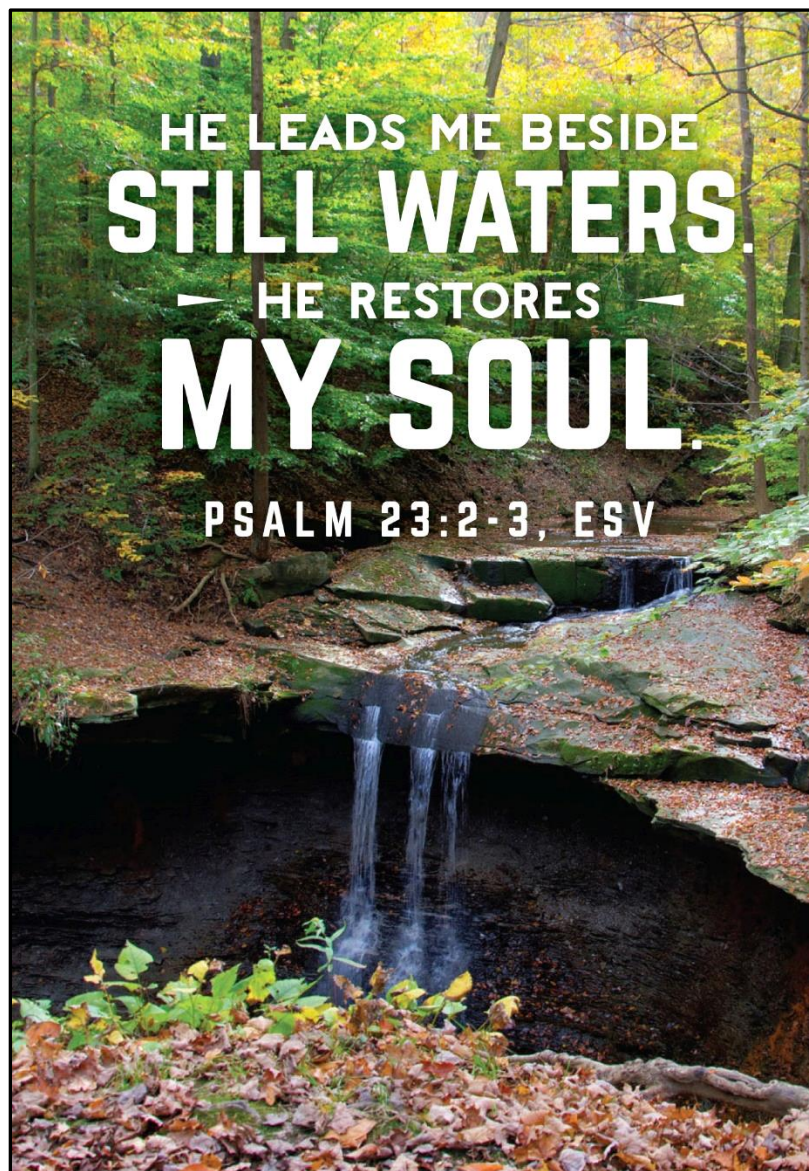


**First Congregational
United Church of Christ
River Falls, Wisconsin**

April 21, 2024



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN**

April 21, 2024

Fourth Sunday of Easter and Earth Day

10:00 am

Gathering

You weren't created just to consume resources,
you were put on this Earth to make a contribution.

- Mother Teresa

Welcome to our guests who are visiting with
us today!

- The nursery is available for young children.
- Activity bags are available for children.
- Large print bulletins are available from the ushers.
- Please stand when noted by the *
- Congregation responses are in bold.
- Please stop at the welcome station for a gift.

*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*

GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: For the water that sustains us:

P: We thank you Creator God.

L: For the plants that breathe for us:

P: We thank you Creator God.

L: For the soil that nourishes us:

P: We thank you Creator God.

L: For the light that guides us and darkness that restores us:

P: We thank you Creator God.

