



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL

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

# God is still speaking,

October 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

So when can we go back and worship in our sanctuary? That is a really good question. The pandemic has upended so many things, including the ways we worship. For the past 4 months we have been offering worship in three different ways—on the live stream, on the radio and when possible, in person out on the church lawn. Thanks to the heroic and dedicated efforts of our web and music teams, this has gone well and we are one of very few churches offering three ways to worship. Outside worship is by far the safest way for us to gather together for

worship. But this is Wisconsin and winter will soon be here. So what do we do when it is too cold to gather outside for worship?

Our Church Council has appointed its Executive Committee (Moderator, Moderator-Elect, Clerk and Pastor) to research options. The bad news is that the sanctuary is the worst space at church for a large group gatherings. With little airflow due to its age, radiator heat instead of a modern HVAC system and low ceilings on the side and back, it is not the safest room in which large groups could gather. The best place would be our new Fellowship Hall. It has the highest ceilings, most space, and best HVAC system (brand new after our summer fire). We know that the Fellowship Hall has an air refreshment rate of every 15 minutes and we are also researching some new technologies to help clean and purify the air. If we do decide to offer inside in-person worship, this is likely the space we will use. We hope to have a recommendation and decision in the next few weeks.

The fact of the matter is, indoor worship will be different in the age of COVID-19. Masks will be required at all times. Congregational singing will not be allowed and even the song leaders will need to be masked. We will still need to register ahead of time, limit our numbers severely, practice social distancing and remember good hand washing. The nursery will still be closed, there will be no

coffee fellowship and Sunday School will continue in its Faith At Home format.

So what can we do now? Well, until a decision is made about indoor worship, we can worship in two ways—online at 10:00 am on the church live stream (archived on the church YouTube channel for later viewing) and radio worship at 11:00 am on WEVR 106.3 FM/1550 AM. We can meet inside for small group gatherings. All groups gathering inside the church building need to schedule their gathering through the church office ahead of time, wear masks, maintain social distance, and use hand sanitizer which is placed in each room. We want to make sure each room has lots of time to air out and our custodian can clean and sanitize the room so scheduling your small group is imperative. Many groups may choose to move inside, but many groups may decide the best method of meeting is online.

I know this is a lot to digest and I know you are tired of it all. I am tired of it too. Trust me, I would rather preach and worship in a full church than an empty church. Please pray for the Executive Team as they seek to find ways that are both safe and faithful for us to worship together. In the meantime, keep the faith, and keep on being Christ's courageous disciples. We need you to be at work in your world.

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](mailto: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 meet **Wednesdays from 1:00-2:30 pm**, outside when possible, socially-distant with masks in the Fellowship Hall when necessary. The group will read and 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 Day, 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. Also this year, if you have someone who has died in the past year, please email that name to Pastor Chris so they may be remembered in our worship service that day. May God grant peace and comfort to those who mourn on earth.

## 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](https://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](https://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.

## Giving Thanks Meal 2020

Good news! The 2020 Giving Thanks Meal will take place this year! The even better news is that you can enjoy this meal from your home! Each year our church serves a huge Thanksgiving Meal in mid-November. It is a fun festive day in which our 7<sup>th</sup> grade confirmands get their aprons, the Youth have a pie auction, we dedicate out pledges and at the end of it all we gather in the Fellowship Hall for a huge Thanksgiving Meal.



Because of the pandemic, it is not safe for us to gather together in the Fellowship Hall so the Miller and Kruger families are working on a way of moving this meal to a drive thru format, much like our Wednesday Family meals.

The date will be Sunday, November 15, so mark your calendars and stay tuned for further updates!

## Wednesday Family Meals Return with a Twist!

Wednesday meals have moved to take-out format. Available for pick up from 5:00-6:00 pm. We will have some 'runners' who can 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. Please sign up by Tuesday.

- Oct 14 Parmesan crusted chicken with hollandaise sauce, rice pilaf, salad, and croissant  
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-wednesday1>
- Oct 21 Roasted turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, vegetable, and dinner roll
- Oct 28 Meatloaf, macaroni and cheese, vegetable, and dinner roll



## Home Worship Place

As the pandemic persists, we will continue to have outdoor, streamed and radio worship services. 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>

If you cannot make a cross, but would like one made for you, please sign up using this link (also on the church website on the Worship page): <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-already>

### Simpson Shelter Supply Needs

The Simpson Shelter is currently in need of:

- White t-shirts—new, all sizes
- Bath towels—gently used or new

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

### Men's Group Gathering

The group is planning to get together on **Tuesdays at 9:00 am outside on the church lawn** (depending on the weather). If you can come, please bring a face mask and lawn chair.

