

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

January 25, 2026



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

January 25, 2026

Third Sunday after Epiphany

10:00 am

Gathering

The place God calls you is where the world's deep hunger
and your deep gladness meet.

- Frederick Buechner

Welcome to our guests who are visiting with us today!

- 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.

**Our Mission is to Love God and
Serve People.**

**Everyone is Welcome Because
Everyone Matters.**

GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Jesus said to Peter and Andrew,

P: **Come and follow me.**

L: Jesus says to us today,

P: **Come and follow me.**

L: Follow me to places you would never go on your own.

P: **Come and follow me.**

L: Follow me to help heal and bless, forgive and offer grace.

P: **Come and follow me.**

L: Follow me as together we reach out in love to the lonely and broken, stressed out and fearful.

P: **Come and follow me.**

All: **Come let us follow Jesus as he leads us closer to God!**

***HYMN**

Lead Me, Guide Me

Blue #498

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

L: O God, our many fears keep us distant from you and from one another.

P: **Have mercy on us, O God.**

L: We hear Jesus inviting us to follow and become fishers of people, yet we do not understand what this means for our lives.

P: **Have mercy on us, O God.**

L: We do not easily leave behind the things that seem important to our own welfare.

P: **Have mercy on us, O God.**

L: We do not easily reach out to people whom we think are different from us.

P: **Have mercy on us, O God.**

All: **Empower us by your Spirit to turn from our ways and walk with Jesus wherever he leads us. Amen.**

*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: "I am the light of the world," Jesus proclaimed. The people who sat in darkness have seen this great light!

P: **When we come to the Light in repentance, we are restored and forgiven.**

L: Let us walk now as the children of the Light and be at peace.
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

*Love is flowing: love is flowing, love is flowing from the fountain of life;
Love is flowing: love is flowing, love is flowing from the fountain of life.*

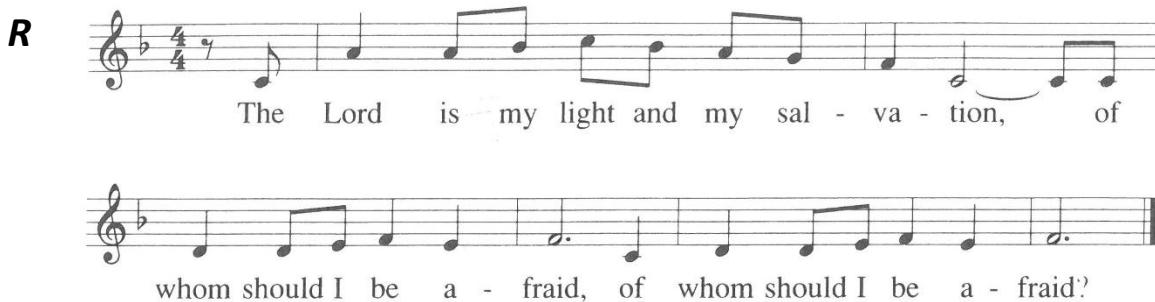
*Grace is flooding: grace is flooding, grace is flooding from the fountain of life.
Grace is flooding: grace is flooding, grace is flooding from the fountain of life.*

Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

PSALM 27:1, 4-9 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)



R The Lord is my light and my sal - va - tion, of
whom should I be a - fraid, of whom should I be a - fraid?

L: The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

P: **The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?**

L: One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in God's temple.

P: **For the LORD will shelter me, hiding me in the day of trouble, concealing me, setting me high upon a rock. R**

L: Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

P: **Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!**

L: "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, LORD, do I seek.

P: **Do not hide your face from me.**

L: Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help.

P: **Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! 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: The table is set and Jesus invites all of us to join him here.

P: **Come to the table...**

L: Like Peter, with more enthusiasm than resolve; like James and John, seeking to follow God's way.

P: **Come to the table...**

L: Like Martha, hosting and leading with confidence; like Mary, full of love and attention.

P: **Come to the table...**

L: Like Judas, disillusioned and rebellious; like Mary Magdalene, faithful to the end.

P: **Come to the table...**

L: Jesus offers the gift of himself in the bread and the cup.

