

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

FEBRUARY 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!

It's February. It's cold. We are all inside more than a typically February due to Covid-19 restrictions. Make sure you are taking care of yourself, mentally, physically and spiritually. Let's reach out to one another and please please if you are struggling, call me. My family took up

outdoor ice skating recently...just for fun. I hope you are finding ways to enjoy this odd Covid time, too.

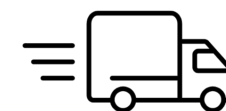
I'm excited about the Lenten Journey before us beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 17. Read further into the newsletter to see how we will be together. Many times in Lent we take a pause to remind ourselves that all is not right with the world. We have to remind ourselves of struggle and pain. This year as we sit in the midst of a global pandemic, we have a much different vantage point. "From dust you have come and from dust you shall return" is right in our faces every day. 4,000 people are dying every day in our country as I write this.

So our challenge this Lent will not be to face the struggle, our challenge will be to find joy and love and peace in the midst of the suffering and pain and monotony we know all too well. The Holy Spirit surrounds us. God will provide for us. And Jesus will show us the way. As we walk with Jesus to the cross and resurrection this year, we will keep our eyes open for the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God where all is right and well and no one is sick or dying.

Peace be with you!
Rebecca

ANNUAL BUDGET AND FOUNDATION MEETING

Join together via ZOOM at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, February 14, 2021 for the Annual Budget and Foundation Meeting. Budget packets will be available February 7.



FOOD TRUCK

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Monday, February 22
10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

We are looking for volunteers who would be willing to help load food boxes on Monday, February 22. This is a Mission Ministry Team project to help feed those in need. Please call Debbie in the church office if you are interested in helping. (815)963-8431

NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST UCC HAVEN BEATS THE COLD AND THE ODDS BY 'WORKING WITH' INSTEAD OF 'PROVIDING FOR'



Denison Avenue United Church of Christ was keeping people out of the cold, giving them meals and a place to sleep. A Cleveland City Council member complained. City fire officials almost shut the project down. But the Ohio community rallied in support of the church and things looked

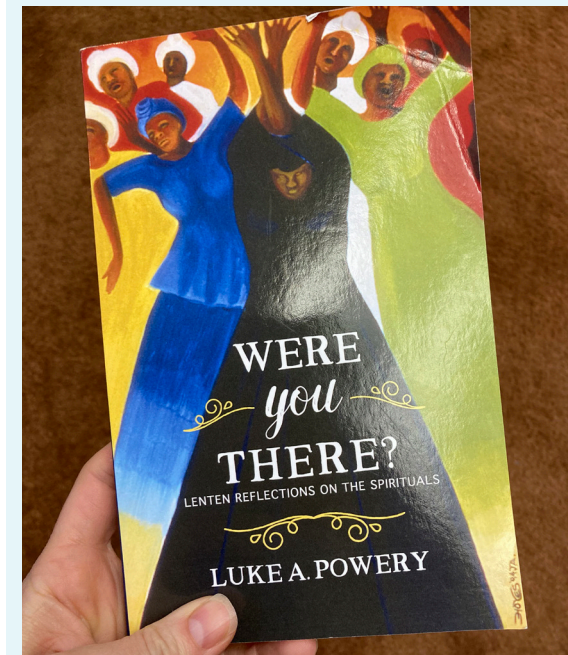
better. Then COVID-19 arrived. The church's partner — a shelter provider — dropped out. The ministry kept going. But the Rev. Nozomi Ikuta, Denison's pastor, wasn't sure how long it would last. Staff and volunteers have shown up from the neighborhood. Surprising funding has emerged, too. It's working, she said, because of all of that — and God. **Read more: www.ucc.org**

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) ONLINE WORSHIP 'IN YOUR JIM-JAMS WITH A NICE CUP OF COFFEE' IS PROBABLY HERE TO STAY



Pastors and Christian educators from around the country as well as Canada and the United Kingdom joined for a webinar Monday to find out from one another how they're creating community among the generations

during the pandemic and, just as importantly, once it's over. GenOn Ministries, whose mission is to "nurture, grow and deepen intergenerational Christ-centered community," hosted the hour-long webinar, which attracted nearly 30 participants separated by more than 4,900 miles but united by the task of providing meaningful worship, fellowship and other ministry to parishioners stuck in their homes on Sunday. **Read more: presbyterianmission.org**



MIDWEEK WORSHIP

Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m. on Zoom

Based off of the week's readings from *Were You There? Lenten Reflections on the Spirituals* by Luke A Powery, come be uplifted by the powerful words and tunes of these African American Spirituals. (No prior reading necessary to enjoy). This will be a time of prayer and reflection, meditation and sharing led by Rev. Rebecca and Pastor Jermel Flannigan, former pastor New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church. Let's be together virtually.



