



**FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL**

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

God is still speaking,

May 1, 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

I was walking the dog the other day past a local elementary school when I saw two young girls out on the playground during recess. It was a warm sunny day so the girls were standing by the playground fence, excited and giddy. Then one girl started to twirl around and around and around until finally she could not stand it any longer and fell to the ground laughing. The other girl saw this and of course

started to do the exact same thing—she twirled and twirled and twirled and eventually fell to the ground in laughter. This went on again and again until both girls literally could not get off the ground because they were laughing so hard (& probably so dizzy they couldn't move).

Seeing those girls laugh so hard for so long was healing for me because the last thirteen months have been so difficult for so many. I think of all the things we have had to miss and give up. While all of us have been impacted, the effects have been more profound on some. Recently I went into the room of a woman in the nursing home on the first day it was opened back up again. I was the first non-staff person to enter her room for thirteen months. It was a powerful moment when we visited, celebrated communion and prayed together.

My Christian faith reminds me that God is active and at work, even now, perhaps especially now. I have seen the amazing ways you have helped out and reached out, coped and adjusted, pivoted over and over and over. I have seen the ways God has been present strengthening and guiding us. But I will confess that more than once these past few months I have struggled to make sense of all this. Like the writer of Psalm 13 I ask: How long O God?

One of you dropped a prayer on my desk that has really spoken to

me. It is called: Prayer for a World Where Hope Seems Dim. You can read it on page 3. I like that it is both honest and faithful. It recognizes the darkness of this moment in time but it does not leave us there. It reminds us that Jesus also was familiar with darkness and his call to us today to be bearers of his light. We do not need to manufacture that light on our own, but we can and should reflect God's light, power and love.

So pray this prayer (on page 3) or another of your own choosing. Live out of the 23rd Psalm and its promise of God's steadfast presence even in the dark valleys. And perhaps when it is a nice sunny day, go outside when no one else is watching and twirl and laugh.

Pastor Chris



Upcoming Important Dates

Saturday, May 1
Outdoor Clean Up

Sunday, May 2
Confirmation Sunday

Sunday, May 9
*Mother's Day Worship
with Brass Group*

Saturday, May 8
Indoor Clean Up

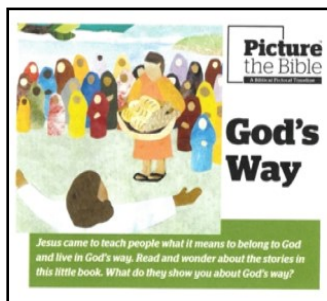
Sunday, May 30
Memorial Garden Dedication

Sunday, June 6
Graduation Sunday

GROW spiritually

Adult Bible Study

Weekly Adult Bible Study meets Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm via Zoom. The group is reading *Living Faith While Holding Doubts* by Martin Copenhaver. Copies are available in the church office. All are welcome! Please contact the church office for a Zoom link to participate.



Little Books

Available each month during the school year is a Little Book featuring *Picture the Bible* images, Bible stories, and a question to discuss. The final 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.



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.



Wednesday Night Family Meals Thanks!

A huge thanks to all who both enjoyed and helped out to make these meals possible. Thanks to our cook Katy Kapaun, our faithful kitchen helpers Evelyn Purdy and Susan Walden, and JaNae Westrich and our church interns who ran meals out to cars in rain, snow and sun.

We hope to resume our family meals program this fall.

Memorial Garden Dedication

On Sunday, May 30, Memorial Day Weekend, we will dedicate the new Memorial Garden inside the existing church garden. A small team of Pastor Chris, Lu Lueck, Susan Walden and JoAnne Friedell are working to quickly establish policies and procedures so that we can inter the ashes of the saints of our church in this beautiful garden. Thanks to the Filkins family there will be two new eco-friendly benches that will grace the area in memory of Dan Filkins. Please look to the newsletter for future updates.



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 debhoffman234b@gmail.com. Hooray!



Church Clean Up Outside & Inside

The Trustees need your help **Sat, May 1 at 9:00 am**, to clean up outside around the church. Please bring a rake, pruning tools, and help spruce up the yard. They will be cleaning up inside the church on **Sat, May 8 at 9:00 am**. Cleaning supplies will be provided. Church Interns will receive double hours for helping out.

One More Lawn Mower Needed

We are looking for one more person to join the church lawn mowing team. Training provided and the team signs up for weekly shifts making sure our church lawn looks its best for Sunday mornings. Want more info? Contact the church office 715-425-2052 or office@firstchurchrf.org

Prayer for a World Where Hope Seems Dim

Dear God, the world seems so dark and foreboding.

Where are the signs of hope? What are you calling us to do?

Wars, uprisings, displacements, hunger, poverty, and disease continue to claim victims by the millions around the world each year. Our ears do not want to hear their stories and our eyes do not want to see their plight because the suffering and destruction is so massive and cruel.

