



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

October 1, 2023

*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

One of the very best things about living in Wisconsin is that we enjoy four very distinct seasons. While I wish one of them was not quite so long (winter), and while spring and fall seem to be fickle and short lived, each season comes with its own gifts and opportunities. And because we know each season will pass and change quickly, it is our job to savor and enjoy them.

One of the better books I have read recently is by a UCC pastor who recently moved from

Vermont to Madison named Daniel Cooperrider. The book is called Speak with the Earth and It Will Teach You: A Field Guide to the Bible. The title comes from a quote in the book of Job 12:7-9:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak with the earth and it will teach you, and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?

Isn't that marvelous? I've read the book of Job many times, led Bible studies on it even, but somehow amidst all Job's troubles, I missed this gem. So when was the last time you spoke with the earth? And what has the earth taught you?

Another gem from this book is the wonderful quote from an old 9th century Irish monk (Eriugena) who once said: *Christ wears two shoes in the world—scripture and nature. Both are necessary to understand God.* As Pastor Dave would say, that will preach.

As we have been learning in the recent five-part worship series 'Living The Story,' God has entrusted this beautiful creation to us. Each generation takes temporary possession of it and is in charge of stewarding it, caring for it, then passing it on to the next generation. It has become abundantly clear to many of us (even to insurance companies), that we are not doing a very good job of this. The signs are

everywhere—warming oceans, stronger storms, intense rainfall, heat waves, intense drought, the list goes on. Call it global warming or weirding, but something is changing and not for the better. Will we use our biblical faith to speak with the earth and allow it to teach us? Or will we be a stiff necked people who refuses to listen to both our Christian faith and the reality we see unfolding before us?

I am thankful for the work of our church Green Team and a group of River Falls churches called Hope for Creation with their efforts to challenge all of us to live more sustainably. I am thankful for our community of River Falls and particularly the work of church member and River Falls Municipal Utilities employee Mike Noreen who has catapulted River Falls into 5th place nationally in participation of Green Power sales. But the reality is we cannot recycle ourselves out of this mess. Again, our faith teaches us about the interconnectedness of life and our creation. The way forward is by working together, talking together, worshipping together, serving, praying and acting together so that as the body of Christ and with the guidance of God's Spirit, we may help heal our aching creation and start living the abundant life God wants for all God's people.

See you in worship.

In Gratitude, Pastor Chris

Learning Community: Sojourner Truth

You are invited to a Learning Community event on **Wednesday, October 18, 6:30–8:00 pm**. Please register for the event by signing the list in the gathering space or on the church website.

Rev. Dr. Nancy Koester, author and historian, will lead a presentation and discussion about Sojourner Truth, abolitionist and women's rights advocate. Born into slavery in the state of New York in 1797, Sojourner became free around the age of 30, and then became a traveling preacher who spoke for human rights as God's gift to every person. During the Civil War, Truth went to Washington DC to meet Abraham Lincoln and to work with the freed people in the nation's capitol. Truth spoke for many social reforms, based on her belief that God loves all people equally.

Copies of Koester's book, *We Will Be Free: The Life and Faith of Sojourner Truth* (2023) will be available at the event and are on Amazon. It is not necessary to read the book prior to the event.

Sunday Morning Text Study

The Sunday Text Study groups meets at **9:00–9:50** Sunday mornings to read and discuss the Bible texts for the day's worship. The conversations are engaging and everyone is welcome. Please come! For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Adult Bible Study

Wednesday afternoon Adult Bible Study meets **Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm**. The group is discussing the Book of Genesis. Our resource book is *Genesis* by W. Sibley Towner. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.



College Packs

It is College Pack Time again! Each year, we send a small care package to all our church college kids both here in town and away at school. What to bring? Think fun, useful and light (many will be mailed). What would you have liked to receive in college? We have 25 or so packs to gather this year so please be generous. Items need to be at church by October 15. Parents of college students, please make sure the church office has your college student's current address! Let's bless them with some love!

FAQ: Children and Communion

When do children begin taking Communion?

At First Congregational Church, children begin participating in Communion at different ages. Some children are pre-school age, others are in elementary school, and some wait until confirmation to begin taking Communion. Our practice is to include children when they and their parents think they are ready to participate.

How will I know when my child is ready?

Some parents choose infant Communion for their children. Many parents wait until their children express an interest. Typically children are ready to participate in Communion when they begin asking questions about the sacrament. One important theme of Communion is inclusion: All are welcome at the table of the Lord. If a child feels excluded or is interested in participating, it is a good time for that child to begin taking communion.

My child does not yet receive Communion. Should she/he still come forward?

