

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

March 15, 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

As we enter the season of Lent, 40 days meant to prepare us for Holy Week and Easter, let me suggest you pay attention to these two R's: Relationships and Rituals.

First relationships. I asked some of our confirmands recently to name three non-family members who have greatly influenced their life and why? This was a struggle for most of them. After a long time they came up with the name of a teacher here, a coach there, but most of them really struggled to come up with any names of people who influenced their life. If we have learned nothing since the

pandemic it is that relationships are the key to healthy and abundant living. This has recently been backed up by the world's longest scientific study.

Way back in 1938 researchers at Harvard University set out to learn what makes a person thrive, what makes them live a good life. They recruited 724 18-year-olds, a combination of first year students at Harvard, and low income teenage boys from South Boston. And they followed them and their children and spouses for 85 years. They interviewed them, took blood samples, DNA samples, checked in with them every year, and then every five years, even sent a researcher to spend the whole day with them asking questions. 25 of them even donated portions of their brains after they died. And so now researchers have a database of 1300 people. It is the longest running scientific study in the world. And the results are stunning.

The key to living a happy, fulfilling and abundant life is....can I have a drum roll. Relationships. It is that simple. The key to living a good, happy, abundant life is your relationships. Having healthy social relationships can add up to 10 years to your life. The average American now spends over 11 hours a day interacting with media, from tv, our phones, computers, and less than an hour interacting with another live human being. The number of friends we have, the number of valuable relationships we have created has

plummeted in the last 20 years. And the result is that too many of us feel alone, isolated and disconnected.

So this Lent take stock of your relationships. Who are the people you relate to? Who are the people who shaped you and continue to shape and build you up? Find time to nurture and grow your relationships. The fact of the matter is that like our muscles, our relationships can weaken when they are not used. Especially after Covid, especially in our hyper partisan, hyper individualistic society. Just as your body needs exercise, so does your soul. Seek out and nurture your relationships this Lent. Ask questions like who are the people who shaped me—and thank them. Find time to reconnect with old friends. Create and prioritize your relationship time with God, and with others.

Relationships matter. And the second R is Rituals. All of us have routines and rituals that shape us. When you get up each morning what do you do? Take shower, eat breakfast, brush your teeth, rush out the door (don't forget to get dressed). We are creatures of habit. At their best, rituals don't just comfort us, they help shape us, give our lives direction and structure. The crosses we wear on our heads tonight—that is ritual. The bread we break, the cup we share, that is a ritual. The water we use to welcome people by baptism, a ritual. Saying the Lord's Prayer together, a ritual. Singing together, a ritual.

(Continued on next page)

Pastor's Page *(Continued from page 1)*

Our Protestant ancestors in the faith were sometimes afraid of rituals. The Reformation back in the 1500's was a reaction in a lot of ways to rituals that seemed almost like magic. Those of you going to Boston will learn that our Pilgrim ancestors thought Christmas rituals were getting way out of hand, so they did not celebrate Christmas, it was a regular work day. But in our day, rituals can not only provide comfort, but also meaning, they can shape us in a way words can cannot.

Remember in those Charlie Brown TV specials, the adults and teachers, you never heard their voice. Whenever an adult or teacher spoke it was always, waaaaan, waann, wannn. You and I live in an age of so much wannn. So much noise. So much stimulation. So many words. So much of everything. Rituals like ashes, communion and baptism, they don't talk to our heads, they speak to hearts and souls. They speak to us in a way beyond and even deeper than words. So during the season of Lent, what if you let one of our Christian rituals, like communion, and let it take you someplace deeper in your faith. As you come forward for communion with your hands open, you are asking to be fed. God feed me. As you come forward to be fed by God, ask yourself the question: What is it that is lacking in my life? What is it that I need more of or less of in my life? And God feeds you with the bread and cup, what if you spend some time in your pew or chair praying, asking God to help you see the people God has provided to help you and guide you. We believe in an active God, a living God, a God who is at work in your life today. But so often we are so busy, we miss the nudges. We miss the ways God tries to communicate with us. So during that prayer time back in your pew, ask for God's guidance, look for the people God has placed in your life to help you, support you, connect you to God and others.

My favorite scripture verse is this: John 10:10 — I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly. God wants all of us to have a fuller, more abundant, more peaceful, more hopeful, more loving life. Lent is a gift, a short time dedicated to remember who God is, who God created us to be and how together we can share in the healing and renewing of God's good creation. May your relationships and rituals grow this Lent so that you may receive with joy the good news of the resurrection on Easter Sunday. Amen.

