



**FIRST**  
**CONGREGATIONAL**

110 North Third Street  
River Falls, WI 54022  
715-425-2052  
[www.firstchurchrf.org](http://www.firstchurchrf.org)

# God is still speaking,

December 1, 2020

*No matter who you are,  
No matter where you are  
on your spiritual journey,  
you are welcome here!*

As Jesus' courageous disciples,  
living God's grace, we strive to:

- Worship faithfully
- Welcome openly
- Grow spiritually
- Care passionately
- Serve generously



## Pastor's Page

### A Grinchy Christmas

One of the most iconic Christmas movies of all times is Dr. Seuss' *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*. In case you are one of the 0.00001% of people who hasn't watched that movie the premise is this: A big, mean Grinch seeks to disrupt Christmas for a community by taking away all their familiar things and traditions. It sounds a lot like life in 2020 doesn't it?

Easter and Holy Week were different this year. Graduation, summer, fall, school, work, sports, vacations, family, life, all of it is way different this year. And not in a good way. There are lots of different proverbs, images and metaphors we could use—making lemonade out of lemons, making the best of it, pivoting. But in the end, 2020 has just been hard on all of us, particularly if you are older and isolating. And it seems particularly hard at Christmas.

But amidst the real heartache, there is good news. Do you remember how the movie ends? The Grinch seeks to cancel Christmas, but can't because even the Grinch does not have that kind of power. The same is true for us this year. Christmas will not be cancelled. Christmas cannot be cancelled. It may be different and feel kind of strange, but Christmas still comes because God still comes. At Christmas we celebrate how God has entered into our world through the birth of Jesus. The churchy word for that is 'incarnation.' Christmas means that the God we once knew only up in the heavens or far away from ourselves is now as close to us as the baby Jesus. Not even a pandemic can stop God and God's plan to save the world.

So in the meantime, what do we do? We do the same things we always do at Advent and

Christmas, only with a twist. We make cookies and deliver them to those we love. We sing songs, decorate and put up trees. We remember to be thankful and let that thankfulness move us to concrete acts of generosity like supporting the many mission programs of the church and community. We worship and pray, even if we have to do it online or through a radio broadcast. Jesus is still coming. Not even a pandemic can stop that. Thank God for that.

In Gratitude, Pastor Chris

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## Advent Evening Prayer



Each Advent we gather in the sanctuary for the beautiful, sung Holden Evening Prayer worship service at 6:30 pm. Once again, even a pandemic cannot stop us. Though we cannot safely gather in the sanctuary, a livestream of Evening Prayer will be held at **6:30 pm on Wednesdays, December 2, 9 and 16.**

Our singers will sing, our pastors will read scripture and a story, and you can join at home. Look to future Weekly Words for more information and the link.

## GROW spiritually

### Christmas Worship

For many years now our church has offered Christmas Eve worship at 4:00, 6:00 and 11:00 pm which has been a treasured tradition. In the age of COVID-19 and with Christmas 6 weeks away, we do not yet know what form our worship will take that night. We know that online worship will be an option.

We are also looking at brief outdoor, drive through, and other options. We thank you for your flexibility and patience as we try to remain both safe and faithful in our Christmas worship.

### Confirmation and Church Interns

Confirmation and Church Interns continue, for now, online via Zoom. Please watch for the weekly Confirmation Update emails and talk to Pastor Chris with any questions. Since we are in Advent, class begins at 6:30 pm

for Evening Prayer (livestream) then our Zoom class at 7:00 pm.

### Advent Adult Bible Study

Weekly Adult Bible Study will read and discuss *Names for the Messiah* by Walter Brueggemann on **Wednesday, December 2, 9, and 16 from 1:00–2:30 pm, via Zoom.** All are welcome!

Copies of the book are available in the church office for \$11.00 each. Please contact the church office for a Zoom link.

## 2021 Financial Pledge

A last call and plea to make sure you return your 2021 Pledge today. Mail, drop off or smoke signal it to the church office today (just kidding about the last part, but we made you laugh, which is so needed in 2020)! Your financial gifts empower our mission and ministry. Thank you!

