

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

February 1, 2023

*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

*... and he had **compassion** on them... Matthew 9:36*

What is your image of compassion? Is it bringing an item to church which will be given to the Food Pantry, Our Neighbors' Place or the Simpson Shelter? Is it listening to a colleague as they share a particular challenge they are facing? Or is it watching the poor people in Ukraine trying to survive and just feeling sorry for

them? What image comes to your mind?

Jesus was compassionate. In the above mentioned scripture text from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has been teaching and healing. Word of his power has spread and so crowds came from all around to see and hear him. He is bringing good news! But as he looks out on the crowds, Matthew says he had compassion on the people because they were harassed and felt helpless. They were like sheep without a shepherd. I think we have all felt that way. Helpless and like leaders were failing us.

So what is compassion? The word compassion appears about 80 times in the Bible. In Hebrew (the language of the Old Testament) the word means something close to pity and showing mercy. In Greek (the language of the New Testament) it means to be moved in your inward parts. Perhaps today we would say tugging on your heart strings. Compassion is different from empathy and charity. Empathy is a shared emotion. And charity is an action that benefits someone else. Compassion combines both of those, a shared emotion and an action that benefits someone else, but it also adds an important third element: an authentic desire to help someone. Perhaps

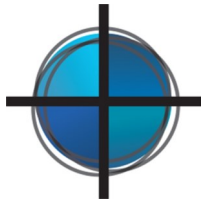
compassion is God's way of breaking open our sometimes cold and hardened hearts.

The root word of compassion in English means to suffer with someone. Not to suffer for them. Not even to solve their problems. But to stand with them in their suffering. I think this adds another element to this important word. We may not be able to solve some of the big problems our world is facing, but we can face the world with compassion. We may not be able to cure our friend's illness, but we can sit by them in compassion. We may not solve all the injustice some people face, but we can stand with them in compassion.

So let us take our cue from Jesus and treat one another with compassion.

In Gratitude, Pastor Chris

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Matthew 9:35-38



Annual Meeting: Sunday, February 5

The 2022 Annual Meeting of the church will be Sunday, February 5 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, receives reports and elects officers. Church committees will talk about their accomplishments over the past year and plans for 2023. There will also be proposals for the congregation to approve to modestly support capital campaigns from the Wisconsin Conference and Back Bay Mission. We will also hear some good news about our Building Fund drive.

We expect the meeting to begin at 11:15 am 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 our outgoing Moderator Joel Larsen, incoming Moderator Kathy Rausch and incoming Vice-Moderator Marie Roe. Please note our meeting is usually Super Bowl Sunday, but this year the game is a week later.



Ash Wednesday and Lent

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday which this year will be on Wednesday, February 22. Lent is a time to prepare our hearts and minds for Easter and Holy Week, just like Advent prepares us for Christmas and Epiphany.

Each Wednesday evening during Lent, we will gather for a brief 30-minute 'Prayer Around the Cross' worship service in the Fellowship Hall. Our theme this year is 'Be Still' and worship will allow time for prayer, scripture, singing and a brief message as we gather around a candle-lit cross. It is a beautiful informal service which lends itself to all ages.

Join us at 6:30 pm for worship and at 5:15 pm for the Wednesday Night meal.

Civil Rights Pilgrimage

Our church has a history of pilgrimage trips. In addition to the bi-annual mission trip to Back Bay Mission, our youth head to Boston to learn more about both their Congregational Church heritage and our nation's history. We also have led a Holy Land Pilgrimage to learn more about the biblical roots of our faith.

This fall we will add a new experience — A Civil Rights Pilgrimage. This 5-day pilgrimage will include stops in Atlanta, Birmingham, Selma and Montgomery. We will literally be walking in the steps of history to learn more about our country and our Christian faith. There will also be time to enjoy southern cuisine!

The trip will take place **October 25-29, 2023**. Space is limited to 14 people and an outline of the proposed itinerary is available from Pastor Chris. Act fast as spaces are going quickly.

Learning Community Event: A Conversation about Christian Nationalism

The Learning Community event exploring Christian Nationalism will be **Tuesday, February 7, 6:30–8:30 pm**. The presenter will be The Rev. Rolf Olson, an ELCA pastor. Pastor Olson will provide an historical perspective of Christian Nationalism and compare it to Christianity and Jesus' Way. The evening will include dessert and time for conversation. Space is available but registration is required. For more information, please contact Pastor Chris or Stacy.