L: For this beautiful creation that is entrusted to us:

All: We thank you Creator God. Come let us worship the God who leads us into life!

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

L: Merciful God, you call us to love our neighbors, and to care for the wonder of your creation.

P: **But again and again we act in ways that harm the Earth and bring misery to its inhabitants.**

L: You gift us with plenty of fresh, clean water and soil that supports life.

P: **Yet too often we have used your gifts selfishly and not left a better world for our children.**

L: Create a new heart in us, O God.

P: **Create in us a deeper commitment to be your good stewards. Amen.**

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

L: Friends, let us believe in the good news:

P: **In Christ, we are a new creation, set free to love God and love God's good creation with our whole selves.**

All: **Thanks be to God!**

L: May the peace of the Lord be with you all.

P: **And also with you.**

***PASSING OF THE PEACE**

(Please greet one another with signs of peace)

***GLORIA**

Come, All You People

*Come, all you people, come and praise the Most High,
Come, all you people, come and praise the Most High,
Come, all you people, come and praise the Most High,
Come now and worship the Lord.*

*Come, all you people, come and praise the Savior,
Come, all you people, come and praise the Savior,
Come, all you people, come and praise the Savior,
Come now and worship the Lord.*

Hearing the Word

PSALM 23 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

R

Shep-herd me, O God, be - yond my wants, be -
yond my fears, from death in - to life.

- L: The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
- P: He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.**
- L: He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
- P: Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.**
- L: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- P: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long. R**

Celebrating the Meal

(All Christians are welcome at the table of our Lord. The bread is gluten-free. Red wine and white grape juice are offered. Those choosing not to commune may receive a blessing from the servers.)

The Invitation to the Meal

- L: In the beginning, out of a formless void, God spoke, and the creation slowly emerged.
- P: It was a garden of great beauty and bounty, with enough for all to live, love and grow.**
- L: Here at this table we see a glimpse of that garden.
- P: Here at this table God provides fine bread and good drink, signs that God is still at work in our world today.**
- L: So let us gather together as God's creations.
- P: Let us eat, drink and be fed at the table of our Creator.**

The Great Thanksgiving

- L: The Lord be with you.
- P: And also with you.**
- L: Lift up your hearts.
- P: We lift them up to the Lord.**

L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
P: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**
L: It is right and good always to give thanks...

The Words of Institution

L: We praise your name as we proclaim the mystery of faith...
All: **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

Prayer of Consecration

Distribution of the Elements

Hymns during the distribution of the elements:

Morning Has Broken

Blue #35

For the Beauty of the Earth

Blue #40

Eat This Bread

Eat this bread, drink this cup, come to me and never be hungry.

Eat this bread, drink this cup, trust in me and you will not thirst.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

All: **We give you thanks, Almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Proclaiming the Word

TIME WITH CHILDREN

Rev. Chris Myers

SONG OF BLESSING

***He's got the whole world in his hands,
He's got the whole wide world in his hands,
He's got the whole world in his hands,
He's got the whole world in his hands.***

GOSPEL LESSON

John 10:7-18

SERMON

Rev. Chris Myers

***STATEMENT OF FAITH – Good Shepherd Sunday**

I believe I need a shepherd.

Because I am sometimes timid and other times overconfident,
Because I often don't know the best path yet pretend I do,
Because I rush into dead ends or lead others into hazardous places,
Because my brightest ideas are seamed with darkness,
Because the things I crave may not be what is good for me,
I need a shepherd.

I believe in Jesus, the best possible shepherd;
His wisdom leads me to the best opportunities,
His word comforts me when I'm anxious or afraid,
His arm steadies me when I feel weary and heavy-laden,
His wounded body displays the cost of my rescue,
I believe in Jesus, the best possible shepherd.

I believe that I do not find him, but he finds me,
That I am under his care by virtue of sheer grace,
The love he gives me is to be shared with others,
That he treasures my name and prepares a place for me,
That his fold transfixes earth and heaven.

I trust Jesus, the good shepherd of us all. Amen.

