

# “The Congregator”

First Congregational United Church of Christ - 110 N. Third Street - River Falls, WI

Phone: 715-425-2052 - Website: [www.firstchurchrf.org](http://www.firstchurchrf.org)

Rev. Chris Myers: [chris@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:chris@firstchurchrf.org) - Office email: [office@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:office@firstchurchrf.org)

FEBRUARY 15, 2010

## Pastor's Corner

*A Christian does not avoid questions; a Christian embraces them. In fact, to truly pursue the living God, we have to see the need for questions. ~Rob Bell*

I recently read about a church that sponsored a doubt night. People were encouraged to write down whatever questions or doubts they had about God and Jesus and the Bible and faith and church. They needed a large box to hold all the scraps of paper. The first question was from a woman who had been abused and didn't press charges because she was told that doing so wasn't "the Christian thing to do." The man then went on to abuse many other women and so this woman wanted to know if God would still forgive her even if she hadn't forgiven the man who abused her. And this was the first question out of the box!

Other questions included:

Why does God let people die?

Why does it seem than mean people get the most money?

Why does the killer go free and the honest man die of cancer?

Questions are central to our faith. No matter how shocking or blasphemous to arrogant or ignorant. Questions are rooted in a humility that understands we are not God and there is more to know.

Questions also bring freedom. Freedom that I don't have to be God and don't have to pretend that I have it all figured out. I can let God be God.

A Christian doesn't avoid the questions in life. A Christian embraces them. Struggles with them. Asks God to help them with them. Questions aren't scary. What is scary is when people don't have any. What is tragic is faith that has no room for them.

Beginning on Ash Wednesday and every Wednesday through Holy Week, we will gather as a faith community to eat and worship. Our worship will be centered around stories that help us both ask questions and look for answers. Please join us.

Pastor Chris

## Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent. It is a time to remember who we are and whose we are. We do this in worship by receiving the ashes of our burnt palms on our heads or hands.

Ash Wednesday is **February 17** and all Confirmands and their parents should be present. The Pre-confirmation class will be making and serving a pancake supper that evening from 5 until 6:15pm. Worship is at 6:30. Please join us.

## Valentine Concert for Haiti

The seventh annual "It Takes a Village" concert will be held in the Ezekiel sanctuary at 7:00 pm, Sunday, February 21. The concert will feature several River Falls church choirs and the community Gospel Choir, each singing two numbers. All will join together as a mass choir to sing the final two numbers. An update on the Haiti project will be given. A free-will offering will be taken and all proceeds will go to the Haiti elementary school project. Refreshments will be served in Fellowship Hall following the concert. Please make offering checks out to Haitian Relief Services.

**Please note: Endowment Grant Requests are due February 14, 2010.**

*We believe...*

*~The Christian faith is a life-long learning process.*

*~Our church family aspires to be the living presence of Christ in the world.*

*~Our faith in Jesus is demonstrated through our lives, actions, and commitments.*

*~We are striving to become a congregation of life-long givers.*

*~Worship is the center of our life together.*

# Lent, 2010: God Speaks, We Respond

For centuries Christians have prepared to celebrate Jesus' passion and rising to new life. The practice of 40 days of preparation prior to Easter began in the Christian Church during the third and fourth centuries. It is a time for reflection on individual and communal life and how they respond to the Gospel.

The people of First Congregational are invited to gather for food, fellowship, and worship during the 2010 Lenten season. The worship services will feature Marty Haugen's *Evening Prayer*, scripture, and stories that imaginatively encourage us to listen to and respond to God.

Evening worship is a gift. It offers a chance to give thanks for what has been and anticipate the light of a new day. Please come. It is important.

## Ash Wednesday—February 17:

3:30 – 5:00	Wednesday School
5:00 – 6:15	Pancake Supper (Please make a reservation)
6:30 – 7:30	Ash Wednesday Worship

## Wednesday Schedule:

3:30 – 5:00	Wednesday School
5:00 – 6:15	Family Meal (Please make a reservation)
5:30 – 6:30	Bell Practice
6:30 – 7:00	Worship
7:00 – 7:30	Confirmation
7:00 – 8:00	Choir Rehearsal

## Wednesday Worship Themes:

February 17:	Ash Wednesday: Dust & Ashes
February 24:	Enduring Bonds
March 3:	Seeing Anew
March 10:	Giving Yourself
March 17:	Hearing and Listening
March 24:	Loving Enemies

## TREASURER'S NOTE\$

Missy Luedtke

Financial Information for January and YTD:

	<u>January</u>	<u>2010 YTD</u>
Income	\$ 56,074.28	\$ 56,074.28
Expenses	\$ 29,604.41	\$ 29,604.41
Net	\$ 26,469.87	\$ 26,469.87

A full accounting of all income and expenses is always posted outside the church office door on the bulletin board.