From Ash Wednesday sermon preached by Pastor Chris

Sunday Morning Text Study

Each **Sunday morning, 9:00–9:50**, adults gather to explore the scripture texts used in that Sunday's worship. There is no need to be intimidated by this group. No one is an expert, everyone learns and listens. Everyone learns. Please come!

Adult Bible Study

The Adult Bible Study Group meets **Wednesday afternoons, 1:00–2:30 pm**. If you are interested in supportive, engaging discussion about the Bible and faith, please join us. For more information, talk with Pastor Stacy.



Easter Breakfast – Sunday, April 9

Join us for Easter Breakfast in the Fellowship Hall served by our church youth. The menu will be deluxe scrambled eggs, blueberry French toast bake, oven fried potatoes (a blend of sweet and red potatoes), bacon, sausage, an assortment of sweet breads and quick breads, fresh fruit medley, juice, coffee, milk prepared by Chef Andy and his crew and served by our confirmands and interns. The cost is \$10 per person with a family max of \$40. All proceeds go to our Youth Fund.

All confirmands and interns are expected to help set up and serve, cook and clean up. And we can also use some adult helpers! Talk to Alex to volunteer! Please sign up by April 5 either on the table or online.



Easter Lilies

Easter Lilies are offered for you to honor or remember someone and grace our worship space with beauty. The lilies will be displayed on Easter morning and may be taken home following the 10:00 service. To order an Easter Lily for \$15, please fill out the form on the sign-up table and place in the offering plate or leave in the office. **Orders must be placed by April 2.** Proceeds go to our youth fund.

New Members

The church will be receiving new members on Palm Sunday, **April 2**. Please contact the church office if you wish to be received into membership of the church.

Confirmation Sunday

Confirmation Sunday is always celebrated on the first Sunday in May. Join us on **Sunday, May 7**, as we welcome into the Christian faith our third-year confirmation students.



Please pray for our team of 12 who are working at the UCC-related Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, MS. During their week-long mission, they will be working on repairing hurricane damaged housing, working in the Mission's Food Pantry and Day Center as well as a local Soup Kitchen. Special thanks to Dan Rude, Marie Roe and Carol Merriman who are driving our church van to and from the mission. The mission team will help lead worship on Sunday, March 19, and serve Coffee Fellowship. Pray for a safe, meaningful mission trip.

Holy Week and Easter

Holy Week is the most important week of the Christian year. In just one week, we see the depth and breadth of the Gospel displayed from the excitement of Palm Sunday, the mystery of Maundy Thursday, the agony of Good Friday and the sheer joy of Easter. Briefly, here is what is being planned this year:

Palm Sunday	April 2	Festive Worship with Palms at 10:00 am
Maundy Thursday	April 6	Foot Washing - more coming!
Good Friday	April 7	Choir Cantata
Holy Saturday	April 8	Set up for Easter Breakfast
Easter Sunday	April 9	Worship at 9:00 and 10:30 am with Breakfast from 8:00 until 10:15 am



The second annual Earth Fest will be held on **Saturday, April 22, at Glen Park**. Sponsored by Hope for Creation, this family-friendly

community event celebrates the gift of God's good earth and our call as Christian people to help conserve and care for it. Save the date!

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 catch up. Talk to Pastor Chris, Roger Kampstra or Brad Williams for more information. Next gatherings are **March 21 and April 4 and 18**. Join us!



Boundary Waters Trip Overview: 5 days up in the Boundary Waters!! Full/ Partial outfitting packages available. \$200-300 (depending on scholarships and outfitting needs). For youth grades 7 through graduated and will need adults as well. Please fill out the Google form (QR code to the right) ASAP so Alex can find dates and make reservations. **Registration deadline is March 17.** Alex will reach out before final decisions are made.



June Service Trip Overview: Select 2-3 mission opportunities in the Twin Cities to serve the community. Trip will be determined on group size and skill set. Hotel stay at the Great Wolf Lodge and will have plenty of time spent in the waterpark. Lunch at Midtown Global Market. \$75 trip deposit and total cost! For youth grades 6 through graduated and will need a few chaperones. Please fill out the Google form (QR code to the left) ASAP so Alex can find dates and make reservations. **Registration deadline is April 14.** Alex will reach out before final decisions are made.

Middle School Retreat to Action City in the Fall: Any middle school students interested in a retreat to Action City/Waterpark in the fall, please sign up online. An official date will be selected based on interested students' availability.



