



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL

110 North Third Street
River Falls, WI 54022
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www.firstchurchrf.org

God is still speaking,

February 1, 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

After Jesus called his disciples, one of the first things he did was heal people. In fact if the Bible is to be trusted, Jesus healed a lot of people. He healed sick people. He healed demented people. He healed people who had given up hope that their lives could change. The question is why? Why did Jesus heal?

The obvious answer is to show the power of God at work through him. God does not want suffering.

God does not cause suffering. So, in Jesus, God does something about human suffering. God gets involved. Jesus heals people. But how?

Most of the healing Jesus does has to do with restoration. Over and over and over in the Bible, sick people were cut off from society and those they loved. Just as people with COVID today have to completely self-isolate from others, the people Jesus healed were totally cut off from others. So a large part of Jesus' ministry has to do with restoring people, bringing them back into the community, back into society. John 10:10 says that Jesus comes that we may have life and have it abundantly. Sickness and isolation block that abundant life, so Jesus comes to heal and restore. Looking at our world today, I see a great need for healing and restoration.

I am not much of a woodworker, but I have appreciated the ways talented people restore old buildings, furniture and antiques. Restoration is not an easy task. It requires patience and a very good skill set. In fact, more often it is cheaper, easier and quicker simply to buy something brand new and just junk the old stuff. Thankfully, God does not operate that way. God is in the restoration business.

Soon we will begin the season of Lent. Lent is a time of preparing for Holy Week and Easter. In a

way, it is a time for restoration and healing. Once again, we will gather for Wednesday worship on Ash Wednesday and on subsequent Wednesdays at 6:30 pm. In our worship this year, we will focus on Jesus' ministry of healing and restoration and how we too might be called as his disciples in that ministry today.

In Gratitude, Pastor Chris



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>

GROW spiritually

Advent Adult Bible Study

Weekly Adult Bible Study meets Wednesday, 1:00-2:30 pm via Zoom to study *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 pick up date is February 7, 2021.

When you pick up a new bag, remember to return your old bag, the red folder and any storybooks included in your previous bag.



Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent. This year Ash Wednesday will be February 17. Our tentative schedule includes Drive-Thru Ashes from 5:00-6:00 pm and a 6:30 pm online Ash Wednesday service. Once we see the weather forecast, we may try another outdoor service. Please keep our church staff in your prayers as they try to safely and faithfully plan our worship services.

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.

Graphic Annual Report

Contained in this newsletter is a two-page Graphic Annual Report highlighting some of the ministry of the church for 2020. Please notice a couple of things. One, notice the distribution of our financial gifts on page one. It details how we as a church spent all our financial gifts in 2020 which includes money given to the general and building funds, scholarships, as well as special giving to certain mission projects like the Compassion Fund. Second, notice on the outreach section the number and variety of outreach ministries supported by our congregation. Lastly, notice all the creativity this year or as Pastor Chris would say, pivoting, we have had to do. The complete Annual Report can be accessed through this link (<https://firstchurchrf.org/wp-content/uploads/ANNUAL-REPORT-ALL-2020.pdf>) on the church website or via a hard copy at the church office, but we hope this gives you a peek at some of the ministry our church accomplishes through your support.



Wednesday Night Meals Resume

After a winter break, we hope to resume our Wednesday Night Family meals starting Ash Wednesday, February 17. Sign up will be online and the meals will again be offered in to-go format. Here are the first couple of meals. Sign-up sheets will be forthcoming.

Feb 17 - Chicken Marsala, rice pilaf, asparagus salad, croissant

Feb 24 - Rosemary crusted pork loin, garlic mashed potatoes, sweet and sour cabbage, dinner roll

Little Books

Each month, Faith At Home bags include a “little book” featuring *Picture the Bible* images, a Bible story, and a question to discuss. This month’s little book is *Water* and features seven Bible stories about water. If you are interested in a copy, pick one up in the “Little Church” or contact the church office.

Church Yoga

Jan Hansen's church yoga group will begin again on Tuesday, February 2nd via Zoom and a small group of people in the church Fellowship Hall. Please contact the church office to receive the Zoom link.

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.

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!

Treasurer’s Report

	Dec 31, 2020
General Fund Income *	\$ 477,451.88
General Fund Expenses	<u>476,810.47</u>
Net Income	<u>\$ 561.41</u>
	Through Jan 17, 2021
General Fund Income *	<u>\$ 48,685.47</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

February 4, 6:00–7:00 pm—Wisconsin Lieutenant Governor **Mandela Barnes** will meet with River Falls Hope for Creation churches to discuss the work of the Governor's bi-partisan Task Force on Climate Change, which is charting a path to 100% carbon free energy production by 2050, while ensuring a strong economy and communities' participation. At age 25 Barnes began two terms in the State Assembly before becoming its first African-American Lieutenant Governor. Everyone is invited and encouraged to *join in by either going to the River Falls Public Library's YouTube channel or its Facebook page.*

February 10—Racial Reconciliation meets at 7:30 pm via ZOOM.

