

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

**March 15, 2026**



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN

March 15, 2026

Fourth Sunday in Lent

10:00 am

**Gathering**

“Above all the grace and the gifts that Christ gives  
to his beloved is that of overcoming self.”

– St. Francis of Assisi

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:** Some days, it's hard to recognize the signs – what they mean, where they'll take us.

**P:** **Do we not know how the Holy One can restore our sight?**

**L:** Some days, it's difficult to believe the signs – what truths are there for us to know.

**P:** **Do we not know that the Holy One reveals what is true to us?**

**L:** Some days, it feels impossible to embrace the signs – obstacles get in the way. WE get in the way.

**P:** **Holy One, we want to see, we want to understand, we want to follow and find the Life you offer. Be with us and lead the way.**

**\*HYMN**

*Come Away from Rush and Hurry*

Blue #655

**\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Gracious God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

**\*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

**All:** May what has been lost find restoration.  
May what has been broken find repair.  
May what has been hurt find healing.  
May what has been closed off find openings.  
May what has been unimaginable be envisioned.  
May whatever has been, become a sign of God's love.

**\*PASSING OF THE PEACE**

(Please greet one another with signs of peace)

**\*GLORIA**

***Give Me a Clean Heart***

**Black #188**

*Cantor sings once, then all sing once*

***Give me a clean heart so I may serve you.  
God, fix my heart so that I may be used by you.  
For I'm not worthy of all these blessings.  
Give me a clean heart and I'll follow you.***

**Hearing the Word**

**PSALM 23** (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

**R**

The Lord is my shep-herd, I shall not want. The

Lord is my shep-herd, I shall not want.

**L:** The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

**P:** **He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.**

**L:** He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

**P:** **Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.**

**L:** You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

**P:** **Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long. 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: He was always the guest. In the houses of Peter and Jairus, Mary and Martha, he was always the guest. At the tables of the wealthy where he pled the case of the poor, he was always the guest. But here at this table, he is the host. Those who wish to serve him, must first be served by him. Those who want to follow him, must first be fed by him. For this is the table where God intends for us to be nourished; this the time when Christ can make us new. So come, you who hunger and thirst for a deeper faith, a better life, a fairer world. Jesus Christ who sat at our tables now invites us to be guests at his.

### *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:*

### *On Eagle's Wings*

*Congregation join on refrain:*

And he will raise you up on ea - gle's wings, bear you on the  
breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and  
hold you in the palm of his hand. To verses

*Here I Am, Lord*

Blue #559

*This is the Body of Christ*

*This is the body of Christ, broken that we may be whole;  
This cup, as promised by God, true to his word, cradles our Lord;  
Food for the good of the 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**

**GOSPEL LESSON**

**John 9:1-41**

**SERMON**

*The Questions of Lent*

**Rev. Nancy Swanson**

**\*HYMN**

*The Summons*

**Blue #350**

**\*STATEMENT OF FAITH (from a morning prayer liturgy at Eastern Mennonite Seminary)**

**We believe in God:**

**Whose love is the source of all life and the desire of our lives,  
Whose love was given a human face in Jesus of Nazareth,  
Whose love was crucified by the evil that waits to enslave us all,  
And whose love, defeating even death, is our glorious promise of  
freedom.**

**Therefore, though we are sometimes fearful and full of doubt, in God we trust; And  
in the name of Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves in the service of others,  
To seek justice and to live in peace,  
To care for the earth and to share the commonwealth of God's goodness,  
To live in the freedom of forgiveness and the power of the spirit of love,  
and in the company of the faithful, so to be the church for the glory of  
God. Amen.**

## THE PRAYERS & LORD'S PRAYER (debts/debtors)

Lord in your mercy... **Hear our prayer.**

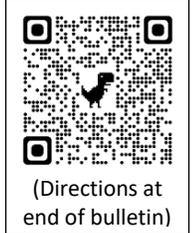
...Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

## MISSION MOMENT – Madeline Pietz

## GATHERING OUR GIFTS – Calpurnia Bastien

***Sonata L.422***

*Arr. by D. Scarlatti*



## \*OFFERTORY

***Now Thank We All Our God***

***Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices;  
Who, from our mother's arms, has blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.***

## \*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

O God, into a world desperate for signs of hope, may all our giving be beacons of hope, signs of freedom, acts of compassion, and symbols of new life. Then, we can live and breathe the love of God, the faith of Jesus that we hold, and the loving presence of God's Spirit in every place we go. Amen.

