

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

MARCH 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!

With Spring around the corner, it feels like we have almost made it! Hold on, hold onto God and hold onto each other. Covid distancing is a long journey and we need each other. Please reach out if you are feeling like you are at the end of your rope. Soon we will be able to see

one another more often for worship or fellowship in outdoor spaces where the air is clean.

A couple of you have asked some version of the question, "Why can people sleep in the gym overnight and I cannot come to worship on a Sunday morning?" It is a great question and it really exposes the grief we are all feeling by not being together in person. I've heard others of you respond: because your life does not depend on it. If people do not sleep in our gym overnight, they will die in the cold (it happened every year before you opened this overnight café). If those with homes and food do not come to worship, they will still be alive and safer due to less Covid exposure. Our Covid committee has done excellent work and made hard decisions to prioritize our safety.

The second response is more of a practical one, which we are working on solutions for. Last summer when we surveyed the congregation and you overwhelmingly said you wanted to worship virtually until this pandemic was over. As I speak with you all in meetings and over the phone, this sentiment remains the same. As we have prioritized virtual worship, all sung music has to be recorded and what actually happens in our sanctuary on a Sunday morning is not worshipful. For example, Andy shouts video cues from the back of the sanctuary to Valerie at the organ midservice (outtakes forthcoming). A newly formed AV committee is trying to address what upgrades we need to be able to hold a live worship service and stream at the same time once it is safe for us to be and sing together again. (Please thank Andy for the long hours of figuring out how to stream our worship and for doing it for a year without a Sunday off!)

If you have any questions, please please reach out to someone on the Covid Committee or give me a call. I'm back from disability and have spent a lot of time reaching out to those not in worship, but I would love to hear from you, too!

Peace to you,
Rebecca

P.S. A new all church survey will go out soon to regauge desire to meet in person since so many of us are being vaccinated. I'm really looking forward to seeing you all!!

SEE HOLY WEEK & EASTER INFO ON PAGE 2



Our Mission Ministry Team sponsored the Northern Illinois Food Truck to offer boxes of food to the children and families at Haskell School. Our volunteers (masked of course) loaded a box of perishable and a box of non-perishable for each household into cars. Even a delivery driver from the neighborhood dropping off a package for the school was grateful to be on the receiving end. Principal Loree Leathers also loaded boxes during school pick-up that day. Nice work, church!



NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CHURCH LEADERS URGE BIDEN TO DROP SUPREME COURT CASE, AID VULNERABLE PUERTO RICANS



Church leaders are calling on the Biden administration to withdraw a lawsuit that has reached the U.S. Supreme Court. The main issue in the case — filed by the Trump administration — is government benefits for vulnerable U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico.

United Church of Christ leaders were among 20 signers of a recent letter asking Biden to end the lawsuit. They said the suit, if successful, would deny \$2.3 billion a year in Supplemental Security Income to some 300,000 people with disabilities in Puerto Rico. SSI helps the elderly and people with disabilities who have little or no income. **Read more:** www.ucc.org

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) PC(USA) CHAMPIONS PEACE IN COLOMBIA



The Washington office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has signed onto a letter asking President Joe Biden to make the Colombian government's full implementation of 2016 peace accords a priority.

The Office of Public Witness joined more than 20 other groups in signing onto the March 1 letter, which asks Biden's administration to "pay attention to preserving and strengthening peace in Colombia and protecting the nation's endangered human rights defenders." The letter centers on peace accords dating back to the Obama-Biden administration that are at risk because of what the signatories describe as "weak implementation" in the South American country that has been embroiled in 56 years of armed conflict. **Read more:** presbyterianmission.org

LENT



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

PICK UP PALMS FOR PALM SUNDAY

Holy Saturday, March 27: 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Palms will be available for pickup on Saturday, March 27 between 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. Like last year, the palms will be strategically placed on the fence around the playground. Please park on Court Street.



PALM SUNDAY DRIVE-THRU

Sunday, March 28, 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

We can't celebrate together for our annual Palm Sunday Potluck, but we can host a drive through Lemon Bar event after church on March 28. If you weren't able to pick up palms on Saturday, we can send you home with palms and Lemon Bars. Hope to see you all here on Sunday, March 28!

HOLY WEEK PRAYER STATIONS

March 29 - April 1 (call to arrange time)

Come seek the Living Christ in the solace of our sanctuary. Times available Monday-Thursday. Contact Debbie Wise to schedule a time 815-963-8431.