Yes! Everyone is invited to come forward to the servers at the Communion distribution time. Children who will not be communing should keep their hands folded (as opposed to reaching out). This is a signal to the pastor and deacons that the child desires a blessing.

What should I say to my child about Communion?

First Congregational Church has a book and guide for families about Communion. Please talk with Pastor Stacy.





Family Meals Resume

Each Wednesday night, we serve family style meals in the church Fellowship Hall from **5:15 to 6:00 pm**. Whether you are coming from Wednesday School or going to confirmation, youth group, choir or bells; whether you are eating as a large family or don't want to eat alone; whether you are young or old, all are invited to join us to eat.

Cost is \$9 with a family maximum of \$30. Sign up by Tuesday at noon for Wednesday's meal using the sign-up sheet at church or on the website. We also need helpers to serve and clean up. Here is our fall menu:

- Oct 4 - Lasagna and chicken alfredo, salad, and garlic toast
- Oct 11 - Swedish meatballs, butter and parsley potatoes, vegetable, and roll
- Oct 18 - Beef stroganoff, noodles, salad, and bread
- Oct 25 - Chicken marsala, rice, asparagus, salad
- Nov 1 - Boneless BBQ ribs, mac & cheese, butter & parsley potatoes, vegetable, and roll
- Nov 8 - Taco Bar (FMSC Night)
- Nov 15 - Parmesan crusted chicken over rice pilaf, salad, and croissant
- Nov 22 - No Meal - Thanksgiving
- Nov 29 - Bruschetta chicken over pasta, asparagus salad and garlic toast
- Dec 6 - BBQ ribs, mac & cheese, potatoes, veggies, and roll
- Dec 13 - Baked pork chop, garlic mashed potatoes, red cabbage and cooked apples, and bread
- Dec 20 - Meatloaf, baked potato, vegetable, and bread
- Dec 27 - Jan 3 - Off for Christmas and New Years



Let's Feed Hungry Kids!

Join us on **Monday, November 6** as we take the church van and carpool up to Feed My Starving Children in Eagan to feed hungry kids. We will leave church on Monday at 10:30a m, work from 11:30 am to 1:15 pm packing meals, then go out for a late lunch before we head home. We have thirty spots reserved and there are both standing and sitting jobs you can do during the work shift.

Lunch is optional. Use the sign-up sheet and let us know if you are joining for lunch, riding in the van or driving yourselves. See Barb Peterson or Pastor Chris for details.

Financial Support for Art Commissions

The congregation will add two new images for the Picture the Bible art collection: *Manna and Quail in the Wilderness* and *Jesus' Anointing at Bethany*. Each image will cost \$500. Please consider sponsoring an image or contributing to its cost. For more information, please contact Pastor Stacy.

The story of *Manna and Quail*, people God had miraculously rescued from slavery grumbled that freedom was hard. They wondered if the predictability of bondage was more comfortable than the challenges of freedom. When they grumbled that their food was not adequate, God provided manna every morning and quails every evening. The people were told to gather as much manna as they needed for the day (except for two days prior to the sabbath). If they took more than they needed, the manna would spoil. The comparisons between slavery and freedom, resignation and trust, taking enough or taking too much will be much food for thought.

The second story, *Jesus' Anointing at Bethany* is set at Simon's house. While Jesus is at the table, a woman approaches, opens a jar of costly perfumed oil and pours it on Jesus' head. The men (only men were allowed to eat at the table) challenged her, thinking there would have been a better use for such expensive oil. Jesus defends her saying she is anointing Jesus' body prior to his death. While the woman is not named in the story, she is remembered for her kind, gracious act. She is also shown to have insight into what is coming next for Jesus when the men didn't understand what was happening.

Endowment Grants

Each quarter the Endowment Grant Committee meets to evaluate proposals for new ministries and projects submitted through our church committees. Does your group have a new idea you want to pursue? Is there a need in the church or community your group wants to address? Consider applying for an Endowment Grant! The group has \$12,400 to award this year. All proposals must come from a committee and the last date for submission is: **December 10**. Forms can be accessed through the church office or on the church website under 'connect' then 'forms' tabs.

Second Holy Land Tour

In 2019, 24 people from church participated in a Holy Land Tour to visit important places in our Christian faith like Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Galilee. We also learned about the cultural and political struggle between Jews and Palestinians and how the three great religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam literally converge in Jerusalem.

Pastor Chris is planning a trip for October 2024 or April 2025. Please use the sign-up sheet to indicate your interest and time frame. Space is limited to 25 people.

