

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)
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Non Profit
Organization US
Postage PAID
Permit No. 3734
Rockford, Illinois

DECEMBER 2022

THE TOWER

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL UCC/FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PC(USA)

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace



FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

The season of Advent is upon us and soon the joys of Christmas. Advent is the time of waiting, to hear the great proclamation, 'The Word made flesh and made his dwelling among us,' (John 1:14). The season of Advent is a season of waiting, designed to grow our

awareness of God's action-past, present, and future. Let us celebrate in our usual tradition of peace, hope, love, and joy.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Christ and the mystery of the incarnation, the knowledge of God entering Human history through the incarnation of the Son. Sound complicated? Not really. Just Believe.

As we come to worship during this season, let us try something new. Let us all sit in the pews closer to the front of the Sanctuary. For those who can't come to worship, it is a joy to see the faces of friends and church family as the camera scans the congregation. It gives people the feeling that they too are here.

Blessed Advent and Merry Christmas to all!
Becky E.

SAVE THE DATES

- Dec. 2 – Festival of Lights
- Dec. 3 – LOVE Rockford Event
- Dec. 11 – Bell Sunday
- Dec. 16 – Family Christmas Bake Off
- Dec. 17 – Christmas Bell Concert
- Dec. 18 – Pop Up Pageant and Christmas Cookies
- Dec. 24 – Christmas Eve Service
- Dec. 25 – Hymn Sing



Baptism of Novalee Rose Picchioni



Another successful year of collecting winter boots for Haskell School!

NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST RELIGIOUS ADVOCATES APPLAUD AS COURT RULES AGAINST POLICY THAT BLOCKED ASYLUM SEEKERS

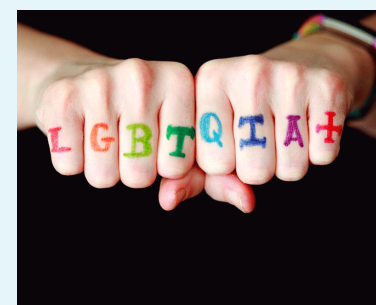


A federal court has overruled a policy that the U.S. has used to turn back hundreds of thousands of migrants from its southern border without allowing them to seek asylum.

The ruling in U.S. District Court drew praise from religious leaders. Among them were immigration advocates in the United Church of Christ, who have criticized expulsions under Title 42 since their start 2020.

In his Nov. 15 opinion, U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan found the policy – which uses public health as a reason to expel asylum seekers – “arbitrary and capricious.” The Trump administration started the policy in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Biden administration has continued to use it but now must cease because of Sullivan's ruling. **Read more:** www.ucc.org

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) PC(USA) NATIONAL STAFF USES WEDNESDAY CHAPEL SERVICE TO HONOR THE LIVES AND MOURN THE DEATHS OF 30 TRANSGENDER PEOPLE KILLED DURING 2022



Nearly 50 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) national staff gathered online Wednesday to remember and honor the lives of at least 30 transgender people killed so far this year during a Transgender Day of Remembrance service.

The Rev. Shanea D. Leonard, director of Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries, led the service, hosted by RE&WIM and the Office of Gender & Racial Justice.

“I fully embrace this day,” Leonard said at the beginning of the service, “and I welcome you to honor this day with me and those who have tragically lost their lives way too soon.”
Read more: presbyterianmission.org



REFLECTIONS FROM THE MODERATOR

By Phil Davidson

Pope Benedict XVI said, "It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope." As we enter this wonderful Advent season and the celebration of the birth of our Savior, let us remember that despite a year of uncertainty this body of believers has delivered memorable acts of caring and offered hope to those we serve.

In this past year, the Overnight Café was a warm haven for those in need of shelter from the bitter cold. Each week, you opened your arms and welcomed the hungry to Serious Soup, and you continued to feed the hungry by teaming up to work at the Jubilee Soup Kitchen each month. The children at Haskell School were given boots, enabling them to go outside for recess during the entire school year. Through the development of the Called to Care program, you reached out to members of our church family who needed support and encouragement. And, there are so many other ways this church family has made a difference in people's lives.

Romans 15: 13 (NLT) says, "I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope."

During this Advent season, there are many blessings to be counted and the birth of the greatest blessing of all to be celebrated. There is much work to be done in our search for a Designated Pastor. We are a strong church. We are a resilient church. We are a church that will continue to be a beacon of care, hope, and love, as we energize downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace for years to come.

Christmas Bell Concert is Back!

Saturday, December 17, 3:00 PM

CHRISTMAS BELL CONCERT "HOPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS" HANDBELL BENEFIT CONCERT

By Julie Cook Ramirez, Director of Handbell Ministries

For the first time since the arrival of COVID, SecondFirst Handbell Ministries will present its annual Christmas concert. All four of our bell/chime ensembles (Martin Ringers, Bellcantos, Carillons and Peanuts) will share holiday favorites, including "Advent Carol," "I Wonder As I Wander," "Feliz Navidad," "Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!" and "Mary, Did You Know?"

