

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)
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Organization US
Postage PAID
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Rockford, Illinois

MARCH 2023

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 purpose of observing Lent is for Christians to prepare for the coming of Easter by getting closer to God. In some Christian traditions "giving up something" is to do penance of some sort that could prevent us from getting closer to God and to participate in some small way with Jesus' suffering.

Does giving up a chocolate bar or a glass of wine really do that?

What if this year, this Lent, you try something different. Instead of giving up something, you took something on?

In our first Wednesday Lenten Experience we explored spiritual practices or disciplines. What are spiritual practices or disciplines that you could take on this Lent? Here are some suggestions;

- » Bible Reading - Dust off your Bible and begin reading the New Testament.
- » Bible Memorization - Pick a few scriptures to memorize. It's amazing how repeating a favorite short scripture can get you through tough moments of your day.
- » Prayer - We have many ways we can be thankful. Count your blessings to God in prayer.
- » Generosity - Whether financial or time and talent, being generous to the church and others serves us all.
- » Fellowship - From the start, Jesus' message was that the kingdom of God was at hand. This was more than an invitation to a relationship with God; it was also an invitation to create relationship with others. Attend church and activities on a regular basis.

This Lent let's take something on together!

SAVE THE DATE

Easter Sunday

April 9, 2023

UPCOMING PREACHING SCHEDULE

March 5 - Norm Shirk
March 12 - Kathy Lawes
March 19 - Becky Erbe
March 26 - Norm Shirk
April 2 - Becky Erbe
April 9 - Becky Erbe
April 16 - Jim Ozee



NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST UCC OFFERS PRAYERS, LAUNCHES APPEAL TO AID TURKEY AND SYRIA AFTER EARTHQUAKE



The United Church of Christ is offering prayers for the region encompassing Turkey and Syria as the death toll continues to climb following one of the strongest earthquakes in

100 years. As of Feb. 13, the number of people killed has passed 36,000. Responders who have worked hard in the cold weather continue to rescue victims from the ruins as the odds of survival begin to wane over a week since the Feb. 6 quake. Many survivors are struggling to find enough food, water and basic amenities. UCC Global H.O.P.E. has launched the Turkey and Syria Emergency Appeal to direct financial support to partners responding in the areas of greatest need for relief and long-term recovery. **Read more: www.ucc.org**

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) PC(USA) MISSION CO-WORKERS SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON A ONCE-IN-A- LIFETIME PEACE DELEGATION



For the first time in 500 years, an ecumenical peace pilgrimage was undertaken earlier this month to South Sudan by Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church leaders. The delegation included Pope Francis; the Most Rev. Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury;

and the Rt. Rev. Iain Greenshields, moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Also attending this historic event were a group of mission co-workers from the Presbyterian Mission Agency's World Mission ministry, including Jeff Boyd, co-coordinator for Africa; Sharon Kandel, regional liaison for the Horn of Africa; the Rev. Bob Rice and Kristi Rice, mission co-workers in South Sudan; and the Rev. Shelvis Smith-Mather, mission co-worker in South Sudan. **Read more: presbyterianmission.org**

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

The One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) special mission offering of the United Church of Christ and Presbyterian USA involves you in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. When a disaster strikes, such as the earthquake in Syria and Turkey, and people are displaced or made refugees by violence or extreme poverty, you are part of the immediate response and of the long-term recovery.

Through OGHS you engage in holistic development programs including health care, education, agriculture, food sustainability, micro-financing and women's empowerment. Because the UCC and PC(USA) relate in mutual partnership to churches and organizations through the UCC Global Ministries, PC(USA) Disaster Assistance which are worldwide response and recovery networks, your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing put you in the right place at the right time for the relief, accompaniment and recovery of the most vulnerable. You meet immediate needs and you address the underlying causes that create those needs in the first place.

While you can give at any time the offering will be taken Sunday, March 19th. Please give as generously as you are able.



