



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL

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

God is still speaking,

March 1, 2021

*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

Excerpt from Ash Wednesday Homily

As Christians we spend a lot of time talking about God, learning about God's way, but that is not the same thing as having a relationship with God. You can't have a relationship with someone you have never met. And too often, especially in our church tradition, we ask people to serve a God they haven't met and don't really know. Prayer is a way for us to get to know the God we seek to serve. Prayer is one of the most important ways for us to grow in

our relationship with God. The problem is, although simple, prayer is often misunderstood and few of us feel like we have a vibrant prayer life.

In Confirmation, I show a video that humorously depicts some of the ways people approach prayer. It is called 'The Skinny on Prayer' by the Skit Guys, Google it, it is only about 4 minutes long. The video introduces us to five people who are trying to pray, but most of them fall short because they misunderstand prayer. The first person tries to pray, wants to pray, but easily gets distracted, even falling asleep sometimes. The second person also wants to pray, but gets hung up on having the right pattern or form of prayer. The third thinks prayer is a formal occasion, something you only do in church, with thee's and thy's. The fourth person is a lister, he has a list of 714 things he wants God to do. Each of them misunderstands prayer, misses out on the power of prayer. But in the video, the fifth person, using the Lord's Prayer as his guide, speaks simply and honestly. He acknowledges his past failures, opens his world to God's way, and trusts God will lead him into a new future.

In the gospel lesson for tonight (Mtw 6:5-15), Jesus' followers ask to be taught how to pray and you can almost picture them getting out their pens and pads ready to take notes—like Jesus was going to lead them in a class called Praying 101. Instead, what Jesus offers is a

simple prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. He begins the prayer with the words—Our Father. The 'our' part reminds us that prayer is not just a connection between us and God, it connects us with others. And the father part, the word Jesus actually uses is Abba which means Papa or even Daddy, is the way a little child talks to her parent —dada, mama, abba. From the very first words of this prayer, we are invited to have intimate relationship with God.

Each Wednesday in Lent we are not only going to talk about prayer, learn about prayer, we are going to practice ways and models of praying together.

So for tonight let me offer you a suggestion about prayer, a way of praying that we used recently in the small group online discussion, *The Way*, by Adam Hamilton. He suggests using your fingers to pray five times a day. Once when you wake up. Once when you go to bed. And then three times when you eat. When you wake up begin with a help prayer—God help me today. As you wake up, offer yourself to God inviting God to find ways to use you for God's work in the world. Maybe something as simple as—God help me to be your instrument today. Amen. And then as you stop each day for breakfast, lunch and dinner, thank God. Pray: Thank you God for this food and those who made it, grew it, enable me to be fed.

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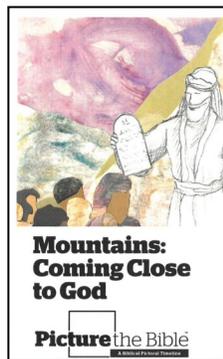
GROW spiritually

Adult Bible Study

Weekly Adult Bible Study meets Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm via Zoom to study *I and II Corinthians* by John Proctor. Please contact the church office for the Zoom link to participate.

Little Books

Each month, Faith At Home bags include a Little Book featuring *Picture the Bible* images, Bible stories, and a question to discuss. This month's little book is *Mountains* and features seven Bible stories that include



mountains. If you are interested in a copy, pick one up in the Little Church or contact the church office.

Confirmation and Church Interns

Confirmation and Church Interns continue, for now, online via Zoom. Please watch for the weekly Confirmation Update emails and talk to Pastor Chris with any questions.

Pastor's Page—Continued from front page

And as you go to bed, end the way you started the day, with gratitude, praise and thanks. As you go to bed thank God for the gifts you have received that day. And if you have had a particularly bad day, thank God that it is over and a new day will come with new opportunities. Again in a few minutes we will spend some time practicing this, actually praying together.

Like life, Lent does not have to be dour and depressing. If we think of it as time to renew, refocus and return to God, it can be an incredible opportunity to experience the presence and power of God. It can be a time to be refreshed, and in winter, in Wisconsin, during a pandemic, we all need to be renewed. Together may we have a blessed Lenten season full of opportunities to worship, give and pray. Amen.

Pastor Chris

Lenten Worship

Once again, this year we will be offering Wednesday Lenten worship at 6:30 pm. This year our theme is *Teach Us To Pray* taken from Matthew 6. Prayer is perhaps the most underutilized and misunderstood of God's gifts to us. Prayer is our way to connect to God, ourselves and our neighbors. Prayer has the power to relieve stress, reorient our living and change the world by starting with ourselves. Join us!

