

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

December 1, 2024



FIRST SUNDAY
OF
Advent

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN

December 1, 2024

First Sunday of Advent

10:00 am

Gathering

If the Gospel is good news, it is not because it predicts a bright shiny future based on our morality. The Gospel is neither a cocoon that insulates us from the sufferings of this present age, nor a pair of ear plugs that shuts out the groaning of creation. The Gospel is good news, not because it predicts a future based on our good behavior or other present trends; the Gospel is good news because it promises a future based on God's own faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

- James Katy, professor of preaching at Princeton

Welcome to our guests who are visiting with us today!

- 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.

No matter who you are. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you are welcome here!

- Please stop at the welcome station for a gift.
- Please note our worship service is livestreamed.

GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Today, we begin the journey of Advent.

P: Let us pray that we may be ready and able to welcome the Christ child into our lives again.

L: May the keeping of Advent be upon our hearts and lives.

P: Come, Lord Jesus!

L: May this Advent wreath remind us to prepare for Christ's coming

P: Come, Lord Jesus!

L: The first candle is the candle of HOPE. It was hope that gave people the courage to go on, and it was hope that directed their prayers toward a Messiah.

P: Because of our trust in what God has already done for us, we are bold to hope for what God will yet do with us.

L: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

P: Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." May our lights so shine before others that they will give glory to God!

All: Come, let us worship the God who leads us into life!

(Light the first Advent candle)

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

L: O God, we confess to you that we have fallen asleep.

P: We often go through the motions and live our daily lives without much thought outside of ourselves.

L: Forgive us for our shortsightedness.

P: Forgive us for not being awake to the wonders and signs that you are doing something new in our world and in our lives.

L: Help us to seek you in the face of others.

P: Call us into your ways of love and justice, so that we might be fully awake, watching and waiting for your return in our world and in our lives in a new way. Amen.

*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray.

P: Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.

All: As we wait in Advent, we know that Christ is coming yet again into our world and will bring with him renewal and restoration. Bring us these gifts and help us to take up our part in your work. Amen.

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 (Sung twice)

He Came Down

He came down that we may have love; He came down that we may have love; He came down that we may have love; hallelujah forever more.

Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

PSALM 25:1-10 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

Response Unison D Bm Em7 A D Antiphon: Judy Hunnicutt, 1994

Your mer-cy and love have been from of old.

The image shows a musical score for a response. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the bass line is in the bass staff. Above the treble staff, there are chord markings: D, Bm, Em7, A, and D. The lyrics 'Your mer-cy and love have been from of old.' are written below the treble staff. The word 'Response' is written above the treble staff, and 'Unison D' is written below it. 'Antiphon: Judy Hunnicutt, 1994' is written above the bass staff.

L: To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

P: O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

L: Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

P: Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

L: Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

P: Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. R

L: Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

P: Good and upright is the LORD; therefore God instructs sinners in the way.

L: God leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

P: All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep God's covenant and decrees. R

Celebrating the Meal

All Christians are welcome at the Lord's table. The bread is gluten-free. The cup is alcohol-free. Those choosing not to commune may receive a blessing from the servers.

The Invitation to the Meal

L: Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we wait and watch during this Advent season, we pray...

P: Come, O Come, Emmanuel, come and save us.

L: As we transition from a season of giving thanks to a time of preparing for the Messiah's birth, we pray...

P: Come, O Come, Emmanuel, come and save us.

L: As we look for signs of his presence among us yet again, we pray...

P: Come, O Come, Emmanuel, come and save us.

All: So come let us gather at the table of our Lord.

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 remember 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:

Piano Sonata No. 8 in A Minor KV310, Movement 1 by W. A. Mozart

Serena Hernke

Be Not Afraid

Congregation join on refrain:

Refrain

Be not a - fraid. I go be - fore you al - ways. Come, fol - low

me, and I will give you rest.

Lord of All Hopefulness

Verse 1 – Solo, Verses 2, 3 and 4 – All

Blue #469

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 (Children preschool through grade 8 leave for Sunday School.)

Stay awake (clap, clap). Be ready (stomp, stomp).

