

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)

318 N. Church Street, Rockford IL 61101

(815)963-8431

www.secondfirst.org

www.facebook.com/secondfirstchurch

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

January 2026



The Tower

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's Grace



Seeking the Light

January 6—the 12th day of Christmas—is when we celebrate Epiphany, retelling the story of the magi who visit the holy family and kneel before Jesus with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. It brings an end to the Christmas season in the church, just as New Years brings an end to Christmas in our daily lives.



AND YET... New Years and Epiphany are not actually endings, instead they are waypoints on our journey into the future.

Each year, as we retell the story of foreign astronomers and sages following a prophetic star, I wonder about their journey. If we look at their story, we find the deep connection between their knowing and their doing. They see the star, find the story, AND THEN they make the journey. Without their action, their knowledge is incomplete.

This is the time of year, that I am reminded that without action all my knowledge of Jesus is incomplete. Until I respond to God's love in Jesus Christ with love for my neighbor, my life is incomplete. So I wonder... how will God move in my heart this year, where will God's love call me, and how will I respond?

In 2025, God's call led me to Rockford, IL to the people of SecondFirst Church and the people of the Coronado/Haskell neighborhood.

In 2025, God's call has led this congregation to declare itself Open and Affirming embracing "the rich diversity of God's creation" and celebrating "the uniqueness of every individual—regardless of gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, relationship status, physical or mental ability, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, age, or background."

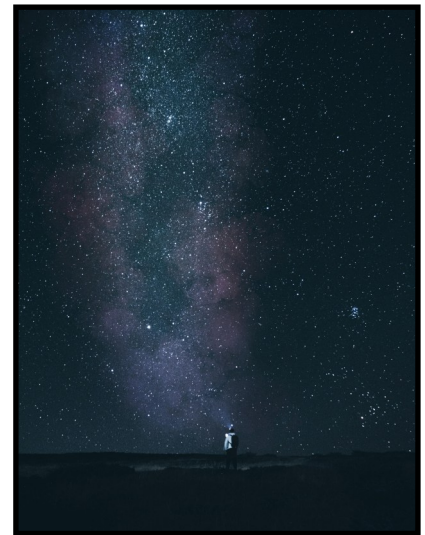
In 2025, this congregation continued its work with the unhoused through weeks and months of extreme cold weather. It has ministered to those who are ministering to our neighbors by housing KFACT, the Bridge Clinic, and the El Shaddai congregation.

In 2025, this congregation contributed to the blessed work of so many non-profits who work in Rockford and beyond.

In 2025, we've learned more of Jesus and we've made that knowledge more complete by serving the world that God loves.

This month, as we leave the waypoint of Epiphany, let us dream of all the ways we can follow God's light into the year to come.

Blessings, *Martha*



P.S. In 2026, we will continue our conversation with Court Street United Methodist Church. For a summary of the work to date use this link if viewing the digital version of this newsletter:

<https://www.secondfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Summary-Conversations-between-SecondFirst-and-Court-Street.pdf>

We will gather for a town hall on *Sunday January 11*, where members and friends of the congregation can hear more, ask questions, and make comment.



www.secondfirst.org

A little Missive From Your Moderator

In preparing this message to you, I looked back on the December Missive and discovered how prophetic it was in noting the ways SecondFirst has responded to the needs of our neighbors when frigid temperatures appeared a month earlier than anticipated.

Our Overnight Café welcomed guests during the weeks of December 3-7 and again December 10-15, providing a warm, safe, restorative place of rest when other options were not available. In similar style, Serious Soup numbers have hovered around 100 during much of the fall. The twice-monthly Bridge Clinic provides medical assistance to our downtown neighbors.

Rediscovering these activities has proved restorative to me. This response has reminded me how our church is living out God's Dream for our community and ultimately ourselves. Perhaps doing all we can for those nearest to us is the first step to realizing God's Dream for our nation and world.

The transformation of the Sanctuary this Advent Season has been a delight. I so enjoy the traditions found in our Chrismons – ornaments imbedded with Christian symbols to remind us Jesus's birth is the Reason for the Season.

