



The SPIRE



First Congregational Church of Ripon • 220 Ransom Street • Ripon, Wisconsin 54971
☎ 920-748-5898 • office@riponcongregationalucc.org • www.riponcongregationalucc.org

February 2023

“Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.”

— *Mary Oliver, “Sometimes,”*
from Devotions, p. 104

The first time I encountered Mary Oliver’s poetry was in high school during a long bus ride to a retreat somewhere. I don’t quite remember the details of the journey, but I remember Mary Oliver’s words for the journey. They were breathtaking. Refreshing. Like drinking in a big glass of wilderness and vivid dreams. The poem that has stuck with me ever since is *Wild Geese*, published in a book of her poems by the same name in 1993:

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Oliver’s words are like a journey themselves. They wind into the depths of your soul, out into the world, into the hearts of others, into the noise of creation, and then back to your own heart. The first time I read this poem, I felt



like I was being called to embody the truth of myself: I am accountable for this life I live.

I do not mince words when I say that Mary Oliver knows how to dance with the English language. Her words are hopeful. Hope-filled. They offer healing to those hearts which have waned.

I think this is what the journey is all about. It is about pouring over the Word – the grace-filled Word found in the Bible, the living Word found in Jesus, and the hope-filled Word found in you. We may not know the path the journey will take, where it will lead or where it will end. We may not remember the journey: all the pit-stops and bumps in the road, the wrong turns or moments of serendipity. But we remember the words that have sustained us, the ways in which our spirits have been fed. They have done so for me over the years, and I hope they will for you as well this season.

At the end of the bus ride to the retreat to which I was headed, I discovered some simple yet profound truths about myself, and my place in the family of things.

In the end I believe love wins. I have found that to see grace in this life, I had to look closely at my own sense of brokenness, failure, and despair. Those are the (supposedly) defining words of my life, or so I thought. Mary Oliver gives these instructions for living life: Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.

Continued on page 3

In Our Thoughts & Prayers

Prayers for health and healing...

Wayne Larson (health); **Dave Iserman** (stroke); **Bob Harper** (broken shoulder); **Gerry Nelson** (fall); **Marilyn Lehnerr** (stroke); **Don Amsden** (hospice); **Wendy Smith** (cancer); **Dawn Scholtens** (cancer); **Loren Boone** (cancer); **Katie Del Ponte's** cousin and **Tony Reilly's** niece **Jessica** (cancer); Grandmother **Cindy** from the **Berndt/Selz's** family (cancer); **Rose Marie Freeman** (sister of Al Jarreau, health); **Susan Osteen's** sister-in-law **Chona** (cancer); all those experiencing health issues in need of prayer.

Prayers for **Carla McNair, Mary Lyke's** mother, who moved into assisted living in Markesan.

Prayers for the victims of recent mass shootings in California, affecting AAPI communities. We pray to end gun violence.

Prayers for peace in Ukraine and Russia and around the world.

Please note: If you wish to see your prayer request listed in next Sunday's bulletin or The Spire, please notify the church office.

Our Condolences

...to those who have experienced a recent loss:

Buzz Rasmussen's wife, **Corinne Carlson Rasmussen**, 82, died May 3, 2022 in Portage, WI. A memorial service was held in September 2022.

Michele Wittler's friend **Leslie** (hospice) passed away in November 2022.

Welcome!

We've been anticipating your arrival! It's true, because we believe that every person who comes to join us for fellowship was sent by God. We look forward to getting to know you and to share with you the marvelous ways God is working in our church and beyond. If you've been thinking, praying, searching, or hoping for a place to belong, we would like, again, to say Welcome! We're glad you found us.

Prayers of Joy

Dawn Scholtens who completed chemotherapy treatments in January and has been worshipping with us in person!

Amanda Edwards, the new site director at Daycholah Center, UCCI, and **Rev. James Schleif** who was named executive director of UCCI. Schleif has been serving as interim executive director since April 2022.

Buzz Rasmussen joined us in worship.

Our **Community Dinner** served 88 meals on January 24.

Brandon Barnes who served on our Sunday School staff years ago just announced the birth of his new baby.

Lynn Grout-Paul and **Justus Paul** celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary.

