

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church
PC(USA)
318 N. Church Street, Rockford IL 61101
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Non Profit
Organization US
Postage PAID
Permit No. 3734
Rockford, Illinois



www.secondfirst.org

April 2026 the tower



Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's Grace



Easter People



Followers of Jesus hold resurrection faith—we believe that God raises the dead to new life. In the fifth-century, Augustine of Hippo coined the phrase “Easter People” to talk about those who hold resurrection faith.

We understand that we live in a “Good Friday” kind of world—a world that is broken and torn, where oppression and heartbreak seem to rule the day. Yet, we are Easter People—servants of hope—who believe in God’s goodness and God’s power to heal the world even through our feeble hands.

So what does that look like in practice? Easter People practice “holy noticing”—they look for God’s presence in the face of others, in the world around them, in the events unfolding across the globe.

Easter People seek out “moral beauty”—they pay attention to acts of compassion, courage, tenacity, and grace and are inspired to awe and gratitude through them.

Easter People hold “active faith”—doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

Easter People “speak the truth in love”—giving honest, authentic witness to God while upholding the dignity and worth of those to whom we speak.

Greeters for April

5 - Alice Uphouse & Sarah Hallberg
12 - Jim Burright
19 - Kim Craft
26 - James Casimir Family

If Easter People had a theme song (and I would argue they do) I think it might be “Go to the World!” This hymn by Ralph Vaughan Williams comes out of the United Church of Canada—a union of Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians. Today it serves as my charge and benediction:

Go to the world! Go into all the earth.
Go preach the cross where Christ renews
life's worth, baptizing as the sign of our rebirth.
Alleluia. Alleluia.

Go to the world! Go into every place.
Go live the word of God's redeeming grace.
Go seek God's presence in each time and space.
Alleluia. Alleluia.

Go to the world! Go struggle, bless, and pray;
the nights of tears give way to joyous day.
As servant church, you follow Christ's own way.
Alleluia. Alleluia.

Go to the world! Go as the ones I send,
for I am with you till the age shall end,
when all the hosts of glory cry "Amen!"
Alleluia. Alleluia.

Happy Easter,

Martha

One final missive from your moderator...

It’s April, a month which this year conjures up visions of Easter, flowers in bloom, warm weather (at last!), and for me a time of reflection, to look back on my year as your Moderator, marveling at how swiftly the time has flown. This Missive then will allow me the space to reflect on our year together at SecondFirst Church where it is our constant endeavor to energize downtown Rockford and beyond with God’s grace.

April 2025: After a successful vote in early March, a call was extended to Pastor Martha Langford who joined us just in time for what may be the busiest season in the church calendar - LENT. Pastor Martha was up to the task, leading the congregation through Holy Week observances and on to Easter.

May 2025: The Annual Meeting at the end of April bestowed upon me the Moderator’s Gavel and we were off. One of my goals was to ensure Communication among the various Ministry Teams, the Pastor, and the Support Staff. To that end I attended weekly staff meetings, joining Past Moderators each week and relying on them for guidance. A highlight of May was the service conducted by our Youth, an amazing group under the leadership of Aubrey Barnett, Sarah Hallberg, and Madeline Archer. How proud your new Moderator was of her own connection to the participants.

June 2025: The month was busy, busy with Pastor Martha’s Blackhawk Presbytery Installation, a member exploration class, followed by a new

member Sunday, all while she wasted no time starting classes toward her UCC installation.

July 2025: Court St. United Methodist Church reached out to us in July with the news of their consideration to vacate their building. Governing Council directed the Moderator and Pastor to form a small group for Conversations with a group from Court Street. Ultimately both congregations conducted surveys and Town Hall meetings, the outcome of which appears elsewhere in this Tower.

August 2025: Our Annual Church Picnic – a true favorite captured in Greg Makulec’s drone photo. Plans are already underway for this year’s gathering to be preceded by our service at the park. Bell Sunday, featuring Joyce Zartman on the bell tree, ably accompanied by husband Bill, and the Blessing of the Backpacks launched the new school year.

September 2025: The second member exploration luncheon was held and led to our welcoming six new members. Martha began a series of Federated Church 101 presentations after church, based on what she had been learning in her classes – informative and fascinating content.

October 2025: The big event of October was the positive vote on our Open and Affirming Task Force’s Welcome Covenant. The group had been working for more than two years to frame a Welcoming Statement in order to qualify SecondFirst Church as an ONA congregation.

(continued on page 3)



the tower

The monthly publication of

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

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Where We Are: Court Street Conversations

In January, SecondFirst held a town hall meeting to discuss and field questions about the conversations that we’ve held with leaders from Court Street United Methodist Church. In February, our team fielded a congregational survey, both for those who participated in the town hall meetings and those who were unable to participate in person. There was a consistent theme to the responses and some very creative suggestions, with the team appreciated.

This is our summary of where we stand.