P: **Come to the table of Christ!**

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:

One Bread, One Body

Blue #689

Seed, Scattered and Sown

Congregation join on refrain:

*Seed, scattered and sown, wheat, gathered and grown,
bread, broken and shared as one, the Living Bread of God.*

*Vine, fruit of the land, wine, work of our hands, one cup that is shared by all;
the Living Cup, the Living Bread of God.*

The Summons

Blue #350

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

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

*Jesus loves me! This I know, as he loved so long ago,
Taking children on his knee, saying, "Let them come to me."
Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.*

GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 4:18-25

SERMON

Rev. Chris Myers

***HYMN**

Rain Down

Blue #444

***STATEMENT OF FAITH – from the Iona Ecumenical Community in Scotland**

L: Let us affirm our faith.

P: We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of the One God, maker and sustainer of earth, sea and sky. Born of Mary, faithful to the God of Abraham and Sarah, Jesus healed the sick, served the poor, and proclaimed heaven on earth. Condemned by the religious, crucified by the state, He died but transformed even death and rose to life everlasting. He blessed the disciples with his Holy Spirit and sent them forth, east and west, north and south. We commit ourselves to Jesus, to one another as brothers and sisters and to the grace of the Holy Spirit. 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

In the Garden

Deb Hoffman

Arr. by C. Austin Miles

***OFFERTORY**

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

*Come, thou Fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise his name, I'm fixed upon it, name of God's redeeming love.*

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

Holy and Gracious God, with thankful and glad hearts, we offer our gifts to you. Thank you for the privilege of participating in your kingdom, of spreading the good news, of taking care of the "least of these." Use these gifts, and us, for your purposes and will in our world. For Christ's sake we pray. Amen.

Sending

*HYMN

Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart

Blue #113

*BLESSING

POSTLUDE

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SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Chris Myers
Celebrant: Stacy Johnson Myers
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Jean Smith
Deacons: Lance Lueck, Ann Nelson,
 Liz Swank, Paul Shepherd,
 Heidi Cavaness
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Welcomers: Rene Bylander
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Trustee: Rick Price
Coffee
Fellowship: Morrison Family
Counters: Diane Welsh, Mark Anderson
*Altar table flowers are given by Eunice Filkins in
memory of Dan Filkins, missing him since 1-27-21*

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

Dec 31, 2025

General Fund Income	\$ 557,322.26
General Fund Expenses	<u>\$ 549,379.68</u>
2025 Net Income	<u>\$ 7,942.58</u>

Jan 18, 2026

General Fund Income*	<u>\$ 55,991.22</u>
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A full accounting of all income and expenses is available in the church office.

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

A new budget will be approved at the Feb 1 Annual Meeting.



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), Emily Rognholt (sister of Missy Linaberry), Blake Friese, Barb Mahoney, Joyce Kampstra, Jim Larson

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For our congregation as it meets for its Annual Meeting on Sunday, February 1 and for our church leaders who guide us, may we faithfully celebrate our 2025 accomplishments and courageously plan for 2026
- For our committees and teams who met on Tuesday, January 20th for our All Church Meeting Night, may we have the mind and heart of Christ as we seek to love God and serve people
- For our choir and other local choirs gearing up for the It Takes A Village concert on Sunday, February 22nd at 4pm at Ezekiel, may your voices bring hope and healing to the folks in Haiti (proceeds from the concert go to the village in Haiti sponsored by the churches of River Falls)
- For our Back Bay Mission Team headed to Biloxi, MS over Spring Break, may you be the light of Jesus as you work there
- For Louise Schmahl (sister of Becky Pajac) as she continues dialysis

Prayers for our World:

- For those in our church and community living in fear with recent immigration raids
- For people who work and live outside as we live through (hopefully) the coldest week of the year
- For those in treatment and rehab, may you be given strength for the journey
- For stability and peace in Venezuela, Greenland, Gaza and Ukraine
- 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 our Trustees and their helpers cleaning the church on Saturday, Jan 31, thank you!
- For our mid-winter experiment of Pizza and Salad for our Wednesday Night Meals—let's eat together
- For our church custodian Troy Zakrzewski trying valiantly to keep our church floors clean from all the snow and ice melt, stay strong and thank you!
- 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 Wanell, mother of Jill Paulson, who died recently, may you mourn with gratitude
- For the families of JoAnn Lentz and Jim Filkins, may they be comforted

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: The group is discussing 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.

Upcoming: Ash Wednesday and Evening Lenten Worship: Ash Wednesday worship will be on Wednesday, February 18, 6:30–7:30 pm in the sanctuary. Throughout Lent, we will gather together on Wednesday evenings for simple Prayer Around the Cross services. Wednesday Evening Worship will be on Wednesdays February 25, March 4, 11, 18 and 25. Please plan to attend!

