

Weekly Word – For Sunday, December 15, 2024

Worship this Week:

Advent is a strange season. We live in hope and expectation at the coming of the Christ child at Christmas. And yet when we look at the world, it seems very much the same. We live between hope and reality. This third Sunday of Advent is the Sunday when we light the Joy candle on the Advent Wreath. Join us at the 10:00 am worship service as the Bell Choir rings their joy, our Sunday School kids gather for their last Sunday practice before their program next week, and we learn how to live more joyfully today.

Link to Worship Livestream: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/A8zjb3Nsyyk?si=v-IxH0y-VNJgXSuZ>

Sunday Bulletin

This Week

Sun., Dec 15	9:00-9:45 am	Bells Rehearsal in the Sanctuary
	9:00-9:45 am	Sunday Morning Text Study in the Youth Room
	9:45-11:15 am	Nursery Open
	10:00-11:00 am	Worship Service in the Sanctuary and Livestream
	10:30-11:15 am	Sunday School (Pre-School – Grade 8)
	11:00-11:30 am	Coffee Fellowship in the Fellowship Hall
	11:00-11:30 am	WEVR Broadcast 106.3 FM
	11:15 am	Game Day
	11:30 am	Christmas Sing Along
Tues., Dec 17	9:00-10:00 am	Yoga
	9:00-10:00 am	Men's Group
	9:00 am-3:00 pm	Among Friends
Wed., Dec 18	1:00-2:30 pm	Adult Bible Study
	3:45-5:15 pm	Wednesday School
	5:15-6:00 pm	Wednesday Meal (sign up!)
	5:45-6:30 pm	Bells
	6:30-7:00 pm	Advent Evening Prayer
	7:00-7:30 pm	HS Class
	7:00-7:30 pm	MS Youth Group
	7:00-8:00 pm	Chancel Choir
Thurs., Dec 19	9:00-10:00 am	Yoga
	9:00 am-3:00 pm	Among Friends
	10:00-11:00 am	Knitting Group
	6:30-7:30 pm	Blue Christmas Worship Service
Sat., Dec 21	10:00 am-12:00 pm	Advent Musical Rehearsal
Sun., Dec 22	9:00-9:45 am	Music Rehearsal in the Sanctuary
	9:00-9:45 am	Sunday Morning Text Study in the Youth Room
	9:45-11:15 am	Nursery Open
	10:00-11:00 am	Worship Service in the Sanctuary and Livestream – Advent Musical
	11:00-11:30 am	Coffee Fellowship in the Fellowship Hall
	11:00-11:30 am	WEVR Broadcast 106.3 FM
Tues., Dec 24	8:00 am-12:00 pm	Church Office Closes at Noon
	4:00-5:00 pm	Christmas Eve Worship
	10:00-11:00 pm	Christmas Eve Worship
Wed., Dec 25		Christmas Day – Church Office Closed
Thurs., Dec 26	8:00 am-4:30 pm	Church Office Open
Fri., Dec 27		Church Office Closed

Assisting in Sunday's worship service are:

Preacher:	Chris Myers
Celebrant:	Stacy Johnson Myers
Cantor:	David Reilly
Liturgist:	Larissa Lueck
Deacons:	Lance Lueck, Marshall Skule, Karen Lloyd, Cindy Gandrud, Kathy Tomlinson
Organist:	Terry Mithun
Nursery:	Kahla Fuller
Live Stream:	Jeff Hoffman
Trustee:	Vicki Sippel
Welcomers:	Dennis and Lynn Linder
Coffee Fellowship:	Larry and Barb Peterson
Counters:	Diane Welsh, Scott Nelson

Altar table flowers are given by David Reilly in memory of Ruth Reilly.

Annual Reports Due: All Committees, please submit your Annual Reports, preferably electronically, by **Mon, Jan 13** to Missy Luedtke at missy@firstchurchrf.org. Annual Reports will be available to the congregation on Sun, Jan 19 for the Sun, Feb 2 Annual Meeting.

Loving God

Advent Evening Prayer: Each Wednesday in Advent, we gather for worship using the Holden Evening Prayer Service of simple songs, scripture and stories. Join us on **Wed, Dec 18 at 6:30 pm** in the sanctuary for the absolutely lovely thirty-minute worship service. Youth Groups, Confirmation Classes and Interns, will all start in worship and then move to class afterward.

Christmas Eve Worship Changes: This year, we will again offer our 4:00 pm Christmas Eve family worship with candlelight, communion and a story for children of all ages. The late service this Christmas Eve will move to 10:00 pm, an hour earlier than previous years. It will again include the choir, communion and candlelight. It is beautiful, and it is not as full as the 4:00 pm family service. Please join us at either service this Christmas Eve as we again welcome the Christ child into our world and lives and consider inviting a friend to join you.

