

SecondFirst Church

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

SEPTEMBER 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!

Any interim time can be exciting and fear inducing. With God's good blessing, Valerie Blair will lead us through our music interim. We are a blessed church!

The Worship, Music and Arts Ministry Team (the former Music Ministry Team expanded) decided the music interim has two goals:

1. To support the choir and our other member musicians as they give glory to God. To discern how to best support their music going forward. With this interim time, we have the opportunity to show our appreciation of those who use their musical gifts in worship by empowering our interim music director and bringing in choral directors and other creatives to make music with us.
2. To explore a wide array of musical traditions to determine what resonates within our church and community. Music has a unique way of bringing people together, and since as a church we are committed to diversity and inclusion, we'll use this interim time to explore a diverse range of musical possibilities.

Most of us know how blessed we have been for years to have Valerie Blair at the piano and organ and now we will get to experience even more of her talents. As Interim Music Director, she will lead and encourage the choir and our member musicians. She will secure musical talent for Sunday morning worship and special services with a balance of people from within and outside of the church, that inspires a wide range of cultures and peoples to worship God.

Let us be in prayer together for Valerie and for our church. Thanks be to God!

Peace to you,
Rev. Rebecca



Narrative Bible Study is Back!

Tuesdays at noon on ZOOM, beginning September 7, we will study the upcoming Sunday's Bible passage from the Narrative Lectionary. Come once or every week as we discuss the interaction of our stories with the Story of our faith. Led by Rev. Rebecca and open to all!



The church picnic was a beautiful afternoon full of great food and fellowship. More photos from the day can be found on page 7.



NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST UCC ISSUES \$100,000 APPEAL FOR HAITI AFTER 7.2 EARTHQUAKE, TROPICAL STORM



The United Church of Christ is issuing a call to action to help the people of Haiti. A massive 7.2 earthquake on Saturday has killed nearly 1,300 people. Search and rescue efforts are expected to be hampered by Tropical Depression Grace, which came ashore on Monday.

"The island of Haiti suffered major damages and loss of life from an earthquake this weekend," said the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, associate general minister, Wider Church Ministries and Operations. "We are issuing an appeal through the Global H.O.P.E. team to raise funds to assist in Haiti in any ways that we can, short-term, and also to assist with long-term recovery needs. **Read more:** www.ucc.org

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) HEARING FROM A DIVERSITY OF VOICES



Committee on the Office of the General Assembly gets latest updates on the 225th General Assembly

As the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

approaches another historic General Assembly next year, church leaders are making sure that all voices are heard across the denomination. In its monthly meeting on Thursday, the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly received updates on the planning as well as efforts to make this a more inclusive gathering. Julia Henderson, OGA's leader of Planning and Business, provided a summary of accomplishments as well as a list of ongoing and future items. The 225th General Assembly of the PC(USA) is scheduled to take place as a hybrid gathering between June 18 - July 9, 2022. Committee meetings will be held in person at the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, with online plenaries taking place afterward. The entire Assembly will cover a three-week period. **Read more:** presbyterianmission.org

This back to school season I did something I haven't done for a while - bought myself a new backpack. But I also did something I've done for years by opening my first year seminar with students reading "Theme for English B" by Langston Hughes. I do this for several reasons. One is to reinforce earlier statements that, particularly in this class, we are there to learn with and from each other and each of them brings unique experiences and insight. Another is to introduce the topic of identity, and how we incorporate the influences around us, including music, geography, and history. But finally, and maybe most important, is to address the fact I'm a white teacher and a majority of the students are persons of color, and I know they've experienced power imbalances in their life. It's a subtle way of saying "I see you," but equally a challenge for me. Will I be receptive to their truths? Will I humble myself enough to truly learn from them? Will I be able to foster a learning environment where we become a part of each other as Hughes states?

Some of these first year students said their first-day emotions included anxiety, hesitancy, nervousness, excitement, and feeling overwhelmed. I countered by having them state their hopes for the semester. A couple were just hoping to pass, others were concerned about finding balance, and a few were hoping to be positively shaped by their classes. A line on my syllabus for the class reads, "Our world needs YOU." No one asked me what my hope was, but it's that they embrace it.

What Can I Do? A Reflection on Race for DVT

By Darlene Riddle

When George Floyd was murdered, I felt helpless and wanted to educate myself to answer "what can I do?"

