



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL

110 North Third Street
River Falls, WI 54022
715-425-2052
www.firstchurchrf.org

God is still speaking,

November 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

The Games of Thrones was a hit fantasy television series that won many, many awards during the time it ran from 2011 and 2019. It was powerful, bloody and involved a lot of violence and sex, so naturally it was extremely popular (and not a show I would recommend). While I never watched the shows, I did read the books on which the show was based. And one of the phrases that appears over and over in the series is this: Winter is coming. We in Wisconsin know firsthand what this means.

Here at church, winter means the end of outdoor worship, outdoor meetings and gatherings which have been remarkably successful. At home, the onset of winter means the end of backyard bonfires, gathering with neighbors on our decks, porches and patios. In

our community, the cold weather means the likely end of outdoor dining and long walks along the Kinni River. And as I write this, we are in the midst of an early, record breaking snow fall. Winter is indeed coming. And with the increasing COVID numbers in Wisconsin this promises to be a very unique winter indeed.

We have a lot of people in our congregation who are elderly and rightfully concerned about contracting the virus. They are taking necessary precautions, but missing contact with their grandkids, kids, travel, weekly trips to restaurants and their pre-COVID routines. And if they live alone, they are missing simple human touch and conversation. They are absolutely dreading the winter cooped up and cut off.

We also have a lot of young people and families in our congregation who are living together in close quarters in ways they have never had to before. Having their plans changed, games cancelled, working from home, learning at home, it all gets a little much some days. While they love their families, they are craving a little alone time.

So how are we going to get through it? How are you going to get through it?

In one of our small groups that is meeting online to read the book *The Walk: 5 Essential Practices of Christian Life*, we talked about the difference between general revelation and special revelation. As Christians we talk about a Still Speaking God, a God who is not shut up and out of human life, but active and at work in our world today, even in a pandemic, even in an election season. This same God chooses to reveal himself in amazing and creative ways—through the creation, arts, works of beauty and

majesty, our own life experiences and of course the most often way God chooses to work—through people. We call this general revelation and should give thanks for all these ways. But there is another way God chooses to work in the world we call special revelation. These are those times when God directly discloses the divine self & will. Scripture, the Holy Spirit and Jesus himself are all examples of this kind of special revelation. Too often I think we neglect this type of revelation and insight.

In one of our small group sessions, we were encouraged to read scripture daily. Pick a few short verses and use those verses as a way of looking at the world that day, almost as if you are praying the scriptures. We were also encouraged at some point to read a gospel (one of the 4 books of the New Testament that detail the life and ministry of Jesus) all the way through. In the past I have also recommended spending some time with the Psalms which have an amazing ability to convey our emotions to God (check them out, there is everything in there from comfort food for the soul to anger at the way things are - how much longer O God!).

It is going to be a long winter. But we can and will get it through it. This church is creatively involved in making the Christian faith real and relevant in an age of social distancing and masks. There are opportunities to worship and grow, serve and bless others each and every week, if not every day. And as always, church staff are here, ready, willing and able to help you individually and as a community to continue to be Jesus' courageous disciples at work in our world today.

In Gratitude, Pastor Chris

GROW spiritually

Pastoral Care

Our church staff are here to help and support you. Please do not hesitate to contact a pastor or church staff member through email or phone. As hospital and nursing home access is severely limited, we have a system to reach out to our shut-ins and vulnerable

seniors with notes and cards. If you want to be included in this ministry please email the church office (office@firstchurchrf.org) & we will connect you to a shut-in.

Church Finances

Please maintain your financial pledge or consider an extra gift. Gifts can be mailed or even better, sign up for e-giving by contacting the church office. There is also a secure mail drop in the right-hand pillar of the front entrance of the church building which is checked daily.

Weekly Adult Bible Study

Weekly Adult Bible Study meets **Wednesdays from 1:00-2:30 pm**, socially-distant with masks in the Fellowship Hall. The group will discuss Amy-Jill Levine's book *Sermon on the Mount: A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven*. Copies are available in the church office for \$14.00. All are welcome! Please contact Stacy Myers for more information.