Amber Dalziel began a new job at Aurora Health in January.

Spire Deadline

Our next Spire newsletter will be for March, 2023. The deadline for submissions is Wednesday, February 15, at noon. Please submit materials to the church office, or email to Maria Dietrich at dietrich.maria@gmail.com.



Pastor *Jeffrey Dodson*
CE Director *Jeanne Williams*
Moderator *Erin Ter Beest*
Vice-Moderator. . . *Michele Wittler*
Clerk *Justus Paul*
Treasurer *Andy Lyke*
Choir Director *Kurt Dietrich*
Faith Formation . *Barb Splittgaber*
Finance. *Judy Neill*
Historian *Robin Patzlaff*
Maintenance Officer *Lyle Mathias*
Membership. *Bev Christ*
Nominating. . *J. Christ, T. Konecny*
Organist. *Maria Dietrich*
Outreach *Dawn Scholtens*
PPRC *Michele Wittler*
Women's Fellowship *Susan Osteen*
Worship *Kathleen Hones*

Church Contact Info

Office manager Ashley Dodson:
920-748-5898 or
office@riponcongregationalucc.org

If not in the office, Pastor Jeffrey Dodson can be reached at ...

Cell: (719) 330-8549 or by email, at jeffrey@riponcongregationalucc.org

Jeanne Williams, CE Director
jeanne@riponcongregationalucc.org

Rod & Peggy Freeman – Church Custodians - Cell: 920-896-2152

Worship Schedule

A long bus ride through vacant and sometimes despairing landscapes will often help you reflect on your life. It did so for me at that moment on that bus, with my nose buried deep into the pages of Mary Oliver's poetry. Soon I began to see between the lines. I was forced to move beyond the words I thought mattered to see the Word that really does matter – I had to let the soft animal of my body tell me to Love what it loves. Life is more than the disheartening words we are often left with at the end of the day. The body is full of the imagination of God. We are made in God's image, *imago Dei*.

Beyond the words of this broken world, there is space to breathe again. There is a chance to take a break, to look-up from the news and distorted narratives.

I did pay attention to one other thing from my bus ride, and I must tell you about it. In a moment of grace, I looked up from Mary Oliver's poems that I held in my hand. I watched the world travel past me through the oversized windows of the bus: Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain / are moving across the landscapes, / over the prairies and the deep trees, / the mountains and the rivers. / Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, / are heading home again. The world's despairing words transformed into a liberating Word, ushered into my heart by the sweet poetry of Oliver's soul as she wrestled with the meaning of living life. Other passengers seemed to carry on as if nothing had changed in the world. Meanwhile the world moves on. The world may not have changed, but I could not deny that I had. I changed. Or rather, the Word inside me had changed.

The Word is a powerful tool for change. The reason I'm in ministry is because I believe that Jesus is the

Sunday, February 5 | Fifth Sunday of Epiphany | Communion

Understanding Church: Justice

10:30 am Worship in-person | 4:00 pm Worship online

Sunday, February 12 | Sixth Sunday of Epiphany | Souper Bowl of Caring

Understanding Church: Humility

10:30 am Worship in-person | 4:00 pm Worship online

Sunday, February 19 | Transfiguration Sunday

10:30 am Worship in-person | 4:00 pm Worship online

Wednesday, February 22 | Ash Wednesday

Aanointing with Ashes available in North Vestibule at 12 pm, 4 pm or 6 pm

Sunday, February 26 | First Sunday in Lent

10:30 am Worship in-person | 4:00 pm Worship online

Sunday, March 5 | Second Sunday in Lent | Communion

10:30 am Worship in-person | 4:00 pm Worship online

Sunday, March 12 | Third Sunday in Lent | Daylight Savings begins

10:30 am Worship in-person | 4:00 pm Worship online

one Word that allows me to help change the world. You matter in this divine landscape, and the Word that dwells inside you matters. Because of this living Word, we can go into the world and change it for the better. Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, / the world offers itself to your imagination.

Jesus' liberating Word helps us to imagine:

A world in which we all matter.

A world where love is the first and the last Word.

A world charged with justice.

A world that cares for children, the environment, and all our neighbors.

