

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

January 15, 2022

*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

Stubborn Hope and Enduring Faith

So how many emails do you receive each day? 10? 50? 100? More than that? You may be surprised to learn the average American receives over 125 emails a day. Which means if you don't check your email for one day, guess what? 250 emails await you

the next day. It is kind of overwhelming isn't it?

The good news is that most of those emails seem to be junk email which are easy (and sometimes very satisfying) to delete. Still the thought of going through, reading and responding to all those emails can be rather daunting. In fact, if truth be told, sometimes I am too quick to read through even important emails and miss valuable insights.

Recently our Wisconsin Conference Minister, the Rev. Franz Riegert, sent out an email to UCC pastors with the current state of pandemic and recommendations for churches. In my haste to read the email and move on to the next item in my inbox, I almost missed his closing comment, sometimes called a valediction. He closed his email with these words: With Stubborn Hope and Enduring Faith.

These words resonate with me. As we see-saw our way through what will soon be the third year of this global pandemic, it is easy to lose hope that this will all end. That is why I am stubbornly clinging to hope. Hope is more than wishful thinking. For Christians hope is grounded in the faith that Jesus really is who he promised he was—the one sent by

God to free us for abundant life both eternally and here and now. At Christmas we celebrated God's sending of Jesus to be Emmanuel, God with us. And by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the world today, Jesus continues to be active and at work today. Even in the midst of a pandemic.

So I am hopeful that doctors and researchers (exhausted though they may be) are working on our behalf to help us navigate what I pray is the last part of this pandemic providing useful recommendations and advice. I am hopeful we have learned something in these past 24 months about ourselves, our world and our faith. I hopeful that we who have been through so much, can keep going on. And I am stubbornly hopeful that just like after Good Friday, God has the ability to resurrect our world and our lives.

Together let us see-saw our way through the next few weeks, finding ways to enjoy both the ups and downs.

With Stubborn Hope and
Enduring Faith,

Pastor Chris

COVID Pause

Well here we are again. As we see-saw our way through the latest Covid wave, we have decided to temporarily 'pause' those parts of church life that seem the most risky, which mostly involve singing and eating together. For the rest of January we will pause:

Choir and Choir Practice—Having large groups of people sitting and singing together in close proximity is not wise or recommended now. Knowing how much the choir like to sing and be together, and knowing also how much the congregation enjoys their music, choir practice and worship presence will be evaluated regularly by church staff

Wednesday School—While we can do lessons, crafts and fun, the eating part without masks is problematic. And having kids go without snack after a long day does not seem wise. Pastor Stacy will let families and volunteers know when this will resume.

Meals—During January we will no longer be offering any meals after funerals and will pause the family meals which were to begin again on January 19. Church staff will keep monitoring local conditions and hope to return at least drive through family meals in early February.

Please note things like Worship, Sunday School, Confirmation, Youth Group, Bible Study which we can do safely while masked and distanced will continue. Please continue to pray for church leaders and they try to navigate us through another difficult part of the pandemic.



Christmas Offering for Feed My Starving Children

Again this year we gave our small containers of M&M's to those who attended Christmas Eve worship services. After eating the M&M's (an important first step!), please fill the plastic container with quarters (\$14 in quarters fits perfectly, but with the coin shortage, dollar bills and checks work as well!). If all who worshipped with us on Christmas Eve return these containers, 80 children will be fed for the entire year which is a worthy and fitting gift to honor Emmanuel,

God with us. Please return containers to the offering plate or church office by the end of February. Thank you for your generosity.

Current Sunday Schedule

8:30 am—Coffee ready!

8:45-9:45 am—Adult Forum

9:00-9:45 am—Music Practice

10:00 am—Worship and Sunday School in Sanctuary

10:30 am—Kids Preschool thru 8th Grade leave for Sunday School

11:00-11:30 am—Coffee Fellowship in Fellowship Hall

11:15 am—Sunday School Ends

11:30 am—12:30 pm—Middle or High School Youth Group

Our current schedule is above. We are now worshipping in the sanctuary again and continue to ask people to mask when indoors in groups following CDC guidelines. Please continue to pray for our church leadership as they seek to find ways for us to gather both safely and faithfully.



Gratitude

The church staff would like to thank ALL of you for the kind expressions of thoughtfulness expressed to us this past Christmas. We are humbled by your generosity. We try to thank you personally when we can, but when gifts simply appear on our desks and in our offices, sometimes we do not know exactly whom to thank. Please accept our deep gratitude for your kindness.

