

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

May 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

Why Boston?

For many years now, we have been taking our Third Year Confirmants to Boston at the end of their confirmation experience. Because of Covid, this is the first trip we have been able to take since 2019 so we had a big crew of 22 participants. So why Boston?

Boston is the place where our Congregational Church history and nation's history come together. There we see our ancestors living out their Christian faith at both their best and worst. We also see how for over 400 years, the folks in our church have been in the forefront of some of the most

important struggles of our nation's history. We visit places like the Congregational Library, the archive of our church's history which also houses things like the baptismal records for Ben Franklin at Old South Church and a copy of the first book published in America, a translated Bible into a Native American Dialect (it also has in its archives our 150th Anniversary book written by Stephanie Zeman and our Picture the Bible curriculum!). We visit the Boston Massacre site where we learn that Crispus Attucks, an African American man, was one of the first casualties of the war for our nation's independence. We visit Paul Revere's house where he raised his 16 children and the USS Constitution (Old Ironsides) the oldest ship still afloat (launched in 1797 with a brass hull installed by Paul Revere). We visit Old North Church (one if by land, two if by sea) and Old South Church, where nearly half of Boston met before the Boston Tea Party. We also climb the 294 steps to the top of Bunker Hill (arriving just 15 minutes before it closed!). We walked 11 miles on our Boston day! All the history our kids learned in school comes alive in Boston.

After Boston, we head to Plimoth Patuxet Museums to see a recreated Mayflower where we can see how small the space was for 102 Pilgrims (80 feet by 20 feet with no windows) and their 66-day voyage that turned into seven months on board for some of the passengers. We see Plymouth

Rock (underwhelming because it is so small). We explore the English village and meet characters who tell us what life is like, why the Pilgrims came, what they hoped and dreamed for as well their faith. Next we head to Patuxet, a recreated Wampanoag Native American village where we learn what life was like for native people before, during and after the arrival of the Pilgrims. We learn about stories of trust and cooperation, as well as fear, war and the tragedies left in their wake.

We learn that we in our Congregational Church are the direct descendants and participants in many of our nation's founding struggles like abolition, votes for women and insistence on public education for girls and boys, rich and poor. We learn about how our ancestors in the faith insisted on things like educated clergy founding colleges like Harvard and Yale and closer to us Northland, Lakeland and Carleton Colleges.

Some of the other learning that goes on for our youth are things like how to take public transportation (they were excellent on this including one student who refused to hold on and was always tossed about when the train slowed or sped up), how to read a map so you don't get lost, as well as how to travel together as a group.

Thank you for the support of our young people on this pilgrimage. Some pictures from our adventure are later in the newsletter.

Pastor Chris

Wednesday School

Wednesday School has drawn to a close for the present school year. Many thanks to the wonderful, terrific, amazing, incredible, fabulous volunteers who helped to make Wednesday School a success. Wednesday School could not happen without these faithful folks. Many thanks to: Christina Krueger, Missy Linaberry, Dave Reilly, Connor Rude, John Sullivan, Kim Swanson, Erin Syverson, and Jennifer Syverson. Wednesday School will resume in the fall.

Confirmation and Graduation Sundays

Some of the most exciting moments of the church year are those Sundays when we confirm our 9th graders and bless our graduating 12th grade seniors. Please add these dates to your calendars.

Confirmation Sunday—May 7—Worship at 10:00 am

Graduation Sunday—June 4—Summer worship at 9:30 am

Spring Clean-Up

Sat, April 29, 9:00 am

Please bring your gloves, rakes, blowers, pruning shears, etc. to help clean up the grounds at the church. Back-up date is Saturday, May 13. Please join us!

Last Day of Sunday School

May 21 is the last day of Sunday School for the current academic year. We will celebrate another successful year with root beer floats and cookies during Coffee Fellowship. Please join us!

Sunday Morning Text Study

Join us each **Sunday morning, 9:00–9:50**, to explore the scripture texts used in that Sunday's worship. Participating in this discussion is a great way to prepare for worship. Please come!

