

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

February 15, 2026

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

**Everyone is welcome because
everyone matters.**



Pastor's Page

Mixed Blessings

One of the scripture texts we encounter between the seasons of Christmas and Lent is the Beatitudes, those beautiful words about blessing, this year taken from Matthew 5. When we think of blessings, usually we think of good things: A well-deserved vacation! Time with family! A snow day! A good meal! And those can all be wonderful blessings. Hallelujah and thanks be to God!

But listen to blessings Jesus talks about in Matthew 5:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Mourning and hungering are not activities we normally consider blessings. What is Jesus talking about here?

Someone at church recently recommended the book Tailspin by John Armbruster, a Wisconsin high school teacher and author. He tells the true story of Gene Moran from Soldier's Grove, Wisconsin whose plane was shot down over Germany in World War 2 and who survived a four-mile fall from the sky in the tail of his airplane without a parachute. It is a truly miraculous story and book (see details later in the newsletter under 'What the Pastor is Reading').

Toward the end of the book, after Gene had died, his family travels to Germany to the very spot he was shot down. The community there was dedicating a monument to the 10 men (8 of whom died) who crashed just outside their town. Just think about that — a monument to the very people who were dropping bombs on you. At the dedication ceremony one of the speakers spoke about being a 6-year-old boy sitting in a bomb shelter with his grandmother. As explosions shook the ground all around him, his grandmother told him not to be afraid but to be grateful for the Allied bombing because it was the only way Nazism would be

destroyed. Those bombs she said, were a blessing. Incredible. The speaker ended with these words: *No German today carries any grudges toward any Allied airmen or soldiers, because they were needed to bring peace.*

God desires peace. Between nations. Between people. Between you and me. And between you and the person you are not feeling too great about right now. Seventy-five years ago, who would have thought Germans and Americans would be friends? Who would have thought bombs could be a blessing? Who would have thought peace was possible. May we live and act as those who believe peace is possible and who are actively working toward it.

In Gratitude, PC

Upcoming Events

Wed, Feb 18 - Family Meals each
Wednesday Night Serving from
5:15 to 6:00 pm

Wed, Feb 18 - Ash Wednesday
Worship at 6:30 pm

Thurs, Feb 19 - WISE Creative
Prayer Flow Workshop (sign up!)

Sun, Feb 22 - It Takes a Village
Choir Concert for Haiti at Ezekiel
Lutheran Church at 4:00 pm

Wed, Feb 25 - Prayer Around the
Cross Lenten Service in the
Fellowship Hall

Sun, Mar 8 - Dedication of the
Spring Break Mission Team to
Back Bay Mission

Sun, Mar 22 - Mission Team
Returns and Helps Lead Worship



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!

Sunday Morning Text Study

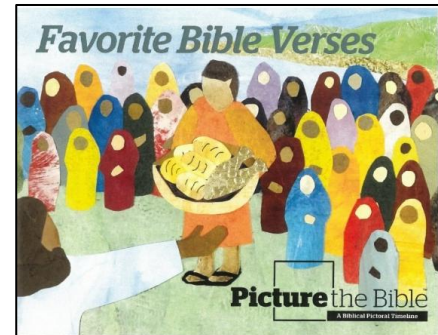
Please join us on Sunday mornings to ponder the Bible passages used in worship. The group meets at **9:00–9:50 Sunday mornings in the Youth Room**. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study

The Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study is finishing a study of the New Testament Book of Acts and will begin a new study on March 4. The beginning of a study is a good time to join the group. The group meets in the Fireplace Room on **Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm**. If you have questions, contact Pastor Stacy.

Fused Glass Project

The Christian Education Committee is organizing a project 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.



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?

First Congregational Receives Catalyst Grant for Tiny Home Project

In December 2025, First Congregational applied for a Catalyst Grant through the Wisconsin Conference, UCC, to support Wellspring Village, the Tiny Home project First Congregational is working on with other congregations in River Falls. We recently learned that we were awarded the full \$5,000 grant for the project. While funding needs for this project will be considerable, \$5,000 is a very helpful start.

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 someone to visit you.