By the time this Tower reaches you, we will have welcomed a New Year full of promise and opportunity, as well as challenge. A Town Hall early in January will provide the opportunity to explore how SecondFirst might support another congregation seeking to minister to our downtown neighbors while maintaining its own identity as a



church. That candid conversation will allow for an honest exchange of ideas, opinions, and suggestions that might ultimately lead us to solutions we can all live with. How will we meet what lies ahead?

I have every confidence our response will be as it has always been – with selfless generosity, determination, and compassion for our own members and our nearest neighbors. Doing what we can to realize God's Dream close to home will surely lead to remarkable missions that will continue to serve downtown Rockford and beyond with God's Grace.

Yours,
Linda Oshita



The Tower

The monthly publication of

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

Senior Pastor: Martha Langford
martha.langford@secondfirst.org

Moderator: Linda Oshita
moderator@secondfirst.org

Graphic Designer/Editor:
Charles Fernandez
charles.fernandez@secondfirst.org

Children and Family Coordinator:
Aubrey Barnett
aubrey.barnett@secondfirst.org

Music Director, Organist/Pianist:
Valerie Blair
valerie.blair@secondfirst.org

Bookkeeper/Business Manager:
Caryl Hay
caryl.hay@secondfirst.org

Church Receptionist:
Jacqueline Bradford
jacqueline.bradford@secondfirst.org

SecondFirst Church
318 N. Church Street Rockford, IL 61101
815.963.8431
www.secondfirst.org

ONA Church #1,946: Second First Church of Rockford!

Celebrating A New ONA Church!



Welcome the newest ONA church in the Illinois Conference!

Dear ONA family:

Please join us in welcoming Second First Church in Rockford, IL as a newly-certified Open and Affirming congregation!

As ONA church #1,946, Second First Church is now part of the largest and fastest-growing LGBTQ-affirming church movement in the world! We're proud of the congregation and grateful to the church's leadership for the hard work that led to this milestone in their history.

Please join the entire Open and Affirming movement in celebrating Second First Church, and join us in prayer that their ONA covenant will be a blessing to their LGBTQ+ neighbors.

Blessings,

Rev. Derek Terry
ONA Coalition Acting Executive Director

Greeters For Our Sundays in January

4 - Janet Novak
11 - Bill & Sally Hoff
18 - Jim Ozee
25 - Bob & Sue Saunders

Coffee Class

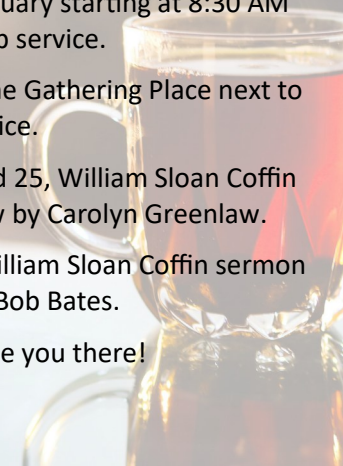
Please join us for Adult Education Class Sundays in January starting at 8:30 AM before worship service.

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

January 11 and 25, William Sloan Coffin sermon review by Carolyn Greenlaw.

January 18, William Sloan Coffin sermon review led by Bob Bates.

We hope to see you there!



Sunday Services in January 2026

January 11:
"Fulfilling All Righteousness"
Matthew 3:13-17

January 18:
"Come and See"
John 1:29-42

January 25
"Follow Me"
Matthew 4:12-23

**The Thrift Shop @
SecondFirst Church**
PRICES BETWEEN
\$1 AND \$10
CASH ONLY!
318 N CHURCH ST.
ROCKFORD IL

**OPEN
TUESDAYS
9:00AM TO
1:00PM**

WWW.SECONDFIRST.ORG

Stewardship Note

To date, we have received pledges from 53 households who together have promised to support our church building, staff, and mission to the tune of \$254,204! Thank you everyone! Caryl Hay, our bookkeeper/recording secretary, will be mailing out letters of confirmation in early January. Please review the information and if there is any error, let Caryl know by calling or emailing the church office. If you thought you had submitted a pledge card but you did not receive a letter, please contact Caryl; we want to make sure no pledge has been overlooked by accident.

For those who are curious, if you would still like to make a pledge for 2026, it's not too late! Just let Caryl know and she will take care of everything. And remember that you can donate to the general fund or to specific mission projects (for example, Haskell Boots) at any time, as the Spirit moves you, no pledge is necessary.