THE PRAYERS & LORD'S PRAYER (debts/debtors)

Lord in your mercy... Hear our prayer.

...Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

GATHERING OUR GIFTS

Praise to the Lord the Almighty
By McChesney

Jubilee Ringers

***DOXOLOGY**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Good Shepherd, **guide us to the places where we should be and nourish us with food that restores our spirits. Lead us to abundant life here and now. Bless the gifts we offer that we may be your faithful followers in all we do. Amen.**

Sending

*HYMN

For the Fruit of All Creation

Blue #723

*BLESSING

POSTLUDE

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SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Chris Myers
Celebrant: Chris Myers
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Steve Koecher
Deacons: Brian Miller, Traci Hagberg,
Suzanne Hagen, Cindy Gandrud,
Laura Anderson
Organist: Terry Mithun
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Ryan Luedtke
Trustee: Tim Bylander
Coffee
Fellowship: The Luedtke Family
Counters: Marie Roe, Jean Smith
*Altar table flowers are given by Sally
Steneman in celebration of Earth Day.*

CHURCH STAFF

Pastor: Christopher Myers
Education Pastor: Stacy Johnson Myers
Community &
Outreach Pastor: Deb Meyer
Youth Minister: Alex Plum
Music Coordinator &
Bell Director: Jamie Mills
Choir Director: Sarah Plum
Organists: Terry Mithun,
Marsha Pearson
Building Manager: Timothy Bylander
Church Moderator: Kathy Rausch
Office Administrator: Missy Luedtke
Nursery Attendant: Kahla Fuller
Custodian: Farnum Fuller

Treasurer's Report

	<u>Apr 14, 2024</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 9,424	\$ 202,929
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,463	\$ 156,945

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

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.



Offering QR Code

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

Please remember the following in your prayers this week:

Those who are ill or recovering:

Dorothy Shavers (mother of Rene Bylander), Carsten (grandson of Duane Church), Sue Taylor, Judy (mother of Lara Koecher), Woods (grandson of Bobbie Kuhn), Melissa Oscanyan (friend of Ann Nelson), Dennis Kiel, Michael O'Brien, Glenn Kees, Marshall Skule, Linda (daughter of Chuck White)

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For our church mowing team as they soon begin their season (there is room for one more mower – training provided, contact the office)
- For those from our Mission Team and others who participated in Earth Fest at UWRF this past Saturday, that it may inspire us to better care for God's gift of the good creation
- For Pastor Stacy as she begins her sabbatical, that it may be a time of rest, renewal and growth
- For our Music Team who offered the most recent Music at First Church concert celebrating the music from Ken Burns documentaries here at church, bless you
- For the Northwest Association Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 20 in Eau Claire, a gathering of the 60 some UCC churches in Northwest Wisconsin, that we may celebrate our common mission

Prayers for our World:

- For civilians caught in bloody conflict in Israel and Gaza who are always the ones who suffer in times of war, may a new way forward be found to bring lasting peace
- For those fighting cancer and those working to find a cure, may your efforts be fruitful

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

- For those who planned and participated in our third annual Earth Fest!
- For all those who bring snacks each week for our Wednesday School kids to enjoy, bless you!
- For the Among Friends Program, which meets here at church on Tuesdays to help those with dementia and their families by providing a fun and safe place for them, may they be blessed with more participants and volunteers!
- For our baptism boom which is now at 8 children of God in 4 months including Hope Withers (Erik and Vanessa) baptized February 25, Laney Sitz (Heather and Dan) baptized on March 3, Nora Koecher (Dan and Mari) baptized on March 10, and four Thompson children (Talia, Orion, Oliver, Tova) to be baptized on May 5, and Dean Wilhelmy (Heidi and Mason) to be baptized on May 19, may they all grow in love and faith!