Loving Neighbor

First Church Companions: We are working to reinvigorate our visits to church members. Are you interested in being a companion to someone in our church connecting with them at least once a month with a call or visit? Or would you like to have someone for a companion. Please use the sign-up sheet to be a companion or request someone to visit you.

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.

Grace Place is a homeless shelter run by the Salvation Army in New Richmond. It is housed in the old St. Croix County Nursing Home. They operate on a short shoe-string budget and are delighted that we will support them with donations and meals. The shelter has three family rooms, a men's wing and a women's wing. They can house up to 50 people, two or three people to a room. If you have any questions, please see Carole Mottaz.

Grace Place Donations: Needed items: New adult undergarments (underwear up to size XXL), new bras, thermal underwear (up to size XXL), new or like-new sweatpants up to size 4X, new or like-new T-shirts up to size 4X, new shoes (adult men and female), belts, adult socks, new or like-new winter coats, adult gloves, good buys. There is a bin at church 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

Creative Prayer Flow—Thurs, Feb 19, 6:30-8:00 pm: The workshop will be lead by Carrie Windett MA, ATR-BC, LPCC, Be Still Art + Healing, LLC. In this workshop, you'll explore Sensorimotor Art Therapy's guided drawing's three resourcing movements before moving into a time of watercolor play; an invitation for joy and connection. The experience will conclude with reflections on Christ-centered truths and witnessing others. No artistic experience is required - just open hands and a willing heart to try. The group will meet in the youth room. Please sign up & join us.

Game Day Sunday: Game Day Sunday is held on the third Sunday of the month. Our next Game Day is **February 15 with a new time of 11:45 am.** Join us!

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 **Feb 3 & 17.**

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 27 & Feb 10.**

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

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.

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 at 6:30pm. The WISE Team meets the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30pm. For info, call Marg Downing at 715-307-5905.

Community Life

Pizza Party: Until our full Wednesday Night Family Meals resume on Ash Wednesday, Feb 18, we will hold a Pizza Party on Wednesday night from 5:15 to 6:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall. This week our pizza will come from Steve's Pizza here in River Falls. Salad, fruit & drinks will also be served. When you sign up, suggest pizza toppings & we will do our best to accommodate. Normal pricing of \$9 per person/family max of \$30. Join us!

Church Clean Up Inside: The Trustees need your help cleaning up inside the church on **Sat, Jan 31 at 9:00 am.** Cleaning supplies will be provided. Church Interns receive double hours for helping out. Please sign up.

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!

Tiny Home Summit: Every night in River Falls, there are people who experience homelessness. You are invited to join seven River Falls churches (including First Congregational) in cooperation with Our Neighbors' Place to learn about a project to build Tiny Homes to help lessen homelessness in our community. Pastor Chris will be a presenter. Please come! The Tiny Home Summit will be **Thurs, Jan 29 at 6:00 pm** at Luther Memorial Church. Go to Facebook page for more info: <https://www.facebook.com/share/17wJu6tCtk/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

Radical Imagination for Climate Hopeful Futures – Thurs, Jan 29, 6:30-8:00 pm: This presentation will feature Lil Milagro Henriquez, Founder and Executive Director of the Mycelium Youth Network, as she shares how we can build climate-resilient, hopeful futures grounded in scientific truth. This event is part of the Sustainability Speakers Series. The presentation is virtual only so Hope for Earth is planning a Watch Party to bring people together! You can watch the presentation live through the River Falls Public Library Facebook and YouTube pages, or you can join Hope for Earth for the in-person watch party at Junior's Restaurant with free appetizers and beverage ticket. RSVP for in-person watch party required. Please see the flyer for more info.

Name Tags: We encourage you to wear your name tags so that everyone 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.



Join our 20th Anniversary Ecumenical Fundraising Concert for a memorable night of music supporting vital projects in Ganthier, Haiti.

It Takes a Village

Sunday, February 22 at 4:00 pm

Ezekiel Lutheran Church

202 South 2nd St. | River Falls, WI

A free-will offering will be collected to support the school, orphanage, and health center—bringing hope and lasting impact.

A dessert reception will follow the concert.



Featuring: Croix Chordsmen Chorus, Cross Lutheran Choir (Roberts), Ezekiel's Chancel Choir, First Congregational Church Choir, Pierce County Ecumenical, UWRF-University Community Chorus, and a mass choir number

Learn more about this nonprofit at HaitianRelief.org

SCRIPTURE LESSON: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 4:18-25

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.