A world that is not afraid to go into the desert to look at hard truths.

We are not to linger for long in the vacant and despairing places of our lives. The journey is always before us, leading us to the next moment of awe. Each leg of this journey is a bus, a stream, a tree, a goose, a poem that carries us through the expanse.

Jesus calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – / over and over announcing your place / in the family of things.

In this new season, you do not have to be good. / You do not have to walk on your knees / for a hundred miles through the desert repenting. Instead, let's turn to the word that picks us up off the ground, that takes us out of the deserts of our lives and moves us to be a renewed people. And while we're at it, let's read some poetry along the way.

In awe of this life's journey, and willing to tell about it,



—Pastor Jeffrey

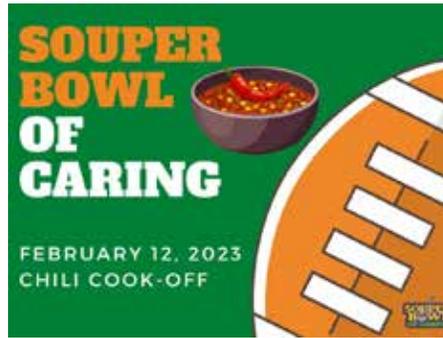
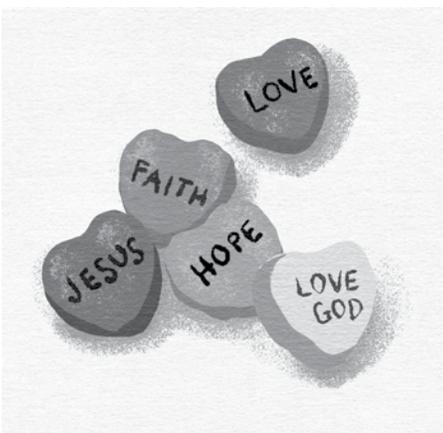


Each Thursday at 10:30 AM join us for coffee or tea and lively discussions on various topics of the day using faith, politics, and the daily news. All are welcome! We meet in the Chapel.



Every 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month join us for an hour of Adult Education in the Chapel. Each Chapel Chat will feature a topic or speaker on a variety of subjects. Chapel Chats are open to everyone, and we will be seeking presenters to sign up for a Sunday to share a topic they are passionate about.

February 19 | 9 AM | The 5 Love Languages | Rev. Jeffrey Dodson



Souper Bowl of Caring Chili Cook-off! | Sunday, February 12

Game on! Grab your spices and start cooking! On February 12 we will have a friendly chili competition. Prizes and bragging rights will be awarded! All proceeds will be donated to our Community Dinner. Help us tackle hunger in our own community by joining us for the nationwide Souper Bowl of Caring! Please sign up online or on the sign-up sheet during worship if you plan on bringing chili.



Direct Thrivent Choice Dollars®

Eligible Thrivent Financial members who have available Choice Dollars® have until March 31, 2023, to direct them. Don't miss this opportunity to recommend that Thrivent Financial provide outreach funding to First Congregational Church of Ripon. Go to [Thrivent.com/thriventchoice](https://thrivent.com/thriventchoice) to learn more, or call Thrivent at 800-847-4836 and say "Thrivent Choice" after the prompt.



Offering Envelopes Available

If you use offering envelopes to pay your pledge, and would like new envelopes for 2023, we have several boxes available in the church office.

Annual Meeting Recap

Thank you to all our members of the church who attended the Annual Meeting of the congregation on Sunday, January 22. All business items on the agenda were passed by unanimous vote, including our 2023 budget, the slate of nominees for church leadership and committees, and updates to the church bylaws that modified term limits and the number of people who can serve on a committee. An updated copy of the bylaws is available by contacting the church office.

Register for UCCI Events and Camps!

New and exciting events are planned at the three UCCI campuses: Moon Beach, Daycholah Center (Our local camp at Green Lake!), and Cedar Valley. Check out the full event list: <https://ucc.org/events-2023/>

If you are interested in attending a UCCI summer camp or retreat, please let Pastor Jeffrey or CE Director Jeanne Williams know. There are scholarships available to help with the cost of camp.