## Habitat for Humanity

Habitat is looking for volunteers to "man" the St. Croix Valley Habitat for Humanity ReStore on **Saturday, February 27 from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm**, when they will be accepting donations so they can get the store open. Sign up on the back table. If you cannot help out that day, consider donating your used light fixtures, cabinets, flooring, etc. that you don't know how to get rid of after your renovation. Contact Carol Merriman with any questions.

## Summer Boundary Waters Trip Anyone?

Anyone interested in joining a church group trip to the Boundary Waters canoe area this summer is invited to an **informational meeting on Sunday, February 28 after the 10:30 am worship service in the Fellowship Hall**. Anyone 7th grade and older is welcome to participate. We hope to have at least two groups. Please see Pastor Chris if you want to participate but cannot be at the meeting.

## Country Fair Planning

Country Fair is approaching, and it's time to start thinking crafts, potting those plants, cleaning out the kitchen cabinets, etc. We are having a **Committee Meeting on Tuesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> at 3:00 pm in the church lounge.** We ask that all Committee Chairs attend this meeting, along with anyone else that is interested in helping out with this fun spring event.

The committee chairs include: Sue Danielson (Attic Treasures/Jewelry/Books), Beth Amacker (Baked Goods/Pies, Vicky Sullivan (Candy Booth), Dianne Barnes, Eunice Filkins (Crafts), Diane Westbrook (Household/Linens), Marge Mittelstadt, Kris Ainsworth (Kitchen), Alice Hanson, Annette Petersen (Plants), Virginia Hilden (Publicity), Stella Ray, Polly Wymer (Rugs), and Al Westbrook, Al Barnes, Tim Bylander (Tools/Stuff). Hope to see you then.

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## Congregational Reading Project

The Adult Forum will discuss the 2010 First Congo Reads selection, *Conquering Fear: Living Boldly in an Uncertain World*, by Harold S. Kushner, on February 28 and March 7. The book is available in the church office for \$17.00.

## River Falls Relay for Life

Join us **March 26-27** at the River Falls High School. Anyone interested in joining the church's team call Marie Roe (381-1215) for details.

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## New to Church? Come to the Inquirer's Class

If you would like to know more about the life and ministry of our church, please register to attend the fall Inquirer's Class on **Sunday, March 7.**



At this 90-minute gathering you will meet church leaders, other newcomers and more about the church's life and ministry. Lunch and childcare are included. Please use the sign-up sheet to register your attendance or contact Lu Lueck in the church office.

After completing this class, those who wish to join the church will be received into membership on Sunday, March 28 at the 10:30 am worship service.

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## Dead Sea Scrolls Trip

A traveling exhibit of the famed Dead Sea Scrolls is coming to the Science Museum of Minnesota this spring. The church has reserved 30 spots for **Tuesday, April 13, 2010.** We will leave the church at 10am, have a bite to eat, enter the exhibit at noon. Our time at the museum should end around 2pm and we will return to the church around 3pm. The cost is \$20 and includes admission to the museum, exhibit and an audio guide. We must have payment when you sign up for the trip. We will take the church van and need others to drive. Please see Pastor Chris for more info.



## COFFEE MATTERS

The *Cloudforest* coffee offered for sale in the church lobby is grown by farmers in the central highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. They are some of the poorest people in this hemisphere. A reliable market for their coffee at *Fair Trade* prices is of extreme importance to them. It may even make the difference between staying in their village or deciding to make the long and dangerous trip to "El Norte" in the hopes of finding work as an illegal immigrant. If you drink coffee please consider making this excellent, **organic, shade grown** coffee your coffee of choice. Decaf coffee is available upon request, as is coffee in 5 lb. packages which sell for about \$1 less per pound.

## Dealing With Difficult Texts

In *A pathway of Interpretation*, Walter Brueggemann describes how important it is to let biblical texts stand on their own, resisting the temptation to impose ideas on the text rather than listening to what the text has to say. This can be a tall order, particularly with texts that present a view of God that is contrary to our usual understandings. Such texts provide a “counter testimony,” ideas that go against the grain of readily recognized and embraced understandings of God.

Consider the following: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?” (Psalm 22); “Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days?” (Lamentations 5:20); “For a brief moment I abandoned you...In overflowing wrath, for a moment I hid my face from you...” (Isaiah 54:7-8). These are difficult texts. How do we reconcile these texts that proclaim God’s neglect and abandonment with the conviction that God is always present?

