

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

August 23, 2026

“YOU ARE THE
MESSIAH,
THE SON OF THE
LIVING GOD.”

MATTHEW 16:16, NRSV



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

August 23, 2026

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

9:30 am

Gathering

“In an age of information overload . . . the last thing any of us needs is more information about God. We need the practice of incarnation, by which God saves the lives of those whose intellectual assent has turned them dry as dust, who have run frighteningly low on the bread of life, who are dying to know more God in their bodies. Not more about God. More God.

Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*

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.
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GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Come let us worship the God of surprises,

P: **Who graces us with new life.**

L: Come let us worship the God of love,

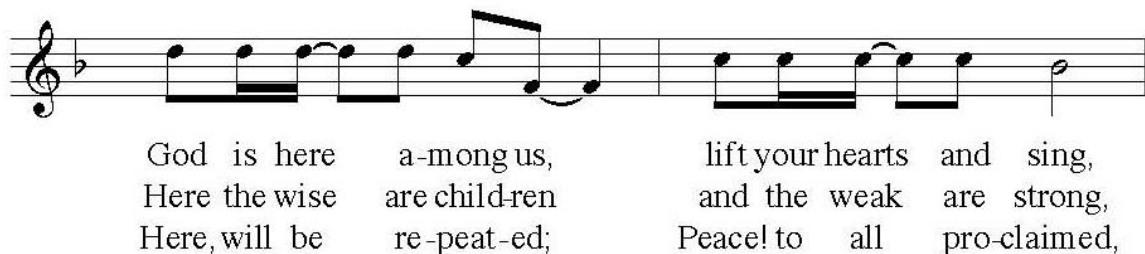
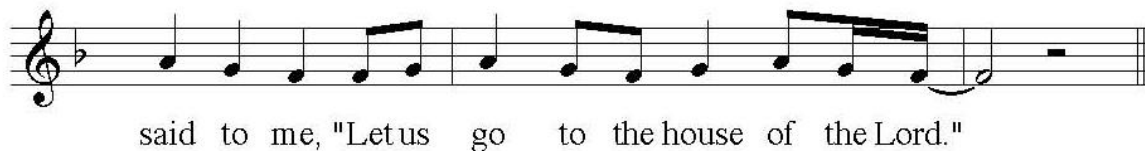
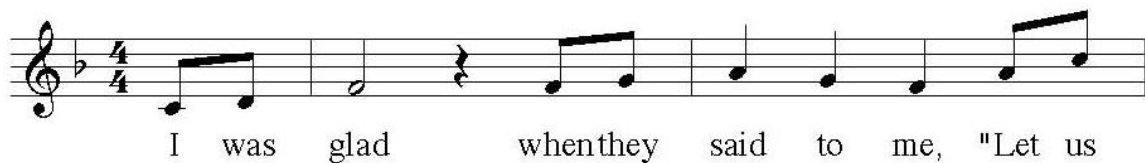
P: **Who shows us in Jesus what true love looks like.**

L: Come let us worship the God who can make all things new,

P: **Including you and me.**

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

I Was Glad



*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of Glory, you sent Jesus among us as the Light of the World, to reveal your love for all people. We confess that our sin and pride hide the brightness of your light. We turn away from the poor; we ignore cries for justice; we do not strive for peace. Forgive us, God. In your mercy, renew us and set us once again on your path so that as forgiven and renewed people we may reflect the love and life of Jesus Christ in our world. Amen.

*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: Our God is a God of grace and mercy and love;

P: **May we be strengthened in all goodness and live together in peace.**

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

Je - sus, name a - bove all names; beau - ti - ful Sav - ior,
glo - ri - ous Lord. Em - man - u - el God is with us;
bless - ed Re - deem - er, Liv - ing Word

Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Romans 12:1-8

PSALM 138 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

Unison
Great is the glo - ry of God.

L: I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;

P: I bow down towards your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness;
L: For you have exalted your name and your word above everything.
P: On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul. R

Proclaiming the Word

GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 16:13-20

SERMON

Rev. Chris Myers

***HYMN**

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

Blue #358

STATEMENT OF FAITH - Written by children and used in worship during the World Council of Churches' Seventh Assembly in Canberra, Australia, 1991

We believe in God who loves us and wants us to love each other.

This is our God.

We believe in Jesus who cared about children and held them in his arms. He wanted a world where everyone could live together in peace.

This is Jesus Christ.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who keeps working with us until everything is good and true.

This is the Holy Spirit.

We can be the church which reminds people of God because we love each other.

This we believe. Amen.

