

## SecondFirst Church

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

DECEMBER 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



*It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope.*  
*Pope Benedict XVI*

Welcome Advent!

In Advent we wait, and hope and dream. We prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child in our midst. We are no longer wandering in the darkness for the light of Christ is coming.

In this time of waiting, take opportunities for yourselves dear friends. Whether you pray or meditate be intentional. Listen to music, focus on the lights of a tree. Worship fully, spend less, give more, Love all.

### SAVE THE DATES

- Dec. 2 – LOVE Rockford Event
- Dec. 10 – Budget Meeting
- Dec. 16 – Christmas Bell Concert
- Dec. 17 – Christmas Pageant
- Dec. 17 – Wassail and Cookies
- Dec. 24 – Christmas Eve Service

## The SecondFirst Merchandise Store

### Making a list and checking it twice?

Give Second First Merch as gifts this holiday season.

[https://stores.inksoft.com/second\\_first](https://stores.inksoft.com/second_first)



You can get the church logo on the upper right chest, the church logo full front OR you can choose the church logo on the upper right chest and a custom Word Cloud on the back (Make sure to choose a shirt with "Word Cloud" in the description).

You can pick them up from "Embroid This" on North Second or choose to have them picked up at Church. If you have any questions, please reach out to Jennifer Archer.



JOIN US FOR

## Christmas Eve!

Sunday, December 24, 4:30 pm  
In the Sanctuary and Facebook Live

Come and join us as we proclaim Christ is born through word and song! A fun children's message with Ms. Aubrey and Ms. Rachel. Pastor Becky will deliver a Christmas message. Christmas Eve music will feature Sanctuary Choir, strings and oboe from our own RSO; first sharing two hauntingly beautiful anthems reflecting on the darkness of night, followed by a joyful anthem that celebrates the light of Jesus being born.



## The Christmas Fund & Christmas Joy Offering Sunday, December 24

Presbyterians and United Congregationalists have special Christmas offerings for expressing thanks to retired and active pastors and lay church workers.

The PCUSA Christmas Joy Offering and the UCC Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross offer assistance to families facing financial need by:

- \* providing direct assistance to supplement pensions
- \* helping with the cost of medical insurance
- \* assisting with other emergency needs

The fund provides a way to say 'thank you' for the Veterans of the Cross years of dedication to our two faith traditions. By Dave Jones

## Reflections From the Moderator

Hello Church!

Wow! We have just come through a whirlwind of activities. Sadly, we had funerals for 3 long-time members within 8 days. Not only did Hospitality serve a delicious luncheon after each of the memorial services, they also prepared and served strata for our Sunday Stewardship brunch. The Jubilee Soup Kitchen also took place the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Not only does this stretch the volunteers to their maximum, but it also places an extra burden on staff. Please keep Becky in your prayers as she tends to the families of these members as well as others in the congregation who are suffering. Debbie is taxed with creating extra bulletins for the three services plus a stewardship mailing – and training Mitzi which takes additional time. None of them are complaining; just give extra grace when something falls through the cracks or doesn't happen in the time frame you think it should. Everyone is doing the best they can under stressful circumstances.

On the other hand, we are coming into the season of Advent - a time of anticipating the arrival of the Christ child. It's a season for all of us to reflect on how we can prepare our hearts and homes for Christ's birth. In this time of waiting, may we all find the Hope, Peace, Joy and Love represented by the Advent candles. That's not to say there isn't as much going on in December. There will be a trip to see the Festival of Lights on December 8th, our budget meeting December 10<sup>th</sup>, a bell concert December 16<sup>th</sup>, the Christmas Pageant and Cookies and Wassail on December 17<sup>th</sup>, and Christmas Eve services on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Also, your deadline to order poinsettias is December 8<sup>th</sup>. May the spirit of Christmas somehow find you this season.

Peace Darlene

## Let's Celebrate Debbie's Retirement

Join us Sunday, January 7, 2024 for a special coffee hour after worship as we celebrate Debbie Wise.

