

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ www.firstchurchrf.org

October 15, 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 living saints of this church has a funny saying that used to puzzle me. This person often shows up at funerals and memorial services of people he only knew casually. When asked why he feels the need to attend these gatherings he responds: *If you want people to come to yours, you have to go to theirs!*

On one level this statement is verifiably false. Dead people don't get to go to other people's funerals. It is impossible. And yet it is also incredibly true. If you want people to come to your funeral you have to be connected and in relationship with others. People who have big funerals are not just people with big families, but also people who have been able to maintain relationships and connections with others. If you want people to come to your funeral, you have to go to theirs.

The problem is, it is so easy to be alone these days. I hear this from just about every age group. From the college student struggling to make connections on the new campus. From the senior living alone after their spouse has died. From the parents busy raising young kids who are so exhausted at the end of the week they simply fall half asleep in front of the tv. From the parents whose kids flew the coop and now have to find new ways to be together as a couple. From the 20 and 30 year olds who wonder how do I meet people I might actually like and want to date and perhaps even marry. It is so easy to be alone these days.

Marked within the pages of the newsletter are at least 21 ways for you to connect with God's people. As one of the creation stories reminds us, *it is not good for us to live alone* (Genesis 2:18). We know this is true. We crave connection, but it is hard and quite honestly difficult these days to be in relationship with one another. We humans are wonderful, quirky, complicated people. And being in relationship with one another requires real work on our part. Yet as Covid showed us, the alternative, each of us sitting in our homes living life through a screen, is not healthy either. So come and connect.

I'll end with a two-part challenge. First, the next time you are in worship, during the passing of the peace or at the end of the worship service, find one person you do

not know and introduce yourself. Don't smother them with your life story, just introduce yourself. Build one connection. Being in worship is one of those wonderfully strange moments like being a first year freshman on campus — there are people everywhere, but you still feel very alone. So next time you are in worship reach out to someone new.

Second, if you want bonus points, do the same thing at Coffee Fellowship. I can tell you even today after 30 years of ministry, Coffee Fellowship is the most stressful part of my week. Let's face it, we get in routines and kind of cliquy sometimes. Even after 20 years of being in this congregation, I still get a little nervous walking into the Fellowship Hall for coffee (and I'm the pastor!). Imagine how difficult it must be for people who are new, or shy? So the next time you are in Coffee Fellowship go up and introduce yourself to someone. Don't tell them your life story, simply build a connection so that the next time you go, you know one more friendly face. And if you want even more brownie points, invite someone from worship to join you for Coffee Fellowship.

It is not good for us to be alone. As Ecclesiastes 4:12 says: "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

Together may we be the body of Christ.

See you in worship.

In Gratitude, Pastor Chris

Learning Community: Sojourner Truth

The next Learning Community event is 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 present a discussion about Sojourner Truth, abolitionist and women's rights advocate. Sojourner Truth was born into slavery in the state of New York in 1797. Around the age of 30, she 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. Truth supported 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 Text Study group meets at **9:00–9:50** Sunday mornings to discuss the Bible texts for the day's worship. Please come! For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Adult Bible Study

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

Sunday School

Each week Sunday School students in Pre-School through Grade 5 receive a discovery page to take home related to the day's lesson. Please watch for these pages and work through them with your children.



Many thanks to volunteers who faithfully teach Sunday School. This important ministry would not exist without their support! Thanks to: George Beatty, Susan Beatty, Jennie Friese, Katie Jackson, Kim Korent, Christina Krueger, Jen Meyer, Sarah Meyer, Becky Pajac, Connor Rude, Mara Shepherd, Christina Treu, Anne Tuveson.

Night In Norway

Join us on **Monday, October 23, from 6:30 to 7:30 pm** as Pastor Chris leads a Night In Norway! He will detail a recent family trip there including itineraries, travel trips plus a few pictures of the trip. He will also talk about his experience renting an all-electric vehicle, favorite websites, as well as his favorite tips for planning and affording such a trip. Norwegian desserts to be served! Please sign up at church or online so we have enough food.



Family Meals

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 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 10:30 am, 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.

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.