MAUNDY THURSDAY WORSHIP

Thursday, April 1, 6:30 p.m. on Zoom

GOOD FRIDAY WORSHIP

Friday, April 2, 12:00 p.m. on Zoom

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunday, April 4

8:30 a.m. Outside Informal Worship, in person!
10:00 a.m. Traditional Virtual Worship, Facebook Live

RENEWAL AND REPAIR

By Paul Laprade, Director of Music

I remember first driving to Pennsylvania to start a new position as Associate Professor of Choral Music at Slippery Rock University. I had been conducting an off-Broadway show for two years while completing a degree with Grammy-winner Joseph Flummerfelt, and realized that the excitement of conducting nightly in such an environment was not in alignment with my hopes to start a family. I packed my belongings into a U-Haul, placed my car on a trailer, and drove on I-80 toward my new position.

In the midst of the I-80 stretch toward my new position, two tires (one on the trailer, another on the truck) were suddenly punctured by something that was never visible to me. On that early Sunday afternoon, I was stranded alongside the longest stretch of forest in PA: a national forest preserve. Cell towers weren't in reach, and towing/garage facilities were dozens of miles away, if at all opened on a Sunday afternoon in rural PA. State Police appeared after two more hours passed. They were kind to connect me with the only garage that was open (127 miles away); after two more hours passed, the mechanics arrived with the wrong size of tires! A little over four more hours later, I was back on the road and on my way to my destination.

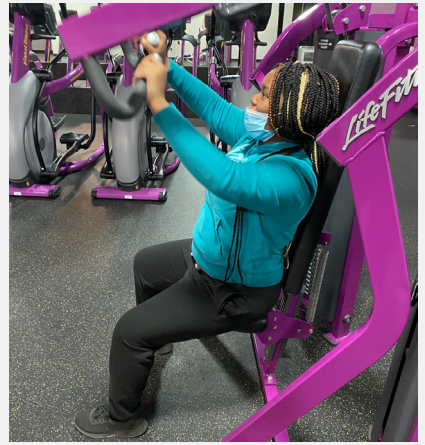
The current pandemic is a bit like that day. My approach is not to be panicked, but to seize the moment. I took out a blanket on that sunny day, picked a beautiful grassy spot alongside the forest-lined area of I-80, read chapters from the Dalai Lama's "The Art of Happiness", and wrote some music. Later, the truck was repaired, the destination reached, and I was renewed by doing something meaningful. While our congregation is not meeting in the sanctuary, we have repaired the Steinway and are undertaking a long-overdue and extensive set of repairs to the organ. When we are on the road of person-to-person worship again, we will have benefitted from the advantages that this unexpected puncture to our wheel of worship activities has made possible.

KFACT UPDATE

By Shamika Williams, Founder/CEO of KFACT

KFACT is in the process of launching our Spring programming for the girls! We are having a vision board night February 23rd to teach the girls the importance of creating a vision and plan for their lives regardless of their age and any life circumstances! There will be arts and creativity in the air! A special thank you to Beef A Roo for sponsoring dinner for the event!

Another exciting program that's taken place virtually and at a local gym is the FIT Girls Program led by FACT's very own Fabbie and Tavi! FIT Girls is designed with mind, body and spirit components to ensure development of the whole girl! Some of the activities: Crossfit, physical fitness, healthy eating and meal prep, journaling, spiritual affirmation and personal development!




EASTER SUNDAY FLOWERS

We will again have colorful pots of Spring flowers for the Chancel area of the Sanctuary, to celebrate Easter morning.

- Tulips in yellow, pink or purple are \$11.00
- White Easter Lilies are \$17.00
- Azaleas in deep pink are \$16.50

Orders are due by Friday, March 12, if you want a specific color. After that date, we can't guarantee the color. If you would like to order a blooming plant call or stop by the office and let us know what kind and what color you want. If you would like to acknowledge a loved one please provide that information at the time you order. You can call the office to place your order. The order form below is provided for your convenience.





EASTER FLOWERS ORDER FORM

Your Name _____

Name of Loved Ones _____

Type of Flower & Color _____

No. of Plants _____

Amount \$ _____

MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

This weather! Oh, my goodness, have we had enough of the snow and the Siberian Express? I certainly have. What makes me particularly grateful is that once again we have been able to keep people from freezing by opening our gymnasium for the Overnight Café. I am also grateful for the organizations and individuals who have provided food at the last minute when, because of the dangerous cold, the decision was made to keep the café open during the day.