Our Wednesday Schedule in Lent will be:

- 5:00-6:00 pm Drive-Thru Wednesday Night Meals (reserve by Tuesday @ 5 pm!)
- 5:15-6:00 pm Bells for Interns/Confirmands
- 6:30-7:00 pm Lenten Worship—via YouTube
- 7:00-7:30 pm Confirmation - via Zoom
- 7:00-8:00 pm Bells - Adult Group

Our Themes for Wednesday Lenten Services will be:

- Feb 17—Ash Wed **Lord's Prayer** from Matthew 6:5-15
- February 24 **Withdraw:** Luke 5:16 *He would withdraw to a deserted place to pray*
- March 3 **Embody:** Daniel 6:10 *He got down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God*
- March 10 **Silence:** Habb 2:20 *The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence*
- March 17 **Creation:** Ps 148:3-4 *Praise God sun and moon, praise God shining stars, praise God highest heavens!*
- March 24 **Imagine:** Is 43:19 *I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*



In Person Worship Resumes in March

I am pleased to announce that starting Sunday, March 7, we will resume in-person worship in the church Fellowship Hall at 10:00 am. To gather both faithfully and safely, we will have to:

- * Register ahead of time for worship (registration will open Wednesday mornings)
- * Limit our gatherings to 75 people
- * Wear masks, social distance and wash hands
- * Allow the song leaders to sing while you enjoy their sounds
- * If you are feeling ill for any reason or have been exposed, please stay home and enjoy worship via the livestream or radio.

As a reminder, the church Fellowship Hall and Office have new bipolar ionization technology that cleans the air and refreshes the room every fifteen minutes. We are pleased we can again offer three ways to worship each Sunday. As the weather warms, we hope to also offer a brief outdoor option for those who are not comfortable being indoors. Please continue to pray for our pastors, worship leaders, musicians and webteam as we try to safely and faithfully worship together.

Sunday School, 2021

The next Faith at Home bag will be ready for pick up on March 7. You may pick up bags:

- in the gathering space Sunday morning,
- during the week when the church office is open,
- in the Little Church—call to make arrangements.

If you prefer to have your bag delivered, call the church office.

The congregation has made a considerable investment to provide these bags. Please pick them up and use them well.



Financial Planning Class

Come one, come all! Living the life of your dreams starts with a solid financial plan. Join my virtual *Financial Peace University class* and learn to dump debt and build wealth. You won't even have to leave home. Visit fpu.com/1134144 to sign up for my class and start your 14-day free trial of Financial Peace. Class starts **Sunday, February 28, 2021**. It will run on Sunday nights through April and don't worry, we'll skip Easter Sunday! If you have any questions, please email Mike Stifter at stiftm1@gmail.com.



Handbell Groups Resume

Interns and confirmand players meet from 5:15-6:15 pm on Wednesdays and the adult group meets from 7:00-8:00 pm. We will practice in the Fellowship Hall wearing masks and socially distanced. All are welcome, no previous playing experience is necessary! Please contact Jamie Mills at degolierjamie@gmail.com if you would like to join!



Starting March 1, you will notice a new look for the church website. Check it out! Also in the works is a app for your smart phone.

A huge thank you to Brad Richter and the Web Team who have been hard at work revamping and expanding our church website.

Wednesday Night Family Meals To Go!

Each Wednesday night, we are serving home-cooked family meals to be picked up in the church alley from 5:00-6:00 pm. The cost is \$8 per meal, you must reserve by Tuesday, and our church interns will bring your meal right to your car. Here is the upcoming menu and sign-up link:



March 3 - Lasagna and chicken Alfredo, salad, garlic toast

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054BA9AD29A4FF2-wednesday9>

March 10 - Parmesan crusted chicken with hollandaise sauce, rice pilaf, vegetable, and croissant

March 17 - Corned beef and cabbage with potatoes & carrots, macaroni and cheese, roll (St. Patrick's Day!)

March 24 - Boneless BBQ ribs, macaroni and cheese, pasta coleslaw salad, and biscuit

Picture the Bible Book and Trailer

Picture the Bible, published by The Pilgrim Press featuring First Congregational's art, is coming soon. To view the promotional video trailer, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9LY-kgDQys&feature=youtu.be>

To learn more about the book visit:

www.thepilgrimpress.com and click on "new releases."

Church Yoga

Jan Hansen's church yoga group meets on Tuesday and Thursdays in person with a small group of people in the Fellowship Hall from 9:00-10:00 am and via Zoom. Please call the church office to receive the Zoom link.

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.

