

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

December 28, 2025



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

December 28, 2025

First Sunday After Christmas

10:00 am

Gathering

“I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live
in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall
strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach.”

- Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol

<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.- Visitors please stop at the welcome booth.- Please stand when noted by the *- Congregation responses are in bold.- Please note our worship service is livestreamed.	<p style="text-align: center;">Our Mission is to Love God and Serve People.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Everyone is welcome because everyone matters.</p>
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GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: It is still Christmas.

P: Joy is still loose in the world,

L: Love is lodged in hearts,

P: And peace is still our fervent hope.

L: It is still Christmas,

P: Though the presents are all unwrapped,

L: The batteries have run down,

P: And family members have returned home.

L: It is still Christmas,

P: For God begins anew,

L: Giving us a baby to care for,

P: And calling us to live with tender compassion, gentle care and overflowing love.

All: Come let us worship Emmanuel, God with us.

***HYMN**

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

Blue #198

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord God of Christmas, we stand on the threshold of another year. We thank you for giving us another year of life. You have given us many gifts during the year; and yet we realize that we have often failed to use those gifts or our lives as creatively and constructively as we might have. Give us, we pray, the care to shape the moments of this next year into gracious expressions of concern. May the year be fulfilled with achievements: wrongs corrected, friendships deepened, the disheartened encouraged. Help us to be your love and grace to others. Amen.

*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: Just as Mary, Joseph and Jesus settled in Nazareth, help us, O God, to let you take up residence in each one of our hearts.

P: **Forgive us our failures, our weaknesses, our fears and our doubts.**

L: In the name of the babe of Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace, we are forgiven.

P: **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

Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come

Joy to the world! The Lord is come: Let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare him room,

And heaven and nature sing, And heaven and nature sing,

And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Isaiah 63:7-9

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

R



L: Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise God in the heights!

P: **Praise God, all God's angels; praise God, all heavenly host!**

- L: Praise God, sun and moon; praise God, all you shining stars!
- P: Praise God, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!**
- L: Let them praise the name of the Lord, for God commanded and they were created.
- P: God established them forever and ever; God 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 God's name alone is exalted; God's glory is above earth and heaven.**
- L: God has raised up a horn for God's people, praise for all God's faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to God.
- P: Praise the Lord! 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: Christ is born! God has sent us Jesus who will lead us in the path of peace. Let us welcome him into our hearts and lives. Let us follow him on the journey of life. And here at this table he feeds his followers with good food and great joy.
- All: Glory to God in the highest heaven!**

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 and everywhere 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:

Sing We Now of Christmas

Blue #193

Carol at the Manger

Blue #199

'Twas in the Moon of Wintertime

Blue #213

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

GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 2 :13-23

SERMON

Rev. Doris Ruben

***HYMN**

Star Child

Blue #223

Verse 1 – Cantor; Verses 2, 3, 4, 5 - All

***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

Sarah Plum

***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**

Holy God, we are so grateful you sent your Son to live among us. May our Advent offerings of food feed your people in our community. Bless, we pray those who receive it and those who gave it. May these gifts be a joy to your heart. Amen.

***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.

Thanks to all who brought food for our Reverse Advent Calendar this year.
The food will be dedicated today and then brought to the River Falls Food Pantry
on Monday at 9:00 am. We need help loading. Please come!



SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Rev. Doris Ruben
Celebrant: Rev. Doris Ruben
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Carol Merriman
Deacons: Loral Keil, Brian Miller,
Liz Swank, Jena Most,
Becky Pajac
Organist: Terry Mithun
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Trustee: Matt Meyer
Coffee
Fellowship:
Counters: Marie Roe, Scott Nelson
*Altar table flowers are given by Deb Hulbert
in memory of Abby Timmerman and the
caring community of River Falls.*

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
Custodians: Farnum Fuller,
Troy Zakrzewski

Treasurer's Report

	<u>Dec 21, 2025</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 8,034	\$ 538,593
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,623	\$ 541,773

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'
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Please remember the following in your prayers this week:

Those who are ill or recovering:

Barbara de Souza, Jeff Auchampach (nephew of Yvonne Benson), Glen Corliss (brother of Raelle Jorae), Eric (friend of Liz Schwank), Don Larson, Rhonda Klink, Elaine (friend of Janice Healy), Emily Rognholt (sister of Missy Linaberry), Arlene Johnson

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For our church kids who shared their Christmas program this past Sunday, it was wonderful!
- For Tim Bylander, our faithful and busy snow removal guy who has been BUSY and for our custodian Troy Zakrzewski who has been constantly mopping floors, we appreciate your efforts!
- For those who received Amaryllis bulbs and Giving Tree gifts, may they bring God's love closer to all who give and receive them
- For the sixty men at Kinnic Alcohol Drug and Rehab who received their Christmas Shoebox gifts, may they bring God's love and hope closer
- For our congregation as we dedicate our 2026 financial pledges, may generosity power our ministry
- For Louise Schmahl (sister of Becky Pajac) as she continues dialysis

Prayers for our World:

- For those traveling over the Christmas and New Year's break, may they come and go safely
- For food pantries dealing with so much demand, may communities generously support them and the people they serve
- For emerging peace in Gaza, may it lead to a just and lasting peace
- For the people of Ukraine as they battle for their freedom, may they be given strength and courage
- 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
- For those living with dementia and families trying to care for them, may they all be given strength, grace and help along the way

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

- For those who gave the poinsettias gracing our sanctuary on Christmas Eve, they are beautiful
- For the Christmas trees gracing our Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall donated by the Noreen family, they are beautiful
- For our choir and church musicians who led us through a busy Advent and Christmas, God bless you all!
- For 10 years of generating clean solar energy with our church solar panels, thanks be to God!