Sunday Morning Text Study: Please join us on Sunday mornings to discuss the Bible passages used in worship. The group meets from **9:00–9:50** in the Youth Room. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Adult Bible Study: Wednesday afternoon Adult Bible Study meets from **1:00–2:30 pm**. The group is discussing *Signs and Wonders* by Amy-Jill Levine. Participants will explore the historical and theological context of Jesus' miracles and wonder what they say to us today. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

2025 Financial Pledges: On Sun, Nov 17th, our Giving Thanks Sunday, we dedicated our financial pledges for 2025. If you did not return yours, please do so today. We need all of our church families and friends to make a financial commitment to support and fund the mission and ministry of the church. These pledges pay for our programs and buildings, mission and staff. Everything from Bibles and aprons for young people to VBS and confirmation, Among Friends to choir, worship and coffee fellowship and so much more. Please return your pledge in the offering plate or the church office. Thank you.

Damascus Project: Our Wisconsin Conference sponsors an online learning community called the Damascus Project with a wide variety of options to grow in faith and living. Their website is: www.the-damascus-project.org. And upcoming topics include a class on UCC History and Polity as well as Theology and Ecology. Check it out!

Loving Neighbor

Poinsettias for Christmas Eve: Poinsettia sales in honor or memory of someone special have begun. The order forms are on the sign-up table. The cost is \$15.00 each. Please return the order form with payment by **Dec 15**. The plants will be on display for the Christmas Eve services. You may pick your plants up after the 10pm service on Christmas Eve. Proceeds of the sales go toward youth activities.

Sharing Families Giving Tree: If you would like to help some children have a better Christmas this year, please select an ornament from the tree and purchase a gift from their wish list. The unwrapped gift with the ornament needs to be at the church **no later than noon TODAY, December 12**. Please give the gift cards to someone in the church office. If you would like to make a cash donation instead, please make out checks to First Congregational Church with "Sharing Families" in the memo line. Thank you for your generosity. If you have questions, please contact Diane Welsh (651-334-3128 or 715-386-6620) or the church office.

The Christmas Fund: The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower income retirees. United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. There are envelopes on the gathering table or you can put a check in the offering plate with "Christmas Fund" on the memo line. Thanks again for your generosity. - Mission Education Committee

Reverse Advent Calendars: "Reverse" reminds us Advent is a season of giving. Rather than getting a toy or candy each day, we will be adding a food item to the Reverse Advent grocery bag. Each bag has a list of a suggested daily donation, but you can use your imagination and add whatever you want. When the bag is full, bring it in and leave it in the gathering area. The Mission Ed Committee will bring all the bags to the Food Pantry at the end of December. Thank you!

Bring Christmas Joy! Each year we invite members of the church family to deliver an amaryllis plant to one of our shut-ins or special church friends. This is a wonderful, family-friendly activity that brings joy to both the giver and recipient. Simply sign up at church, prepare the amaryllis plant, and deliver it. Feel free to add a card or some cookies if you wish. Thank you for being part of this ministry of compassion.

Red Cross Blood Drive: Join us **Fri, Jan 10, 2025**, for the Red Cross Blood Drive held here at church from **11am-5pm**. Donations will help the blood inventory stabilize and ensure patients continue receiving lifesaving blood products. Sign up: <https://www.redcrossblood.org/give.html/drive-results?zipSponsor=firstcongregationalrf>

Thrivent Free Money: Do you have a retirement account through Thrivent? If so, you can designate some or all of your 'choice dollars' to a non-profit such as First Congregational Church. We are now set up to receive such gifts. Talk to the church office if you need more information.

Among Friends is a community-based social respite program serving adults who have memory loss who reside in Pierce and St. Croix Counties. For more information, contact them at (715) 293-2561. Check out the website: amongfriendsrf.com and Facebook page. It is held at the church on **Tuesdays and Thursdays 9am to 3pm**.

Among Friends Volunteers Needed: The Among Friends program for families with dementia needs more helpers. The program has expanded to two days a week and has 12 active guests which means they need more volunteers. Training is provided & the rewards are phenomenal! They are particularly in need of male volunteers but are willing to receive all. Contact the program coordinator Sarah Schaffner at amongfriendsrf@gmail.com

Simpson Shelter Donations: Please note that all donations to the Simpson Shelter need to be **new** items. They will not take anything that is used. Thank you.

Loving Self

Blue Christmas: Join us **Thursday, December 19 at 6:30 pm** for a service of blessing for those who are low in spirit, grieving, lonely, dealing with physical or mental trauma. If you are looking for comfort, hope, wholeness and renewal, join us. Please sign up.

Family Meals: On Wednesday nights, we offer a home-cooked meal in the Fellowship Hall. The cost is \$9 per person with a family max of \$30. **Meals are served from 5:15 to 6:00 pm.** You can get your meal to go if you go through the line (indicate when you sign up). **Reservations must be placed by noon on Tuesdays.** You can make a reservation online, at the sign-up table or by calling the church office.

Dec 18 – Spaghetti and meatballs, salad and garlic toast

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-53292881-wednesday>

Cribbage Night: The cribbage group meets the second Monday. Players are asked to donate \$2 & the group decides which charity. Playing time is **7:00 pm**. All players & abilities welcome. The next game is on **Jan 13**.

Men's Group: Our church men's group meets **every other Tuesday from 9:00-10:00 am** in the Youth Room. All men are welcome to join us for coffee, donuts and lively conversation. We gather for an hour and Pastor Chris leads us into a brief discussion. Our next gatherings are **Tues, Dec 17 and Jan 7 & 21**. Join us!