The most recent book I read was "Me and White Supremacy" by Layla F. Saad. The book is meant to be read over 28 days with journaling responses to tough questions at the end of each chapter. It's a tool to help people with white privilege "understand and take ownership of their participation in the oppressive system of white supremacy." We tend to think, "I'm not that bad" or "that doesn't apply to me", but by our whiteness we have unearned privilege, protection and power that comes at a steep price for those who are not white. There is an explanation of white fragility, tone policing, white silence and white exceptionalism.

No matter how much it hurt, I began to see and understand my personal complicity in experiences I didn't understand before. There are chapters about anti-Blackness against Black women, Black men and Black children to understand the impact on each. It was especially disheartening to learn of studies that show how Black children experience "adultification". One

study found that from the age of 10, Black boys are perceived as older and more likely to be guilty than their white peers and that police violence against them is more justified.

In 2017 a study titled "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood" was published by the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty. It provided data showing that adults view Black girls as less innocent and more adult like than their white peers. It showed that adults felt that they need less nurturing, less protection, and that they need to be supported and comforted less. That was mind boggling to think how they may be viewed by educators and school resource officers. "They are not being treated as children but dehumanized as if they are not worthy of the same level of care and attention that white children are." Very eye opening indeed.

This is just scratching the surface. This book is meant to be read multiple times and perhaps with friends and family for discussion. It's a lot to digest. The main question that sticks with me is "to what extent do I place white comfort over antiracism?"

CHILDREN AND YOUTH UPDATE

By Rachel Huffman

VBS was a lot of fun! I, being new to ministry, was shocked by how quickly 45 minutes can fly by when you're having fun. We truly have an extraordinary group of youth at SecondFirst. We have some fun fall plans and on the 29th we will be blessing backpacks (and devices!) for our students as they head back to school. We pray for their success, their safety, and that hopefully this year is a joyous one.



VALERIE'S THOUGHTS ON THE MUSIC INTERIM



Dear Church,

The church is not the building. It is not the pastor. It is not the music program. It is not a staff member. The church is you. All of you, doing the things for other people that Jesus himself did while he walked on the earth. Feeding hungry people. Clothing people who have nothing. Working in politics to create more equity and justice in your community. Gathering together to worship, hear the Word, and sing and play instruments in praise of the Almighty. I am in my twenty-second year of being here, as a member, and in my seventh as an organist and pianist, and have seen many changes happen these years. I love this church, and am so proud to be a part of something that is growing in the direction that we are.

Going forward we will be trying new ways of worshiping with music, while keeping ties to the traditional ways that have connected us from generation to generation, decade to decade, and century to century. At the same time that darn Covid keeps us in a certain amount of uncertainty, and makes planning difficult, this is an exciting time of possibility for innovation and exploration. I'm making notes (on envelopes and napkins and everywhere) of ideas as they come to me. I welcome any ideas you may have about music you would like to hear in worship. Let's see what we can do, Church!

Sincerely,
Valerie

Governing Council Highlights

By Katy Paterson

- » Paul Laprade's resignation was announced. A search committee will eventually be created by the Governing Council to find a replacement.
- » Serious Soup received a grant from Home Start.
- » John DeWaters, treasurer, reported declining expenses and contributions. The declining contributions need to be evaluated.
- » Trustees are working on fencing around our air conditioner to prevent vandalism. We need doors from the south parking lot into the church and new windows will soon be completed in Gordon Chapel. Missing mural panels have been repainted and are ready to be installed.
- » We discussed the Video Improvement Project.
- » Community Communion has been restarted.
- » DVT is looking at programs to study anti-racism.

SEPTEMBER *worship schedule*

SEPTEMBER 5 - COMMUNION
LABOR DAY WEEKEND
Preacher Rev. Rebecca White Newgren

SEPTEMBER 12
FALL KICK-OFF, OUTSIDE WORSHIP
Creation by the Word, Preacher Rev. Rebecca White Newgren

SEPTEMBER 19
Binding Isaac, Preacher Rev. Rebecca White Newgren

SEPTEMBER 26 - CARILLONS
Jacob's Dream, Preacher Andy Newgren



We were blessed to resume our church picnic tradition at Anna Page Park. It was a beautiful day.

SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

Wednesday, Sept 1
 10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 9:30 AM – Clothes Sorting
 7:00 PM – Worship Ministry

Thursday, Sept 2
 9:30 AM – Carillons
 4:00 PM – Deaconesses
 5:00 PM – JD Board Meeting

Friday, Sept 3
 No scheduled activities

Saturday, Sept 4
 No Scheduled Activities

Sunday, Sept 5 Communion
 8:30 AM – Coffee Class
 10:00 AM – Worship Service
 10:20 AM – Sunday School

Monday, Sept 6
 Office Closed Labor Day
 No Serious Soup

Tuesday, Sept 7
 7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast
 12:00 PM – Narrative Bible Study

Wednesday, Sept 8
 9:30 AM – Clothes Sorting
 10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 12:00 PM – Covid Committee

Thursday, Sept 9
 9:30 AM – Carillons

Friday, Sept 10
 No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, Sept 11
 9:00 AM – Bridge Clinic

Sunday, Sept 12
 8:30 AM – Coffee Class
 10:00 AM – Worship Service
 10:20 AM – Sunday School
 5:00 PM – Memorial Service

Monday, Sept 13
 11:30 AM – Serious Soup
 5:00 PM – Deacons Ministry

Tuesday, Sept 14
 7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast
 9:30 AM – Presbytery
 12:00 PM – Narrative Bible Study
 6:00 PM – DVT

Wednesday, Sept 15
 9:30 AM – Clothes Sorting
 10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 5:00 PM – Trustees Ministry

Thursday, Sept 16
 9:30 AM – Carillons

Friday, Sept 17
 No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, Sept 18
 No scheduled activities

Sunday, Sept 19
 8:30 AM – Coffee Class
 10:00 AM – Worship Service
 10:20 AM – Sunday School
 11:15 AM – Family CE Ministry Team

Monday, Sept 20
 11:30 AM – Serious Soup

Tuesday, Sept 21
 7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast
 12:00 PM – Narrative Bible Study
 5:00 PM – Missions Ministry

Wednesday, Sept 22
 9:30 AM – Clothes Sorting
 10:00 AM – Staff Meeting

Thursday, Sept 23
 9:30 AM – Carillons
 5:30 PM – Governing Council

Friday Sept 24
 No scheduled activities

Saturday, Sept 25
 9:00 AM – Bridge Clinic
 10:00 AM – Love Rockford w/Lunch

Sunday, Sept 26 Carillons
 8:30 AM – Coffee Class
 10:00 AM – Worship Service
 10:20 AM – Sunday School

Monday, Sept 27
 11:30 AM – Serious Soup

Tuesday, Sept 28
 7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast
 12:00 PM – Narrative Bible Study

Wednesday, Sept 29
 9:30 AM – Clothes Sorting
 10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 6:00 PM – Stewardship Committee

Thursday, Sept 30
 9:30 AM – Carillons

REFLECTIONS FROM THE MODERATOR

After attending new member sessions and the Governing Council retreat, I found that the answers to questions such as what attracted you to our church or why did you join our church are very interesting. To those of us who were born into the church, the question is why we continue to belong to our church. The answers to these questions tell us much about our church and what we’re doing right.

I’ve pondered some over the past few weeks thinking as to why I continue to belong to our church. We talked about belonging at the retreat. I know that Rebecca will continue to talk with us about belonging. I feel like I belong at our church. Our religion is what I believe. I very much appreciate the freedom to believe what I want to and still be comfortable at church. I appreciate that there’s not a lot of rules to follow or that there’s not a lot of rituals. We’re free to believe what we want to about such hot topics as abortion and gay marriage. I appreciate that the governing body of our church is our own congregation and not our staff or someone in our denomination.

My church is an integral part of my life. I have many friends here both within the congregation and the staff. During my recent health crisis the outpouring of love, prayers, visits, texts, phone calls, offers of help, cards, and food from our church has been tremendous. I couldn’t ask for more support.

Please take a few minutes and think about why you joined the church and why you continue to come. Hopefully we can find a way to share our stories. They are wonderful conversation starters and give us insight as to what is important to our church members.

Thoughtfully,
 Katy Paterson

SPECIAL MEMORIAL SERVICE

Sunday, September 12, 5:00 pm

It is difficult to lose someone you love. It is hard to say goodbye to a dear friend or family member. Due to the COVID, we were not able to say goodbye to friends and family of our church congregation who passed away during the shutdown. On Sunday, September 12, at 5:00 pm we will have an opportunity to say our goodbyes. The service will be filled with words of comfort and beautiful music. Please join us for this special service.