Debbie, our long time Church office manager extraordinaire will be retiring.

Debbie's last official day is December 31, 2023.



## Notes from the Music Director

From Britannica: "Advent, (from the Latin *adventus*, 'coming'), in the Christian church calendar, the period of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas...." During the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, we prepare for it; we deck the halls, light candles each Sunday at church, sing Advent hymns, and whatever your family includes in preparations. I think American culture celebrates gratification more than preparation, and so waiting to sing Christmas hymns seems onerous, perhaps, but Jesus was nothing if not counter to the culture of his time, trying to hold people in power to account, and get them to follow the rules in their own religious texts. So we resist the temptation to sing carols every week in December, and Christmas Eve will be a wonderful time of singing as many as we can squeeze in before people need to run back to food and present prep for the next day.

Christmas Eve this year will feature Sanctuary Choir, strings and oboe from our own RSO, first sharing two hauntingly beautiful anthems reflecting on the darkness of night, followed by a joyful anthem that celebrates the light of Jesus being born. By Valerie Blair

**Advent music:**  
Dec 3 Choir with a small group of handbells  
Dec 10 Martin Ringers, Bellcantos, and Peanut Ringers  
Dec 17 Dorothy Paige-Turner joins the children for the pageant  
Dec 24 Joyce Zartman on bell tree

## Opportunities to Volunteer and Support

### KFACT - Keeping Families & Communities Together -

KFACT will be celebrating each of the 163 girls in their program with their annual Christmas Holiday Party in mid-December. Each girl in the program will receive a pair of pajamas and a pair of fuzzy, soft socks. Our Mission Ministry Team brings KFACT's request to you, our congregation to help fill this request. We bring this need to your attention, noting some of the girls' families in the KFACT program cannot afford pajamas.

If you would like to make the holiday brighter for a KFACT mentee, please bring to the church office by **December 12<sup>th</sup>** a pair of new pajamas and fuzzy socks. **Do not wrap** the items.

The needs & sizes are:  
Fifty-Six(56) pair of pj's/socks are still needed  
Pajama sizes needed are size **Teen/Adult Small**.  
The fuzzy socks are one size fits all.

All donations are greatly appreciated! Help make spirits bright for KFACT girls! Note "For KFACT" on your gift.

Thank you for your kindness.

Mission Ministry Team (by Zan Picchioni)

### What is LOVE Rockford?

by Holly Beeman

If you have been at this church in the last several years you have likely heard the term. You may have been a part of it, donated to it, or said a prayer hoping it would be successful. Or, you may still wonder what this event is all about. OK, I am happy to tell you!

LOVE Rockford is an event held from once a year to several times a year. It is sponsored by Jeremiah Development, the organization that started as a result of "downtown churches" coming together to support and improve the Haskell Coronado Neighborhood. By connecting people to resources.

*Nitro and LOVE Rockford connect our neighbors to resources in their neighborhood and beyond!*

SecondFirst Church will host the December 2, 2023 LOVE Rockford event. Volunteers will be gathering Saturday morning to register folks who need a helping hand. These folks will have access to make connections with social services, housing, mental health, medical services and much more. Hair cuts will be offered. Blood pressure, Glucose, and Cholesterol screenings will be provided. There is always a hearty lunch as well as a food box to take home. Santa will be visiting the December 2, 2023 LOVE Rockford event with gifts to take home.

So, all that being said, it takes a village to prepare for this event and then to clean up. Think about donating your time, a requested item, or a prayer. If you just want to see an event in action, feel free to stop by and look me up; I may be in our gym, our South Narthex, or maybe a Santa's helper.

Thank you for your interest in LOVE Rockford. It is very special to me as I have participated from the very first event and have seen so many lives that have been positively touched.

