

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

February 1, 2026

*Our mission is to love God
and serve people.*

*Everyone is welcome because
everyone matters.*

Pastor's Page

Thank you to over a hundred of you who showed up for the Prayer Service in our sanctuary Sunday, January 25th. Thanks to your generosity \$1000 in gift cards have been given to local families who are hunkering down, afraid to leave their homes. Thanks to your generosity folks are driving people to work and school. Thanks to your generosity people gathered together to support one another in our quest to be a compassionate, welcoming community. Our mission is to love God and serve people. Everyone is welcome because everyone matters.

Below are the prayers from that service.

Opening prayer

God of Mercy, for generation after generation when your people have been faced with difficulty and hardship they gather together to worship and pray. Send we pray your Holy Spirit upon us gathered here today. Kindle your way of peace. Speed your holy justice. Stand with those living in fear. Encourage us to be your light and love, your courageous disciples to all our neighbors. May we not lose hope that peace and shalom can blanket this earth and this

community here and now. Let the church say. Amen.

Prayer for our Community (Hebrews 10:23-35)

Holy God, your servant Paul encourages us to provoke one another. He calls us to provoke one another to love and do good deeds. Amidst the real tension and real fear, help us to do this--provoke one another to love and good deeds. On the night of his arrest and betrayal as he washed his disciples feet Jesus gave his followers a new commandment--love one another, by this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. God, help us to love, help us to be your body at work in our community today as we seek to love all our neighbors. Bless the good deeds of those delivering food, driving people to and from work and school. Bless the efforts of those trying to keep us safe. Bless the generosity of this community we call home that it may be a true reflection of your love for all your people. Help us to be your beloved community in this time and this place. Lord in your mercy... hear our prayer.

Prayer for Neighbors (Matthew 22:34-40)

God of compassion, you are infinite, beyond measure and outside our ability to imagine. The vastness of your way can never be contained. And yet we try. We try to limit the places you have called us. We try to narrow the expectations you place on us. We try to justify our actions that

don't match your way. Jesus knew this. He knew when the Pharisees asked about the greatest commandment that it was a trap--their attempt to discredit him and his teaching--and yet your son wasn't dissuaded. Jesus forthrightly said loving God and loving neighbors are joined--they cannot be separated--and together they establish the foundation of everything else. When we're honest, we know we, too, look for ways around loving our neighbors. Forgive us, O God. When we are tempted to forget and narrow our definition of neighbor, remind us that we don't have to agree with our neighbors and we don't have to even like our neighbors, but we do have to love them. We have to work for their wellbeing and want the same things for neighbors near and far that we want for ourselves and our children. When we see neighbors, sharpen our eyes until we see you in their place. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Prayer for Wisdom (James 3:13-18)

God of truth, we come before you as people who have too often lost our way. We think we can devise our own truth, shaping it to match our own agenda, our own values. We allow fear and mistrust to cloud our sense of what is right. We think the laws of supply and demand or the market or private investment or the government has the capacity to fix our problems and make our world right.

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Pastor's Page Continued

In our more reflective moments, when we catch a glimmer of your way, we know our earthly ways fall short, and yet we don't change. We cling to our broken ways and close our hearts to what you tell and show us over and over again. Forgive us, O God. Remind us that your wisdom, wisdom that comes to us from above and is beyond our own ways is marked by gentleness, mercy, integrity, and peace. Let that be the measure of our individual and collective actions and commitments. Prod us until we open our imaginations to your wisdom and then stir up in us the willingness to live accordingly. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Prayer for Children (Matthew 18:1-5)

God of love, in your infinite wisdom, you entered our world as a baby, as a child needing love, tenderness and safety. Too often, though, your children today live with fear, isolation, with little hope for the future. There are young people today who have experienced multiple episodes of gun violence, and way too many of them haven't survived. Children are born and spend their childhoods in refugee camps, amid the violence of war and persecution, and in unspeakable poverty. Some children have so much that it never seems enough and their lives become an endless pursuit of entitlement. Forgive us, O God. Forgive our neglect of the young people who depend on us. Help us to reorient our priorities so we protect children as the blessings they are, as our collective path to the future. When we are tempted to forget, remind us that your son once said that unless we change and become like a child—creative, inquisitive, adventurous—we will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Remind us over and over again that the true measure of a society's health and prosperity is found in its commitment to children. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Prayer for Peace (Romans 12)