JUBILEE SOUP KITCHEN OFFERED AT LOVE ROCKFORD

Saturday, September 25

Our Soup Kitchen effort will dovetail with the lunch offered at Love Rockford in a fabulous two-fer! Love Rockford will supply funds for the meal and we will supply the people-power. Marge is coordinating the preparation of 250 to-go lunches of veggie-enhanced beef stew and various tasty sides. We will plan on two shifts: 9-11:30 am and 11 am - 1:30 pm. Would you like to participate? We’d love to have you. Contact the church office or Marge to make your wishes known. Thanks for all you do and for the continued support of our mission to feed the hungry.

SPECIAL UCC AND PCUSA OFFERING

Sunday, October 3

Opportunity for Giving: Neighbors in Need/Peace and Global Witness Offering. This month we receive a denominational support offering for both the UCC and the PCUSA. Neighbors in Need (NIN) supports UCC ministries of justice and compassion throughout our country: the Council for American Indian Ministry, and Justice and Witness Ministries. NIN funds projects that address systemic injustice. Peace and Global Witness (PGW) supports PCUSA programs in justice and reconciliation in cultures of violence, both locally and world-wide. Your support for this vital work is greatly appreciated. Checks can be sent to the church with notation.



FAIR TRADE SHOP

A new helper in the Fair Trade Shop-stop in and say hello to Donna. NEW helper but same OLD good coffee, chocolate bars, preserves, salsa, mustard, Olive oil etc. etc.



NEW WINDOWS!

By Trustee Alice Uphouse

Greetings to My Church Family, WOW! The final phase of new windows for Gordon Chapel, Emerson Hall, Choir Room and old office area are complete. The south end of our church is finished. Window World of Rockford did an amazing job from Tony, our salesman, Mike and his crew and myself for being so (patient). Scott Williamson the owner, gives a 10% Discount for

churches, the total cost was \$32,535.00. Scott visited our church to see the windows, the design of some of the windows have never been made before. Check out the choir rooms’ rounded corner windows and the fan shaped in Emerson Hall and Gordon Chapel. I would like to thank Bill Hoff and the Foundation for continuing to support projects that enhance the beauty of this Church that we call home. Check out some of the construction. All the old steel window frames had to be removed with a Sawzall. Pictured are Scott Williamson Owner of Window World, Katy Paterson Moderator, Jim Delmore Chairman of Trustees, Alice Uphouse.

2021 HYBRID CROP HUNGER WALK

Sunday, October 17, 1:00 pm

This year the Rockford Area CROP Hunger Walk will be a hybrid event. This means we will gather again at 1 p.m. in the Riverfront Museum Park October 17th, IF Covid conditions allow. OR our congregation may hold its own walk around our building as we did last year when we raised \$7,040 of the \$41,455 Rockford total.



Rockford is just one of some 1,000 other communities nationwide that are joining together again in interfaith CROP Hunger Walks around the theme “Ending hunger one step at a time.”

Looking to make a difference in our local community and in communities worldwide, the Rockford CROP Hunger Walk has set a goal of 200 Walkers and hopes to raise \$45,000 to help end hunger and poverty through long-term sustainable approaches to significantly reduce hunger. A portion of the funds raised will go to the Greater Rockford Pantry Coalition.

Billions of neighbors around the world have to walk to live. Millions of Americans must rely on local food pantries, food banks and meal sites. From combating droughts in Nicaragua to providing agricultural training in Indonesia to stocking shelves in hundreds of food pantries across the United States, CROP Hunger Walks are a part of Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty. Please join in this critical endeavor. Learn how at www.crophungerwalk.org/rockfordil.

LOVE ROCKFORD IS BACK!
September 25, 2021: 10:00 am – 2:00 pm
 Registration 9:30 am

- ♥ LOVE Rockford is back in 2021. The pandemic prevented Jeremiah Development from holding the event in 2020, but the 2021 event will incorporate measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- ♥ LOVE Rockford is a four-hour event organized to help those in need of physical, emotional, medical, legal, and financial support.
- ♥ LOVE Rockford is fortified with the help of more than 30 agencies that provide services such as family therapy, counseling for addiction and domestic violence, evaluation and treatment for mental illness, assistance with medical needs, and legal aid regarding immigration issues. It also provides basic necessities such as food and clothing.
- ♥ LOVE Rockford is a chance for individuals, faith communities, organizations, health care providers and businesses to join hands to make a difference in the lives of struggling residents.
- ♥ LOVE Rockford is the potential for a fresh start—an opportunity for those who are ready to put the pieces of their lives back together again.