Women's Group: Interested in fellowship & community with other women? You are invited to join the group at noon every 2nd & 4th Tuesday. Please bring a sack lunch. The next meetings will be **Jan 14 & 28**.

Let's Knit/Craft Together: Join us on **Thursdays at 10:00 am**. We meet at **The Sycamore on the first Thursday of each month and in the Fellowship Hall the other Thursdays**. We have a great time sharing our current projects and enjoying each other's company. Any questions, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103 or firstroe@gmail.com

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.

WISE Corner: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Family Support Group is held on the **2nd and 4th Thursdays at 6:30 pm at the River Falls Public Library**. For more info, call Marg Downing 715-307-5905.

Community Life

Game Day Sunday is Dec 15 following Coffee Fellowship. Please bring a dish to share. Join us!

Christmas Sing Along – Dec 15: Come join members of the choir in the Fellowship Hall about **11:30 am to noon** for some Christmas caroling. Music will be available for all to join and share in the singing. We will be located on the tree-side of the Fellowship Hall. We look forward to having you join us.

Learning Community: Conflict in the Middle East—Save the Date: Please mark your calendars for a Learning Community focused on the Israel/Hamas conflict. Dr. Andrew Latham, Professor of Political Science at Macalester College, will provide a balanced presentation that captures the complexity of the situation in Israel and Palestine. Dr. Latham will include a perspective on the role of the US in the conflict as well as imagine components in a lasting peace for the region. The Learning Community event will be **Tuesday, January 28, 2025, 6:30–8:30 pm**. Please register for the event: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-52650250-learning>

Youth Events

Children's Advent Musical: Sunday School children in pre-school through grade 5 have begun rehearsing the 2024 Advent Musical during Sunday School. **The dress rehearsal will be on Saturday, December 21.** Children in grades 1–5 should arrive at 10:00 am. Children in Pre-School and Kindergarten should arrive at 11:15 am. All the children will be done at noon. **The musical will be presented during worship on Sun, Dec 22.** It is important for all children to regularly attend Sunday School and be present for these rehearsals.

Sign Ups

Coffee Fellowship Hosts Needed: Please sign up to help host and serve. Everything you need is provided, you just need to get there a little early to get things ready, serve and do a quick clean up. Sign up at church or here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-coffee>

Liturgists Needed: Please sign up to be a Sunday liturgist. You will lead us in the Call to Worship and a Scripture text. The bulletin will be sent via email to you on Thursday. Sign up at church or here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-liturgist>

Welcomers Needed: Please sign up to be a welcomer on Sunday morning before the worship service. One person is needed at the bottom of the stairs & one person is needed at the ramp entrance. Please arrive 20 minutes prior to the service. Sign up at church or here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-welcomers>

Altar Table Flowers: Please sign up to provide flowers for the altar for Sunday worship. Sign up at church or here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-altar>

Church App: The church has a mobile phone app. You can download it from the church website or by scanning the QR Code found on a flyer on the sign-up table and Facebook.



Offering QR Code

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

Finances

THANK YOU to all of you for your support of the mission and ministry of our church through your tithes, offerings, and gifts. Your generosity empowers our church! Please be sure to sign up for e-giving or mail/drop off your gifts. There is also an option to give online via our church website.

Treasurer's Report

	<u>Dec 8, 2024</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 4,833	\$ 517,834
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,463	\$ 512,687

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

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

Current Capital Campaign – Nov 24

Total Pledged	\$596,646.00
Total Received to Date	<u>567,319.55</u>
Remaining Balance	\$ 29,326.45

People

- For all who helped cook, serve and clean up after the Christmas Luncheon, which was enjoyed by over 140 people this year, it was delicious!
- For the River Falls High School Costumed Carolers who graced our annual Christmas Luncheon this past week under the direction of Tanner Pietz who sings in our choir, you brought smiles to all of us
- For the \$1198.23 that was donated to the River Falls Food Pantry as the proceeds from our annual Giving Thanks meal in November, thank you for your generosity!
- For our own Matt Cernohous who was recently appointed acting Fire Chief for the River Falls Fire Department, God bless you in your service to our community

Do you have upcoming news or celebrations to share with the congregation? Graduations? Birthdays and Anniversary celebrations? Please email them to office@firstchurchrf.org by Wednesday of each week to be included in the Weekly Word which is sent out on Thursdays.

Prayer: Prayer connects us with God and our neighbors. Each week in the bulletin there is a prayer list of people, situations and thanksgivings that is also sent out by email to help people in their prayer life. You can sign up by contacting the office at office@firstchurchrf.org

Church Office Hours:

Monday through Thursday – 8:30 am to 4:00 pm

Friday – 8:30 to Noon

Church Staff Contact:

Church Office - 715-425-2052

Pastor: Chris Myers - chris@firstchurchrf.org

Education: Stacy Johnson Myers - stacy@firstchurchrf.org

Youth: Alex Plum – rfyouthgroup@gmail.com

Office/Finance: Missy Luedtke - missy@firstchurchrf.org

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