



FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL

110 North Third Street
River Falls, WI 54022
715-425-2052
www.firstchurchrf.org

God is still speaking,

April 15, 2021

*No matter who you are,
No matter where you are
on your spiritual journey,
you are welcome here!*

As Jesus' courageous disciples,
living God's grace, we strive to:

- Worship faithfully
- Welcome openly
- Grow spiritually
- Care passionately
- Serve generously



Pastor's Page

The Holy Earth is a lovely little book from a bygone century. Published in 1915 by Liberty Hyde Bailey, it recalls the beauty and wonder of creation in an era when respect for the land was stronger. Today the title alone is jarring; long ago the holiness, the sacredness of the earth faded significantly.

The 52nd celebration of Earth Day is upon us, reminding us that much remains to be done to

recover a sense of living on and with the *holy* earth, even as it faces dramatic and potentially catastrophic change.

Caring for creation, of course, is *a life-long call and commitment for Christians, a mark of faithfulness*, not just a designated day or month. Over generations, though, our own sense of the holy, sacred earth has diminished, worn down by the cultural and economic realities that dominate the contemporary global community and the dramatic shift of people off the land.

In our own homes and in the church today, we *are and must be* on a life-giving journey toward more sustainable living. Along with our neighboring churches and community partners working together at the *Hope for Creation* table we *are* making a difference. There are *always* new possibilities for action and learning before us, there is much to do, and much is being done.

But even as we strive anew to care for creation in this turbulent era, we cannot let *tasks and good works* overwhelm our deepest *sense of reverence* for the holy creation. We are in so many ways a human family that seeks to fix things, to build, to have, to improve, to change; in our busyness it is easy to overlook the sheer beauty and magnificence of the creation we seek to sustain.

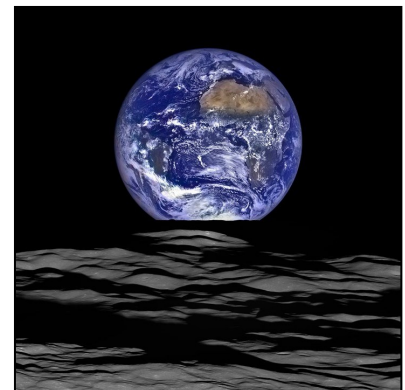
We live on the northern edge of a spectacular, unglaciated land mass encompassing 57 counties of rolling hills, bluffs, rivers, and

forests in four states. The Driftless Area is a unique gem of creation. Head out of River Falls on County O or take the highways down the Great River or through bluff country, and be amazed and humbled once again. While the holy earth is always outside our own windows, its beauty truly defies words as we head south. Look and see.

Creation stories of cultures and religions around the world are wondrous. The stirring words of Genesis still evoke our reverence. In 1968, when those verses were read from Apollo 8 as it captured the Christmas Eve earthrise from space, the world was—and still is—stunned and stilled, a gift we direly need in this time.

Long ago Liberty Hyde Bailey wrote that “The sacredness to us of the earth is intrinsic and inherent. If God created the earth, so is the earth hallowed; and if it is hallowed, so must we deal with it devotedly and with care that we do not despoil it, and mindful of our relations to all beings that live on it.”

Might it be so. -Pastor Dave



GROW spiritually

Adult Bible Study

Weekly Adult Bible Study meets Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm via Zoom. The current text is *First and Second Corinthians* by John Proctor and is available in the church office for \$25.00. Please contact the church office for a Zoom link to participate.

Confirmation and Church Intern Classes Move to In Person

We have moved Confirmation and Church Intern classes from Zoom to an in-person format. Please pay attention to the weekly confirmation email for details. We will continue to monitor the local COVID situation and meet in ways that allow for maximum distancing.

VBS, 2021

While there are still many unknowns, our congregation will have Vacation Bible School during the week of **August 2–5**.

Please mark your calendars either so your children will attend or to volunteer to help.



New Choir Director

We are thrilled to announce we have a new choir director! Starting late this summer, we welcome Sarah Plum as our new Chancel Choir Director. Sarah is the choir directors at River Falls High School and Meyer Middle School. A graduate of UWEC, she also has experience leading worship in multiple churches. She wrote in her application:

It is a personal mission of mine to insist that those around me know they are always welcomed openly. I believe that we are all continuing to grow spiritually, no matter where we began our faith journeys. I will always give my best effort to foster spiritual growth through music and worship for the singers and myself.

Sarah has also participated in nine mission trips and sees her music as part of her call to love and serve others. She is married to Alex who is a High School Band Director in Balsam Lake, WI. We hope to have Sarah lead one of the summer Sunday choir gatherings. Please stay tuned for more details. After a year of not being able to gather together as a choir to sing, this is another step on the journey back to normal. Hallelujah!