REFLECTIONS FROM THE MODERATOR

By Phil Davidson

I would like to begin with an excerpt from an opinion written by Matt Server in the February 11, 2016, edition of The Daily Nebraskan:

While the common perception of Lent is that you “give something up,” there are several things Christians can do that don’t involve simply abstaining from something. Sometimes, the most effective Lenten habits actually involve adding something to your life, such as prayer, quiet time or a holy hour. Or, I’ve seen others commit to quitting a bad habit such as overusing social media or watching too much Netflix...While Lenten promises can differ, here’s what is important: that Christians use this time to grow in their faith.

Now, we all have habits that could be eliminated or reduced. But, the last sentence seems to say it all...growing our faith. The old standard during Lent, particularly among Catholics, was to give up meat. And that probably helped make Friday fish fries so popular at restaurants. But, I sense my faith growing, not just during Lent but throughout the year, just by witnessing how SecondFirst Church serves those in need and our members.

How can your faith not grow when you see our members preparing and serving food at Serious Soup and the Jubilee Center; volunteering to help at Overnight Café; buying, sorting, and delivering boots to Haskell School; visiting and taking communion to those members who cannot come to church; and just devoting time and effort as part of our ministry teams or as church leaders.

During this season of Lent and beyond, let us continue to grow in faith by being part of this loving body of believers through continued participation on ministry teams, acceptance of leadership roles, and through an abundance of prayers for guidance in all our endeavors. John Wooden said, “There are many things that are essential to arriving at true peace of mind, and one of the most important is faith, which cannot be acquired without prayer.” Thank you.

NEWS FROM THE VICE MODERATOR

By Darlene Riddle

The Nominating Committee has been diligently working on filling the teams with new members. As of this writing, we only have four openings left. Please consider joining one of these teams. If you would like more information about a specific team, please contact Darlene Riddle at driddle88@gmail.com or 815-988-3573. Thank you to everyone that has said yes already!

- » Deacons/Fellowship: 1-two year opening, meets second Monday of the month at 5:00 PM
- » Missions: 1-two year opening and 1-three year opening, meets third Tuesday of the month at 5:30 PM
- » Nominating: 1-three year term, meets on an “as needed” basis
- » Worship/Music/Arts: 1-three year term, meets on fourth Monday of the month at 6:30 PM

Thanks!

JEREMIAH DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL REPORT

Dear friends,

2022 was the year of the new normal and, like so many other agencies, we spent a good part of it regaining our footing. Much of the work we had put on hold during the Covid-19 pandemic began anew and new programs were added to strengthen the Coronado Haskell Neighborhood and the greater Rockford area.

Within the pages of this annual report, you will find not only the numbers of who we are but also the stories of who we are. The staff and board of Jeremiah Development would like to thank you for the part you played in making 2022 a year of building back.

Sincerely,
Sue Kanthak, Executive Director

▶▶▶▶ If you would like to read the full annual report, please contact Debbie in the office at debbie.wise@secondfirst.org and she will email the PDF file.



MARCH CALENDAR

Wednesday, March 1

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 12:00 PM – JD Executive Becky
 6:00 PM – Soup
 6:00 PM – Martin Ringers
 6:30 pm – Lenten Worship

Thursday, March 2

9:30 AM – Carillons
 5:00 PM – Hospitality Team
 5:30 PM – JD Board Meeting
 6:00 PM – Bellcantos
 7:00 PM – Choir Rehearsal

Friday, March 3

No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, March 4

9:00 AM – Bridge Clinic
 10:00 AM – Jubilee Soup Kitchen

Sunday, March 5 Norm Shirk Communion

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

Monday, March 6

11:30 AM – Serious Soup

Tuesday, March 7

7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
 9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
 12:00 PM – Lenten Study

Wednesday, March 8

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 6:00 PM – Soup
 6:00 PM – Martin Ringers
 6:30 PM – Lenten Worship

Thursday, March 9

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

Friday, March 10

No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, March 11

10:00 AM – 3rd Floor Cleaning

Sunday, March 12

Kathy Lawes Bells
 8:30 AM – Coffee Class
 10:00 AM – Worship Service
 10:20 AM – Sunday School

Monday, March 13

11:30 AM – Serious Soup
 5:00 PM – Deacons/Fellowship

Tuesday, March 14

7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
 9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
 12:00 PM – Lenten Study
 5:00 PM – Adult Ed Team

