



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC

110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022

715-425-2052 ■ [www.firstchurchrf.org](http://www.firstchurchrf.org)

November 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

A few years ago, one of the 'saints' of the church, Vietnam vet and retired executive Larry Bauer spoke during worship about the five stages of giving he has personally experienced.

Stage one he called 'unknown giving.' When parent's put a few coins in a Sunday School envelope and hand it to the child to bring to Sunday School class, this is an example of 'unknown giving.'

Stage two he called 'forced giving.' When I tell my kids to give a portion of their allowance to church or charity, this an example of 'forced giving.'

Stage three he called 'resentful giving.' When Larry had his first job, a newspaper route, and his parents forced him to give to church each week, this is an example of 'forced giving.'

Stage four he called 'giving out of obligation.' When we join any church or organization, we are obligated to support it.

Stage five he called 'delighted giving.' Delighted giving comes as a surprise for many. It happens when you realize that your giving helps not just other people, but most of all it helps you. It not only makes the world better, it makes you feel better. It gives you joy, purpose and meaning.

As we enter the Thanksgiving season, we all strive to be delightful givers.

In Gratitude, PC

## 2024 Pledges Due

Our ministry here at First Congregational is possible because of the faithful support of people like you. As we celebrated on our annual Giving Thanks Sunday, we recognize that even with the faithful giving of so many people, our church is currently behind \$30,000 in its expected giving. We ask you to:

- \* If possible, please catch up with your pledged giving
- \* If you have not given a gift this year, please do so
- \* If you are able, please give an additional gift
- \* If you make a one-time gift, please do so now

We know the current economic environment is challenging for many so we appreciate your faithful giving that empowers the many ministries of our church. God bless you all and may God continue to bless our church and its many ministries.

In Gratitude, Pastor Chris,  
Moderator Kathy Rausch and  
Vice Moderator Marie Roe

## Upcoming Events

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Sun, December 3     | Advent Workshop for Families                               |
| Wed, Dec 6, 13 & 20 | Advent Evening Prayer at 6:30 pm                           |
| Tues, December 12   | Christmas Luncheon with RFHS Carolers                      |
| Sun, December 17    | Children's Christmas Program                               |
| Sun, December 24    | Christmas Eve Worship Services:                            |
|                     | - Worship Service for the 4th Sunday in Advent at 10:00 am |
|                     | - Family Service with Communion at 4:00 pm                 |
|                     | - Choir, Candles and Communion Service at 11:00 pm         |



## Christmas Luncheon

You are invited to attend a Christmas Luncheon on **Tuesday, December 12, at noon**. The menu features Norwegian meatballs and a beautiful collection of Christmas cookies. Please come! The cost is \$10.00 per person. Please make a reservation by signing up at church, online, or call the church office. Please let the office know if you need a ride.

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### 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** and is reading and studying Genesis, the first book of the Bible. We have a group of 12 people who regularly participate and there is always room for more. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.



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### The Advent Workshop

The 2023 Advent Workshop for families will be in the Fellowship Hall following Sunday School on **December 3**, the First Sunday in Advent. The event includes a chance to make a variety of Christmas ornaments. If you have friends or neighbors considering participation in a church family, invite them to join you! Please sign up at church or online.

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### Children's Advent Musical

Sunday School children in pre-school through grade 5 will begin rehearsing the 2023 Advent Musical on November 12 during Sunday School. The dress rehearsal will be on Saturday, December 16, 10:00-12:00 noon for children in grades 1-5. The musical will be presented during worship on Sunday, December 17.

It is important for all children to regularly attend Sunday School to be present for these rehearsals.

### Volunteers Needed for the Christmas Luncheon

Many thanks to all the people who have volunteered to help with the Christmas luncheon. We still need a few folks willing to help with the tablecloths on Monday, December 11. Please talk with Pastor Stacy to volunteer.



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### New Hymnals

The Music Committee would like to purchase new hymnals for our congregation. We have selected a hymnal that more closely matches the music we sing during worship services. We already have pledges for 100, but we need an additional 125 copies to serve the congregation at peak times of year. Each hymnal costs \$15 and we are looking for donors.

If you would like to dedicate a hymnal to a special person, we will insert a label inside the front cover in honor of that person. Please sign-up at the Gathering Table and provide your name, number of copies, and the name of the person/s you wish to honor. Sign up deadline is December 17.



## Holiday Helpers (formerly Angels on Earth) Giving Tree

If you would like to help some children have a better Christmas this year, please select an ornament from the tree and purchase a gift from their wish list. The unwrapped gift with the ornament needs to be at the church **no later than noon Thursday, December 7**. Please give the gift cards to someone in the church office. If you would like to make a cash donation instead, please make out to First Congregational Church with "Holiday Helpers" in the memo line.

