

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

July 12, 2026

*Other seeds fell
on good soil and
brought forth
grain*

Matthew 13:8, NRSV



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

July 12, 2026

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

9:30 am

Gathering

Rev. Bob Wang recently retired after 36 years of fulltime service having served in numerous parish settings. In the Wisconsin Conference, he served 9 years with Somers Community Church and 12 with Plymouth UCC in Burlington. For the last five years, he has served as an interim in Illinois. He is married to the Rev. Judy Wang, and they have two adult children, Josh and Mollie, and Josh (Evy) is dad to baby Allen and resides in Minneapolis. Bob and Judy will be permanent Minnesota residents once they settle into their new home in Shoreview in just a few weeks.

<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>Our Mission is to Love God and Serve People.</p> <p>Everyone is Welcome Because Everyone Matters.</p>
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GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Every good gift comes to us from God.

P: So thanks be to God for the beauty and diversity of creation.

L: Thanks be to God for our ancestors of faith.

P: Thanks be to God for loving families and encouraging friends.

L: Thanks be to God for meaningful work.

P: Thanks be to God for the variety of talents within the body of Christ.

L: Thanks be to God for freedom.

P: Thanks be to God for calling us to life and love.

All: With thankful hearts let us worship and praise the God who leads us into life!

***HYMN**

Breathe on Me, Breath of God

Blue #461

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

L: God of Creation, if we have failed to notice the beauty of your world.

P: God forgive us, and set us back on your right path.

L: And if we have forgotten our call to be good stewards of this gift.

P: God forgive us, and set us back on your right path.

L: And if we have misused your gifts to us, using them only for ourselves and not thinking of those who will come after us.

P: God forgive us, and set us back on your right path. Amen.

*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: In Christ, God is at work in our world doing a new thing.

P: In Christ, God is at work in our lives redeeming past mistakes, making new ways out of dead ends.

L: So let us live into the freedom God offers us.

P: And as forgiven people, let us forgive others.

L: In Christ you are forgiven.

P: In Christ you are forgiven.

All: 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 (repeat)

Peace Be with You

by Christopher Grundy

Peace be with you, peace be with you, peace be with you now,
— God's peace to you. Peace be behind you, peace be before
— you, peace be all a - round in Je - sus Christ

Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Romans 8:1-11

PSALM 119:105-112 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

Response

Antiphon: Elaine Kirkland, 1994



Teach me,
Teach O God,
me the way of your stat-utes.

- L: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
P: **I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances.**
L: I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word.
P: **Accept my offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your ordinances.**
L: I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law.
P: **The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts.**
L: Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.
P: **I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end. R**

Proclaiming the Word

GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

SERMON

"We Breathe, Therefore We Are"

Rev. Bob Wang

***HYMN**

God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending

Blue #572

***STATEMENT OF FAITH (World Council of Churches)**

I believe in the living God, the Maker of all humankind who creates and sustains the universe in power and in love.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God incarnate on earth, who showed us by his words and work, suffering with others, conquest of death, what human life ought to be and what God is like.

I believe that the Spirit of God is present with us now and always, and can be experienced in prayer, in forgiveness, in the Word, the Sacraments, the community of the Church and all that we do. Amen.

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

Pastoral Prayer in Song and Word: *Break Our Hearts Again* (by Paul Demer)

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 – Sagan Linaberry

Bourrée by Händel

*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, You are the One who creates us, the Christ who redeems us, the Holy Spirit who fills us with hope. May we and our gifts be instruments of your purpose here on Earth. Bless us and bless also the gifts we offer this day. Amen.

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: This is the table, not of the church, but of our Lord. It is to be made ready for those who love him and those who want to love him more. So come, you who have much faith, and you who have little. Come, you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time. Come, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed. Come not because it is I who invites you, come for it is God's desire that we should meet here.

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:

Seed, Scattered and Sown

Congregation join on refrain:

Seed, scat-tered and sown, wheat, gath-ered and grown, bread, bro-ken and shared as one, the
7 Liv-ing Bread of God. Vine, fruit of the land, wine, work of our hands, one cup that is
14 shared by all; the Liv-ing Cup, the Liv-ing Bread of God.