I'm writing this on Ash Wednesday and am thinking about what Lent will look like this year. We are fortunate for the many ways we can connect during Lent thanks to technology and the vision/creativity of our leadership. There are Wednesday night services, people are able to pray through the sanctuary today, Thursday mindfulness guided meditation, daily readings, and discussion groups about the spirituals. I like to use the Daily Lectionary from the Book of Common Worship to walk me through this time of introspection and waiting. It helps me focus and consider what Lent means to me. I hope and pray that you find a meaningful way to journey through the Lenten season too.

Thanks be to God!
Ann Stites

JEREMIAH DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

By Sue Kanthak, Executive Director



Happy March! Jeremiah Development had a busy February. We continue to patiently wait as our new offices are being rehabbed in the old Parthenio's restaurant building. We partnered with Emmanuel Episcopal Church on February 13th to provide a drive-through food distribution.

Emmanuel sponsored the food boxes which contained shelf-stable food, a farm-to-table box (dairy and proteins), chicken, lunch meats, and other loose items. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois provided 250 boxes of fresh produce. Hats, gloves, and scarves of all sizes were generously donated by the community.

Jeremiah distributed the winter wear, community resource packets, and a bag with items that will help keep people busy during the indoor months. It included a journal, colored pencils, a kit to grow tomatoes, conflict resolution activities for children, and positive, self-affirmation activities for adults. These were sponsored through a grant from the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois - Armer F. Ashland Fund. Food and resources were delivered to those living in the Coronado Haskell Neighborhood who were unable to drive to the event, those living in the high rises, and those who walked up. Planning for the event began in November.

We planned on the possibility of snow, but the sub-zero temps added a bit more fun! With around 40 volunteers, we were able to rotate teams in and out of the cold. This would not have been possible without the many people who were able to bundle up and help including the 8 Boylan High School student volunteers who were out there with us. That night 274 households including 577 people had healthy food to eat. Thank you to all who made this a reality.

GOVERNING COUNCIL

During our January meeting, we had lively discussions about the budget and opportunities for worship. As you know, we approved a budget that had a significant shortfall and that budget was also approved by the congregation.

The budget was based on a combination of the 2019 and 2020 budgets and did not include two positions that were anticipated but can't be filled at this time. There will be a mid-year review of the budget to determine if we can sustain it or if it needs to be modified. If it needs to be modified, there will more than likely be another congregational meeting to approve the modifications.

With God's assistance and grace, we plan to have two Easter services: one outside at 8:30 and our traditional Zoom service at 10:00. It will be wonderful to see folks again in person!

Grace and peace,
Ann Stites

OVERNIGHT CAFÉ UPDATE



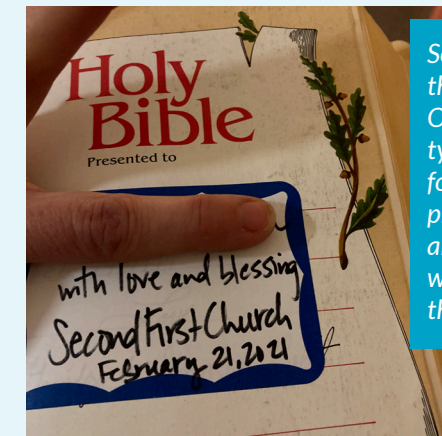
March 7th was the last night of the Overnight Café. While all data has not been calculated, we can tell you a few things. We have housed safely over 150 different guests over a 7 week period. We have averaged about 20 guests per night that were sleeping over 6 feet apart and

COVID recommendations were used. More exact information will be available in coming weeks.

The Community support has been tremendous. People have donated money, blankets, clothing, blessing bags and meals. Thank you SecondFirst for your gifts and space of the gym to house people in need.



Kids assemble care packages for our Overnight Café guests. Things like handwarmers, personal hygiene items, and warm socks.



Sometimes it's the small things. A man at the Overnight Café, who typically sleeps in the foyer, as his mental illness prevents him from being around too many people, was overjoyed to receive the gift of this Bible.

An Overnight Café guest, waiting for the doors to open.



Overnight Café guest, Rosie, was rightfully proud to have connected a McDonald's donation from Miss Carly's.

SERIOUS SOUP UPDATE!

