



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL

110 North Third Street
River Falls, WI 54022
715-425-2052
www.firstchurchrf.org

God is still speaking,

January 15, 2021

*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

2020: A Good Year?

Like many of us, I was ready to leave 2020 behind. Most of us are anxiously looking forward to a much better 2021. But just when you think 2020 was a complete and total disaster, it was a record breaking year for our church solar system. In 2020, we generated more energy than ever before.

Here are the statistics since we installed the panels in the summer of 2015:

Year	Energy Produced (KwH)	Carbon Emissions Avoided(Tons)
2015	10,750	8.4
2016	22,198	17.3
2017	21,857	17.0
2018	21,692	16.9
2019	19,694	15.3
2020	22,917	17.9
Totals	119,108	92.80

To put it in perspective, the average American household uses about 10,000 KwH per year. So in our 5 years of operation, our solar panels have generated enough electricity to power 11 River Falls homes for a year. Just as importantly, 92,800 tons of carbon are not floating around in our atmosphere. So while many of us were hunkered down and just wanted the year to be over, our panels were safely and silently not just saving the church money, but also helping to save the creation as well.

One of the images we hear from scripture during the Christmas and Epiphany seasons is from John 1:5 which says—*the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.* 2020 was a dark year in many,

many ways. And yet as people of faith and action, we can also say that the light of God shone through the darkness. It shone through in your care for others, especially the most vulnerable in our community through your giving to the Compassion Fund. It shone through in the ways you reached out to shut-ins, neighbors, the struggling. It shone through in the ways you adapted and pivoted and adjusted over and over and over. It shone through in the ways you prayed for one another, worshipped and stayed connected to one another. You even showed up for outside worship when the temperature was near zero. The light of Christ was blazing bright in 2020.

Though we are all looking forward to a much better and brighter 2021, let us give thanks for the gift of faith and the light of Christ. May they continue to lead us forward into a better and righter 2021.

In Gratitude,
Pastor Chris



GROW spiritually

Weekly Adult Bible Study

Weekly Adult Bible Study meets Wednesday, 1:00-2:30 pm via Zoom. On January 13, 2021, we will begin *First and Second Corinthians* by John Proctor.

The Proctor book is available in the church office for \$25.00. All are welcome! Please contact the church office for a Zoom link to participate.

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.



Sunday School, 2021

The next Faith At Home bag is ready for pick up. When you pick up a new bag, remember to return your old bag, the red folder and any storybooks included in your previous bag.

Annual Meeting

Each year our congregation holds its Annual Meeting on the first Sunday of February. This year's meeting will be on **Sunday, February 7 at 11:00 am**, following the 10:00 am worship service. The meeting will take place via Zoom. To receive a link, please sign up and a link will be sent to you prior to the meeting. In addition to our normal business of electing officers, passing budgets and hearing reports, we will receive brief 90-second updates from our committees answering the question: How did Covid change your ministry? We will also vote on a proposal to establish a Memorial Garden for the interment of cremains in the current church garden. Please attend.

Sign up: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-annual>

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.



At-Home Communion

With the winter weather upon us, if you are not able to get to church for drive-thru communion (or if you would like to take communion at a different time), the Deacons are available to bring communion to you! We are happy to come to you for doorstep or even contactless Communion. We will bring the elements to you and share a short prayer if you would like. Please let the church office know if you or anyone you know would benefit from this service, and we'll contact you to arrange a time.

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



Christmas Eve Thanks

A HUGE thanks to all who lent us firepits for our what will likely go down as the coldest worship service in church history – 7 degrees with a -11 windchill! Thank you to the 150



people who turned out for our two outdoor firepit Christmas Eve services of song, scripture and prayer.

Thanks also to our musicians Jamie Mills and Dave Reilly who then had to go on to sing at the online 6:00 pm service with the help of Natalie Nelson, Emily Stifter, Tim Mills and Terry Mithun. This will be a year to tell our grandkids about!



Little Books

Each month, Faith At Home bags include a *Little Book* featuring seven Bible stories, *Picture the Bible* images, and a question to ponder. This month's *Little Book* is *God Acts*. If you are interested in a *Little Book*, pick one up in the Little Church or contact the church office.

