

# “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)

JANUARY 1, 2009

## Pastor's Corner

If Christmas in our minds is going back to the stable, predictable, remembered past, then the first thing that might be said is that God comes to us as a baby, a child. When God chose to come in the flesh, God did not come as a wise older person full of inspiring wisdom gleaned from years of experience. No. God chose to come as a baby. And nothing changes faster than a baby. When my kids were babies it seemed as if each new day brought some new ability, some new change that would delight us. With a baby, life is always on fast forward.

Another thing about God coming among us as a baby is this—what brings more change, more disruptions, than a baby? Those of you who have welcomed babies into your homes know that nothing so quickly disrupts your stable, secure, predictable existence than a baby. They think day is a great time to sleep and night is a wonderful time to play. They think climbing things like stairs and china cabinets are just a challenge that must be overcome. God comes among us as a child to disrupt some of our familiar patterns, to upset familiar patterns that can make our lives staid, boring.

You know the rest of the story. That dramatic, miraculous birth was only the beginning. As the baby grew into a boy, then an adult, he was always on the move, calling ordinary people to follow him. But follow him where? Follow him into God's unknown and unpredictable future. To follow him was to put our future in his hands and relinquish it to him. To follow him was to take our tomorrow out of our hands and place it in faith into his. That is risky and fearful and anything but stable.

You are here this morning as those who have come forward to follow him. Though you are sitting here in nice, orderly pews, our story is one of surprise, even shock. Though you do not seem like disorderly people, the gospel reminds us that we are following a Savior whose tendency is to disorder our lives, to ask, even demand things of us, to expect great things from us.

If you are really in love with stability, if you have to get your life stable before you can do anything, then you may not be too happy with this sort of a savior we are receiving into our world this time of the year.

Sermon excerpt from December 21, 2008

## Taizé Service

The next **Taizé Service** will take place  
**January 11**  
**at 7:00 pm.**

The service is ecumenical  
and open to all.

## Vatican Splendors Mystery Trip

**Tuesday, January 6** is the date of the Winter Trip to see the Vatican Splendors art exhibit at the Minnesota History center in St. Paul. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to see some incredible Christian art.

We leave the church at 10am, enter the exhibit at 10:45am and will have lunch at the café following the exhibit. We should return to the church around 2:30pm.

The cost is \$17 per person for the exhibit, plus the cost of your meal. Space is limited. Please use the sign-up sheets to register and see Pastor Chris for details.

*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.*

## Committees for 2009

The Nominating Committee is soliciting your help in filling the slate of committee members for 2009. The following ministry teams are in need of your attention. A description of each committee is posted outside the office. Please contact our Moderator, Bob Gustafson ([bagustafson@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bagustafson@sbcglobal.net) -tel: 425-2516 or the Vice-Moderator, Jean Smith ([jsmithler@yahoo.com](mailto:jsmithler@yahoo.com) -tel: 531-1552) if interested.

Christian Education	3 members	3 year terms	to join a 9 person team
Deacons	2 members	3 year terms	to join a 9 person team
Discipleship	1 member	3 year term	to join a 6 person team
Endowment Fund	1 member	5 year term	to join a 5 member team
JH Campus Ministry	1 member	3 year term	to join a 12 member team
Mission Education	6 members	3 year terms	to join a 6 member team
Music	1 member	3 year term	to join a 6 member team
Trustees	4 members	3 year term	to join a 9 member team

### TREASURER'S NOTES

Missy Luedtke

Please remember the following when you make purchases for the church.

- All purchases for the church are TAX EXEMPT. If you do not have a tax-exempt form, ask for one from the office. EFFECTIVE JAN. 1, 2007, THERE WILL NOT BE ANY REIMBURSEMENT FOR SALES TAX.
- Please put a copy of the receipt in my mailbox in the office, attached to a bill submission form. (Blank forms are in my mailbox.) Include proper account to charge to.

Financial Information for November and YTD:

	November	YTD
Income	\$ 29,696.80	\$ 283,115.19
Expenses	\$ 24,145.76	\$ 277,482.83
Net	\$ 5,551.04	\$ 5,632.36

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

A NOTE OF



*Thank you to all who have sent cards, cookies and gifts. I have tried to thank you personally but some of you have left items at church anonymously. Please know that I appreciate your kindness. May you all have a wonderful New Year as we work together in ministry!*  
Pastor Chris



### Taizé Service

The next **Taizé Service** will take place **January 11 at 7:00 pm**. Taizé is an alternative form of worship and is meditative in nature. It utilizes contemplative prayer, spiritual readings, plainsongs and periods of silence in a peaceful candlelight setting. The service is ecumenical and open to all.

