

SecondFirst Church

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Non Profit
Organization US
Postage PAID
Permit No. 3734
Rockford, Illinois

JANUARY 2024

THE TOWER

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL UCC/FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PC(USA)

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's Grace

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Happy New Year!!

January will bring some changes and new beginnings! Our dedicated Office Manager Debbie Wise has retired. She and her partner Jeff (who is also recently retired) are looking forward to a new time in their lives. We wish Debbie the best of luck. We will be celebrating Debbie's time with us on January 7 during a special Coffee Hour after worship.

We welcome Mitzi Muntz into the fold! Mitzi has already begun working on our newsletters and bulletins. She is a great new addition to our staff.

Our office hours will be changing with the New Year. Office hours will be 9:00am until 1:00pm Monday through Thursday. The office will be closed on Fridays. I realize this will take some time getting adjusted to the new times, but eventually it will seem like these are the hours we have always had. Please have patience.

The 2024 Overnight Café begins Wednesday, January 3 and will run through March 10. The first week or so we will be training new staff and we will have extra volunteers from the city to help us recognize guests who may already have housing. We will be looking for volunteers beginning Jan 3, but will be asking for more volunteers as the city phases out in the second week. Stayed tuned to our newsletter and ENEWS for more information.

Lastly, I think by now you have noticed that I like poetry and have added some to my monthly articles. This month will be no different. This poem, by an unknown author is a comfort as we begin a new year, whatever the year may bring.

**At the sound of the tolling midnight bell
a brand new year will begin.
Let's raise our hopes in a confident toast,
to the promise it ushers in.**

**May your battles be few, your pleasures many,
your wishes and dreams fulfilled.
May your confidence stand in the face of loss
and give you the strength to rebuild.**

**May peace of heart fill all your days
may serenity grace your soul.
May tranquil moments bless your life
and keep your spirit whole.**

Blessings to all,
Becky



Let's Celebrate Debbie's Retirement

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

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

There will be Maria Cake!!



9 Serious Soup has many hands and helpers who continue to feed the hungry during December. Thank you for your generous gifts of your time and talent.



Reflections From the Moderator

I hope you all had a meaningful Christmas holiday with whoever you chose to celebrate it. I enjoyed the Festival of lights, the bell concert, Christmas Pageant, cookies and wassail, special Christmas Eve music, and of course, family time. My favorite time is the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. Usually, all the hustle and bustle are done, obligations are completed, there are no meetings, and I can just relax.

I understand not everyone has the luxury to have that week off though. My sympathy if you have to work, but from past experience, it was a good time to catch up since the office was always very quiet then. So, before we all start to stress about New Year's resolutions, just enjoy whatever down time you can find. January will be here in a minute, and we'll be back to Zoom meetings, Overnight Café, Serious Soup and other endeavors. By then, we'll be recharged and ready for anything!

Peace and love, Darlene

Governing Council Update

The Governing Council met December 7th for November and December. We had four member deaths since our last meeting – Arlene Snap, Lillian Smith, Joyce Pennow and Judy Diehl. They will be missed.

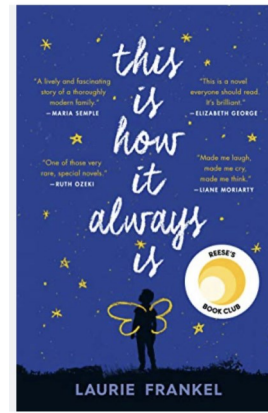
Becky announced that we received a \$25K grant from the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois for the Overnight Café. Bob Canfield reported from Trustees that we are getting quotes to grade and repair the Memorial Garden.

We approved Trustees charge to create an ad hoc committee for recommendations on how we might increase revenues or decrease expenses for the church considering our financial situation. There is a town hall meeting after service on January 21 st for congregational input for ideas and suggestions to that committee. Bob will chair that committee consisting of the moderators, Bill Hoff, Phil Davidson, Karen Olson (DVT) and representatives from Missions and Membership. Any other “outside the box” thinkers are welcome. Each ministry team chair present offers a “one minute team highlight”. DVT is investigating starting a podcast and will invite input from Membership, Missions is deep in planning for the Overnight Café and participated in Love Rockford,

Deacons Fellowship sponsored a bus trip to see the Festival of Lights with cookies and hot chocolate served at church afterwards, and Hospitality will host the cookies and wassail with assistance from Deacons Fellowship. Hospitality is also hosting a farewell retirement party for Debbie after church on January 7 th . There will be Maria's cake so please put it on your calendar.

Family Christian Education is hosting the Children's Pageant, Peanut Bells had a command performance at Stonebridge Church, and a party for 17+ year olds was held on a Saturday night. They are again doing interview questions, so don't be surprised if you're stopped sometime by a youth with a question and a camera.

Worship and Music has wonderful Christmas Eve music planned with a string quartet and oboe. They are also getting quotes to repair our Steinway piano.