Adult Bible Study

The Adult Bible Study Group meets **Wednesdays from 1:00–2:30 pm**. Currently, the group is discussing *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* by leading Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann. For more information, talk with Pastor Stacy.



Chocolate Boutique

A Relational Bible Experience for Women. Join Deb Meyer to renew your spirit with a series on Grace. **May 2**—God's Grace is Rich and Extravagant; **May 9**—God's Grace is Transforming. Meeting time is **6:30 pm**. A chocolate dessert will be served at each session. Come to one or all. Please sign up at church.

Earth Fest 2023

The Second Annual Earth Fest in River Falls was held in the University Center at UWRF due to inclement weather. Our church sponsored a booth on Spiritual Wholeness, including finger labyrinths, stress catchers, story books and a white board with questions such as 'What in nature sustains you?' We had a wonderful turnout with 2,000 people in attendance. It was amazing to see the diversity of businesses, non-profits and churches involved.

Thank you to the mission team and all who helped set up and takedown, and those who worked the booth. Your ministry is greatly appreciated.





Wed, May 3, 6:30-7:30 pm @ St Croix Lanes in River Falls: Bowling for All Church Youth! Bring \$5 and the rest is covered!

Boundary Waters: Alex shared an email to everyone who signed up for the Boundary Waters Trip. **There are still four spots available!** If you have not received an email and would like to, please reach out to Alex at rfyouthgroup@gmail.com. **Dates are Sun, July 16–Thurs, July 20.** [Summer Boundary Waters Google Signup](#)

June Service Trip: 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 so Alex can find dates and make reservations. Alex will reach out before final decisions are made. **Registration deadline is May 7.** [Summer Service Trip Google Signup](#)

Vacation Bible School 2023

VBS in 2023 will be: “DIG! The World When Jesus Lived.” It will be held **July 31–August 3, 9:00–11:30 am**, and is open to all children age 3 through completed grade 5. As always, we will need many adults and teen volunteers as well as one more cookie baker for Wednesday, August 2. Registration forms for students and sign-up sheets to help are all on the church website under the ‘connect’ button or available at church. Please register and invite friends, relatives, and neighbors to participate.



Summer Kids’ Musical: *Oh, Jonah!*

Following a several-year hiatus, we will again have a children’s musical in July for children who have completed kindergarten through grade 6. The show is “Oh, Jonah!” and tells the Old Testament story of Jonah and the whale. Rehearsals are **July 17–20, 9:00–noon**. The performance will be July 20 and will include dinner. Registrations are available online or at church. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Scholarships are Due!

Just a reminder that both the High School Senior and Continuing Education Scholarships are due in the church office **by Sunday, May 7**. Please remember scholarships may require an essay and/or a letter of recommendation so start early! Forms are on the church website under the ‘connect’ then ‘sign up’ tabs. For questions, please talk to Jenny Luedtke who is chair of the Scholarship Team.



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
- Friday, September 15, from 11:00 am–5:00 pm

You can register at www.redcrossblood.org

Softball News

The season begins on Mon, June 5! Practices begin Mon, May 1 at 6:30 pm at the Greenwood School ball fields. We cannot claim a field in advance, so I will have someone in the parking lot with directions. Our new co-manager is Sarah Plum. She played in high school and played the last two years. Thank you to Matthew Thurston for his dedication to co-managing the team and enjoy spending time with your daughter before she’s off to college. If you are interested in playing, please sign up. If you have questions, contact Deb Hoffman at (612)308-4945, debhoffman234b@gmail.com or Sarah Plum at (715)-418-9393, sarah.e.plum.95@gmail.com.

Merry Widows

Nothing in life prepares you for the death of your spouse. Nothing. And yet God has given us the gift of community to help bear the pain together. Each month the Merry Widows meet together to offer support and nourishment to one another.

They meet for lunch and conversation generally on the third Wednesday of each month at 1:00 pm. Please check with JoAnn Lentz who organizes the group.

Here they are at a recent gathering at Stacy and Chris's house for lunch. All widows are welcome!



