

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

March 15, 2026

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

**Everyone is welcome because
everyone matters.**



Pastor's Page

Many of us can remember exactly where we were when they heard President Kennedy had been shot. Even more of us can remember what they were doing when they heard or saw images of the World Trade Center fallings on September 11, 2001. The same thing is true of the good things that have happened to us to - marriages, births, graduations, engagements. On each of these occasions, sad and joyous, a whole new world opens up to us.

For Christians, Holy Week is the most important week of the year. It is a fast-paced roller coaster ride from the joy of Palm Sunday, to the uncertainty of the Last Supper, to the agony of Good Friday, and then finally ends with shouts of joy on Easter dawn. Holy Week has the potential to open up a new world for us. Holy Week is not just God's way of reminding us of the way things unfolded that week nearly two thousand years ago. In a way that continues to amaze and astonish me, our participation in

the full Holy Week experience seems to be God's way of shaping Christian people today - immersing them in the story and then empowering them to be God's people today.

This year, I invite you to do a deep dive into the Holy Week experience. Each day serves a different purpose in our faith walk. On Palm Sunday we welcome Jesus as king, but as a different kind of king who rides a donkey, instead of a war horse. On Maundy Thursday we see how Jesus transforms the Passover meal into the sacrament of communion then washes his disciple's feet with a call to love one another. On Good Friday we watch as Jesus is abandoned by all, even he fears by God. And on Easter Sunday we encounter the impossibility of the empty tomb and resurrected life. Join us for each of these days as we see the full depth of God's love and ponder how these days can shape us in our discipleship walk today. Please remember to invite your friends and family members who do not have a church home.

Upcoming Events

Wednesday, March 18
Prayer Around the Cross Worship
in the Fellowship Hall at 6:30 pm
preceded by Relay for Life
Soup Supper

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 & 10:30 am
with Breakfast Served from
8:00 to 10:15 am (sign up)

Wednesday, April 8
Last Wednesday Night Meal
Relay for Life Hotdish Night!

**Join us for
Holy Week Worship**

Palm Sunday	Mar 29 10:00 am
Maundy Thursday	April 2 6:30 pm
Good Friday Cantata	April 3 6:30 pm
Easter Sunday	April 5 9:00 & 10:30 am
Easter Breakfast	April 5 8:00-10:15 am

All Are Welcome!



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.

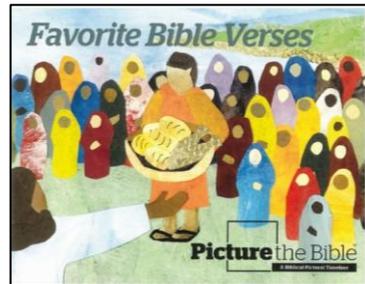
Sunday Morning Text Study

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 Old Testament book of Ruth on March 11. 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**. Copies of the Ruth study are in the office for no charge. 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 continues! The theme of the piece will be Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Children have worked on an area representing chaos – the time before God the Creator brought order to all that is. They have also completed a sun and a rainbow. Next up: mountains and trees!



Wellspring Village: Tiny Homes for Homeless in River Falls

The movement continues as we seek to build tiny homes to address housing insecure folks in our own community. Our church leadership team includes Carole Mottaz, Tom Oscanyan, Marshall Skule and Pastor Chris. 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! The goal is to have a least one or two tiny homes open as early as this summer.

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.

- | | |
|----------|---|
| March 18 | Relay for Life Soup Supper - variety of soups, fruit, dessert |
| March 25 | Beef stroganoff, noodles, salad, bread |
| April 1 | Holy Week - No meal |
| April 8 | Relay for Life Hotdish Night - variety of hotdishes, fruit, dessert |



Relay for Life

The annual Soup Night, a fundraiser for Relay for Life will be March 18th from 5:15-6:00 pm. We will have a variety of soups to taste and enjoy. New this year as another fundraiser is Hotdish Night on April 8th. We will be serving a variety of hotdishes to taste and enjoy. We will even have the winning hotdish from our church's "Hotdish Competition" years ago available to enjoy.