Thank you for your generosity. If you have questions, please contact Diane Welsh (651-334-3128 or 715-386-6620) or the church office.

## 2023 Advent Calendars

For the last several years, we have had a First Congregational original Advent "calendar." Because we aim to be creative and innovative in our congregation, the "calendars" are always actual calendars. This year they will be folded cubes that will hold a candle and will focus attention on our 2023 Advent themes:

Watch and wait and...

Love neighbors

Forgive others

Heal division

Bring justice

Please be sure to pick up an Advent "calendar" and use it!

## Coming in January: Cooking Class with Peter Kwong

He is back! After a long break due to Covid and health issues, local cook Peter Kwong will be back to help lead us in two Chinese Cooking classes. Dates will be Tuesdays, January 23 and 30, from 5:30 to 7:30 pm in the church kitchen. Sign-ups will be in December. Class is limited to 15 people and will cost about \$25 per person and must be paid ahead of time. A full menu of the class will follow.

## Christmas Shoebox

We are collecting donations for Christmas Shoebox items for the gentlemen at Kinnic Falls Alcohol & Drug Abuse Services. The items we collect are so very much appreciated by them. We just wanted you to be thinking of this project and when you 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. The list of items needed is on the gathering table. Blessings, Jean Smith and Marie Roe



## Poinsettias for Christmas Eve

Poinsettia sales "In Honor of" or "In Memory of" someone

special has begun. The order forms are on the sign-up table or call the church office. The cost is \$15.00 each. Please return the order form with payment by **December 17**. The plants will be on display for the Christmas Eve services. You may pick your plants up after the 11:00 pm service on Christmas Eve. Proceeds of the sales go toward youth activities.

## Reverse Advent Calendars

The Reverse Advent Calendars are ready for pick up. "Reverse" reminds us Advent is a season of giving. Rather than getting a toy or candy each day, we will be adding a food item to the Reverse Advent grocery bag. Each bag has a list of a suggested daily donation, but you can use your imagination and add whatever you want (hint: there is a need for diapers). When the bag is full, bring it in and leave it in the gathering area. The Mission Ed Committee will bring all the bags to the Food Pantry at the end of December - our goal is to exceed the 1500 pounds of groceries we donated last year! Thank you!



## Family Meals Continue Through December

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:

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

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## 2024 Pledges Dedicated

All church families were recently sent the 2024 pledge cards in the mail. Your financial gifts power our church ministry. We ask that every church family complete a financial pledge and return it to the church office by December 3 at the latest so our Trustees can begin to work on near year's church budget. We ask three things of our families:

- If you don't pledge, please start pledging this year
- If you do pledge, increase your pledge, even slightly, as a way of growing in generosity
- If you do not use electronic giving, sign up! It is fast, easy and you will never have to write a check again.

Thank you for your financial support of the many ministries of First Congregational Church.

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## 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 [rfyouthgroup@gmail.com](mailto:rfyouthgroup@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.



## Giving Thanks

Thanks to all who made our 2023 Giving Thanks Meal a success! Not many churches are brave (foolish?) enough to put on a home-cooked meal for over 200 people year after year. Thanks to all who helped make this day possible but special thanks to the Krueger Clan and their helpers, Dave Reilly and Laura Miller who each year head up this endeavor. Here are some pictures of our day!



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## “WISE” Corner

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

*It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He enables me to stand on the heights. - Psalm 18:32-33*

### Be Active

Exercise won't make your stress disappear, but it can reduce some of the emotional intensity that you're feeling, clearing your thoughts and letting you deal with your problems more calmly.

Being active is not only great for your physical health and fitness, evidence shows it can also improve your mental wellbeing by:

- Raising your self-esteem
- Helping you to set goals or challenges and achieve them
- Causing chemical changes in your brain which can help to positively change your mood

## 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! 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.

*Given the current situation in the Middle East, there is a great uncertainty about when this trip might happen but we are tentatively planning for a trip in either October 2024 or April 2025. Please use the sign-up sheet to indicate your interest and time frame. Space is limited to 25 people.*

### First Church Companions

A small group of church members are working to invigorate our visits to church community members. We call ourselves “First Church Companions.” The “Companions” will meet quarterly to support each other, help new Companions learn about this role, and discuss questions or concerns. If you are willing to visit with someone in our church community and connect at least once a month with a call or visit, please sign-up at the Gathering Table.

If you are interested in receiving regular visits or recommending someone who might appreciate visits, there is also a line on for “Buddies.”

Contact Pastor Deb or Lu Lueck with questions.

