



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL

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

God is still speaking,

November 15, 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

Recently I have been puzzled by something. One of the refrains I have heard over the course of this pandemic is how thankful people are. Because of economic uncertainty, many of us are more thankful than ever for our jobs. Because so many of us have been cut off or limited contacts with extended family members, we have a new appreciation for those family ties (even missing our Crazy Uncle Joe – we all have one). And I cannot tell you how

many confirmation and church interns have told me how much they miss being at school (words they never in a million years would have uttered before the pandemic!). Even amidst a raging pandemic, a struggling economy and a politically divisive moment in time, people feel thankful. This is good news!

But what I struggle with is this: what moves you from giving thanks to living thankfully? What moves you from counting your blessings to being a blessing to others? What moves you from gratitude to generosity?

Over and over and over again Jesus talked about generosity:

Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be (Matthew 6:21)

Over and over and over again Jesus warned us about the dangers of our possessions and how instead of possessing them, they can end up possessing us.

You cannot serve God and wealth (Matthew 6:24)

One of the most unique features of First Congregational Church is the many ways in which we ask people not just to be thankful, but to live thankfully. In confirmation we call this 'faithing', the living out of your faith in concrete ways today. Just this month I think of the 200 people who will enjoy a

home-cooked Thanksgiving Meal thanks to the generosity and hard work of others. I think of our shut-ins who receive small hand-made care packages monthly. I think of our 60 Sunday School kids and families that receive the Faith At Home bags with incredibly creative projects connected to faith and life. I think of all those who are working creatively to enhance our worship services through music and the livestream. I think of our Christmas Shoebox Ministry to those in rehab, the Compassion Fund to help local struggling families, the Angels on Earth Giving Tree that gifts local families in need. As the Christmas season approaches, look for even more opportunities for us to move from gratitude to generosity.

The fact of the matter is none of this happens on its own. Generosity is the engine that drives the mission and ministry of this church. Actually it is YOUR generosity that drives this church. In faith, you have enabled all of this to happen. Thank you. And thank you for taking time to prayerfully and generously complete your 2021 pledge cards and returning them to the church office today.

In Thanksgiving,
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.

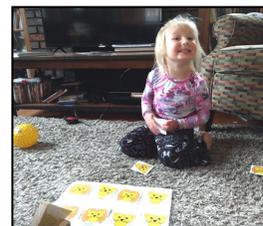
Weekly Adult Bible Study

Weekly Adult Bible Study will read and discuss *Names for the Messiah* by Walter Brueggemann on **December Wednesdays from 1:00-2:30 pm, via Zoom.** All are welcome!

Copies of the book are available in the church office for \$11.00 each. Please contact the church office for a Zoom link.

Sunday School: Fall, 2020

Sunday School has shifted to an online format. Each month we provide **Faith At Home** resource bags. If you are in quarantine and cannot pick up your bag, contact the church office and we will deliver it. Please make sure to return the previous month's bag so we can refill it.



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!

In-Person, Indoor Worship

After a very successful summer and fall of outdoor in-person worship on the church lawn (including a 60 degree day in mid November!), we are waiting before we 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, and the installation of the a Bipolar Ionization system will 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 local COVID numbers permit, we will again welcome small, masked, socially distanced groups into the Fellowship Hall for worship. 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

Wednesday Family Meals

Wednesday Meals are now a take-out format. We have runners who run the meals out to your car. Use the back alley and drive south from Maple toward Elm Street. Cost is \$8 per person & 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.**

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

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-wednesday6>

After November 18, we will take a break from Wednesday Family Meals until at least after New Year's.



Gifting Our Shut-Ins and Special Friends This Christmas

Each year our church families deliver potted amaryllis plants to our shut-ins and special friends. This will be an especially important endeavor this year. The plants are provided. We ask you to sign up, pick up your plant at church, pot it at home (it is super easy), then deliver it to the local shut-in you are assigned. Feel free to include some cookies, a Christmas card, or children's artwork. What a wonderful way to be the body of Christ in the world. Sign up today using this link or on the church website!

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

Sign Up Sheets

All of the current sign up sheets are on the church website. Go to the Resource page and then click on Sign Up Sheets.

Men's Group

After many wonderful gathering outside on the church lawn, the church Men's Group has decided to hibernate for the time being until we can safely meet together.

Church Yoga

Jan Hansen's church yoga group meets in the Fellowship Hall (with masks) from **9:00—10:00 am on Tuesdays and Thursdays**. It is also available via Zoom. Please call the church office to get the Zoom link. You can also access the archived yoga classes on their own YouTube channel. The link is here and on the church website.

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

Treasurer's Report

	Week of	Year to Date
	Nov 1, 2020	
General Fund Income*	\$ 13,505	\$ 403,007
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 9,582	\$ 421,608

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 in an at-home format. 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 29**, the First Sunday in Advent, the same day families will pick up new Faith At Home bags.