By Sarah Reinold

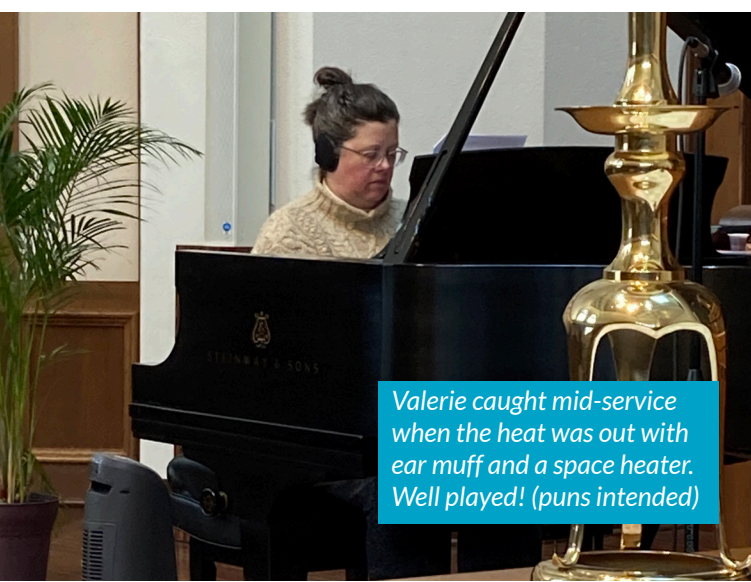


As with many things in 2020, Serious Soup was impacted by COVID-19. Before the pandemic, an average of 80 guests came to the dining room each Monday to enjoy delicious food, meet representatives from local nonprofits, and enjoy the companionship of others. After COVID-19 mitigations began and Serious Soup went on hiatus for a couple of months.

In August, Serious Soup reopened with many safety protocols in place. In addition to the precautions taken by the food preparers in the kitchen, the guests were served outside at tables. About 60 guests were served each week during this time. With the onset of colder weather, fewer guests came to get meals each week. Serious Soup again transitioned to handing out to-go bags full of hot food. Currently, about 30 guests pick up to-go bags each week. Though there has been a reduction in the number of guests served each week from this time last year, Serious Soup remains an important feature in our neighborhood. It continues to help build relationships with and between guests, and it provides a reliable source of food.

One thing that has not changed during the last year is the generosity of many people and organizations. It is this

generosity that makes Serious Soup possible. First, there is a dedicated group of volunteers who buy supplies, pick up food donations, prepare meals, serve food, and talk to guests every week. Next, the Salvation Army donates a plentiful amount of food each week. Not only does this food get used each Monday in the meals that are prepared, a lot of it is packed up (like granola bars and gallons of milk) and given to guests so they have something to eat later in the week. Finally, Serious Soup is financially supported through two main sources—donations to the church and a generous Neighborhood Grant from HomeStart (the same organization that awarded us a grant that made our playground possible!) Together with the generosity of many people and organizations, SecondFirst Church is making a difference in the lives of people in our neighborhood.



Valerie caught mid-service when the heat was out with ear muff and a space heater. Well played! (puns intended)

HAPPY HOUR AND COFFEE HOUR

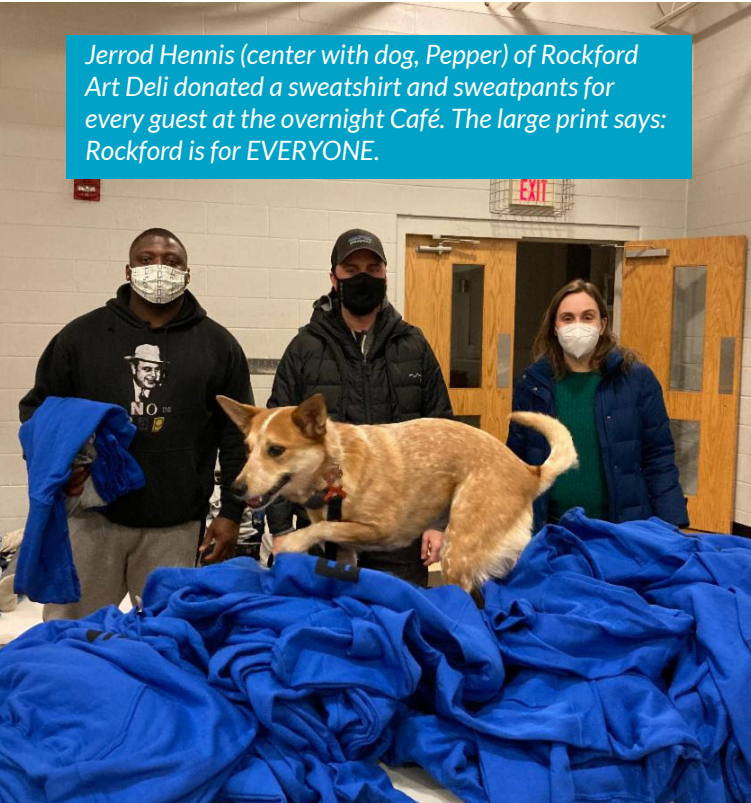
We have been enjoying happy hour chats on the first Thursday of the month at 6:30 p.m. If you can't make that time and would still like to see familiar faces, we're adding coffee hour after church the third Sunday at 11:00 a.m. Mark your calendars! We look forward to seeing you on Zoom. Contact: Debbie for the link.