## Pastoral Acts

- Funeral for George Anderson, son of Synneva and Paul Anderson was on October 7 at Mann Valley Cemetery. Please keep the Anderson family in your prayers.
- Funeral for Ginny Hilden will be a graveside service for family on Sunday, October 18, and a full service in the spring at church. For many years Ginny was our Funeral Meal Coordinator. Please keep the family in your prayers.

## Treasurer's Report

	Week of	Year to Date
	Oct 4, 2020	
General Fund Income*	\$ 5,555	\$ 362,395
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 9,582	\$ 383,280

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](mailto:chris@firstchurchrf.org) - 715-441-2497
- Missy Luedtke—[missy@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:missy@firstchurchrf.org) - 715-222-5427
- Stacy Myers—[stacy@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:stacy@firstchurchrf.org) - 715-338-6406
- Dave Ostendorf—[dave@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:dave@firstchurchrf.org) - 715-441-6559
- JaNae Westrich—[jmwestrich@gmail.com](mailto:jmwestrich@gmail.com) - 715-897-5358
- Jamie Mills—[degolierjamie@gmail.com](mailto:degolierjamie@gmail.com) - 715-419-0850
- Dave Mountain—[focusfan2001@yahoo.com](mailto:focusfan2001@yahoo.com) - 715-245-6854
- Tim Bylander—[timthefixitguy@gmail.com](mailto:timthefixitguy@gmail.com) - 715-808-2900



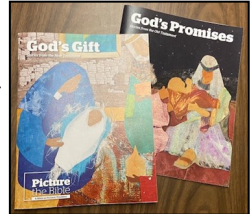
## Sunday School: Fall, 2020

The October **Faith At Home** Sunday School resource bags are ready and distributed. October resources focus on four stories: *The Samaritan Woman at the Well*; *Jesus Feeds 5,000 People*; *Zacchaeus*; and *Mary and Martha*. An online mini-lesson is posted each week to correspond to the activities in the Faith At Home bag.

New for October are activities specifically for Pre-School children: wood blocks for young children to use to build Mary and Martha's house and Zacchaeus' house as well as sequencing activities. Older learners will talk about fresh water, salt water, and living water. They will do an experiment to figure out which kind of water will float an egg and wonder about Jesus' gift of life-giving water.

## Confirmation

The Confirmation program has shifted to Zoom sessions. Confirmands are responsible for homework that is then used as a foundation for the Zoom discussion sessions. First and second year confirmands continue the emphasis on biblical literacy and are using new Picture the Bible workbooks designed specifically for our congregation.



## Christmas Shoebox Project 2020

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, & we will again collect items, wrap, & deliver the boxes to show that we all still care! These shoeboxes contain socks, playing cards, puzzles, & 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 the faces & the thankfulness is something I wish all of you could see. A list of items is below. 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](mailto: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, 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 & at least 60: sewing kit, personal size calendar, stamps, envelopes, and dominos.

## Concerning People

- For the Rev. Jack Merner, former pastor of First Congregational, who turns 100 years old on October 17. You can send cards to him at: Fred Lind Manor, 1802 - 17<sup>th</sup> Ave, Apt 222, Seattle, WA 98122
- For Natalie Nelson who is studying for her Master's degree at Western University (Ontario) and had her senior recital this week and who sings in the choir at St. Andrews United Church, that she may bring joy to others
- For our Barb de Souza who will celebrate her 90<sup>th</sup> 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 our deacons and those who received communion this past Sunday in a new drive through format, that it may nourish their souls

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](mailto:office@firstchurchrf.org)

# Engaging the Word, Engaging the World...

## Upcoming

### October

**VOTE.** Contact the Clerk's office to request your ballot NOW at City Hall or call 715-425-0900. See this newsletter for complete voting information.

**October 17—9:00 am-1:00 pm—Electronic Recycling** at the Public Works Garage. Save up your laptops, printers, cell phones, batteries, cables, light bulbs now for free recycling by the RF Municipal Utilities. Bring River Falls identification or a copy of your Municipal Utility bill. If you are unable to attend and have only several electronics to recycle call the church office so a Mission Education Committee member can arrange for pickup. For more information check [www.rfcity.org/Recycling](http://www.rfcity.org/Recycling)

### November

**November 19—7:00 pm—Learning Community Gathering with Ron and Andrew Laue.** James Laue, the father of Ron and Andrew, grew up in this church, graduated from UWRF, and went on to a distinguished civil rights career committed to racial justice. His sons, Ron and Andrew, will join us virtually from St. Louis to share the powerful story of their father and their family, and the rich legacy they leave us today. Mark your calendar for this unique Learning Community event.