10 Ways To Live More Generously This Thanksgiving and Christmas

1. Bring joy! Deliver an amaryllis plant to one of our shut-in and senior friends. If you don't do it, who will? Be an agent of God's grace by signing up here today! <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-amaryllis>
 2. Come together! Worship with us live each Sunday at 10:00 am (archived for later viewing on the church YouTube channel) or at 11:00 am on the radio WEVR 106.3FM/1550 AM.
 3. Give! Help with the Shoebox Ministry to the sixty men at the Kinnic Alcohol and Drug Rehab program by bringing a shoebox or one of the needed items on the list. Please see the article page 5.
 4. Do crafts! The Advent Workshop has moved to an at home format full of lots of way to kindle the joy of the Christ child in your life which you can share with others. See the article above.
 5. Pray! Each week the church publishes a prayer list in the bulletin. Use it in your daily prayer life to give it structure and focus. Prayer kindles compassion.
 6. Gift! Sign up to provide a needed item for a local family from Giving Tree Wish List which is now online. Gifts need to be at the church office by December 8th. Please see the article on page 5.
 7. Sing! Each week Jamie and our church music team seeks to bring beautiful music into your world using the best of both old time hymns and contemporary songs. Sing along or just enjoy.
 8. Bless! Make an extra gift to the church. Your generosity is the engine that drives the mission and ministry of our church. It enables all our programs and outreach to continue.
 9. Celebrate! Whether we will worship inside or outside, online or on the radio, Christmas Eve worship will happen. Join us on Christmas Eve as we welcome the Christ child!
 10. Create! Are you a woodworker? Craftsperson? Knitter? Quilter? Any and all homemade gifts you can create are given to shut-ins. It makes you feel better and blesses others as well.
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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.

Angels On Earth Giving Tree

Help local families this Christmas by signing up and purchasing a gift on the wish list. **Please go to the link below (also on the church website) to see the wish list. Type your name in the box of the gift you will buy.** The unwrapped gift needs to be at church **no later than Tuesday, December 8th.** Please give the gift cards to the church office. If you would like to make a cash donation instead, please send the check (made out to First Congregational Church with "Giving Tree" in the memo line) to the church office. Thank you for your generosity. Please call the church office with questions or for help signing up 715-425-2052.



https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DP_qeJ0xmzRqfmlpTqitfEnkuvrycQqLhbDyOhtWkVM/edit?usp=sharing



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 & body wash in one, toothpaste—full size, toothbrush, floss, deodorant, coffee mug, hot chocolate mix, decks of cards, chapstick, combs, razors, nail clippers, socks, winter gloves, packaged snack or popcorn, wrapped candy, ruled notebooks (these go to the Director), disposable facemasks (new this year!).

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

Concerning People

- For Our Neighbor's Place who won a \$25,000 grant thanks to the support of our community!
- For the worship & webteams who quickly adjusted to one more outdoor worship service last Sunday
- For Lu Lueck and her Crew who were out in the church gardens preparing them for winter
- For Dan & Eunice Filkins celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary on Friday, Nov 13, may you enjoy many more years together! (922 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 by Wednesday of each week to be included in the Weekly Word which is sent out on Thursdays.

Simpson Shelter Supply Needs

- New heavy-duty winter gloves, hats, scarves (no hand knit)
- New thermals for men and women - all sizes
- Hand warmers
- A new set of TV trays for the women's space (we only need one set, so please contact me if you are able to provide this item.)
- New boxers - sizes L, M, and S
- New women's underwear - sizes L, M, and S
- Razors
- Shaving Cream
- Shampoo, lotion and conditioner - travel size
- Textured and curly hair supplies
- New women's socks
- Blankets - gently used or new
- Twin size sheets - gently used or new
- Bath towels - gently used or new

There is a box at the church for donations.
Thank you!

Engaging the Word, Engaging the World...

Upcoming

November

November 12—Hope for Creation Steering Committee meeting, 6:30 pm via ZOOM. To participate contact Mike Noreen at mnoreen@RFCITY.ORG

November 17—Mission Education Committee meets at 5:00 pm via ZOOM. Note the time change!

November 18—12:00–1:00 pm "**Identifying, Resisting and Responding to Racism**" with **Jason Jackson**, Diversity & Inclusion Consultant for Health Partners, Inc. This is a *Racial Justice-Listening and Learning* program of the St. Croix Valley Foundation. Register at <https://www.scvfoundation.org/conversations-of-the-valley>; there is no cost for the program.

November 18—Cities Working Group meets at 8:00 pm via ZOOM. Note the time change!

November 19—7:00 pm—**Racial Justice and Reconciliation: A Learning Community Virtual Gathering with the James Laue Family**—James Laue grew up in First Congregational, 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 virtual gathering on 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 & the stories we create are central to our commitments.

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

Updating

Great News!! The **River Falls Food Pantry** met its \$50,000 goal to receive a matching grant for its new building from the Otto Bremer Foundation! Many thanks to everyone who helped make that happen, including members of the congregation who serve on the Board, volunteers who make the Pantry such a vital part of our community, and to Mission Ed and other church partners who helped attain the goal.

Mission Partners News

Simpson Shelter in Minneapolis is a long-term Mission Partner of our congregation and, in spite of pandemic challenges, continues to provide essential care for individuals and families in great need. The Shelter's longstanding commitment to racial justice is particularly powerful these days as it advances racial equity for Peoples of Color. In the new year the Shelter will be able to receive meals from congregations once again, which Mission Education will discuss at its upcoming meeting. As well, residents are in need of a variety of other gifts that we have provided in the past, which Mission Ed will also take up. The Shelter has also announced plans for construction of a new, 70 bed and 42 units of permanent supportive housing to be built on its current site, a bold and visionary step forward. For more information visit the website at simpsonhousing.org.

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