### Advent-Christmas-Epiphany Calendars

On November 29 we begin the new church year. Over the coming weeks we move through three seasons of the church year, and:

- Advent's tasks of waiting and preparing for what God will do next;
- Christmas' gift of Jesus, Emmanuel—God with us; and
- Epiphany's opportunity to meet the Christ Child who takes on flesh and lives among us.

You are invited to use this time to pay particular attention to what God is doing in your life, in our church family's life, and in the world. To help you we have a calendar of activities to help you pay attention. Allow it to guide your thoughts, activities, and understanding. Calendars are available for pick up at church. Call if you need to have it delivered.

The calendar features large and small portions of *Picture the Bible* art. See if you can identify the images.



### Drive-Thru Communion

On the first Sunday of each month, the deacons and pastors will offer drive-thru communion. Please pull up in front of the Elm Street doors of the church and a deacon will bring individual communion elements to you in your car, then one of the pastors will pray with you. All will be wearing masks and stay outside so we can serve communion as safely and faithfully as we can. We serve from 9:00–9:45 am so people can be home for the 10:00 am livestream worship service. You do not need to sign up for this.

Thank you to our deacons and pastors who are again pivoting.

## Virtual Sing-Alongs



We will be hosting virtual sing-alongs this December! Come join First Congregational Church choir members to sing Christmas carols via Zoom on **December 2, 9, and 16 from 7:00-8:00 pm** (following the Advent service livestream.) The Zoom link and music PDFs will be available on the church website. Also, you can pick up a song book from the church office.

As it is impossible to line everyone's voices up in a live virtual setting, singers will have to perform with their microphones turned off. However, you will have the opportunity to sing along to the piano as loudly as you would like in the comfort of your home!

We look forward to this chance to enjoy some safe, musical, fellowship.



## Gifting Our Shut-Ins and Special Friends This Christmas

Each year our church families deliver potted amaryllis plants to our shut-ins and special friends. This will be an especially important endeavor this year. We ask you to sign up, pick up your plant at church, pot it at home (it is super easy), then deliver it to the local shut-in you are assigned. Feel free to include some cookies, a Christmas card, or children's artwork. What a wonderful way to be the body of Christ in the world. Sign up today using this link or on the church website! <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-amaryllis>

## Sign Up Sheets

All of the current sign up sheets are on the church website. Go to the Resource page and then click on Sign Up Sheets.

## Book Club

The Book Club will have a **Holiday Tea via Zoom on December 10 at 3:00 pm.** Please contact Bonnie at 715-307-1182 for more information.

## Learning Community Thanks

Thank you to Pastor Dave who initiative and organized our November 19 online Learning Community looking at the life of our hometown boy, James Laue and his work with the Rev. Martin Luther King for racial justice. The hour long event was recorded and can be accessed here through the church YouTube channel or through this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOVHBjUbj5E&t=10s>

## Treasurer's Report

|                                | Week of<br>Nov 22, 2020 | Year to Date |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| General Fund Income*           | \$ 9,524                | \$ 437,784   |
| General Fund Operational Needs | \$ 9,582                | \$ 450,354   |

A full accounting of all income and expenses is available in the church office.

\*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

## Church Staff

You can contact them via their email and cell numbers which are below.

Chris Myers—[chris@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:chris@firstchurchrf.org) - 715-441-2497  
Missy Luedtke—[missy@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:missy@firstchurchrf.org) - 715-222-5427  
Stacy Myers—[stacy@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:stacy@firstchurchrf.org) - 715-338-6406  
Dave Ostendorf—[dave@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:dave@firstchurchrf.org) - 715-441-6559  
JaNae Westrich—[jmwestrich@gmail.com](mailto:jmwestrich@gmail.com) - 715-897-5358  
Jamie Mills—[degolierjamie@gmail.com](mailto:degolierjamie@gmail.com) - 715-419-0850  
Dave Mountain—[focusfan2001@yahoo.com](mailto:focusfan2001@yahoo.com) - 715-245-6854  
Tim Bylander—[timthefixitguy@gmail.com](mailto:timthefixitguy@gmail.com) - 715-808-2900

## Angels On Earth Giving Tree

Help local families this Christmas by signing up and purchasing a gift on the wish list. **Please go to the link below (also on the church website) to see the wish list. Type your name in the box of the gift you will buy. The unwrapped gift needs to be at church no later than Tuesday, December 8th.** Please give the gift cards to the church office. If you would like to make a cash donation instead, please send the check (made out to First Congregational Church with "Giving Tree" in the memo line) to the church office. Thank you for your generosity. Please call the church office with questions or for help signing up 715-425-2052.

