

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

March 1, 2026



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN

March 1, 2026

Second Sunday in Lent

10:00 am

Gathering

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear. - Nelson Mandela

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: Lent is a homecoming.

P: Home from weary years,

L: Home to calm our fears,

P: Home to dry our tears.

L: Lent is a homecoming,

P: Home to remember our name,

L: Home to a warm embrace,

P: Home to a hopeful place,

L: Home with Christ, who is one with our journeying.

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

***HYMN**

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Blue #71

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

L: We've been looking everywhere for you God, and can't seem to find you.

**P: God, we want you to fix the world and you seem to be way too busy
somewhere else.**

L: We're getting tired of all the disruption and chaos and violence and uncertainty
and suffering.

**P: We want you to fix it, God. Make everything just right. For us, for our families,
for our communities and nations and peoples everywhere.**

L: This is our confession, God: we want you to do it all.

P: **This is our confession, God: we want you to fix the world.**

All: **Turn us around, God. Give us the faith we need to be your faithful people here and now. Amen.**

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

L: God is with us. God is in the world. For countless generations God has dwelt among peoples everywhere.

P: **God forgives our doubting and the weakness of our faith. God opens our hearts and leads us home by the pathway Jesus set out for us.**

L: God knows that we're trying, and God forgives our wandering ways.

P: **Thanks be to God, this day and all our days! 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** *Glory, glory hallelujah, since I laid my burdens down.*

Glory, glory hallelujah, since I laid my burdens down.

I feel better, so much better, since I laid my burdens down.

I feel better, so much better, since I laid my burdens down.

Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Genesis 12:1-4a

PSALM 121 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

Response *Unison* *Antiphon: David Hurd, 1994*

My help comes from God who made heav - en and earth.

L: I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?

P: **My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.**

L: God will not let your foot be moved; God who keeps you will not slumber.

P: **God who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

L: The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

P: **The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.**

L: The LORD will keep you from all evil; God will keep your life.

P: **The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore. 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 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:

Come to the Table of Grace

Congregation join on refrain:



ADDITIONAL VERSES: 2. PEACE, 3. LOVE, 4. JOY, 5. HOPE

Bind Us Together

Congregation join on refrain:

***Bind us together, Lord, bind us together
with cords that cannot be broken.***

***Bind us together, Lord, bind us together,
bind us together in love.***

There is a Balm in Gilead

Congregation join on refrain:

***There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole,
there is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul.***

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.)

***Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory.
Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory.
Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory;
Children of the Lord.***

GOSPEL LESSON

John 3:1-17

SERMON

Rev. Chris Myers

***HYMN**

We Are Called to Be God's People

Blue #580

***STATEMENT OF FAITH – Presbyterian Church USA**

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and binds us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.**

**The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the church.
In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

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 – Chancel Choir

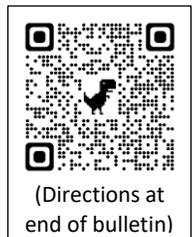
Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross

Arr. by Mary McDonald

***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

L: In the name of Jesus,

P: **We are reminded of how much we have been loved.**

L: In the name of Jesus,

P: **We find the grace to love one another.**

L: In the name of Jesus,

P: **We offer up our worship on this day.**

L: In the name of Jesus,

P: **We give this offering of gifts that all peoples might hear this name, might know this Lord, might experience his love. Amen.**

Sending

*HYMN

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

Blue #84

Verses 1, 3, 4 and 5

*BLESSING

POSTLUDE

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Please join us each Wednesday in Lent for food and worship. Worship will be in the Fellowship Hall with the Prayer Around the Cross Service.
Our Wednesday schedule will be:

Wednesday Schedule

3:45 – 5:15 pm Wednesday School
5:15 – 6:00 pm Family Meals (sign up!)
5:45 – 6:30 pm Bell Practice
6:30 – 7:00 pm Lenten Worship: Prayer Around the Cross
7:00 – 7:30 pm Confirmation/Youth Group
7:00 – 8:15 pm Choir Practice

SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Chris Myers
Celebrant: Stacy Johnson Myers
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Carole Mottaz
Deacons: Lance Lueck, Ann Nelson,
Liz Swank, Heidi Cavaness,
Melissa Oscanyan
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Trustee: Andy Krueger
Coffee
Fellowship: Jerry and Pat Anderson,
Marlys Peterson
Counters: Trish Graves, Dennis Linder

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>Feb 22, 2026</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 5,675	\$ 107,206
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 11,308	\$ 90,464

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'

Join us for Holy Week Worship

Palm Sunday **Mar 29 10:00 am**
Maundy Thursday **April 2 6:30 pm**
Good Friday Cantata **April 3 6:30 pm**
Easter Sunday **April 5 9:00 & 10:30 am**
Easter Breakfast **April 5 8:00-10:15 am**

All Are Welcome!