Wednesday, March 15

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 5:30 PM – Trustees
 6:00 pm – Soup
 6:00 PM – Martin Ringers
 6:30 PM – Lenten Worship

Thursday, March 16

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

Friday, March 17

No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, March 18

9:00 AM – Bridge Clinic

Sunday, March 19

One Great Hour of Sharing
 8:30 AM – Coffee Class
 10:00 AM – Worship Service
 10:20 AM – Sunday School
 11:15 AM – Family CE

Monday, March 20

8:00 AM – Park District
 11:30 AM – Serious Soup

Tuesday, March 21

7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
 9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
 12:00 PM – Lenten Study
 5:30 PM – Missions Ministry

Wednesday, March 22

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 12:00 PM – JD Executive
 6:00 PM – Soup
 6:00 PM – Martin Ringers
 6:30 PM – Lenten Worship

Thursday, March 23

9:30 AM – Carillons
 5:30 PM – Governing Council
 6:00 PM – ARC
 6:00 PM – Bellcantos
 7:00 PM – Choir Rehearsal

Friday, March 24

No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, March 25

10:00 AM – Carillons Rehearse

Sunday, March 26 Norm Shirk Carillons

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

Monday, March 27

11:30 AM – Serious Soup
 6:30 PM – Worship/Music

Tuesday, March 28

7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
 9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
 12:00 PM – Lenten Study

Wednesday, March 29

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
 6:00 PM – Soup
 6:00 PM – Martin Ringers
 6:30 pm – Lenten Worship

Thursday, March 30

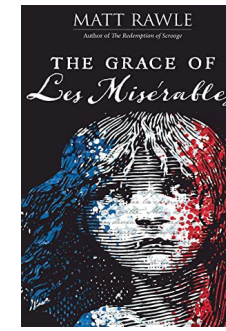
9:30 AM – Carillons
 6:00 PM – Bellcantos
 7:00 PM – Choir Rehearsal

Friday, March 31

No Scheduled Activities

THE GRACE OF LES MISÉRABLES

Beginning Wednesday, March 1, 6:00 pm



Whether you have actually read the 1,462 pages of the novel, seen the Broadway musical, listened to the soundtrack or watched one of the several screen adaptations you already know the power of the story. Through a video series from Matt Rawle, this 6-week Lenten Experience dives into six themes found in the story- grace, justice, poverty, revolution, love, and hope-each represented by a character in Hugo's story and our Christian calling. This Lenten Experience begins Wednesday, March 1, so you have plenty of time to get caught up with the story. Join us at 6:00 pm for a soup dinner or come to just the class which begins at 6:30 pm in the Sanctuary. Call the office or Pastor Becky if you would like to attend.

LENTEN STUDY

Tuesdays during Lent, 12:00 pm (via Zoom)



A Lenten study led by Pastor Becky featuring, "Hard to Dance with the Devil on Your Back". Sometimes in life it is difficult to dance during trials and tribulations. To have faith is to find the strength and endurance to Dance. Let us together find the passion to dance again. There is some homework before each class. Email Pastor Becky if you are interested in attending. We send out materials prior to the class.



EASTER SUNDAY FLOWERS

Sunday, April 9, 2023

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 \$17.50, hydrangeas in pink are \$17.50. Orders are due by Sunday, March 12, if you want a specific color. After that date, we cannot 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.



APPLES FOR EDUCATION

If you take a quick glance at this picture, you will likely see bags of assorted types of apples that you can pick up at the grocery store on any given day and think nothing of them.

But . . . look again very closely and you find these are very special apples. Each of these apples will fill a hungry tummy of a Haskell School child that arrives late to school and misses the breakfast provided. Without these special apples it would be a long time for that child until lunch. It must be so hard to study when your tummy is growling.

But the good news is these apples fix that growling and lend some nutrition too. We at SecondFirst Church provide those apples in our program called "Apples for Education".

There are several ways to support this program, donating a few dollars, donating a bit of time to shop for and deliver those apples and most important praying to support this program & the children it supports. Any support you give is appreciated.

For more information please contact Holly Beeman at auntbee57@gmail.com or by phone at 815-979-8046.