Preparing for Lent

On Wednesdays in Lent, March 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29, we will gather in the Fellowship Hall for Prayer Around the Cross. Prayer Around the Cross is a time for fellowship, prayer, singing, and contemplation. In the midst of busy lives, it is a chance to center yourself, draw close to God, and listen. The 2023 Lenten theme is “Be Still.” To help leaders prepare, please offer your responses to the following prompts:

- When I am still, I imagine...
- When I am still, I understand...
- When I am still, I worry...
- When I am still, I remember...
- When I am still, I regret...

You may give your responses on paper (forms on the sign-up table) or via email to: office@firstchurchrf.org. Your responses can be as short as one or a few words or as long as paragraphs. We hope many people will participate. While we will accept responses throughout Lent, the goal is to turn in the responses with the offering on Ash Wednesday, February 22. For questions, please contact Pastor Chris or Stacy.

Adult Bible Study

The Adult Bible Study Group meets **Wednesday afternoons, 1:00–2:30 pm**. This is an excellent opportunity to deepen your understanding of the Bible, your faith, and your connection to people in the congregation. For more information, talk with Pastor Stacy. The group will start a new study on February 1. This is a good time to try out the group.

Sunday Morning Text Study

Each **Sunday morning, 9:00–9:50**, people gather in the Youth Room to discuss the Sunday’s scripture texts. No one is an expert. Everyone learns. Please come.

Wednesday Night Family Meals

Family meals will be on pause during January and will resume on Ash Wednesday, February 22.

Men’s Group

The church Men’s Group meets **every other Tuesday from 9:00–10:00 am** for coffee, treats and conversation. Pastor Chris leads us in a brief devotion, gives us a topic to discuss and we also have time to meet and catch up. Talk to Pastor Chris or Roger Kampstra for more information. Next gatherings are **February 7 and 21**. Join us!

Church Clean Up Inside

The Trustees need your help cleaning up inside the church on **Saturday, February 18 at 9:00 am**. Cleaning supplies will be provided. Church Interns will receive double hours for helping out. Please join us!



High School Lock-in—Sat, Feb 18 to Sun, Feb 19—Come for an evening of fun activities. Anticipated start time 7pm. High School students will serve Coffee Fellowship after church on Sun, Feb 19.

Please sign up: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-high5>

Ash Wednesday Informational Meeting – February 22 – If you are interested in a June Mission Trip and July Boundary Waters Trip, please come to the informational meeting after the Ash Wednesday Service in the Fellowship Hall.

Summer Boundary Waters Trip with anticipated dates of July 16-20 – Ages: Recommended 7th grade and up. Please reach out to Alex at rfyouthgroup@gmail.com if you have any questions about the trip.

Please sign up: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-summer1>

Middle School Retreat to Action City – Late May – Any middle school students interested in a retreat to Action City/Waterpark in late May, please sign up here. An official date will be selected based on interested students’ availability. Please sign up: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-middle10>

Mortgage Summary—As of January 15, 2023

Original cost of Facilities Expansion Project	\$2,386,970.00
Remaining amount on Bank Loan	\$277,943.77
Needed for Upgrades (Sign/Audio/Visual)	\$150,000.00
Cash on hand in the Building Fund	\$235,365.17
Interest Rate (Locked in through January 2027)	3.39%
Monthly Payment	\$2,622.76

Note: We are at the beginning of a three year capital campaign that will do three things:

1. Pay off our church building bank debt
2. Upgrade our church audio and sounds systems
3. Install a new church sign

The total cost for these is approximately \$495,000. Pledges covering this amount have been received in our recent three-year capital campaign which began last year. We will tackle each of these in the above order once the money from pledges is received. Thank you for your faithful generosity!

Treasurer’s Report

	Dec 31, 2022
General Fund Income	\$ 504,131.59
General Fund Expenses	\$ 503,908.19
2022 Net Income	<u>\$ 223.40</u>
	Jan 22, 2023
General Fund Income*	<u>\$ 40,770.28</u>

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

*A new budget will be approved at the February 5th Annual Meeting.

