

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

May 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

Summer

If ever there were words we longed to hear after a long, snowy winter and a wet, cold spring, it is summer. This year, we have earned each and every day of our summer fun. Summer is time to go to the cabin or fish, to go camping or on road trips, to relax and garden, to breathe a little and sit outside. Especially after the past few years, we all need a relaxing summer.

This year summer at church involves the return of some wonderful church traditions as well as some new surprises. Remember that between

Memorial Day and Labor Day, we move our worship services to 9:30 am. Also remember that each and every one of our summer programs is free and open to all. Summer is a great time to invite people to join you in worship or at any of our special events such as those below. Inviting people is not only a part of our Christian faith, but it is also a way to share with others the gift of this church and its ministry.

Here are some highlights of this coming summer season at First Church:

Graduation Sunday. June 4 we will recognize both our graduating high school seniors and our college and university graduates. High school seniors, please make sure you fill out the Graduation Plans sheet (<https://firstchurchrf.org/pages/sign-up-sheets>). University seniors, please email us (office@firstchurchrf.org) with your college/university, major/degree and plans after graduation. Also on Graduation Sunday, we will ask our church members to offer their advice to our graduates which will be included in the College Packs sent in the fall.

Concert on the Church Lawn.

As a kick off to River Falls Days, we will again be offering a concert outdoors on the church lawn on Thursday, July 13, the night before the River Falls Days Parade. There will be a food truck, drinks and best of all the return of our own Colin Cosgrove's Band, Slapdash Bluegrass.

Youth Musical. It has been many years since we offered a Youth Musical. This year, we will be performing "Oh, Jonah," a wonderful adaptation of the Jonah story. It runs July 17–20 and is free and open to all kids who have completed 1st through 5th grades. Mark your calendars for Thursday, July 20 at 6:00 pm for dinner and the show to follow. We want a packed church to cheer on our kids! Got young neighbors? Invite them using some of the postcards on the sign-up table.

Gospellers. The Wisconsin Conference sponsors a Gospel Choir who tour throughout the state and to our partner church in Germany. After a long covid break, they will return to First Congregational to help sing and lead worship on Sunday, July 30 at the 9:30 am summer worship service.

VBS. No one does VBS better than First Congregational. Period. A defining characteristic of our program is its inter-generational makeup. We have equal parts kids, teens and grown-ups all learning together. This year's program is called "The World When Jesus Lived" and will run July 31 through August 3. Again, mark your calendars for Thursday, August 3 at 6:00 pm for dinner and a program highlighting our week. Pick up a postcard & invite others! Together may we have a fun, healthy and much deserved summer season!

In Gratitude, Pastor Chris

Confirmation

Congratulations to our 9th Graders:

Emma Shepherd, Eleanor Adams, Hannah Cudd, Maggie Cudd, Jaelyn Trautmiller, Mason Peterson, and Rhett Theisen, who were confirmed recently into the faith and family of Jesus Christ.

Their three-year confirmation experience was one of the most unusual in our church history with the pandemic, but they have learned to pivot and grow and see God is at work in their lives.

May God continue to bless them and may we, their church, make room for their gifts.



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

The last Sunday Morning Bible conversation for this academic year will be May 21. Sunday Morning Text Study will then resume in the fall.

Adult Bible Study

Adult Bible Study group had a great year of discussion and learning. The participants read a wide range of books and considered a variety of Bible texts and theological ideas. The group will resume in the fall. Please consider joining us! For more information, please contact Pastor Stacy.

Scholarships

Just a reminder that all those who submitted applications for Senior High School or Continuing Education Scholarships should plan on being in worship to receive their awards on Graduation Sunday, June 4, at 9:30 am. Please see Jenny Luedtke, chair of the Scholarship Team, with any questions.



Spring Clean Up

Thank you to our Trustees, Garden Geeks and others who helped clean up our church grounds recently in between the rain. It looks awesome!

Youth Events

The program year for our 6th–12th graders ended May 3rd with our annual bowling night!

Thanks to our leaders for the year: Diana Villeneuve in 6th grade, Pastor Stacy for 7th/8th grades, Pastor Chris for 9th grade and Alex and PC for Church Interns (grades 10-12).

And congratulations to Noah Follstad who had the high score!



Vacation Bible School

VBS in 2023 will be: “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.



We need more adults and teen-aged volunteers. 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.

Softball News

The season begins on Monday, June 5! Practices have begun at the Greenwood School ball fields. We cannot claim a field in advance, so someone will be in the parking lot with directions.

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.



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



Graduation Sunday

Some of the most exciting moments of the church year are those Sundays when we celebrate our graduates. This year, we will be celebrating Graduation Sunday on, Sunday June 4. We invite our graduating high school seniors to join us wearing their graduation robes. Following the 9:30 am worship service (summer worship hours!), they will be honored with a cake reception, leaving them plenty of time to get River Falls High School for the graduation ceremony. Please make sure you have completed the Graduation Plans Form and returned it to the church office!

