#### SecondFirst Church

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#### NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
MEDIA JUSTICE ADVOCATES HEAR CALL
TO FIGHT WHITE NATIONALISM



The civil rights victories of the 1960s drew a backlash from white supremacists. Today that backlash is rising again — meaning it's time for another movement. That was the message from Eric K. Ward as he delivered the United Church of Christ's 2021 Everett C. Parker Lecture in Ethics and Telecommunications.

"This is the point in history when we have the privilege to launch a 21st-century civil rights movement – one that speaks to the challenges of today," said Ward, who heads a nonprofit devoted to "inclusive democracy." He spoke during the online lecture and awards ceremony Oct. 19. The annual event honors people who work for justice, inclusion and fairness in communications media. *Read more: www.ucc.org* 

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) DETROIT CHURCH UPCYCLES FOOD TO FEED OTHERS



A partnership between Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church in Detroit and an organization that works to reduce food waste is helping to feed the hungry while also protecting the planet. Make Food Not Waste, an environmental

organization that makes use of donated food, and Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian, a Certified Hunger Action Congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), began working together last year to provide meals to those in need, including single mothers, elderly and the working poor.

"It's been actually kind of wonderful," said Paul Booker, mission committee chair, who helps distribute food and washes dishes for the chefs. *Read more: presbyterianmission.org* 

#### **NOVEMBER 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!

Covid has shifted our lives in many ways and all of us are trying to figure out how to live into these new realities. What are our patterns? What do we really enjoy doing? Which people still give us life? Perhaps we should always be asking these questions, but when forced to ask them, it can feel disorienting. Many people I talk to feel a little bit

lost. On Sunday, October 26, we heard the story of the priest Samuel looking for the one God wanted to be the next king of Israel, David. God looks for each one of us with the same intensity. From that sermon:

God will stop at nothing to find you. God will pursue you. God will send out a search team with a glass slipper to see if it fits you. God will look for you when people are pointing to all the others who are more qualified, more talented, better looking, or nicer. God will find you.

What seriously do we do about that? We fall on our knees as David did and we sing. We sing the Psalm written when David messed up with Bathsheba, and we confess our whole selves before God: the good, the bad, the indifferent, the lost, the forgotten... all the parts. And we say as Samuel did, "Here I am." Then we ask for God to "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me." And God does. God does this for us. When we surrender our hearts and our lives, God takes our very life and breath and uses us, you and me, the ones who people think strange things about, US! God uses us for God's glory to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

In this season of stewardship where we reflect on what the church means to us, let us gather together, be reminded that we are not alone. May we each be found by God and be drawn together into God's mission and ministry. In November and every month, I am grateful for you!

Peace, Rev. Rebecca



## STEWARDSHIP DEDICATION

Sunday, November 21
While COVID won't all

While COVID won't allow us to share a meal all together quite yet, we will celebrate with pumpkin bars! For those of you worshipping virtually, you may drive through for your pumpkin bar and to drop off your pledge card beginning at 11:30am. What a great celebration of our mission and ministry it will be!







#### November is Stewardship Season

Our annual Stewardship season began Sunday, October 24 and we will celebrate through Dedication Sunday on November 21. This year's theme from the UCC is Rooted in Love. We ask you to get in touch with your roots in the church recalling a time in your life when the church held its greatest importance for you. Several church members are sharing theirs in worship and the E-word. We hope they will call to mind some of yours.



### A NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT, ANDY NEWGREN

It's not news to say outrage today can be easily manufactured. The great crowd sourced website Urban Dictionary defines "manufactured outrage" as "A falsified righteous outrage at things that are basically unimportant and meaningless, frequently employed by politicians, political activists, or the media. Politicians and talking heads use it to garner support for their causes, to claim the moral high ground and to tar their opponents; the media often just uses it in a cynical bid to increase ratings." Politicians and the media are easy targets here, but warranted deep skepticism over this kind of self-righteousness can blind us to areas where true outrage is justified.

Here's something you may not know about me - sometimes I find kindness, or more specifically niceness, overrated. Creative conflicts, competition, and personal frictions can lead to greater artistic output, circumvent complacency, and lead to deeper interpersonal relationships. And, I must confess, sometimes I miss the emotions and energy that are so apparent on the streets of larger urban centers (or the Philadelphia Phillies stands).

Moreover, we have done all we can to avoid the image of worshipping a God who acts on enraged impulses to smite humans. Any Zeus-like god who hurls thunderbolts towards creation with the intent to cause damage surely cannot align with the God of "loving kindness" in the Hebrew Bible. But yet, surely Jesus was outraged from time to time and didn't flip over the tables because he was having a bad day.