We will have luminaries available both nights to make "in honor of" or "in memory of" a special person. The cost of the luminaries is \$10/bag. Our team is also looking for some silent auction items and ideas to share at the Relay event, please share with a team member or Deb Hoffman.

The cost of the meals is a donation to Relay for Life. A suggested contribution would be \$9/person or \$30/family as with other Wednesday Night Meals. For the meals, there will be a variety of soups or hotdishes (depending on the night), fruit, and desserts.

The Relay for Life Event is Friday, April 10th beginning at 5:00 pm at the River Falls High School. The theme this year is "We are the World, United for a Cure." It will have many opportunities to participate at the event with teams selling items, selling luminaries, and the silent auction. The luminary service is at 9:30 pm and the event is done at 11:00 pm. Please plan to participate or help our church's team, First Congo, raise money for the Relay for Life.

If you have questions or would like to help with the meals or 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 on the sign-up table. Thank you for your generous support. - Mission Education Committee

Earth Fest 2026

Mark your calendars! Our River Falls celebration of this day will be held on **Saturday, April 25, from 12:00-4:00 pm at UW-River Falls University Center.** Last year over 2500 folks showed up for food, fellowship, workshops and so much more.

First Congregational will have a booth so stop by and see us. More details as the date gets closer.

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.



Sunday School Teachers

The congregation owes a significant debt of gratitude to the team of people who share teaching responsibilities to ensure a strong Sunday School program. Please be sure to thank: Laura Anderson, Marg Downing, Traci Hagberg, Kim Korent, Christina Krueger, Mackenzie Merriman, Jen Meyer, Sarah Meyer, Stacy Myers, Becky Pajac, Alex Plum, MiKayla Sanocki, Emma Shepherd, Mara Shepherd, Vicki Swank.



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.

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 **Wednesday, May 20, from 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 Mar 8, 2026	Year to Date
General Fund Income*	\$ 1,257	\$ 110,960
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 11,308	\$ 113,080

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

Scholarships Due

Please note that church scholarships are due the first Sunday of May, this year May 3rd. Three different kinds of church scholarships are available:

1. High School Seniors
2. Secondary and Graduate School
3. Spiritual Growth and Church Camp

All the details are on the church website under the connect tab (then look for forms). Forms must be in the church office by Sunday, May 3rd and will be awarded on Graduation Sunday which will be Sunday, May 31st at 9:30 am. Applicants should plan to be in worship that day to receive their award.

People in the Pews: Jennifer Elsesser

1. Where did you grow up? I grew up in Winona, MN
2. Where do you live now? Hudson, WI
3. How long have you been attending First Congregational Church?

My family and I have been attending for close to 13 years. We had been attending Hope Lutheran in town and left after a transition period over there. I was raised in the Congregational Church. I went to First Congregational Church in Winona, and my grandparents attended a UCC in Iowa, so returning felt like coming home to me.



4. What keeps you coming back to church at First Congregational?

Initially we were drawn to the Christian education program. When our kids were young, they were able to take part in this incredible program. There are so many offerings that are available to our youth, it's so well organized and had a huge impact on both of our children. I truly appreciate Pastor Chris and Stacy. I really enjoy the sermons and always take away so much from them. Having chaperoned a few of the youth activities, I am amazed by Chris's patience and ability to connect with each and every person - truly a gift. He and Stacy have done a fantastic job leading our church, grateful for their work and to be part of this wonderful congregation.

Grace Place

Grace Place is a homeless shelter run by the Salvation Army in New Richmond. It is housed in the old St. Croix County Nursing Home. They operate on a short shoe-string budget and are delighted that we will support them with donations and meals. The shelter has three family rooms, a men's wing and a women's wing. They can house up to 50 people, two or three people to a room. If you have any questions, please see Carole Mottaz.



Volunteers are needed. The program meets two days a week and has 12 active guests. Training is provided and the rewards are phenomenal! They are particularly in need of male volunteers but are willing to receive all. Contact then at amongfriendsrf@gmail.com

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 24 & April 14 & 28**.

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 17 & 31**. 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 **April 19 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**.



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
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH, UCC
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

U.S. POSTAGE PAID

PERMIT #53

RIVER FALLS, WI 54022

.....

MARCH 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.