### Thank You to Bob Johnson

Bob made and donated a candlelighter stand for the church. Please check out the fine craftsmanship of this piece in the history room. It is a wonderful gift and now we have a home for the candlelighters.

## Building Committee Update

The Building Committee continues to meet on a regular basis taking some time for the holidays. The questionnaire has been completed and is now in the process of being used to collect and validate the needs of the groups and organizations using church facilities. The input from the questionnaire will be summarized by the end of January and used to project the space requirements and feasibility. Additionally the property survey has been completed. We now have an updated survey which will be used in requesting the necessary permits from the city. If there are questions or comments, don't hesitate to contact Bill HERRIS, chairperson of the Building Committee (715-222-0992) or any other committee member.

## Mary's Song: An Open Spot on the Timeline

It was not an easy task to determine the list of images for the pictorial timeline. The Bible is filled with wonderful stories, but limited funds and limited wall space set the parameters for the project. One story that we were not able to include is Luke's account of the Angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she would bear God's son.

As Luke tells the story, after hearing the news Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, also in the midst of an unexpected, miraculous pregnancy. During this visit that Mary sings a song. We call this song "The Magnificat." It is eloquent poetry, offered much as a prayer. Mary's song reflects her willingness to participate in God's plan and her gratitude for what God will do in the future through her child. But if we think of Mary's song as a kind of lullaby we are wrong. The Magnificat is a song of liberation—personal and social, economic and political.

Mary sings: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Mary realized that in choosing her, God turned the ways of the world upside down. Mary was poor, young, powerless, unmarried and she stood to be even more marginalized when word of her unwed pregnancy spread. In the world human beings have constructed, where power and position so often dictate opportunity, Mary was not the safe, expected, or probably even reasonable choice. Mary was the one no one else would choose.

It is clear that God does not operate according to the standards of this world. God chose a peasant girl to be the one lifted up and called blessed by all future generations. In doing so, God cast judgment over the ways of the world that find greatness in possessions and privilege and inaugurated a startling new way of being. Now the poor would be raised up and the hungry filled.

The Annunciation and the Magnificat are wonderful parts of scripture. I encourage you to take a few moments this Christmastide to read and reflect upon Luke 1:26-56. It is well worth the time. Consider in your own mind an image for this story.

Stacy Johnson Myers  
Christian Education Coordinator

---

### Adult Forum

**January 4: Video and Discussion: *From Jesus to Christ*, Ray Anderson**—There is continuity and discontinuity between Jesus born in Bethlehem and the continuing body of Christ in the world. The Forum will explore the early years of Jesus' ministry.

**January 11: *A Conversation with the Superintendent*, Dr. Thomas Westerhaus**—The River Falls School District seeks to educate the children God has given to our community. Critically important to the education process is a strong partnership between the district and the community. The Adult Forum will explore issues facing the district as well as ways to strengthen the district-community relationship with Superintendent Tom Westerhaus.

**January 18: *Issues in Diversity*, Mayor Don Richards and Members of the River Falls Diversity Committee**—What do inclusion and diversity mean for our church, our community and our families? Members of the River Falls Diversity Committee will discuss their proposals and explain plans for River Falls Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration on January 19, 2009.

**January 25: *Music in the Church—Part I*, Sarah Parks**—Church music has a long, varied and interesting history. Sarah Parks, Associate Professor of Music at UWRF and First Congregational's Music Coordinator, will lead a discussion of the history of sacred music. Part II of this discussion will follow in February.

### First Congo Reads

The First Congo Reads selection is *The Shack* by William Paul Young. *The Shack* has been at the top of the New York Times reading list. It is a work of "theological fiction" – it is not meant to be orthodox theology. It is provocative, challenging, and will provide plenty of room for exploring images and doctrines of God. Copies of the book are available in the church office for \$9.00. Please consider reading the book. The book will be discussed in the Adult Forum on February 15, 2009.



*Happy Holidays to the members of UCC ~ We want to thank you from the depths of our hearts for the caring calls and all the wonderful meals and the yummy Christmas goodies you provided after my return from the hospital with back surgery. They were so appreciated at a time of need. God bless you all and have a wonderful and safe 2009. Most sincerely, Ginny and Don Larson*



St. B's is buzzing in their new basement! Sorting, shopping & wrapping was done Dec. 7-9 for the Ecumenical Giving Tree Project. Many of our members helped out in various ways.