God, we remember how at Christmas you came into our world as Emmanuel, God with each and every one of us. The prophet Isaiah called him the Prince of Peace. Speed your way of peace in our world, in our community, in our hearts. Too many lives have been disrupted, O God, too many people are living in fear. Too many people are caught in a system that is not working. Speed your way of peace. Keep us from looking at one another as enemies. Do not let hatred and evil infect our hearts and souls. Speed your way of peace. Send your peace to the Good and Pretti families. Send your peace to law enforcement called to do an impossible job. Send your peace to those seeking to deescalate tension so that more innocent lives are not lost. Help us to live as your peacemakers. Help us to hold fast to love and justice. Help us to be good neighbors. Do not let rage and anger win. Speed your peace, O God. We pray all this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray saying...Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Annual Meeting

The 2025 Annual Meeting of the Congregation will be Sunday, February 1 after worship in the Fellowship Hall. The agenda includes familiar and new items including:

- * Passing Reports and approving the 2026 Budget
- * Act on a recommendation to address the Endowment Loan
- * Update on Tuckpointing Project for Bell Tower
- * Act on a recommendation that we become a WISE congregational (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged)
- * Receive updates from our key teams and committees about their accomplishments in 2025 and goals for 2026

We will serve a light brunch with the meeting so please make sure you sign up ahead of time so we have enough food. Childcare will be available for those who sign up. Please come.





Upcoming: Ash Wednesday and Evening Lenten Worship

Ash Wednesday worship will be on Wednesday, February 18, 6:30–7:30 pm in the sanctuary.

Throughout Lent, we will gather together on Wednesday evenings for simple Prayer Around the Cross services. Wednesday Evening Worship will be on Wednesdays February 25, March 4, 11, 18 and 25. Please plan to attend!

Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study

The Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study is discussing Acts with Matthew Skinner's book, *Acts: Catching Up with the Spirit*. The group meets in the library on **Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm**. If you have questions, contact Pastor Stacy.

Upcoming Events

Sunday, February 1

Annual Meeting after Worship in Fellowship Hall

Thursday, February 19

WISE Creative Prayer Flow Workshop (register ahead!)

Wednesday, February 18

Ash Wednesday Worship at 6:30 pm
(Family Meal Starting at 5:15 pm)

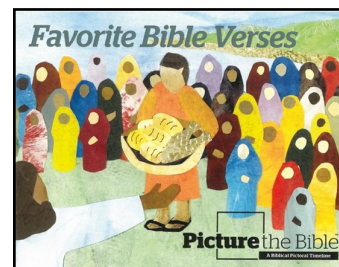
Sunday, February 22

It Takes a Village Choir Concert for Haiti at
Ezekiel Lutheran at 4:00 pm

Sunday Morning Text Study

Please join the Sunday Morning text study conversations. Participants discuss the Bible passages used in worship each week. The groups meets at **9:00–9:50 Sunday mornings in the Youth Room**. Please come! For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Memory Bible Verses



February's memory verse for elementary students is Micah 6:8 -

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”

How do you respond to your call to justice, kindness and humility?

Merry Widows

They will meet on **Friday, February 20 from 1:00-3:00 pm at The Sycamore** in River Falls. They will have pizza & dessert for lunch. All widows are welcome to join us for dinner and conversation! See Linda Morrow for more information.

First Church Companions

We are working to reinvigorate our visits to church members. Are you interested in being a companion to someone in our church connecting with them at least once a month with a call or visit? Or would you like to have someone for a companion. Please use the sign-up sheet to be a companion or request visits.