Church Camps

Did you know our Wisconsin Conference UCC has an awesome, year-round camping program?

There are camps in St. Germain and Green Lake that offer camping programs for young and old alike. Scholarships are available through the church Scholarship Committee. Check out our church camps at www.ucci.org.



Give Blood

Did you know our church regularly hosts blood drives? Join us on the following dates:

- Wednesday, May 17, from 9:00 am-3:00 pm
- Thursday, July 20, from 11:00 am-5:00 pm
- Friday, September 15, from 11:00 am-5:00 pm

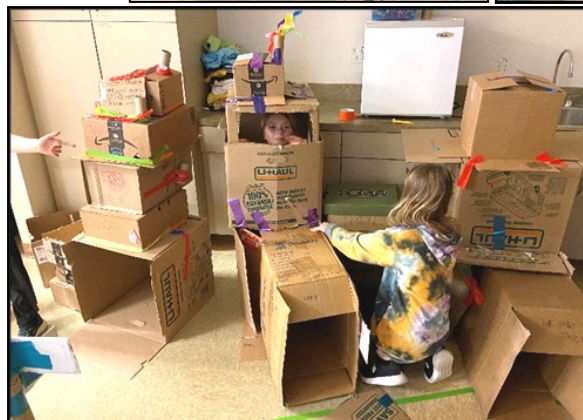
You can register at www.redcrossblood.org

Cardboard City

First Congregational's Cardboard City adventure is now in the books. Children had a lot of fun and did a great job of being creative and collaborative.

Sunday School kids were asked to finish this sentence: "Cardboard City was..." Here are some answers:

- Fun
- Creativity
- Colorful
- Cool
- Amazing
- Challenging but fun
- Teamwork
- Awesome



Relay for Life

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. Join the **Relay for Life Team**.
2. Help provide an item/idea for the Relay for Life's **Silent Auction**.
3. Purchase a **Luminary Bag** "in Honor of" or "in Memory of" a special person. They will be available on Sundays prior to and at the Relay for Life event.
4. **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.

Have questions, want to join the team, please contact Deb Hoffman at debhoffman234b@gmail.com or phone 612-308-4945.

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.

Endowment Grants

Each quarter the Endowment Grant Committee meets to evaluate proposals for new ministries and projects submitted through our church committees and teams. Does your group have a new idea you want to pursue? Is there a need in the church or community your group wants to address? Consider applying for an Endowment Grant! The group has \$14,000 to award this year.

All proposals must come from a committee and the dates for submission are: March 19, June 18, September 17, December 10. Forms can be accessed through the church office or on the church website under the 'connect' then 'forms' tabs or via this link: <https://firstchurchrf.org/pages/sign-up-sheets>

Brazilian Healthcare Mission

The latest newsletter from the Rev. Barb de Souza healthcare ministry in Brazil is available on the church website. Click on the "Serve" tab at the top and select "Our Community" and find the Brazilian Healthcare Mission newsletter link or find a copy on the back table.

Newsletter Deadlines

The church newsletter is sent out twice a month. Deadlines are the 10th and 25th of each month. Items should be sent to the church office no later than those dates.



Vacation Bible School 2023

The 2023 VBS theme is “When Jesus Lived.” The dates are **July 31–August 3 from 9:00–11:30 am**. The Fellowship Hall will be transformed into a series of structures depicting important places in Jesus’ ministry.

Please volunteer to help design and build temporary learning stations prior to the week. As always, we will need many adults and teen volunteers as well as cookie bakers. Registrations for students and sign-up sheets to help are all on the church website under the ‘connect’ button or available at church. Please invite relatives, friends, and neighbors to participate in VBS.

Summer Kids’ Musical

Children who have completed kindergarten through grade 6 are invited to participate in a summer musical program. The group will practice four mornings and produce a wonderful musical in the evening of the fourth day. Rehearsals are **July 17–20 from 9:00–Noon**. The performance will be July 20 and will include dinner. The musical is open to all children in the congregation and community. Please spread the word. Registrations are available online or at church.



We also need adult volunteers to help paint backdrops, create props, and guide the children. Sign up sheets are at church or on the church website under the ‘connect’ button. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Second Holy Land Tour

In 2019, 24 people from church participated in a Holy Land Tour to visit important places in our Christian faith like Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Galilee. We also learned about the cultural and political struggle between Jews and Palestinians and how the three great religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam literally converge in Jerusalem. Planning this tour took a long time.