## Updating

Mission Education Committee and the Compassion Fund has contributed \$1,500 toward the River Falls Food Pantry \$50,000 goal to receive a matching grant for its new building from the Otto Bremer Foundation. The Food Pantry continues to be a vital source of support for many area families in need as a result of the pandemic and the economic downturn, and its new building at 705 St. Croix Street is an important center of operations to fulfill its mission.

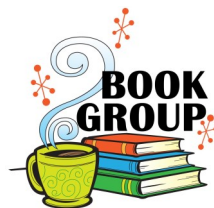
## Mission Partners News

Our Neighbors Place (ONP), a River Falls Mission Partner of the Congregation, continues to serve families and individuals in need of shelter, food and other services, though at a bit of a distance. The Day Center is helping guests via phone and by appointment, maintaining safety measures, and continues to implement creative ways to do its work midst the pandemic. ONP has noticed a high level of need among its guests and others in the community, especially as it relates to food and other basic needs, and works hard to connect them with support, shelter, and housing services they need to foster self-determination. We are grateful that congregation members Paul Shepherd, Kurt Helmrick, and Julie Larson serve on the ONP Board of Directors.

## Church Yoga

Jan Hansen's church yoga group will meet outside when they can, but also in the Fellowship Hall (with masks) when it is too cold outside from **10:00—11:00 am on Tuesdays & Thursdays.** You can also access the yoga classes on their own YouTube channel with archived classes. The link here and on the church website.

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDKl4WmalDidWZwixjZGSFw?view\\_as=subscriber](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDKl4WmalDidWZwixjZGSFw?view_as=subscriber)



We will meet on **Thurs, Oct 29, at 11:00 am** to talk about *Mom Even Said*, a memoir by and about Betty Church, one of our church "Saints." We are circulating a limited number of books among our group & also will try to make copies available in the church office. (Contact Suzanne Hagen (715-425-1471) if you're having problems getting a book.) If it were to be balmy that day, we will meet outside. If the weather is cold, we will meet (masked & distanced) in the large Youth Room in the church's lower level. In the spirit of "pivoting," we will also work on a Zoom connection at that time for people who don't wish to meet in person. Watch for further details. Please join us for connection and conversation.

## Reverend Jack Merner turns 100 years old

A few members of our congregation will remember Rev. Jack and Betty Merner. They served our church from January 1955 to January 1962. The family occupied the (then) brand new parsonage where our fellowship hall now exists. Betty passed away several years ago and today Jack lives in senior housing in downtown Seattle. He is still quite active and in good health. His daughters, Leslie and Sarah who live in the area, visit him or call every day. On October 17<sup>th</sup> Jack will turn 100 years young. Since no party can be held, they are inviting cards and letters from church families he served as a way to celebrate this important day. If you want to send an email or a video, send it to [sarahmerner@hotmail.com](mailto:sarahmerner@hotmail.com), and she will make sure he gets it. Jack loves people, and his love for his many congregations is what has kept him going all these years. He would love to hear from you. Memories, photos and stories from the past are welcome as are short videos. Or you can just say "Hello from River Falls." Send these to: Rev. John Merner, Fred Lind Manor, 1802 - 17<sup>th</sup> Ave., Apt. 222, Seattle, WA 98122

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## 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!

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## 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 and 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

## How to Vote This Fall

Voting is an important right and responsibility, regardless of our politics. Here's how to vote this fall if you cannot get to the polls on Tuesday, November 3, or if you would like to vote in person at City Hall prior to Election Day, from October 20–30:

- ◆ Requesting an absentee ballot to your residence:
  - Visit [www.myvote.wi.gov](http://www.myvote.wi.gov) and click on vote absentee (you may need to upload your photo ID)
  - Stop by City Hall; staff will provide you with an application (you will need your photo ID)
  - Request an application be mailed to you; call 715-425-0900 (you will need to provide a copy of your ID)
  - Absentee ballots will be received at the City Clerk's Office (from the County) for the November election beginning mid-September; and will be then be mailed to those requesting a ballot
- ◆ Returning your absentee ballot:
  - Place the ballot in the self-addressed stamped envelope (Important: please make sure to sign and have a witness sign and include their address)
  - Put it in the mail (please do early to ensure delivery)
  - Ballot are due by 8 pm on election day
    - ◇ If you do not want to return your ballot by mail:
      - Voters can use the locked drop box in the upper, Lewis Street, parking lot, voters have 24-hour access.
      - Voters can use the locked drop box inside City Hall, during normal business hours
      - Voters can hand their ballot to a member of City Clerk staff, during normal business hours
- ◆ Voters have the option to participate in in-person absentee voting:
  - This does *not* require a request ahead of time
  - Scheduled Oct 20 through Oct 30, M–F, 8:30 am–5:00 pm at City Hall, 222 Lewis Street
  - Ballot is issued to the voter by City Clerk staff; be sure to bring a photo ID
  - The voter will place the ballot in a sealed envelope to be processed on election day.