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For the family of JoAnn Lentz who died unexpectedly recently, may they be comforted (funeral plans are pending at this time)
- For the family of Jim Filkins who died recently, may his wife Marge, son Louie and their families be comforted (a Memorial Service is planned here at church for Saturday, January 17th at 11am)

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

Announcements

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

Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study: On January 7, the Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study group will begin a new study on the Book of Acts. We will read and discuss Matthew Skinner's *Acts: Catching Up with the Spirit*. Copies of the book are available in the church office for \$16.00 each. The group meets in the library on **Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm**. If you have questions, contact Pastor Stacy.

2026 Financial Pledges – Last Call: If you did not return yours, please do so today. We need all of our church families and friends to make a financial commitment to support and fund the mission & ministry of the church. These pledges pay for our programs & building, mission and staff. Please return your pledge in the offering plate or the church office. Thank you.

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, and Christmas “Thank You” gifts to our lower income retirees. This year, your care & compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. The envelopes are on the gathering table.

Giving Tree Thank You: On behalf of the Sharing Families Giving Tree program, I would like to thank our congregation for their generosity. Because of our congregation, 10 families, including 20 children, will have a happier Christmas this year. Thank you again! From Diane and Randy Welsh.

Christmas Shoebox Thank You: Thank you everyone! The Christmas Shoebox collection for the gentlemen at the Kinnic Rehabilitation and Alcohol Treatment was once again a success. With your donations of either cash or items we were able to provide 60 boxes and bags with the essentials that you and I sometimes take for granted. These gifts we bring are very much appreciated by those present. Please take note of the beautiful, signed card that they provided. Thank you again. Marie Roe and Jean Smith

Basics for Local Kids: Volunteers are needed. You can help families shop or you can help sort, restock or organize winter wear. Shifts are usually 2 hours. To sign up, go to <https://www.basicsforlocalkids.org/> or call Kim at 715-821-1623. Contact Renee Whipple at 715-307-5074 if you have any questions.

Simpson Shelter Supply Needs: Women's white crew socks, men's white crew socks, men's t-shirts sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL, personal size shampoo and conditioner, personal size body lotion, rain ponchos, eye masks, umbrellas, washcloths, padlocks, good buys on out-of-season clothing. All items MUST BE NEW. There is a box for donations.

Empty Pill Bottles (Prescription Only): The River Falls Lions Club is collecting empty pill bottles, only the clear prescription bottles that are filled by our pharmacists, to send to Africa where there is an urgent need. The bottles will be washed, and the labels soaked off before they are shipped. A tub is in the gathering area.

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

Merry Widows: They will meet on **Wed, Jan 21 at 1:00 pm at Table on Main in River Falls.** All widows are welcome to join us for dinner and conversation! See Linda Morrow for more information.

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 meetings are **Jan 6 & 20.**

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 lunch. The next meetings will be **Jan 13 & 27.**

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 firstroe@gmail.com

Please note: The knitting group is taking a break until Thursday, January 8th when we will meet at the Sycamore. Keep working on your project or craft.

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.

Game Day Sunday: Game Day Sunday is held on the third Sunday of the month. Our next Game Day is **Jan 18 with a new time of 11:45 am.** Join us!

WISE Team: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Family Support Group meets the 2nd & 4th Thursdays 6:30pm at 113 East Elm St & Peer Support Group meets the same evenings at First Congregational Church at 6:30pm. The WISE Team meets the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30 pm. For more info, call Marg Downing at 715-307-5905.

Community Life

Church Office: Please note that during the New Year break, the church office will have the following hours:

Mon & Tues, Dec 29 & 30	8:30 am to 4:00 pm
Wed, Dec 31	8:30 am to Noon
Thurs & Fri, Jan 1 & 2	Closed

Note: Any offering or financial gifts must be either dropped off at the church or postmarked by December 31 to be included in this year's giving statement. Thank you for your generosity!

Annual Reports Due: All Committees, please submit your Annual Reports, preferably electronically, by **Mon, Jan 12** to Missy Luedtke at missy@firstchurchrf.org. Annual Reports will be available to the congregation on Sun, Jan 18 for the Sun, Feb 1 Annual Meeting.

Red Cross Blood Drive: The blood drive held at the church is scheduled for **Fri, Jan 9, 11:00 am–5:00 pm.** Call 1-800-733-2767 or go to www.redcrossblood.org & enter: firstcongregationalrf to schedule an appointment.

Additional Driver Needed: We need a driver willing to pick up two students from the River Falls Public Montessori School on Wednesday afternoons from January through April of 2026. For more information or to volunteer, please contact Pastor Stacy.

Name Tags: We encourage you to wear your name tags so that new people and some not so new, can call you by name. It would also help the deacons when you take communion. If you do not have one, please let Missy in the church office know at missy@firstchurchrf.org. In appreciation, the Welcoming Committee.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Isaiah 63:7-9

I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD,
the praiseworthy acts of the LORD,
because of all that the LORD has done for us,
and the great favor to the house of Israel
that he has shown them according to his mercy,
according to the abundance of his steadfast love.
For he said, 'Surely they are my people,
children who will not deal falsely';
and he became their savior
in all their distress.
It was no messenger or angel
but his presence that saved them;
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 2:13-23

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

'A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean.'