

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)
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February 2026



The Tower

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's Grace



Preparing Our Hearts Through Prayer

We move into February after a tumultuous beginning to the year.

We will mark the beginning of the Lenten Season and consider what we will “give up” or “take on” to focus our attention on growing into our identity as God’s people. Yet this work doesn’t have to wait until our foreheads bear the ashen mark of a cross. It can become the work of our everyday.

This year, I invite you to engage in a season of prayer and reflection on our ministry partners, Pou Kinam Yo—or POUKY for short. Our member, James Casimir, established Pou Kinam Yo (which means “for my people”) as a 501c3 non-profit. This organization implements projects onsite in and around Saut-d’Eau (Sodo), Haiti supporting the common good of the community.

These projects include sustainable family gardens, education for children, a nine-bed hospital, a clean street project that employs the boys and girls of Saut-d’Eau to make their hometown a better place. James devised a genius method for getting supplies to Haiti that covers the cost of transit—you should ask him for the story.

New projects may include Filtration Urns to provide clean drinking water, energy efficient cook stoves. Some projects are pending, waiting for government policing to overcome gang activity: Solar Panels, a Water Well, Tin Roofing, a Garden Tiller, a Library, Satellite/Broadband and Solar Charging units to allow students to pursue higher education from anywhere.

And some projects are cyclical—like the Education Project. POUKY is seeking to send 54 children to school equipped with the necessary uniforms, backpacks,

supplies, lunches, and tuition at a cost of \$250 per student. SecondFirst is a mission partners in the Education Project and the Tools and Seed project, but this call goes beyond the work of a single committee. It invites each of us to embrace the people Saut-d’Eau as neighbors in Jesus Christ.

We support food security and education as “a path out of poverty.”

As for prayers, consider adding these to yours throughout the month of February and through the season of Lent:

- * THANKSGIVING for the foundations that have been built in Pou Kinam Yo and for our congregation’s connection to this vital ministry.
- * LAMENT for the turmoil and gang violence in Haiti with prayer for the restoration of the rule of law.
- * ENCOURAGEMENT for the continuing support of the Education Project.
- * HOPE for the future of Saut-d’Eau and the POUKY projects that will expand the wellbeing of its citizens and the size of all our hearts.

And please, send me your prayers for our ministry work in Haiti and beyond, because I believe that those prayers are buoyed up on God’s dream for our church.

Blessings, *Martha*



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A little Missive From Your Moderator

In Hallmark Channel terms, February is known as Loveuary and has put me in mind of the Burt Bacharach-Hal David song "What the World Needs Now is Love." Written during the Vietnam War, it has become a timeless classic. First recorded by Jackie DeShannon in 1965 and Dionne Warwick in 1966 as well as 25 years later in 1990, the lyrics speak to the same words we have seen in our response to God's Dreams - empathy, unity, humanity. In researching the original timing of the song, I found many writers indicating it continues to remind us in the challenges of the years since — Covid-19, threats of nuclear war, civil unrest — that the answer is love.

*What the world needs now is love, sweet love...
It's the only thing,
that there's just too little of...*

*What the world needs now is love, sweet love...
No, not just for some,
but for everyone.*

Hal David's lyrics are a prayer, starting each verse:
*Lord, we don't need another mountain (v.1)
Lord, we don't need another meadow (v.2)*

Ending with:
*Oh, listen, Lord,
if You want to know...
What the world needs now
is love, sweet love...
It's the only thing,
that there's just too little of...*

*What the world needs now
is love, sweet love...
No, not just for some,
but for everyone.*

Are you singing along yet? Sixty years ago, this song revealed the answer to our struggles and has never been more relevant than in the current climate. In this month and every month, we have the answer which Pastor Martha reiterated in her sermon of January 18th - we have only to look to Jesus "healing the world back into Love."

Yours, Linda Oshita



The Tower
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**SECOND CONGREGATIONAL UCC/
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PC(USA)**
Rockford, Illinois

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ONA

The Open and Affirming Task Force is planning a Pride/ONA design to our church webstore! We're looking for ideas to contribute to the final design. You don't need to draw it (but you're welcome to!).

Send ideas/descriptions/sketches/drawings to Jennifer Archer at jennifer814@hotmail.com by the end of February. We hope to have the new design available soon, but definitely in time for Pride Month activities in June.

Our ONA Task Force is planning a series of activities to get the ball rolling on letting our community know we are an Open & Affirming Congregation. If you haven't checked out the ONA Podcast on our church YouTube Channel, we hope you will!