As always, our concert benefits a local non-profit assisting Rockford's underserved population. This year, we have chosen Winnebago County CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) for Children as our beneficiary. CASA advocates for and represents children in the juvenile court system who have experienced abuse or neglect.

Please join us, right here in SecondFirst's beautiful sanctuary, on Saturday, December 17 at 3:00 pm for a program of music and mission. Admission is free and donations will be accepted to benefit CASA. Original artwork by Rockford artist Rebecca Bowman.

JEREMIAH DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

It's almost here! Jeremiah turns 15 years old in 2023. Keep a watch on our website and Facebook page for a year of celebration with our supporters and our neighbors!

We are currently planning for the final LOVE Rockford of 2022. This LOVE Rockford will focus on services for children and there will even be a visit from Santa himself! Thank you SecondFirst for hosting this one. The garden is shut down for the winter, small engines are in full swing, and we are planning programming for 2023.

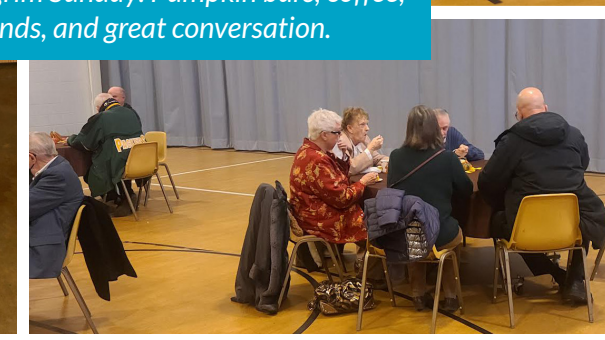
As the year winds down please remember Jeremiah Development in your end of year giving. Donations can be made at our website, jeremiahdevelopment.org. No donation is too small and it all goes directly into local programming that is community driven. Would you consider being a sustaining donor? A \$20/month sustaining donorship would fund the seeds and plants needed for the garden that feeds so many each summer. A \$10/month donorship would provide food for a week of small engines classes. Thank you so much to all who volunteered, donated, and supported us in 2022!

Thank you to our sustaining donors! Your monthly gives us an income we can count on.

Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year,
The Board of Directors and Staff of Jeremiah Development!

NO MORE BIG BLANK WALL!

A big Thank You to the quilters of Court Street United Methodist Church! Last year, they came to our new office space and saw a great big white wall! What do a group of quilters do with a big white wall? Make the most beautiful, community cooperative quilt I have ever seen. They worked with the children at Haskell School to create a quilt full of hand print butterflies and a beautiful sun. It is stunning and the butterfly hand prints are a constant reminder of why we are here. To give the children a safer, better neighborhood. The quilter's hand prints being the rays offering warmth as they emit light from the sun will be a forever reminder of the partnership we have with the churches and the neighborhood. Stop by and take a look at this piece of art. Look for information on our Facebook page in January for the official unveiling.



DECEMBER CALENDAR

Thursday, Dec. 1
 9:30 AM – Carillons
 5:30 PM – JD Board Meeting
 6:00 PM – Bellcantos
 7:00 PM – Rehearsal

Friday, Dec. 2
 6:00 PM – Festival of Lights

Saturday, Dec. 3
 10:00 AM – LOVE Rockford Event

Sunday, Dec. 4 Communion
 8:30 AM – Coffee Class
 10:00 AM – Worship Service
 10:20 AM – Sunday School
 11:00 AM – Fair Trade Store

Monday, Dec. 5
 11:30 am – Serious Soup

Tuesday, Dec. 6
 7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast
 9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
 6:00 PM – DVT

Wednesday, Dec. 7
 10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 6:00 PM – Martin Ringers

Thursday, Dec. 8
 9:30 AM – Carillons
 1:00 Pm – Called to Care
 5:30 PM – Governing Council
 6:00 PM – Bellcantos
 7:00 PM – Choir Rehearsal

Friday, Dec. 9
 No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, Dec. 10
 9:00 AM – Bridge Clinic

Sunday, Dec. 11 Carillons
 8:30 AM – Coffee Class
 10:00 AM – Worship Service
 10:20 AM – Sunday School
 11:00 AM – Fair Trade Store

Monday, Dec. 12
 11:30 AM - Serious Soup and Blood Pressure Truck
 5:00 PM – Deacons/Fellowship

Tuesday, Dec. 13
 7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast
 9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
 5:00 PM – Adult Ed Team
 5:30 PM – Missions Ministry

Wednesday, Dec. 14
 10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 6:00 PM – Martin Ringers