Three Ways to Worship: In Person, Online and Radio!

We are now successfully offering worship in three different ways—in person in the Fellowship Hall at 10:00 am, online and in the radio at 11:00 am. To both faithfully and safely gather, we will still have to:

- * Register ahead of time for worship (registration will open Wednesday mornings)
- * Limit our gatherings to 75 people
- * Wear masks, social distance and wash hands
- * Allow the song leaders to sing while you enjoy their sounds
- * If you are feeling ill for any reason or have been exposed, please stay home and enjoy worship via the livestream or radio.

As a reminder, the church Fellowship Hall and Office have new bipolar ionization technology that cleans the air and refreshes the room every fifteen minutes. We are pleased we can again offer three ways to worship each Sunday. As the weather warms, we will continue to explore options of outdoor worship services on the church lawn. Please continue to pray for our pastors, worship leaders, musicians and webteam as we try to safely and faithfully worship together.

Our Youth Minister, JaNae Westrich, Is Moving

Our Youth Minister, JaNae Westrich is moving. Her husband Adam, pastor at St. Paul's UCC in Ellsworth, has accepted a call at First UCC in Green Bay and will be moving there in early May. We are planning on a farewell celebration for JaNae on Sunday, April 25th. Please pray for strength and guidance for them during this transition and for our church as we begin the search for a new Youth Minister.

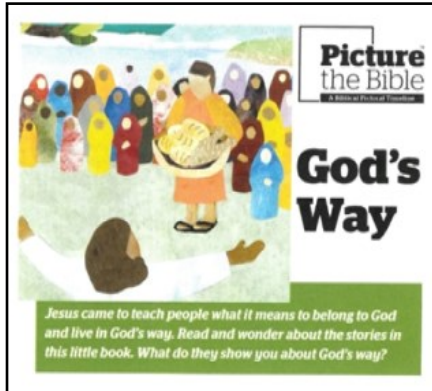
A card will be available in the Gathering Area starting on Sunday, April 11, for people to sign and wish her well. Please also join us in worship on Sunday, April 25th so we can thank her for her ministry and wish her well in her next ministry.

Last Faith at Home Bag

The final Faith at Home bag for the 2020-21 school year will be ready for pick up on **Sunday, April 11**. The bags contain resources for each Sunday through May 23. You may pick up bags:

- in the gathering space Sunday morning (8:00-11:30 am)
- during the week when the church office is open,
- in the Little Church outside—call to make arrangements.

If you prefer to have your bag delivered, please contact the church office. The congregation has made a considerable investment to provide these bags. Please pick them up.



Little Books

Each month we make a Little Book featuring *Picture the Bible* images, Bible stories, and a question to discuss. This month's little book is *God's Way*.

If you are interested in a copy, pick one up in the Little Church or contact the church office.

Children's Bible Featuring Church Art

Picture the Bible, published by The Pilgrim Press featuring First Congregational's art, is scheduled to be available in April. To view the promotional video trailer, visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9LY-kgDQys&feature=youtu.be>.

To learn more about the book visit: www.thepilgrimpress.com and click on "new releases."

Scholarships Due

The deadline for church scholarships is Sunday, May 2. The church awards three types of scholarships:

- *Senior Scholarships* to graduating high school seniors
- *Continuing Education Scholarships* to those engaged in college, technical school or advanced degrees
- *Spiritual Growth Scholarships* for those who wish to go to church camp or church mission trips

Please check out all the details, forms and eligibility on the church website under the 'connect' tab.



Framing Project Complete

In 2008, First Congregational commissioned 33 biblical collages. Over time this collection grew to 52 images and was named *Picture the Bible*. *Picture the Bible* is at the heart of First Congregational's educational materials and is regularly used in worship.

Unfortunately, time and the sun have faded the art. To prevent further damage to this tremendous investment, the art has been reframed with museum-quality glass. The glass will not completely protect against future damage, but it will help significantly.

The art has now been rehung in the hallway, Fellowship Hall, and office. It is lovely.



Give Blood!

Join us in the Fellowship Hall to give blood on **Friday, April 16 from 2:00 to 7:00 pm**. The sign-up link is below and on the church website. You CAN donate blood if you received the COVID vaccine. Special thanks to Mikayla Peterson, one of our high school church interns, who is coordinating this blood drive.

<https://www.redcrossblood.org/give.html/drive-results?zipSponsor=firstcongregationalrf>

Upcoming Important Dates

Sunday May 2 Confirmation Sunday

Sunday June 6 Graduation Sunday

Recent Pastoral Acts

Wedding for Spencer Wakefield and Kim Engler on January 23, 2021

Memorial Service for Dan Filkins on January 31, 2021

Funeral for Polly Wymer on March 6, 2021



Calling All Softball Fans!

