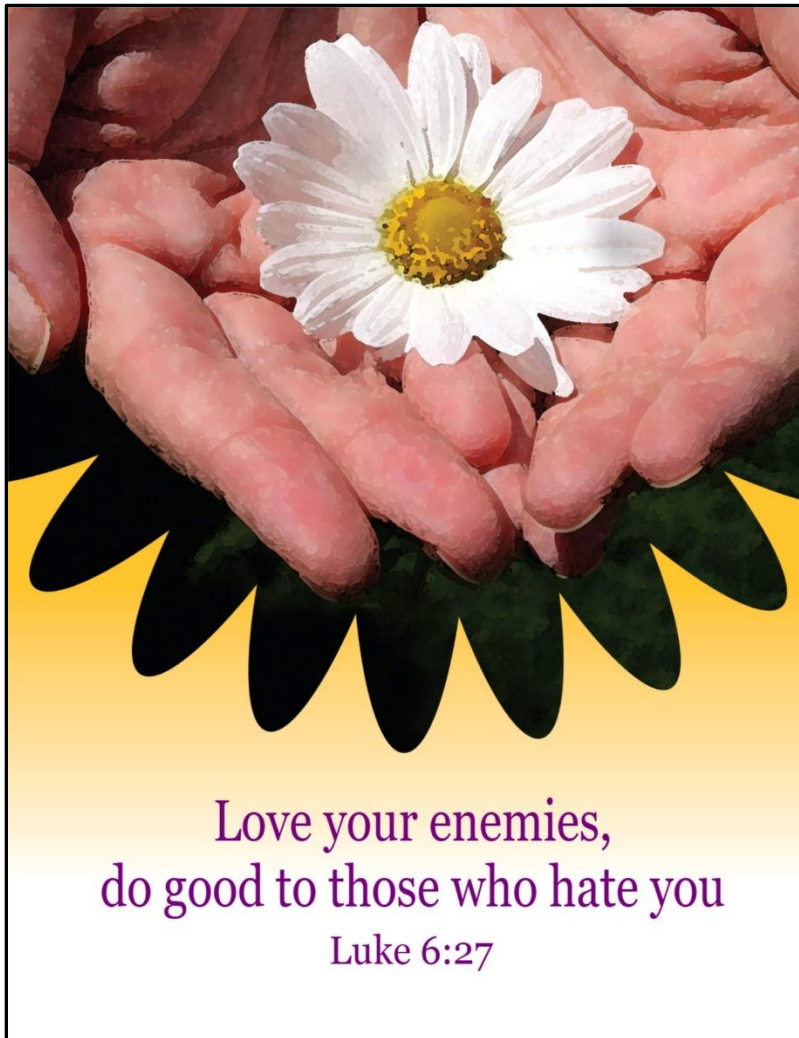


**First Congregational
United Church of Christ
River Falls, Wisconsin**

February 23, 2025



Love your enemies,
do good to those who hate you
Luke 6:27

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

February 23, 2025

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

10:00 am

Gathering

The only safe way to destroy your enemy is to make him your friend.
- Mark Twain

<p>Welcome to our guests who are visiting with us today!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 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.	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>No matter who you are. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you are welcome here!</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Please stop at the welcome station for a gift.- Please note our worship service is livestreamed.
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GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: God is waiting for us:

P: **With a tender heart and a searching question.**

L: God is ready for us:

P: **With truth and wisdom from a deep well.**

L: God is blessing us:

P: **With springs of living water.**

L: God is sending us:

P: **To love, pray and serve every day.**

L: God is here.

All: **Come let us join together in worship!**

***HYMN**

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Blue #71

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

O God, forgive us for failing to understand the depth of your love for us and our world. We promise to be courageous, but find ourselves afraid. We want to be sensitive, but find ourselves hard and callous. Forgive us; take our limitations and turn them into possibilities for service. Have mercy on us and grant us your peace. Amen.

*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: Listen! Here is good news: Christ Jesus came into the world to save the world, including us.

P: **To forgive our follies and foibles, and to set us free from evil's power.**

L: Let us live into the forgiveness God offers each of us.

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 (Sung twice)

*Halle, Halle, Halle – lu – jah, Halle, Halle, Halle – lu – jah
Halle, Halle, Halle – lu – jah, Hallelujah, Hal-le-lu-jah*

Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

PSALM 37:1-11 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

Response *Antiphon: Véne de la Peña, 1994*

E F#m/E E B7 E

Unison



God will give you the de-sires of your heart.

L: Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.

P: **Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.**

L: Take delight in the LORD, and God will give you the desires of your heart.

P: **Commit your way to the LORD; trust in God, and God will act.**

L: God will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

P: **Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.**

L: Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil.

