



FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL

110 North Third Street
River Falls, WI 54022
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www.firstchurchrf.org

God is still speaking,

April 1, 2020

*No matter who you are,
No matter where you are
on your spiritual journey,
you are welcome here!*

As Jesus' courageous disciples, living God's grace, we strive to:

- Worship faithfully
- Welcome openly
- Grow spiritually
- Care passionately
- Serve generously



Pastor's Page

We are all having to learn new skills. Every blessed one of us. From the teacher learning to teach online, to the student having to learn online. From the young parent with kids underfoot, to the older parent with kids returning home from college. From the senior stuck inside, to the nursing home worker now having to work extra shifts. From the employee working remotely, to the employee

just released from work. The list goes on and on and on. We are all having to learn new skills quickly.

In some ways it is like when we take our young people on a mission trip. Every second year we take our kids and adult helpers on a mission trip to UCC affiliated Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi (thankfully that trip will be next spring break not this one!). On a mission trip you have to learn new skills quickly. You also have to learn how to get along with people in very tight quarters (all twenty five people sleep in two huge bunk rooms). Truth be told, if you don't start out on the right foot, the whole week can go bad quickly.

In order to start off on the right path, there are three virtues all the mission participants need to learn and live. I think these same three virtues are needed in our current predicament today.

Patience. Patience is not only a virtue, it one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), one of the ways we live out our faith today. On a mission trip worksite there is a surprising amount of downtime, especially in the beginning of the week as the crew leaders assess people's skill levels and start handing out jobs. Today with people confined to small places with the same people, we are going to have to learn to be very patient with one another, and ourselves.

Flexibility. Even before the pandemic hit, the rate of change and innovation in recent years has been staggering. I think of those first disciples, after Jesus died, huddled together not knowing exactly what they should do. But then God's Spirit blew through the room (Acts 2) and suddenly, miraculously, they began to understand the new thing God was calling them to do and be. On a mission trip, participants need to be flexible recognizing plans change quickly and we need to adapt. In the same way today, we are being called, some may even say tested, in our ability to be flexible and change our plans quickly.

Adventure. Remember when you said life was boring? It almost seems quaint now doesn't it? On a mission trip I encourage our participants to live with a sense of adventure. Once we have mastered patience and flexibility, the third key is living with a sense of adventure. Because we know God is with us (Psalm 23:4), and because we know God is at work in our world today, what if we lived each day with a sense of adventure and see how we might be a part of God's work in our world?

Together we are going to get through this.

God's grace, Christ's peace, and the Holy Spirit's power to you all.

In Gratitude, Pastor Chris

GROW spiritually

Worship Services

As we can no longer worship together in person, there are now two ways we are joining together for Sunday worship. You can tune in to WEVR (106.3 FM) from 11:00-11:30 am for our live worship service. You can also live stream it (or access it later) from the church YouTube channel. A link to the YouTube channel is found each week on the church website and on the Weekly Word. If you subscribe to the church YouTube channel you will receive updates and reminders.

Education Update

Confirmation & Pre-Confirmation Students: Instead of in-person classes, students received emails with alternative lessons. These lessons are also posted on the

church website on the “Education” page under “Confirmation/Church Interns.” We encourage students to connect with each other through phone calls, notes & social media.

Sunday School Students: Each week a family resource is posted on the church website. The resource supports the worship theme. Families with school-age children will also receive an additional Holy Week-Easter resource through old fashioned mail.

Gatherings

Confirmation and Church Interns

After Spring Break, both Confirmation and Church Interns will continue to meet as scheduled during the month of April, albeit in different formats. Look to the Confirmation Update on Monday to tell you the latest news and how these lessons will

take place. Our current schedule has one last confirmation class on Wednesday, April 29. Our end of the year Wednesday, May 6, bowling outing had to be cancelled by St Croix Lanes.

All Small Groups Cancelled

Due to the recent virus outbreak, all in-person small groups are cancelled. This includes Yoga, Men’s Group, Cribbage, Wellhaven Group, Book Group, Bible Study, Choir and Bells, Among Friends, all committees.

Connecting Our Shut-ins and Seniors

At this time when many of our seniors must stay at home, and our nursing home residents are on lock down, we have matched each of these vulnerable people with families who will reach out to them with phone calls, notes, cards and kids artwork. If you wish to be matched with someone, please contact the church office.

Holy Week Schedule

Holy Week is the most important week for Christian people. In this one week, we see the gospel in a nutshell. We see God at God’s best, creating new life out of despair and hope in the midst of death. Although we are unsure of how this will take place, likely online and over the radio, Holy Week worship will take place on Psalm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Unfortunately, there will be no Easter breakfast this year.