In our hearts and minds there is a desire to help somehow, but the

crisis seem so overwhelming that we shake our heads in dismay and we wonder what the point is for us even to attempt to be witnesses for healing and hope in this hellish morass.

We beg with the song writer to open our eyes that we may see glimpses of truth you have for us.

Help us to follow the path of Jesus, the Suffering Servant. Give us the courage to be willing to walk the path of depression and pain with the victims of injustice here at home as well as abroad.

Help us to seek ways to light candles of hope, however small, through our words, our deeds, and our prayers, to encourage our sisters and brothers to hold

onto the faith in spite of the pain and suffering they are facing.

And help those of us who are among the fortunate ones, who have enough bread to eat, good health, and who live in relative peace, to open our heart to learn from our sisters and brothers who are living lives of grace and forgiveness in the horrid circumstances which surround them.

O God, help us to light one candle rather than to curse the darkness.

We pray this in the name of Jesus, who knows what being a light in this dark world is all about.

By Larry Kehler, Canada

Recommended Viewing for People of All Ages

Jesus spoke in parables. He knew that stories help us see ourselves and our world in new ways.

The Children's Theater Company produced a video of the children's book *Something Happened in Our Town* written by three child psychologists. The story is narrowly about two families' conversations about a police shooting occurring in their community, and more broadly about helping children to identify and counter racial bias in their own lives. While it is a heavy topic, the story is carefully told geared for people age 4 and older. The story concludes with a message of empowerment for children and adults alike.

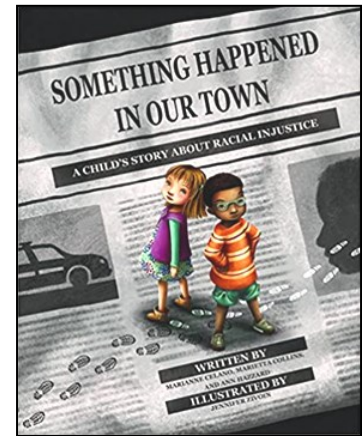
The Christian Education Committee has carefully considered this story and encourages members of the congregation to view and discuss this short (10 minute) video. You will find it at: <https://childrenstheatre.org/home/something-happened-in-our-town/>.

Please remember:

- It is always a good idea to preview resources before showing them to your child/family.
- Although this is a children's story, it speaks to people of all ages—children and adults alike.
- The link contains helpful resources for adults. They are worth reviewing.

We do not read to always agree with a book. We read to be exposed to new ideas and experiences. Discuss your experience of the book and model respect for diverse opinions.

Jesus' call to love our neighbors prompts us to see the world not only as *we are* but as our *neighbor is*. This story can be one step toward that goal.



Last Faith at Home Bag

The final Faith at Home bag for the 2020-21 school year is done. If you have not picked up your bag, please do so. 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.

Confirmation Classes and Church Interns Wrap Up

Thank you to Diana Villeneuve and Pastors Chris and Stacy who have led our Confirmation and Church Intern program this year. This has been a challenging year. We are thankful we have been able to pivot and continue this program without missing a beat. Classes end the end of April. Traditionally our last day is an all class bowling night at St Croix Lanes on the last Wednesday night of the program year, but we cannot safely do that this year. We are very much looking forward to a normal year in the fall.

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.

Investment Committee News

The Investment Committee reflected on and wanted members to be informed as to what this committee has chosen as our mission statement which is listed below. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact any one of us. Members include: Kris Roen, Roland Roe, Mike Danielson, Suzanne Hagen, Jean Smith, Pastor Chris Myers, Joel Larsen/Moderator and Financial Assist, Freddie Trautmiller.

Article I: Mission Statement

The Investment Committee will assist the Church Council of the First Congregational United Church of Christ—River Falls, WI Inc., in fulfilling its oversight responsibility for the invested assets of the Church. The Committee is responsible for formulating the overall investment policies of the Church, subject to approval by the Church Council, and establishing investment guidelines in furtherance of those policies. The Committee monitors the management of the portfolio for compliance with the investment policies and guidelines and for meeting performance objectives over time.

The members of the Investment Committee are fiduciaries of the Portfolio with respect to all responsibilities allocated to them. The members will discharge their duties solely on behalf of the First Congregational United Church of Christ—River Falls, WI Inc., in accordance with its specific terms.

All members shall have a basic understanding of investments and be able to read and understand various investment reports. If possible have at least one member of the committee have investment and related investment management expertise.

People in the Pews: Joel Larsen

1. *Where did you grow up?* I grew up in Neillsville, WI, population 2,780. Neillsville, if you are wondering, is in Clark County, Wisconsin. It is nestled 50 miles East of Eau Claire and 30 miles West of Marshfield. I get back there often as my mother is still there and working at the same grocery store she has for the past 40+ years. My wife Tanya grew up in Marshfield.