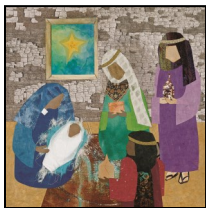
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DP\\_qeJ0xmzRqfnlpTqitfEnkuvrycQqLhbDyOhtWkVM/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DP_qeJ0xmzRqfnlpTqitfEnkuvrycQqLhbDyOhtWkVM/edit?usp=sharing)



## Christmas Shoebox

Our Christmas Shoebox Project is going on even during these strange times of a Pandemic! For many years, the yoga group & members have supported a "Christmas Shoebox" for the men at the Kinnic Drug & Alcohol Rehab Center in River Falls. We will again collect items, wrap, & deliver the boxes to show that we all still care! The look on the faces & the thankfulness is something I wish all of you could see. A list of items is below. **Please bring donations to the church by December 14.** Cash donations will be used to purchase any needed items. Any questions, please contact Jean at [jsmithler@yahoo.com](mailto:jsmithler@yahoo.com) or at 715-781-6880.

Updated Items: Wall calendars, games (Uno-puzzles-table), toothbrushes, floss, deodorant, razors, nail clippers, packages of popcorn, socks



## Picture the Bible Framing Project

Regrettably our *Picture the Bible* art has faded over the years. To prevent further damage to the collection, the art is being reframed with UV resistant glass. At the same time we are framing the 14 new pieces of art. Presently the walls at church look very bare—it adds to the empty feeling when you are not at church.

## Quarantining

With the spread of COVID-19, more and more families are having to quarantine at some point. Please know that your church stands ready to support and help you as we can. We have volunteers who can run errands, pick up medicine or food, even deliver your Sunday School materials if you are quarantined.

Please also know church staff are here to help you navigate the intense emotional pressures these situations bring with them. Contact the church office for more information at 715-425-2052 or [office@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:office@firstchurchrf.org)

## Simpson Shelter Supply Needs

- New heavy-duty winter gloves, hats, scarves (no hand knit)
- New thermals for men and women - all sizes
- Hand warmers
- A new set of TV trays for the women's space (we only need one set, so please contact me if you are able to provide this item.)
- New boxers - sizes L, M, and S
- New women's underwear - sizes L, M, and S
- Razors
- Shaving Cream
- Shampoo, lotion and conditioner - travel size
- Textured and curly hair supplies
- New women's socks
- Blankets - gently used or new
- Twin size sheets - gently used or new
- Bath towels - gently used or new

There is a box at the church for donations. Thank you!



## Sunday School, 2020

Sunday School is presently in an online format called **Faith At Home**. The next resource bag is now ready. If you are in quarantine and cannot pick up your bag, contact the church office and we will deliver it. Please return the previous month's bag, red folder, and storybook.

This month's bag features a wonderful "Marshall Project"—a stable for families to make together.



### Wooden Stable Kits

Marshall Skule made magnificent wooden stable kits for our Sunday School families. We have some additional kits. If you are interested in one, please call the church office.

## 9 Ways To Live More Generously This Christmas

1. Bring joy! Deliver an amaryllis plant to one of our shut-in and senior friends. If you don't do it, who will? Be an agent of God's grace by signing up today! Please see the article on page 3.
2. Come together! Worship with us live each Sunday at 10:00 am (archived for later viewing on the church YouTube channel) or at 11:00 am on the radio WEVR 106.3FM/1550 AM.
3. Give! Help with the Shoebox Ministry to the sixty men at the Kinnic Alcohol and Drug Rehab program by bringing a shoebox or one of the needed items on the list. Please see the article page 4.
4. Pray! Each week the church publishes a prayer list in the bulletin. Use it in your daily prayer life to give it structure and focus. Prayer kindles compassion.
5. Gift! Sign up to provide a needed item for a local family from Giving Tree Wish List which is now online. Gifts need to be at the church office by December 8th. Please see the article on page 4.
6. Sing! Each week Jamie and our church music team seeks to bring beautiful music into your world using the best of both old time hymns and contemporary songs. Sing along or just enjoy.
7. Bless! Make an extra gift to the church. Your generosity is the engine that drives the mission and ministry of our church. It enables all our programs and outreach to continue.
8. Celebrate! Whether we will worship inside or outside, online or on the radio, Christmas Eve worship will happen. Join us on Christmas Eve as we welcome the Christ child!
9. Create! Are you a woodworker? Craftsperson? Knitter? Quilter? Any and all homemade gifts you can create are given to shut-ins. It makes you feel better and blesses others as well.