P: **For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.**

- L: Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.
- P: **But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity. 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: Jesus said: "I am the bread of life. You who come to me shall not hunger; you who believe in me shall never thirst."
- P: **In the company of all who are hungry and thirsty, we come to this table to know the risen Christ and to share in the bread of life and cup of blessing.**

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:

I Come with Joy

Blue #706

Alleluia No. 1

Blue #291

Congregation join on refrain:

Refrain



Al - le - lu - ia, al-le - lu - ia, give thanks to the ris - en Lord.



Al - le - lu - ia, al-le - lu - ia, give praise to his Name.

Bless the Lord, My Soul

Bless the Lord, my soul, and bless God's ho - ly name.

Bless the Lord, my soul, who leads me in - to life.

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.)

*I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river. I've got peace like a river in my soul.
I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river. I've got peace like a river in my soul.*

Spirit, Open My Heart

1 Spir - it, o - pen my heart to the
2 God, re - place my ston - y heart with a
3 Write your love up - on my heart as my
4 May I weep with those who weep, share the

joy and pain of liv - ing. As you love
heart that's kind and ten - der. All my cold -
law, my goal, my sto - ry. In each thought,
joy of sis - ter, broth - er. In the wel -

may I love, in re - ceiv - ing and in
ness and fear to your grace I now sur -
word, and deed, may my liv - ing bring you
come of Christ, may we wel - come one an -

giv - ing,
ren - der.
glo - ry.
oth - er.

Spir - it, o - pen my heart.

***STATEMENT OF FAITH – South Africa**

**We believe in one God who created all the world,
who will unite all things in Christ
and who wants all people to live together in one family.**

**We believe in God the Son who became human:
died and rose in triumph to reconcile all the world to God,
to break down every separating barrier of race, culture or class
and to unite all people into one body.**

**We believe in God the Spirit, the pledge of God's coming reign
who gives the Church power to proclaim the good news to all the world,
to love and serve all people, to strive for justice and peace:
to warn that God judges both the individual and the nations;
and to summon all the world to accept God's reign, here and now. 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

Sing My Soul

Jamie Mills

***OFFERTORY**

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

*Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.*

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

**Generous God, we offer our gifts and our lives; may the spirit in which they are
given allow them to free rather than bind, to heal rather than wound, and to serve
the reign of the Lord of Life. Amen.**

Sending

***HYMN**

Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing

Blue #748

***BLESSING**

POSTLUDE

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SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Chris Myers
Celebrant: Chris Myers
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Larissa Lueck
Deacons: Lance Lueck, Tanya Larsen,
Ann Nelson, Loral Keil,
Brian Miller
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Trustee: JP Okal
Coffee
Fellowship: Jo Anne Friedell, Rene Bylander
Counters: Diane Welsh, Mark Anderson

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: Marie Roe
Office Administrator: Missy Luedtke
Nursery Attendant: Kahla Fuller
Custodian: Farnum Fuller

Treasurer's Report

	<u>Feb 16, 2025</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 5,613	\$ 122,466
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,623	\$ 74,361

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), Barbara de Souza, Crissy (daughter of Brad Williams), Jim French (father of Missy Linaberry), Kelly Luckey (friend of Barb Peterson), Arlyn (Steve Koecher's father), Lu Lueck, Jeff Auchampach (nephew of Yvonne Benson), Melissa Oscanyan

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For our own Alex Plum who competes in his third Birkie cross country ski race next Saturday, go Alex go!
- For those getting ready to serve the Back Bay Mission Shrimp Boil dinner on Tuesday, February 25th at 5:30pm, may we eat well and raise awareness and money for the mission and folks in Biloxi, Mississippi
- For the new Men's Group meeting for three Thursdays in February at The Garage and then to FMSC to pack meals, may we better connect and support one another on our Christian journey
- For our deacons and musicians gearing up for Ash Wednesday worship on Wednesday, March 5th at 6:30pm, may it help on our Lenten journey toward Holy Week and Easter
- For our committees and Church Council who met on Tuesday, February 18th, may they help us all to be better stewards of God's grace
- For the return of our Wednesday Night Family meals on Wednesday, February 26 and running through Holy Week, may we all be fed!