We would like your ideas for swag, events, and activities to promote our ONA status! If you are on social media, the UCC has a Facebook page - Open and Affirming Coalition UCC. We also recommend following The Liam Foundation and PFLAG Rockford Chapter pages that are providing important support for members of the LGBTQIA community.

Podcast 7- The Bells of Second First

In this episode, Phil and Greg talk with guests Valerie Blair, Joyce Zartman, and Sarah Hallberg about our handbells program. Learn about the history of our handbell choirs, and why it is such an important part of our music program at Second First!



February Sunday Greeters

- 1 - Jay Baker
- 8 - Holly Beeman
- 15 - Jim Burright
- 22 - Ann Stites

Adult Ed. Coffee Class

Please join us for Adult Ed Coffee Class – Sundays in February at 8:30 AM

We Meet in The Gathering Place next to the Church office.

Carolyn Greenlaw 815-262-1776

Services in February 2026

Sunday, February 1:
"Not #Blessed, Blessed"
Matthew 5:1-12

Sunday, February 8:
"Salt and Light"
Matthew 5:13-20

Sunday, February 15
"Listen Up"
Matthew 17:1-9

February 18 Ash Wednesday
"Ashes Mark the Road"
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Haiti Project (Pou Kinam Yo... "POUKY")

HEY CHURCH!

Can We Do It Again?

Let's send 54 kids back to school in Saut-d'Eau, Haiti.

This will be our 8th year to send the kids of Sodo back to school. For each child, \$250 provides a backpack, school uniforms, school supplies, books, lunches, AND the teacher.

Education is a path out of poverty!

This is your invitation to join the effort. Please send your contribution to the church office labeled 'Back to School'.

Thank You!

Roger Greenlaw,
John Dewaters, James Casimir,
Dick Larson,
Rosey Massenat,
and Bob Canfield
(Project Directors)



Music Notes by Valerie Blair

Music this month will include choir, String Band, Dorothy Paige-Turner, and choir again as we have our first service of the season of Lent.

Many of you probably were not aware that the piano keys were removed for a week by Tom Tropp of River Forest to do a re-conditioning. We are right on schedule for that; the piano was donated in 1998, and Tom said about every 25 years it should be looked at and have any work done to keep it in good condition. The estimate was between 1,500 and 5,000, depending on what needed doing,

and fortunately, it ended up being 1,500, as it was in good shape, he said. I don't know if you heard a difference on Jan 18, when I played a piano postlude for the first time since Nov. 9th, but I definitely hear and feel a difference; it's really a joy to play again. Our piano is a Steinway Model D, 9 foot concert grand. From the Steinway website:

At 8' 11 3/4" (274 cm) in length, this majestic musical instrument — the *pinnacle of concert grand pianos* — is the overwhelming choice of the world's greatest pianists and for

anyone who demands the highest level of musical expression.

Thank you to the Nelson family for their incredibly generous gift to the church. Thank you to the Presbyterian Endowment for funding this project, to maintain in good faith this gift. Our piano and organ are real treasures, and I am privileged to play them.

Peace, Valerie

Overnight Cafe



These brutally cold temperatures have made our Overnight Cafe a popular destination for the unhoused in our community. THANKS to all who have been volunteering their time to check-in the guests, serving meals, and cooking! Your donations of hand warmers have been very appreciated! Both our members and our community have been sending in financial donations to help us cover the staffing expenses. Our most ongoing need is meals! Check in with Holly Beeman to see how you can help, even if you don't cook!

Each evening, we serve our guests at the Overnight Cafe a meal. Meals are simple such as soup, sandwich, casserole or BBQ. You can google - meals for 60 for ideas of quantities. If the electric roaster pan is full, it's enough! Optional additions might include fruit, chips or cookies.

Meals can be homemade or purchased. Either type works and is welcomed!

If you are considering providing a meal here are the FAQs:

⇒ Meals can be provided in the following amounts:
10 - 12 (for the women's side)
60 - 75 (for the men's side)
depending on the date you choose

⇒ Delivery time is between 5:15 - 5:30pm at the south door - just park under the canopy and ring the bell, staff will assist you. If that time does not work for you, we can easily make other arrangements. If you want to bring it in hot, 6:30 works! We serve at 7pm. Just let Holly B know!

⇒ Most meals should be prepared at home and delivered to the OC to be warmed in our church crock pots or electric roaster. OC will have tableware for serving your meal. Purchased meals can be delivered at that time as well. Canned meals from GFS can be dropped off anytime the church is open.

⇒ If you want to keep it simple, we can always use cans of coffee, hot cocoa mix, sugar, creamer, oatmeal packets, and/or paper plates/bowls/napkins.