**Sending**

## \*HYMN

***What Wondrous Love is This***

**Blue #257**

## \*BLESSING

## POSTLUDE

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Our guest preacher today is Nancy Swanson, an intentional interim pastor in the United Church of Christ. She grew up in the Twin Cities and has served a dozen congregations in both WI and MN. A former member of First Congregational UCC in the early 2000's, she's glad to return this Sunday to see you again.

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**SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS**

Preacher: Rev. Nancy Swanson  
Celebrant: Rev. Nancy Swanson  
Cantor: David Reilly  
Liturgist: Jean Smith  
Deacons: Jena Most, Laura Anderson,  
Liz Swank, Melissa Oscanyan,  
Karen Lloyd  
Organist: Marsha Pearson  
Nursery: Kahla Fuller  
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman  
Welcomers: Norma Revels  
Trustee: Mike Danielson  
Coffee  
Fellowship: Diane Olson, Lu Lueck  
St. B's Donuts  
Counters: Marie Roe, Mark Anderson  
*Altar table flowers are given by Steve and Lara  
Koecher in celebration of their 37<sup>th</sup> wedding  
anniversary.*

**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

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**Treasurer's Report**

	<u>Mar 8, 2026</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 1,257	\$ 110,960
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 11,308	\$ 113,080

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 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

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), Jim Larson, Joyce Kampstra, KayLee (friend of Barb Stephens), Lynn Merriman, Anderson Plum

**Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:**

- 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 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 Louise Schmahl (sister of Becky Pajac) as she continues dialysis

**Prayers for our World:**

- For the people across the Middle East coping with war, may a lasting peace soon come
- For those traveling over Spring Break, may you safely travel away and home again
- For those in our armed forces and their families, may we support them and may God watch over them
- 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 the Relay for Life Soup Supper on March 18th and for their Hot Dish Night on April 8th
- 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 Kate Wolfe-Jenson (adult daughter of Marion and Wayne Wolfe) who died recently 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 4th at 11am with visitation an hour before and a lunch afterward, may her family be comforted
- For the families of Terry Smith (sister of Tom Smith), and Ronald Gandrud (father of Cindy) 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 is studying the book of Ruth. 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](http://amongfriendsrf.com) & Facebook. It is held at church **Tuesdays & Thursdays 9am to 3pm.**

### *Loving Self*

**Merry Widows:** They will meet on **Thursday, March 19 at 1:00 pm at St. Croix Lanes** 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 **Mar 17 & 31.**

**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 24 & Apr 14.**

**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](mailto:fristroe@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 Days are **TODAY and Apr 19 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 18 is Relay for Life Soup Supper.

**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](mailto:missy@firstchurchrf.org). In appreciation, the Welcoming Committee.

**GOSPEL LESSON: John 9:1-41**

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.'

We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.’ The man answered, ‘Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him. Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see”, your sin remains.

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***Join us for  
Holy Week Worship***

<b>Palm Sunday</b>	<b>Mar 29 10:00 am</b>
<b>Maundy Thursday</b>	<b>April 2 6:30 pm</b>
<b>Good Friday Cantata</b>	<b>April 3 6:30 pm</b>
<b>Easter Sunday</b>	<b>April 5 9:00 &amp; 10:30 am</b>
<b>Easter Breakfast</b>	<b>April 5 8:00-10:15 am</b>

***All Are Welcome!***

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