All Saints Sunday, November 1

On Sunday, November 1, we will celebrate All Saints Sunday. This is the day we remember those in our church family who have lived the life of faith and now rest in God's strong care. A white rose in memory of each of our saints will be placed on the Altar Table and may be picked up by family members after worship. May God grant peace and comfort to those who mourn on earth.

The 'saints' of First Congregational: Virginia Hilden, George Anderson, Betty Church, Michael Kelly, Ray Anderson, Rae Farley, Alice Viney, Beth Amacker, Karna Greaser, Joan Smith, Margaret Wesson

In-Person, Indoor Worship

After a very successful summer & fall of in-person, outdoor worship on the church lawn, we are planning to begin offering in-person, indoor worship this winter. As detailed earlier, the safest place to worship will be the Fellowship Hall. It already has the newest HVAC system, and refreshes the air every 15 minutes, but it will soon have a Bipolar Ionization system to help filter the air. This addition was recommended by our church architect and HVAC contractor. It is the same system used by the Mayo Clinic. Once it is installed, and local COVID numbers permit, we will again welcome groups of up to 75 into the Fellowship Hall for worship with masks, social distancing and hand washing protocols.

As with the outdoor service, space will be limited and you will need to sign up ahead of time for contact tracing. We will continue to offer the online and radio worship options as well. Church leaders thank you for your patience as we seek to offer multiple options for worship that are safe and faithful.

Quarantining

With the spread of COVID-19, more and more families are having to quarantine at some point. Please know that your church stands ready to support and help you as we can. We have volunteers who can run errands, pick up medicine or food, even deliver your Sunday School materials if you are quarantined.

Please also know church staff are here to help you navigate the intense emotional pressures these situations bring with them. Contact the church office for more information at 715-425-2052 or office@firstchurchrf.org

Shoeboxes Needed!

We are in need of lots of shoeboxes so we can again continue our Christmas Shoebox Ministry to the men at the Kinnic Rehab facility. This year we especially need larger shoeboxes but will take any that you have. Please place them in the container in the gathering area at church. We will need LOTS of them! Please start bringing them in now. Thank you!

Sunday School: Fall, 2020

The November **Faith At Home** Sunday School resource bags will be ready for pick up on Sunday, November 1, for one hour following the end of worship. When you pick up the November bag, please return the October bag with the book and the red folder. All other materials stay at home. Please remember to view the online Sunday School lesson each week.

This is one of our pre-school children who used her Faith At Home blocks to build a model of Zacchaeus' house.



Wednesday Family Meals

Wednesday Meals have moved to a take-out format. We have runners who run the meals directly out to your car. Use the back alley and drive south from Maple toward Elm Street. Cost is \$8 per person and will be served in eco-friendly containers. Meals of more than 3 will be packaged family style. **Orders must be placed by Tuesday night and can be picked up at church from 5:00-6:00 pm Wednesday.**

Nov 4 - Boneless BBQ ribs, roasted baby red potatoes, vegetable, and bread

Sign up: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-wednesday4>

Nov 11 - Meatballs in gravy, butter and parsley potatoes, vegetable, and bread

Nov 18 - Lasagna and chicken alfredo, salad, and bread

Knitters?

We need three knitters each willing to knit one skein of wool yarn. Once the yarn is knitted it will be felted and used for a Christmas ornament project. All that is required is a simple stockinette stitch (knit one row, purl the next) and it does *not* have to be perfect. If you are willing to help, please contact Stacy.

Men's Group Gathering

The group will meet **every other Tuesday at 9:00 am in the Youth Room** (masks, social distancing and hand washing required). The next gatherings are **Nov 10 and 24**. All men are welcome! Contact Brad Williams for more information (bradleywilliams@comcast.net).

Church Yoga

Jan Hansen's church yoga group will meet in the Fellowship Hall (with masks) from **9:00–10:00 am on Tuesdays & Thursdays**. You can also access the yoga classes on their own YouTube channel with archived classes. The link is here and on the church website.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDKl4WmalDidWZwixjZGSFw?view_as=subscriber

Treasurer's Report

	Week of Oct 18, 2020	Year to Date
General Fund Income *	\$ 18,635	\$ 385,835
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 9,582	\$ 402,444

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

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.

Church Staff

You can contact them via their email and cell numbers which are below.