Gather Your People, O Lord

Congregation join on refrain:

Refrain
Gath-er your peo-ple, O Lord. Gath-er your peo-ple, O
Lord. One bread, one bod-y, one spir-it of
love. Gath-er your peo-ple, O Lord.

Come to the Table of Grace



1 Come to the ta-ble of grace. Come to the ta-ble of



grace. This is God's ta - ble; it's not yours or



mine. Come to the ta - ble of grace.

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

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.

Sending

***HYMN**

For the Fruit of All Creation

Blue #723

***BLESSING**

POSTLUDE

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SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Rev. Bob Wang
Celebrant: Rev. Bob Wang
Worship
Leader: Rene Bylander
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Carole Motaz
Deacons: Paul Shepherd, Liz Swank,
Melissa Oscanyan, Ann Nelson,
Kathy Tomlinson
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Diane Olson
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Trustee: Scott Nelson
Coffee
Fellowship:
Counters: Jane Truesdill, Allen Barnes
*Altar table flowers are given by Lori Otto
in memory of her beloved mother,
Patricia Johnston.*

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>July 5, 2026</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 3,586	\$ 287,356
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 11,308	\$ 305,316

A full accounting of all income and expenses is available in the church office.

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

**Offering QR Code**

1. On your mobile device, open your Camera app or QR Code app
 2. Point your camera at the QR Code
 3. Click the tab 'Give Online'
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Please remember the following in your prayers this week:

Those who are ill or recovering:

Eric (friend of Liz Swank), Steve and Janice Withers (father and mother of Erik Withers), Sam Morrissette, Nathaniel (friend of the Kruegers), Bruce (father of Melissa Oscanyan), Ron Freimark (friend of Roger Kampstra), Kathy Deiss (aunt of Ann Nelson), Wes (son of Dave and Patti Phillipps)

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For the 10,936 (yes, we counted them!) diapers given to local families by our church community to the River Falls Food Pantry, Our Neighbors' Place and Turningpoint, may they be signs of God's love
- For those who will be singing on summer choir dates (July 26 and August 16), thank you for sharing your gifts!
- For those who helped and attended our River Falls Days Bluegrass Concert on the church front lawn, it was awesome!
- For our church softball team as they gather each Monday at Hoffman Park, have a fun and fan filled year!

Prayers for our World:

- As teams are gathering for the World Cup, may the 'beautiful game' unite us on this one earth
- For those affected by recent devastating earthquakes in Venezuela, may help come quickly
- For those struggling to afford basic necessities - food, rent, childcare, healthcare - that God would provide for them through caring communities, compassionate assistance, meaningful work, and generous hearts
- For those in our armed forces and their families, may we support them and may God watch over them
- As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding, may we be given courage on the quest to become a more perfect union
- For farmers, especially small family farms, struggling to stay viable with so many economic challenges
- For stability and peace in Sudan, Iran, Gaza and Ukraine
- 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 Garden Geeks who tend our church garden and who keep everything looking great, God bless you all!
- For our church mowing team who this year includes Laura and Mark Anderson, Randy Welsh, Roger Kapping and Lee Lueck, thanks for keeping our church lawn looking so great!
- For the gift of summer, may we savor every bit of it
- For those giving blood at our next blood drive on Wednesday, July 22, may it bring life

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For family and friends of Jake Wagner, who died unexpectedly last week, may they be strengthened during this difficult time
- For the family of Glenn Hansen who died last week, may they be comforted
- For the families of Ann Gustafson, Gary Pieffer (cousin of Rose Rude), Joyce Kampstra, Ally Fox, Seth Piphon and Karsten Greenchurch, may they grieve in hope

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!

Loving Neighbor

Grace Place Picnic Meal Volunteers Needed: Each year our church will serve a picnic style meal at Grace Place in New Richmond. The date is **Wednesday, July 29**. We cook the meal in our church kitchen then serve it in New Richmond. Please use the sign-up sheet at church to help with this needed mission opportunity. Church interns receive intern credit for this mission.

