Weekly Word – For Sunday, November 29, 2026

Worship this Week:

Happy new year! No you did not forget a month. This Sunday we begin the new church year and enter the season of Advent. Advent is more than a countdown to Christmas. It is a season for making room in our lives for the Christ who came to us in Bethlehem and who comes again among us in ways we might easily miss. This week we celebrate the first Sunday in Advent by lighting the first candle, hope. Hope is so much more than wishful thinking. Hope is trusting that God is still at work, even when we can't see what God is doing. That's why we light a candle at the beginning of Advent. The room may still be dark, but we light that one small flame because we believe Christ is coming, and we trust that the darkness will not have the last word. Join us at the 10:00 am Sunday worship service as we make room for hope!

Link to Worship Livestream: https://www.youtube.com/embed/nsC0pyJCAI8?si=-U6UlSPFfqMCVhEc

Sunday Bulletin

This Week

Sun., Nov 29	9:00-9:45 am	Music Rehearsal in the Sanctuary
	9:00-9:45 am	Sunday Morning Bible Study in the Youth Room
	9:45-11:15 am	Nursery Open
	10:00-11:00 am	Worship Service in the Sanctuary and Livestream
	10:30-11:15 am	Sunday School (Pre-School – Grade 8)
	11:00-11:30 am	Coffee Fellowship in the Fellowship Hall
	11:00-11:30 am	WEVR Broadcast 106.3 FM & 1550 AM
Mon., Nov 30	10:00-11:30 am	Side by Side Choir Rehearsal in the Fellowship Hall
Tues., Dec 1	9:00-10:00 am	Yoga
	9:00 am-3:00 pm	Among Friends
	6:30-7:30 pm	WISE Meeting
Wed., Dec 2	1:00-2:30 pm	Adult Bible Study
	3:45-5:15 pm	Wednesday School
	5:15-6:00 pm	Wednesday Meal (sign up!)
	5:45-6:30 pm	Bells
	6:30-7:00 pm	Advent Evening Prayer
	7:00-7:30 pm	MS Class
	7:00-7:30 pm	HS Youth Group
	7:00-8:00 pm	Chancel Choir
Thurs., Dec 3	9:00-10:00 am	Yoga
	9:00 am-3:00 pm	Among Friends
	10:00-11:00 am	Knitting Group
Sat., Dec 5	10:30-11:30 am	Side by Side Choir Concert in the Fellowship Hall
Sun., Dec 6	9:00-9:45 am	Choir and Bells Music Rehearsal in the Sanctuary
	9:00-9:45 am	Sunday Morning Bible Study in the Youth Room
	9:45-11:15 am	Nursery Open
	10:00-11:00 am	Worship Service in the Sanctuary and Livestream
	10:30-11:15 am	Sunday School (Pre-School – Grade 8)
	11:00-11:30 am	Coffee Fellowship in the Fellowship Hall
	11:00-11:30 am	WEVR Broadcast 106.3 FM & 1550 AM
	11:00 am	Advent Workshop in the Fellowship Hall

Assisting in Sunday's worship service are:

Preacher:	Chris Myers
Celebrant:	Chris Myers
Cantor:	David Reilly

Liturgist:	Sue Danielson
Deacons:	Kathy Rausch, Becky Pajac, Kam Ross, Melissa Oscanyan, Kathy Tomlinson
Organist:	Marsha Pearson
Live Stream:	Jeff Hoffman
Nursery:	Kahla Fuller
Trustee:	Steve Koecher
Welcomers:	Jill Hatfield, Deb Hulbert
Coffee Fellowship:	Beatty Family
Counters:	Trish Graves, Dennis Linder

Altar table flowers are given by Lori Otto in honor of her father's 90th birthday.
Altar table flowers are given by Marge Filkins in memory of Jim Filkins.

Loving God

Advent Evening Prayer: On three Wednesday evenings during Advent, we will gather together for Evening Prayer worship featuring the Holden Village Evening Prayer Service, a favorite service for the congregation. The service is lovely, candlelight, brief, and contemplative. **Worship is 6:30–7:00 pm**. Worship themes are:

December 2: God Acts
December 9: Gabriel Announces
December 16: Mary Agrees

During a season that is easily consumed by stress and long lists, come to center yourself in God's word. Come for Evening Prayer to recognize Advent as a necessary time to prepare yourself to hear the Christmas story. The services are designed to be meaningful to adults, teens, and children.