Please keep Lee Lueck in your prayers after he survived another heart attack, with the quick thinking of his fellow pickleball players on the court and the medics who arrived to take it from there. We ask for God's continued healing & strength during his recovery. We pray his next steps to avoid another one are successful!



Relay for Life Soup Night

Once again the Relay for Life team will have its annual Soup Night to raise money for Relay for Life. Our fundraiser's **Soup Night is March 18 from 5:15-6:00 pm** in the Fellowship Hall. The cost of the meal is a donation of \$9/person or \$30/family as with other Wednesday night meals. There will be a variety of soups, some fruit, and dessert. You are allowed to sample/eat as many of the soups as you like.

The **Relay for Life Event is Friday, April 10** beginning at 5:00 pm at the River Falls High School gym. The theme this year is "We are the World, United for a Cure." It will have the many opportunities to participate in the event with teams selling items, selling luminaries, and the silent auction. Please plan to participate or help our church's team raise money for the fundraiser.

Come and enjoy some soups at the March 18th fundraiser. If you have any questions or would like to join our team: contact Deb Hoffman at debhoffman234b@gmail.com or (612)308-4945.

Creative Prayer Flow—Thursday, February 19, 6:30-8:00 pm

The workshop will be lead by Carrie Windett MA, ATR-BC, LPCC, Be Still Art + Healing, LLC. In this workshop, you'll explore Sensorimotor Art Therapy's guided drawing's three resourcing movements before moving into a time of watercolor play; an invitation for joy and connection. The experience will conclude with reflections on Christ-centered truths and witnessing others.

No artistic experience is required - just open hands and a willing heart to try. The group will meet in the youth room. Please sign up and join us.

What the Pastor is Reading

The Frozen River by Ariel Lawhon

I may be the last person who has not read this book, but it is fabulous. Set in Maine in the late 1700's it chronicles a midwife in a small river town. It has lots of drama and sadness, but ends on a hopeful note of justice. I read this over Christmas break and did not want to put it down! It was another recommendation from one of you. Wonderful quote from the book: "Listening is a skill acquired by the doing."

The Second Fifty: Answers to 7 Big Questions of Midlife and Beyond by Debra Whitman

Written by an executive at AARP who is just getting into her 'second half of life', this is a great read talking about seven questions many of us ask: How long will I live? Will I be healthy? Will I lose my memory? How long will I work? Will I have enough money? Where will I live? How will I die? Lots of scientific exploration of these areas.



Dearest Fellow Worshippers,

It gives me great joy to report Jesus found it favorable to heal me exactly the way He showed / guided me it needed to be done. I'm 100% clear of all b.cancer, and the BRCA2 gene mutation can no longer increase breast nor ovarian cancer in me.

I prayed, He revealed His Will for me, I obeyed & continued praying, and you've been praying (Matthew 18:20); all is going according to His Will. 8 weeks post-op 1/20/26; now I can work on gaining all my strength back. Praise be to God!

I love you in Christ Jesus!

May God bless you all! — Rhonda Klink

2 Timothy 4:17



Hold the Dates: Summer Activities

As you plan for 2026, please keep in mind this coming summer's Vacation Bible School program and the Children's Summer Musical. We will need students and volunteers. Please invite friends and neighbors to participate.

VBS (children age 3 through completed grade 5) will be July 27-30, 9:00-11:30 am.

The Children's Musical (children who have completed kindergarten through grade 6) will be August 10-13, 9:00 am-Noon. Please note the adjusted date for the musical.

Church Family Fused Glass Project

During Lent, members of our church family are invited to work together to create a large fused glass piece of art that will hang by the main stairwell. The theme of the piece will be Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Artists will learn to cut and arrange glass pieces to create the design. Once the art is complete, it will be fused in a glass kiln and then hung on the wall. Please watch for workshop times.



Red Cross Blood Drive

The next Red Cross Blood Drive held at the church is on **Friday, March 16, 11:00 am-5:00 pm.**

See the flyer for more info. Call 1-800-733-2767 or go to www.redcrossblood.org and enter: firstcongregationalrf to schedule an appointment.