2. *Where do you live now?* I live just outside of River Falls and have been a resident here since about 1991.

3. *How long have you been attending First Congregational Church?* My wife Tanya and I have been members since we moved to town so about 30 years.

4. *What keeps you coming back to church at UCC?* We have raised our family in this church and have gotten to know and become friends with many members of our congregation. The church is like a big family to us.

5. *What is your favorite hobby or pastime?* I have several. Probably my favorite activity is hiking and try to plan at least one trip a year to one of our National Parks to enjoy the outdoors. My favorite place to hike so far has been Glacier National Park. In my spare time at home, I enjoy doing car repair and service. I'm certainly not an expert, but have learned nothing relieves stress for me more than changing a wheel bearing!

6. *Tell us something about you or your family that may surprise us.* I graduated college from UW La Crosse and all three of my kids made the decision to attend school there as well. This past fall I had all three kids enrolled at UW La Crosse at the same time, one a Graduate Student, one a Senior, and one a Freshman!

7. *What gives you comfort or joy during these Covid-19 days?* What gives me comfort is that we have amazing doctors and scientists that have developed treatments and vaccines that have allowed us to get on with life.



Engaging the Word, Engaging the World...

Upcoming

Tuesday, May 11, Noon, The Westminster Forum. The Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, will be the guest speaker. Moss is senior pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, the largest UCC church in the country, where he addresses mass incarceration, environmental justice and economic inequality. Moss is a nationally renowned preacher and pastor. His Forum presentation is one of four in May to address racial justice, to be broadcast live on [the Forum's website](#) and [Facebook page](#) and [MPR News](#), and rebroadcast by Minnesota Public Radio.

Tuesday, May 11, 6:00–7:00 pm—Tia Nelson, conservationist and climate change advocate, will meet with River Falls *Hope for Creation* to discuss her work and ways we can continue to unite to address climate change challenges. Nelson is the former managing director of the climate program at the Outrider Foundation in Madison. She will discuss the film created to inspire the continued legacy of her father, former Governor of WI Gaylord Nelson, founder of Earth Day. Everyone is invited and encouraged to *join in by either going to the River Falls Public Library's YouTube channel or its Facebook page.*

Wednesday, May 12, 5:00–7:00 pm—Community Tree Planting Event. Volunteers needed to help plant trees at the DNR registered campus forest located at the Mann Valley Farm. All supplies will be provided. Please wear a mask and respect distancing. Please register by emailing sustainability@uwrf.edu.

Updating

On Earth Day Wisconsin Public Radio featured the groundbreaking story of River Falls renewable energy commitments, lifting up our own **Mike Noreen, Conservation & Efficiency Coordinator**. Mike has been instrumental in making the city a nationally-recognized leader in energy sustainability, and in solar-powering our church, St. Bridget, and Ezekiel. See the story at <https://www.wpr.org/we-need-act-now-small-wisconsin-city-boosting-its-use-renewable-energy-fight-climate-change>

A new **Energy Assessment** was recently completed at the church, an important part of our ongoing commitment to energy conservation and sustainability. Results of the survey will be considered by Trustees in the coming weeks.



Mission Partners: Assistance and Resource Center (ARC)

ARC is a vital part of our congregation's outreach and support of those in great need in the community, seeing households through their short-term financial struggles while maintaining their dignity and respect. Rather than going church to church, people in need contact ARC, which pools resources from local churches and agencies to meet local needs. Every request is addressed individually, in a timely manner, and with individuals and families directly involved in the plan. During the first quarter of 2021 ARC assisted 55 households with rent, 28 with utilities, 52 with transportation, 11 with food, and 7 with other needs, providing total support exceeding \$35,000.

Unique among nonprofits, ARC is 100% volunteer driven. Since it was established by River Falls churches in 2009, including First Congregational, it has broadened its base of support to over seventy donors. In 2020 ARC provided over \$98, 000 to those in need and served 173 families and 397 children through its Angels on Earth Giving Tree Program at Christmas. If you are interested in volunteering with ARC please call 715-338-0755.



Blood Drive Success!

Thanks to Mikayla Peterson, one of our church interns, who successfully led a blood drive with the American Red Cross in our Fellowship Hall recently. It was so successful, she has scheduled another one for Wednesday, July 14. We are proud of the ways she has used her faith and gifts to organize and implement this gift to our community.



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.

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.

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 18, 2021	Year to Date
General Fund Income*	\$ 16,240	\$ 192,023
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 9,262	\$ 148,192

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
Jamie Mills—degolierjamie@gmail.com - 715-419-0850
Dave Mountain—focusfan2001@yahoo.com - 715-245-6854
Tim Bylander—timthefixitguy@gmail.com - 715-808-2900

**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
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

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River Falls, Wisconsin 54022
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MAY 1, 2021
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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