You do not know the hour when the Lord is coming.

Stay awake (clap, clap). Be ready (stomp, stomp).

The Lord is coming soon.

***STATEMENT OF FAITH for Advent**

L: In quietness and darkness, in peace and confusion, Jesus Christ wants to make his home and meet his friends. He is the light of life:

P: He is the hope for the world.

L: In him there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither Roman Catholic nor Protestant;

P: All are one in Jesus Christ.

L: He is the light of life:

P: He is the hope of the world.

L: In him there is neither black nor white, neither north nor south;

P: All are one in Jesus Christ.

L: He is the light of life:

P: He is the hope of the world.

L: In him there is neither male nor female, neither master nor servant;

P: All are one in Jesus Christ.

L: He is the light of life:

P: He is the hope of the world.

L: He is the light of life:

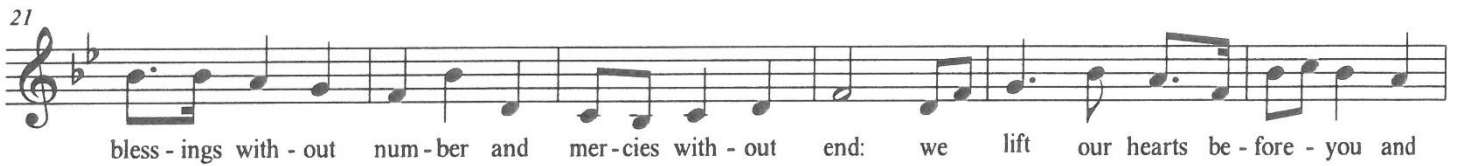
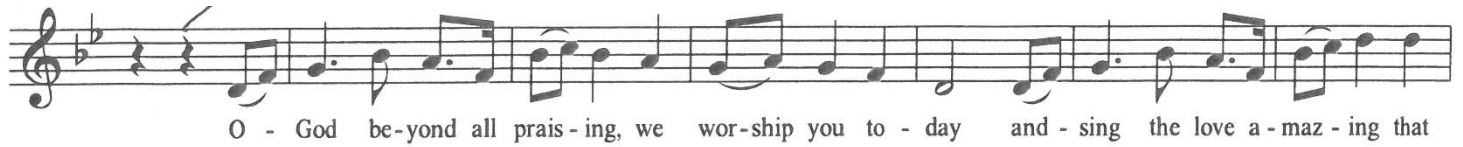
P: He is the hope of the world. Amen.

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.

*OFFERTORY



*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

O God, as we wait in hope, kindle faith in us. May these gifts bring your love and grace to all this Advent season. Amen.

Sending

*HYMN

All Earth Is Waiting

Black #121

*BLESSING

POSTLUDE

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Thank you to the Bylander family who donated our 2 beautiful Christmas trees this year!



SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Chris Myers
Celebrant: Stacy Johnson Myers
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Traci Hagberg
Deacons: Karen Lloyd, Jena Most,
Becky Pajac, Tanya Larsen,
Cindy Gandrud
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Trustee: Jane Truesdill
Welcomers: JoAnn Lentz
Coffee
Fellowship: Pastor Deb Retirement Cake
Counters: Jean Smith, Vicki Sippel
*Altar table flowers are given by the Kampstra
Kids in celebration of Joyce Kampstra's 90th
birthday.*

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>Nov 24, 2024</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 7,088	\$ 485,521
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,463	\$ 491,761

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:

Sue Taylor, Jeff (brother-in-law of Janice Healy), Rev. Kurt Katzmar, Barbara de Souza, Mike (friend of Mark Hudnall), Larry Bauer, Kevin (friend of Tanya Larsen), Crissy (daughter of Brad Williams), Art (father of Christina Krueger)