Prayers for our World:

- For all those called to be foster parents, may God bless you and your efforts
- For our nation as our newly elected government officials take their offices, that they may govern justly, work for the common good and solve our real problems
- For the hope of peace in Gaza and Israel, 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 the return of Wednesday night family meals this coming Wednesday!
- For the return of our Prayer Around the Cross Worship services in the Fellowship Hall during the Wednesdays in Lent, may they be a time of renewal
- For our Trustees and their helpers who cleaned the inside of the church recently, it looks fabulous!
- For Evelyn Adele Sitz born to Heather and Danny and grandparent Maxine and Tom on January 10th, who is home and safe and wonderful, thanks be to God!
- For Josh Sippel who graduated from Basic Training at Ft Jackson, SC on February 6 and will now do training at Fort Gregg-Adams located in VA, congratulations and thank you for your service

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For the family of Rollie Hall as they mourn, may they 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 Lenten Study: You are invited to participate in a discussion of “Entering the Passion of Jesus” by Amy-Jill Levine. This is a six-week study, **starting on February 26**, focusing on the events of Holy Week. The group will meet **Wednesday afternoons, 1:00–2:30**. Books are available in the church office for \$10. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Ash Wednesday: Ash Wednesday will be **Wednesday, March 5th**. Lent is a time of reflection, repentance and preparation. In Lent, we reflect on our lives, not as we want them to be, but as they really are. In Lent, we repent, which does mean thinking less of ourselves, but means changing the parts of our lives that need to be changed. In Lent, we also prepare for the good news of the resurrection at Easter and the events of Holy Week which not only changed the world long ago, but continue to change us today. Join us for the **6:30 pm worship service** which will include both communion and the imposition of ashes.

Prayer Around the Cross: Our Lenten Prayer Around the Cross worship services will resume after Ash Wednesday, March 5, each Wednesday until Holy Week. Join us in the Fellowship Hall at **6:30 pm** for this brief, meaningful, candle-lit service focused on prayer, simple songs and a brief, focused message. The Wednesday night family meal precedes each worship service serving from 5:15 to 6:00 pm. Please sign up for the meal.

Loving Neighbor

Simpson Shelter Supply Needs: Great buys of thermal underwear - men's & women's, women's thermal socks, men's T-shirts - all sizes, men's ankle socks, men's boxer shorts - sizes M, L, personal size body wash, personal size baby oil, lip balm, women's bras. All items MUST BE NEW. There is a bin for donations.

Basics for Local Kids: Basics BFLK takes donations of new and gently used winter clothing year round. It's a great time to shop sales of winter clothing and boots for children ages newborn to 18 years. For more information go to <https://www.basicsforlocalkids.org/>. Thank you!

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. It is held at church **Tuesdays & Thursdays 9am to 3pm**.

Loving Self

New Evening Men's Group: We will head to Feed My Starving Children to pack meals on **Thurs, Feb 27** from **7:00-8:30 pm**. Our purpose is to connect with each other and our Christian faith. Please sign up online or at church and see Pastor Chris for more details. All guys welcome!

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 & lively conversation. Our next gatherings are **Mar 4 & 18**.

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 **Feb 25, Mar 11 & 25.**

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 Sycamore on the first Thursday of each month & the Fellowship Hall the other Thursdays.** We have a great time sharing our projects & enjoying each other's company. For more info, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103 or fristroe@gmail.com

Cribbage Night: The group meets the second Monday. Players are asked to donate \$2 & the group decides which charity. Playing time is **7:00 pm**. All abilities welcome. The next game is **March 10.**

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

Community Life

Shrimp Boil: The Shrimp Boil Fundraiser for the Back Bay Mission Trip will be held **Tues, Feb 25 at 5:30 pm.** The menu will be peel and eat shrimp, coleslaw, breadsticks and cake and chicken fingers for those that don't like shrimp. Please get your tickets in advance on Sundays or call/stop by the church office. Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$8 for kids. Also, please sign up to help with ticket sales & meal set up & clean up at church or online.

Wednesday Meals: On Wednesday nights, we will 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, the sign-up table or by calling the church office. The menu for Feb 26 is Swedish meatballs, butter and parsley potatoes, vegetable and rolls.

Creative Catharsis Workshop - Thurs, Feb 27, from 6:30-8:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall: We often put aside and neglect our creative desires and reflection of ourselves in our fast-paced, grind culture-influenced lives. This workshop aims to provide participants with an invitation to connect to their creativity and meaning-making through the process and application of collage. Using simple materials and tools, we'll explore how the simple act of sifting, sorting, cutting, and arranging paper ephemera offers a sanctuary of rest, reflection and a catalyst for self-discovery. All supplies provided. Sponsored by the WISE Team. Please sign up.

Youth Events

Youth Events for Wednesday, February 26:

3:45-5:15 pm Wednesday School

6:30-7:30 pm MS Youth Group

No HS Class

Summer Dates for Kids: Please mark your calendars for the children's summer program for 2025. We need adults to help, teens to volunteer and kids to participate. Here are the dates:

VBS: July 28-31, 2025

Children's Musical: August 18-21, 2025

VBS is for children age 3 to grade 5. The musical is for children in kindergarten through completed grade 6.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Genesis 45:3-11, 15

Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come closer to me.' And they came closer. He said, 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, "Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty."

And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 6:27-31

'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.