Pastor Becky signs in the first guest at the Rockford Overnight Cafe. We have averaged about 18 guests per night with four staff. Support is pouring in from all over the region with gratitude for our church opening up to keep people safe and warm this winter.

LENT

ASH WEDNESDAY PRAYER STATIONS

February 17, call/email office to register for a time

Come spend time in the sanctuary in prayer and meditation to ready yourself for the journey of Lent. To be Covid safe, individuals will be allotted their own time. Single use ash containers will be available. Register with Debbie in the office, debbie.wise@secondfirst.org or 815-963-8431.

ASH WEDNESDAY WORSHIP ON ZOOM

February 17, 6:30 p.m.

Grab a potted plant and use the dirt to remind yourself of your connection with all living things, the delicate nature of our lives and our the constant strength of the God who made us, claims us and calls us by name. Even in this unusual format, we will find peace and joy in the Holy Spirit that will propel us into our Lenten journey. **Zoom meeting ID: 869 0281 1469 Password: 0701216564 or Call in: 312-626-6799**

DAILY READING

Were You There? Lenten Reflections on the Spirituals by Luke A Powery

Looking for joy in the midst of a global pandemic? African American spirituals were born out of seeing God within hard circumstances. Dr. Luke Powery, the Dean of the Chapel of Duke University, explores one song each day in a short, simple and inspiring format. Books are available at your favorite bookstore or in the church office, \$10 suggested donation. Let's come together and be encouraged by soul stirring spirituals.

STORIES OF THE BIBLE

Tuesdays, noon-1:00 p.m. on Zoom

Following the Narrative Lectionary and using the stories of the Bible for the Sunday to come that lead us to the cross and resurrection, we will ask good questions of the Bible, of Jesus and of ourselves. No Bible experience necessary. Led by Rev. Rebecca. **Zoom meeting ID: 841 9910 2715 Password: 5160900791 or Call in: 312-626-6799**

MIDWEEK WORSHIP

Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m. on Zoom

Based off of the week's readings from Were You There? Lenten Reflections on the Spirituals by Luke A Powery, come be uplifted by the powerful words and tunes of these African American Spirituals. (No prior reading necessary to enjoy). This will be a time of prayer and reflection, meditation and sharing led by Rev. Rebecca and Pastor Jermel Flannigan, former pastor New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church. Let's be together virtually. **Zoom meeting ID: 867 3178 6108 Password: 5668102835 or Call in: 312-626-6799**

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION WITH SANDY WILLIAMS

Thursdays March 4 - 25, noon to 12:55 p.m. on Zoom

Sit back, relax and be blessed by these guided meditations focusing on mindfulness of breath and body with loving kindness. Come learn this sabbath practice with SecondFirst member Sandy Williams, a complimentary health care provider who focuses on the interplay of mind, body and spirit. **Zoom meeting ID: 818 7271 8223 Password: 6660658599 or Call in: 312-626-6799**



HOLY WEEK

SAVE THE DATES

FEBRUARY 17: Prayer Stations in the Sanctuary

APRIL 1: Maundy Thursday Worship via Zoom, 6:30 p.m.

APRIL 2: Good Friday Worship via FB Live, noon

APRIL 4: EASTER SUNDAY

8:30 a.m. Outside Informal Worship, in person!