Pastor Chris is in the beginning stages of planning another Holy Land Tour. A date has not been announced, but if you want to be kept in the loop about developments and involved in determining the timing of a trip, please use the sign-up sheets to register your interest.



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.



Wednesday Night Family Meals

Join us each Wednesday night in March from 5:15 to 6:00 pm for a delicious homemade meal cooked by our own church cook Katy Kapaun and served in the warmth of our Fellowship Hall. If you want to take your meal home, simply go through the line to package a meal to go (please note this in your reservation!). Join us also for 6:30 pm Prayer Around the Cross Lenten Worship in the Fellowship Hall.

Reservations must be placed by noon on Tuesdays. You can make a reservation online, the sign-up table or by calling the church office. See the menu below.

March 22 - Parmesan chicken over rice, salad, croissant

March 29 - Boneless BBQ ribs, mac and cheese, potatoes, veggies, roll

April 5 - Holy Week - No meals

Mortgage Summary—As of March 15, 2023

Original cost of Facilities Expansion Project	\$2,386,970.00
Remaining Amount on Bank Loan	\$194,127.68
Interest Rate (Locked in through January 2027)	3.39%
Monthly Payment	\$2,622.76

Current Capital Campaign

Total Pledged	\$596,646.00
Total Received to Date	<u>376,939.12</u>
Remaining Balance	\$219,706.88

Our current three-year capital campaign began June 2022 and will end in May 2025. It will eliminate our bank loan, fund a new church sign and upgrades to audio visual capabilities in the church building. Thank you for your generous support of our church and its ministry!

Mortgage Pay Down

Thanks to your generosity, we have been able to make another principal paydown of \$70,000 on the church mortgage. Please keep it up! Once we have enough to pay off the mortgage, we can move on to update our sound and video systems and replacing our church signs, which are part of our three-year capital campaign. Thank you!

Treasurer's Report

	Week of <u>Mar 5, 2023</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 7,612	\$ 87,126
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,268	\$ 102,680

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

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

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

People in the Pews: Andy Myers

1. *Where did you grow up?*

I was born in Eau Claire but raised right here in River Falls.

2. *Briefly introduce yourself.*

I'm currently a Ph.D. student in Political Science at Stanford University and a proud alumnus of both St. Olaf College and River Falls High School.

3. *How long have you been attending First Congregational?*

19 years and counting!

4. *What keeps you coming back to church at First Congregational?*

The people, music, and fellowship. The probability of return would increase if we built a church pizza oven. ☺

5. *What is your favorite Bible passage, hymn and/or song?*

Favorite verse is Micah 6:8.

My favorite hymn is "We Are Called."

6. *What is your favorite childhood memory?*

Our family's 2014 European grand tour thanks to a Lilly Endowment grant. Highlights included hiking in Switzerland, climbing the Chartres cathedral belltower, and a tour of CERN.

7. *What is your favorite hobby or pastime?*

I love projects, whether that includes building a pizza oven and patio, woodworking in the shop, or planning my next national parks adventure. And, as a member of an exclusive club, I must add: Skol Vikes!

8. *Tell us something about you or your family that may surprise us?*

I'd prefer 17 degrees and snowing to 85 and sunny any day of the year!

9. *What gives you comfort or joy during these Covid-19 days?*

Music! I'm starting my second year as a tenor in the chancel choir and men's chorus at First Congregational UCC in Palo Alto, California. The friends and music I've made along the way bring me much joy.



ARC Gives Nearly One Million to Local Families

Area Resource Center (ARC) is one of our church mission partners. Started by River Falls churches who noticed people in need having to call around to local churches to receive help with rent, utility and food assistance in 2009, it is a one hundred percent volunteer-run local agency. Every dollar given to the agency gets spent locally to help local individuals and families in need for everything from rent to car repairs, medicine to utility assistance. Since their inception, ARC has given out \$978,000 in assistance over its 14 years of existence. Special thanks to volunteers like JoAnn Lentz and Sue Danielson who volunteer with this ministry. May God continue to inspire and bless this ministry.

*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
HOUSING SERVICES

Simpson Shelter News

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 **April 10**.

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.



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, contact them at 715-293-2561. 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**.

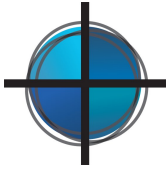


Offering QR Code

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
Kathy Rausch, 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

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RIVER FALLS, WI 54022

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

MARCH 15, 2023

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.