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 in a brief devotion, gives a topic to discuss and there is also time to catch up. Talk to Pastor Chris, Roger Kampstra or Brad Williams for more information. We are up to about 15 regulars and have room for you! Next gatherings are **May 2 and 16**. Join us!

Family Resource Center Volunteers Needed

The Christian Education Committee is looking for two volunteers to help keep the Family Resource Center organized. The volunteer would return check-out items to the shelves and identify resources and books to display. The time commitment would be a short time each week. For more information, please 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.

Church Lawn Mower Needed

Our church lawn mowing team needs at least one more member. Join Ryan Luedtke and Joel Larsen in keeping our church lawn beautiful. You can mow whenever it fits your schedule and you will be part of a team to accommodate vacations. Contact the church office to sign up.

Video Team Members Needed

Each week the church livestreams the worship service. This vital ministry is run by volunteers Jeff Hoffman and Ryan Luedtke. We are in need of 2 more adults and 2 youth who want to be part of this team. Training is provided and you will join a rotation to fit your schedule. Come learn a new skill! Contact the office for more details and to sign up.

Endowment Grants

Each quarter the Endowment Grant Committee meets to evaluate proposals for new ministries and projects submitted through our church committees. 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 \$12,400 to award this year. All proposals must come from a committee and the dates for submission are: **June 18, September 17, December 10**. Forms can be accessed through the church office or on the church website under 'connect' then 'forms' tabs.

On Financial Giving

We have two significant groups of people who give to the church financially — those who give monthly and those who make one-time gifts. Those who sign up for monthly giving via our automated giving program help ease our church cash flow through the year by using this program. Thank you for your generous giving! We also have a significant number of people who make one-time gifts to the church. Thank you for your giving as well! For this second group, we ask you to please make those gifts now rather than the end of the year to help our church cash flow throughout the year. However you give, know that your gifts empower every single ministry detailed in the pages of this newsletter. Thank you!

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.

Current Capital Campaign

Total Pledged	\$596,646.00
Total Received to Date	<u>391,168.42</u>
Remaining Balance	\$205,477.58

Mortgage Summary—As of Apr 15, 2023

Original Cost of Facilities Expansion Project	\$2,386,970.00
Remaining Amount on Bank Loan	\$192,017.14
Interest Rate (Locked in through January 2027)	3.39%
Monthly Payment	\$2,622.76

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!

Treasurer's Report

	Week of Apr 23, 2023	Year to Date
General Fund Income*	\$ 8,987	\$ 168,796
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,268	\$ 174,556

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

Mental Wellness Corner

Mental health has become a huge societal issue. It affects children, youth, adults and seniors. In March, Lisa Hart from the Wisconsin Conference gave a presentation on mental health concerns. To the right is a hand out from her.

In response to that presentation, the Mission Team is organizing a Wise Team for Mental Health Awareness. We are looking for people who share a passion for welcoming, including, supporting, and engaging concerns about mental health in our faith community.

If you are interested in being a part of the Wise Team, please let Pastor Deb or Pastor Chris know.

Once a month, the Mission Team will have a Mental Wellness Corner in the newsletter.



**5 simple things
you can do**
to make the world a better place
for people with mental illnesses
and their families

1 Be a friend

Provide companionship and compassion on the road toward recovery. Offer a ride to church or to a local support group. Listen without judgement. Pray for those you know with mental illnesses and for their family members.

2 Be an inspiration

Share your story. Has mental illness impacted you or your family in some way? Your story may empower others to seek treatment or have hope.

3 Watch your language

Pay attention to the words you use and avoid stigmatizing labels. Do not refer to people as "crazy," "psycho," "lunatic" or "mental."

4 Be a "StigmaBuster"

Challenge negative attitudes toward mental illness among your friends and acquaintances and in the media.

5 Learn the facts

Educate yourself about the various mental illnesses. Attend a lecture or class or use the Internet. Good places to start include the National Alliance on Mental Illness, www.nami.org, and the National Institute of Mental Health, www.nimh.nih.gov.



Look for the Diaper Bins!