Upcoming Events

Wed, Oct 4	Wednesday School and Family Meals begin!
Sun, Oct 8	Baptism of Anderson Plum
Sun, Oct 15	Bibles, Aprons to 6th and 7th Graders and Bible Cards to 3rd Graders
Sun, Oct 22	Weston Peck Baptism
Mon, Oct 23	Night in Norway with Pastor Chris from 6:30 to 7:30 pm
Tues, Oct 24	Inquirer's Class from 6:30 to 8:00 pm
Sun, Oct 29	Reformation Sunday and Trunk or Treat

Current Capital Campaign

Total Pledged	\$596,646.00
Total Received to Date	<u>433,152.31</u>
Remaining Balance	\$163,493.69

Mortgage Summary—As of Oct 1, 2023

Original Cost of Facilities Expansion Project	\$2,386,970.00
Remaining Amount on Bank Loan	\$103,852.14
Interest Rate (Locked in through January 2027)	3.39%
Monthly Payment	\$2,622.76

Our current three-year capital campaign began June 2022 and will end in May 2025. It will eliminate our bank loan, fund a new church sign and upgrades to the audio visual capabilities in the church building. Thanks to your generosity and faithful, upfront giving for the current Capital Campaign, we were able to make a \$75,000 payment on the principal last month. Thank you!

Treasurer's Report

	Week of	
	<u>Sept 24, 2023</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 6,728	\$ 342,317
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,268	\$ 400,452

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
Mission: Deb Meyer—deb@firstchurchrf.org
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Building: Farnum Fuller—farnumfuller@gmail.com
Maintenance: Tim Bylander—timthefixitguy@gmail.com



Christmas Shoebox

We just wanted to plant a seed that we are fast approaching our drive for items and cash donations for Christmas Shoebox items for the gentlemen at Kinnic Falls Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services. This program has been going on for about the past 15 years and the items we collect are so very much appreciated by them. (If you want to read the thank you notes from the past couple of years just ask to see them, we'd be more than happy to show you).

With that being said, we just wanted you to be thinking of this project in the weeks to come and when you are out and about and see the items listed, you can grab a couple and before we know it, our list will be complete. If you would rather donate cash, just designate it for the Christmas Shoebox and we will make sure all items are purchased. Thanks to all of YOU, we are making a difference. The Christmas Shoebox list is on the gathering table.

Blessings, Jean Smith and Marie Roe

“WISE” Corner

Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, Engaging
for Mental Health and Wellness

The Lord is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing. - Zeph. 3:17

Wellness Wave “4-7-8 Breathing”

Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold the breath for 7 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds.

This breathing pattern aims to reduce anxiety or help people get to sleep. It is a form of pranayama, which is the practice of breath regulation.

Tuesday, October 10 is World Mental Healthy Day. World Mental Health Day is about raising awareness and funds to drive positive change for everyone's mental health.

The WISE Committee will meet with Lisa Hart, Associate Conference Minister, via Zoom at 6:30 pm on October 5th.

Spring Break Mission Trip

Once again we are leading a mission trip to UCC-related Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi in March 2024 over Spring Break.

These trips are literally life-changing, both for the communities we serve and for the people who participate in them. Our hope is that everyone will have an opportunity to participate at some point, but especially our teens.

Once again we have obtained coveted spots for the Mission Trip on **March 16-23, 2024**. Sign-ups have begun. The cost for pledging members is \$450 per person for the week. You must be 14 and older to participate. **A deposit of \$150 is needed by October 15.** See Carol Merriman, Pastor Chris or Alex for more information.



Council Summary September 19, 2023

Treasurer's Report – 2023 budget looks better at this time this year than last year. We are holding our own and are currently \$4900 ahead of last year at this point.

New Business:

New Committee Members - Marie and Chris - Committees need to make sure they have all their members and provide all their contact information to Missy.

New Member promotion: Next Inquirer's Class will be held Tuesday, Oct 24. At this time, three more families are planning to join and three more are considering. The congregation will receive the new members on Giving Thanks Sunday. Discussion occurred regarding a return to providing a new member meal on a bi-annual basis.

Stacy Sabbatical Update - Personnel and Moderator Kathy R. applied for a Lilly Clergy Renewal Grant and Stacy has been notified that she is a recipient. The grant will provide funding for travel and educational opportunities, a replacement for Stacy during her absence and funding to bring in four visiting artists and receptions to show their work.

Old Business:

Committee Descriptions and Calendars - All committees have revised their information.

Reports and Accounting – Search is ongoing at this time.

Capital Campaign Updates: Sign - Tim B, Louie F, Chris M, Kathy R, Andy K - A design has been developed. It appears we will get approval for a back light for the sign from the city. Sound - Joel L, Alex P, Marsha P, Jeff H, Dave R, Chris M – 3 vendors provided quotes of the cost. They will have further discussions with 2 of them.