Chris Myers—chris@firstchurchrf.org - 715-441-2497

Missy Luedtke—missy@firstchurchrf.org - 715-222-5427

Stacy Myers—stacy@firstchurchrf.org - 715-338-6406

Dave Ostendorf—dave@firstchurchrf.org - 715-441-6559

JaNae Westrich—jmwestrich@gmail.com - 715-897-5358

Jamie Mills—degolierjamie@gmail.com - 715-419-0850

Dave Mountain—focusfan2001@yahoo.com - 715-245-6854

Tim Bylander—timthefixitguy@gmail.com - 715-808-2900



Advent Ornament Kits

Our traditional Advent Workshop will be offered this year with a twist. Age-appropriate kits of materials to make four ornaments will be offered for pick up. The cost for each kit (designed for one person) will be \$5.00, with a family maximum of \$20.00. The following kits are available:

Preschool & Kindergarten: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-advent>

Elementary Children: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-advent1>

Big Kids & Adults: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-advent2>

Please call the church office to pay via credit card or you may pay when you pick up the kit(s). The kits will be available starting on November 22, the First Sunday in Advent, the same day families will pick up new Faith At Home bags.

College Pack Thanks

We have received MANY thank you cards from our college students for the college packs they received this fall. Here are a few more of them. Thank you to our church community who continue to support our college students.

I got my care package in the mail a few weeks ago! I really liked getting it in the mail. It really means a lot that even in the current world situation, the members of my church took time to think of me. ☺ Thank you so much and please express my gratitude to the confirmation classes if you can. I am doing ok in college. I am enjoying most of my classes. AFROTC is going great. I really like the program. I miss you and my church family very much! Hopefully I'll see you soon. Stay safe. Sincerely, Nate Lawrence

This is Derick, and I'm emailing to thank those who have sent me the care package. I really appreciate the snacks, especially now with the weather is getting

colder. I also appreciate the pens and the stress penguin, they are both handy when I'm going homework. I'm still healthy and still walking up the BIG hill to get back to my dorm after classes are done. Anyway, again thank you for the care package. Be safe, stay healthy, act smart, Derick Graves

Thank you very much for the care package! This year has been challenging in unique ways, and getting this care package meant a lot. I really appreciate it. I hope everyone is doing well and staying safe. Thanks again, Zack

Thank you for the care package! I have eaten most all of the goodies in the box! Thanks again, Alex Martin



Home Worship Place

To facilitate worship when we are at home, we are inviting all families and households to create a cross that will be a focal point for worship. We will provide a wooden cross and stained glass pieces to glue onto the cross. For each season of the church year, we will send a small colored parament (the fabric banners that are used in worship) to put under your cross as a reminder of the liturgical season.

If you are interested in making a cross, please sign up using this link (also on the church website on the Worship page): <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-make>

Giving Thanks Meal 2020

Our Annual Giving Thanks Meal will take place on **Sunday, November 15 from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm in a drive-thru, take out format.** The menu will include turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, corn, coleslaw, roll and your choice of apple or pumpkin pie. The cost is \$8 per meal and if you cannot afford that a church angel has donated the cost of the meal. All profits are given to the River Falls Food Pantry. Meals are packaged in eco-friendly, microwaveable containers. **Sign up by noon on Thursday, November 12.** Please drive up in front of the church on 3rd Street (not the back alley!) and a church intern will take your payment and run the meal out to you. Thank you Kruger and Miller families for pivoting and continuing this great tradition!



<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-giving>



Christmas Shoebox

Our Christmas Shoebox Project will go on even during these strange times of a Pandemic! For many years, the yoga group & members have supported a “Christmas Shoebox” for the men at the Kinnic Drug & Alcohol Rehab Center in River Falls. Even though these are strange times, the NEED is still there, and we will again collect items, wrap, and deliver the boxes to show that we all still care! These shoeboxes contain socks, playing cards, puzzles, and many other items. One really wonderful item last year was the thick warm gloves that a member purchased! They were a big hit as well as a new cribbage board. The look on their faces and their thankfulness is something I wish all of you could see. Your donations will be most welcome.

Please leave donations in the church office. Cash donations will be used to purchase any needed items. If you have questions, please contact Jean at jsmithler@yahoo.com or at 715-781-6880.