Simpson Shelter Supply Needs

- Twin, full, and queen size blankets and sheet sets—new
- Pillows—new
- White t-shirts—new, sizes small and medium
- Large tubs of Country Time Lemonade and Kool Aid mixes (we use these in Igloo containers for meals)
- Hot sauce
- Coffee—ground, caffeinated
- Products for textured and natural hair
- New shower curtains and shower rings

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

Treasurer's Report

	Week of	
	Feb 21, 2021	Year to Date
General Fund Income *	\$ 5,295	\$ 102,399
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 9,262	\$ 74,096

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



Holy Week Worship

Holy Week is the most important week for Christian people. Beginning with Palm Sunday, then continuing with Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter, we see humanity at its worst and God at God's best. For Holy Week this year, we will continue to offer three ways of worship—in person, online and on the radio. Much like Christmas, we will work with the weather to see if we can offer an outdoor option on Easter, perhaps a sunrise service. Please stay tuned and keep praying for our pastoral team as they seek to offer ways to gather for worship that are both faithful and safe.



Picture the Bible Lent/Easter Story- Coloring Book

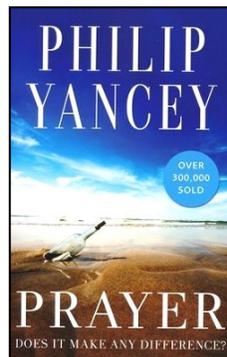
Children in the congregation will receive a Lent/Easter Story-Coloring Book in their next Faith at Home bag. We have additional copies available. If you would like a copy for a grandchild or someone in your life, please contact the church office.



A NOTE OF
Thank you to all the people who made the amaryllis (Greek word for shepherdess) project possible. My plant had two spikes and eleven blossoms—so nice in winter. And thanks to all the shepherds who have kept the church vibrant in this last year. You've done a good job of keeping the flock together.
Blessings, Darlene Sumption

Book on Prayer Available

The church office has five copies of Philip Yancey's book *Prayer: Does it Make Any Difference*. You may check them out. The book is a wonderful way to grow your prayer life during the season of Lent. It is short, accessible and quite powerful. Our Lenten worship theme this year is 'Teach Us To Pray' and this book helps us to do this. Please contact the church office to borrow a copy.



At-Home Communion

With the winter weather upon us, if you are not able to get to church for drive-thru communion (or if you would like to take communion at a different time), the Deacons are available to bring communion to you! We are happy to come to you for doorstep or even contactless Communion. We will bring the elements to you and share a short prayer if you would like. Please let the church office know if you or anyone you know would benefit from this service, and we'll contact you to arrange a time.

New Assignment

For the past 2 years Brad Williams has served as our Church Moderator. At the February 7 Annual Meeting, he turned the moderator's gavel over to Joel Larsen who will be our new Moderator for the next two years. One of Brad's many gifts is project management. Now in his 'retirement' from the moderatorship, Brad has agreed to serve as volunteer business manager. In this capacity, Brad will help shepherd several projects including renovating of the old unisex bathroom downstairs (the only part of the building not included in the 2014 renovations), painting projects, as well as reviewing church contracts with outside vendors for review by the Trustees. God has graced us with leaders who provide the exact gifts we need at the time. Hallelujah!

Engaging the Word, Engaging the World...

Upcoming

March 25, 6:00–7:00 pm

Tia Nelson, conservationist and climate change advocate, will meet with River Falls Hope for Creation churches to discuss her work and ways we can continue to unite to address climate change challenges. Nelson is the former managing director of the climate program at the Outrider Foundation in Madison. She will discuss the film created to inspire the continued legacy of her father, former Governor of WI Gaylord Nelson, founder of Earth Day. Everyone is invited and encouraged to *join in by either going to the River Falls Public Library's YouTube channel or its Facebook page*.

Updating

Keep watching... the solar report will arrive soon with a church newsletter! Meantime, celebrate that, since mid-2015, electricity from the solar array has helped divert 17.9 tons of carbon from the atmosphere...

Mission Partners News

St. Croix Valley Habitat for Humanity will break ground in March in New Richmond for new home construction, with a goal of 2-3 houses per year, in partnership with Thrivent Financial. Executive Director Kristie Smith reports that two other projects are in place for this summer and fall that will include the River Falls community:

Rock the Block - a program with the City of River Falls and HUD doing exterior landscaping upgrades and constructing sheds. Neighborhoods are currently being identified for the program, with volunteers to be assembled this summer and fall to complete the work.

Brush With Kindness (Aging In Place) - a program to identify aging persons who want to stay in their homes and assisting with amending their residences for safety and comfort. Volunteers, for example, worked with a veteran who wanted to stay in his home, putting hand rails in his bathroom for assistance.

Rock the Block, Brush With Kindness and the home-build in New Richmond rely on our volunteer time and commitments. More information about volunteering will be provided by Mission Ed in the coming weeks as these important projects get underway.