Basics for Local Kids

A big thank you to everyone who has donated items. Your support keeps us going. The next few months will be busy times at BLK and volunteers are needed. You can help families shop or you can help sort, restock or organize winter wear. Shifts are usually 2 hours and new days and times are available.

To sign up for a day and time that works for you, go to <https://www.basicsforlocalkids.org/> or call Kim at 715-821-1623.

Contact Renee Whipple at 715-307-5074 if you have any questions.

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. We are now set up to receive such gifts. Talk to the church office if you need more information.

WISE Corner

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Family Support Group meets on the 2nd & 4th Thursdays at 6:30 pm at 113 East Elm St (Mei Mei's) & Peer Support Group meets the same evenings at First Congregational Church at 6:30 pm. Our church WISE Team meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30 pm. For more info, call Marg Downing 715-307-5905.

Treasurer's Report

	Dec 31, 2025
General Fund Income	\$ 557,322.26
General Fund Expenses	\$ 549,379.68
2024 Net Income	\$ 7,942.58

	Jan 18, 2026
General Fund Income *	\$ 55,991.22

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

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

A new budget will be approved at the Feb 1 Annual Meeting.

Church Staff Contact Info

Pastor: Chris Myers—chris@firstchurchrf.org

Education: Stacy Myers—stacy@firstchurchrf.org

Office: Missy Luedtke—missy@firstchurchrf.org

Youth: Alex 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

Troy Zakrzewski—ztruck51ford@gmail.com

Maintenance: Tim Bylander—timthefixitguy@gmail.com

CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING

Minutes for January 20, 2026

Attendance: Pastor Chris Myers, Missy Luedtke, Marie Roe, Norma Revels, Deb Hoffman, Angie Knutson, Lance Lueck, Jo Anne Friedell, David Reilly

Opening Prayer given by Pastor Chris

Approval of Agenda: Motion to approve the agenda made by Lance. Second by David. Passed by Council

Approval of Dec 16, 2025 Council Minutes: Motion to approve the December council minutes made by Angie second by Deb. Passed by Council

Treasurer's Report—Missy—Motion to approve the Treasurer's Report made by Lance. Second by Angie. Passed by Council. Looking at the 2025 year: ended with a surplus of close to \$8000. All missions and all bills were paid in full in December. Council Discussion and recommendation with Missy occurred regarding distribution of the Endowment Fund proceeds: The Investment Committee decided they would disburse 6% of the funds which was \$62,255. The decision by the committee was made due to the growth of the fund in 2025. (Council determines the ways those funds are to be allocated.) Discussion occurred about how to split those funds. Motion made by David: \$20,000 to Endowment Grant and the balance to the General Fund. Lance made 2nd, Passed by Council.

New Business:

Annual Meeting Business

Meal prep—Marie will make arrangements with the caterer. Desserts from Council. Marie will send out sign ups for set up, clean up and desserts to the Council.

Need PowerPoints to Chris by Monday, Jan 26—Presentations by: CE, Deacons, Discipleship, Endowment Grant, Mission, PTB, Trustees, Welcoming, Among Friends and Youth

Agenda approval for the Annual Meeting to be held on February 1, 2026. Motion made by David and second by Deb H. Passed by Council.

Old Business:

Minister for Community Update—Marie—Team: Alan T, Marie E, Suzanne H, Kathy R, Chris M, Carol M. A candidate will be meeting with members of the committee and personnel on Friday, Feb. 13th. Discussion about why not all of the members of the committee were invited to the interview. Marie will follow up with Alan regarding that question.

Christian Education (Angie) - Fused glass project—hopefully installed by Easter. Dates: Ash Wednesday after service. Additional dates have not been set up.

Deacons (Lance) - May need a long-term sub to assist with Deacons obligations

Endowment Grant (Norma) - 2nd Sunday April, July, October and December. \$500.00 spent so far in 2026.