We are grateful for all of our volunteers! This group of bell ringers stayed to help stuff the Stewardship mailing.

## NOVEMBER worship schedule

**NOVEMBER 7: REMEMBERING LOVED ONES**God Speaks to Elijah, Preacher Becky Erbe

#### **NOVEMBER 14: BAPTISM**

Amos: Justice Rolls Down, Preacher Rebecca White Newgren

#### **NOVEMBER 21: DEDICATION SUNDAY**

Isaiah: A Child is Born, Preacher Rebecca White Newgren

#### NOVEMBER 28: FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Jeremiah's Letter to Exiles, Preacher Becky Erbe

## A little bit from Pastor Becky E.

The very first time I stepped in this church was for my Father's wedding. The next time I came to church was several years later. I brought my first born who was almost 3 at the time. We sat in the balcony. When my child saw the white-haired minister, he asked if that was God. The next time after that, I was sitting alone in the middle section of the main floor. The sermon was great, but I had angered some women who were sitting behind me. They loudly voiced their frustrations about not being able to see the chancel over my big hair. It was the 90's, what can I say. I did come back though. I wanted this to be my church home. Before too long I was teaching kindergarten Sunday school, then on the Christian Ed Board, until finally I became the CE Director and the rest is history. I climbed my way up the corporate ladder of a church, if that is a possible thing.

What if I had let those ladies, who really meant no harm, chase me away? How do we react to visitors? It is ok for a new visitor to sit in your usual pew. It is wonderful to have children in worship and hear them wiggle, giggle and drop the hymnals. Jeans and tee shirts are just fine to wear. It is a pleasure to have people in our Sanctuary and at home worshipping together. It is a pleasure to have you with us each week. Let us be a blessing to each other, and let us be a blessed church in our community. Let us be alive, awake and aware of Christ's presence. Let us be a blessing to the stranger that may come in and shower them with the love we have for each other.

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#### FROM THE ORGAN BENCH BY VALERIE BLAIR

On November 7th we will begin a three week series centered around the song Lift Every Voice and Sing, known as the Black National Anthem. The text was written in 1899 by James Weldon Johnson, then set to music by his brother, J. Rosamund Johnson, and first performed by the children of Edwin McMasters Stanton Elementary School in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1900. The brothers subsequently moved to New York, and didn't think of the song again, but the children of that school kept singing it, and it spread until it was sung all around the South by individuals and organizations for a variety of occasions. In 1919 the NAACP adopted it as the official Negro National Anthem. During the worship services of the next three weeks, we will attempt to really learn the song and text, examining the ways the text connects to the scriptures, and speaks to us individually and collectively. The intent behind this is to grow as a congregation in our commitment to justice, and to reimagine this song as more than just what we sing in February for Black History Month; a song that can be sung many times during the year, as it connects to many parts of scripture, and calls us all to work for a just society. And...it's a good song.

Lift every voice and sing

Till earth and heaven ring

Ring with the harmonies of Liberty

Let our rejoicing rise

High as the listening skies

Let it resound loud as the rolling sea

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us

Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us

Facing the rising sun of our new day begun

Let us march on till victory is won

Stony the road we trod

Bitter the chastening rod

Felt in the days when hope unborn had died

Yet with a steady beat

Have not our weary feet

Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

We have come over a way that with tears has been watered

We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered

Out from the gloomy past

Till now we stand at last

Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast

God of our weary years

God of our silent tears

Thou who has brought us thus far on the way

Thou who has by Thy might Led us into the light

Keep us forever in the path, we pray

Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee

Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee

Shadowed beneath Thy hand

May we forever stand

True to our God

True to our native land

Our native land

## 2021 Illinois Conference Annual Celebration

November 16 - November 20

STRONGER TOGETHER: Annual Celebration

"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." -Ecclesiastes 4:12b

This year's Annual Celebration will be a little different! The completely virtual format, held from November 16 – 20, will offer inspiring worship services and learning opportunities as well as sessions for conducting the business of our conference.

Beginning Tuesday, November 16, each day will offer different ways for participants to connect. Each morning will begin with a devotional time to set our intention for the day. Afternoons will offer learning opportunities and evenings will have worship services, panel discussions and fellowship time.

This year's learning opportunities include an All-Conference Book Discussion Day with Rev. Dr. Terrill Murph leading a discussion on the book, Culture Catalyst by Samuel Chand, and Rev. Gloria Cox will lead a discussion on the book, The Color of Compromise by Jemar Tisby. You'll want to read the books and come prepared for great discussions.