Recent or Upcoming Pastoral Acts

January 4 Memorial Service for Peg Thompson

January 22 Memorial Service for Judie Henning



Wednesday, January 19—Church Interns
 Sunday, January 23—High School Youth Group Service Project
 Wednesday, January 26—Middle School Youth Group
 Sunday, January 30, 1:00-3:00 pm—Rock Climbing at UWRF (All ages)
 Please sign up <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-middle5>
 Wednesday, February 2—High School Youth Group
 Sunday, February 6—Middle School Youth Group Bowling
 Wednesday, February 9—Middle School Youth Group
 Sunday, February 13—High School Youth Group Bowling

Wednesday School

Wednesday School is temporarily on hiatus due to rising COVID infections. Of particular concern for Wednesday School is the snack time when students remove their masks to eat. The tentative plan is to resume on January 19, 2022.

Spring Break Trip Cancelled

A reminder that the March Mission Trip to Back Bay was cancelled due to Covid.

Adult Bible Study

The Adult Bible Study group meets **Wednesday afternoons, 1:00–2:30 pm** in the Fellowship Hall. The group is now studying the Old Testament book of Amos. Discussion books are available in the church office for \$24.00. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.



Blood Drives and Church Interns

Yet another successful and full Blood Drive was held in our church Fellowship Hall. These were organized by Mikayla Peterson, one of our church interns. Held by the Red Cross, these drives help address a critical shortage of blood in our society right now.

Thanks to Mikayla, those who donate, Red Cross staff and our church set up staff who make it happen.

To sign up, check out the Red Cross website: <https://www.redcross.org/local/wisconsin.html>

Adult Forum

The Adult Forum discusses the Sunday’s texts prior to worship on Sunday mornings. Please come! All are welcome. The Adult Forum meets in the Youth Room, **Sunday mornings, 8:45-9:45 am.**

Church Yoga

Jan Hansen's church yoga group meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the church Fellowship Hall from 9:00-10:00 am and via Zoom. Please contact the church office to receive the Zoom link.

New Members to be Received on February 6

Thanks to our deacons who recently hosted the Inquirer’s Class to those interested in church membership. We will be receiving new members on **Sunday, February 6 at the 10:00 am worship service.** Please contact the church office if you wish to join us as members.

Annual Meeting: Sunday, February 6

The 2021 Annual Meeting of the church will be Sunday, February 6 in the Fellowship Hall following the 10:00 am worship service. The Annual Meeting is the time the congregation receives updates from key committees and teams, passes budgets, received reports and elects officers. As we go through another COVID year, many of our key committees will provide updates on how they have pivoted and adjusted their ministries. We will also hear some good news about our Building Fund and the refinancing of our church Building loan at a significantly lower rate. Finally there will be a proposal to switch our electricity to a carbon free source thereby helping us better care for God's awesome, yet delicate creation.

Because of the pandemic we cannot serve a lunch, so we expect the meeting to begin at 11:15 and run for slightly more than an hour. We hope to livestream the meeting, though voting will be done in person. Please pray for our current church leaders including moderator Joel Larsen and vice-moderator Kathy Rausch.

Award Given to our Choir Director!

With joy we announce that our church Choir Director, Sarah Plum, has been selected by the Wisconsin Choral Directors Association to receive the 2022 Outstanding Young Choral Director Award! She will be honored in Milwaukee January 14-15. Please be sure to congratulate her when you see her!



Offering QR Code

1. On your mobile device, open your Camera app or QR Code app
2. Point your camera at the QR Code
3. Click tab 'Give Online'

Mission Ed Subcommittee on Mental Health

The holiday season is full of family, togetherness and light. But for those who are struggling with mental health challenges the holiday season can be especially difficult. If you or someone you know is struggling, these resources might help: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) www.nami-stcroixvalley.com. The NAMI Peer Support Group meets the 2nd and 4th Thursdays at Luther Memorial in River Falls from 6:30-8:00 pm (not on Holidays). Suicide Prevention Hotline number is 1-800-273-8255. Watch for more information and events in upcoming newsletters or contact Sally Steneman stenesal9@gmail.com with questions.

Save The Date: St Olaf Bells Coming to First Congo for a Concert



Yet again the St Olaf Bell choir will be coming to First Congregation for a concert. This will be the third time the Bell Choir has performed at our church. With 15 ringers and a director, the St Olaf Bell Choir is nationally acclaimed musical group. They will perform in the sanctuary on Friday, February 25 at 7:00 pm. Matthew Myers, a senior at St Olaf and member of First Congregational Church, will be one of the students in the choir. Save the date, join us and spread the word!

Thank You Notes

Mike and I would like to thank First Church for remembering us in December. First there was the shut in bag of goodies, then a loaf of bread beautifully wrapped and hand delivered by Chris.

Topping everything off was a beautiful poinsettia.

It's been a tough few months since my cancer diagnosis and we appreciate being remembered by your gifts and your prayers.

Thanks, Mike and Donna Moseman

I would like to thank everyone for the wonderful retirement party! I am humbled and very grateful for the generous retirement gifts I received. It has been a pleasure to work here and to have such great friends!