The ReStore for Habitat, originally in New Richmond, then Roberts, is no longer open. ReStore donations can be taken to St. Croix Falls or Maplewood; St. Croix Valley Habitat, however, does not receive funding from either of these stores.

People in the Pews: Bobbie Kuhn

Sparta, Wisconsin, is my hometown, and the place where I attended St. John's Lutheran Church and School. Jim and I met in Sparta and were married in that church before moving to River Falls some 52 years ago. Jim and I followed friends to UCC about ten years ago, and we are so glad we did. The pastoral staff is so very welcoming, as is everyone we've met. The sermons, the music, the programs, and the fellowship are outstanding. My favorite bible passage is the Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It was my grandmother's favorite bible verse; I heard it often, usually in the form of a scolding.

My sisters and I spent the summers of our youth at the Sparta Public Swimming Pool. We safely walked there without adult supervision and then bought popsicles to drip all over us on the way home. The good, old 1950's. I love keeping our family trees on ancestry.com and could work on them every day. I don't miss doing any sudoku puzzle that comes my way. The harder, the better.

Jim and I have 13 beautiful grandchildren whose genetics include every major human race. Getting our vaccines gives us comfort during the time of COVID because we will soon be able to visit with all of them.

Church Reopening Plan

Throughout the pandemic, the ministry of our church has not stopped. We have not missed one worship service, meeting or confirmation class. We have faithfully and safely tried to pivot, adjust and creatively face our challenges. Our next challenge will be how to safely and faithfully resume in-person gatherings. Here is our plan in brief:

- Starting in February, small group (12 people or less) in-person meetings at church are resuming (Note: You must reserve space for these through the church office to make ensure we are cleaning and ventilating rooms between groups)
- Yoga and music practices (bells, brass and small group ensembles) will resume in February subject to the 12 person limit
- The first place indoor worship will happen will be in Fellowship Hall with reserved small groups at 33% capacity (about 75 people), with masks and socially distanced, on March 7th
- The Fellowship Hall and church office both have new Bipolar Ionization systems in our HVAC system which filter and replenish the air every 15 minutes
- At this time, there will be no coffee fellowship, nursery or in-person Sunday School
- In the next few months, we will continue to experiment with a variety of in-person worship services both inside the church building and outside on the lawn
- The livestream and radio options will continue to be options for worship going forward
- The church building and office are open with normal hours (Monday-Thursday 8:30 am to 4:00 pm, Friday 8:30 am to Noon)
- Masks, social distancing, and hand sanitizing are required inside the church building
- As always, if you feel unwell or have been exposed to COVID, please stay home!

Annual Meeting Follow Up

If you missed this year's Annual Meeting, you can access the PowerPoint presentation on the church website. You can also access the Annual Report through this link: <https://firstchurchrf.org/wp-content/uploads/ANNUAL-REPORT-ALL-2020.pdf> and through the church website as well. A big thank you to all who participated, to our retiring Moderator Brad Williams, our incoming Moderator Joel Larsen, and our incoming Moderator-Elect Kathy Rausch. Please keep our church leaders in your prayers as they help lead us through a difficult and creative time in our church history.



The last 4 weeks took me on an unplanned journey. Along with my 5 sisters and brothers, upon learning of our 93 year old mom's passing on January 21 in Traverse City, MI, we pivoted. A service was held, house readied for last week's open house, car sold. Many decisions forward/backwards, just moving ahead.

Now home, I look back and know that it was in part my church family's loving, caring words, strength and faith that kept me engaged. Thank you for being there for me and for so many others close by and far away. In faithful peace, Roz Ostendorf

Covid-19 Vaccine Updates:

- Pierce County has changed the "call in for appointment line" to **844-684-1064**. The online scheduling remains the same at piercecovid19vaccines.as.me.
- Walgreens in River Falls has been authorized to give Covid-19 vaccine; however all appointments must be scheduled on line and you have to set up a pharmacy account. Currently they do not have Covid-19 vaccine, but soon will be getting regular deliveries.
- Freeman Drug continues administering vaccines on Wednesdays and Thursdays by appointment only (online at freemandrug.com or call 715-307-9465).
- Family Fresh Pharmacy also is taking appointments online at familyfresh.com

**First Congregational United
Church of Christ**

Office Phone: 715-425-2052
E-mail: office@firstchurchrf.org
Website: 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
Joel Larsen, 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
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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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MARCH 1, 2021



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:

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.

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.

Sign Up Sheets: All of the current sign-up sheets are on the church website. Click on the "Connect" button at the top of the page and then select "Sign Ups/Forms."

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