Beginning Wednesday, November 17, Dr. Velda Love, Minister for Racial Justice of the UCC, will lead a 2-day workshop, Sacred Conversations to End Racism, "a Restorative Racial Justice Journey curriculum created to address and dismantle racism within the Christian Church and society." Resources for pre-reading and pre-viewing of videos prior to the class will be provided with registration for the workshop.

Other highlights of Annual Celebration are:

- » November 16: Opening Worship with Conference Minister, Rev. Molly Carlson
- » November 18: Interactive Panel on Financial Status of Conference
- » November 19: Keynote Address with Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer
- » November 19 & 20: Business Sessions
- » November 20: Closing Worship with Rev. Jesse Knox

SecondFirst has paid for our church's virtual access, so please contact the church office for the link!

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### NOVEMBER CALENDAR \* held via zoom

Monday, Nov 1 No Serious Soup

Tuesday, Nov 2

7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast 12:00 PM – Narrative Bible Study\* 5:30 PM – DVT\*

Wednesday, Nov 3

10:00 AM - Staff Meeting 4:00 PM - Executive Comm. 6:00 PM - Martin Ringers 7:00 PM - Worship Ministry\*

Thursday, Nov 4

9:30 AM – Carillons 4:00 PM – Hospitality Team\* 5:00 PM – JD Board Meeting 6:00 PM – Bellcantos

6:00 PM – Bellcantos 7:00 PM – Choir Rehearsal

Friday, Nov 5

No scheduled activities

Saturday, Nov 6 9:00 AM - Bridge Clinic

Sunday, Nov 7 Communion

Remember Loved Ones 8:30 AM – Coffee Class\* 10:00 AM – Worship Service 10:20 AM – Sunday School

Monday, Nov 8

No Serious Soup 5:00 PM - Deacons\*

Tuesday, Nov 9

7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast 9:30 AM – Presbytery 12:00 PM – Narrative Bible Study\* Wednesday, Nov 10

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting 12:00 PM – Covid Committee\* 6:00 PM – Martin Ringers

Thursday, Nov 11

9:30 AM – Carillons 6:00 PM – Bellcantos 7:00 PM – Choir Rehearsal

Friday, Nov 12

No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, Nov 13

8:00 AM - Church Landscape Clean Up

Sunday, Nov 14 Baptism

8:30 AM – Coffee Class\* 10:00 AM – Worship Service 10:20 AM – Sunday School

Monday, Nov 15

11:30 AM - Serious Soup

Tuesday, Nov 16

7:00 AM - Men's Prayer Breakfast 12:00 PM - Narrative Bible Study\* 5:00 PM - Missions Ministry\*

Wednesday, Nov 17

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting 5:00 PM – Trustees Ministry\* 6:00 PM – Martin Ringers

Thursday, Nov 18

9:30 AM – Carillons 5:00 PM – Governing Council\*

6:00 PM - Bellcantos

7:00 PM – Choir Rehearsal

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Friday, Nov 19 No Scheduled Activities Saturday, Nov 20 No Scheduled Activities

Sunday, Nov 21 Peanuts

8:30 AM – Coffee Class\* 9:30 AM – Peanuts Rehearsal

10:00 AM – Worship Service 10:20 AM – Sunday School

11:15 AM – Family CE Ministry Team

Monday, Nov 22

11:30 AM - Serious Soup

Tuesday, Nov 23

7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast No Narrative Bible Study\*

Wednesday, Nov 24 Office Closed

Thursday, Nov 25

Thanksgiving Office Closed

Friday, Nov 26 Office Closed

Saturday, Nov 27 No scheduled activities

Sunday, Nov 28 First Sunday in Advent

8:30 AM – Coffee Class\* 10:00 AM – Worship Service 10:20 AM – Sunday School

Monday, Nov 29

11:30 AM - Serious Soup

Tuesday, Nov 30

7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast 12:00 PM – Narrative Bible Study\*





#### REMEMBERING LOVED ONES

Sunday, November 7

We have a wonderful tradition here at SecondFirst Church. On the first Sunday in November we will honor our members who have passed away this past year. Please join us for this special Sunday.