Link: <https://firstchurchrf.org/pages/sign-up-sheets>

Also, if you are graduating from college, please let us know where you are graduating from, your major/degree and any future plans so we can include that on Graduation Sunday as well (office@firstchurchrf.org).

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 16 and 30** in which we will continue our look at the middle and ending of the 23rd Psalm before we break for the summer months. Join us!

20th Anniversary of Church Yoga

About 20 years ago, a recently retired kindergarten teacher named Jan Hansen decided to get certified as a yoga instructor and start a yoga group at church. Today, nearly 20 years later, we celebrate Jan and her group which continues to meet each Tuesday and Thursday at 9am in the Fellowship Hall.

In addition to keeping bodies and minds in shape, this group has gone on to bless our community through its annual Christmas Shoebox Ministry to the men at Kinnic Falls Alcohol and Drug Rehab program.

There is no fee to join, simply a free will offering of which all goes to local missions like the Shoebox Ministry. God bless you Jan and the ministry you have provided over the years!



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.



Diaper Drive

Mission Education is encouraging our First Congregational family to contribute children’s diapers and wipes to United Way as a way to honor the mothers and fathers in our lives. Diaper bins are located in the Gathering Area from 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!

WISE Team Interest Meeting

There will be a meeting regarding becoming a WISE church that focuses on mental health and awareness on **Tuesday, May 23, at 6:30 pm.** Join us if you are interested in learning more.

Birthday Celebration

You are all invited to Lou Greub’s 90th Community Birthday Party to be held **Saturday, May 20** at the River Falls American Legion Hall, 701 N. Main St., from **1:00-5:00 pm.** Czech Area Concertina Club will be playing from 2:00-4:00 pm. Sandwiches and snacks provided. No gifts please.



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 their website to register: healthpartners.com/classes-events

Regarding People

- For Duane Church as he celebrated his 90th birthday on Wednesday, May 10, and he and his wife Mary celebrate their 63rd wedding anniversary the day before, on Tuesday, May 9, may God continue to bless you both.
- For the chaperones on the Boston Trip – Jena Most, Callie Trautmiller, Cindy Peterson, Kit Luedtke, you were awesome!
- For Lorraine, the matriarch of the Van Dell family, who celebrated her 102nd birthday with family on May 7, that their gathering be blessed with love and gratitude.

People in the Pews: Josh Sippel

1. *Where did you grow up/hometown?*

I was born in River Falls, grew up in North Hudson till I was 7.

2. *Where do you live now?*

I currently live in Hudson with my mom (Vicki), sister (Erica), and dog (Maple).

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

My whole life, my parents dragged me to church. At church, I have participated in the youth group, intern program, VBS, Boston Trip, coffee fellowship, Feed My Starving Children, greeted people, and a whole lot more.

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

I like to hear what Pastor Chris (PC) has to say and seeing everyone at coffee fellowship.

5. *What is your favorite Bible passage or quote or hymn and why?*

The hymn we sing when the kids go to Sunday school: "This Little Light of Mine"

6. *What is your favorite childhood memory?*

Teasing my grandfather. Going on pontoon rides in Pike Lake in Amery, where grandpa would let me drive the boat.

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

Welding at Northwood Technical College (WITC), working out at the YMCA in Hudson lifting weights and using the treadmill.

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

I may not talk a lot, but once you get me going it's hard to get me to stop. I like talking about and showing off my recent welding projects from school.



What the Pastor is Reading

The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our "Correct" Beliefs by Peter Enns

Written by an Old Testament scholar, Enns talks about the mistake some Christians make when they confuse certainty and correct belief for faith. If you have ever thought your faith was lacking, this book challenges you to see that as part of your faith journey. Good book.

The Lager Queen of Minnesota by J. Ryan Stradal

Written by a writer who grew up in Hastings, MN, this is a fun romp through life in the upper Midwest complete with the Steamboat Inn in Prescott and lots of familiar characters and scenery. He is also the author of just released book Saturday Night at the Lakeside Supper Club (on my list!) and Kitchens of the Great Midwest (good book but LOTS of language issues—why do authors do that?) Fun books.

The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success by Ross Douhat

This is one of those books I am still trying to process. The author is trying to understand why we as a society seem stuck today and his answer is that we are enduring a kind of sustained decadence. Still trying to think through this one.

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.

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.

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>395,413.72</u>
Remaining Balance	\$201,232.28

Mortgage Summary—As of May 15, 2023

Original Cost of Facilities Expansion Project	\$2,386,970.00
Remaining Amount on Bank Loan	\$189,955.30
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	
	May 7, 2023	Year to Date
General Fund Income*	\$ 17,542	\$ 201,662
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,268	\$ 195,092

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

CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING SUMMARY—April 18, 2023

Treasurer's Report: March giving enabled the church to catch up income. April giving amounts also look good. Missions are typically paid on a quarterly basis. They were delayed but now some will be paid soon. Insurance is also due and that will be paid first. Association dues will also be paid.