Church Staff Contact Info

Pastor: Chris Myers—chris@firstchurchrf.org
 Education: Stacy Myers—stacy@firstchurchrf.org
 Mission: Deb Meyer—deb@firstchurchrf.org
 Office: Missy Luedtke—missy@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

New Associate Conference Minister Coming to River Falls

The Rev. Michael Jones, our new Associate Conference Minister in the Wisconsin Conference, will be our guest preacher on Sunday, February 26. Originally from Ohio, Michael received a bachelor's degree in Religious Studies from Indiana University and a Master of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School.

He previously served as pastor in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Michael chaired the Chicago Metropolitan Association Church and Ministry Team for five years and worked in other Association and Illinois Conference roles as well. In his free time, Michael enjoys spending time with his family, swimming, playing the piano, singing and studying history. He is married to husband Blake and they have two young daughters. They live in Eau Claire.

The Association Minister provides guidance and support to the churches and pastors in the Northwest part of Wisconsin. Join us for worship and Coffee Fellowship on **Sunday, February 26th** as we welcome Michael to Wisconsin and River Falls!

Relay for Life

Once again our church is participating in Relay for Life and raising money for American Cancer Society. The Relay for Life event is **Friday, April 14, from 6:00 to 11:00 pm** held at the **River Falls High School**. How can you participate or help?



1. **Soup Night - Wednesday, March 8 from 5:15 to 6:15 pm.** The Relay Team is having their annual Soup Night where you can come and sample a variety of soups or enjoy just one for the Wednesday night meal. What's new this year is a piece of pie is included with your soup. The pie is being provided by Joy Seekers, a new committee inviting people to have a chance to form new friendships, join an activity at church, or share time with shut-ins. Cost of the meal is a donation or the recommended \$8/person and \$5/child or a minimum of \$30/family.
2. Join the **Relay for Life Team**.
3. Help provide an item/idea for the Relay for Life's **Silent Auction**.
4. Purchase a **Luminary Bag** "in Honor of" or "in Memory of" a special person. They will be available at Soup Night, on Sundays prior to, and at the Relay for Life event.
5. **Participate at the Relay Life Event** by enjoying a **Spaghetti Supper from 6:00- 7:30 pm** or **walking around the track**. This year's event has shortened the hours to 6:00 to 11:00 pm.
6. On February 1, enjoy the **Chipotle Dine Out Night** fundraiser.
7. On March 6, join the **Survivor Reunion** which includes a meal.

Stay tuned for more information in the upcoming weeks. Have questions, want to participate, or join the team, please contact Deb Hoffman at debhoffman234b@gmail.com or phone 612-308-4945.



Among Friends

Among Friends is a community-based social respite program serving adults with memory loss who reside in Pierce and St. Croix Counties. For more information about Among Friends, contact them at 715-293-2651. Also, check out the website: amongfriendsrf.com and the

Facebook page. Among Friends is located at the church and is held on **Tuesdays from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm**. Guests are invited to join them for coffee from 9:30-10:00 am the last Tuesday of the month.

Chancel Choir and Bell Choir Recruitment

Have a little bit of a musical itch and thinking about wanting to sing in the choir or play bells. Here's your chance, the Music Committee and choirs are reaching out to the congregation and their friends to let you know the Bell and Chancel Choirs are looking for new members.

We understand you are busy and cannot participate all the time, but the choirs are open for you to try out with the only requirement of you participating in practices prior to the related Sunday's performance.

The practice schedule is: Wednesdays the Bell Choir practices from 6:00-7:00 pm and Vocal/Chancel Choir practices from 7:00-8:15 pm. Both choirs also practice an hour before worship on the Sunday they perform. Please consider joining in the fun! We look forward to welcoming you. For more information contact: Bell Choir—Jamie Mills: degolierjamie@gmail.com or Chancel Choir—Sarah Plum: sarah.e.plum95@gmail.com.



Hope for Creation Book Study

Hope for Creation invites you to a community book study of *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature* by J. Drew Lanham. The author is a poet, wildlife biologist and 2022 recipient of a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship. "In me, there is the red of miry clay, the brown of spring floods, the gold of ripening tobacco. I am, in the deepest sense, colored." From these fertile soils—of love, land, identity, family, and race—emerges *The Home Place*, an unforgettable memoir. The book study meets three Tuesdays: February 21, 28 and March 7, 6:30-7:30 pm via Zoom. An 'in-person' discussion hosted by Journey House will also be held at UWRF.