Important Registration Opening Dates

Hello UCCI Community,

Thank you for being so patient as we put some final touches on the plan and process to sign up for a camp this season. We are pleased to share that registration for UCCI camps and events taking place on April 1, 2023, or after will open on Monday, January 30, 2023, at 7:30 a.m.

Registration for Camp AweSum Family Camps will open on Monday, February 6, 2023, at 7:30 a.m.

UCCI will be using a new, online registration system. New and returning guests will create a new account. In preparation for this, we encourage you to allow plenty of time to complete your registration. Technical support will be available and the UCCI team can assist you with questions about the events. In the meantime, here is a list of information to gather:

- Name, address, phone, email, and birthday of the primary contact person for your online account
- Name and contact information for an alternate emergency contact
- Names, birthdays, and grade levels of youth participants

In preparation for making your event selections, please take note of the following:

- Payment of the deposit amount for multigenerational events or total program costs for adult events will be required to complete your registration and hold your place
- Abbreviations for the site hosting the event are: Cedar Valley=CV, Daycholah Center=DC, Moon Beach=MB
- Know the name of camp/event you want to register for
- Know the dates of the camp/event you want to register for

Bookmark our 2023 events page for opening day and watch for more helpful hints about the online registration system to be shared soon.

Looking forward to seeing you!



Shrove Tuesday/Mardi Gras Pancake Supper, and Service of Ashes Tuesday, Feb. 21 at 5-6:30 p.m.

Join us on Tuesday, February 21 for a Mardi Gras celebration with a pancake supper featuring gluten free and flour pancakes, apple-sauce, sausage, and coffee and orange juice. There will be music and games, including a pancake flipping contest. At 6:00 p.m. we will hold a short family friendly Service of Ashes, burning of palm branches, and reminding ourselves that God made us from dust, and to dust we shall return.

Ashes to Go

**Ash Wednesday, February 22
North Vestibule off Parking Lot
Noon, 4PM, and 6PM**

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the liturgical season of Lent for Christians, a 40 day period where fasting and reflection is practiced. We will offer Ashes To Go at noon, 4:00 pm and 6:00 pm in the Sanctuary, when you may stop in anytime during that hour and receive an imposition of ashes. (A Service of Ashes will be offered during the Pancake Supper the day

RECYCLING UPDATES



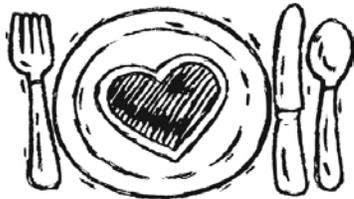
We are currently working with
NexTrex
and
Bic Corporation

25 JANUARY, 2023

THANK YOU SO MUCH

WE DID IT!

We have successfully collected 500 pounds of plastic!
Thank you to everyone that donated plastic over the last
several months! A bench will be selected and placed on
the church grounds!



COMMUNITY DINNER

Our Community Dinners, held on the fourth Tuesday of every month, are temporarily in a drive-through format due to COVID-19. Our next dinner will be held on February 28.

From the Outreach Committee

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING special offering

One Great Hour of Sharing shows us what love is by helping others. There are many ways for us to experience love and to share that with others. Sometimes, we just need to think about love in new ways.

One of the ways we can show love is to help others. Through a special offering for One Great Hour of Sharing, we have the chance to help people we may never meet. One of the projects we have helped make possible was rebuilding a school after it was destroyed by a hurricane. Doesn't that sound like love? Would you want someone to help rebuild your school if it was destroyed?

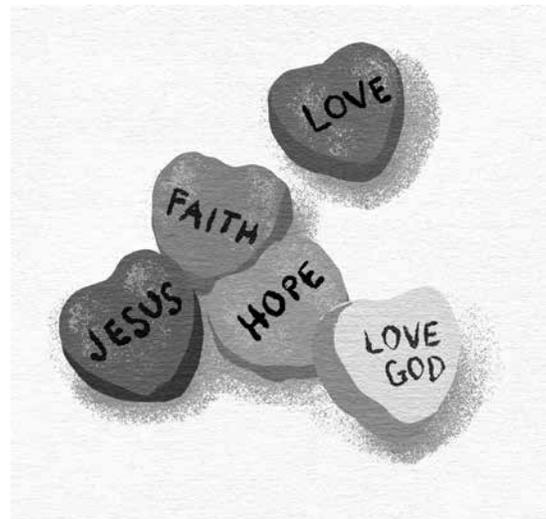
The One Great Hour of Sharing special offering will be collected on March 19, 2023