Annual Meeting Follow Up

At the 2025 Annual Meeting held February 1, in addition to electing officers, passing the 2026 budget and receiving reports we also:

- * Authorized a team to investigate and bring forth a plan to pay for a tuckpointing project in our church bell tower
- * Passed a resolution to pay back the Endowment Fund for the \$300,000 loan taken out from ourselves during the 2011 building expansion project
- * Were reminded that the Kitzerow Music Fund, which pays for things like Music at First Church Concerts and River Falls Days Concerts, will soon be all spent leaving no dedicated way to pay for these events

Please also see the copy of the Graphic Annual Report contained in the pages of this newsletter. How many babies did you find? 😊



Tiny Homes for Homeless in River Falls

We had a great showing for the inaugural gathering for this project to provide a village of tiny homes for those facing housing insecurity in River Falls. Over 60 people from 6 different churches plus community members gathered at Luther Memorial Church to learn more about Wellspring Village. Next up is a smaller gathering of leaders who will shepherd this project to the next phase. Our church will have two spots on the leadership team.

Please see Pastors Chris and Stacy for more information and to sign up to get mailings. We will soon need volunteers to build, clean, work with guests and of course fund raise. Keep this project in your prayers at this critical initial phase.

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

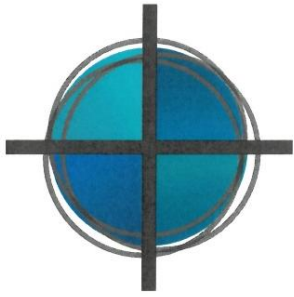
The workshop will be led by Carrie Windett MA, ATR-BC, LPCC, Be Still Art + Healing, LLC. In this workshop, you'll explore Sensorimotor Art Therapy's guided drawing's three resourcing movements before moving into a time of watercolor play; an invitation for joy and connection. The experience will conclude with reflections on Christ-centered truths and witnessing others. No artistic experience is required - just open hands and a willing heart to try. Please sign up at church or online and join us.



Wednesday 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, the sign-up table or by calling the church office.

February 18	Taco bar, Spanish rice, chips
February 25	Lasagna and chicken alfredo, salad, garlic toast
March 4	BBQ pork, mac 'n cheese, potatoes, vegetable, roll
March 11	Chicken marsala, rice, asparagus, salad
March 18	Relay for Life Soup Supper
March 25	Beef stroganoff, noodles, salad, bread



FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH, UCC
RIVER FALLS

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

WORSHIPfaithfully



Sunday worship

IN-PERSON
LIVESTREAM
RADIO

Lenten
Prayer
Around
the Cross

Advent
Evening
Prayer

Holy Week
Worship

Christmas
Eve
Candlelight



Baptized
3



Confirmed
7



3
Weddings



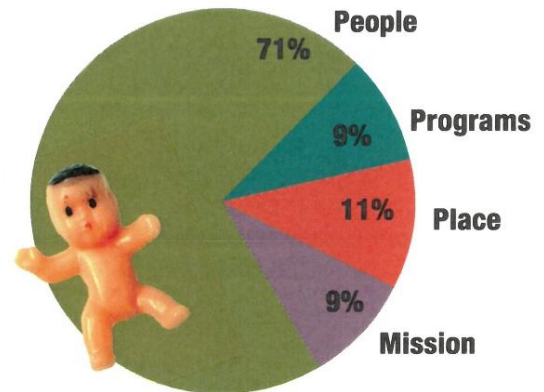
Funerals
10

FINANCIALgifts

Total Church Income: **\$557,322**

Total Church Expenditures: **\$549,380**

Surplus: **\$7942**



WELCOMEopenly



Received **11**
new members

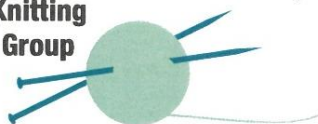


Men's
Group



Widow's
Group

Knitting
Group



Music at First Church
Piano, Violin, Viola
Organ
Bluegrass



Gathered for yoga

GROW spiritually



Sunday school



Wednesday school



19
confirmation students

14
church interns

35 children
for Vacation Bible School

"Be the Light!"

Adult Bible Study



Sunday morning
Text Study



Learning Community:

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Rudolph Bostic
Exploring Political Polarization*

Malice in the Palace
Summer Children's Musical



Built a **Mud Kitchen** for VBS



CARE passionately

Pastoral Calls & Contacts

Too many to count!