Items: Wall calendar, games (Uno—puzzles—table), shampoo and body wash in one, toothpaste—full size, toothbrush, floss, deodorant, coffee mug, hot chocolate mix, chapstick, combs, razors, nail clippers, socks, paperback books, pens, winter gloves, packaged snack or popcorn, wrapped candy, DQ gift card, ruled notebooks (these go to the Director), disposable facemasks (new this year!), **LARGE** empty shoe boxes.

If we can get new ones and at least 60: sewing kit, personal size calendar, stamps, envelopes, and dominos.

amazon smile Free Money for Church Ministries

The church has created an Amazon Smile account through which the church can receive a portion of the price of each purchase you make through Amazon. It is important to know that you need to do two things for the church to receive this money. First, go to Amazon Smile by typing in smile.amazon.com and then add First Congregational Church River Falls to your Amazon Smile. Second, every time you order you must order through your Smile account by going to smile.amazon.com. Once you do this, the church will receive 0.5% of each eligible order. Please contact the church office if you have questions.

Concerning People

- For Jan Hansen who delivered this month’s treat bags to our shut-ins, you are a blessing!
- For Barb de Souza who celebrated her 90th birthday on October 18 (cards can be sent to her at 620 West Walnut Street, River Falls, WI 54022), that she may continue to stay busy and involved
- For Dan and Eunice Filkins celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary on Friday, November 13, may you enjoy many more years together! (722 Fairchild Drive, River Falls, WI 54022 for cards)
- For Mark Anderson who is building a little church which will be outside the church door and be a place to drop off and pick up items after church hours—it will be like our little church from VBS which sits to the right of the main church doors

Do you have other upcoming news and celebrations to share with the congregation? Graduations? Birthday and Anniversary celebrations? Please email them to office@firstchurchrf.org

Racial Justice and Reconciliation: a Learning Community

Virtual Gathering with the James Laue Family

Thursday, November 19, 7:00 pm

James Laue grew up in First Congregational UCC, graduated from UWRF and from Harvard with a doctorate, and went on to a distinguished career committed to racial justice and reconciliation. He was active in Civil Rights Movement sit-ins and worked closely with its leaders, and in 1965 joined the Department of Justice to shape its work in communities facing racial conflict. In an iconic photo taken the evening Dr. King was assassinated James Laue is seen on the balcony with those gathering around the fallen civil rights leader.

Laue later wrote of King, “His life – and his death – changed my life. He taught me that ‘conflict resolution,’ a laudable goal on the surface, does not truly occur without struggle refined in love and that justice is not fulfilled without reconciliation.” Laue founded what became the U.S. Institute of Peace; mediated in civil rights disputes from Selma to Northern Ireland; and was a mentor to a generation of scholars of the emerging field of conflict resolution. His career is honored far beyond his roots in River Falls. Yet, in a quiet spot in Greenwood Cemetery, his gravestone reminds us of his faithfulness, steeped long ago in this congregation. His brother Don was ordained in this church in 1961 and resides in Greeley, Colorado.

We are honored to welcome James Laue’s sons to a Learning Community Virtual Gathering on Thurs, Nov 19 at 7:00 pm to share their family’s rich story & to help us reflect on our current commitments to advance racial justice. Ronald W. Laue, Sr. Assistant Dean, McKelvey Engineering, at Washington University in St. Louis, and Andrew Laue, Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions, Webster University will join us that evening to share their powerful reflections on their father’s life and their family legacy. Join the online gathering via Zoom. You must register using the sign-up. It will be about an hour and will include a presentation and time for questions.

One of the driving forces to guide our trajectory toward a community of faith committed to racial justice is the pathway set out by those who—both past and present—give generously and faithfully of themselves in the daily struggle for racial justice and reconciliation. Their stories and the stories we create are central to our commitments.

Sign-up: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-learning>

2021 Financial Pledge

The Discipleship Committee sent out 2021 financial pledging information in a recent mailing. Please prayerfully consider your financial giving to support the church mission and ministry in the coming year and return your pledge form by November 15.

We ask you to do three things:

- * If you don’t pledge, please begin this year.
- * If you do pledge, please increase your pledge, even if only a little bit.
- * If you do pledge, please consider signing up for electronic giving which is safe, reliable and easy.