**First Congregational Church
110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI**

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), Joyce Kampstra, Jim Larson, KayLee (friend of Barb Stephens)

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For our pastors and musicians gearing up for Lent and the Prayer Around the Cross worship services in the Fellowship Hall on Wednesdays at 6:30pm, may we come together to worship and pray
- For our choir and other local choirs whose It Takes a Village concert on Sunday, February 22nd raised over \$22,000 to support the school, orphanage, homes and clinic in Ganthier, Haiti, wow!
- For housing insecure folks in our community and those who are planning for Wellspring, a community of Tiny Homes to meet housing insecurity needs in our community, may God grace them with vision and courage
- For our own Alex Plum and Peter Rayne who competed in last week's Birkie, way to go!
- 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 the people of Ukraine now living into the fifth year of conflict there, may this madness end
- For those in our church and community living in fear with recent immigration raids
- For those in treatment and rehab, may you be given strength for the journey
- For stability and peace in Venezuela, 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 the gift of the season of Lent, a time to return to God and remember our priorities
- For the \$25,000 given by church folks to help refugees in Ukraine, you are angels
- For the gift of winter in all its varieties
- For those who will receive blood from the March 16th blood drive in our Fellowship Hall, may it bring life
- For the return of our full Family Meals each Wednesday during Lent (sign up!)

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For the family of Ron (father of Cindy Gandrud) who died peacefully this past week surrounded by his family, may they mourn with hope
- For the family of Kate Wolfe-Jenson (adult daughter of Marion and Wayne Wolfe) who died this past week and who will be welcomed home to the church Memorial Garden this spring
- For the family of Loral Keil (wife of Brian Miller) and one of our deacons, whose Memorial Service will be at Bakken and Young on Easter Saturday, April 4 at 11am with visitation an hour before and a lunch afterward, may her family be comforted
- For the family of Mike Checkalski (friend of Mark Hudnall) who died this past week after a courageous battle with cancer, may his family be comforted as they gather to remember his life in Eau Claire
- For the family of Terry Smith (sister of Tom Smith) who died unexpectedly and peacefully recently, may their family be comforted
- For the families of Jane Webb (Greenwood Teacher), Cody Peterson (RF Fire Department), Wanell Hansen (mother of Jill Paulson), 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!

Prayer Around the Cross: Our Lenten Prayer Around the Cross worship services resume 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.

Holy Week and Easter: Holy Week is the most important week for Christian people. It shows the depth and breadth of God's love. Challenge yourself to join us for all of the Holy Week services this year.

Palm Sunday, March 29 Sunday Worship and Procession of Palms at 10:00 am

Maundy Thursday, April 2 Worship at 6:30 pm

Good Friday, April 3 Choir presents their Good Friday Cantata at 6:30 pm

Holy Saturday, April 4 Youth set tables and prepare for the Easter Breakfast at 10:00 am

Easter Sunday, April 5 Worship at 9:00 and 10:30 am with Breakfast served from 8:00 to 10:15 am

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 will begin studying the book of Ruth on Mar 4. The beginning of a study is a good time to join. The group meets in the Fireplace Room on **Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm**. To receive a copy of the study book or if you have questions, contact Pastor Stacy.

Loving Neighbor

One Great Hour of Sharing is one of four special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ within the Wider Church Ministries. We need to support this ministry, maybe now more than ever. Envelopes are in the pews and on the sign-up table. Thank you for your generous support. - Mission Education Committee

First Church Companions: 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: There is a bin for donations. Volunteers are also needed. You can help families shop or you can help sort, restock or organize. Shifts are 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: **Sidewalk salt**, shampoo – large or travel size, conditioner – large or travel size, body wash – large or travel size, body lotion – large or travel size, new or like-new wash cloths, new or like-new bath towels, new or like-new hand towels, new or like-new twin and full sheets, new or like-new twin and full size blankets, new pillows, 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

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 **Mar 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 **Mar 10 & 24.**

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.

Game Day Sunday: Game Day Sunday is held on the third Sunday of the month. Our next Game Day is **March 15 at 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 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

Fused Glass Project: The Christian Education Committee is organizing a project to create a large fused glass piece of art that will hang by the main stairwell. The theme of the piece will be Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Artists will learn to cut and arrange glass pieces to create the design. Once the art is complete, it will be fused in a glass kiln and then hung on the wall.

Wednesday Meals: On Wednesday nights, we 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 sign up at church or online. The menu for Mar 4 is BBQ pork, mac 'n cheese, potatoes, vegetable, roll.

Relay for Life is April 10 at the River Falls High School beginning at 5:00 pm. Our church's team, 1st Congo, is having their annual Soup Night on Wed, March 18 from 5:15 to 6:00 pm. New this year is a Hot Dish Night on Wed, April 8 to help raise additional funds for the event. Both meals will have a variety of soups/hot dishes, depending on the night, fruit and desserts. Luminaries will also be available both nights to make in honor of or in memory of that someone special. The cost of the bags is \$10 each. Thank you for your support for Relay for Life from the relay team and Deb Hoffman.

Join us for Easter Breakfast – Sunday, April 5: Easter Breakfast will be served from **8:00 am to 10:15 am.** Cost is \$10 per person with a family max of \$40, all of which goes to our Youth Fund for mission trips and opportunities. Please sign up by Wednesday, April 1. Sign up at church or online.

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.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Genesis 12:1-4a

Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

GOSPEL LESSON: John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.'

Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.