#### CHURCH FALL LANDSCAPE CLEAN UP

Saturday, November 13, 8:00 am - 12:00 pm

Please bring rakes, pruning shears, and any other items you would like to use. Contact: Ron Schaad

#### JUBILEE SOUP KITCHEN SOS!

Saturday, November 20, 10:00 am

The good news is that our next date to pack to-go lunches at the Jubilee Center will be November 20! The bad news is that both Marge and Jean will be dealing with knee replacements at that time, something neither of us had planned on when we selected this date a year ago. Hence the SOS: Marge is the official coordinator and is looking for a personal assistant for that day. I will still do the planning and assembling of items (utilizing online ordering and pick up service from GFS and Woodman's) but I need someone to help schlep it all into the Jubilee Center and get it ready to go. Could this person be you? Let me know if you are interested or if you have other questions, at <a href="mailto:mtm.home@me.com">mtm.home@me.com</a> or call me at 815-980-5304.

#### CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA DONATIONS

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

#### THE CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING / CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING

Sunday, December 19

We will receive gifts to the UCC and PCUSA funds that support current and retired church workers in need. The funds are used to help with emergency situations, housing, long-term care, health care costs, and supplements to small pensions. In this season of giving, we extend our gifts to those who were called to serve our churches with love and faithfulness. Thank you.

#### FOLLOW UP TO BELONGING INTERVIEWS

The Belonging committee has conducted their interviews. In this process, we were hoping to connect with ALL of you. That being said, any list can always be incomplete or a phone number wrong. If you have not been contacted, please let Debbie in the office know and provide the phone number or email address that you wish us to contact you by. She will let us know and someone will get back to you. Thanks to all of you who have participated already.

#### **EDWARDS APPLE ORCHARD**

What fun!! Edwards' Apple Orchard visit was a hit!! We had so much fun we forgot to take pictures. We all were in good company, long time members and new friends alike. We are looking forward to doing more things like this in the future. If you have any idea of where we can go, drop me a line or give me a call. We are looking for daytime and evening outings.







#### CROP HUNGER WALK NEARS ITS GOAL

What a lovely day October 17 was for a CROP Hunger Walk in Rockford. Several members gathered in the parking lot and walked for a couple of blocks. Led by Pastor Becky they marched with posters and hula hoops to let neighbors know their support for the fight against hunger in Rockford and around the world.

The Walk is well on its way toward reaching the goal of \$40,000 thanks to church members and other friends. Though the date is past, the chance to contribute is not. You can still give a donation online at <a href="https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2021/team/2nd-1st-church-of-rockford">https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2021/team/2nd-1st-church-of-rockford</a> and know the satisfaction of helping Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty, CROP Hunger Walk communities like ours.



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#### MODERATOR'S REFLECTIONS

By Katy Paterson

One of the groups that I belong to outside of church is the Women's Interfaith group. This group meets monthly, although Covid disrupted it, and has a speaker or discussion and sometimes a delicious potluck. It is made up of women from various faiths. This month we will be discussing the book An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz.

Until I read this book, I thought I was fairly well educated about how we, as a nation, had treated Indigenous peoples. Wow! I learned so much by reading this book. I've been thinking about the book ever since I finished it.

The author emphasized that it is a myth that our pilgrim ancestors found an undeveloped, frontier land when they landed in America, Instead the colonists took the land from a large network of small and large Indigenous peoples' nations whose governments, commerce, arts, sciences, agriculture technology, theologies, philosophies,

and institutions that were intricately developed and interwoven. When the colonists arrived most of the Indigenous peoples were farmers who had created towns, farms, earthworks, and roads. If North America had been wilderness and underdeveloped lands without roads and cultivated ground, the colonists wouldn't have survived. The colonists stole cultivated farmland with crops such as corn, vegetables, and tobacco. They used existing roads and waterways to move armies to conquer the Indigenous peoples. Many wars throughout history were fought to displace the Indigenous peoples. Unarmed women, children, and old men were annihilated during these wars.

Looking at my roots, I continue to be proud of my roots in our church. However, I have a long ago relative in my mother's family who came over on the Mayflower. I am horrified to think that I had relatives participating in the unjust treatment of the Indigenous peoples. Reading this book has certainly changed

my opinion of the pilgrims and those who followed them in history.

We recently took a special UCC and PCUSA offering at church. I was encouraged to read part of the donations were going to the Council for American Indian Ministry. Another encouraging act was President Biden issuing a presidential proclamation of Indigenous Peoples' Day to refocus Columbus Day.

Indigenous peoples are currently asking that treaties made between them and the United States be honored, sacred sites restored, and all stolen sacred items and body parts be returned. In addition, they are asking for payment of sufficient reparations for the reconstruction and expansion of Native Nations.

I encourage all of you to read this book. We can't erase history, but we can help change the future. Hopefully.

#### SEPTEMBER GOVERNING COUNCIL By Katy Paterson

Staff Reports - Many church activities were reported.