—Anne Flasch, Outreach committee member

Help Stock the Pantry

During the month of February, the food pantry would appreciate your donations of canned soup, dry soup mixes, bouillon cubes. Ongoing needs include paper grocery bags, peanut butter, and personal toiletry items such as deodorant, soap, and feminine hygiene products. Cash donations are always very much appreciated as well. Donations may also be dropped off at the church and will be delivered to the pantry. Thank you for your help!

—Outreach Committee





Worship Committee News

Have you wondered what the Worship Committee does? Our team has been busy behind the scenes. Together, we talk about what's happening in worship, what can we add, themes that speak to our community of faith, and we look toward the future for how we can engage our members and visitors. We planned and wrote the dramas and liturgy for services during Advent, thinking carefully over the course of several months how to approach the time of waiting for the birth of Christ.

We just developed a survey of Time and Talents for all members to fill out. There will be paper and online surveys available. Our goal is to have all members complete the surveys by February 28. It will only take a few minutes of your time, and then we can plan better in matching tasks with interests. We hope this will also add some new talents to our worship, fellowship, and outreach.

Look for a new flower donation sign-up. Having fresh bouquets (whether natural or silk) grace our sanctuary adds so much to worship. Please consider giving a bouquet in honor of loved ones or in celebration of a special event. It's easy to do: sign up for a date, send payment of \$30 to the church office, and the flowers will be purchased and delivered.

We now have several new members in our church, which is good news! In order to make these new folks feel welcome, it is especially helpful for members to wear name tags. Presently, we have stickers that are used by a few, but not all. Imagine being new to this community, and wondering who everyone is. Or, imagine the beginning of memory issues, and wondering who your old friends are. The worship team will have new name tags printed for all members and friends starting January 29. Please help us to show extravagant welcome to new and old friends by wearing your name tag.

Thank you for your support.

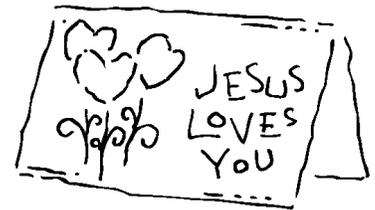
Worship Committee
Kathleen Hones, Chair
Scott Henke
Tim Lyke
Barb Mitchell
Lou Scholtens
Sarah Seidler-Halwas



Make tray favors for a local hospital, nursing home, nutrition project or home-delivered meal program.

You will need for each:

- white, unlined index cards (4"x6")
- red & pink construction paper
- markers — green, black
- glue or glue stick



- ♥ Fold card in half
- ♥ Cut 3 hearts from colored paper. Make them about 1 inch high.
- ♥ Glue the hearts on the left side, overlap a little.
- ♥ Use marker to make "stems" from the hearts — they'll look like a bouquet of flowers.
- ♥ On the right side print a message or a verse, such as "Jesus Loves You."



Faith Formation - Sunday School News



Sunday School Every Sunday at 9 a.m.

Younger Learners - Preschoolers through Grade 3 will continue to learn about the parables of Jesus this spring. These stories shared by Jesus during his ministry teach lessons about God’s love and how we can live into that love every day.

Older Learners - Youth in Grades 4-7 will learn about World Religions and how they are similar to and different from our Christian Faith. Please note the change in time for this class.

Music - All children and youth will have music time each week during our Sunday School time as we prepare for our spring holidays (Palm Sunday and Easter) and for Children’s Sunday in May.



First Congo Kids Time - Children who attend Sunday School may return to the classrooms after the Children’s Moment in the worship service for a snack and time for play and craft activities. We will bring children to the Fellowship Hall for coffee hour at the end of the service.



February Family Activities - Look for a full schedule of family activities for Spring Semester in the next issue of the Spire.

- Sunday, February 12, coffee hour, Souper Bowl Fundraiser and Chili Cook-Off
- Tuesday, Feb. 21, Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner, 5-7:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, February 22, Ashes to Go at noon, 4 & 6 p.m.