It appears that the River Falls Church Softball league will happen this year! Please stay tuned for more information or contact Matthew Thurston at 715-781-3626 or Deb Hoffman at 612-308-4945 or debhoffman234b@gmail.com. Hooray!



At-Home Communion

The Deacons are available to bring communion to you. We are happy to come to you for doorstep or even contactless Communion. We will bring the elements to you and share a short prayer if you would like. Please let the church office know if you or anyone you know would benefit from this service, and we'll contact you to arrange a time.

Easter Sunday

Last year on Easter Sunday, due to the pandemic, we celebrated with only 6 people in the sanctuary and everyone else joining either online or on the radio. There was no Easter Breakfast, no brass group, no choir, yet still we celebrated with what Matthew 28:8 calls both fear and joy.

This year we celebrated Easter Sunday with worship in four different ways: in-person indoors, in-person outdoors, online and on the radio. Though not our normal attendance of 400 on Easter morning, over 200 people joined us both in person and outdoors as we heard again the good news of the resurrection and our challenge to live the Gospel in hope today.

A special thanks to all who made this Easter Sunday special including our two Bell Groups, our Vocal and Brass Groups, our faithful musicians Marsha, Jamie and Dave (and William Tuchtenhagen joining us on drums), our deacons and our pastors. We are not where we want to be in the world right now, but in faith we proclaim Jesus is going ahead of us to Galilee to open up a new and better future for us all. Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed!

Here are a few pictures from the day:





Wednesday Night Family Meals To Go!

Our Wednesday Meals served to-go style will continue through the end of April. The cost is \$8.00. Please sign up by Tuesday then drive through the church alley between 5:00-6:00 pm on Wednesday and a church intern will deliver it to your car. Enjoy!

April 14 - Chicken burrito with white enchilada sauce (flour tortillas filled with chicken & veggies) served with spanish rice and corn salad

April 21 - Lasagna and chicken alfredo, salad, and garlic toast

April 28 - Chicken marsala, rice pilaf, asparagus salad, croissant — Last Meal of the Program Year!

Church Yoga

Jan Hansen's church yoga group meets on Tuesday and Thursdays in person with a small group of people in the Fellowship Hall from 9:00-10:00 am and via Zoom. Please call the church office to receive the Zoom link.

Rental Needed

Lori Nitz's daughter Jennifer Moen is looking for a furnished summer rental with hi-speed internet within 45 minutes of River Falls. Please call Jennifer at 1-608-553-0815 or Lori at 715-426-6437.

amazon smile Free Money for Church Ministries

The church has created an Amazon Smile account through which the church can receive a portion of the price of each purchase you make through Amazon. It is important to know that you need to do two things for the church to receive this money. First, go to Amazon Smile by typing in smile.amazon.com and then add First Congregational Church River Falls to your Amazon Smile. Second, every time you order you must order through your Smile account by going to smile.amazon.com. Once you do this, the church will receive 0.5% of each eligible order. Please contact the church office if you have questions.

Simpson Shelter Supply Needs

- Twin, full, and queen size blankets and sheet sets—new
- Pillows—new
- White t-shirts—new, sizes small and medium
- Large tubs of Country Time Lemonade and Kool Aid mixes (we use these in Igloo containers for meals)
- Hot sauce
- Coffee—ground, caffeinated
- Products for textured and natural hair
- New shower curtains and shower rings

There is a box at the church for donations. Thank you!

Treasurer's Report

	Week of Apr 4, 2021	Year to Date
General Fund Income *	\$ 13,315	\$ 172,294
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 9,262	\$ 129,668

A full accounting of all income and expenses is available in the church office.

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

Church Staff

You can contact them via their email and cell numbers which are below.

Chris Myers—chris@firstchurchrf.org - 715-441-2497
 Missy Luedtke—missy@firstchurchrf.org - 715-222-5427
 Stacy Myers—stacy@firstchurchrf.org - 715-338-6406
 Dave Ostendorf—dave@firstchurchrf.org - 715-441-6559
 JaNae Westrich—jmwestrich@gmail.com - 715-897-5358
 Jamie Mills—degolierjamie@gmail.com - 715-419-0850
 Dave Mountain—focusfan2001@yahoo.com - 715-245-6854
 Tim Bylander—timthefixitguy@gmail.com - 715-808-2900

Engaging the Word, Engaging the World...

