

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

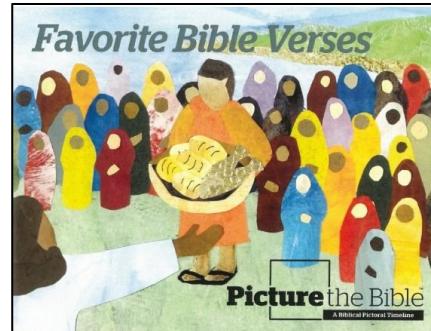
Please join us on Sunday mornings to ponder the Bible passages used in worship. The group meets at **9:00-9:50 Sunday mornings in the Youth Room**. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

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

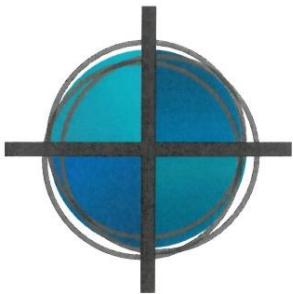
The workshop will be led by Carrie Windett MA, ATR-BC, LPCC, Be Still Art + Healing, LLC. In this workshop, you'll explore Sensorimotor Art Therapy's guided drawing's three resourcing movements before moving into a time of watercolor play; an invitation for joy and connection. The experience will conclude 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
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CHURCH, UCC
RIVER FALLS

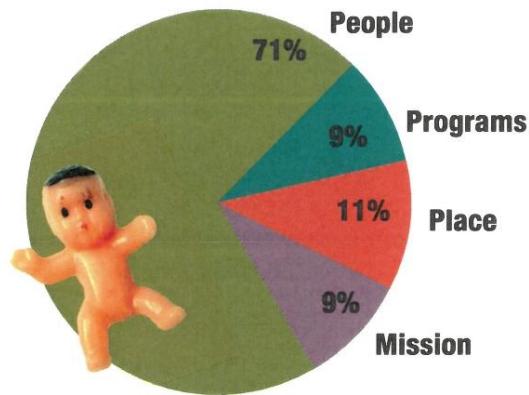
ANNUAL REPORT 2025

WORSHIP faithfully



FINANCIAL gifts

Total Church Income: **\$557,322**
Total Church Expenditures: **\$549,380**
Surplus: **\$7942**



WELCOME openly



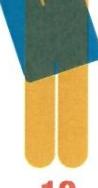
GROW spiritually



Sunday school

30

Sunday school



19 confirmation students

14 church interns

Adult Bible Study



Sunday morning Text Study

Text Study



Malice in the Palace
Summer Children's Musical

Built a **Mud Kitchen** for VBS



Wednesday school

24

Wednesday school



35 children for Vacation Bible School



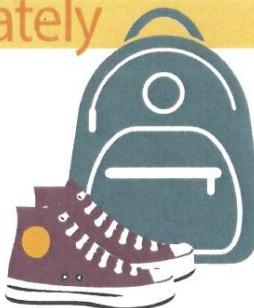
Learning Community:
Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Rudolph Bostic
Exploring Political Polarization

CARE passionately



Pastoral Calls&Contacts

Too many to count!



Gathered school supplies for 422 community children



Delivered amaryllis plants to special friends

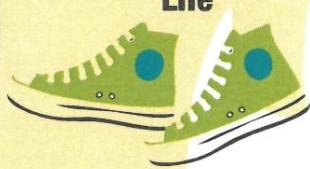
22

Gathered twice weekly Among Friends



Sent 40 college packs

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

\$26,000	— OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission)
\$15,000	— Compassion Fund
\$16,500	— Denominational Gifts
\$49,950	— Other Mission Gifts
\$42,020	— Scholarships



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 BREAD together

Celebrated weekly
Communion



Gathered for our annual
Giving Thanks meal



Easter breakfast



Advent
family meals



Lenten
family meals



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



Delivered
1438 pounds
of food

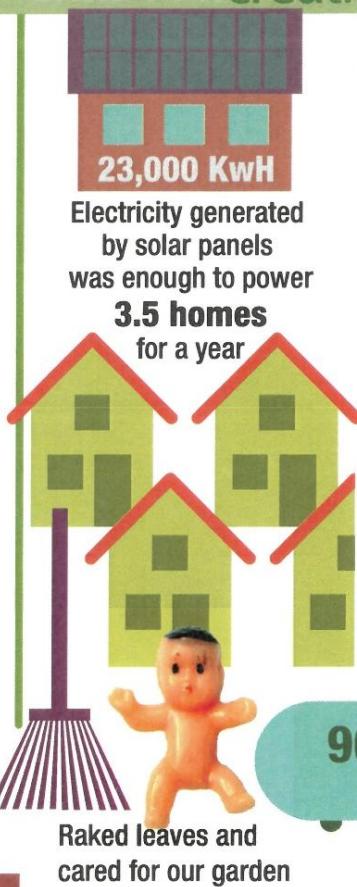
YOUTH serving&fun

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

Service projects

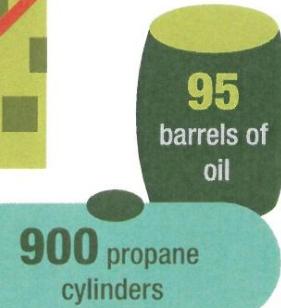


CARE FOR creation



We diverted **22 tons** of carbon from the atmosphere

Solar energy generated on our roof was the equivalent of



2025 WAS THE YEAR WE ...

Paid off the **Endowment Fund** loan to the building project

Hosted **4** blood drives

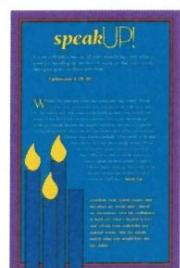
Celebrated VBS with a **Bubble Machine**

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?



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



Started a fund to **restore** the bell tower



Prepared **2** meals for the **Simpson Shelter** in Minneapolis





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

It Takes a Village

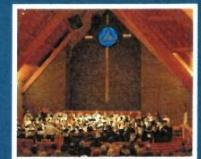
Sunday, February 22 at 4:00 pm

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 restauranteur 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.

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.

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.

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		
<u>Feb 8, 2026</u>		<u>Year to Date</u>

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://rfcp.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.

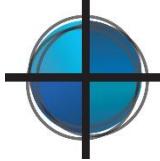
Among Friends

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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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-alter>

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.