2026 Devotional for Advent and Christmas Day: This year's devotional for Advent and Christmas Day features scripture, art representing different times and cultures, reflections on themes common to the art and contemporary life, quotations to consider, and prayers. Please get a devotional booklet and use it throughout the coming weeks.

Christmas Eve Worship: This year, we will again offer our 4:00 pm Christmas Eve family worship with candlelight, communion and a story for children of all ages. The late service will be at 10:00 pm. It will again include the choir, communion and candlelight. It is beautiful, and it is not as full as the 4:00 pm family service. Please join us at either service this Christmas Eve as we again welcome the Christ child into our world and lives and consider inviting a friend to join you.

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

Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study: The Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study group is discussing Revelation. Copies of the book are available in the church office for $20.00 each. The group meets in the library on **Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm.** If you have questions, contact Pastor Stacy.

Damascus Project: Our Wisconsin Conference sponsors an online learning community called the Damascus Project with a wide variety of options to grow in faith and living. Their website is: www.the-damascus-project.org. And upcoming topics include a class on UCC History and Polity as well as Theology and Ecology. Check it out!

Loving Neighbor

Ministry of Visitation Commissioning and Orientation: We celebrate our renewed approach to Visitation Ministry and invite all those who have offered to call on our homebound members to join us during worship on **December 6** for a special service of commissioning and blessing. Then on **December 13**, we are asking our Visitation Team to join us for an organizational meeting and orientation immediately following worship. We want to make sure all are comfortable and fully equipped to begin making visits. Questions can be directed to Lu Lueck or Pastor Bob.

Cards for Barb de Souza: Barb de Souza is our retired healthcare missionary who spent decades training healthcare workers in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and after a recent stroke, she is now being cared for by many of the people she trained. Her daughter will be going to visit her just after Christmas. If you would like to send her a Christmas card or thinking of you card, please drop them off in the basket in the Gathering Area by Christmas Eve. We have blank cards available as well. Please keep Barb and her family in your prayers.

Christmas Shoebox: The drive for donations for Christmas Shoebox items for the gentlemen at Kinnic Falls Alcohol & Drug Abuse Services has begun. If you would rather donate cash, just designate it for the Christmas Shoebox. **Donations are due by December 10**. The list of items needed is on the gathering table.

Sharing Families Giving Tree: The unwrapped gift with the ornament needs to be at the church no later than noon Thurs, December 10. Please give the gift cards to someone in the church office. Thank you for your generosity. If you have questions, please contact Diane Welsh at 651-334-3128 or the church office.

Reverse Advent Calendars: "Reverse" reminds us Advent is a season of giving. Rather than getting a toy or candy each day, we will be adding a food item to the grocery bag. Each bag has a list of a suggested daily donation, but you can use your imagination and add whatever you want. Bags will be available this Sunday. When the bag is full, bring it in and leave it in the gathering area. The Mission Ed Committee will bring all the bags to the Food Pantry at the end of December. Thank you!

Bring Christmas Joy! - Each year we invite members of the church family to deliver an amaryllis plant to one of our shut-ins or special church friends. This is a wonderful, family-friendly activity that brings joy to both the giver and recipient. Simply sign up at church, prepare the amaryllis plant, and deliver it. Feel free to add a card or some cookies if you wish. Thank you for being part of this ministry of compassion.

The Christmas Fund: The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower income retirees. United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. There are envelopes on the gathering table, or you can put a check in the offering plate with "Christmas Fund" on the memo line. Thanks again for your generosity. - Mission Education Committee

Basics for Local Kids (BLK): BLK is a non-profit organization that provides winterwear to local kids in need from infant to 18 years old. Please consider donating gently used or new coats, snow pants, boots, hats, mittens, gloves, scarves, or socks. Donations can be placed in the bin. Volunteers are needed to help families shop, or to sort and restock items. To volunteer go to www.BasicsforLocalKids.org or call Kim Johnson at 715-821-1623. Thank you for your generous, continuing support. Other questions contact Renee Whipple 715-307-5074.

Back Bay Mission Trip Planned for April 2027: Ever wanted to go on a mission trip? Heard about the awesome experiences so many of our church folks have had at UCC related Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi? Just want to get out of town to someplace warm? Join us! Our church is sponsoring yet another trip to Back Bay Mission, **April 18-24, 2027**. Please contact Carol Merriman or Pastor Chris for details. Use the sign-up sheet to register your interest.