Gathered **school supplies** for **422** community children

Delivered **amaryllis plants** to special friends

22



Sent **40** college packs



Gathered twice weekly
Among Friends



American Cancer Association
Relay for Life



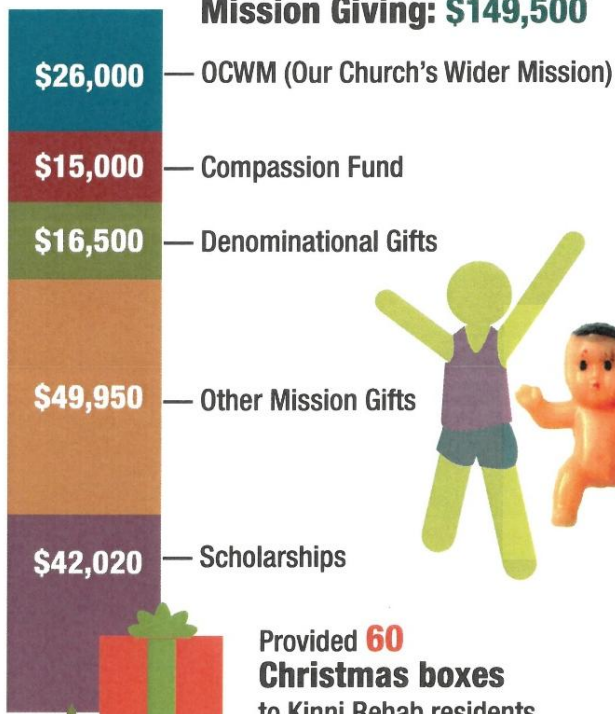
Mission Support for:

Among Friends
Area Resource Center
Back Bay Mission
Basics for Local Kid
EarthFest
Falcon Links
Feed My Starving Children
Habitat for Humanity
Hope for Earth
Operation Help
Our Neighbors' Place
River Falls Food Pantry
River Falls Free Clinic
Servant of the Shepherd
Turningpoint
UCC's wider Missions
UCC Camps



SERVEgenerously

Mission Giving: \$149,500

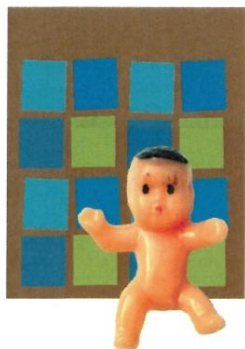


Provided **60 Christmas boxes** to Kinni Rehab residents

Gave gifts to **10 families**, including **20 kids**, through Sharing Families



Gathered **9,562 diapers** for the community



Gave **\$2104** to the River Falls Food Pantry with a **Reverse Advent calendar**, *giving* treats/food to the food pantry rather than *receiving* chocolate

Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, just as you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." —Matthew 25:40

BREAKING BREADtogether

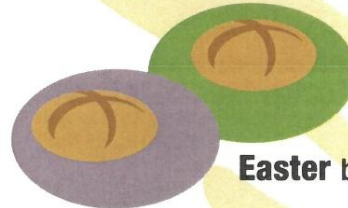
Celebrated weekly **Communion**



Gathered for our annual **Giving Thanks** meal



Christmas luncheon



Easter breakfast



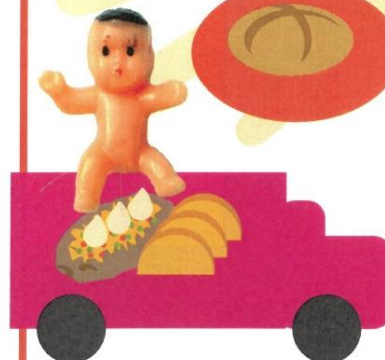
Advent family meals



Lenten family meals



Wednesday night family meals



Served **loaded potatoes and tacos** from Rollin' River Food Truck for **River Falls Days**



Delivered **1438 pounds** of food

YOUTH serving & fun

Ultimate Frisbee
Stick Figures Rock Climbing
Wonderland Nintendo Switch/Wii
Feed My Starving Children
Exploding Kittens Mario Kart
Four Square Hues and Cues
UWRF Basketball/Hockey
Sardines Day Trip to the Cities

Service projects

Served the Giving Thanks meal

Served Easter breakfast

Played *Among Us* – live!

Worked at
Feed My Starving Children
at Tattersall in River Falls

CARE FOR creation

23,000 Kwh

Electricity generated
by solar panels
was enough to power
3.5 homes
for a year

We diverted
22 tons
of carbon
from the atmosphere

Solar energy
generated on our roof
was the equivalent of

95
barrels of
oil

900 propane
cylinders

Raked leaves and
cared for our garden

2025 WAS THE YEAR WE ...

Paid off the Endowment Fund
loan to the building project

Hosted
4
blood
drives

Started a fund
to restore
the bell tower

Sold and distributed 455 peaches,
earning \$1970 for the youth fund

Celebrated VBS with a
Bubble Machine

Reflected on W-Words for Lent,
prayed with an Advent devotional,
and revised our
Discipleship Traits poster

Installed a new
sound system
in the sanctuary

Hid 100s of tiny babies
all over the church
(thanks to Alex Plum and co.)
How many can you find here?