New Business:

Committee Descriptions and Calendars-Kathy sent out committee descriptions to the council chairs with the request to update them. Goal to have them completed in April and May. These will be helpful for the nominating committee to provide to potential members. Please send them to Missy. Please include a calendar of major events through the year that the committee is involved with.

Old Business:

Emergency Response Team – Linn/Laura, Scott/Jeff, Chris, Marie, Matt C. and Justin W. (fire dept). Initial meeting scheduled for April 30th. Goal to be completed by September.

Reports and Accounting – continued work to do.

Capital Campaign Update – Sign—Tim B, Louie F, Chris M, Kathy R, Andy K—no additional information

Sound—Joel L, Alex P, Marsha P, Jeff H, Dave R, Chris M—no additional information

Roof Update—3-4 weeks the flat roof work could be started.

Ministry Updates

Christian Education—Goals reviewed for the year. Looking for 1st—5th grade students for musical. “Oh Jonah” will be performed. VBS plans are made. Possible restructuring of confirmation. Evening Bible Study class—possibly 1-2 times per month.

Deacons—Committee description discussed. Hosting coffee fellowship for Confirmation Sunday. New candles ordered for the altar.

Discipleship—No meeting, no report—will work on committee description via email communication.

Endowment Grant—funds are available.

Mission Education—Earth Fest this Saturday, Building Blocks to Mental Health training on May 2nd. Will create a WISE committee. June and July mission moments are scheduled. Veterans lunch on June 11th. Refugee Relief Partner fund—what direction?

Music—A hymnal count was completed, cost will be \$4500 to purchase the new hymnals. Some old hymnals will remain in the pews. Ukrainian concert went really well—\$480 in donations covered the cost of the performance. The musicians were very complimentary. July 13th—Slapdash Bluegrass will perform. Food Truck information is still pending. Wisconsin Conference Gospel Choir coming on July 30th. Looking for hosts to reduce costs. Brass group offered to do a concert August 10th or 12th—more information to come on them.

Trustees—Authorized Missy to pay ½ insurance for 2023, other ½ will be paid in October. Tim has been busy—replaced all the ceiling tiles, basement leak repaired, carpeting has been replaced from the leak, waiting on flat roof repair, solar panels will be placed back on the roof, new fire suppression canister for kitchen, fridge and freezer monitors were purchased, conduit on side of building will be replaced with metal. Spring clean up will be held on April 29th-9am-noon

Welcoming Ministry—Starting in Sept they will begin meeting every 3 months. Talked about how members can help individuals feel welcomed during the service and at coffee fellowship. Visitor cards in the pews to place in the collection plate. Discussion about having a follow-up New Member dinner as a check-in, introduction of committees, etc.

Pastor—Alice Hanson died—Memorial Service on April 22. Holy Week thanks—especially to the choir, musicians and deacons—it was a lot of work for everyone. Boston Trip—22 people leave this Thursday and back on Sunday. Confirmation Sunday will be held on May 7th. 6 students will be confirmed. Coffee fellowship will be hosted by Deacons. Graduation Sunday is June 4th—Christian Education will host coffee fellowship for that event.

Possible Mini Lay Academy held here in the fall. Small groups are thriving—Men's group and Widows group have grown. We will continue to encourage ideas for groups—Joy Seekers will continue to host activities.

Respectfully submitted, Jo Anne Friedell, Church Clerk

NEXT MEETING: May 16, 2023 -- Note there is no Council meeting in June or July, but we do meet in August!

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 (Prescription Only)

The River Falls Lions Club is collecting empty pill bottles, prescription only, 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.

Relay for Life 2023 Follow Up

Thank you to everyone for supporting our Relay for Life team. Our team raised \$1,684 and was listed as one of the Rising Star teams. The Community total as of April 16 was over \$77,850 and funds are still coming in. Money raised by the event goes to American Cancer Society and the research to find way to cure cancer. Have questions about joining the team, next year's fundraisers (soup and hopefully plant sale again) and/or participating at the event, please contact Deb: debhoffman234b@gmail.com or phone 612-308-4945.

Cribbage

The group will be taking a break for summer and will start back up on the second Monday in September. The group gave their donations of \$146 to the River Falls Food Pantry.

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.

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**.



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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

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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

110 N. Third Street
River Falls, Wisconsin 54022

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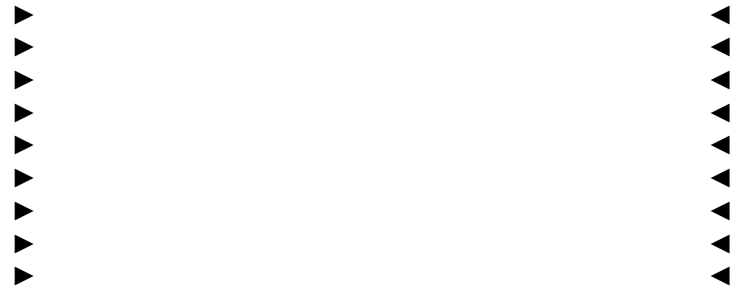
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MAY 15, 2023



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.

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.