## Ecumenical Giving Tree Project

Many members of our congregation felt a real sense of community as we participated in the "Ecumenical Giving Tree Project." Not only did we feel that we were helping families in the community but joining with other denominations to accomplish this.

I feel this is a very worthwhile project and gives many people a chance to let their light shine at this "giving" time of year. I sincerely thank everyone that participated. This congregation's generosity and compassion never ceases to amaze me.

### THANK YOU.

*Lu Lueck, Parish Coordinator*

## Musical Anyone?

We are interested in getting together a group of people from First Congregational to produce "Godspell", a wonderful musical that tells the story of Jesus' ministry. Performers would be an intergenerational group of adults and teens. As with every performance, time and work is involved but we also anticipate a great deal of fun and community building. If you would like more information about participating in Godspell, please sign the list on the sign up table, call the church office, or speak to Sarah Parks or Stacy Myers. PLEASE consider participating. It would be a great adventure!

## Sunday School & Wednesday School Schedule

Wed., December 24 & 31	No Wednesday School
Sunday, December 28	No Sunday School, Everyone Worships
Sunday, January 4	No Sunday School, Everyone Worships
Wednesday, January 7	No Wednesday School
Sunday, January 11	Sunday School Resumes
Wednesday, January 14	Wednesday School Resumes

## Temple Visit

Ever wondered what a Jewish worship service might look like? On **Friday, February 13<sup>th</sup>** all three confirmation classes and any interested adults are welcome to join us as we worship at Temple of Aaron Synagogue in St. Paul. The service will be in the evening and we will car pool and use the church van to get there. Before worship we will tour the temple and have a question and answer time. Please use the sign-up sheet if interested or see Pastor Chris for details.

## Annual Meeting

**Sunday, February 1** is the date of the Annual Meeting. Following the 10:30 am worship service, we will meet as church family in the Fellowship Hall for a light lunch. During the business portion of the meeting, childcare will be provided.

In addition to passing budgets and electing officers, there will be an update from the Building and Finance Committees. Please use the sign-up sheet to let us know you will be attending.

## Souper Bowl

Please remember to bring a \$1 or a can of soup as our young people receive the annual Souper Bowl offering on Super Bowl Sunday, February 1.

**Advent Event** -- Over 80 people turned out for this year's Advent Event held in the Fellowship Hall. Families gathered together to help make ornaments and other



decorations for Christmas. A highlight was making a nativity set to take home.

A sincere thanks to all the members of the Christian

Education Committee who helped prepare the meals and crafts for this event.



Dear Chris and Congregation of our beloved Congregational Church

This has been a stressful year, as you know, but then there are moments when you know it is all worth it, that you are making a difference with the help of so many supporters.

On Thursday, we had our Christmas party for the children in our program "Desenho e Arte, crescendo e transformando" Drawing and Art, growing and transforming. The symbol of this group is the butterfly who, from an ugly cocoon, working hard in spite of the obstacles, transforms itself into a beautiful butterfly. The significance you can understand for these children are often undisciplined, rowdy, neglected, lacking parental support or social graces of any kind and unable to grasp what it means to work in a group for the benefit of everyone, to know what citizenship means.

I have written of this program for it is your financial support with others that make it possible for it is not a city program but our Association's. 40 children (that is all we have room for, 20 in the morning and 20 in the afternoon) come to the clinic and on the 3rd floor of our newest building, we have a room designed for them to work in. The children range from 7 to 12 years of age and we choose the problem children, those whose parents work all day leaving these children to fend for themselves, or children who have no father, problems in school or relational problems. Not an easy group and over the year there have been many problems but many victories.

The health educators all participate on different days, we have volunteers for games, for school help study, story tellers and art work and the most enjoyed theater. They create their own plays, make the costumes and perform for each other. They learn to work in a group with objectives that are common and to be shared. They learn how to start a project and finish it, each one contributing as best she or he can.

On Wednesday of this week, they invited their parents (few came) and gave their play. It was wonderful, loud, often undisciplined but theirs, their interpretation of life in the shanty town. Then to end it they gave a play on how to prevent dengue which is upon us. As you remember it is a disease caused by the mosquito and can be fatal. The rainy season, now is when we have our epidemics.

I was so moved by all their work, the children and the health educators, plus volunteers that my eyes were misty most of the time, especially when they called the leader of the shantytown Association to the stage and sang to him! Santa Claus (one of the larger health educators) was to come at the end of the play and distribute the gifts which had been donated by a very wealthy woman, wrapped then and decorated by the health educators. However, since there were so many children watching the play who did not participate in the program the health educators felt that it would not be fair to distribute them while the other children were there so there was to be party the next day at the clinic for distributing the gifts which were the same for all, a wonderful back pack for school and a school kit with crayons, and all sorts of art supplies and school supplies--a gorgeous box of useful items, plus candy.