Thursday, Dec. 15
 9:30 AM – Carillons
 6:00 PM – Bellcantos
 7:00 PM – Choir Rehearsal

Friday, Dec. 16
 6:00 PM – Family Christmas Bake Off

Saturday, Dec. 17
 3:00 PM – Christmas Bell Concert

Sunday, Dec. 18 Pop Up Pageant
 8:30 AM – Coffee Class
 10:00 AM – Worship Service
 10:20 AM – Sunday School
 11:00 AM – Fair Trade Store
 11:15 AM – Christmas Cookies

Monday, Dec. 19
 11:30 AM – Serious Soup

Tuesday, Dec. 20
 7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast
 9:00 AM – Thrift Shop

Wednesday, Dec. 21
 10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 5:30 PM – Trustees Ministry

Thursday, Dec. 22
 7:00 PM – Choir Rehearsal

Friday, Dec. 23
 No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, Dec. 24
 4:30 PM – Christmas Eve Service

Sunday, Dec. 25 Hymn Sing
 10:00 AM – Worship Service

Monday, Dec. 26
 Office Closed

Tuesday, Dec. 27
 Office Closed

Wednesday, Dec. 28
 No Staff Meeting

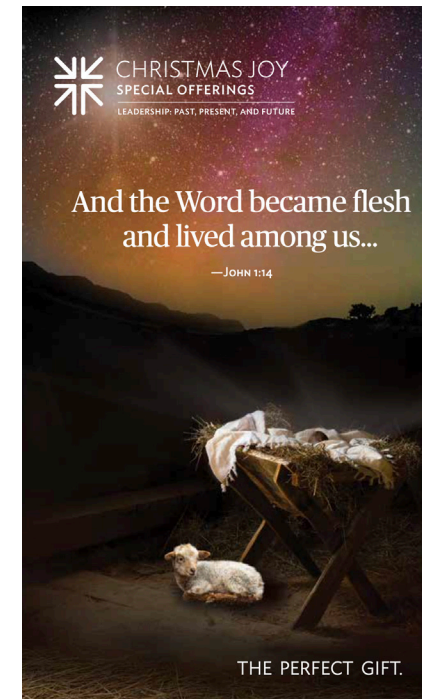
Thursday, Dec. 29
 7:00 PM – Choir Rehearsal

Friday, Dec. 30
 No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, Dec. 31
 No Scheduled Activities

CROP WALK RECAP

About 75 walkers enjoyed a cool and windy, but dry afternoon at the 36th Annual Rockford event. Our church was well represented, especially by the funds it raised. We are nearly at the \$10,000 mark, just a bit short of last year’s record amount. Final figures will not be available until January. You may still contribute online at <https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2022/team/2nd-1st-church-of-rockford>.



THE CHRISTMAS FUND/ CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING

Sunday, December 18

We will receive gifts for 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.

ADULT EDUCATION

Great Expectations: Studies in Isaiah

Join us as we explore this beautiful, poetic book prophesying the coming of the Messiah. Meetings are hybrid for your convenience.

Although a book of prophecy, Isaiah is also one of the most poetic books of the Bible. These texts from Isaiah are read by people throughout the world during the season of Advent. With imagery such as the lion and lamb laying down together, the holy mountain of God, and streams in the desert, the words of Isaiah are woven together with great expectations of the life to come.

This 4-session Bible study explores four word pictures in Isaiah and encourages participants to explore this book thoughtfully together:

- » Sunday, Nov. 27: Isaiah 2:1-5
- » Sunday, Dec. 18: Isaiah 35:1-10

COFFEE CLASS: ALL ARE INVITED

Sunday, December 4 and Sunday, December 11, 8:30 am

The 5-year impact of our Haiti Project. We will look at what progress we have made in the Mountainous town of Saut-d’Eau in the Central Highlands of Haiti, the hometown of James and Odette Casimir and family. They are church members and have led us forward in making a difference. Join us for this meaningful and compelling update to our mission to assist in achieving self-sufficiency in food security and education for the people in and around Saut-d’Eau.



JOIN US FOR THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Friday, December 2, 6:00 PM

Come see the Festival of Lights at Sinnissippi Park. Ride the bus or follow in your car, then come back to the church for a bonfire and hot chocolate. Get into the holiday mood early!

POINSETTIA SUNDAY

Sunday, December 18

We will be taking orders for poinsettias through Monday, December 5. The cost is \$14.00 and you can call or email 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.



CHRISTMAS COOKIES AND COFFEE

Sunday, December 18, After Worship

Join the Deacons Fellowship team for Christmas cookies in the gym after Church. Remember, life is short, eat Christmas cookies.



POP-UP CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Sunday, December 18, During Worship

Who will be the star this year? What will the story be? It will all unfold before our eyes as we participate (no practice required or allowed) in our now annual and beloved pop-up Christmas Pageant.