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

Grace Place Donations: Needed items: New adult undergarments (underwear up to size XXL), new bras, new or like-new thermal underwear, new or like-new sweatshirts up to size 4X, new or like-new sweatpants up to size 4X, new or like new winter jackets, new or like new winter hats, new or like new winter gloves, new shoes (adult men and female), belts, adult socks, good buys. There is a bin at church for donations.

Empty Pill Bottles (Prescription Only): The River Falls Lions Club is collecting empty pill bottles, only the 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.

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

Among Friends is a community-based social respite program serving adults who have memory loss who reside in Pierce and St. Croix Counties. For more information, contact them at (715) 293-2561. Check out the website: amongfriendsrf.com and Facebook page. It is held at the church on **Tuesdays and Thursdays 9am to 3pm.**

Loving Self

Men's Group: Our church men's group meets **every other Tuesday from 9:00-10:00 am** in the Youth Room. All men are welcome to join us for coffee, donuts and lively conversation. We gather for an hour, and Pastor Chris leads us into a brief discussion. Our next gatherings are **Tues, Dec 8 & 22**. Join us!

Women's Group: Interested in fellowship & community with other women? You are invited to join the group at noon every 2nd & 4th Tuesday. Please bring a lunch. The group will not meet in December. The next meetings will be **Tues, Jan 12 & 26.**

Merry Widows: They will meet on **Wed, Dec 16 at 1:00 pm at West Wind in RF**. All widows are welcome to join us for dinner and conversation! See Linda Morrow for more information.

Game Day Sunday: Game Day is held on the third Sunday of the month. Our next Game Day is **20 at 11:45 am.** Join us!

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

WISE Corner: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Family Support Group meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays at 6:30 pm at the River Falls Public Library and the Peer Support Group meets the same evenings at First Congregational Church at 6:30 pm. For mental health issues, please call 988. For more info, call Marg Downing 715-307-5905.

Community Life

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.

Dec 2 - Parmesan crusted chicken over rice pilaf, salad, croissant
https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-65963144-wednesday

Dec 9 - Chicken-ala king served over biscuit with fresh fruit
Dec 16 - Meatloaf, baked potato, vegetable, bread

Red Cross Blood Drive: The next Red Cross Blood Drive held at the church is on **Wed, Nov 25, from 11:00 am to 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.

Side by Side Choir - Discover the Joy of Singing Together! - For those living with memory or thinking changes, their care partners, family, friends & community volunteers who enjoy helping others. It is a welcoming choir where people gather at the church to connect & thrive by sharing music, joy & laughter! Join us on **Mondays at 10:00 am** for our fall session.

A concert, *Joy in Friendship*, will be presented on Sat, Dec 5 at 10:30 am at the church. To learn more contact: Norma Revels at 651-416-9530 or sidebysidechoir@gmail.com

The Advent Workshop: The Advent Workshop for families will be in the Fellowship Hall following Sunday School on **December 6**, the Second Sunday in Advent. The event includes making a variety of Christmas ornaments. If you have friends or neighbors considering participation in a church family, invite them to join you! Sign up at church or online: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-67554570-advent

Cookie Exchange: The WISE team has a Cookie Exchange planned for **Sun, Dec 6, 11:30 am** in the Youth Room. Please bring four dozen cookies. Divide into 8 bags of 6 cookies each and include the recipe. You will go home with eight different types of cookies. For more information, contact Rose Rude at 715-781-7032. Please sign up at church on the gathering table.

Annual Christmas Luncheon: You are invited to attend a Christmas Luncheon on **Tues, Dec 8, at 12:00 noon**. The menu features Norwegian meatballs and a large collection of Christmas cookies. The River Falls High School Costumed Carolers will sing. Please come! The cost is $10.00 per person. Please make a reservation at church or online: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-67473247-christmas

Volunteers Needed for the Christmas Luncheon: Thank you to those who have already volunteered to help with the Christmas luncheon. We still need a few more volunteers for serving and the kitchen. Many hands make light work! We also continue to need cookie bakers which is sweet work.

Winter Soulstice Event – December 21 at 6:30 pm: The longest night of the year is the day/night when earth's tilt positions us as far from the sun as possible creating the most darkness in a 24-four-hour period. For many years, people have considered this event an annual "turning point" and have created rituals to commemorate the absence of light and the hopeful return of brighter days. Then there is the concept of a blue Christmas. Everybody knows the Christmas season can often be a difficult time for many folks due to grief associated with the loss of a loved one. But, even remembering the anniversary of a traumatic experience or a particular rough patch can trigger sadness or melancholy. This year, the W.I.S.E. Team is developing a hybrid event that will cover both areas. The evening will begin indoors in the Fellowship Hall at 6:30 pm and will include music, readings, litanies, and the sharing of our stories. We will then head outside for a traditional fire circle for more singing and sharing and finally return to the Fellowship Hall for some seasonal refreshments and fellowship. This is open to anyone so spread the word.