Ministry Updates:

Christian Education - Discussion of Sunday School programming. There are enough teachers for the classes. Confirmation and Intern programming has begun. Stacy and Chris are team-teaching the programs. The Family Resource Center has a new check-out system for materials. Sojourner Truth will be here October 18th. Suggestion of bringing out some activities during fellowship. Joy Seekers group may help lead the Trunk or Treat event.

Deacons - Fall schedule discussion - dividing some of the duties among more members. Oct. 24th the Deacons will serve dessert for the Inquirers Class.

Discipleship - Kicking off fall campaign. Letters will be written and mailed out. Beginning Oct 22 - for 4 weeks prior to Giving Thanks Sunday - the committee members will present during the service.

Endowment Grant - At the beginning of the year the committee has \$14,000. There is \$10,250 left at this time. This year grants have been provided for hearing aid devices, display for Earth Fest, Name Tag stand and additional supplies for emergency bags. Committees can utilize these funds to increase their outreach.

Mission Education - Discussion of creating action committees within the larger committee. Each member is serving as a contact for each of the mission partners. WISE committee has been meeting and discussing plans and has been providing information for each monthly newsletter. Mission moment planning is occurring as well. Carol M. will provide Five for Five this Sunday.

Music - Summer concerts went well. Discussion of some type of children's programming at the same time of the Trunk or Treat event. The organ needs to be tuned with the piano.

Personnel - October meetings with staff will take place.

Trustees - Discussing the maintenance needs for the building. Committee requested help with tracking specific costs on the treasurer's report. Tim has been tuck pointing and replacing bricks - still more to be done.

Welcoming Ministry - Completing welcome cards to send to new members. They will be hosting an upcoming coffee fellowship with Christian crackers and cheese.

Pastor - Missy is currently on vacation until September 27th. We have welcomed three babies this past month. Second Holy Land trip is being planned. Travel dates will be either October 2024 or April 2025. This Sunday a Back Bay mission trip information meeting will occur. Wednesday, October 4, the Family Meals will begin again. Pastor Chris will be conducting a "Night in Norway" presentation on October 23 for anyone interested in traveling there. The next learning community event will be Wednesday, October 18 on Abolitionist Sojourner Truth. Tuesday, October 24 Inquirer's Class, Sunday, October 15 Bibles will be given to all 6th graders and the 7th graders will receive their aprons. On Wednesday, November 8 there will be a trip for all 6-12th graders to Feed My Starving Children and Sunday, November 12 we will hold the Giving Thanks Meal and reception of the new members.

Moderator - Vice Moderator Marie R thanked everyone for their work.

Respectfully submitted, Jo Anne Friedell, Clerk

NEXT MEETING: October 17 at 7:30 pm

SERVE generously

Simpson Shelter Needs

Urgent supply needs for June:

- Men's T-shirts—all sizes
- Men's boxers—all sizes
- Men's short socks
- Women's white crew socks
- Personal size body wash
- Flip flops/shower shoes

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

Save Your Batteries to Recycle!

We have a container available for recycling all those old, depleted batteries. Start saving them now and bring them to church. We'll pass them on to the recyclers and keep them out of landfills and the environment in our ongoing commitment to sustainability.

Empty Pill Bottles (Prescription Only)

The Lions pill bottle collection has been put on hold for a month because the organization that ships the bottles to Africa doesn't have funds to ship them all. The program will resume in October **but only for the clear prescription bottles that are filled by our pharmacists.**

Thank you so much for making this program the success it is. If you have questions, please contact Carole Mottaz.

Merry Widows

They will meet **Wed, October 18 at 1:00 pm at The Bungalow in Lakeland, MN.** All widows are welcome to join us for lunch and conversation! See JoAnn Lentz for more information.

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.



Cribbage Night

The cribbage group meets on the second Monday at the church. Players are asked to donate \$2 and the group decides which charity to donate to. Playing time starts at **7:00 pm**. All players and abilities welcome. The next game will be **October 9**.

Men's Group

Our church men's group has resumed and 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. Our next gatherings are **October 10 and 24**. Join us, we really aren't that scary ☺!



Offering QR Code

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



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 from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm**.



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RIVER FALLS

Office Phone: 715-425-2052
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STAFF

Chris Myers, Pastor
Stacy Johnson, CE Minister
Deb Meyer, Minister for Community and Outreach
Missy Luedtke, Office Administrator
Kathy Rausch, Moderator
Alex and Sarah Plum, Youth Ministers
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

Pastor's home phone number:
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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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

OCTOBER 1, 2023

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 & 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/or 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.