## amazon smile Free Money for Church Ministries

The church has created an Amazon Smile account through which the church can receive a portion of the price of each purchase you make through Amazon. It is important to know that you need to do two things for the church to receive this money. First, go to Amazon Smile by typing in [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and then add First Congregational Church River Falls to your Amazon Smile. Second, every time you order you must order through your Smile account by going to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com). Once you do this, the church will receive 0.5% of each eligible order. Please contact the church office if you have questions.

## Giving Thanks Meal Thanks

A HUGE thanks to Andy and Christina Krueger, Laura Miller, David Reilly, Bill and Martha Olson, JaNae and the Church Interns, the Care Team and ALL who enabled us to carry on with your Giving Thanks meal last week. It was a treat!



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## Church Finances

*A quick note about finances:* As of this week, the church is about \$12,500 behind in its giving. We have already reduced staffing, turned off fridges and freezers, reduced heat and all the expenses we can. Please be sure to mail in your offering each week or month and consider making an extra gift to support the mission and ministry of our church as detailed below. Your generosity is the engine that drives our church. God bless you all!



Many thanks to Christina Krueger who spent considerable time cutting out shapes and pieces for the Advent Workshop kits and the young children's version of the Faith At Home bags.

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## Among Friends Volunteers Needed

If you have a willing heart and a voice to share, we need 4-6 individuals who are willing to be part of a duet or quartet sharing 2-3 songs while being socially distanced outside of our participants' homes. This can be done at a time convenient for you that also works for our Among Friends participants. Please contact Bonnie at 715-307-1182. Thanks.

## Church Yoga

Jan Hansen's church yoga group is taking a break until after New Year's. You can still access the archived yoga classes on their own YouTube channel available on the church website on the Connect page.

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## Concerning People

- For Laura and Mark Anderson who decorated the planters at the entrance of the church
- For Donna and Mike Moseman who are delivering this month's treat bags to the shut-ins which are overflowing with goodies, that they may be a tangible sign of God's grace
- For Marshall Skule who made 40 nativity sets for families to assemble and use at home
- For Pastor Stacy and her team who put together incredible Advent Ornament Kits and the December Faith At Home Bags
- For the now 3 different vaccines, that they may quickly, safely and equitably be shared in our world
- For Eunice Filkins who made pocket prayer quilts for shut-ins and Joan Hyland who made yet more quilts to be given at baptisms
- For those who helped make our fall Wednesday Night meal program a success!

Do you have other upcoming news and celebrations to share with the congregation? Graduations? Birthday and Anniversary celebrations? Please email them to [office@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:office@firstchurchrf.org) by Wednesday of each week to be included in the Weekly Word which is sent out on Thursdays.

## From the Investment Committee

The Investment Committee meets quarterly to ensure that investment guidelines and policies are being followed and to ensure proper management of the Church's investment portfolio by financial firms that we have chosen as custodians. The Church investments are diversified over several asset classes and rebalancing is performed on a quarterly basis to maintain the target diversification ratios. An annual portfolio performance report will be forwarded to the Church Council for inclusion in the Church's annual report.

As of 9/30/2020, the church investments are showing an overall gain of 2% for 2020 year to date. For comparison purposes over the same time period, the Dow Jones Industrial Average posted a 3.7% loss while the NASDAQ Composite showed a 3% gain."

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## Charitable Giving

The CARES Act, designed to help the nation recover from the pandemic, has five important implications for charitable giving.