10:00 a.m. Traditional Virtual Worship, Facebook Live

PAUL'S HYMN STORIES "SHALL WE GATHER AT THE RIVER"

In 1864, the United States was in the fourth year of a Civil War, in the midst of a Presidency that attempted to govern over great divisions between members of both family and country, and in the depths of a typhus/typhoid epidemic. Robert Lowry, a New York City pastor, was recovering from typhoid in the parsonage of his New York City Baptist Church when he experienced a vision. In this vision, he saw the apocalypse as a tableau created with the images of a heavenly throne, the river of life, and the gathering of the saints. Meditating on Revelations 22:1 and upon this vision, he asked himself why so few writers had discussed the river of life. That is when the first words appeared to him: "Shall we gather? Yes, we'll gather!" The words and music came at the same time, which was somewhat unusual at the time for hymn writers. The original name of the song was "Beautiful River."

With the exception of popularly-derived tunes and spirituals, most sung hymns before the 20th century came from the pens of composers who would find suitable texts—these texts were actually what were called "hymns"—and provide the melody and harmony to suit these words. For this reason, several hymns have alternative melodies. (A more familiar example is "Away in the Manger" which has no fewer than three melodic settings among contemporary hymnals!) Although Shall We Gather at the River is known only by a single melody and text, it is arguably more famous for having been arranged in classic settings by composers such as Charles Ives and, most prominently, Aaron Copland. In fact, if memory might serve some of us well, our Sanctuary Choir premiered its own version of Shall We... as part of a larger work commissioned from Chicago composer Paul Carey, not long before we became a confederated church. What a memorable and joyous hymn!

GOD'S KINGDOM THANKS GIVERS

By Dave Jones

Worship each Sunday includes the Lord's Prayer. While its request for daily bread, forgiveness, resistance to temptation and deliverance from evil are pleas for our personal well-being, one request is for all humankind. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." Contributions of our time, talent and treasure to SecondFirst Church make possible efforts to do God's will so that God's kingdom may emerge.

Your time and talent continue to make possible such missions as Serious Soup, Bridge Clinic, the Thrift Shop, the Fair Trade Store, KFACT, apples and boots for Haskell School students, winter shelter and the Haiti Pouky project. Your financial contributions, which have reached \$300,000, provide support for the worldwide ministries of the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Church of Christ as well as staff and facilities for traditional ministries of worship, Christian education and pastoral care for members and friends. Thanks to givers like you weekly prayers for God's will and kingdom find fulfillment in downtown Rockford and beyond.

CHILDREN MINISTRY UPDATE

By Rachel Huffman, Children and Families Coordinator

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Jeremiah 29:11. It says "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" After a year full of serious challenges like 2020, what better message is there to hear than that God has plans to keep us safe and help us to move forward? This is the message that has informed my lesson planning for the children of our congregation this year. I was blessed to begin leading Sunday School right before Christmas. What better time than Christmas and Epiphany to focus on a message of hope and gratitude? I am blown away by the resilience that I have seen in children throughout the duration of this pandemic. In them I see hope and a future; in them I can see the wonderful things that they will accomplish and the people that they will become. One of the greatest joys of working with children is watching them grow up into amazing adults. On the Sunday after New Year's I had the children come up with a word to be their theme for the year and I chose one too. Their answers were excellent: from puppets to playing, I was happy to see them choosing the things that bring them joy. I want to see them choosing to see the good in the world and knowing that they can contribute

THANKS TO OUR CHILDREN FOR LEADING US IN WORSHIP!



to it. My word for the year is hope. I have focused the lessons on tying Biblical stories to real world examples that they are already familiar with. For the story of Jesus being rejected by his hometown, we talked about how sometimes doing the right thing won't be the easiest thing and that some people might not like us for doing what is right. It just so happened that the following day was Martin Luther King Jr. Day, so I tied this lesson to Dr. King and how even though he was doing good things in the world, there were people who didn't understand his message and didn't like him. We have also learned that God is a fixer and we tried to put together both simple and complex puzzles to see how sometimes we have small problems that we can figure out on our own and sometimes we have bigger problems that we need help or guidance to solve. I want them to always come away feeling familiar with these Bible stories, but also being able to see how they tie to our lives centuries later. Our group for Sunday School has been fairly small but I would love to get to know more of the youth and hope to see more join us on future Sundays. I hope to help them build their relationships with God and grow in the word of Christ through learning and laughing together.

MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

If it weren't for Debbie Wise, you might rarely hear from me. Debbie reminds me to write my articles, gives me a list of important announcements, and generally keeps me on track. She is always kind and is very good at corralling a lot of us. Additionally, Debbie is usually the first voice people hear when they call the church.

Why is this important today? It takes a lot of people both in front of the congregation and community and behind the scenes to let us do God's good work. Can you imagine if all of the tasks that we don't think about didn't get done? We wouldn't function very well at all. The parking lot wouldn't be kept in good condition or plowed after snow storms, the sanctuary and restrooms wouldn't be cleaned, the kitchen would be a mess, emails and regular mail wouldn't be sent, we wouldn't have sound for either remote or in-person worship, and so many other things wouldn't get done.

We are blessed to have our saints behind the scenes who keep the church running so that others are able to care for our church members and the larger community. Let us give thanks to the Lord!

Grace and peace,
Ann Stites



KFACT UPDATE

By Shamika Williams & KFACT Leadership Team

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

We wanted to take a moment to express a special thanks to Second First Church and the Mission Team for all that you've done to make mentoring possible for KFACT girls! Your recent donations from the Mission Team, members and your congregations willingness to serve in different areas is appreciated. We are grateful beyond words and heaven has certainly sent us a supernatural gift, all of you! God Bless and thank you for being supportive of KFACT.

KFACT SCHOLAR PROGRAM, MENTEE SPOTLIGHT

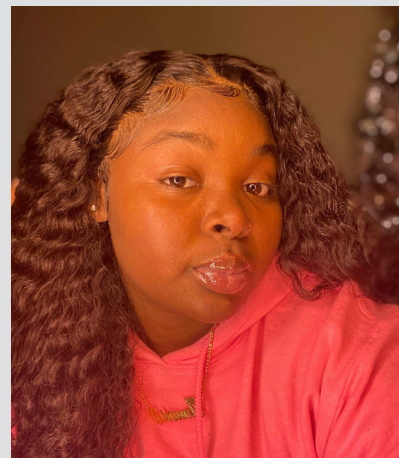


Mary Falls has been selected as our Senior Spotlight! Mary is a senior with Auburn High School where she has excelled despite her circumstance. This fall, Mary plans on further her education by attending college and studying secondary education.

After college, Mary hopes to obtain a job in this field and give back to students such as herself. Mary has been a part of KFACT since she was in the 7th grade. Mary states,

KFACT has made an everlasting impact on her life and there is no way she could have got to this point without them. Girls like Mary are the reason KFACT continues to be successful and we want to thank Mary for always setting a great example for those who need it most.

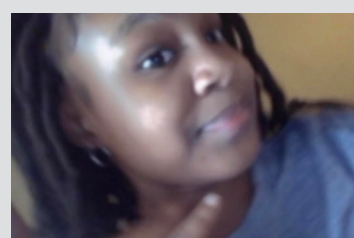
KFACT SCHOLAR PROGRAM, MENTEE SPOTLIGHT



Amaria is an 11th grader who has been in KFACT since middle school. Despite the challenges of remote learning, she has maintained her grades of all A's and B's while working two part-time jobs. Amaria aspires of attending Clark Atlanta University or Alabama A&M when she graduates high school. She is currently part of CAPA, the performing

arts academy at Auburn High School. Her career interest is nursing with a goal of becoming a neonatal nurse. When asked what she misses most do to the pandemic she said, "I miss being able to go out places with my friends and family." She shared her favorite part of KFACT: "My favorite part about KFACT is the staff! The staff do their best to check in with us make sure we are moving on the right check and they bring us around other girls with positive vibes which is amazing!"

LADY ALL STARS MENTORING PROGRAM, MENTEE SPOTLIGHT



Jadeamarie is an 8th grader at Flinn middle school. This is her second year as a KFACT Lady All Star mentee. She is an honor Roll student exceeding her map test scores time after time! Jadeamarie is outgoing and

engaged with multiple activities KFACT offers. In her spare time, she enjoys cheerleading, volleyball and eating snacks!

HAPPY HOUR AND COFFEE HOUR

We have been enjoying happy hour chats on the first Thursday of the month at 6:00 p.m. If you can't make that time and would still like to see familiar faces, we're adding coffee hour after church the third Sunday at 11:00 a.m. Our next gatherings will be Thursday, February 4 for Happy Hour and Sunday, February 21 for Coffee Hour. Mark your calendars! We look forward to seeing you.