*Make no mistake, you can feel God working in that room.*

# December 2023 Calendar

## Friday, Dec. 1

No Scheduled Activities

## Saturday, Dec. 2

10:00 AM – Love Rockford

## Sunday, Dec. 3 Jim Ozee

### **Communion**

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

## Monday, Dec. 4

11:30 AM – Serious Soup  
12:00 PM – Bible Study

## Tuesday, Dec. 5

7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast  
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop  
12:00 PM – Bible Study

## Wednesday, Dec. 6

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting  
6:00 PM – Martins

## Thursday, Dec. 7

9:30 AM – Carillon  
5:30 PM – Governing Council  
6:00 PM – Bellcantos  
7:00 PM – Choir

## Friday, Dec. 8

No Scheduled Activities

## Saturday, Dec. 9

9:00 AM-Bridge Clinic  
1:00 PM – Carl Dickow Memorial

## Bell Sunday, Dec. 10

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

## Monday, Dec. 11

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

## Tuesday, Dec. 12

7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast  
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop  
12:00 PM– Bible Study  
5:00 PM – Adult Ed  
5:30 PM – Missions

## Wednesday, Dec. 13

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting  
6:00 PM – Martins

## Thursday, Dec. 14

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

## Friday, Dec. 15

No Scheduled Activities

## Saturday, Dec. 16

3:00 PM - Bell Concert

## Sunday, Dec. 17

### **Christmas Pageant**

8:30 AM – Adult Ed  
10:00 AM – Worship Service  
10:20 AM – Sunday School  
11:00 AM – Fair Trade Store  
11:00 AM – Wassail and Cookies

## Monday, Dec. 18

11:30 AM – Serious Soup

## Tuesday, Dec. 19

7:00 AM – Men’s Prayer Breakfast  
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop  
12:00 PM – Bible Study

## Wednesday, Dec. 20

10:00 AM – Staff Meeting  
5:30 PM – Trustees  
6:00 PM – Martins

## Thursday, Dec. 21

10:30 AM – Food Insecurity and Equity

## Friday, Dec. 22

No Scheduled Activities

## Saturday, Dec. 23

No Scheduled Activities

## Sunday Dec. 24 Christmas Eve

8:30 AM – Adult Ed  
10:00 AM – Worship Service  
10:20 AM – Sunday School  
11:00 AM – Fair Trade Store  
4:30 PM – Christmas Eve Service

## Monday, Dec. 25 Christmas Day

Office Closed  
No Serious Soup

## Tuesday, Dec. 26

Office Closed

## Wednesday, Dec. 27

10:00 AM - Staff Meeting  
6:00 PM - Martins

## Thursday, Dec. 28

No Scheduled Activities

## Friday, Dec. 29

No Scheduled Activities

## Saturday, Dec. 30

No Scheduled Activities

## Sunday, Dec. 31

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

## Annual Budget Meeting Announcement

Join together in person or via zoom at 11:15 am

Sunday, December 10, 2023 for the Annual Budget.

Budget packets will be available December 3.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81203235476?pwd=WHZubzdHMVhqUnBBcGFuZ3N1TTZlZz09>



## JOIN US FOR THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Friday, December 8, 6:00 PM

Come see the Festival of Lights at Sinnissippi Park. Ride the SecondFirst bus or follow in your car, then come back to our church for hot chocolate.



## Christmas Bell Concert

Saturday, December 16, 3:00 PM

*CHRISTMAS BELLS ARE RINGING!*

By Joyce Zartman

Christmas bells are ringing! Yes, they are! The bell choirs at SecondFirst Church are already rehearsing music for the Christmas concert. You ask, "What Christmas concert?" Answer: All four bell choirs will be presenting music at a Christmas concert on Saturday, December 16, 2023 at 3:00 PM in the sanctuary of SecondFirst Church.

The concert is open to the public and includes a free will offering. This will be a wonderful opportunity to hear Christmas music and invite friends to join you. Peanut Bells, Bellcantos, Martin Ringers, and Carillons all have a few pieces to share. There will even be a bell tree solo! Do you like the "Ukrainian Carol of the Bells"? Have you heard of "Over the River and through the Woods"? The ringers don't want to reveal the whole program in advance. There will be some delightful surprises.