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

- Sun, Oct 15 Bibles to 6th Graders,
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
- Sun, Nov 5 All Saints Sunday
- Sun, Nov 12 Giving Thanks Sunday and Meal
Aprons to 7th Graders

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>Oct 8, 2023</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 9,890	\$ 366,624
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,268	\$ 420,988

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

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

Church Staff Contact Info

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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 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

Let's Knit (or Sew, or Quilt, or...) Together

Calling all who knit, crochet or have a craft that can be brought to church or want to learn. Join us on **Thursdays at 10:00 am in the Fellowship Hall starting Thursday, October 19.** We will have a great time sharing our current projects, learn about *Knit a Difference and Crochet, Too!* and enjoy each other's company. If you want to learn, we will show you how we knit or crochet. Any questions, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103 or firstroe@gmail.com.



"WISE" Corner

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

I am loved just as I am. - Ephesians 2:8

How to Practice Box Breathing

Box breathing is exceedingly simple to practice. Simply relax your body and do the following:

- Let out all of the air in your lungs to the count of four.
- Keep your lungs empty for a count of four.
- Inhale for a count of four.
- Keep your lungs full for a count of four.

That's it! You can vary this in a few different ways. You can invite in the silent repetition of an affirmation by syncing it with your breath rather than counting to four.

Another variation is to visualize four sides of a box changing to a new color, one after the other, or in a line as though the box is being traced by a colored pen you hold with your mind, making this into a visualization exercise.

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.

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.



People in the Pews: Norma Revels

I grew up on a dairy farm between Roberts and New Richmond, the second of five children. All five of us live within 40 miles of each other. My family attended the Roberts Congregational Church, as did both sets of grandparents. Many special family occasions took place in that church.

Wayne and I started attending First Congregational 9 years ago, when we were planning our move to River Falls and seeking a church that would feel comfortable to both of us. Judy and Gary Grimm welcomed us and told us a few things about the congregation. We came back and soon spoke to Pastor Chris to schedule our marriage ceremony. First Congregational has been our church family since then.

Some of my favorite activities are biking, dancing and kayaking. I also read a lot. One of my favorite Bible verses is Isaiah 41:10. "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

God has put me where I needed to be throughout my lifetime. Through my employment and activities, I have met incredible people who taught me and supported me in weathering the storms of life's challenges. That's true for me here at First Congregational UCC too.



Financial Support for Art Commissions

Many thanks to Eunice Filkins and Suzanne Hagen for their generous financial gifts toward two new Picture the Bible images, *Manna and Quail in the Wilderness* and *Jesus' Anointing at Bethany*. Each image costs \$500. There is still room for more contributions to meet the remaining \$250 requirement for the second image. Please talk with Pastor Stacy for more information.



January 26-27 for 6th-9th Graders

Due to popular demand, we are planning a winter retreat January 26 to 27 for our current youth in 6th through 9th grade! Here are the details for the trip.

Metropolis Resort - We will stay at the Metropolis Resort in Eau Claire, Wi. We will stay as a group in a Bunk House which includes ten queen bunk beds, two bathrooms, a table with seating for twelve, and a full size refrigerator and a sink! Located right off the Metropolis water park.

Chaos Water Park! - Chaos water park is located inside the Metropolis resort! We will have the opportunity to attend and enjoy all of the attractions.

Passes to Action City! - Action City is located inside the Metropolis resort. Passes include access to...

- Indoor go-kart track (the largest track in the Midwest)
- Laser tag course/laser maze vault room,
- A massive arcade (over 150 video arcade, redemption games, and racers)
- Trampoline park (one of the largest in MN and WI)

If you are interested, please sign up with Alex at fyouthgroup@gmail.com. Once we have a strong group signed up, we will make the reservations and plan around the group's interests!

We will travel as a group after school on Friday and return Saturday evening after a full day of fun! You are welcome to bring a friend depending on the group size! Male and female parents/chaperones are requested to help balance the needs of the trip. Pricing will be determined soon, but will be reduced for church members with the youth fund.

SERVE generously

Simpson Shelter Needs

Urgent supply needs:

- 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 for recycling old, depleted batteries. Save them 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 resumes **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.

Empty Bowls

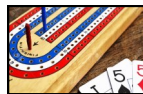
Join Our Neighbors' Place on **Thurs, Oct 26, 5:00-7:00 pm at St. Bridget** for an event to raise money and awareness for food insecurity. Funds raised will support the ONP Backpack Program and the ONP Day Center. Please see the flyer for more information.

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 **November 13**.

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. At our last gathering we hit a new record of 16 of us and there is room for you! We gather for an hour and Pastor Chris leads us into a brief discussion that for the next few weeks will focus on the 9 fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control). Our next gatherings are **October 24 and November 7**. 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

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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

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River Falls, Wisconsin 54022

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
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RIVER FALLS, WI 54022

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

OCTOBER 15, 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.