives is KFACT Scholars for 11th and 12th grade girls who are planning to pursue post-secondary education after high school graduation! The class of 2020 will be 26 graduating Scholars! Our featured Scholar, Esharie has been accepted into SIUC, Rockford University and NIU to pursue higher education.



Adult Christmas Pageant participants.