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

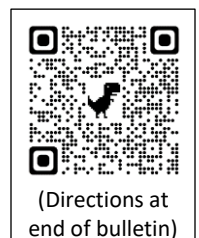
Lord in your mercy... **Hear our prayer.**

...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 – Emma Cruciani

I Need Thee Every Hour

arr. by Emma Nissen and Stephen Nelson



***We praise you, O God, our Redeemer, Creator;
In grateful devotion our tribute we bring.
We lay it before you, we kneel and adore you;
We bless your holy name, glad praises we sing.***

***OFFERTORY PRAYER**

O God, we bring gifts to our church so that our lives and our gifts will be a blessing to others. May the gift-giving we make through your church make a difference in the world. And may our lives and our church reflect your presence in the world through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

<i>Celebrating the Meal</i>

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:** Beloved in Christ, the Gospel tells us that on the first day of the week, Jesus Christ was raised from death, appeared to Mary Magdalene, on the same day sat at table with two disciples, and was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.
- P:** **This is the joyful feast of the people of God. Men and women, young and old, come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and gather about Christ's table.**

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

**Refrain: *One bread, one body, one Lord of all,
one cup of blessing which we bless.***

***And we, though many, throughout the earth,
we are one body in this one Lord.***

Gentile or Jew, servant or free, woman or man no more. Refrain

Many the gifts, many the works, one in the Lord of all. Refrain

Grain for the fields, scattered and grown, gathered to one for all. Refrain

As We Gather at Your Table

Congregation join on refrain:



I Come with Joy

Black #349

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**

Every Time I Feel the Spirit

Blue #481

***BLESSING**

POSTLUDE

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SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Chris Myers
Celebrant: Stacy Johnson Myers
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Rebecca Ferguson
Deacons: Paul Shepherd, Brodie Lueck,
Liz Swank, Kathy Thomlinson,
Fallon Lueck
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Diane Olson
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Welcomers: Norma Revels, Jo Anne Friedell
Trustee: Tim Bylander
Coffee
Fellowship: Morrison Family
Counters: Marie Roe, Allen Barnes
*Altar table flowers are given by Mike and
Suzie Danielson in memory of Linda Huppert
(sister of Mike).*

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>Aug 16, 2026</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 3,616	\$ 368,342
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 11,308	\$ 373,164

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'

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 Morrisette, Nathaniel (friend of the Kruegers), Bruce (father of Melissa Oscanyan), Kathy Deiss (relative of Ann Nelson), Ryan Cottrell (friend of the Koechers), Jeff (brother of Steve Healy), Diana (friend of Janice Healy), Greg (friend of Ron Ruhnke), Nolan, Kelly (sister-in-law of Cindy Gandrud), Jill (daughter of JoAnn Mathews), Connie Pajac (sister of Jeff Pajac), Dave Woeste, Lu Lueck

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For the Tools for School program this past week which provided over 350 River Falls kids school supplies, may this help them and their families have a great school year
- For our summer youth musical "The Rock Slinger," the story of David and Goliath which 16 of our kids presented recently, what amazing things you can do in a week with some help, thank you!
- For our 2026 VBS program "Peace Be With You" which ran recently with over 50 kids, what a great week!
- For all those who bought, unloaded and will eat peaches as part of our youth fundraiser, enjoy them!
- For our church softball team as they played their final games of the season, thanks for a fun filled year!

Prayers for our World:

- For all those getting ready for school, teachers, students, staff and college students moving in, may you have a great and fruitful year
- For peace in our world, our communities and our own hearts
- For those affected by recent tornadoes in Appleton, Neenah and Menasha, and for those in our church who contributed \$5000 to help them rebuild, with the help of good neighbors may they recover 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
- 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 our Among Friends program as they seek more board members (see Norma Revels or Marshall Skule for details), and may their program continue to grow and provide support to families with dementia

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

- For the gift of the Pierce County Fair and Minnesota State Fair, let the good times (and food!) roll!
- For Bobbie Kuhn who celebrates her 80th birthday on Thursday, August 27, may you enjoy many more!
- For our Garden Geeks who tend our church garden and our Lawn Mowing Team who keep everything looking great, God bless you all!
- For the \$3136 raised from peaches that will go to our Youth Fund, thank you!
- For the gift of summer, may we savor every last bit of it
- For those who will give blood at our next blood drive on Monday, September 28, may it bring life

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For the family of Linda Huppert (sister of Mike Danielson) whose Memorial Service was yesterday and in whose memory the altar flowers are given this Sunday
- For the families of Robert (Bob) Peterson (brother of Larry Peterson), Krisan Shaw, Glenn Hansen, Ann Gustafson, Joyce Kampstra, 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!

Sunday School Teachers Needed: Sunday School is one of the most critical ministries we offer to support children as they learn and grow in faith. First Congregational uses a shared teaching model, so a team of three teachers shares responsibilities for an individual class. All curriculum and materials are provided, and teachers teach approximately once every three weeks. For more information, please contact Pastor Stacy. To volunteer, please sign up at church or online.