SAVE THE DATE: CHURCH PICNIC

August 15 at Page Park Shelter House

The church has reserved the shelter house for the church picnic. The number of participants will be determined by the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Winnebago County Health Department. The Fellowship Ministry Team is hopeful the Covid-19 assembly regulation will be relaxed for outdoor activities by mid-August. Reserve the SecondFirst Picnic date on your 2021 calendar.



OPPORTUNITY FOR GIVING: OGHs

On March 14 we will accept an offering to support One Great Hour of Sharing, commonly called OGHs. The funds raised support activities in disaster relief and refugee relief, both in the US and around the world. How to give: use the special envelope or make a check out to the church and write OGHs in the memo line. The world thanks you!



"GET AWAY" TO PILGRIM PARK AND TOWER HILL

Seek relief from the busyness of life, a place to unwind, relax and recharge. We have many rentals available with lodging ranging from 2 to 6-bedroom units to complete retreat areas. This is a great chance for close families to "get away" in a safe manner and greatly help our camps with the financial resource of this short-term rental income.

Come snuggle in with us for a couple days taking the time to hear God's voice in the wind, the waves of Lake Michigan, the babble of the creek. Come enjoy activities that range from having hot chocolate and reading a book, to eagle watching at Pilgrim Park to cross country skiing at Tower Hill. Call Tower Hill at 269-426-3881 and Pilgrim Park at 815-447-2390 for rental details!



SECONDFIRST FILM SERIES ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION: THE BUTLER

Discussion Sessions:

February 10 at 12:00 p.m. & February 11 at 7:00 p.m.

America's history of racial discrimination is well documented with filmmakers bringing their unique perspective and storytelling prowess. Join us for the first of what may become more discussions exploring and better understanding this history through film. In February we will watch Lee Daniels' The Butler, starring Oprah Winfrey and Forest Whitaker. Here are the logistics. On your own, watch The Butler in any way possible - on Netflix, rent on other streaming platforms like Amazon or Xfinity, or borrow the DVD from your local library. Then gather for one of two discussion sessions to discuss and reflect on the film. Both sessions will be held on Zoom. Registration is not required but helpful for our planning purposes. Contact Andy Newgren to register and receive the Zoom link or to ask any questions.

COFFEE CLASS

February 7: Theology as Autobiography, Special Guest Colby Dickinson, Loyola University

Giving an account of one's faith is at the same time to give an account of oneself—an act that is as relevant for theology as for any other facet of one's life. Traditionally, this is why the word confession has two meanings: to profess what one believes and to give a personal account of one's life and actions. Doing theology, in this sense, is an auto/biographical act that demonstrates the relevance of a particular life story and its context as things that are essential to the shaping of one's theological views. In turn, theology itself only becomes possible through individual life stories, something that theology has historically been loath to admit directly. Yet throughout the history of theological thought, the role of auto/biography has played a significant role in shaping the contours of its tradition. Through the lenses of ancient and contemporary Christian autobiographical writings (for example, from Augustine's classic Confessions to Mary Karr's memoir Lit), we will look at the role that auto/biography plays in shaping theological reflection as well as further understanding the daily operations of theology within a person's life of faith. As such, we can perhaps learn to see theology through the lives of those who make up traditions of faith.



Youth snow competition at the White Newgren's home. Next Youth Event: Friday, February 19.



These beautiful Valentine's Day items are from our Thrift Shop and they are available for purchase. For details, call Alice Uphouse.



Pictured: Andy Newgren gives an early word to his own children. Missing: All the other kids! We miss you and look forward to being together again when it is safe.



Rev. Rebecca and family ice skating on the lagoon at Nicholas Conservatory as mentioned on Sunday, January 31.



A NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT, ANDY NEWGREN

The books on my bedside table are a mess. They spill onto the floor. Some have traveled downstairs and wait their turn on the coffee table; others have found their way into my bag and journeyed beyond the house all the way to my office. All of these books are, of course, great. I received some as recent gifts while others have been sitting there for years. Subjects include the nature of the internet, the culture of the Vikings, novels, novels, novels, a biography, some academic works, and cartoons. And here's the confession you know is coming - I'm not going to read all of them, and I'm disappointed by that.