Summer Nursery Volunteers Needed: During the summer months our church nursery is staffed by volunteers while our weekly, faithful nursery worker Kahla Fuller enjoys some time off. Please sign up for a Sunday to staff the nursery. Thank you! Use the sign-up sheet at church or online.

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.

Grace Place Donations: Needed items: New adult undergarments (underwear up to size XXL), new bras, 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, 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

Summer Choir is low stress and low commitment. We simply meet an hour before the service and sing a familiar song. The next dates will be **July 26 and August 16**. Please consider joining 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 **July 21 & Aug 4**.

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 **July 14 & 28**.

Merry Widows: They will meet on **Wed, July 15 at 1:00 pm at The Sycamore for a potluck lunch**. All widows are welcome to join us for dinner and conversation! See Linda Morrow for more information.

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.

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

Game Day Sunday: Game Day is held on the third Sunday of the month. Our next Game Day is **July 19 at 11:45 am.** Join us!

WISE Team: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Family Support Group meets on the 2nd & 4th Thursdays at 6:30 pm at 113 East Elm St. & Peer Support Group meets the same evenings at the church at 6:30 pm. For mental health issues, please call 988. For info, call Marg Downing at 715-307-5905.

Community Life

Softball News: You know that old saying, “you win some you lose some,” well, we lost our game on Monday. We played Luther Memorial and it just wasn’t our night. We still had fun though. Our record is back to 500 in baseball logo, or 3 wins:3 loses. Our next two games are **July 13 at 7:30 pm and July 20 at 6:15 pm** both games at Hoffman Park. Come cheer us on! We play every Monday at Hoffman Park throughout the summer until August 24th. We are the team in the red shirts. Any questions, contact Deb Hoffman at (612)308-4945, debhoffman234b@gmail.com.

VBS Volunteers Needed: VBS requires many adult and teen volunteers. Please join the excitement by volunteering to help. VBS will be July 27-30, 9:00–11:30 am. Please sign up at church or online.

Peaches: It’s time to place your order for the delicious Washington State Peaches! One single-layer box is \$27.00; 2 or more single-layer boxes are \$26.00 each. **Orders must be placed by July 27 for pick up around August 7.** There are 3 ways to order: 1. Email: office@firstchurchrf.org; 2. Sign up at church or online; 3. Call: 715-425-2052 – Mon-Thurs from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm or leave a message with name, phone, and number of boxes. This is an annual fundraiser for our youth. Thank you for your support!

Red Cross Blood Drive: The next Red Cross Blood Drive held at the church is on **Wed, July 22, from 11:00 am–5:00 pm.** See the flyer for more info. Call 1-800-733-2767 or go to www.redcrossblood.org and enter: firstcongregationalrf to schedule an appointment.

Tools for School: Once again, we are collecting school supplies for local families. As you are out shopping, please start collecting everything students might need this fall. The School Supply Event will be on **August 17 & 18** here at church. Typically, we serve about 300 students. Thank you for your generous support of this needed local ministry. Please also sign up to help sort and distribute items.

Let’s Feed Some Kids! Join us on **Wed, Sept 9, from 6-8pm at Tattersall** as we feed 100,000 starving kids right here in River Falls. Our church is one of the sponsors of this Feed My Starving Children event. All our Middle and High School kids will have their first night of Confirmation/Youth Group this night, but EVERYONE is welcome to come and help. Sign up before July 15th to get your spot! Questions to Pastor Chris or Alex.

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.

Youth Events

VBS and Summer Children’s Musical: Dates for the 2026 children’s summer programs are:

VBS: July 27-30, 9:00 to 11:30 am. Theme is: My Peace I Give to You

Children’s Musical: August 10-13, 9:00 am to Noon. The show will be *Rock Slinger and His Greatest Hits*.

VBS is for children age 3 to completed grade 5. The musical is for children who have completed kindergarten through completed grade 6. Emma Cruciani will be the director. We will need adult and teen volunteers for VBS. Please save the dates! Registration forms are online and at church. Please invite friends and neighbors.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

"Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."