In his book, Brueggemann outlines several categories of ways interpreters (individuals and communities) have responded to texts such as these. The easiest way to respond is to disregard the texts. Interpreters choose which texts will become the focus of their concern, and which will be set aside. Another response is to suggest that God’s absence may well be perceived, but in fact God was consistently present. While it is true that this could be the case, it is not always the case, particularly in Isaiah 54. The interpreter is imposing on the text ideas or convictions from outside the text. Yet another response is to suggest that there has been an evolution in Israel’s understanding of God, from absent and silent to just and forgiving. All of these interpretive strategies, and others that Brueggemann identifies, are lacking in two ways: they fail to take the central theme of the text seriously (abandonment); and they have a concern to “protect” God from that which will challenge an understanding we hold dear (God’s omnipresence).

Brueggemann proposes taking a “dramatic” approach to interpretation. He suggests that we consider the texts to be like a script which outlines characters and dialogue. Such an approach takes the text seriously as something the character said, but it also recalls that these lines are not the totality of what the characters have to say. A dramatic approach would encourage the interpreting community to attend to the fullness of the text but also maintain that it is only one part of our collective memory of God. We dare not forget that since the human experience of God is vast; our interpretation of scripture must also but be vast; never made to conform to a narrow set of ideas or experiences. I recommend the book.

Stacy Johnson Myers, Christian Education Coordinator

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## Reproductions Available of the Pictorial Timeline

The artist of our biblical pictorial timeline, Amy Sands, is making reproductions available of the images of the timeline. The reproductions will be signed and numbered giclee prints. Each signed and numbered giclee will be part of a limited set of 1,000. A giclee is a fine-art print on archival paper. The giclees are available unframed, or matted and framed in either a black or natural-colored frame. The style of the matte and frame is like the originals in the Fellowship Hall. Examples are available to view.

The cost of each unframed giclee is \$150. The cost of each matted and framed giclee is \$200. First Congregational Church will receive a donation from the artist in the amount of 15% of the sale price for each image sold within the First Congregational community.

Money is due at the time the order is placed. Orders will be collected from February 21 to March 28. The art will be delivered after Easter when it is complete.



## Haiti Relief Efforts in the Wisconsin Conference

Your gifts have been coming into the Wisconsin Conference and are being forwarded to the United Church of Christ for the relief work through the special Haiti Fund of One Great Hour of Sharing. Here are the ways we are working with your gifts:

- We will send in gifts on a weekly basis, typically later in a week, as your gifts arrive from Sunday offerings.
- Gifts sent to the Wisconsin Conference and undesignated except for "Haiti Relief" will go to the UCC/One Great Hour of Sharing Haiti appeal.
- If you designate your gifts for other particular agencies, we will, of course, direct your gifts there.
- We will continue to promote and encourage gifts to the ministries of the Wider Church Ministries/Global Ministries of the UCC, but there are many other important ministries, some of which with deep ties to Wisconsin, that we also encourage you to support. Among these are the "What If?" Foundation", begun by Margaret Trost, and initially supported by the Conference; the ministry of Bryan Sirchio and the Community of Hope UCC in Madison; and the partnership of the Southeast Association with CONASPEH, the council of church in Haiti. The "What If" website has some of the best information on Haiti that is available.

~Mission Committee

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## 2010 Time and Talent Sheet

Enclosed in this newsletter is a blue 2010 Time and Talent Sheet. This sheet is vitally important to our church's ministry. Please carefully look over the sheet and check those areas in which you wish to participate or receive more information. This information is put into the church software system so we can better mobilize and communicate with one another. Please return then by March 1st. We are keeping track of who returns them so please save us additional mailing costs by return yours today!

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## Adult Forum

**February 14: *Book Discussion: Getting to the Heart of Interfaith: The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi, and a Sheik*, Alan Tuchtenhagen**—According to the authors, "too often religion seems to fuel more hatred than love, more conflict than collaboration". This session will discuss the ways we can work together to transcend the difference that have historically divided us.

**February 21: *Video: Cathedral*, by David Macaulay**—In a DVD, author David Macaulay discusses some of the finest architectural achievements of all time, evident in European cathedrals from the Middle Ages. The presentation includes amazing footage, and tells stories about the faith and challenges behind the construction of magnificent worship spaces.

**February 28, March 7: *First Congo Reads Conquering Fear*, Stacy Johnson Myers**—The discussion will focus on Rabbi Kushner's ideas about how people face fear and uncertainty in their lives. The discussion will focus on suffering, disappointment, guilt, forgiveness, growing old, and the fear of death, and resources in the religious tradition for coping with and confronting fear.

