

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

March 1, 2026

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

**Everyone is welcome because
everyone matters.**



Pastor's Page

To many people, Lent is a needless, dour season. Like winter in Wisconsin, too many want to just get past it. Spring! Easter! But what if instead of dour, it is a season of new possibilities? What if instead of a season to rush through, it is season in which to linger and savor it for what it is instead of what it isn't? Jan Richardson is a Methodist pastor and author, and she has a beautiful reflection about Lent and Ash Wednesday.

All those days you felt like dust, like dirt, as if all you had to do was turn your face toward the wind and be scattered to the four corners or swept away by the smallest breath as insubstantial -

Did you not know what the Holy One can do with dust?

This is the day we freely say we are scorched.

This is the hour we are marked by what has made it through the burning.

This is the moment we ask for the blessing that lives within the ancient ashes, that makes its home inside the soil of this sacred earth.

*So let us be marked not for sorrow.
And let us be marked not for shame.*

Let us be marked not for false humility or for thinking we are less than we are but for claiming what God can do within the dust, within the dirt, within the stuff of which the world is made and the stars that blaze in our bones and the galaxies that spiral inside the smudge we bear.

May you linger in this season of Lent, open to the new possibilities God has set before each of us.

In Gratitude, Pastor Chris



Holy Week Schedule

Palm Sunday

Palms and Hosannas
Sunday, March 29 at 10:00 am

Maundy Thursday Worship

Thursday, April 2 at 6:30 pm

Good Friday

The Passion
Friday, April 3 at 6:30 pm with
Choir Cantata

Easter Sunday

Alleluias and New Life
Sunday, April 5 at 9:00 and
10:30 am (note change!)

Easter Breakfast

Served by Youth 8:00-10:15 am
(please make a reservation)

2026 Lenten Devotional

First Congregational's 2026 Lenten devotional is ready for people to pick up. There is a scripture reading, a brief reflection, and a prayer for each of the six weeks in Lent.

Upcoming Events

Wednesday, March 4
Prayer Around the Cross Worship
in the Fellowship Hall at 6:30 pm
preceded by Family Meal

Sunday, March 8
Dedication of the Spring Break
Mission Team to Back Bay Mission

Wednesday, March 11
Prayer Around the Cross Worship
in the Fellowship Hall at 6:30 pm
preceded by Relay Soup Supper

Wednesday, March 18
Prayer Around the Cross Worship
in the Fellowship Hall at 6:30 pm
preceded by Family Meal

Sunday, March 22
Mission Team Returns and
Helps Lead Worship

Wednesday, March 25
Prayer Around the Cross Worship
in the Fellowship Hall at 6:30 pm
preceded by Family Meal

Thursday, April 2
Maundy Thursday Worship
at 6:30 pm

Friday, April 3
Good Friday Choir Cantata
at 6:30 pm

Sunday, April 5
Easter Worship at 9:00 and 10:30
am with Breakfast Serving from
8:00 to 10:15 am (sign up)



Prayer Around the Cross—Lenten Worship

Our Lenten Prayer Around the Cross worship services are each Wednesday until Holy Week. Join us in the Fellowship Hall at 6:30 pm for this brief, meaningful, candle-lit service focused on prayer, simple songs and a brief, focused message.

The Wednesday night family meal precedes each worship service serving from 5:15 to 6:00 pm. Please sign up for the meal by Tuesday.

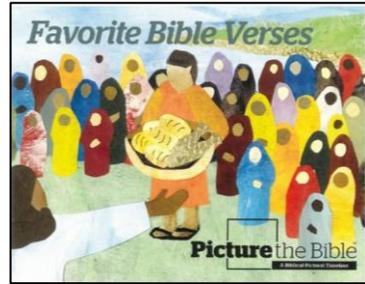
Sunday Morning Text Study

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 will begin studying the book of Ruth 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**. To receive a copy of the study book or if you have questions, contact Pastor Stacy.



Memory Bible Verses

March’s memory verse for elementary students is Psalm 46:10 –

“Be still, and know that I am God!”