Thank you, Dave Mountain

Sponsoring Afghan Families: Please Help!

The Bible is filled with challenging texts. Perhaps one of the most challenging texts is in Luke 12. In this chapter, Jesus issues a series of warnings about denying God, holding on to a false sense of security, and the importance of paying attention to the urgency and needs of the times to be ready for the one who is coming. Luke 12:48 includes: *“From everyone to whom much as been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”*

Our congregation has an opportunity to co-sponsor Afghan refugee families. In light of Luke 12:48, I believe we should accept this challenging opportunity. Our congregation can step forward and agree to help; not out of guilt but out of thanksgiving for the many blessings we have received as well as a commitment to serve God’s vulnerable people.

I am willing to lead this project, but I cannot do this alone. Please consider helping. At present we need:

- A group of willing people to provide leadership. This is not a time to think of the many reasons *not* to help. Think of all reasons *to* help. **Update:** So far, Laura Anderson and Juli Okal have agreed to help. We need more volunteers.
- Affordable, appropriate housing. This is a significant challenge. The refugee resettlement agency suggests finding housing first and they will match families to the homes we can secure. Please follow up on any housing ideas you have and let me know.
- Significant financial resources. In order to have our application accepted we need to sponsor a minimum of two families at one time. Bringing two families to town allows families to have a small sense of community with people of a similar background. **Update:** Presently we have two financial commitments of \$5,000 each. We need to a minimum of twice this amount of money. Large and small gifts are welcome.

The above list is what we need to begin this project. Once the project is underway, there will be many more ways to volunteer. *Please* carefully ponder your ability to participate in this project. Contact me to volunteer, to indicate a willingness to provide financial support, or with leads on housing. The need is urgent and the time is here.

Pastor Stacy

People in the Pews:

Matthew Meyer

Hello! My name is Matthew Meyer, and I am a member of First Congregational Church in River Falls. I grew up in Osseo, WI, but now live outside of River Falls with my wife Sarah and son Mason. We have been attending church here for over 8 years. We keep coming back because, quite frankly, this church isn't boring! The messages are interesting and relevant, and the values of this church align well with our own personal values and beliefs. And the kids/youth programs are outstanding.

Some of our family hobbies include camping, enjoying our classic cars, and pretty much any activity that gets us outdoors. We also spend a fair amount of time fixing up our 115-year-old house and taking care of our property. A fun fact about me is that I married my senior prom date at age 22. My generation is not known for tying the knot so young, but I sure am glad that I did!





Ministry to Shut Ins and Seniors

Each month a small team of volunteers delivers a gift bag with homemade treats, cards, and small gifts to the shut-ins and special senior friends of the church. It is a valuable and important ministry reminding these people of God's care for them and their continued connection to the church family. If you would like to be a part of this growing ministry, please contact the church office. You would sign up for a month, fill the bags and then deliver them to approximately 24 households (many are in nursing homes or apartments

so there are far fewer stops). Those currently helping with this ministry are Jill Paulson, Carole Mottaz, Randy and Diane Welsh, Callie Trautmiller.



New Church App

The church has a new mobile phone app. You can download it from the church website or by scanning the QR Code to the left (directions below) which can also be found on a flyer on the sign-up table and Facebook. The App includes: Live and Past Services, Weekly Word, Newsletters, Sign Up Sheets, Events Calendar, Prayer Wall, Giving, Bible, News Feed, Push Notifications. Call the church office with any questions or if you need help.

Five easy steps to get our church app on your mobile device:

1. On your mobile device, open your Camera app or QR Code app
2. Point your camera at the QR Code above or visit: <https://bit.ly/FCCApp>
3. Click on the link that pops up
4. Install the Church App - Tithe.ly onto your device
5. Open the Church App (skip login if prompted) and get connected with our church



Altar Flowers

Please sign up to provide flowers for the altar for Sunday worship. Sign up at church or on the church website:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-altar>

Welcomers Needed

Please sign up to be a welcomer on Sunday morning before the worship service. One person is needed for at the bottom of the stairs at the 3rd Street Entrance. Please arrive 20 minutes prior to the worship service. Sign up at church or here:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-welcomers>

Coffee Fellowship Hosts and Liturgists Needed

Coffee Fellowship Hosts will be asked to serve Best Maid cookies which are in the church freezer, make lemonade and/or serve coffee. All the materials are provided, you will simply need to serve and clean up (at this point we are using disposable cups). Sign up at church or on the church website: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-coffee>

Liturgists will lead us in the Call to Worship and one of the Scripture Lessons. The material will be emailed out on Thursday to practice. Sign up at church or on the church website: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-liturgist>

Please note church interns can receive credit for either of these activities. Thank you for volunteering in these important ministries as we continue our journey.

Engaging the Word, Engaging the World...