Adult Ed - January 14 and 21 Study

“This Is How It Always Is” by Laurie Frankel

A Book Discussion Coffee Class

Led by Karen Olson

January 14 and 21 at 8:30 am - 9:45 am

Janet Moore recently offered to the Sunday Morning Coffee Class her presentation “May All God's Children Sing Their Own Song, Our Family's Transgender Journey”. During this presentation, Janet suggested a novel about a transgender family that she felt provided useful information on this topic. “This is How It Always Is” explores the challenges a family faces with their transgender child, the choices the parents face and the struggles of growing up in this family.

Sunday morning Coffee Class will be hosting discussion on this novel on Sunday January 14 and 21 at 8:30 am. The discussions will be led by Karen Olson.

We encourage everyone to read the book prior to the discussions. Adult CE will provide copies of the book for those who wish to borrow one. They will be available in the church office.

Please contact Jim Ozee (jdozee@gmail.com) for more information or to reserve a book.

CROP Hunger Walk In Wartime

World War II survivors in Europe were the first to benefit from CROP Hunger Walks. Today the prolonged wars in Sudan, Ukraine and the Gaza strip, on top of the pandemic and other disasters are causing an even greater food crisis. Millions are on the brink of famine.



Our participation in Rockford's CROP Hunger Walk is now addressing this crisis, feeding the hungry through Church World Service. Once again our congregation raised over \$6,000 last fall. Our donations are now providing life-saving support like emergency food along with the seeds, tools and programs that will help war survivors feed themselves in the future. War survivors feed themselves in the future.

What generous stewards our church members continue to be.

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

By Dave Jones

Why Have You Pledged?

Many of you have pledged your support to the financial needs of our congregation. It is your time and talents that bring these funds to life in downtown Rockford and beyond. Why do you give of yourself so generously?

Which of these mottos best expresses you response:

- Pray Together, Play Together, Serve Together
- Servants of a Just & Common Good
- To Heal, Inspire, & Empower in the Way of Jesus
- We Seek God, Include All, Serve Others
- Inclusive, Generous, Creative, Progressive
- Love Unconditionally, Challenge Spiritually, Minister Fervently
- We Agree to Differ, Resolve to Love, Unite to Serve

Perhaps it is all of these.

In any case - thank you for your generosity as our two-congregation federation enters its twelfth year of ministry to one another and the world God has given us to serve and protect.

OVERNIGHT CAFÉ OPENING SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 2024

Overnight Café Meal and Personal Items

- We are asking that meals be kept simple.
- Soup and Sandwiches
 - Pasta and bread (no salads or veggies)
 - Hot Dogs and Chips

We are asking that personal items be limited to :

- Hoodies, sweatpants, thermal shirts and pants, snow shoveling boots, gloves, hats, coats, socks and boots.
- Light weight blankets only. No comforters, our washer can not handle them.

Thank you so much for your donations and time.

From the Organ Bench

Our Christmas Eve service was a little different than years past; Nanette Felix, the harpist was noticeably absent; out for surgery this year, and we hope she is recovering well. [Richard Stiltner](#), our choir director, contracted Covid right before the week leading up to Christmas Eve, and so Leah Baskin jumped in and directed the choir, strings, and oboe. **Thank you** to all the musicians who made this service possible; our guest string instrumentalists, and oboist, as well as the many extra singers; I am very grateful. There are so many parts that come together to create a greater sum.

Blessings and wishes for a Happy New Year!
Valerie

Music Notes

Our handbell groups gave a lovely concert "Christmas Bells Are Ringing" on Dec 16th. Peanut Bells, Carillons, Bellcantos and Martin Ringers came together to ring up some good cheer and raise \$704.00 for the Overnight Cafe. Well done, all!! Special thanks to Linda Johnson for her graphic artist skills for the flyers and programs, and to Phil Davidson for his unique talents as emcee. (Where DOES he find those jokes?).

Blessings and wishes for a Happy New Year!
Valerie

A Note from our Children and Family Coordinator

By Aubrey Barnett

The Birthday Party- Well after months of practicing for small moments at Sunday School after our lessons, and one very fun Friday night, the children presented their Christmas Pageant *The Birthday Party*. Each song is a gift from God, helping us celebrate the birth of Jesus. It was an honor to be able to guide these youngsters in silly and celebratory art for God. As a parent community gathering on the Friday before, we valued the gift of having kids present in church on a non Sunday. Something that used to be such a rich part of our culture has truly fallen to the wayside, and those who understand its loss are heartbroken. But Friday night was another little glimpse at that joy. The kids were joined by Mrs. Dorothy Paige Turner who helped them practice their enthusiasm and rhythm!

What a gift.