Music (Dave) - Preparing for "It Takes a Village" and Good Friday Cantata

Trustees (Louie) - Given by Marie: Approved Treasurer's Report for 2025 with \$8000 surplus. Tim fixed a boiler noise and raked off the sanctuary. The heat tape is not working. Reviewed of bell tower quotes. Indoor cleanup is scheduled for Saturday Jan. 31st 9-11 am. Approved the 2026 budget with a 3% pay increase for staff (Council approved 4%).

Welcoming Ministry (Deb) - Updating goals from last year. Discussion of creative ways to encourage people to serve at Fellowship and also to Welcome.

Pastor (Chris) - Front automatic door opener broken so must manually open/close. Should be fixed this week. Joyce Kampstra is in hospice care. Chris will be gone Feb 5-9. Steve Kehr from UMC will preach. Pizza party instead of family meals until Ash Wednesday, Thursday Jan 29th—Tiny Home Summit at Luther Memorial at 6 pm. Ash Wednesday is February 18th. Sunday February 22nd: It Takes a Village Concert at 4 pm at Ezekial. Sarah Plum directing.

Moderator (Marie) - Reminder that Marie will send out some type of sign up for the annual meeting.

Adjourn—Motion to adjourn the meeting Norma. Second by Lance. Passed by council.

Items to Keep Track of:

Budget, Endowment Loan Study Group recommendation goes to Annual Meeting. Tuckpointing Capital Campaign authorization at Annual Meeting, Solar Panel Inverters and Monitoring and Safety Training early next year will possibly occur in April 2026.

NEXT MEETING: Feb 17, 2026

Respectfully submitted by Jo Anne Friedell, Clerk

SERVE generously

Grace Place

Supply needs:

- New adult undergarments (underwear up to size XXL)
- New bras
- Thermal underwear (up to size XXL)
- New or like-new sweatpants up to size 4X
- New or like-new T-shirts up to size 4X
- New shoes--adult men & women
- Belts
- Adult socks
- New or like-new winter coats
- Adult gloves
- Good buys

There is a bin at church for donations. Thank you!

Empty Pill Bottles (Prescription Only)

The River Falls Lions Club is collecting empty pill bottles, only the clear prescription bottles that are filled by our pharmacists, 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 tub is in the gathering area. If you have questions, contact Carole Mottaz.

River Falls Food Pantry

The pantry is currently in need of: toilet paper, cereal, peanut butter and cooking oil. Information about donations is on their website at <https://rfcfp.org/>. Donations can be brought to 705 St. Croix Street during their hours of operation:

Mondays 10:00 am–12:00 pm
and 6:00–7:30 pm
Wednesdays 1:00–5:00 pm
Thursdays 6:00–7:30 pm
Fridays 10:00 am–12:00 pm



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 at church** 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

Women's Group

Interested in fellowship and community with other women? You are invited to join the group at noon every 2nd & 4th Tuesday of the month. Please bring a lunch. The next meetings will be **Feb 10 & 24**.

Church Yoga

The yoga group meets on **Tuesdays & Thursdays** in the Fellowship Hall from **9:00-10:00 am** and via Zoom. Please contact the church office to receive the Zoom link.

Men's Group

Our church men's group meets **every other Tuesday**. We gather for conversation and fellowship around a scripture verse or story. All guys are welcome to join us at **9:00 am in the Youth Room**. Our next gatherings are **Feb 3 & 17**. Join us!

Game Day Sunday

Game Day Sunday is held on the third Sunday of the month. Our next Game Days are **Feb 15 & Mar 15 with a new time of 11:45 am**. Join us!



Veterans Coffee Chat

Held on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month at 9:30 am at The Sycamore in River Falls. Coffee and pastries are provided. Contact Megan at The Sycamore 715-997-3441 with questions.



Offering QR Code

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



Among Friends
RIVER FALLS, WI

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 and Thursdays from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm**.



FIRST
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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
Missy Luedtke, Office Administrator
Marie Roe, Moderator
Alex Plum, Youth Minister
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
Troy Zakrzewski, 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

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RIVER FALLS, WI 54022

FEBRUARY 1, 2026

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.