Updating

Last fall we were gifted with a powerful Learning Community Gathering as Ron Laue and the Laue family shared the story of their father, Dr. James Laue, who grew up in First Congregational UCC in the 1950s and went on to work with Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement. James Laue was with Dr. King the evening he was killed, cared for him as he lay dying, and helped carry his stretcher to the waiting ambulance. In his personal account of his work in the Movement and with Dr. King, Laue wrote:

"Fate or God had given me eight years of knowing Martin Luther King, Jr. His life—and his death—changed my life. He taught me that 'conflict resolution,' a laudable goal on the surface, does not truly occur without struggle refined in love and that justice is not fulfilled without reconciliation."

We are grateful to Dr. Laue's daughter, Lisa Laue Moreland, for recently sharing these words, and to Barbara Peterson for passing them on... words that ring true, powerful, and inspiring for our own day and for all time. Our gratitude goes to all the Laue family for helping our community of faith remember and celebrate the life and work of Dr. Laue.

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 apiece our commitments to each of our six 2020 Mission Partners, has added four new Mission Partners for 2021, and will make decisions for any allocation of additional 2021 mission funds in the coming months. New 2021 Mission Partners include the River Falls Food Pantry, Turning Point, the Free Clinic, and Servant of the Shepherd for its housing program. Additional information about all our Mission Partners will be included in upcoming newsletters.

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

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH—CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING SUMMARY

January 19, 2021

Attendance: Brad Williams, Pastor Chris Myers, Joel Larsen, Marie Roe, Cori Fosmo Missy Luedtke, Kathy Rausch, Kathy Wochomurka, Susan Walden, Brian Miller, Bob Ferguson, Rose Rude

Treasurer's Report: Documents were sent out for review by Council members prior to the Council meeting. This was a review of the 2020 end of year report. Discussion occurred regarding the recommendation by Sonya J. that the \$60,000. PPP loan amount is listed in the budget column as the balance even though the Church has not received the actual notification of the forgiveness by the SBA. The funds were spent on payroll as was the condition of the loan within the 24 week forgiveness period. Until the confirmation of the forgiveness is received, the equivalent of the loan amount is being held in reserve. The loan was obtained for emergency purposes. Joel reports that all of the required steps and conditions were followed and the notification should be received within days. This can be documented in time for the annual meeting report. The good news for the 2020 year-end report is that it did not end in a deficit.

Old Business:

- Building Fund Update—Brad reported that the fund is similar to last month and there are funds in reserve to cover 27 months of payments at this time.

- Annual Meeting is Feb 7—The following committees will do 90 second 'How Our Group Did 2020 Differently' segments and persons who will do the presentations: CE/Stacy, Deacons/Kathy R, Discipleship/Marie, Endowment Grant/Brian, Mission Ed/Rose, Music/Kathy W, Trustees/Bob, Welcoming/Susan

- Readiness 360 -- Chris, Diane, Joel, Marie will meet to continue to work on this project

- 2021 Budget—Bob, Brad, Missy and Chris: Bob primarily led this discussion about the budget. The Trustees reviewed and approved the budget. There was discussion of the allocations identified in the budget and the ability to be flexible with the allocations towards the missions as long as the total budget amount remained the same. Brian recommended a change on a line item name regarding the Endowment Income amount. Bob also reports that the 2021 budget is balanced. The motion was made to accept the 2021 budget as written. Joel & Bob made the 1st & 2nd motions and the Council passed the budget.

- Open and Affirming and Church Signage—Rose and Cori reported that they met and continue to work on this issue. They did determine that using yard signage is not an option due to zoning codes and the location of the Church building. The committee is working on expanding their communication to the congregation about the work of the church to welcome all people. Mission Ed is planning to combine efforts with the Welcoming Committee on increasing this message.

New Business: none

Ministry Updates:

Christian Education: The committee discussed the Faith at Home bags, Easter color books, they discussed their goals for 2021. They are beginning conversations about "post-covid" plans.

Deacons: They are 'staying the course' at this time. Drive through Communion continues. They are beginning to discuss Ash Wednesday Service arrangements.

Discipleship: No meeting, no report

Endowment Grant: No meeting, next application deadline is January 25th. Next meeting February 1st.

Mission Education: Guest speaker Christi Smith, Habitat for Humanity presented at their meeting to update members on the projects that are going on. Rock the Block. Brush with Kindness plans for 2021. Approved funds to Simpson Shelter for a meal, Racial Reconciliation Group will continue to provide learning programs for children and adults. Committee added Free Clinic to their mission list due to the increasing needs the organization has.

Music: The committee is discussing having a piece commissioned for the choir to perform.

Personnel: No meeting, no report.

Strategic Plan: No meeting, no report.