Grow Kids! January Curriculum: The overarching question for our first month of 2024 will be "what can I do?". The goal of the month will be to consider the active role we can take when interacting with God. Worship and following the way of the Christ are more than ideas and thoughts, more than passively sitting in a pew every week as they might think when they are young. Throughout the month we will be supporting our children in learning:

- I can listen to God's Voice
- I Can Trust Jesus Knows Me
- I Can Trust God's Plans for Me
- I Can Include People Who Aren't Like Me



Thoughts and Dreams: As we complete another cycle around the sun, it is inevitable that we reflect about what has happened to us. As a transplant to SecondFirst and a transplant to Rockford, I admit, this is the first year I have really felt a part of the community, like my roots took hold. Listening to God's voice which led me here was a scary risk at the time, but it seems to me that anytime we actually listen to God and not our own ego, it appears to be a risk to the outside world. What 2023 has brought me is incredible affirmation that the choices I make of spirit will lead me towards goodness. I am grateful to be the recipient of the Rockford Golden Apple Major Grant award as well as place in the top 20 for Golden Apple Teacher Awards. It's humbling to be recognized in the community and to be able to bring my belief in compassion and justice to the forefront of work with children. I try to bring this to our church every week, and I think you as a community feel that. I have been most honored when members stop to tell me they enjoyed my early word messages, or the moments the children perform. It means a great deal to me that your hearts are filled with spirit when I am with you. For what better gift can there be then when we are gathered in His name and he is present? I continue to give the most thanks to the Creator, who knew me before I was born, who will be with me until the end. Being able to proclaim that God's love is for ALL, that love has no limits, that giving love to oneself and to the world is the purpose for which we were all created- this is the calling and gift of the time God has granted me on this floating orb circling endlessly in the universe.



Children's Christmas Pageant was fabulous. The kids were joined by Ms. Dorothy Paige Turner who helped them practice their enthusiasm and rhythm!

Thank you to all who helped make this event a success.

Wassail and cookies were enjoyed by all after worship on Sunday, December 17. Thank you to everyone who helped make this fellowship time possible.



2023 was filled with many memory making activities.
Let's make 2024 as, if not more, memorable.



Fishing with Peter and Tim!

Blessing of the Backpacks



The Landscape Crew

Excursion to the Historic Auto Attractions Museum



An Ambulance for Haiti

January 2024 CALENDAR

Monday, Jan. 1
No Serious Soup

Tuesday, Jan. 2
7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
No Thrift Shop
No Bible Study

Wednesday, Jan. 3
8:00 AM – Park District
10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
8:00 PM – Overnight Café begins

Thursday, Jan. 4
8:00 AM – Park District
9:30 AM – Carillon
7:00 PM – Choir

Friday, Jan. 5
8:00 AM – Park District

Saturday, Jan. 6
10:00 AM – Jubilee Soup Kitchen

Sunday, Jan. 7
8:30 AM – Adult Ed
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:00 AM – Fair Trade Store
11:15 AM – Debbie's Retirement Party

Monday, Jan. 8
11:30 AM – Serious Soup
5:00 PM – Deacons/Fellowship-Zoom

Tuesday, Jan. 9
7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
12:00 PM – Bible Study-Zoom
5:00 PM – Adult Ed-Zoom
6:00 PM – DVT-Zoom

Wednesday, Jan. 10
10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
6:00 PM – Martins
6:30 PM – Euchre in the Dining Room

Thursday, Jan. 11
9:30 AM – Carillons
4:00 PM – Delta Kappa Gamma
6:00 PM – Bellcantos
7:00 PM – Choir Kick Off

Friday, Jan. 12
No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, Jan. 13
9:00 AM – Bridge Clinic

Sunday, Jan. 14 Peanuts/Special Music
8:30 AM – Adult Ed
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:00 AM – Fair Trade Store

Monday, Jan. 15
11:30 AM – Serious Soup
1:00 PM – Hospitality Team

Tuesday, Jan. 16
7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
12:00 PM – Bible Study

Wednesday, Jan. 17
10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
6:00 PM – Trustees
6:00 PM – Martins

Thursday, Jan. 18
9:30 AM – Carillons
6:00 PM – Bellcantos
7:00 PM – Choir

Friday, Jan. 19
No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, Jan. 20
No Scheduled Activities

Sunday, Jan. 21
8:30 AM – Adult Ed
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:00 AM – Fair Trade Store
11:15 AM – Town Hall Meeting

Monday, Jan. 22
11:30 AM – Serious Soup
6:30 PM – Worship/Music-Zoom

Tuesday, Jan. 23
7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Store
12:00 PM – Bible Study

Wednesday, Jan. 24
10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
6:00 PM – Martins

Thursday, Jan. 25
9:30 AM – Carillons in Sanctuary
5:30 PM – Governing Council
6:00 PM – Bells
7:00 PM – Choir

Friday, Jan. 26
No Scheduled Activities

Saturday, Jan. 27
9:00 am – Bridge Clinic

Sunday, Jan. 28 Carillons
8:30 AM – Adult Ed
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:00 AM – Fair Trade Store

Monday, Jan. 29
11:30 AM – Serious Soup

Tuesday, Jan. 30
7:00 AM – Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
12:00 PM – Bible Study

Wednesday, Jan. 31
10:00 AM Staff Meeting
6:00 PM – Martins

Soup Kitchen 2024

Saturday, January 6 at 10:00 a.m.

Our first 2024 date to serve lunch at the Jubilee Center is Saturday, January 6. It's closer than you think! If you are able to join the team that day, let Marge Maynard know, If you have a friend that you'd like to bring along, we would love it!

Stay tuned for the rest of our 2024 Soup Kitchen dates.