Following conversations with Court Street leadership and after listening carefully to the voice of the SecondFirst congregation, we find the following to be true:

The congregation of SecondFirst Church stands ready to welcome and receive members of Court Street UMC into the life of the congregation as participants or members; however, not as a separate church entity. We have sincere openness to supporting Court Street members who wish to continue specific mission programs that benefit our downtown neighbors including Waffles and Worship and the community Thanksgiving Dinner.

Pastor Martha communicated this precise information to Court Street UMC leadership by letter. We expressed our willingness to continue conversations about the possibilities listed above, and expressed our support for the leaders and members of Court Street as they plan next steps. Court Street also surveyed its congregation, and Pastor Cal Culpepper shared their current plan to remain in their building as long as possible—beyond the May 24 date once set by congregational vote.

Please hold our neighbors at Court Street in your prayers.

Conversation Team members:
Linda Oshita, Karen Hill, Phil Davidson, Katy Paterson, Martha Langford.



Handbell Concert

Presented by Martin Ringers,
Peanut Bells, and Carillons bell choirs

Ring in Spring

Sunday, April, 12, 2026

SecondFirst Church, 3:00 p.m.
318 North Church Street, Rockford, Illinois
www.secondfirst.org

Open to the public
Free will offering



Next Jubilee Soup Kitchen: May 2, 2026

We will gather at the Jubilee Center (the small building in the Emmanuel Episcopal Church parking lot) at 10 am. We will prepare, serve, and clean up a delicious lunch which is available to any person who walks through the door that day. While we work hard, our time is filled with laughter, and conversations, and the blessings we give to our hungry neighbors and those we receive in thanks from them. We are truly blessed to be able to participate in this hands-on ministry! If you are able to help, let Marge Maynard know. Thank you.

April Music coming in April-May

5th Easter brass
12th Martin Ringers
And Ring In Spring 3:00 p.m. in the sanctuary
19th Choir
26th guest musician (to be announced)

May

3rd choir
10th Children’s Service
17th Carillons
24th Quartet (Pentecost)



Today as I write this, the sun is out and we are expecting a high of 70 degrees. Not bad temperatures if you live outside. Imagine having nowhere to go in snowy, below zero temperatures like we experienced this winter. Fortunately, there was a place to go. Once again, SecondFirst Church generously opened the doors and offered a warm safe place for people to stay.

379 different guest stayed at least one night or more this season. 306 were males and 72 were females. 129 claimed some type of disability, physical or mental. 36 were veterans. 2 described themselves as other gender. The majority of guests were from Rockford/Winnebago County. One guest gets the farthest from home award, just arriving from the Congo in Africa.

This year we had support from many social service organizations from our community. Thank you to St. Vincent DePaul, Carpenter’s Place, City of Rockford and the Winnebago County Health Department.

Thank you to the many churches who volunteered to deliver meals and serve. Many churches also donated to the Overnight Café financially. Thank you to Emmanuel Episcopal Church for allowing the women to use the Jubilee Center. Due to staffing issues, the women came back over to Secondfirst, using the space in the old Radar Room. This turned out to be a huge blessing. The space was perfect. Thank you to the many church and community volunteers.

I don’t think any of us ever imagined what the impact to our community would be when the Overnight Café began 8 years ago. We opened for 2 weeks during a “polar vortex,” with a handful of guests. The Overnight Café is now serving hundreds with our generosity and love.

We bring hope to those who have none.
Thank you SecondFirst church and its members.
This is what church should be like. Showing the love of Christ to all those in need.

God Bless you all!
Pastor Becky Erbe

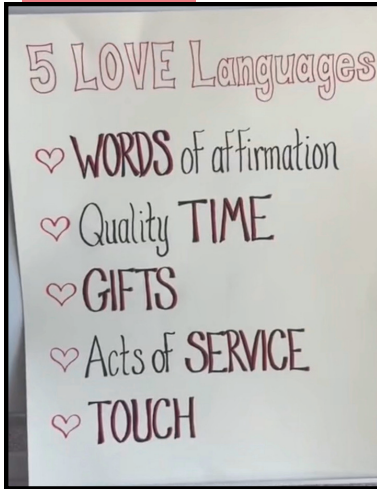
KFACT

February 2026

KFACT held a Glamping Galentine Self-Love Theme overnight at Atwood for 50 girls!

The event focused on self love as young girls the importance of creating a life that’s centered around internal self love for yourself to be all that God designed you to be.

Some of the activities we did was yoga and meditation, DIY self care activities such as making lip gloss, and the girls wrote love letters to themselves and participate in the love language quiz for teens!



November 2025: The Holidays were upon us. Deacons Fellowship treated us to pumpkin bars as we moved toward a joyful Thanksgiving.

December 2025: And suddenly it was December and the weather couldn’t wait to remind us of who was really in charge. Below zero temperatures brought an early opening for our Overnight Café with limited services, but at least a warm place to sleep. As I recall, nearly 15 nights were offered on an emergency basis.

