

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

December 29, 2024



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN

December 29, 2024

First Sunday After Christmas

10:00 am

Gathering

Our hearts grow tender with childhood memories and love of kindred, and we are better throughout the year for having, in spirit, become a child again at Christmastime.

- Laura Ingalls Wilder

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: For people in darkness,

P: Christ is the light.

L: For people in despair,

P: Christ is the hope.

L: For people grieving,

P: Christ is a comfort.

L: For people burdened,

P: Christ is a friend to share the load.

L: For people anxious,

P: Christ is calm assurance.

L: For all people gathered here,

P: Christ is for you.

L: For everyone gathered here,

P: Hear the call to follow Christ and be Christ to others.

L: For all in this place,

P: Let your praise arise.

*HYMN

The First Noel

Blue #229

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

L: O God, whose wondrous love took the form of a little baby, we confess our great lack of love.

P: **Forgive us and set us on your right path.**

L: We fail to love the unlovely.

P: **Forgive us and set us on your right path.**

L: We forget that, with you, love means acceptance first.

P: **Forgive us and set us on your right path.**

L: And Lord, we suspect that we do not love even ourselves properly;

P: **Forgive us and set us on your right path. Amen.**

*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: As Mary, Joseph and Jesus settled in Nazareth,

P: **Help us, O God, to let you take up residence in each one of our lives.**

L: In the name of the babe of Bethlehem,

P: **The Prince of Peace, we are now made new and whole. 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

Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains,

And the mountains in reply, echo back their joyous strains.

Glo----ri-a in ex-cel-sis De-o,

Glo----ri-a in ex-cel-sis De-o.

Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Colossians 3:12-17

PSALM 148 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

R *Unison*

Praise God from the heavens, praise God in the heights!

L: Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

P: **Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!**

L: Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!

P: Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

L: Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.

P: He established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. R

L: Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!

P: Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

L: Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!

P: Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

L: Young men and women alike, old and young together!

P: Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.

L: He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him.

P: Praise the LORD! R

Proclaiming the Word

GOSPEL LESSON

Luke 2:41-52

SERMON

“Growing in Wisdom”

Rev. Doris Ruben

***HYMN**

Joy to the World!

Blue #179

***STATEMENT OF FAITH for Christmas**

I believe in Jesus Christ and in the power of the gospel, which began in Bethlehem.

I believe in the one whose spirit glorified a small village, of whose coming the shepherds saw the sign, and for whom there was no room at the inn.

I believe in the one whose life changed the course of history, for whom the kings of the earth had no power, and who was not understood by the proud.

I believe in the one to whom the poor, the oppressed, the discouraged, the afflicted, the sick, the blind, gave welcome, and accept as Lord and Savior.

I believe in the one who with love changed the heart of the proud and with his life showed that it is more important to serve than to be served, and that the greatest joy is giving your life for others.

I believe in peace, which is not the absence of war, but justice among all people and nations, and love among all.

I believe in reconciliation, forgiveness, and the transforming power of the gospel.
I believe that Christmas is strength and power, and that this world can change if, with
humility and faith, we kneel before the manger.
I believe that I must be the first one to do so. 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

Special Music

*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

Gracious God, we thank you for this season of carols and gifts, and for your
most precious gift of Jesus. We thank you also for the opportunity to give our Advent
Calendar gifts again this year. Bless this food and those who will receive it in our
community. Together may we work to make your priorities our priorities. May love
and justice blossom among us. Amen.

<h3>Celebrating the Meal</h3>

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: In Christ, the hope of the prophets,
P: **The song of the angels,**
L: The yearnings of all people for peace, come true.
P: **For in the Christ Child, the son of Mary,**
L: We come close to God,
All: **And God comes even closer to us.**

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:

Good Christian Friends Rejoice

Blue #198

Angels, from the Realms of Glory

Blue #189

Come and Fill Our Hearts

Come and fill our hearts with your peace.

You alone, O Lord, are holy.

Come and fill our hearts with your peace, alleluia!

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.

Sending

***HYMN**

Go, Tell It on the Mountain

Blue #218

*BLESSING

POSTLUDE

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Our guest preacher this morning is the Rev. Doris Ruben a retired UCC pastor who lives in Winona and serves with Pastor Chris on the Northwest Church and Ministry Team. She has served pastorates in Stratford, Dorchester, Wisconsin Rapids as well as churches in Iowa and Minnesota. She is also a close friend of the Rev. Barb de Souza our retired healthcare missionary in Brazil. Please be sure to welcome her.

SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Rev. Doris Ruben
Celebrant: Rev. Doris Ruben
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Tanya Larsen
Deacons: Karen Lloyd, Tanya Larsen,
Ann Nelson, Laura Anderson,
Marshall Skule
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Trustee: Steve Koecher
Coffee
Fellowship: Tim and Rene Bylander
Counters: Jean Smith, Vicki Sippel

CHURCH STAFF

Pastor: Christopher Myers
Education Pastor: Stacy Johnson Myers
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>Dec 15, 2024</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 7,471	\$ 539,326
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,463	\$ 523,150

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'
-

Thank you to our church children for sharing their Christmas Program last Sunday.