Prepared
2 meals for the
Simpson Shelter
in Minneapolis

Got a new sign



Join our 20th Anniversary Ecumenical Fundraising Concert for a memorable night of music supporting vital projects in Ganthier, Haiti.

It Takes a Village

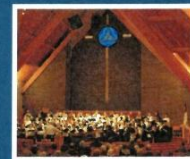
Sunday, February 22 at 4:00 pm

Ezekiel Lutheran Church

202 South 2nd St. | River Falls, WI

A free-will offering will be collected to support the school, orphanage, and health center—bringing hope and lasting impact.

A dessert reception will follow the concert.



Featuring: Croix Chordsmen Chorus, Cross Lutheran Choir (Roberts), Ezekiel's Chancel Choir, First Congregational Church Choir, Pierce County Ecumenical, UWRF-University Community Chorus, and a mass choir number

Learn more about this nonprofit at HaitianRelief.org



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 **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, & dessert. You can 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 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.

If you have questions or would like to join our team, contact Deb Hoffman at debhoffman234b@gmail.com or (612)308-4945.

People in the Pews: Dan and Mari Koecher

We’d like to introduce the Koecher family! My husband, Dan - son of Steve and Lara Koecher - grew up in New Brighton, MN, and moved to River Falls in eighth grade. I’m Mari (Pechacek) Koecher, and I’ve lived in River Falls my entire life. Dan and I are high school sweethearts and have been married for six wonderful years.

We now live just a few miles outside of town with our two daughters, Lydia and Nora. Our family has been attending First Congregational Church for the past four years. After our girls were born, we knew we wanted to raise them in the fullness of faith, and we’ve found FCC to be a warm and welcoming community, especially as we navigate the early years of parenthood alongside other young families.

A little more about us: both of our daughters spent time in the NICU after birth - Lydia arrived at 32 weeks and Nora at 36. They each needed some extra care to ensure they were ready to thrive at home, and those experiences strengthened our faith in countless ways.

As I’ve grown from daughter to wife to mother, one phrase my father always instilled in me has become a guiding reminder: *“Let go and let God.”* Although it isn’t a direct biblical quote, it has shaped my trust in God through every chapter of life.



What the Pastor is Reading

Tailspin by John Armbruster

This was recommended by one of you. It is the true story of a farm kid from Soldier’s Grove, Wisconsin whose plane was shot down over Nazi Germany in World War 2 and survived a 4 mile drop in the tail of his airplane with no parachute. It is a miraculous story that is inspiring and exactly what I needed to be reading at this moment in time. It gave me deep hope. Read it, even if you are not a war story fan.

Unreasonable: The Power of Giving People More than They Expect by Will Guidara

Written by an award-winning restaurateur in New York City he talks about his strategy of bringing a mid-tier, nice but pretty average restaurant to three Michelin stars. Surprisingly it has nothing to do with the food and more to do with training of staff and setting a vision for hospitality. What would happen if the church thought like this?



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, from 9:00-11:30 am.

The Children's Musical (children who have completed kindergarten through grade 6) will be August 10-13, from 9:00 am-Noon.



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. 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, 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.

Name Tags

We encourage you to wear your name tags so that everyone can call you by name. It would also help the deacons when you take communion. If you do not have one, please let Missy in the church office know at missy@firstchurchrf.org. In appreciation, the Welcoming Committee.

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

	Week of Feb 8, 2026	Year to Date
General Fund Income*	\$ 2,983	\$ 105,477
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 11,308	\$ 67,848

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
 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

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

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.

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**.

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!

Merry Widows

They will meet on **Friday, Feb 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.

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.

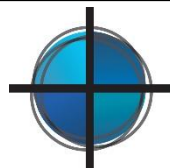
Among Friends

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



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'



FIRST
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CHURCH, UCC
RIVER FALLS

Office Phone: 715-425-2052
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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

U.S. POSTAGE PAID

PERMIT #53

RIVER FALLS, WI 54022

FEBRUARY 15, 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 and 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 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.