Upcoming

Monday, January 31, 6:30 pm—“Climate Change and Sustainability: Pathways Ahead” - With climatologist Dr. Mark Seeley of the University of Minnesota and Minnesota Public Radio. This Learning Community is cosponsored by First Congregational UCC, Hope for Creation communities of faith, UWRF, the RF Municipal Utility, the River Falls Library and our community partners. It will be held at the River Falls Library with Dr. Seeley and 50 in-person participants (registration is required) and will also be available via YouTube or Facebook. To register to participate in person or to join the evening with Dr. Seeley on YouTube or Facebook go to <https://www.riverfallspubliclibrary.org/library-events.html>

Updating

Among Friends seeks a part-time, paid Program Coordinator to assist its commitments with older adults with memory loss, and their caregivers, at its social respite program, which meets weekly at the church. Since 2017 Among Friends has provided welcome support to many area families. Its staff & volunteers are recognized for their kindness & support for participants & their families. To learn more about this position contact **Bonnie Jones-Witthum** (715-307-1182) or **Norma Revels** (651-260-5725). Among Friends will resume meeting Feb 1.

Unfolding

Earth Fest 2022, April 24, 2:00–5:00 pm, Glen Park—As plans for this major community-wide, free celebration take shape Hope for Creation invites your participation and ideas. Earth Fest will feature food, music, exhibits, demonstrations, giveaways, activities for kids, and a wide range of other events to celebrate River Falls past, present, and future sustainability commitments. Mark it on your spring calendar! And join in the planning! See Pastor Dave prior to/after worship or contact him any time to join preparations or for more information.

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 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. Last quarter the church received over \$75 for this account, but that amount could grow greatly if you add the church to your Amazon account. Do it today!

Simpson Shelter Supply Needs

- Twin, full, and queen size blankets and sheet sets—new
- Pillows—new
- White t-shirts—new, sizes small & medium
- Large tubs of Country Time Lemonade and Kool Aid mixes (we use these in Igloo containers for meals)
- Hot sauce
- Coffee—ground, caffeinated
- Products for textured and natural hair
- New shower curtains and shower rings

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

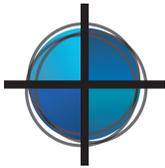
Treasurer's Report

	Week of	Year to Date
	Dec 26, 2021	
General Fund Income *	\$ 12,006	\$ 474,511
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 9,262	\$ 481,624

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

Church Staff Contact Info

Pastor: Chris Myers—chris@firstchurchrf.org
Office: Missy Luedtke—missy@firstchurchrf.org
Education: Stacy Myers—stacy@firstchurchrf.org
Mission: Dave Ostendorf—dave@firstchurchrf.org
Youth: Alex and Sarah Plum—rfyouthgroup@gmail.com
Music: Jamie Mills—degolierjamie@gmail.com
Choir: Sarah Plum—sarah.e.plum.95@gmail.com
Building: Farnum Fuller—farnumfuller@gmail.com
Maintenance: Tim Bylander—timthefixitguy@gmail.com



FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH, UCC
RIVER FALLS

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
Missy Luedtke, Office Administrator
Joel Larsen, Moderator
Alex and Sarah Plum, Youth Ministers
Jamie Mills, Music Coordinator and Bell Choir Director
Sarah Plum, Choir Director
Marsha Pearson, Organist
Terry Mithun, Organist
Tim Bylander, Building Supervisor
Farnum Fuller, Custodian

Pastor's home phone number:
Chris Myers 715-426-2075
chris@firstchurchrf.org

.....

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

110 N. Third Street
River Falls, Wisconsin 54022

.....

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID

PERMIT #53
RIVER FALLS, WI 54022

.....

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

.....

JANUARY 15, 2022



First Communion Information for Parents

When do children at First Congregational Church begin taking Communion?

There is no uniform age at First Congregational Church when children begin participating in the Lord's Supper. Some children are pre-school age, others are in elementary school, and some wait until confirmation to begin taking Communion. The Bible and church history do not give decisive guidelines about the age to begin celebrating the Lord's Supper. The decision about when people are welcome at the Lord's Table has largely been made by local worshipping communities. Our practice is to include children when they and their parents think they are ready to participate.

How will I know when my child is ready?

Some parents choose infant communion for their children. Many parents wait until their children express an interest. Typically, children are ready to participate in Communion when they start asking questions about this sacrament. One important theme of Communion is inclusion: All are welcome at the table of the Lord. If a child feels excluded, it is a good time for that child to begin participating.

My child does not yet receive Communion. Should she/he still come forward?

Yes, all people are invited to come forward to the servers at the Communion distribution time. Children who will not be communing should keep their hands folded (as opposed to reaching out). This is a signal to the pastor and deacons that the child desires a blessing.

Sign Up Sheets: All of the current sign-up sheets are on the church website. Click on the "Connect" button at the top of the page and then select "Sign Ups/Forms."

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