Sunday School Teachers' Meeting: Sunday School teachers are asked to attend a meeting on **Thurs, Sept 10, 6:30 pm**. This meeting is a chance to get organized for the new Sunday School year. The meeting will conclude by 7:30 pm.

Rally Day: Sunday School, Sunday Morning Bible Study, choir and bells resume, resume on **Rally Day, Sept 13**. All children who are three years old (and toilet-trained) are welcome in Sunday School. Previously registered students do not need to register again. New students should register. Registration forms are available at church or online.

Sunday Morning Bible Study: Sunday morning Bible study groups resumes on Rally Day, **September 13**. The group discusses the Bible passages used in worship. The group meets at **9:00–9:50** Sunday mornings in the Youth Room. Please join us! For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study: The Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study will resume on **Wed, Sept 16, 1:00-2:30**. The group will study Revelation. Copies of the discussion book are available in the office for \$20.00 each. The fall is a terrific time to being participating in Bible Study. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Wednesday School Workers Needed: Wednesday School begins on **October 7**. We need volunteers to provide snacks on a rotating basis and adult and teen volunteers to help with the children. Please sign the list on the sign-up table or volunteer on the website.

Loving Neighbor

Summer Nursery Volunteers Needed: During the summer months our church nursery is staffed by volunteers. Please sign up for a Sunday to staff the nursery. Thank you! Use the sign-up sheet at church or online.

Journey House: (Ecumenical young adult outreach) is getting ready for the new school year! If you're interested in contributing, here are some ideas: **A Welcome to School Care Kit & Goody Bag**. We are asking for a donation of \$25. The bags will be handed out to students; **A suggested donation of \$30 to help sponsor our weekly gathering, Journey Nights; Amazon Wish List**. We created and plan on keeping up with an Amazon Wish List.

Among Friends Volunteers Needed: The program meets two days a week and has 12 active guests. Training is provided & the rewards are phenomenal! They are particularly in need of male volunteers but are willing to receive all. Contact them at amongfriendsrf@gmail.com

Among Friends Board Members Needed: They need board members. They meet on the second Monday of each month at 4:00 pm. Please see Norma Revels for details.

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

Harp Concert: Experience the calming, soothing effect of live therapeutic music. You are invited to a free concert by Certified Therapeutic Musician Kristin Andes and her harp on **Tues, Aug 25, from 6:30-7:30 pm**. 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 **Sept 1 & 15**.

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 **Aug 25 & Sept 8**.

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 **Sept 20 at 11:45 am**.

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: Monday was our first playoff game and we WON!! Yeah! Way to go team! Our next game is Monday, August 24 at 6:15 pm. The winner of that game goes to the championship game at 7:30 pm. We are planning on a long night of softball. August 24th will also be a fun night for all teams with a picnic and having one field at 7:30 pm available for a fun game for kids of all ages while the other field has the championship game. Come join us for the playoffs and the picnic. We will have enough food for all. All activities are at the softball fields at Hoffman Park. Any questions, contact Deb Hoffman at debhoffman234b@gmail.com.

Side by Side Choir: For people living with memory or thinking changes, their care partners, family, friends & community volunteers who enjoy helping others. It is a welcoming choir where people gather here at the church to connect & thrive by sharing music, joy & laughter! Join us weekly on **Mondays at 10:00 am** for our fall season. **Rehearsals start on Sept 14**, and will conclude with a **concert on Sat, Dec 5 at 10:30 am**. To learn more or sign-up contact: Norma Revels at 651-416-9530 or sidebysidechoir@gmail.com

Committee Needs Update: Thank you to all that said YES!! when asked to serve. **We are still in need of 2 Deacons and 1 person for the Christian Ed Committee.** Please consider giving of your time to help our church in any of these openings. The term begins in September 2026 and runs for three years.

Red Cross Blood Drive: The next Blood Drive held here is on **Mon, Sept 28, 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.

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

Fall Confirmation Orientation: The Confirmation Orientation for grades 6–8 will be following worship on Sun, Sept 13. This meeting is **required** for all confirmands & their parents.

The Orientation for High School Confirmands (grade 9) & Church Interns will be Sun, Sept 20. This meeting is **required** for all confirmands & their parents.

Wednesday School: All children who will be in kindergarten through Grade 5 in the fall are invited to participate in Wednesday School. Elementary students in River Falls are picked up at the four elementary schools in town at the end of the school day and it concludes at 5:15. Registration and permission forms are available at church and online. Wednesday School begins **October 7**. Please contact Pastor Stacy with questions.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.



Tools for School
Over 350 kids
received supplies
for the school year!
Plus shoes and lunch.
Thank you!