Music Notes by Valerie Blair

Welcome back and Happy New Year! I hope you all enjoyed the Christmas Eve service as much as I did. Rehearsals for Martin Ringers and Sanctuary Choir resume this week, the 7th and 8th.

Upcoming music:

Jan 11 Sanctuary Choir

Jan 18 Sanctuary Choir

Jan 25 Carillons

Feb 1 choir

Feb 8 String Band

Feb 15 Dorothy Paige-Turner

Feb 22 Sanctuary Choir

Mar 1 Sanctuary Choir

Mar 8 Julie Cook Ramirez

Mar 15 Sanctuary Choir

Finally, in the upcoming weeks we will have some sharing around the 4 questions on the survey, with one question's answers per week. Here's a sample:

1. What is God's Dream for the world? That people live without war.
2. What is God's Dream for our nation? That we, as a country of much, learns how to give, instead of keep/take.
3. What is God's Dream for our city/community? More support for the unhoused and hungry. More affordable housing.
4. What is God's Dream for our church? Mutuality, authentic welcome, generous witness, faithful service.

There is much to think about! And...if these responses stir something in you, there are more copies of the survey on the table near the entrance to /exit from the sanctuary. Just drop your paper in the offering basket any Sunday. Thank you for the time and energy you spent and the commitment you made to Dreaming God's Dream: No Gift Too Small, No Dream Too Big.

Marge Maynard and the Stewardship Team (Jennifer Archer, Linda Johnson, Linda Mohaupt, Linda Oshita and Doug Phillips)

Eight Seasons of Overnight Cafe

What comes together to make the Overnight Cafe work?

Having space, staff, volunteers, meals, community members, and a spirit of hospitality.

Our church provides in-kind support: the gym, showers, laundry, water, electricity, and most importantly heat. During the regular season, Overnight Cafe can house up to 60 men (in our gym) and 12 women (at Emmanuel Episcopal's Jubilee Center).

Member Sarah Reinold writes grants that secure funds to pay our staff. She is currently working on a grant from the Winnebago County Community Mental Health Board. **AND** Sarah wrote the grant request from the Community Foundation of N. Illinois (CFNIL) who gave a \$40,000 grant for this season! Our Outreach Associate, Pastor Becky Erbe leads the charge in hiring staff and collaborating with our community members: Emmanuel Episcopal, Rosecrance, St. Vincent dePaul, City of Rockford, Carpenters Place, etc.

Volunteers are needed to check in our guests, arriving at 5:15pm to set up and start coffee. Check-in begins at 6:00pm and volunteers leave around 7:00pm when check-in is complete. As guests enter, staff check both the guests and their bags before they enter the gym to get their mat and blanket. When check-in is complete, volunteers serve a meal (around 7:00pm).

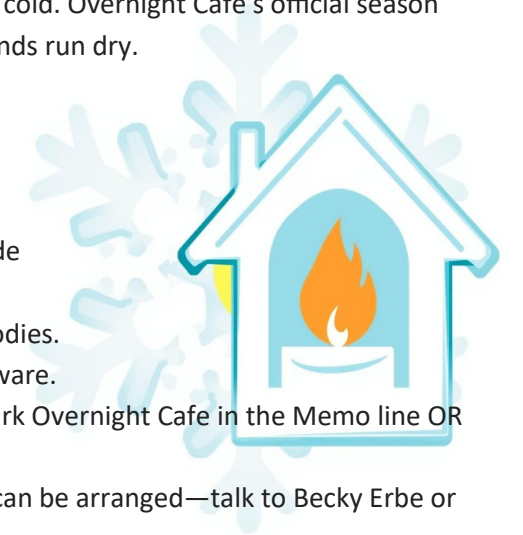
In December, we opened on an emergency basis for 11 nights due to the extreme cold. Overnight Cafe's official season begins Sunday, January 4 and continues every night until March 8—or until our funds run dry.

Want to know how you can help?