January 2026: New Year, new projects. The second goal of my Moderatorship (is that a word?) was orchestrating a revision of the By Laws. After a thorough review, several items will be brought to the Congregation for approval at the Annual Meeting later in April. I have appreciated the assistance of Bob Canfield, Darlene Riddle, Jennifer Archer, and incoming Moderator Bob Langford in the process.

February 2026: What would we do without the Foundation? With resources demonstrating the vision and generosity of our congregation and nurtured by the Foundation’s Board, this year SecondFirst was able to refurbish our organ and piano, replace carpeting in the Sanctuary, repair the south Sanctuary wall, and install solar panels, not to mention handle emergencies such as unanticipated floods and loss of heat in Emerson Hall. We are indeed a fortunate flock to have reserves to call upon to keep our building operational.

March 2026: Pastor Martha has led the weekly Lenten Pause, adding significantly to our preparation for Holy Week, culminating in one of my favorite services - Easter Sunday with Valerie Blair rocking the organ. As we approach anniversary dates not only for Pastor Martha, but our outstanding staff – Jacqueline Bradford, Caryl Hay, Josh Hopkins, Charles Fernandez, as well as our Maria Mandujano

- all who have exceeded expectations, I need to celebrate each of them and express my appreciation for their contributions to my year as Moderator. Truly, truly we were able to accomplish all we have because of them. What a blessing Pastor Martha has been and will be in the coming years – as we have often said, she was so worth waiting for!

April 2026: And here is the hardest part, so full of gratitude to have been entrusted with this responsibility of leadership, which is never accomplished alone, I am sure I will omit significant helpers along the way.



Please know how much I appreciate getting to know you and work with you as together we moved SecondFirst Church through this year. And the best part is still ahead as those relationships will extend long after the Moderator Gavel is transferred to Bob – we have much to look forward to.

Yours,
Linda Oshita

ONA (Open & Affirming) News

The ONA Task Force is transitioning to being the ONA Ministry Team and having a seat on the Governing Council! This team is being added into our Church Bylaws on April 26.

A Media Release has been sent out to our denominations and our community, and a banner has been posted to celebrate our decision to welcome EVERYONE!! A NEW t-shirt design is being created and will be unveiled soon!

Our Mission Ministry Team is developing a working relationship with the Liam Foundation and will be letting you know how we can better support the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community. Lots of exciting opportunities!

Missions and Earth Day

Earth Day is April 22! Save the Date!! Plans are afoot to host an event 5:30 or 6pm for refreshing our recycling knowledge and learning about hybrid and electric vehicles! If you have curious friends, bring them along! More details to follow

March 23 Blood Drive Successful!

The Deacons/Fellowship team is delighted to report that the Blood Drive held on March 23rd was a success! We are grateful to all who signed up or walked on to donate a life-saving pint of blood. As the Rock River Valley Blood Center report shows, 45 lives could be saved with SecondFirst's donations!



This is Terry's Bambi getting comfortable for the service on Tim Carter.



April 2026 Calendar

Wednesday, April 1

8:00 AM- Park District
10:00 AM- Staff Meeting
6:00 PM- Martin Ringers

Thursday, April 2

8:00 AM- Park District
9:30 AM- Carillons
6:30 PM- Maundy Thursday Service
7:30 PM- El Shaddai

Friday, April 3

9:00 AM- Good Friday Walk for Justice

Saturday, April 4

9:00 AM- Bridge Clinic
10:00 AM- Phantom Regiment Practice

Sunday, April 5

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

Monday, April 6

Building is Closed

Tuesday, April 7

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

Wednesday, April 8

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

Thursday, April 9

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

Friday, April 10

Office is Closed

Saturday, April 11

9:00 AM- Bridge Clinic
4:00 PM- Big Luxx Give-a-ways Fashion Show

Sunday, April 12

8:30 AM- Adult Coffee Class
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
3:00 PM- Ring in Spring

Monday, April 13

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

Tuesday, April 14

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

Wednesday, April 15

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

Thursday, April 16

9:30 AM- Carillons
5:30 PM- DVT(zoom)
7:00 PM- Choir
7:30 PM- El Shaddai

Friday, April 17

Office is Closed

Saturday, April 18

Building is Closed

Sunday, April 19

8:30 AM- Adult Coffee Class
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:15 AM- Family Christian Ed

Monday, April 20

11:30 AM- Serious Soup
5:30 PM- Missions (hybrid)

Tuesday, April 21

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

Wednesday, April 22

10:00 AM- Staff Meeting
6:00 PM- Earth Day Recycling/EV/Solar Event

Thursday, April 23

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

Friday, April 24

Office is Closed

Saturday, April 25

9:00 AM- Bridge Clinic

Sunday, April 26

8:30 AM- Adult Coffee Class
10:00 AM – Worship Service
10:20 AM – Sunday School
11:00 AM - Annual Meeting
1:00 PM- Kantorei Rehearsal

Monday, April 27

11:30 AM- Serious Soup
6:00 PM- Worship/Music(zoom)

Tuesday, April 28

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

Wednesday, April 29

10:00 AM- Staff Meeting

Thursday, April 30

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

times/dates/events subject to change