Mission Education is encouraging our First Congregational family to contribute children's diapers to United Way as a way to honor the mothers and fathers in our lives. You'll see diaper bins located in the Gathering Area from now through Mother's Day and on to Father's Day. You can take a small card to let the good parents in your life know that you're thinking of them by helping other parents who need some extra assistance.

Here's what the United Way St. Croix Valley wants us to know:

One in 3 families in our area struggles to meet the basic needs for their family. Food shelves report an increase in need across the state – and diapers are one of the most requested non-food items. Diapers and other hygiene items cannot be purchased with SNAP (food stamps) or any other state- or federally-funded safety net programs. Parents are often forced to ration their diaper supply, endangering the health of their children and making it impossible to enroll their children in childcare so that the parents can work.

United Way St Croix Valley is responding by launching new and supporting existing diaper pantries in the St Croix Valley. All children deserve to be loved, cared for, and have their basic needs met. All parents who request assistance will be served by the United Way.

Any and all sizes of disposable diapers are needed, but the most requested sizes are the larger ones, 4, 5 and 6, since children wear them for the longest period of time. Look for the sales and give generously!

SERVE generously

Simpson Shelter Needs

- Women's bras—all sizes
- Women's white crew socks
- Shower shoes—all sizes
- Men's t-shirts—sizes XL, XXL, XXXL
- Personal size Vaseline
- Personal size body wash and shampoo
- Sunscreen
- Nail care products
- Women's briefs—size 5, 6

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

Save Your Batteries to Recycle!

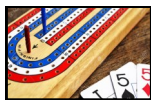
We have a container available for recycling all those old, depleted batteries. Start saving them now and bring them to church. We'll pass them on to the recyclers and keep them out of landfills and the environment in our ongoing commitment to sustainability.

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.

HealthPartners Class

HealthPartners is offering an online class on Dementia and Family Communication. Home and hospice social worker Janelle Johnson, BSW, will cover eight helpful strategies to navigate difficult conversations and communicate with your loved ones who have dementia. The class will meet **Thursday, May 18, from 4:00-5:00 pm, online**. The class is free, but registration is required in advance. Visit healthpartners.com/classes-events to register.



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 **May 8**.

Church Yoga

The 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.

Past & present yoga participants are invited to a brunch honoring Jan for her 20+ years of yoga instruction on **Tuesday, May 9, about 10:15 am**. Jackie Ross is the new instructor and is carrying on in Jan's tradition.

Merry Widows

The Merry Widows will meet **Wed., May 17 at 1:00 pm at Kingdom Buffet in Hudson**. All widows are welcome to join us for lunch and conversation! See JoAnn Lentz for more information.

Family Fresh has discontinued their program of collecting receipts. Thank you for your support!



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'



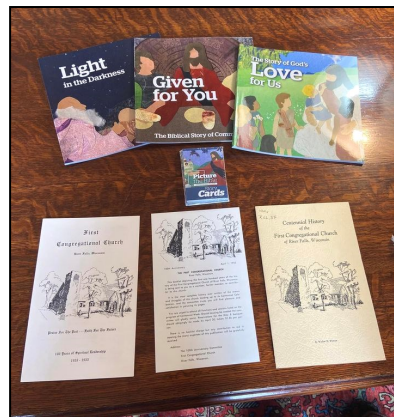
Among Friends

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**.

Confirmation Boston Trip



Learning about our church history at the Congregational Library



They have copies of our important church documents, including our 150th Anniversary book and all of our Picture the Bible books!



Number 5 on the 'Most Under Whelming Sites in America:' Plymouth Rock



Talking to one of the Pilgrims



A mishoon (canoe) could be up to 40 feet long to harpoon whales!



Learning about how the Wampanoag people lived



Our group on the steps at the state capital in Boston



Taking a glide on the Swan Boats



The MooFlower (get it?)



One of our group throwing tea into Boston Harbor (it comes back up)



At the top of Bunker Hill after 294 steps



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RIVER FALLS

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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

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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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River Falls, Wisconsin 54022

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RIVER FALLS, WI 54022

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

MAY 1, 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.

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.