We Made Our Plastic Recycling Goal!!!!

Thanks to everyone who donated plastic to our recycling effort. We look forward to adding another bench to our playground and garden area. A decision will be made soon about continuing this project.

— Submitted by Barb Splittgaber, Faith Formation Committee Chair, and Jeanne Williams, C.E. Director

Worship Participation Schedule

Date	Lector	Ushers/Greeters	Tech Booth	Coffee Fellowship Hosts
Feb. 5	Dan Volkmann	Mary & Tim Lyke	Erik Dietrich	Wittler and Dalziel
Feb. 12	Kaitlyn Boscaljon	Deanna & Loren Boone	Katie Del Ponte	Souper Bowl of Caring
Feb. 19	Tom Konecny	Ed & Lou Scholtens	Gary Scholtens	Seidler-Halwas and Prellwitz
Feb. 26	Tom Moniz	Katie & Nate Berndt	Sarah Seidler-Halwas	Volkmann/Tumas, Hones
Mar. 5	Michele Wittler	Susan & Preston Osteen	Dan Volkmann	Edwards and Flasch
Mar. 12	Tina Solberg	Bev & Jack Christ	Tim Lyke	Minch and Mathias
Mar. 19	Kathleen Hones	Katie & Nate Del Ponte	Erik Dietrich	Boscaljon and Osteen
Mar. 26	Katie Grady	Lynn Grout-Paul/Justus Paul	Katie Del Ponte	Scholtens and Scholtens

Thanks
for your
participation

Please try to meet this schedule. If you cannot help on the Sunday assigned...

- Please switch Sundays with someone else and then notify the church office (748-5898 or office@riponcongregationalucc.org) of the change.
- We all appreciate your participation!

FEBRUARY 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29	30	31	1	2	3	4
9 am Sunday School and World Religions 10:30 am Worship 11:30 am Fellowship 12 pm Confirmation 4 pm Online Worship		6 pm Girl Scout Leader meeting	5:30 pm Youth Group 	10:30 am Discussion Group 6 pm NA meeting 7 pm RC Choral Union	9 am Coffee at Mugs	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
9 am Sunday School and World Religions 10:30 am Worship 11:30 am Fellowship 11:45 am Outreach 12 pm Worship committee 12 pm Confirmation 4 pm Online Worship			5:30 pm Youth Group	10:30 am Discussion Group 6 pm NA meeting 7 pm RC Choral Union	9 am Coffee at Mugs	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
9 am Sunday School and World Religions 10:30 am Worship 11:30 am Souper Bowl of Caring 11:45 am Outreach meeting 12 pm Confirmation 12 pm Worship Committee 4 pm Online Worship		5 pm Sharing the Table at Grace 	12 pm Spire deadline 5:30 pm Youth Group	10:30 am Discussion Group 6 pm NA meeting 7 pm RC Choral Union	9 am Coffee at Mugs	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
9 am Sunday School and World Religions 9 am Chapel Chat 10:30 am Worship 11:30 am Fellowship 12 pm Confirmation 4 pm Online Worship	Presidents Day	5 pm Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper, Service of Ashes	5:30 pm Youth Group Ash Wednesday Noon, 4 & 6 pm Ashes to Go	10:30 am Discussion Group 6 pm NA meeting 7 pm RC Choral Union	9 am Coffee at Mugs	
26	27	28	1	2	3	4
9 am Sunday School and World Religions 10:30 am Worship 11:30 am Fellowship 11:45 am Membership Committee 12 pm Confirmation 4 pm Online Worship		5:30 pm Community Dinner	5:30 pm Youth Group	10:30 am Discussion Group 6 pm NA meeting 7 pm RC Choral Union	9 am Coffee at Mugs	6 pm Ripon Area Community Theater Auditions

Future Events:

- March - Women's History Month
- April 6 - Maundy Thursday
- April 7 - Ecumenical Good Friday Service at Grace Lutheran
- April 9 - Easter

First Congregational Church of Ripon

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

220 Ransom Street • Ripon, Wisconsin 54971

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Enter to Worship—Go Forth to Serve