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For the family of Lillian Tan whose brother James Tandias died suddenly this past week, may his family be comforted as they gathered in Marinette for a Memorial Service this past Saturday
- For the family of Dahn Carrison as they gather to celebrate his life on Friday, April 26 at 2pm with visitation an hour before and a lunch to follow, may they be comforted
- For the Rausch family mourning Bill, the Fosmo family mourning Harold, the Prochnow family mourning Neal, the Sorensen family mourning Dorothy, the Carrison family mourning Dahn, may you be strengthened through the care of others

If you have people you wish to include on our prayer list, please contact the church office or one of the pastors.

Loving God

New to Church: Are you a first-time visitor? Please stop at the welcome table in the gathering area to receive a special welcome gift from us!

Sunday Morning Text Study: Join us each Sunday morning, **9:00–9:50**, to explore the scripture texts used in that Sunday's worship. Participating in this discussion is a great way to prepare for worship.

Adult Bible Study meets on **Wednesdays from 1:00–2:30 pm**. The group is reading and discussing *Jesus is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* by UCC pastor and writer Martin Copenhaver. For more information, contact the church office.

Loving Neighbor

Memorial Service for Dahn Carrison will be **Friday, April 26 at 2:00 pm** here at church with a visitation one hour before and a lunch to follow in the Fellowship Hall. We are in need of both cakes/bars for the lunch as well as workers. Please use the sign-up sheet online or at church. Thank you for offering this gift to the family.

Spring Clean-Up, Saturday, April 27, 9:00 am: Please bring your gloves, rakes, blowers, pruning shears, etc. to help clean up the grounds at the church. Back-up date is Saturday, May 4. Please sign up and join us!

Relay for Life Follow Up: Thank you very much for your generous donations for Relay for Life events. The money raised for the Relay event goes to the American Cancer Society. Our church team raised **\$1,784** putting us in the Rising Star bracket. The **community Relay for Life event has raised over \$80,000**. They will continue taking donations into August for the 2024 event.

Red Cross Blood Drive: A Blood Drive held at the church will be **Wed, May 15, from 11:00 am–5:00 pm**. Please call 1-800-733-2767 or visit www.redcrossblood.org and enter: firstcongregationalrf to schedule an appointment.

Brazilian Healthcare Mission: The newsletter from the Rev. Barb de Souza healthcare ministry in Brazil is available on the church website or you can find a copy at church on the back table.

Scarves, Mittens, & Hats: Join our knitting group by making scarves, mittens and/or hats for school age children. We are supporting Basics for Local Kids in Pierce & St. Croix counties. You can make items at home from yarn, fleece or wool or join us on Thursdays at 10 am. If you have questions, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103.

First Church Companions: The “**Companions**” meet quarterly to support each other, help new companions, and discuss questions. 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. If you are interested in receiving regular visits, there is also a line on the same sign-up sheet for “**Buddies**.” Contact Pastor Deb or Lu Lueck with questions.

Among Friends is a community-based social respite program serving adults who have memory loss who reside in Pierce and St. Croix Counties. For more information, contact them at (715) 293-2561. Check out the website: amongfriendsrf.com and Facebook page. It is held at the church on **Tuesdays 9am to 3pm**.

Among Friends Volunteer Needed: Among Friends is seeking someone who can spend 2-3 hours with them **each Tuesday in April from 10:30 am to 1:30 pm**. That person will be there as someone who will spend time chatting with our participants. Please contact the church office for more information.

Loving Self

Learning Community Event: In Our Own Voice, The Journey Toward Mental Wellness will be held **Tuesday, April 30 at 6:30 pm**. Members of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) will share their personal stories of what it is like to have a mental illness or to live with and care for someone with a chronic mental illness. Discussion will center around how we as a church can become more informed, inclusive, and responsive to those who have mental health needs. The session will conclude with question/answers, a survey and resources for attendees. Dessert will be provided. Join us!

Inquirer's Class: New to church? Want to know more about our life and ministry? Join us for the Inquirer's Class on **Tues, May 7 from 6:30 to 8:00 pm** in the Fellowship Hall. At this 90-minute gathering, you will meet church leaders, other new folks and learn more about First Congregational Church. Dessert and childcare are provided. Please sign up on the table.