Why might stillness be needed to feel God?



Easter Lilies

Those wanting to have Easter lilies in honor or memory of loved ones, please fill out the form on the sign-up table or contact the church office. The lilies will be displayed on Easter morning and may be taken home following the 10:30 worship service or can be donated to a shut-in. The cost is \$15 each.

Orders must be placed by March 29. Proceeds go to our Youth Fund.

Wednesdays in Lent

In Lent, our Wednesdays look a little different. Here is our full Wednesday schedule. Join us!

Wednesday School	4:00 to 5:15 pm
Family Meals	5:15 to 6:00 pm (serve times—reserve your spot!)
Bell Practice	5:45 to 6:30 pm
Prayer Around the Cross	6:30 to 7:00 pm
Confirmation/Youth Group/Interns	6:30 to 7:30 pm (start out at Prayer Around the Cross)
Choir Practice	7:00 to 8:00 pm

Fused Glass Project

The Lenten fused glass project is underway! The theme of the piece will be Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Artists have started making a border for the art. The next steps will be to create a section representing churning chaos and another the life-giving sun.



Wellspring Village: Tiny Homes for Homeless in River Falls

The movement continues with a leadership gathering of the six churches as we seek to build tiny homes to address housing insecure folks in our own community. We received a grant from the Wisconsin Conference for \$5,000 who remarked about the interchurch and community support for this project. Stay tuned for more updates soon!

Join us for Easter Breakfast – Sunday, April 5

Easter Breakfast will be served from **8:00 am to 10:15 am**. The menu will be blueberry French toast, eggs benedict casserole, scrambled eggs with cheese, sausage links, bacon, mixed fresh fruit, Danishes and cinnamon rolls, coffee, apple and orange juice and milk.

Cost is \$10 per person with a family max of \$40, all of which goes to our Youth Fund for mission trips and opportunities. Please sign up by Wed, April 1 at church or online.



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.

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| 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 |



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.

One Great Hour of Sharing

One Great Hour of Sharing is one of four special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ within the Wider Church Ministries. We need to support this ministry, maybe now more than ever.

Envelopes are in the pews and on the sign-up table. Thank you for your generous support. - Mission Education Committee

Earth Fest 2026

Earth Fest is a free community celebration that includes live music, fun family activities, food sampling, a sustainability and wellness fair, free giveaways, and more.

Earth Fest will be held on **Saturday, April 25, from 12:00-4:00 pm at UW-River Falls University Center**. Please see the flyer for more information.

Habitat for Humanity

St. Croix Valley Habitat for Humanity is holding their Foundations of Hope Gala on March 28th at Kilkarney Hills Golf Course from 5:30-9:30 pm.

The Gala is celebrating the homeowners, volunteers, and work they have done for the past 30 years. Their next build will be in Baldwin for a health care worker. Register for the Gala by March 15th at onecau.se/Celebrate30.

Ukraine Relief

A quick but heart felt thank you to so many of you who have contributed to refugee relief for those living through the war in Ukraine. Nearly \$25,000 has been given by folks in this congregation to help.

Funds have been funneled through Church World Service through their Moldova office to pay rent, provide food, medicine and schooling. Thank you church! May this madness soon end and peace come.

What the Pastor is Reading

Dominion by Tom Holland

This is a big, bold, loooong book. Not a history of Christianity but tracing how many of the values we hold today are not so much universal but uniquely Christian. The concepts of things like human rights, equality and even feminism are based not so much on universal rights but Christianity. This is an important work.

Garden City: Work, Rest and Art of Being Human by John Mark Comer

I love this author. Super easy to read and relevant. In this book he asks the question: what does it mean to be fully human and alive? He talks about work, rest and the afterlife. He really zeroes in on our vocation or work today and how it can and should be connected to our faith. Good read.



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 15, 2026	Year to Date
General Fund Income*	\$ 8,293	\$ 101,531
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 11,308	\$ 79,156

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

Church Council Minutes - February 17, 2026

Treasurer's Report – Missy - Note: Music staff salaries are now all coded correctly. Payroll looks off because new raises didn't get approved until the Annual Meeting in February. That will be adjusted retroactively. First quarter Missions were paid in February.