Your generosity is the engine that drives our mission and ministry. Your giving changes lives and helps make this world a brighter, more hopeful and graceful place. Thank you!

People in the Pews is a new newsletter section that will seek to keep us connected in the age of COVID. Each newsletter we will ask a different person to introduce themselves by answering a few questions. Becky Pajac is our first Person in the Pews!

People in the Pews – Becky Pajac

I grew up in the Hammond / Roberts area. I was baptized at Roberts UCC and graduated from St. Croix Central. I currently live in Martell with my husband, Jeff and our fur babies.

We have been attending this church for 15 years. We were impressed with Chris’ sermons and friendliness of the people. There are (usually) so many opportunities to get involved. That hasn’t changed and that is why we continue to come here, although now it is with YouTube. (Thank you to all who make this happen!)

A favorite church memory from childhood was singing “I’ve Got the Love of Jesus Down In My Heart” in the round style during Bible School. My favorite song is “You’ll Never Walk Alone.” I sang it in choir in fifth grade and it has stayed with me ever since. I still sing it loudly when I am alone in the car. “I Come to the Garden Alone” has special meaning to me because it always made my Mom cry.

I enjoy dabbling at a variety of crafts & cooking. Laughing unexpectedly helps me feel slightly more normal during these trying times.

From the Investment Committee

The Investment Committee meets quarterly to ensure that investment guidelines and policies are being followed and to ensure proper management of the Church's investment portfolio by financial firms that we have chosen as custodians. The Church investments are diversified over several asset classes and rebalancing is performed on a quarterly basis to maintain the target diversification ratios. An annual portfolio performance report will be forwarded to the Church Council for inclusion in the Church's annual report.

As of 9/30/2020, the church investments are showing an overall gain of 2% for 2020 year to date. For comparison purposes over the same time period, the Dow Jones Industrial Average posted a 3.7% loss while the NASDAQ Composite showed a 3% gain."

Charitable Giving

The CARES Act, designed to help the nation recover from the pandemic, has five important implications for charitable giving.

- **New Charitable Deduction for Non-Itemizers:** Taxpayers who take the standard deduction can nevertheless claim a charitable deduction of up to \$300 for cash donations in 2020.
- **Higher Deduction Limits:** Individuals will be able to deduct cash gifts in 2020 to the extent of their entire adjusted gross income rather than a cap at 60%.
- **Increased Deduction Limits for Corporations:** The contribution limit for corporations has been raised to 25% for cash contributions this year.
- **Required Minimum Distributions Waived:** For the year 2020, there will be no mandatory distributions from retirement accounts, thus allowing those accounts to recover. Once they do recover, retirement funds are a tax-wise giving strategy.
- **Waiver of Penalties When Retirement Funds Are Used for Coronavirus Purposes:** If you are under the age of 59½, and withdraw money from your retirement plan to cover expenses incurred by you or a family member related to treatment of the coronavirus, the 10% tax penalty will not apply. In the future you may consider a retirement fund gift.

Please consult your tax advisor to see if you qualify!

Special Gifts

We are all familiar with giving to the General Fund which financially powers our ministries here at church. We are also familiar with giving to the Building Fund which pays the current mortgage for our 2012 church building addition. But did you know the church also receives special financial gifts for special projects?

A few years ago one of the 'saints' of this church named Lucille Kitzerow, left a modest gift to be used to expand and empower our music ministry. This gift continues to fund things like musical instrument purchases, choir robes, new music and Music at First Church concerts including our recent Halloween Concert.

Special gifts are also received in honor or memory of someone. Recently the Gustafson family, seeking to honor Bob Gustafson's long tradition of advocacy for teens and children, gave a memorial gift to the Youth Fund. Such a gift enables confirmation trips, mission trips and a host of other activities designed to help our young people 'flex' their faith muscles.

Lastly, special gifts can be designed for long term use through the Endowment Fund. Gifts given to the Endowment Fund are used to make sure the church has the long term financial resources to continue to do ministry in the coming generations. You can remember the church by including it in your will & estate planning. Thank you for remembering the church with your financial gifts & considering ways you may make the extra step of giving that will continue to empower the ministry of this church for years to come.

--The Investment Committee