- » Treasurer's Report This year's finances look very similar to last year and assuming the giving comes in as usual, we expect to be in the black. Congregational contributions are down from year's past due to Covid and members dying.
- » Trustees continue to move towards utilizing two committees financial and facilities.
- » Covid Committee -Vaccination will be required for church attendance for those people who are eligible and have access.

#### **New Business**

- » The Worship, Music, and Arts Ministry Team moved to appoint Linda Johnson to fill a vacant 3-year term. The motion passed.
- » Sundae Sunday Because we will not be having it this year it was suggested that teams post videos or photos of various events on the website.

#### **Reports from Teams**

- » Deacons are planning Dinners for 9.
- » Hospitality is planning a muffin celebration.
- » Worship, Music and Arts reported the sound system has been ordered. Choir practice is starting. Research is being done as to what other churches do for music staff.
- » Family Christian Ed reported a successful trip to Summerfield Zoo. Trunk or Treat is October 30th.
- » Missions reported that Love Rockford is September 25th.
- » DVT had their first Belonging Committee meeting and worked on interview questions.
- » Adult Ed continues to develop programs for Sunday mornings.

#### OCTOBER UPDATE FROM THE TRUSTEES

By Jim Delmore, Chair

On October 6th the water pipe from Church Street sprung a leak. The leak was in the hallway between the restroom and the old church office. The water pipe is lead and cannot be patched. We had two options which were to cut the cement floor in the old office area and hand dig or run a new service from the Gym area. It was estimated that the cutting of the cement and hand digging would probably cost at least twice as much. The city turned off the water. Duraclean dried everything out and Helm will run a new 2 inch copper pipe that will tie into the existing copper pipe in the church. The church is safe because the water supply to the sprinklers has not been affected. I would like to thank everyone that helped move everything from the office area and the Historian's Room. It will be a while before the new flooring can be installed and items returned. We will have to use the gym restrooms until the new service is installed. Other items have been taking place which are not as exciting. We have received a quotation for the replacement of the electric sign and are determining which would be the correct action to take. The mural needs to have one more panel painted before installation can take place. Many other items have been repaired or replaced for a complete list of Trustees activities please look at the meeting minutes in the office.

#### JEREMIAH DEVELOPMENT HAS HAD A BUSY MONTH!

LOVE Rockford was an amazing success. I wasn't sure if we would get a turnout due to Delta, but we did. The Winnebago County Health Dept was onsite and gave 25 Covid vaccines and even more flu shots! We had twentyfour leaders, and multiple sub-committees working hard to make this event successful and safe. Their commitment to their role with Jeremiah Development, as well as their effort to the Rockford community is applauded.

We had thirty-one vendors from medical, mental health and social service organizations present. Twenty-two of the organizations reported back to us on having given out 637 pieces of agency information and a combined total of 987 face-to-face contacts.

At the drive-thru food distribution, 124 households received a combined weight of 3,846 pounds of food, feeding 281 family members. At the walk-up food market, bags of fresh vegetables were passed to 150 families.

For this 2021 LOVE Rockford, we had 142 households, with 276 household members, register their participation. We are aware that in taking Covid precautions, we were unable to capture the count of all who attended. We did not funnel the attendees through a single registration

point as in past years and the outdoor setting allowed for easy foot access to the activities. We appreciate the support of the pastors, their staff and congregations, the 100+ volunteers, and the Jeremiah Board.

Movie Night was so much fun. We had 40 neighbors enjoy The Addams family and receive Halloween costumes. It was VERY cold, so by the end of the movie there were only 2 brave adults left! We are looking forward to watching movies next summer.

Computer Center: The computer center opened unofficially last week. In the two days (8 hours) it was open, we had four people use the computers. One person received help signing up for SNAP and another was able to access records online from Wisconsin so she could get her driver's license. Between the free books and computers, our space is being used 5 - 6 days a week

Board Training: Over the next few months the board of directors will be doing training and future visioning. We will hopefully have an answer to "what will Jeremiah look like in 10 years and how do we get there?" Jeremiah has been growing so quickly, it's time for some solid direction.













#### To Come:

#### **Food Distribution**

November 6th, Jeremiah will be doing our final food distribution. The drive through food distributions were begun as a response to the needs of the neighborhood during the pandemic, however it is not a program JD is able to take on permanently. We will be distributing produce and frozen turkey. If you would like to volunteer to help, go to jeremiahdevelopment.org and fill out a volunteer request form.

#### **Bingo**

Many of our more senior neighbors have expressed a desire to get together of a regular basis and play bingo. Oak Street Health will be hosting regular bingo days at our offices beginning November 23rd! This will be a great opportunity to meet each other and build a community around our seniors.