The OC kitchen is very limited on both freezer and refrigerator space so frozen meals delivered further in advance is challenging to store.

So, if you or a group are considering providing a meal or if you have any other questions about these meals, please, contact myself, Holly Beeman at 815.979.8046 or at overnightcafe815@gmail.com. We can find a date and get you on our calendar.

Thank you so much for considering taking part in this very important mission!

This year we have a fledgling Board helping with Overnight Cafe:

Becky Erbe, Martha Langford, Linda Oshita, Sarah Reinold, Holly Beeman, Mike Meltzer, Rick Gallegos, Steve Showers, Alice Uphouse, Lindsey Lancaster, Dave Laib, Michael Brandon, Brandon Williams, and Karen Hill



Youth Worship Sunday



We are so proud of how thoughtfully and joyfully our children leaned into these moments of imagination, courage, and trust.

Looking Ahead to Lent: Walking Where Jesus Walked

As we move toward Lent, our children and youth will be stepping into a new, immersive way of learning the stories of Jesus, quite literally.

We will be using a giant map of Israel to explore the real places where Jesus lived, taught, healed, argued, prayed, and loved. Each week, students will “travel” to a new location on the map: from Galilee to Jerusalem, from rivers to roads, and hear the stories that happened there.

To bring these places even more vividly to life, we will also be sharing photographs from Pastor Martha’s own visit to the Holy Land, helping students see that these are not just Bible stories, but real landscapes, real villages, and real journeys.



This larger-than-life visual storytelling experience is designed to help our students do something powerful: to imagine Jesus not as a distant figure in a stained-glass window, but as a real person who walked dusty roads, stood in crowded towns, and moved through a complicated world not so different from our own.

By grounding these stories in real geography and real images, we hope to deepen curiosity, spark questions, and invite a more meaningful connection to Jesus’ life and ministry especially as we follow his path toward the cross and resurrection.

In Lent, we won’t just be *reading* the story. We’ll be *walking it together*.

Following in Faith:

Our Journey These Past Two Weeks

Over the past two Sundays, our children and youth have been exploring what it means to follow not just with our feet, but with our hearts.

In the first week, you’ll see photos of the children searching for and creating colorful footprints. First, as they followed the trail, we talked about how God often guides us one step at a time, not always showing us the whole path at once, but inviting us to trust that each step still matters.

Then we created our own paths of footprints, discussing how each represented a small, faithful step we can choose: *kindness, courage, forgiveness, or hope in our everyday lives*.

Then in the older group you’ll notice videos of a playful but meaningful trust activity. One child closed their eyes and tried to walk a simple path while another child gave them directions.

Laughter filled the room, along with a few wobbly steps and wrong turns, but also moments of deep listening and teamwork. Afterward, we reflected on how hard it is to trust a voice when you can’t see where you’re going, and how important it is to both give gentle guidance and to receive it.

Together, these activities helped the children experience something ancient and holy in a very modern way: *that faith is not about having all the answers, but about learning to follow love, listen for wisdom, and walk together, even when the path feels uncertain*.

February 2026 Calendar

Sunday, February 1
8:30 AM- Adult Coffee Class
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School

Wednesday, February 11
10:00 AM- Staff Meeting
6:00 PM- Martin Ringers

Friday, February 20
Building is Closed

Saturday, February 21
Building is Closed

Sunday, February 22
8:30 AM- Adult Coffee Class
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School

Monday, February 23
11:30 AM – Serious Soup
6:00 PM- Worship/Music (zoom)

Tuesday, February 24
7:00 AM- Men’s Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
4:30 PM- Adult Christian Ed

Wednesday, February 25
10:00 AM- Staff Meeting
6:00 PM- Martin Ringers

Thursday, February 26
9:30 AM- Carillons
7:00 PM- Choir
7:30 PM- El Shaddai

Friday, February 27
Building is Closed

Saturday, February 14
9:00 AM- Bridge Clinic

Sunday, February 15
8:30 AM- Adult Coffee Class
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:15 AM- FCE

Monday, February 16
Building is Closed

Saturday, February 7
Building is Closed

Sunday, February 8
8:30 AM- Adult Coffee Class
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:15 AM- Brownie Reception
11:15 AM- ONA Meeting

Tuesday, February 17
7:00 AM- Men’s Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop

Wednesday, February 18
10:00 AM- Staff Meeting
6:30 PM- Ash Wednesday Service

Thursday, February 19
9:30 AM- Carillons
5:30 PM- DVT
7:00 PM- Choir
7:30 PM- El Shaddai

Saturday, February 28
9:00 AM- Bridge Clinic

Times/Dates/Events subject to change