Please sign up for details by sending an email to hope4creationRF@gmail.com by February 17. Each participant is responsible for securing their own copy of the book. Consider supporting a local business by purchasing the book from Fox Den Books (117 S. Main, River Falls).

Among Friends Kicks Off a New Year, Receives Donation

Among Friends, the community-based program serving individuals with memory loss and their caregivers that is housed at First Congregational, recently received a \$500 donation from River Falls State Bank. These funds will help the program begin a new year of providing engaging activities for its participants. The donation was funded by the bank's employees and customers, who assembled and purchased treat bags during the bank's employee-sponsored holiday fundraiser.



The bank's employees then nominated worthy local organizations as recipients and voted to award the money to Among Friends. Among Friends' board, staff, and participants appreciate this recognition of the program's service to the community. The River Falls State Bank's donation is an example of local support that is especially helpful as Among Friends rebuilds after a long hiatus due to the pandemic. Everyone at Among Friends extends a sincere 'thank you' to River Falls State Bank, its employees, and its customers.

*SERVE
generously*

Simpson Shelter Needs

- New men's boxers—sizes S, M, L and XL
- New men's t-shirts—sizes S, M, L, XL, and XXL
- New women's underwear—sizes 5, 6, 7, and 8
- New women's t-shirts—sizes S, M, XL, and XXL
- Deodorant
- Shaving cream and razors
- Travel size shampoo, conditioner, body wash, and bar soap
- Towels
- Toothbrushes

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

Save Family Fresh Receipts

ARC gets \$1,000 for every \$150,000 in receipts, so every dollar counts. ARC is the agency funded by local churches to help address the immediate needs of people in our community (rent, utility, gas, repair help). A box for receipts is on the back table.

Save Your Batteries to Recycle!

We have a container available for recycling all those old, depleted batteries. Start saving them now and bring them to church. We'll pass them on to the recyclers and keep them out of landfills and the environment in our ongoing commitment to sustainability.

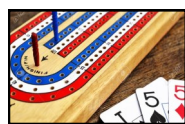


SIMPSON Simpson Shelter News

HOUSING SERVICES

40 years ago Simpson Homeless Shelter opened in Minneapolis when Simpson Methodist Church noticed people sleeping in their church doorways. Since then, Simpson Shelter has expanded. Today, they have taken ownership of the old Simpson Church. After recent fundraising efforts, the shelter is temporarily moving to a different location while the old church building is demolished and a new shelter and apartment complex is built. The new shelter will have 70 shelter beds, 42 low cost apartments, an onsite clinic and social worker and a commercial kitchen to serve meals.

The Simpson Shelter is one of our church mission partners. Several members of the church have acted as overnight hosts and we annually provide meals for guests. We also contribute financially to the Shelter. Please pray for their guests and staff as they navigate this transition.



Cribbage Night

The cribbage group is meeting on the second Monday at the church. Players are asked to donate \$2 and the group decides which charity to donate it to. Playing time starts at **7:00 pm**. All players and abilities welcome. The next game will be **February 13**.

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.

Merry Widows

The Merry Widows will meet **Wednesday, February 15 at the Table on Main in River Falls at 1:00 pm**. All widows are welcome to join us for lunch and conversation! See JoAnn Lentz for more information.

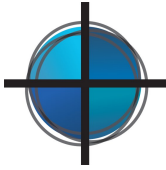


Offering QR Code

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

Empty Pill Bottles

The River Falls Lions Club is collecting empty pill bottles, both prescription and over the counter, to send to Africa where there is an urgent need. The bottles will be washed, and the labels soaked off before they are shipped. A blue collection tub is in the gathering area. Please see Carole Mottaz with questions.



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RIVER FALLS

Office Phone: 715-425-2052
E-mail: office@firstchurchrf.org
Website: www.firstchurchrf.org

STAFF

Chris Myers, Pastor
Stacy Johnson, CE Minister
Deb Meyer, Minister for Community and Outreach
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

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**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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River Falls, Wisconsin 54022
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FEBRUARY 1, 2023
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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 & one person is needed at the ramp entrance. Please arrive 20 minutes prior to worship. 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. Sign up at church or on the 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 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.