**March 14: *Eternal Life: A New Vision*, by John Shelby Spong, Barry Butenhoff**—In his latest book, Bishop Spong suggests that fear of death is the most fundamental fear of human existence. The only way it can be conquered is through knowledge and experience of your eternal being. Barry Butenhoff will provide a synopsis of the book and lead a discussion regarding its ideas.

**March 21: *Martin Luther King & Jesus: Peacemaking Begins by Disturbing the Peace*, Barbara Peterson**—The Wisconsin Council of Churches and biblical scholar Ched Myers have produced Bible study materials exploring the Gospel of Mark and social justice. Barbara Peterson will the discussion.

**March 28: *Let's Go Catch Some Big Fish: Jesus' Call to Discipleship in a World of Injustice*, Barbara Peterson**—The Adult Forum will focus on the second session of the Bible study materials prepared by the Wisconsin Council of Churches and Ched Myers. The study encompasses ideas from Mark's Gospel and concerns for social justice.

## Youth Bell Choir

John Kleppe will be assembling a Youth Bell Choir to play special music for Palm Sunday this Lenten season. Age limit is 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade. No music experience is necessary, just a willingness to learn!

### Schedule:

Wednesday March 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5:30-6:00 p.m.  
Wednesday March 10<sup>th</sup> – 5:30-6:00 p.m.  
Wednesday March 24<sup>th</sup> – 5:30-6:00 p.m.  
Performance – Sunday March 28<sup>th</sup> – both services

Contact John Kleppe for more details:  
763-607-9298 — john.kleppe@uwrf.edu

## Summer Dates

Please keep the following dates in mind when scheduling summer activities. We will need lots of kids and lots of adults for these programs.

**Youth Musical: June 21-24, 2010**

**Vacation Bible School: August 2-5, 2010**

## Middle School Musical, Anyone?

The Board of Christian Education is researching the possibility of a musical for middle school students, meeting in the afternoons of June 21 – 24 for rehearsals. Please consider your interest in such an endeavor and reply to Stacy Myers. It would be lots of fun!

## Coffee Fellowship Hosts Needed

We are in need of hosts for our Coffee Fellowship time on the following Sundays: March 28 (Palm Sunday), April 4 (Easter), 11, 18, 25



The coffee is already made by Pastor Chris, all you need to do is bring some treats and serve. We even do the dishes! Training provided. Please use the sign up sheet or contact Lu in the church office for more information. This is a great family project or bonding time with a couple of friends!

## Women's Fellowship

Women's Fellowship meetings resume on **Thursday, March 4<sup>th</sup>**. Our program, by Stacy Myers, is entitled "The Parable of Talents and Children's Literature"; devotions by Sue Danielson, and our hostesses are Virginia Hilden and Marguerite Barker. See you there.

## Weekly Email

Do we have your current email address? The "Weekly Word" is a weekly email sent out on Thursdays that highlights upcoming church activities.

Please send the church office your updated email address at [office@firstchurchrf.org](mailto:office@firstchurchrf.org).

## Wanted

If you have any 100% wool sweaters that you are looking to get rid of, please contact Eunice Filkins at 425-5437.



## American Cancer Society's Daffodil Days Sale

Help raise funds for cancer research and have a small glimpse of spring with daffodils. Call the church office or JoAnn Mathews at 425-1057 to order or for more information. Orders are due by February 19.

## Got Choir?

Chancel Choir is the place for you! Our Chancel Choir at First Congregational is open to anyone post-confirmation age and up. The choir rehearses every Wednesday from 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. and performs two times per month. No previous experience is necessary, and the choir is always looking for more members of any voice part. Contact Scott Perau for more details.



## Summer Musical

Did you enjoy Godspell last summer? Once again our church is planning on performing a musical this summer. We will need many members in order to make this a success. Whether you want to be on center stage singing a solo or a part of the chorus, we will find a place for anybody that wants to be a part of this production.

If interested, please sign up on Scott's door. Contact Scott Perau (sperau@gmail.com) with any questions or concerns.



## Habitat for Humanity Build

Thanks to all who helped build the Habitat house in New Richmond, and also to Bonnie Jones-Withuhn who supplied us with a very tasty lunch.

St. Croix Valley Habitat for Humanity is looking for volunteers for committees and also for homeowners. If you are interested or know of someone that is in need of affordable housing (people of all ages are eligible), please contact Carol Merriman for more information. We are also opening a Restore that will be selling new and used tools, furniture, appliances, household items such as used ceiling fans, cupboards, etc. If you have any of these items and would like to contribute to a great cause, contact the Habitat office at 425-2053.