Please plan to come to this wonderful Christmas concert. Questions? Ask the directors (Valerie Blair, Sarah Hallberg, and Joyce Zartman).

See you Saturday, December 16!



## POINSETTIA SUNDAY

Sunday, December 17

We will be taking orders for poinsettias through Monday, December 8<sup>th</sup>. The cost is \$14.50. You can call or email Debbie with your order. You will also find a Poinsettia Order Form/Envelope in the Fellowship Folders on Sunday. Be sure to let us know if you want the poinsettia to be in memory or in honor of a loved one.

## CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Sunday, December 17 during worship

This year the children will perform a short musical called "The Birthday Party". Cookies and cocoa will be served in the 3rd floor children's space following the pageant.

## CHRISTMAS COOKIES AND WASSAIL

Sunday, December 17 after worship

Join the Deacons Fellowship team for Christmas cookies and wassail in the Dining Room after Church.

## Church Office Hours Changing

Beginning January 2, 2024 our church office hours will be changing.

The office will be open

Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m.—1 p.m.

The office will be closed on Fridays.

Pastor Becky will be available by cellphone in case of an emergency.

## A NOTE FROM OUR CHILDREN AND FAMILY COORDINATOR

My mom told me a few months before when we were going. A few months of December is upon us, and like many others, it is my favorite time of year! The children have been getting into the holiday spirit early, working on the Christmas Pageant since November.

This year, we will perform a short musical called "The Birthday Party". With songs like "Peace on Earth", "It's A Great Day", and "Hear the Chimes", our children will bring to life a birthday for Jesus.

Join us on Sunday, December 17th for the culmination of weeks of hard work from our youngest members and Dorothy Paige—Turner. Cookies and cocoa will be served in the 3rd-floor children's space following the pageant.

In the GROW Curriculum, we take a break from studying Old Testament stories to look at the stories of Advent. The themes are: God sent Jesus for a reason; we can trust God's timing; God gives us what's best; Jesus was born; Simeon and Anna meet Jesus. The Curriculum continues to be a blessing and fantastic investment, helping our children learn important lessons with fun and engaging videos and activities.

By Aubrey Barnett



Hello everyone,



I would like to thank the members of the Hospitality Ministry for their effort last weekend and this coming weekend. As most of you know, the team and others prepared and served food and set up the dining room for two funerals. They also prepared the strata and fruit for Sunday's brunch.

This coming Friday and Saturday they will have a repeat performance with two more funerals. We are one of the few churches in town that still do this type of event. Katy says that part of the mission of Hospitality is to provide the loved ones of the deceased a place to relax and spend time with family and friends while enjoying an elegant, home cooked meal complete with good silver and china.

Thanks to Ann Boline, Jean Herro, Linda Johnson, Linda Miller, Arlene Noel, Katy Paterson, Darlene Riddle, Anne Stratemeyer and Judy Wyatt, Hospitality members. Thanks to our invaluable helpers this past weekend: Mary Conklin, Liz Dickinson, Jan Fromm, Jan Novak, Dave Noel, Keegan Noel, Linda Oshita, Allison Paterson, Diane Pippel, and Peg Showers.

Sincerely, Judy Wyatt



### Boots for Haskell

On Saturday, November 11 our annual boot sorting party in the sanctuary began promptly at 8 am!

All told, the boots were sorted, loaded, and on their way to Haskell by 9:40 a.m. Karen Olson and team are a well oiled machine!!

275  
Pairs of Boots

Thank you Church



### CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

Warm Home
Thermal Long Johns
Snow Shoveling Mittens
Snow Shoveling Boots
Hoodies (no zipper please)
Hand Warmers
Snow Shoveling Coats
Show Shoveling Hats

### OverNight Café 2023 Opening Day is January 3rd

The OverNight Café crew has been hard at work sorting and organizing resources.

Our guests are very specific (as Peg Joachim put it "they have pride") as to what clothing and personal items best suit their situations.

As you and yours celebrate the holidays this winter keep our guests in your thoughts.

Check out our Christmas Wish List and give what you are able.