The event takes place at the locations of Jeremiah Development's three founding churches:

Court Street United Methodist Church — 215 N. Court St.
 SecondFirst Church — 318 N. Church St.
 Emmanuel Episcopal Church — 412 N. Church St.



APPLES FOR EDUCATION UPDATE

By Holly Beeman

Apples for Education provides a fresh, healthy apple to any student at Haskell School who arrives at school hungry and too late to eat the breakfast provided before their school day begins. You can imagine what it would be like trying to learn in class while being so hungry you could not concentrate. Apples are packed with nutrition and help fill that hungry student until the lunch hour where lunch is then provided.

“Apples” has been a successful, ongoing mission which SecondFirst Church has been working with Haskell School for more than 5 years. The pandemic may have thrown a curve into this mission yet SecondFirst still got those apples donated and delivered whenever the doors at Haskell were open! This could not have happened without continued support and prayers from our congregation.

“Apples” has many volunteers who donate, pick-up and deliver apples all the while keeping these apples and the kids who enjoy them in prayer. You might have volunteered or prayed for this program in the past. For this Haskell School staff & students are very grateful!

This new School year 2021/2022 is right around the corner. In the next few weeks I will work with Loree Leathers (principal) to find the safest way for those apples to get to school. Meanwhile, if you would like to donate, deliver or both (even if you have done so in the past). Let me know you would like to continue to do so or to maybe join for the first time. Likely you will be called on several times during a school year. And always, your prayers are needed. Thank you so much!

KFACT
 Trunk
 Party
 Update

KFACT has terrific news to share about the success of our Community Trunk Party campaign that kicked off July 1 thru July 31 with our community partners: Mr. Goodwater, Blackhawk Bank, Kaney Aerospace, Bischoff Dentistry, Fitness Works, 510 Threads, Martha Hutt, Courtney Geiger, SecondFirst Church, Brian Boyer State Farm Group, PEO Group, Therese Trendhile and friends, community friends of KFACT and an anonymous donor.

We have exceeded our goal of making sure all 2021 class graduates have college and career essentials needed for the fall as they pursue post-secondary education!

However, if you have items you've already purchased to donate or would like to donate, we are still in need of program supplies such as hygiene products, multicultural hair products, gift cards to be used for program incentives, snacks for the Girls Space, and gas cards for the KFACT van to transport the middle and high school girls!

Please visit www.k-fact.org to contribute financially or drop off any items you would like to contribute Tuesday through Friday at KFACT 318 N Church Street 9:00 am-3:00 pm in the main church office!

BACK TO SCHOOL TIME FOR HAITI SEPTEMBER 2021

How are our friends in Haiti? We hear from the news that there is continued upheaval in Haiti. The assassination of President Jovenel Moise, 53 occurred on July 7, 2021 in his home. On August 14, Haiti suffered another 7.2 earthquake with the resulting death toll of over 1,400 people. This week tropical storm Grace is drenching Haiti as rescue and recovery efforts continue. Our church members, Odette and James Casimir report that their town of Saut-d'Eau was not damaged from the earthquake but tropical storm Grace is bringing drenching rains as rescue efforts continue.



James Casimir greets our school kids

It is Back to School Time in Haiti. The Casimir's returned to Rockford the last week of August and they report to us that our 54 children are ready to go to school. We remember that there is no free education in Haiti and our SecondFirst Church provides tuition for our sponsored students. These children would otherwise not be able to enroll in school but with our donation they receive tuition, uniforms, books, backpacks and a daily meal at the cost of \$250 per child per year.

Our Mission Ministry Team has offered to donate one dollar for every two dollars up to \$2,500. 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 any questions, or would like to join the Haiti Interest Group at SecondFirst Church, please contact:

- » Roger & Carolyn Greenlaw: rgreen97@aol.com, csgreen52@aol.com
- » James & Odette Casimir: casimir0401@gmail.com



Odette Casimir gives school supplies



Mom has her children ready for school



Kids receive their backpacks



Baptism of Aiden Jon Butterbaugh, born August 28, to parents Chris and Jessy, little brother of Ellise, and grandson of Janet and Jon Merchant.



After last summer's quiet (Covid, of course), the gym was again full of fun and love with the Park District's Teen Therapeutic Rec program. Each teen's special needs were met by a caring and fun park employee whose patience and love exceeded the norm. What a gift it is for us to be able to host this program!