Softball News: Our church will sponsor a softball team in the River Falls Church Family League. The family league is a co-ed division allowing players to play at the age of 14. The co-ed description requires teams to have three women on the field at all times. The games are played on Monday evenings at Hoffman Park. Games will begin the first Monday after Memorial Day and continue until the middle of August. Any questions, contact Sarah Plum at (715)418-9393 or Deb Hoffman at (612)308-4945, debhoffman234b@gmail.com.

Music Committee News: Thank you to all who attended the Jacqueline Schwab piano concert. Jacqueline has a special gift of expressing her emotions through her music. Our next concert is Music on the Lawn, Thurs, July 11, the opening day of River Falls Days. We plan to have Colin Cosgrove again with his bluegrass band and food provided by a food truck. Stay tuned for more information.

VBS Volunteers: Please volunteer to help with Vacation Bible School! We need adult and teen workers. VBS will be July 29–August 1, 9:00–11:30 am. Pastor Stacy will be back for VBS. To volunteer, please sign the list on the sign-up table or on the church website.

Women's Group: Interested in fellowship and community with other women? Pastor Deb invites you to join her every 2nd & 4th Tuesday of the month. Please bring a sack lunch. The next meeting will be **Apr 23 & May 14**.

Men's Group: The group meets **every other Tuesday from 9:00-10:00 am** for coffee, treats & conversation. Next meetings are **Apr 23 & May 7**. Join us! Talk to Pastor Chris for more information.

Let's Knit Together: Calling all who knit, crochet or have a craft that can be brought to church or want to learn. Join us **Thursdays at 10:00 am in the Fellowship Hall**. We have a great time sharing our projects & enjoying each other's company. Questions, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103 or firstroe@gmail.com

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 group meets on the second Monday at church. Players are asked to donate \$2 & the group decides which charity to donate to. Playing time is **7pm**. All players & abilities welcome. Next game will be **May 13**.

Youth Events

Scholarship Forms Due: Please be advised that all church scholarship forms are due in the church office by **Sunday, May 5**. Church Scholarships come in three forms: Senior High School Scholarships for graduating High School Seniors which require an essay, recommendation letter and application. Continuing Education Scholarships which require a brief essay and application which are for those already in college, technical school or graduate school. And Spiritual Growth Scholarships for those going to church camp or mission trips. Questions can be directed to Jenny Luedtke chair of the Scholarship Team.

Vacation Bible School: Children age 3 through completed grade 5 are invited to Vacation Bible School. The theme is *Christian Art: Stop, Look, Listen* and will feature Bible study, children's literature, Christian art and architecture, music, and an engaging variety of art projects from painting to felting. VBS is free and open to all community children. Registration forms are online or at church. Dates are **July 29–August 1, 9:00–11:30 am**.

Summer Children's Musical: Children who have completed grades 1-6 are invited to produce the musical *Rescue in the Night: The Story of Daniel in the Lions' Den*. Rehearsals include singing, learning lines, and working on the set and props. The show will be presented on Thursday evening. All are welcome and there is no charge. Registration forms are online or at church. Dates are **Aug 19-22, 9:00 am–Noon for Rehearsals and Aug 22, 6:30 pm for Dinner and the Show**.



A Learning Community Event

**In Our Own Voice,
The Journey Toward Mental Wellness**

April 30, 2024 @ 6:30pm

**First Congregational UCC, River Falls, WI
110 North Third Street**

**Members of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
will share their personal stories
of what it is like to have a mental illness or
to live with and care for someone
with a chronic mental illness.**

**The session will conclude with question/answers,
a survey and resources for attendees.
Dessert will be provided.**

**Please come and learn how we can support
those who have mental health challenges
in the church and community.**

SCRIPTURE LESSON: 1 John 3:16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

GOSPEL LESSON: John 10:7-18

So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.’

Still: The Art of Noticing by Mary Jo Hoffman
www.stillblog.net