TOWER HILL CAMPING

Tower Hill camping is just around the corner. This year camping is July 6-9. This is a great experience for all ages, especially children! Ok kids, you need to bring your parents also. Tower Hill is a UCC retreat center located next to Warren Dunes state park located in southeast Michigan, a 3-4 hour drive. Camp is a 15 minute walk away from Beautiful Lake Michigan and our own private beach! Did I mention sand and water?! At Camp we have a large bathhouse with showers and a large covered area with tables. There are electrical hookups at each site. Firewood is provided with fire rings and picnic tables. In the past we have had tent campers, RV campers, pop up campers, pickup campers. Contact Doug Phillips for more information: 815-494-0112.

A NOTE FROM OUR CHILDREN AND FAMILY COORDINATOR

By Aubrey Barnett

The children's team has launched a truly wonderful 2023. We are busy planning for many more upcoming events but here are the highlights:

What a wonderful set of events we had in February! It started with an amazing lesson from Pastor Becky on the story of Stone Soup, and the kiddos gathered together to make some delicious chicken soup for the people who come to the Overnight Cafe. The smells filled the church with deliciousness, and I believe it was the spirit of love that was the magic ingredient!

It is becoming a tradition with this younger group of children to make soup, and we are becoming truly comfortable again with prepping, cooking, and cleaning up in our kitchen. We are so blessed to have such an amazing resource in our building, and helping our kiddos understand who Christ has called us to serve by being his hands and feet is an awesome job!

We then got back in the kitchen for our beloved Valentine's Day Bake Off. We had unexpected cheesecakes brought in by Selena and Chris Banks: Oreo, strawberry, and blueberry. If you were there you know they were incredibly yummy. You should ask Chris for his secret ingredient; it will be one I use in the future! The kiddos had fun decorating their cookies, we had a few Godiva chocolate houses, and then some fun crafts. I was not sure on Sunday morning who would come, and I cannot describe the warmth in my heart seeing a group of almost 30 people gathered once again in our shared space celebrating love. God was truly present. I hope again for a day soon when we can have more time together over food. I for one will start with the Lenten worship services on Les Misérables, one of my favorite stories. I hope to see you there.

Also at the end of the month, we had our second meeting of Safe Spaces, our young adult group. We met at MOD Pizza and shared conversation, laughs, and a sense of belonging. Our young adults are either in their final years of high school, or navigating college and jobs. It is unusual to have a group get together with people who have no demands or agenda, you can feel them exhale. It is an incredible gift to be a part of the lives of young people whom I have seen grow into such confident individuals over the past five years.

As we move forward into the summer, we are so excited about the Kids Love Camp which will be offered the week of July 10th to July 14th. Each day will have a unique theme and kids can come for one day or all five days. We will ask families to pack a lunch for students, but the crafts, games, and fun activities will otherwise be free to anyone in our community.

Finally, as I continue to pray and reflect about this work, and how God would call me to be present to our community and the larger community of Rockford, I have come to realize I want you, my community, to hear my gratitude for your kindness and words of affirmation. I come to church because I know I need it, because when I am open to the spirit and willfully approaching God on bended knee, I can feel God

present and it makes my heart whole. The beauty of our worship space, the generosity of the spirit, the focus of those in need both in our community and around the world, the humor and longing to reach laughter even through the very hard work- I see in this community I have come to call home, so much of Christ's spirit. I often tell people I think I have the best job you can have, because I get paid to worship God. I want you to know how grateful I am that our community continues to value my role, because this community is sustaining mine and my children's lives both spiritually and financially. I can never say thank you enough. The world spins so quickly, and trying to hear God's voice has always led to a narrow way. I am honored to be given a chance to pass on God's message of love to children, especially in a community I am so proud to be a part of. I continue to pray to keep growing in love with our community so that I may sustain others as I have been sustained.



HIGHLIGHTS & MEMORABLE MOMENTS

We are blessed as a church family to be able to gather for worship, fellowship, fun, and tasty treats.

We extend a warm thank you to those who dedicate their time and talents to making these moments happen. From baking to decor, planning to serving, it takes a lot of heart and kindness to keep this community engaged.

Take a moment to enjoy this collection of photos from our recent church gatherings and outing.

More photos can be found on page 7.