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For Pastor Deb as she retires from her church position to spend more time with family and as we celebrate her two-year ministry here on her last Sunday, may God grant her rest and renewal in this next stage of her life
- For those who will receive gifts from the Giving Tree, may they be tangible signs of God's presence
- For those receiving amaryllis plants, may they kindle joy in all who receive them
- For our Discipleship Team as they work to secure pledges to fully fund our church ministry for 2025 as we dedicated our financial pledges on Sunday, November 17th, may we be blessed with generous hearts
- For those gearing up for the Advent Workshop for families, may it be a time of crafty connections
- For our Sunday School kids working on their Christmas program on Sunday, December 22, may it kindle faith in them and us

Prayers for our World:

- For those traveling over the Thanksgiving holiday, may you have safe journeys and enjoy time with family and friends
- For a safe and fruitful hunting season
- For lasting peace in the Middle East that brings justice and security to all people and for those working for a lasting peace in the Middle East, may God's Spirit be present
- For all of us as we work to better care for the gift of God's good creation and reduce the effects of climate change

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

- For Joyce Kampstra who celebrates her 90th birthday on November 30th, congratulations on making this milestone!
- For Sonny and Mary Miner who celebrate their 62nd wedding anniversary on December 1, may God continue to work in and through you both!
- For Don and Ginny Larson who celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on November 20th, may God continue to bless you both! Wow!
- For Loral Keil and Brian Miller who celebrate their 43rd wedding anniversary on November 28, may you continue to grow in love
- For our own Matt Cernohous who was recently appointed acting Fire Chief for the River Falls Fire Department, God bless you in your service to our community

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For the family of Richard Paulson, brother of Merle, and the family of Jean Hector, mother of Kathryn, both of whom died suddenly recently, may their families be strengthened at this difficult time
- For the saints of First Congregational as we remembered them on All Saints Sunday, November 3rd: Susan Koosmann, Bill Olson, Fred Volkmann, Sheila Peterson, Dahn Carrison, Dorothy Sorenson, Dick Alexander, Neal Prochnow, Harold Fosmo, Richard Wells, Ron Truesdill, Janice Charpentier

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

Announcements

No matter who you are. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you are welcome here!

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!

Inquirer's Class: New to church? Want to know more about our life and ministry? Join us for the Inquirer's Class on **Tues, Dec 3 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.

Advent Evening Prayer Returns: Each Wednesday in Advent, we gather for worship using the Holden Evening Prayer Service of simple songs, scripture and stories. Join us on **Wed, Dec 4, 11 and 18 at 6:30 pm** in the sanctuary for the absolutely lovely thirty-minute worship service.

Christmas Eve Worship Changes: This year, we will again offer our 4:00 pm Christmas Eve family worship with candlelight, communion & a story for children of all ages. The late service this Christmas Eve will move to 10:00 pm, an hour earlier than previous years. It will again include the choir, communion & candlelight. Please join us at either service this Christmas Eve as we again welcome the Christ child into our world & lives and consider inviting a friend to join you.

Sunday Morning Text Study: Please join us on Sunday mornings to discuss the Bible passages used in worship. The group meets from **9:00–9:50** Sunday mornings in the Youth Room. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Adult Bible Study: Wednesday afternoon Adult Bible Study meets from **1:00–2:30 pm**. The group is discussing *Signs and Wonders*, by Amy-Jill Levine. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Loving Neighbor

Poinsettias for Christmas Eve: Poinsettia sales in honor or memory of someone special have begun. The order forms are on the sign-up table. The cost is \$15.00 each. Please return the order form with payment by **Dec 15**. The plants will be on display for the Christmas Eve services. You may pick your plants up after the 10pm service on Christmas Eve. Proceeds of the sales go toward youth activities.

Christmas Shoebox: The drive for donations for Christmas Shoebox items for the gentlemen at Kinnic Falls Alcohol & Drug Abuse Services has begun. The items we collect are so very much appreciated by them. If you would rather donate cash, just designate it for the Christmas Shoebox. The list of items needed is on the gathering table.

Sharing Families 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 Thurs, Dec 12**. Please give the gift cards to someone in the church office. If you would like to make a cash donation instead, please put "Sharing Families" 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.

The Christmas Fund: The Christmas Fund has been caring for active & retired clergy & lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities & health premiums, & Christmas "Thank You" gift each December to our lower income retirees. United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank You! There are envelopes on the gathering table or you can put a check in the offering plate with "Christmas Fund" on the memo line.