The Pilgrim Press News

The Pilgrim Press will publish First Congregational's upcoming Lent-Easter story-coloring book. The publication process for the new Pilgrim Press book *Picture the Bible* seems to be on target for the book to be ready in spring of 2021. We won't hold our collective breath quite yet, but after a long journey, perhaps 2021 will be the year this dream becomes a reality.

Treasurer's Report

	Dec 31, 2020
General Fund Income *	\$ 485,439.69
General Fund Expenses	<u>476,810.47</u>
Net Income	<u>\$ 8,629.22</u>
	Through Jan 3, 2021
General Fund Income *	<u>\$ 28,140.47</u>

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

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

-A new budget will be approved at the February 7th Annual Meeting.

Church Staff

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

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

Engaging the Word, Engaging the World...

Upcoming

January 14—First Congregational and *Hope for Creation* will be featured in a statewide Wisconsin Conference UCC webinar Thursday, January 14, at 7:00 pm focused on Green Teams and Action Teams committed to Care for Creation. Mike Noreen is helping lead the webinar, along with other RF/*Hope for Creation* church leaders. The important webinar is part of the Conference's new commitment to environmental sustainability and earth care, and will link with other Wisconsin churches sharing creation care commitments. To register for the webinar go to:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0lce2prjspHdI0co2RYTANvM0fnDTMQJxc>

January 13—Cities Working Group meets at 7:30 pm via ZOOM.

January 19—Mission Education Committee meets at 5:00 pm via ZOOM.

Updating

The Cities Working Group allocated the balance of the Twin Cities Recovery Fund (\$2,804) to the Lake Street Council in Minneapolis to help rebuild businesses impacted by damages from the summer upheaval. \$7,804 was received for the Recovery Fund, with \$5,000 providing food to impacted neighborhoods in both Cities in early June, in areas with little access to groceries. Lake Street Council has played a leading and vital role in rebuilding one of the city's main thoroughfares. We are most grateful to the congregation for its generosity in this effort!

Mission Partners News

Mission Education Committee has increased by \$200 each financial commitments to our six 2020 Mission Partners, has added three new Mission Partners for 2021, and will make decisions for allocation of additional 2021 mission funds in the coming weeks. New 2021 Mission Partners include the River Falls Food Pantry, Turning Point, and Servant of the Shepard for its housing program. Additional information about all our Mission Partners will be included in upcoming newsletters.



Picture the Bible Art Reframed

The Fellowship Hall walls look

empty because all the PTB art has been removed for reframing. Our original art sustained considerable sun damage and needed to be reframed in sturdy frames with UV protected glass. We expect the art to return to us in February.

Simpson Shelter Supply Needs

- New heavy-duty winter gloves, hats, scarves (no hand knit)
- New thermals for men and women - all sizes
- Hand warmers
- New boxers - sizes L, M, and S
- New women's underwear - sizes L, M, and S
- Razors and 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!

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 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. Once you do this, the church will receive 0.5% of each eligible order. Please contact the church office if you have questions.



Marriage Tune Up

This pandemic has many of us spending lots more time together which can be stressful, even when you are married. One of the tools Pastor Chris uses to help couples as they prepare for marriage is an online assessment that helps couples see both their marriage strengths and growth areas. This same assessment can help those already married improve their marriage. As we wait for the end of the pandemic, perhaps now is the time for a ‘Marriage Tune Up?’ Couples will complete an online assessment and then meet privately with Pastor Chris either in person or via Zoom to go through the results. Couples will retain a copy of their confidential report. He has led hundreds of couples through this process and uses it in his own marriage. The cost is \$35 which is paid online to the company that scores the assessment.

Want to know more? Check out: <https://www.prepare-enrich.com> or contact Pastor Chris directly (chris@firstchurchrf.org).

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!

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
Website: 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

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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RIVER FALLS, WI 54022
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JANUARY 15, 2021
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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.

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.

Annual Reports Due

All Committees, please submit your Annual Reports, preferably electronically, as soon as possible to Missy at missy@firstchurchrf.org. Thank you!