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING
SPECIAL OFFERINGS
HUNGER • DISASTER • DEVELOPMENT

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!



Jerrod Hennis (center with dog, Pepper) of Rockford Art Deli donated a sweatshirt and sweatpants for every guest at the overnight Café. The large print says: Rockford is for EVERYONE.



Nothing better than having a cup of coffee from our Fair Trade Shop. We are taking orders of coffee, chocolate bars and other items. Contact the Church Office.

While the church is vibrant as we meet virtually, these windows remind of us God's radiant grace.



Andy Newgren leads his children in an enactment of the Good Samaritan.



WREX used our sanctuary to film a segment on the impacts of gun violence on families. What transpired was a healing session for loved ones to grieve together.

NOMINATING MINISTRY TEAM

By Katy Paterson Chair and Phil Davidson, Co-Chairs

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.



The temperature dropped a day or two before, but the snow was still there and ready for us to have tons of fun! The kids and adults alike had an absolute blast on the tubing hill at Alpine Hills Adventure Park on February 28th. We had a safe and snowy good time.

CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTRIES

By Rachel Huffman

When I felt called to work in children's ministry, I knew that it might be something of a challenge since I do not come from a traditional educational background in religious education and ministry. I of course spent my whole life and youth in the church, participating in all of the same things that the youth I would be working with will also be participating in, learning the same stories, being confirmed in my faith, and eventually working with youth groups and chaperoning when I was a young adult. Even with my active church background I find sometimes as I am lesson planning that even I have some gaps in my Biblical knowledge and I often spend hours pouring over websites and other sources of information written by passionate ministers who make these pieces of scripture accessible and understandable. What a gift it is to have such knowledge at the tips of our fingers.

of history, such as when Abraham Lincoln said "a house divided against itself cannot stand." This is an almost direct quote of Mark 3:25, however many children have grown up assuming that these words were Lincoln's own.

To this day there are a multitude of things whose context lies within the Bible and children who have no familiarity with the stories and people of the Bible are missing out on these vital connections. Fewer families are attending church these days, many because they feel that the Bible and church have no relevance to their lives. I believe that it is a gift to teach children how God fits into their lives and to share these important stories and scripture with them. This is knowledge that does not take anything away from what they learn outside the (virtual and physical) church walls, rather it adds so much value to their knowledge base as a whole.

With that being said, a kind long-time member of the church left me a sweet welcome note in my mailbox accompanied by an article from 2018 that outlined how few children in their school aged years are familiar with stories that you and I might know by heart: Noah and the great flood, David and Goliath, the story of the Last Supper, Moses and the Ten Commandments, and even the story of the Nativity. Beyond these stories, the article mentioned that gaps in Biblical knowledge can also cloud parts

As our weekly group grows, I feel privileged to get to know our congregation's children and to see already how much they know and how eager they are to learn. They have already done a great job at making connections to their current lives and I hope that as they grow, they are able to use their Biblical knowledge to make important connections academically and personally. I know that I certainly have.



A small but mighty youth group braved frigid temps and snow to flit around the ice at Nicholas Conservatory.

CALLING ALL PEANUT RINGERS

Sunday, March 21, 11:15 a.m.

Calling all Peanut Ringers please join us to play and record for upcoming service. If you have any questions please contact Sarah Hallberg at 815-978-7040.