- **New Charitable Deduction for Non-Itemizers:** Taxpayers who take the standard deduction can nevertheless claim a charitable deduction of up to \$300 for cash donations in 2020.
- **Higher Deduction Limits:** Individuals will be able to deduct cash gifts in 2020 to the extent of their entire adjusted gross income rather than a cap at 60%.
- **Increased Deduction Limits for Corporations:** The contribution limit for corporations has been raised to 25% for cash contributions this year.
- **Required Minimum Distributions Waived:** For the year 2020, there will be no mandatory distributions from retirement accounts, thus allowing those accounts to recover. Once they do recover, retirement funds are a tax-wise giving strategy.
- **Waiver of Penalties When Retirement Funds Are Used for Coronavirus Purposes:** If you are under the age of 59½, and withdraw money from your retirement plan to cover expenses incurred by you or a family member related to treatment of the coronavirus, the 10% tax penalty will not apply. In the future you may consider a retirement fund gift.

Please consult your tax advisor to see if you qualify!

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## Special Gifts

We are all familiar with giving to the General Fund which financially powers our ministries here at church. We are also familiar with giving to the Building Fund which pays the current mortgage for our 2012 church building addition. But did you know the church also receives special financial gifts for special projects?

A few years ago one of the 'saints' of this church named Lucille Kitzerow, left a modest gift to be used to expand and empower our music ministry. This gift continues to fund things like musical instrument purchases, choir robes, new music and Music at First Church concerts including our recent Halloween Concert.

Special gifts are also received in honor or memory of someone. Recently the Gustafson family, seeking to honor Bob Gustafson's long tradition of advocacy for teens and children, gave a memorial gift to the Youth Fund. Such a gift enables confirmation trips, mission trips and a host of other activities designed to help our young people 'flex' their faith muscles.

Lastly, special gifts can be designed for long term use through the Endowment Fund. Gifts given to the Endowment Fund are used to make sure the church has the long term financial resources to continue to do ministry in the coming generations. You can remember the church by including it in your will & estate planning. Thank you for remembering the church with your financial gifts & considering ways you may make the extra step of giving that will continue to empower the ministry of this church for years to come.

--The Investment Committee

## First Congregational United Church of Christ

Office Phone: 715-425-2052  
E-mail: [office@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:office@firstchurchrf.org)  
Website: [www.firstchurchrf.org](http://www.firstchurchrf.org)



### STAFF

Chris Myers, Pastor  
Dave Ostendorf, Minister for Community and Outreach  
Stacy Johnson, CE Minister  
JaNae Westrich, Youth Pastor  
Missy Luedtke, Office Coordinator  
Brad Williams, Moderator  
Jamie Mills, Music Coordinator and Bell Choir Director  
Marsha Pearson, Organist  
Terry Mithun, Organist  
Tim Bylander, Building Supervisor  
Dave Mountain, Custodian  
  
Pastor's home phone number:  
Chris Myers 715-426-2075  
[chris@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:chris@firstchurchrf.org)

## FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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River Falls, Wisconsin 54022

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RIVER FALLS, WI 54022

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

DECEMBER 1, 2020

## Ways to Reach Out to Others

All of us want to do something to help and be Jesus' loving disciples in the present moment. Below are some specific things you can do at home:

**Quilts/Prayer Shawls:** We continue to collect prayer shawls, quilts and handmade items. If you have some to donate, please contact Pastor Chris who will distribute them to our seniors and shut-ins.

**Shut-ins/Seniors:** We have connected our seniors/shut-ins with church families who send them notes, small parcels and kid's artwork. If you want to be matched with a shut-in, contact the church office.

**Compassion Fund:** There are families in our church who have been furloughed, fired, and laid off. We will be able to offer some modest assistance to these families through our church Compassion Fund. Gifts should be mailed to the church and marked 'Compassion Fund.' Families who need assistance, please contact Pastor Chris.

**Twin Cities Recovery Fund:** A fund has been established to help rebuild the Twin Cities affected by recent riots. The goal is to help in two ways, one with immediate help to families and second is to help small businesses rebuild. Money will be dispersed quickly through trusted, partner agencies established by the church.

**Prayer:** Prayer connects us with God and our neighbors. Pray for the helpers. Pray for your families. Pray for people losing their jobs. Pray for students learning online. Pray for families learning new routines. Pray for people cooped up inside. Each week there is a prayer list of people, situations and thanksgivings that is sent out by email to help people in their prayer life. You can sign up by contacting the church office. There is also a link to the prayer list on the church website.

## Masks Available at Church

We have masks available at church, including child-size masks. If you need one, please call the church office.