Santa Claus arrived and though the children all recognized who she was, they played the game. The children were told to sit down and they would be called, one by one, to come to Santa and receive their gift but not to open it till everyone had theirs. They were very good, each one had a picture taken being hugged by Santa and then sat down with the huge colored package. After everyone had received theirs, they were told they could open theirs. I was already feeling emotionally affected by what was happening, the children's cooperation, their transformation into a solid group, all the work gone done by the health educators and volunteers, that tears filled my eyes.

But the moment was yet to come that would make me want to drop to my knees and thank the God who is love and all of you, everyone who made this day possible. The God of love was present and I would feel this presence even more. For amid the tearing of paper and squealing of happy and surprised children, Lena and I noticed one boy sitting in a chair clutching his large gift to his chest. He was watching the others and his broad white smile in this dark face was a joy to see, but why wasn't he opening his gift, I wondered. I went over to him and asked him, "Eric, aren't you going to open your gift?" "No," he said smiling broadly, "I'm going to save it for Christmas day because in our house we don't have presents". I hugged him, turned my head and bursting into tears, hugged the health agents in gratitude. My heart is full and we want to express now to the whole congregation of our gratitude for the support you give, the help you so freely give to make this all possible. What a fabulous Christmas this is! ~Barb and Gus

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**STAFF**



Chris Myers - Pastor  
 Lu Lueck - Parish Coordinator  
 Missy Luedtke - Office Assistant  
 Stacy Johnson - CE Coordinator  
 Sarah Parks- Music Coordinator  
 Organists - Marsha Pearson,  
 Barb Wall  
 Tim Bylander - Building Supervisor  
 Dave Mountain - Custodian  
 Bob Gustafson - 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

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

110 N. Third Street  
 River Falls, Wisconsin 54022

STANDARD PRESORT  
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID

PERMIT #53  
 RIVER FALLS, WI 54022

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

January 1, 2009



**2009 JANUARY 2009**

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 New Year's Day  Church Office Closed	2 Church Office Closed	3
4 <b>Communion Sunday</b> 9:00 am Worship Service 9:00 am Adult Forum 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship 10:30 am Worship Service 11:00 am WEVR Broadcast	5 Building Committee Meeting 6:30 pm	6 Epiphany  Mystery Trip 10:00 am-2:30 pm	7 3:30 pm Wednesday School 6:00 pm Jubilee Ringers 6:30 pm Confirmation Year 1 (7th Grade) 7:00 pm Chancel Choir 7:30 pm Confirmation Year 3 (9th Grade)	8 Finance Committee Meeting 6:30 pm	9	10 NEWSLETTER DEADLINE
11 8:00 am Chancel Choir 9:00 am Worship Service 9:00 am Adult Forum 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship 10:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Sunday School 11:00 am WEVR Broadcast 7:00 pm Taizé Service	12	13 2nd Tuesday Banquet 5:00 pm at St. Bridget's	14 3:30 pm Wednesday School 6:00 pm Jubilee Ringers 6:30 pm Confirmation Year 2 (8th Grade) 7:00 pm Chancel Choir	15	16	17
18 8:00 am Chancel Choir 9:00 am Worship Service 9:00 am Adult Forum 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship 10:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Sunday School 11:00 am WEVR Broadcast	19 Building Committee Meeting 6:30 pm	20 Boards and Committees Meeting 6:30 pm  Church Council Meeting 7:30 pm	21 3:30 pm Wednesday School 6:00 pm Jubilee Ringers 6:30 pm Confirmation Year 1 (7th Grade) 7:00 pm Chancel Choir 7:30 pm Confirmation Year 3 (9th Grade)	22	23 Youth Winter Retreat to Wisconsin Dells	24
25 8:00 am Jubilee Ringers 9:00 am Worship Service 9:00 am Adult Forum 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship 10:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Sunday School 11:00 am WEVR Broadcast  NEWSLETTER DEADLINE	26 Journey House Meeting 6:30 pm	27 4th Tuesday Banquet 5:00 pm at St. Bridget's	28 3:30 pm Wednesday School 6:00 pm Jubilee Ringers 6:30 pm Confirmation Year 2 (8th Grade) 7:00 pm Chancel Choir	29	30	31