

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

January 4, 2026



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

January 4, 2026

Epiphany Sunday

10:00 am

Gathering

If you look throughout human history ... the central epiphany of
every religious tradition always occurs in the wilderness.

- John F. Kennedy

<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>
--	--

GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Arise, shine, for your light has come.

P: **Stand up, a new day is dawning,**

L: A new year is born,

P: **Fresh and clean.**

L: Arise, shine, for your light has come.

P: **Emmanuel, God is with us,**

L: On every path we take,

P: **No matter where we go.**

L: Arise, shine, for your light has come,

P: **And the stars still shine,**

L: Where Christ is present,

P: **And voices sing in praise!**

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

***HYMN**

We Three Kings of Orient Are

Blue #233

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of Light, **you bring hope to the world and joy to our lives.** Yet darkness hovers in many corners and clings to many minds. Possessions grip, hold and pile up so as to block simple views of the light. Anger and violence overpower gentle words and knock out the light for others. God of light, open our eyes, clear our minds and soften our hearts so we may walk as children of light. Shine in our midst, again and again. Through Jesus we pray. Amen.

*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: As far as the heavens are above the earth,

P: **So great is God's mercy toward those who trust God.**

L: In Christ 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

The First Noel

*The first Noel, the angel did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep, on a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, Born is the King of Israel.*

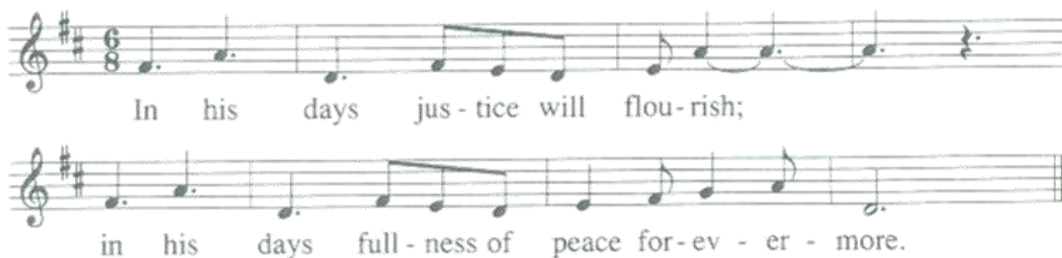
Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Isaiah 60:1-6

PSALM 72:1-7, 10-13 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

R



L: Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.

P: **May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.**

L: May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

P: **May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.**

- L: May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
- P: **May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. R**
- L: In his days, may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.
- P: **May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.**
- L: May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.
- P: **For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. 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: With joy, let us come before our Lord and Savior.
- P: **Let the Light of Jesus Christ shine on us and on all people.**
- L: Christ comes to gladden our hearts, restore our souls.
- P: **Christ comes to give hope to the despairing, joy to the joyless.**
- L: In him, we see God and God's hope for the whole wide world.
- P: **In him, we see ourselves as we can be.**

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:

Wise Men, They Came to Look for Wisdom

Blue #234

O Sing a Song of Bethlehem

Blue #242

Songs of Thankfulness and Praise

Blue #243

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 may return to their families or young children can go to the nursery. Sunday School resumes next week.)

***This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.***

GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 2:1-12

SERMON

Rev. Chris Myers

***HYMN**

I Am the Light of the World

Black #584

***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 *Children, Go Tell it on the Mountain* Chancel Choir
Arr. by Joseph Martin

***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**

God of Star and Sign, lead us in this new year along the paths of peace. Guide us in the way of truth. Place in us the words of kindness. Kindle in us an ever-flowing joy.

God of the journey and God of home, walk with us in times of trouble and dwell with us in the stillness of each night. May your love surround our resting and our hurrying, our laughing and our worrying. Bless us and the gifts we offer as we enter this new year. Amen.

Sending

***HYMN**

As with Gladness

Blue #236

***BLESSING**

POSTLUDE

Reprinted music used by permission under the following licenses:
OneLicense.net A-703731; CCLI License 2892021

SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Chris Myers
Celebrant: Chris Myers
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Marie Roe
Deacons: Heidi Cavaness, Ann Nelson,
Loral Keil, Brian Miller,
Kathy Tomlinson
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Welcomers: Norma Revels
Trustee: Mike Danielson
Coffee
Fellowship: Deb Hoffman
Counters: Jane Truesdill, 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: 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.

*Final 2025 budget numbers will be available next week.



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:

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

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For Deb Hoffman who has again been delivering poinsettias to shut-ins and special friends, thank you!
- For Tim Bylander, our faithful snow removal guy who has been BUSY, and for our custodian Troy Zakrewski who has been constantly mopping floors, we appreciate your efforts!
- For our congregation as it meets for its Annual Meeting on Sunday, February 1 and for church leaders compiling Annual Reports which are due Monday, January 12, may we faithfully celebrate our 2025 accomplishments
- 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 Shoe Box 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 were beautiful
- For the Christmas trees gracing our Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall donated by the Noreen family which will retire after this Sunday, Epiphany, 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.

Loving Neighbor

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.

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

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.

Annual Meeting: The Annual Meeting of the congregation will be **Sunday, February 1** in the Fellowship Hall starting at about 11:15 am. In addition to receiving reports, passing budgets and electing officers, we will also hear ministry updates from many of our teams and committees. Please sign up and join us!

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.

Super proud of our church today as Randy Welsh, Alan Tuchtenhagen, Bob Ferguson, Roger Kapping and others brought 1,438 pounds of food and \$2,103 to the River Falls Food Pantry as part of the Mission Team's Reverse Advent Calendar. As we celebrate Epiphany this Sunday, the day tradition tells us the Magi offered their gifts to the Christ child, may these gifts honor Jesus in our community. God bless you all.



SCRIPTURE LESSON: Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.