Trustees: OCWM expense for 2021 is reduced. Money will be spent on local missions. Mission Partners is new to provide more clarity on how monies are spent versus Mission Ed. Downstairs bathroom renovation will likely be a 2021 project. Picture the Bible insurance will increase to cover original art work. Technology is a new line item.

Welcoming Ministry: Sending monthly postcards, rotating calls to all congregation members, providing meals to Bernice Larson and sending Valentines packages to all our college students.

Pastor: Building Needs: Sanctuary-wood floors, cracks in walls, repaint, Upstairs-repainting-offices, Fellowship hall walls, gathering area, Downstairs-mail hall. When to open for worship? Staff is currently discussing timing and schedules. Pastoral staff is tracking 12 people right now with COVID. Readiness 360 for winter months-group will meet next month. Annual Meeting: need to confirm presenters and registrants. Thanks extended to Brad Williams as Moderator whose term ends at the Annual Meeting. Brad's new position will be as volunteer Church Business Manager.

Moderator: Brad gave a farewell message to the Council and thanked everyone for all their hard work.

Pic the Bible: No report

Investment Committee Report 2020

As you all know, 2020 was not your typical year. The COVID-19 Pandemic changed a great deal, not only in our personal world but also in our church community. It changed how we do things and as Pastor Chris has told us, we needed to pivot! Our normal quarterly meetings, other than January 2020, were held via Zoom and all discussion and decisions were done by us during those held meetings. In 2020 the Investment Committee continued following the investment policy and guidelines created in 2013. Another one of our roles and responsibilities is to oversee the investment and reinvestment of funds.

In October 2019 the Investment Committee discussed, then moved and approved a request from Church Council to continue to keep the expenditure allocation at 6% of the Endowment Fund as of December 31, 2019. That figure was \$56,341 and will be disbursed by Church Council in 2020.

12/31/2020 Investment breakdown as follows:

We maintain investment dollars in three financial accounts - United Church Funds, Cornerstone Funds (Certificate of Deposit) and a Non General Fund checking account.

Non General Checking	\$3,300.75
Cornerstone Funds (CD)	\$109,231.83
UCF Funds Fixed Income	\$303,004.75
Domestic Core	\$491,269.97
Small Cap equity	\$215,859.62
International Equity	\$209,452.74
Total Invested Funds	\$1,332,119.66

12/31/2020 Church Funds breakdown:

	<u>Balances</u>
Endowment Fund	\$671,561.13
Scholarship fund	\$565,734.82
Discretionary	\$15,957.78
Music	\$13,392.10
Brazil	\$65,473.83
Sub Total	\$1,332,119.66
Endowment Loan	\$300,000.00
Total of Funds	\$1,632,119.66

Total Gain on the funds for 2020 was \$176,196 for an annualized return of 13.75%.

If you have further questions please do not hesitate to ask any committee members.

Committee Members: Kris Roen/Co-Chair, Jean Smith/Co-Chair, Suzanne Hagen, Roland Roe, Mike Danielson, Brad Williams/Moderator, Fred Trautmiller/Advisor and Chris Myers/Staff



I would like to thank all of the church members who contributed to the generous Christmas gifts I received this year. I feel truly blessed to be a part of this congregation and to have the rare opportunity to lead music and be at worship services in person. Thank you to everyone who makes the livestream possible as well!

Lastly, I would like to send thanks to those who have participated in the music at UCC this year, and everyone who has sent us kind words about the services. It helps us remember that even though there aren't bodies in the pews, you are still with us. - Jamie Mills



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).

Sunday School Passport Game

To identify family learning opportunities in the Faith at Home bags, children have passports. One of the activities in the current passport is the game, *Would You Rather?* based on Bible stories. Try it!

Directions: Anyone can play but everyone has to choose between the two options. “I don’t know” or “both” are not allowed!

Would you rather...

- Ask Daniel about the Lions’ Den or Jonah about the whale’s belly? Why?
- Be Mary and listen to Jesus or Martha and serve Jesus? Why?
- Be Naaman who was healed or Solomon who built a temple? Why?
- Meet John the Baptist or one of Jesus’ disciples? Why?
- Be an angel or a magi? Why?
- Visit Jerusalem or Bethlehem? Why?
- Have Jesus visit your home or eat when Jesus fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes?
- Eat a meal with Jesus or have him wash your feet? Why?
- Talk with Jesus’ mother, Mary, or Jesus’ father, Joseph? Why?
- Listen to Jesus teach or be there when he healed? Why?

Pre-School Fishing Game



Jesus’ first disciples were fishermen. When Jesus called them he asked them to use their fishing skills in a new way so they would catch people rather than fish. To help our pre-schooler children explore what it means to fish, the January Faith at Home bags included a magnetic fishing game. Many thanks to Christina Krueger for cutting out just under a zillion felt fish.

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!

**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
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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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FEBRUARY 1, 2021



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.

Masks Available at Church

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

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.