### Current Capital Campaign

Total Pledged	\$596,646.00
Total Received to Date	<u>444,776.61</u>
Remaining Balance	\$151,869.39

### Mortgage Summary—As of Nov 1, 2023

Original Cost of Facilities Expansion Project	\$2,386,970.00
Remaining Amount on Bank Loan	\$101,229.38
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>Nov 5, 2023</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 12,358	\$ 428,157
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,268	\$ 462,060

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](mailto:chris@firstchurchrf.org)  
Education: Stacy Myers—[stacy@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:stacy@firstchurchrf.org)  
Mission: Deb Meyer—[deb@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:deb@firstchurchrf.org)  
Office: Missy Luedtke—[missy@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:missy@firstchurchrf.org)  
Youth: Alex and Sarah Plum—[rfyouthgroup@gmail.com](mailto:rfyouthgroup@gmail.com)  
Music: Jamie Mills—[degolierjamie@gmail.com](mailto:degolierjamie@gmail.com)  
Choir: Sarah Plum—[sarah.e.plum.95@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.e.plum.95@gmail.com)  
Building: Farnum Fuller—[farnumfuller@gmail.com](mailto:farnumfuller@gmail.com)  
Maintenance: Tim Bylander—[timthefixitguy@gmail.com](mailto:timthefixitguy@gmail.com)



# Thanks for Feeding Hungry Kids!

We had two groups head to Feed My Starving Children. On Monday, a group of mostly seniors (and some grandkids!) packed 14,040 meals during their shift. And on Wednesday, our 6th-12th graders packed 33,264 meals for a total packed this week of 47,304 meals which is enough to feed about 130 kids for a year. Thank you church for making time for this ministry!





## People in the Pews: Trish Graves

1. *Where did you grow up/hometown?* My hometown is Glenwood, MN (not to be confused with Glenwood City, WI) which is located on a lake near Alexandria in west central MN. I attended Hamline University in St. Paul and then moved to Indiana. I returned to teach in MN for eight years, and moved to Amery, WI for ten years before coming to River Falls.
2. *Where do you live now?* I've lived in River Falls for about 26 years, co-parenting three boys adopted from Guatemala.
3. *How long have you been attending First Congregational Church?* About 12 years.
4. *What keeps you coming back to church at First Congregational?* I was raised Lutheran and participated in that denomination for most of my life. However, I needed to find a vibrant religious youth educational experience. The boys attended Vacation Bible School at First Congregational one summer and we found the church to be very welcoming. The church supports youth continually from Sunday School through college and this has helped ground them in their faith. I enjoy the musical offerings and participate in bells and choir.
5. *What is your favorite Bible passage, quote, or hymn. Why?* My favorite hymn is "children of the Heavenly Father" as it has a calming melody and provides support in trying times.
6. *What is your favorite childhood memory?* My dad was a teacher and also taught Driver's Ed in the summer so our family vacations were always in August. We took a two-week adventure camping vacation that I still treasure today. We explored many parts of the U.S. and this experience encouraged me to establish that camping vacation tradition with my family.
7. *What is your favorite hobby or pastime?* I enjoy being outside and active. As a family, we bike, play tennis, golf, kayak, camp and hike. I like to garden (other than pulling the weeds), cook and love to travel.
8. *Tell us something about you or your family that may surprise us.* I've traveled to or through all 50 states and 4 continents: North America, South America, Europe and Australia.



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## What The Pastor is Reading

Romney: Reckoning by McKay Coppins.

I know, surprising I am reading this, right? It is quite a good read and tells the inside story of what one GOP insider (Mitt Romney) thinks about changes he has seen in his party and nation. The first part has to do with Romney's growing up through the Romney vs. Obama election results back in 2012 (can you believe it has been 13 years!), the second part has to do with changes in the GOP since then.

Who Do You Want To Be When You Grow Old: The Path to Purposeful Aging by Richard Leider and David Shapiro.

Every gets old but not everyone is growing old. This is the mantra of this book on purposeful aging. Framed as a conversation between old friends, this is a short, animating book about how we can age with grace and purpose.



## 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.



### 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**. We will have a great time sharing our current projects and enjoying 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.



### 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 **December 11**.

### Men's Group

Our church men's group meets **every other Tuesday from 9:00–10:00 am in the Youth Room**. All men are welcome to join us for coffee, donuts and lively conversation. We gather for an hour and Pastor Chris leads us into a brief discussion 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 **Nov 21 and Dec 5 & 19**. At our last gathering, we hit a new milestone of 20 guys! Join us, there is room for you.

### 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.



### 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](http://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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Office Phone: 715-425-2052  
E-mail: [office@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:office@firstchurchrf.org)  
Website: [www.firstchurchrf.org](http://www.firstchurchrf.org)

## 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:  
Chris Myers 715-426-2075  
[chris@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:chris@firstchurchrf.org)

## 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

NOVEMBER 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.