Upcoming

Saturday, April 17, 9:00 am–1:00 pm - Electronics Recycling Customer Event at the Public Works Garage, 950 Benson Street. This is the annual event sponsored by the River Falls Municipal Utilities. Please remain inside your vehicle while staff unload items for recycling; should you need to roll down your window to speak to staff, you are requested to wear a mask. Customers are limited to one trip for the event and are asked to *bring a form of identification and a copy of your recent RFMU bill.*

Sunday, April 18, 3:30 pm - Open Our Hearts to Earth: *Hope for Creation* will honor Earth Week with a Poetry Reading by Barbara Draper and Thomas R. Smith at the Glen Park Pavilion in River Falls. Draper is a Minneapolis poet whose first book of poems (*Sometimes a Door*) was published in 2019. Smith is an acclaimed River Falls poet and teacher whose many works have been widely published and praised nationally and internationally. Celebrate an outdoor Spring day with them and *Hope for Creation* at the Pavilion.

Wednesday, April 21, 6:00-7:00 pm - Wildlife and Plastics: The Innocent Victims. Dr. Terry L. Root, Nobel Peace Prize (IPCC Member) Recipient will share the devastating impact plastics are having on wildlife and solutions for change. This is the second Winter Climate Series event with Dr. Root, sponsored by *Hope for Creation* and its many partners through the River Falls Public Library. You can connect to the presentation by going to the River Falls Public Library's YouTube channel or its Facebook page.

Updating

Gardening. Our *Hope for Creation* partner, Hope Lutheran Church, has organic garden plots available! Plots are 10'x50' or 10'x25'. Garden Rules are on the HOPE website main page (www.hopelutheranrf.com) under announcements. If interested, contact psrudesill@gmail.com by April 15th.



Mission Partner: United Church Camps:

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE!

The United Church of Christ in Wisconsin has three beautiful, modern camps for youth, adults, and families, offering a wide range of experiences for all ages at Moon Beach, Pilgrim Center, and Cedar Valley. These are *not* church camps from bygone days! Facilities, food, programs, and relaxation amaze everyone and provide unique opportunities and times for a wide range of getaways and programs. As the camps reopen this year, health and safety rules will be in effect.

The camps are a Mission Partner supported by our congregation, offering opportunities for all of us to renew and relax in amazingly beautiful settings. Scholarships for camps are available from the church to help cover costs. Please contact the church office if you are interested in providing a camp experience to any members of your family, or for your entire family.

Detailed information about all the camps is available at <http://ucci.org/events/>. A complete color copy of the 2021 season is also available at the church office.

Paying It Forward

Many have asked how they can help share their stimulus money to help bless others. Here are 2 concrete ways: Compassion Fund—Just this month we have paid 3 people's rent checks. All money stays in the River Falls area and benefits families hit hardest by COVID and the economic downturn.

Building Fund—Each month the church still needs to pay the bank \$3300. The Building Fund enables us to pay our mortgage until we can hold a Building Fund Campaign after COVID.

First Congregational United Church of Christ

Office Phone: 715-425-2052
E-mail: office@firstchurchrf.org
Website: www.firstchurchrf.org



STAFF

Chris Myers, Pastor
Dave Ostendorf, Minister for Community and Outreach
Stacy Johnson, CE Minister
JaNae Westrich, Youth Pastor
Missy Luedtke, Office Coordinator
Joel Larsen, Moderator
Jamie Mills, Music Coordinator and Bell Choir Director
Marsha Pearson, Organist
Terry Mithun, Organist
Tim Bylander, Building Supervisor
Dave Mountain, 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

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RIVER FALLS, WI 54022

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

APRIL 15, 2021

Ways to Reach Out to Others

All of us want to do something to help and be Jesus' loving disciples in the present moment. Below are some specific things you can do at home:

Shut-ins/Seniors: We have connected our seniors/shut-ins with church families who send them notes, small parcels and kid's artwork. If you want to be matched with a shut-in, contact the church office.

Compassion Fund: There are families in our church who have been furloughed, fired, and laid off. We will be able to offer some modest assistance to these families through our church Compassion Fund. Gifts should be mailed to the church and marked 'Compassion Fund.' Families who need assistance, please contact Pastor Chris.

Prayer: Prayer connects us with God and our neighbors. Pray for the helpers. Pray for your families. Pray for people losing their jobs. Pray for students learning online. Pray for families learning new routines. Pray for people cooped up inside. Each week there is a prayer list of people, situations and thanksgivings that is sent out by email to help people in their prayer life. You can sign up by contacting the church office.

Sign Up Sheets: All of the current sign-up sheets are on the church website. Click on the "Connect" button at the top of the page and then select "Sign Ups/Forms."

Quarantining: With the spread of COVID-19, more and more families are having to quarantine at some point. Please know that your church stands ready to support and help you as we can. We have volunteers who can run errands, pick up medicine or food, even deliver your Sunday School materials if you are quarantined. Please also know church staff are here to help you navigate the intense emotional pressures these situations bring with them. Contact the church office for more information at 715-425-2052 or office@firstchurchrf.org