Easter Lilies

Easter has not been cancelled! Whether we worship online, or in another format, Christ is Risen! We cannot cancel our order of Easter lilies so consider ordering a lily in honor or memory of a loved one. After Easter worship, they will be available to be taken home. Cost is \$13. Please see the form on the church website on the “Resource” page then click on “Forms” or contact the church office at office@firstchurchrf.org

Church Finances

Although we can no longer meet in person, please continue to keep up your financial pledge. Church leadership is committed to keeping our church staff paid and they are stepping up in extraordinary ways to learn new skills, connect people together and continue the ministry of the church. Please consider signing up for e-giving (form is on the church website on the “Resource” page under “Forms”) or you may mail your offerings to the church office. Thank you for your continued generosity.

The Calendar for April

As you can see from this newsletter, the calendar is missing. In this strange era in which things seem to change by the day, if not by the hour, we will hold off printing the church calendar for the time being. Here at church we are taking things two weeks at a time. As of today (March 25) here is what we know:

- * Holy Week Worship services will likely move to online, although we are seeing if we can do a drive in Easter service someplace with a big parking lot. Holy Week is the most important week of the year for Christians so we will be offering worship in some form for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter.
- * Music – Jamie Mills, our church Music Coordinator, has been fantastic about providing music for our online services. Since choir and bell groups cannot practice, and since we can only have a few people together for the live stream, she will continue in this capacity. There will be no Good Friday cantata this year.
- * Meetings – Again, since we are only planning 2 weeks out at a time, it seems likely that April committee and council meetings will have to move to online formats. More later on this.
- * Church Office; Church Staff; Church Building – The building itself remains closed. We are available electronically and via our cell phones. You can also leave messages on the church voicemail. Lastly, the church mailbox is secure and can be used to drop off letters, checks and offerings. It is located on the Third Street entrance inside the right hand door pillar—there is a mail slot there with a lock that is checked daily.

Church Staff Contact Info:

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Compassion Fund

We are starting a fund to help families who are financially affected by our current crisis. Gifts should be marked ‘Compassion Fund.’ If you would like to contribute, please mark your checks. And if you know of a church family in need, please contact one of the pastors.

Masks Needed for Hospitals

Allina Hospitals has issued a call for masks, including homemade fabric masks. Here is a link about the need: <https://blog.bluecrossmn.com/covid19masks/>

Directions for making masks: <https://www.sewgoodgoods.org/face-mask-covid-19>. This pattern, approved by Allina, has directions for masks with elastic and without elastic.

This video provides helpful visual directions and a good strategy for sewing even pleats on the mask: www.sweetredpoppy.com.

Although masks will be sterilized before being used, it is important to wash fabrics in hot water and dry on high heat before using. Use 100% cotton fabric, the softer the better.

If you have materials but are unable to make masks yourself, please contact the church office. Needed materials:

- Good quality 100% cotton fabric or 100% cotton flannel—the type of fabrics used for quilting.
- Round elastic cord, 1/4” or 1/8” flat elastic in any color

**First Congregational United
Church of Christ**

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APRIL 1, 2020

Holy Week & Communion Bread

In the coming days and weeks, the church staff will find ways for us to connect with each other during Holy Week if we are unable to be together in person. Holy Week poses a particular challenge.

The bread we eat when we celebrate the Sacrament of Communion is both ordinary and extraordinary bread. It uses ordinary ingredients but when we share it during worship it becomes something more than bread—it nourishes us and binds us together as the body of Christ in the world.

In preparation for celebrating the Sacrament on Maundy Thursday, we give you our congregation's communion bread recipe. Please consider making this bread and serving it with your evening meal on Maundy Thursday, April 9. Prior to Maundy Thursday, we will provide a simple prayer for you and your family to use as you eat this bread.

Communion Bread Recipe

1. Sift together: 2 c. whole wheat flour, 1 c. white flour 1¼ tsp. baking powder 1¼ tsp. salt. Note: if you do not have whole wheat flour, use 3 cups white flour.
2. Combine: 4 teaspoons oil, ¾ cup + 2 tablespoons very hot water, 3 tablespoons honey, 3 tablespoons molasses. Add to the dry ingredients and mix well. Note: if making this with children let the children decide on the proportion of honey and molasses. Any combination will work as long as you use a total of 6 tablespoons.
3. Divide into four pieces. Roll or pat into loaves that are ¼" thick. Use a knife to mark each loaf with a cross.
4. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes. Remove bread from oven and brush top of bread with oil. Bake an additional 5-8 minutes, remove and cool.