There's a wonderful Portlandia sketch that captures the absurdity of trying to impress and outdo one another. This notion of competition and one-upping isn't what drives my disappointment. Perhaps it is fueled instead by the realization that even during this past year, a season that seems like it should have gifted an abundance of time, time remains elusive.

Various Psalmists remind us that our time on earth is finite, and like the author of Ecclesiastes, warn against vanity. I think it's a spiritual discipline to reflect on this reality, to confront our limitations, but equally important to connect to others' sense of humanity. At a time when so many, myself included, long for normalcy, I wonder what memories will last. Mine will certainly be a mixed bag and perhaps left to linger without grand sweeping realizations. But these memories will help shape my understanding of what comes next. And no, in case you're wondering, Proust's In Search of Lost Time is not one of those books waiting for me...but maybe I'll add it to the pile since it ends with a marvelous party, the kind I remember and anxiously await to attend again.

WINTER HAS ARRIVED AND JEREMIAH IS IN FULL SWING!



- » Planning for 2021 planning LOVE Rockford is in its early stages
- » Our first of two food box distributions, which will include a packet of local social service agencies and financial help information, will be February 13th
- » Planning for the 2021 garden season has begun
- » The Neighborhood committee is in full swing with more neighbors involved in the planning than ever
- » We continue to deliver our newsletter door to door throughout the winter. It has been an important source of Covid related health information as well as pertinent economic related information from Prairie State Legal Services.
- » Plans for a spring scavenger hunt to bring the community to the business and art district of the Coronado Haskell Neighborhood
- » Planning our annual fundraising dinner
- » Organizing our sustaining donor kick-off (goal: 75 sustaining donors to commit to \$25/month)

If you would like to join in with the planning of any of these things, please call Sue at (815) 627-0001 or email at sue@jeremiahdevelopment.org.

SECONDFIRST COVID WORSHIP PLAN

Many thanks to our Covid committee who has been meeting regularly since last Spring! The next few months may be a roller coaster as people begin to be vaccinated and new variants of the virus are popping up. Our worship services and meetings will remain virtual during this time. On Easter Sunday, April 4, we will have two services. Our traditional Easter Sunday service with special guest musicians and all the fanfare the Resurrection deserves will be on Facebook Live at 10:00 a.m. But at 8:30 a.m. we will gather in our parking lot for an informal socially distanced celebration of the resurrection. This service will tentatively (Covid has taught us not to plan too far out!) kick off regular outdoor worship for the Spring/Summer at our normal 10:00 a.m.. Hopefully we can return to worship in the Sanctuary this Fall... knowing the world has changed and we will always have a virtual option as well. Won't it be great to be able to sing together again!

OVERNIGHT CAFE UPDATE



All is well with the Overnight Café. We are hosting 16-18 guests per night. Everyone is spaced out and wearing masks. Our staff is great! They treat the guests with dignity. If there is not a meal

on a certain night, they pool their money and order pizza or sandwiches.

The biggest expense for the Café is staffing. We hope to stay open until March 1. But if we do not have the funds we will close earlier. Thank you to all that have donated, whether it is financial, clothing, toiletries or food. If you would like to donate a meal, log onto Mealtrain and sign up with the Overnight Café.

NOMINATING MINISTRY TEAM

It is that time of year again when we are asking you to share your gifts and talents. The Church Ministry Teams are seeking enthusiastic people to be part of their teams. There is something for every interest. Team membership builds lasting friendships, provides a stronger sense of belonging and gives the feeling of accomplishment. As a result of COVID 19, meetings at this point will be held via Zoom. This eliminates the need to drive at night, go downtown at night, and gives us the ability to attend a meeting from nearly any location.

Do you want to know more about SecondFirst Church? Join a Ministry Team. You don't have to be a member to join. However, we are certain that if you join a Ministry Team you will want to be a member of the church also. If you would like to suggest yourself or someone else to fill a spot on a ministry team please contact any of the Nominating Ministry Team members listed below or call the office at 815-963-8431.

Katy Paterson, Chair; Phil Davidson, Co-Chair