CHRISTMAS HYMN SING: PASTOR BECKY
 Christmas Day, December 25 at the 10:00 am worship

NEW YEAR’S DAY AND COMMUNION
 Sunday, January 1
 Pulpit Talk: Jim Ozee and Communion: Pastor Becky



ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Sunday, January 8, 2023

This year we will celebrate the 10th Anniversary of our federation on January 8, 2023.

A brunch will be served in honor of our two congregations becoming one. More information to follow...

UPCOMING worship schedule

DECEMBER 4: Becky Erbe
 DECEMBER 11: Becky Erbe
 DECEMBER 18: Becky Erbe
 DECEMBER 24: Becky Erbe
 DECEMBER 25: Becky Erbe



A NOTE FROM OUR CHILDREN AND FAMILY COORDINATOR

By Aubrey Barnett

Trunk or Treat

Start the December season off right with the memory of just how warm it was on Halloween this year! We had a beautiful day and the families who were there enjoyed the sunshine.



Improving Our Space

We put some man hours into some much-needed organization of the children's space. We are so blessed to have so many resources to make spirituality engaging. Making our space feel more lived in, as a return to some normalcy in a post covid world, is a healing experience. Ms. Sarah and Nicholas took some time to hang some of the lovely pictures we found in the process of cleaning. It was so heartening to watch them work together on a meaningful project. It was a moment to bear witness: the role of stewardship, of obedience to wisdom, connection between long term meaningful relationships between the children of this space and the congregation. Nicholas has continued to take on a leadership role with the younger students, and this continued when we had our open house sponsored by FCE on November 6th. Without prompting, Nicholas helped organize all the kids into a game on the colored squares. He continues to be an example of what our community seeks to nurture for our future. We are also so glad to be able to display all the puppets for the years, beckoning the young, and young at heart, to come and play. A special thanks to Sarah Hallberg and Jess Lindblade for their work in cleaning. Along with the paintings we discovered a large amount of crayons. We have been sorting them to repurpose them for an art piece. Keep your eye on the next newsletter to see the outcome!



Family Christmas Bake Off!

Friday, December 16th, 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Come one come all, kids and adults, we want you to come celebrate Christmas with us! For those who liked the Chopped Challenge in the past, we invite you to a night of games, cookies, ugly sweaters, and most importantly the new "Bake it Easy" competition- a spin off of the new Netflix show! You do not need to participate in the baking to enjoy- there will be games, cookies to decorate, holiday songs, and general merriment. Not to mention being a judge for "Bake It Easy". Bring your grandchildren, bring your grandparents, bring your nephews and nieces! Wear an ugly Christmas sweater for a door prize! We can't wait to celebrate Advent in the church basement.

HOW ARE OUR FRIENDS IN SAUT-D'EAU, HAITI?

Adult Ed's two-part series on our Haiti Project

Sunday, December 4 at 8:30 am: The History of Haiti Revisited

We will begin with a look at Haiti, the originally beautiful Caribbean Nation with abundant natural resources that is now considered the poorest country in the western hemisphere... What happened over the last two hundred years that explains how Haiti evolved to the tragic conditions of today, while other similar Caribbean countries like Costa Rica prospered. What role did foreign countries play?



Sunday, December 11 at 8:30 am: The 5-year impact of our Haiti Project

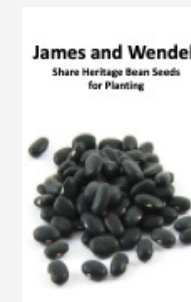
We will look at what progress we have made in the Mountainous town of Saut-d'Eau in the Central Highlands of Haiti, the hometown of James and Odette Casimir and family. They are church members and have led us forward in making a difference. Join us for this meaningful and compelling update to our mission to assist in achieving self-sufficiency in food security and education for the people in and around Saut-d'Eau.

For more information contact:

Carolyn Greenlaw csgreen52@aol.com 815-987-0723

Roger Greenlaw rgreen97@aol.com 815-262-1776

James & Odette Casimir casimir0401@gmail.com 815-319-0741



KFACT UPDATES

As we approach the holiday season KFACT staff and mentees are working diligently inside and outside of the classroom. We are meeting at each RPS205 middle school for group sessions and we have had new students sign up and attend groups. We have provided one-on-one sessions and Learning Labs which provide a comfortable environment for our mentees to genuinely open up and be transparent about their needs and desired takeaways from the program.

KFACT has accepted and requested several volunteer opportunities for this last quarter of the year. We hosted Volunteering for GiGi's Playhouse at the end of October and got great feedback from the kids, their parents, and staff. Our girls really enjoyed spending time with the families and making connections. We can't wait to host another Party!

KFACT also signed up to volunteer at Stroll on State in late November which is always a great time to make community connections while demonstrating that one of the best gifts to give is time. We're THANKFUL and we hope you have a wonderful Christmas.