If you reside at Wellhaven, Comforts of Home, or Kinni Care staff should be available in the coming weeks to assist you in answering questions about voting.

*We are grateful to Amy White and staff at the River Falls City Clerk Office for providing this information and for all their good work assisting residents in voting this fall!*

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**Bakken & Young Grief Support Group 6:00-7:00 pm, Virtually through Zoom**—This is a 6-week grief support group for adults who are grieving the death of a loved one. We ask that you try to attend all six sessions. Mondays, Oct 26, Nov 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, 2020. Anyone is welcome to participate in the group and the sessions are free. Group facilitator: Chaplain, Julia Rajtar, M.A.P.S., BCC, Grief Support Coordinator. Register with your name, email address & phone number by email at: [julia.rajtar@bakken-young.com](mailto:julia.rajtar@bakken-young.com) or call or text: 715-781-4003 by Friday, Oct. 23. Visit “Grief Support” at [www.bakken-young.com](http://www.bakken-young.com) for additional groups and other grief support resources or join us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/bakkenyoung](https://www.facebook.com/bakkenyoung)

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**Assistance & Resource Center, Inc. (ARC)** is the primary resource in our community providing timely help for those needing support to get back on track financially during these unsettled times. ARC is completing 12 years of providing short-term financial assistance to residents of River Falls and Ellsworth to help them meet their basic needs (payment assistance to prevent evictions, utility help to prevent a disconnect, gas, auto repair, food, and much more.) Every request for help is looked at individually, with clients treated with empathy, confidentiality, and respect as situations are discussed.

Combining the amazing generosity of donors like you with the flexibility of ARC volunteers, services have continued without disruption, avoiding added stress to our prospective clients. ARC has recently been able to increase both the frequency and the amount of assistance available to our local residents.

THANK YOU for your unprecedented gifts & please help spread the word that ARC is here to assist those in need. Call [715-338-0755](tel:715-338-0755) to make a request.

Community means all of us working together. Together we can do so much!

## First Congregational United Church of Christ

Office Phone: 715-425-2052  
E-mail: [office@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:office@firstchurchrf.org)  
Website: [www.firstchurchrf.org](http://www.firstchurchrf.org)



### STAFF

Chris Myers, Pastor  
Dave Ostendorf, Minister for Community and Outreach  
Stacy Johnson, CE Minister  
JaNae Westrich, Youth Pastor  
Missy Luedtke, Office Coordinator  
Brad Williams, Moderator  
Jamie Mills, Music Coordinator and Bell Choir Director  
Marsha Pearson, Organist  
Terry Mithun, Organist  
Tim Bylander, Building Supervisor  
Dave Mountain, Custodian  
  
Pastor's home phone number:  
Chris Myers 715-426-2075  
[chris@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:chris@firstchurchrf.org)

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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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OCTOBER 15, 2020



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## Ways to Reach Out to Others

All of us want to do something to help and be Jesus' loving disciples in the present moment. Below are some specific things you can do at home:

**Quilts/Prayer Shawls:** We continue to collect prayer shawls, quilts and handmade items. If you have some to donate, please contact Pastor Chris who will distribute them to our seniors and shut-ins.

**Shut-ins/Seniors:** We have connected our seniors/shut-ins with church families who send them notes, small parcels and kid's artwork. If you want to be matched with a shut-in, contact the church office.

**Compassion Fund:** There are families in our church who have been furloughed, fired, and laid off. We will be able to offer some modest assistance to these families through our church Compassion Fund. Gifts should be mailed to the church and marked 'Compassion Fund.' Families who need assistance, please contact Pastor Chris.

**Twin Cities Recovery Fund:** A fund has been established to help rebuild the Twin Cities affected by recent riots. The goal is to help in two ways, one with immediate help to families and second is to help small businesses rebuild. Money will be dispersed quickly through trusted, partner agencies established by the church.

**Prayer:** Prayer connects us with God and our neighbors. Pray for the helpers. Pray for your families. Pray for people losing their jobs. Pray for students learning online. Pray for families learning new routines. Pray for people cooped up inside. Each week there is a prayer list of people, situations and thanksgivings that is sent out by email to help people in their prayer life. You can sign up by contacting the church office. There is also a link to the prayer list on the church website.

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## Masks Available at Church

We have masks available at church, including child-size masks. If you need one, please call the church office.