- Volunteer for guest check-in (5:15-7:00pm)—talk to Karen Hill.
- Bring a fully prepared meal for 65-75—talk to Holly Beeman or Linda Oshita.
NOTE: We have roasters and crockpots to keep food warm, or you can provide canned meals from GFS.
- Donate hand warmer packets, warm socks, gently used jeans/sweatpants/hoodies.
- Donate cans of coffee, hot chocolate, sugar/creamer, paper products/plastic ware.
- Donate funds to pay our staff. Make checks payable to SecondFirst Church mark Overnight Cafe in the Memo line OR give electronically through our website's [Donate](#) link.
- Promote the Cafe to the philanthropic organizations you belong to, speakers can be arranged—talk to Becky Erbe or Karen Hill.

We are the only church providing a warm, safe place for the unhoused in our community. We greatly appreciate your support!

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



This year, our children told the Nativity story in a slightly different way, through the eyes of the animals who were there.

In *The Animals Tell the Story*, camels gossip, sheep wonder out loud, a donkey remembers the long road to Bethlehem, and even the smallest creature asks the biggest questions. With humor and honesty, the animals help us imagine what that holy night might really have been like: messy, noisy, ordinary, and still filled with wonder.

By telling the story this way, our children reminded us that Jesus was born not into perfection or comfort, but into the everyday world of real people, real places, and real animals. The stable becomes a place where heaven comes close, where love shows up quietly, and where peace begins in the most unexpected ways.

Their voices, curiosity, and joy helped us remember that the Christmas story is not just something we look back on, but something we are invited into again and again. We are deeply grateful for our children, their creativity, and the way they continue to teach us how to see the story with fresh eyes.



Noisy Offering decision:

On Youth Worship Sunday, our children made a powerful choice together. After learning about several local organizations, they voted unanimously to give their Noisy Offering to Marshmallow's Hope.

What spoke to them most was Marshmallow's Hope's work to stand up against bullying and to care for kids who are hurting. The children named how important it is to create safe spaces where everyone is treated with kindness, dignity, and love, especially when someone feels left out or targeted.

Their decision reminds us that even small hands can make brave choices. With every clink of coins and joyful noise, our children showed us what it looks like to listen to others' pain and respond with compassion. We are proud of their empathy, their courage, and their commitment to loving their neighbors well.



January 2026 Calendar

Thursday, January 1

Building is Closed

Friday, January 2

Building is Closed

Saturday, January 3

Building is Closed

Sunday, January 4

8:30 AM- Adult Coffee Class
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
6:00 PM- Overnight Café Opens

Monday, January 5

11:30 AM – Serious Soup
12:30 PM- Hospitality

Tuesday, January 6

7:00 AM- Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop

Wednesday, January 7

10:00 AM- Staff Meeting
6:00 PM- Martin Ringers
6:00 PM- Trustees (zoom)

Thursday, January 8

9:30 AM- Carillons
7:00 PM- Choir
7:30 PM- El Shaddai

Friday, January 9

Building is Closed

Saturday, January 10

10:00 AM- Jubilee Soup Kitchen

Sunday, January 11

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

Monday, January 12

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

Tuesday, January 13

7:00 AM- Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop
4:30 PM- Adult Christian Ed

Wednesday, January 14

10:00 AM- Staff Meeting
6:00 PM- Martin Ringers

Thursday, January 15

9:30 AM- Carillons
7:00 PM- Choir
7:30 PM- El Shaddai

Friday, January 16

Building is Closed

Saturday, January 17

Building is Closed

Sunday, January 18

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

Monday, January 19

11:30 AM – Serious Soup

Tuesday, January 20

7:00 AM- Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop

Wednesday, January 21

10:00 AM- Staff Meeting
6:00 PM- Martin Ringers
6:00 PM- Trustees

Thursday, January 22

9:30 AM- Carillons
5:30 PM- Governing Council
7:00 PM- Choir
7:30 PM- El Shaddai

Friday, January 23

Building is Closed

Saturday, January 24

Building is Closed

Sunday, January 25

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

Monday, January 26

11:30 AM – Serious Soup

Tuesday, January 27

7:00 AM- Men's Prayer Breakfast
9:00 AM – Thrift Shop

Wednesday, January 28

10:00 AM- Staff Meeting
6:00 PM- Martin Ringers

Thursday, January 29

9:30 AM- Carillons
7:00 PM- Choir
7:30 PM- El Shaddai

Friday, January 30

Building is Closed

Saturday, January 31

Building is Closed

Times/Dates/Events subject to change