Late Christmas Eve Worship Service



Please remember the following in your prayers this week:

Those who are ill or recovering:

Sue Taylor, Jeff (brother-in-law of Janice Healy), Barbara de Souza, Mike (friend of Mark Hudnall), Larry Bauer, Kevin (friend of Tanya Larsen), Crissy (daughter of Brad Williams), Tara (friend of Dave Reilly)

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For all who made our Christmas Eve worship services so special (and full!) this year!
- For our Sunday School kids who presented their Christmas program on Sunday, December 22, it brought the joy of Christ to us
- For those receiving 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 those receiving food as part of the Reverse Advent Calendar, may it bless givers and receivers
- For our Discipleship Team as they work to secure pledges to fully fund our church ministry for 2025, may we be blessed with generous hearts

Prayers for our World:

- For those travelling over the Christmas and New Year's holidays, may you travel safely
- 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 Ruth Anne and Chuck White who celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary on Thursday, December 26th, may this second chance you have received at love continue to grow and bear good fruit
- For Salem Elaine who arrived on Thursday, December 19th to Marlee and Joe Querna and grandparents Wendy and John Querna, may she be welcomed in love and grace
- For Maverick Martin Bos born on December 18th to Alison and Tony Bos and grandparents Dean and Sue Grisar and proud uncle Dennis, who arrived at 7 pounds 9 ounces and 20 inches, may he grow in grace and love
- For all who helped cook, serve and clean up after our Wednesday Night meals these past 3 months, you are angels!
- For the \$1198.23 that was donated to the River Falls Food Pantry as the proceeds from our annual Giving Thanks meal in November, that you for your generosity!

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For Tanya Larsen as she mourns her mother Gloria who died recently, may her family mourn in hope
- For the Paulson family as they mourn Richard, and the Hector family as they mourn Jean, may their families be strengthened at this difficult time

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!

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: The Adult Bible Study group meets on **Wednesday afternoons, 1:00–2:30 pm** and is currently reading and discussing *Signs and Wonders* by Amy-Jill Levine. In mid-January, the group will begin a new discussion book. That would be a particularly good time to join the Adult Bible Study. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Loving Neighbor

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 on Monday.

Sharing Families Giving Tree Thank You: On behalf of the Sharing Families Giving Tree program, I would like to thank our congregation for their extreme generosity. We were able to brighten the Christmas of 10 families with 28 children! Thank you! - Diane Welsh

Thank you from the Christmas Shoebox Project: Another successful Christmas Shoebox year has been completed. The gentleman at the Kinnic Rehabilitation and Alcohol Center were once again so appreciative for what they received. A truly humbling and amazing experience and it would not be possible without your support, donations of items or cash. Thank you to the after-school program for decorating the bags, to the yoga group that helped fill our boxes and bags, to the Among Friends that helped carry boxes and bags upstairs. Once again we pulled together as a community of faith and served those less fortunate. Bless you all. - Marie Roe and Jean Smith, Co-Chairs

Red Cross Blood Drive: Join us **Fri, Jan 10, 2025**, for the **Red Cross Blood Drive** held here at church from **11am–5pm**. Donations will help ensure patients continue receiving lifesaving blood products. Sign up at redcrossblood.org

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

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 **Jan 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. Our next gatherings are **Jan 7 & 21.**

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 & 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 & the Fellowship Hall the other Thursdays.** We have a great time sharing our projects and 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

Annual Reports Due: All Committees, please submit your Annual Reports, preferably electronically, by **Mon, Jan 13** to Missy at missy@firstchurchrf.org. Annual Reports will be available on Sun, Jan 19 for the Sun, Feb 2 Annual Meeting.

Learning Community: Conflict in the Middle East: Please mark your calendars for a Learning Community focused on the Israel/Hamas conflict. Dr. Andrew Latham, Professor of Political Science at Macalester College, will provide a balanced presentation that captures the complexity of the situation in Israel and Palestine. Dr. Latham will include a perspective on the role of the US in the conflict as well as imagine components in a lasting peace for the region. The event will be **Tues, Jan 28, 6:30–8:30 pm.** Please register.

Youth Events

Youth Mission Trip Survey: We are reaching out to gauge interest and availability for mission opportunities for the Summer of 2025 and Spring of 2026. We hope to find areas of mission work that youth and families would be interested in and provide spiritual and personal growth. Please take time to take the survey that was emailed to all families of those in grades 6-12. This survey is not a commitment to any trip or date, but rather to gauge group interest for further discussion and planning. Ask Alex for the link if you did not receive it. Either students or parents may fill out this form.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.