## Tille Quints

Please look into your hearts & calendars & find a spot to help out this very deserving and TIRED local family! The babies at 7 months are incredibly cute and alert and so extra hands to feed, hold & play are ALWAYS needed. Angela & Heath graciously rely on volunteers around the clock... with 2-3 volunteers per 3 hour shift, 24 hours a day... that is 150 opportunities for you to help out!!! Many volunteers take one or more regular shifts a week, but many more are needed to fill in the blanks, especially due to absences during this cold season.

Several members of our church have given our hearts over to this wonderful "little" family... ask us how you can help, go to their website [www.tillefamily.com](http://www.tillefamily.com) or call volunteer coordinator Brenda @ 426-3604.

Thanks so much! Wendy Hill, Mary Church, Maxine Sitz

## Our Neighbors' Place Update

It is amazing to see how much has happened in such a short time towards helping the homeless in our community! As the pieces come together we are seeing a 3-part service, outlined here for your information:

- 1. TEMPORARY SHELTER** (in place)
  - a) **Transition House** – until the Emergency Shelter is in place, this temporary location accommodates single families in the process of acquiring permanent housing
  - b) **Servant of the Shepherd** – members provide emergency meals & housing
- 2. DAY CENTER** (in place) - day-time resource center providing information, Social Service assistance, Literacy & Life Skills instruction, laundry service, The Closet clothing, mail/email access, transportation assistance to work or the Workforce Center
- 3. EMERGENCY HOMELESS SHELTER** (in progress) - negotiations and fundraising are underway to purchase an 8-plex located at 235 West Johnson St., River Falls. The site will provide emergency housing for up to 4 families.

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**STAFF**



Chris Myers - Pastor  
 Lu Lueck - Parish Coordinator  
 Missy Luedtke - Office Assistant  
 Stacy Johnson - CE Coordinator  
 Scott Perau - Music Coordinator  
 Organists - Marsha Pearson,  
 Barb Wall  
 Tim Bylander - Building Supervisor  
 Dave Mountain - Custodian  
 Jean Smith - Moderator

Office Phone: 715-425-2052  
 Office E-mail: office@firstchurchrf.org  
 Website: www.firstchurchrf.org

**PASTOR'S HOME PHONE NUMBER**

Chris Myers 715-426-2075  
 chris@firstchurchrf.org

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**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
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February 15, 2010



2010 FEBRUARY 2010						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
14 8:00 am Chancel Choir <b>9:00 am Worship Service</b> 9:00 am Adult Forum 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship <b>10:30 am Worship Service</b> 10:30 am Sunday School 11:00 am WEVR Broadcast Relay for Life Bake Sale Endowment Grant Requests Due	15 Kettle Bells 5:00 pm	16 3rd Tuesday Soup 'n Sandwich 5:00 pm at St. Bridget's Boards and Committees Meetings 6:30 pm Church Council Meeting 7:30 pm	17 Ash Wednesday 3:30-5:00 pm Wed School 5:30-6:30 pm Jubilee Ringers 5:00-6:15 pm Pancake Supper 6:30-7:30 pm Worship Service 7:30-8:00 pm Chancel Choir	18	19	20
21 8:00 am Jubilee Ringers <b>9:00 am Worship Service</b> 9:00 am Adult Forum 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship <b>10:30 am Worship Service</b> 10:30 am Sunday School 11:00 am WEVR Broadcast It Takes a Village Concert at Ezekiel 7:00 pm	22 Kettle Bells 5:00 pm Endowment Grant Committee Meeting 6:30 pm	23 4th Tuesday Banquet 5:00 pm at St. Bridget's	24 3:30-5:00 pm Wed School 5:00-6:15 pm Family Meal 5:30-6:30 pm Jubilee Ringers 6:30-7:00 pm Worship Service 7:00 pm Confirmation Years 2 & 3 (8th & 9th Grades) 7:00 pm Chancel Choir	25 NEWSLETTER DEADLINE	26	27
28 8:00 am Chancel Choir <b>9:00 am Worship Service</b> 9:00 am Adult Forum 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship <b>10:30 am Worship Service</b> 10:30 am Sunday School 11:00 am WEVR Broadcast 11:30 am Boundary Waters Trip Meeting						

**Donations Needed**

We are looking for donations of new or gently used plastic Easter eggs for the Community Easter Egg Hunt that is on Saturday, March 27. There is a box in the lobby. Please see the flyer on the bulletin board for more information about the event.