Reverse Advent Calendars: "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 grocery bag. Each bag has a list of a suggested daily donation, but you can use your imagination and add whatever you want. 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. Thank you!

Bring Christmas Joy! Each year we invite members of the church family to deliver an amaryllis plant to one of our shut-ins or special church friends. This is a wonderful, family-friendly activity that brings joy to both the giver and recipient. Simply sign up at church, prepare the amaryllis plant, and deliver it. Feel free to add a card or some cookies if you wish. Thank you for being part of this ministry of compassion.

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

Loving Self

Blue Christmas: Join us **Thurs, Dec 19 at 6:30 pm** for a service of blessing for those who are low in spirit, grieving, lonely, dealing with physical or mental trauma. If you are looking for comfort, hope, wholeness & renewal, please sign up

Family Meals: On Wednesday nights, we offer a home-cooked meal in the Fellowship Hall. The cost is \$9 per person with a family max of \$30. **Meals are served from 5:15 to 6:00 pm.** You can get your meal to go if you go through the line (indicate when you sign up). **Reservations must be placed by noon on Tuesdays.** You can make a reservation online, at church or by calling. The menu for Dec 4 is chicken marsala, rice pilaf, salad and croissants.

Game Day Sunday is Dec 15 following Coffee Fellowship. Bring a dish to share. Join us!

Cribbage Night: The cribbage group meets the second Monday. Players are asked to donate \$2 & the group decides which charity. Playing time is **7:00 pm**. All players & abilities welcome. The next game is **Dec 9**.

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. Our next gathering is **Dec 17**. Join us!

Women's Group: Interested in fellowship & community with other women? You are invited to join the group at noon every 2nd & 4th Tuesday. Please bring a sack lunch. The next meetings will be **Jan 14 and 28**.

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.

Let's Knit/Craft Together: Join us on **Thursdays at 10:00 am. We meet at The Sycamore on the first Thursday of each month and in the Fellowship Hall the other Thursdays.** We have a great time sharing our projects & enjoying each other's company. Any questions, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103 or firstroe@gmail.com

WISE Corner: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Family Support Group is held the **2nd & 4th Thursdays at 6:30 pm at the River Falls Public Library**. For more info, call Marg Downing 715-307-5905.

Community Life

Pastor Deb Retirement Gathering: After two years serving as our Minister for Community and Outreach, Pastor Deb Meyer is retiring so she can spend more time with her family. Her last Sunday is today. Join us during Coffee Fellowship as we honor her time here and send her off into retirement with cake and cookies.

Ornament Sale Fundraiser: The Music Committee has been blessed with wonderful wooden ornaments made by Bob Johnson to sell for this Christmas season. 100% of the proceeds go to the Music Committee for future concerts and events. These ornaments make great Christmas gifts. Thank you in advance from the Music Committee.

The Advent Workshop: The 2024 Advent Workshop for families will be in the Fellowship Hall following Sunday School on **December 8**, the Second Sunday in Advent. The event includes making 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.

Annual Christmas Luncheon: You are invited to attend a Christmas Luncheon on **Tues, Dec 10, 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 at church or online. Please let the office know if you need a ride.

Journey House Event: Journey House will be sponsoring an opportunity to both meet Deacon Ben Rush AND help deck the house out for Christmas on **Sun, Dec 8, from 1:00-3:00 pm**. For those interested in learning a little bit more about Journey House, this is a great opportunity. And please feel free to bring any decorations you would like to donate.

Youth Events

Children's Advent Musical: Sunday School children in pre-school through grade 5 are rehearsing the Advent Musical during Sunday School. **The dress rehearsal will be on Sat, Dec 21**. Children in grades 1–5 should arrive at 10:00 am. Children in Pre-School & Kindergarten should arrive at 11:15 am. The **musical will be presented during worship on Sun, Dec 22**. It is important for all children to regularly attend Sunday School and be present for these rehearsals.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 21:25-36

‘There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’

Then he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.’

‘Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.’