New Business:

Annual Meeting Business Follow Up

2025 surplus allocation - Reserve Fund. There is currently \$14,000 in the reserve fund account. If there are surplus funds at the end of the budget year, the Council approves depositing the funds into the reserve account. This is for emergencies the church may experience. Louie made the motion of depositing the surplus of \$7943.00, second by Deb. Passed by Council.

\$300k loan payback progress and status - The transaction has been completed. It is in a liquid account that can currently earn 4%. Investment advice has been obtained to determine how the funds should be invested. There is approximately \$44,000 remaining in the building fund to be used towards future building projects. Louie made the motion that the tuck-pointing fund be merged into the building fund with the condition that 50% of the building fund be used for the bell tower repair. Second made by Lance. Passed by Council.

Tiny Homes Update – The UCC Catalyst Grant was awarded to the Tiny Homes project. The Grant is for \$5000. There is a leadership meeting on March 3rd. Carol Mottaz and Thomas Oscanyan will be attending the meeting along with Pastors Chris and Stacy. Each participating congregation commits to building one tiny home. The cost of the tiny home is \$10,000-\$11,000. This grant funds ½ of our commitment.

Old Business:

Minister for Community Update – Marie - Team: Alan T, Marie E, Suzanne H, Kathy R, Chris M, Carol M. Person of interest declined an interview. There is another person of interest that Chris will be contacting.

Ministry:

Christian Education (Angie) - No meeting tonight. Fused glass project planning underway. Lenten Service tomorrow.

Deacons (Lance) - Mourning loss of Loral Keil. Her funeral is on April 4th. Visitation at 10 am and service at 11 am at Bakken Young. Deacons are conducting a Safety Plan review. Looking for wedges for the classroom doors and recommending more lighting by the sidewalk in front. Annual safety training suggested for September with a refresher this April.

Endowment Grant (Norma) - Update from Chris: \$19,500 in funds. April 1st is next deadline.

Mission Education (Larry) - Earth Fest-UCC will participate. Earth Balls project to give out to kids. Sleep in Heavenly Peace bed making project participation is being explored. Carol M going to Back Bay with 15 others. Madeline is creating a link on the website to our Mission Partners to learn how to volunteer.

Music (Dave) - Update from Chris: It Takes a Village concert this Sunday at Ezekiel.

Trustees (Louie) - Reviewing building for addition of handrails in the hallway. Tim and Chris found the leak in the women's bathroom and were able to get it repaired. Ash trees removed from the front of the church by the city. Recommending we all exercise caution on the sidewalk to the front of the church. The fire suppression system froze, thawed, and began leaking in the sanctuary. A repair company was hired to complete the repair. Tuck-pointing project/bell tower project - There is a team developed to oversee the project. Tim Bylander, Matthew Meyer, and Lance Lueck have all expressed interest in serving on the team. May consider looking at a timeline/deadline to complete the project.

Welcoming Ministry (Deb) - Updated goals, requesting that committees start asking members to sign up as Welcomers

Pastor (Chris) - Pizza party went really well. Very well attended. Relay for Life - Hotdish night on April 8th in addition to soup night on March 18th.

Moderator (Marie) - Next meeting will be March 24th.

Grace Place

Supply needs:

- Shampoo - large or travel size
- Conditioner - large or travel size
- Body wash - large or travel size
- Body lotion - large or travel size
- New or like-new wash cloths
- New or like-new bath towels
- New or like-new hand towels
- New or like-new twin and full size sheets
- New or like-new twin and full size blankets
- New pillows
- 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 fristroe@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 **March 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 **March 3 & 17**. Join us!

Merry Widows

They will meet on **Thursday, March 19 at 1:00 pm at St. Croix Lanes** in River Falls. 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 **March 15 at 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**.



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FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
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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

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**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

110 N. Third Street
River Falls, Wisconsin 54022
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NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

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RIVER FALLS, WI 54022
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MARCH 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 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.