Poinsettias for Christmas Eve: Poinsettia sales in honor or memory of someone special have begun. The order forms are on the table. The cost is $15.00 each. Please return the order form with payment by **Dec 13.** The plants will be on display for the Christmas Eve services. You may pick your plants up after the 10pm service on Christmas Eve. Proceeds of the sales go toward youth activities.

Journey House Events: All young adults are invited to Journey House (143 Cascade Ave) for the following:
Overstimulated and Overwhelmed – Sun, Nov 29, 6:00-8:00 pm
https://journeyhousecampusministry.org/event/3h5k98w/overstimulated-and-overwhelmed

A Night of Prayer – Making Space for the Sacred – Thurs, Dec 17, 6:00-8:30 pm
https://journeyhousecampusministry.org/event/jzrbks3/discover-night-a-night-of-prayer

Endowment Grants: Each quarter the Endowment Grant Committee meets to evaluate proposals for new ministries and projects submitted through our church committees. Consider applying for an Endowment Grant! All proposals must come from a committee, and the **next due date is December 6**. Forms can be accessed through the church office or on the church website.

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.

Youth

Children's Advent Musical: Sunday School children in pre-school through grade 5 have begun working on the Advent musical, *The Christmas Guest*. It is important for the children to have consistent attendance so they are able to learns lines and songs.

The dress rehearsal will be on **Sat, Dec 19, 10:00–12:00 noon**, for children in kindergarten through grade 5. The musical will be presented during worship on **Sun, Dec 20**.

Sign Ups

Coffee Fellowship Hosts Needed: Please sign up to help host and serve. Everything you need is provided, you just need to get there a little early to get things ready, serve and do a quick clean up. Sign up at church or here: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-coffee

Liturgists Needed: Please sign up to be a Sunday liturgist. You will lead us in the Call to Worship and a Scripture text. The bulletin will be sent via email to you on Thursday. Sign up at church or here: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-liturgist

Welcomers Needed: Please sign up to be a welcomer on Sunday morning before the worship service. One person is needed at the bottom of the stairs & one person is needed at the ramp entrance. Please arrive 20 minutes prior to the service. Sign up at church or here: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-welcomers

Altar Table Flowers: Please sign up to provide flowers for the altar for Sunday worship. Sign up at church or here: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-altar

Church App: The church has a mobile phone app. You can download it from the church website or by scanning the QR Code found on a flyer on the sign-up table and Facebook.

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

Finances

THANK YOU to all of you for your support of the mission and ministry of our church through your tithes, offerings, and gifts. Your generosity empowers our church! Please be sure to sign up for e-giving or mail/drop off your gifts. There is also an option to give online via our church website.

Treasurer's Report

	Nov 22, 2026	Year to Date
General Fund Income*	$ 1,805	$ 515,733
General Fund Operational Needs	$ 11,308	$ 531,476

A full accounting of all income and expenses is available in the church office.
*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

People

- For the gift of this church and its ministry as we dedicate our financial pledges for 2027
- For those who took the Giving Tree ornaments in a record 8 days, may they bring joy to those who receive them
- For Diane Welsh who is again coordinating our church's portion of the Giving Tree this year, we appreciate you!
- For our Trustees who recently painted classroom 101 downstairs (they are trying to repaint one classroom a year), it looks brand new!
- For Tanner and Madeline Pietz who celebrated their 3rd wedding anniversary on November 10, may your love continue to grow
- For those who will give blood at our next blood drive on Wed, Nov 25 (the day before Thanksgiving), may it be a time of true thanksgiving and may it bring life to others

Do you have upcoming news or celebrations to share with the congregation? Graduations? Birthdays and Anniversary celebrations? Please email them to office@firstchurchrf.org by Wednesday of each week to be included in the Weekly Word which is sent out on Thursdays.

Prayer: Prayer connects us with God and our neighbors. Each week in the bulletin there is a prayer list of people, situations and thanksgivings that is also sent out by email to help people in their prayer life. You can sign up by contacting the office at office@firstchurchrf.org

Church Office Hours:
Monday through Thursday – 8:30 am to 4:00 pm
Friday – 8:30 am to Noon

Church Staff Contact:
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