



The SPIRE



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

March/April 2026

Making Space for the Future

This Lenten season, by exploring Jesus' encounters with people like Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and the man born blind at birth, we make space for slow but steady transformation. We loosen our grip. We allow the love of God — vast enough to

embrace the whole world — to breathe new life into us. In doing so, we confront the voices that try to make us forget who we are and clarify our identities as God's beloved. We make space for God's Living Water to flow. I have felt the refreshment of this water as you've made space for me in this congregation.

I am now into my 5th month as interim pastor here. One of my first experiences with you was celebrating the church's 175th anniversary and its rich tradition and witness. As we've experienced worship and community life through several liturgical seasons and navigated church business and operations through multiple meetings and decisions, we have been making a gradual turn towards the church's future. As I've gotten to know this congregation, its people's griefs and longings, and its operational successes and challenges, Cabinet leadership has helped me identify several priority areas of focus that can be cultivated and nurtured so that a promising future can be realized for the church and all who encounter its ministry.

So as we move closer to Holy Week and Easter, and in the months beyond, I invite you to make space for something else: **I invite you to make space for the future.** Beginning in April and continuing through August, each month I will facilitate a Making Space



Retreat. These interactive, in-person evening retreats are designed to dive the most deeply and collaboratively into that month's focus area. A shorter virtual gathering is offered a week after the in-person retreat for people unable to participate in-person and/or who want a secondary opportunity to discuss their reflections following the in-person retreat. For more about the topics and dates, see the additional information in this edition of the Spire.

It might seem counterintuitive that to "make space" for the future I'm asking you to commit to another thing! I recently read a reflection by a businesswoman who juggles it all—family, career, personal pursuits. In describing the juggle, she shared how she's started to look at her life not so much as what or how many things she's holding, but making sure she's attending to what is holding her up. So many of you have shared how this church community holds you up, or at the very least, how you desire this church to be the place your faith and life is nurtured. My hope and prayer is that by choosing to make time once a month to simply be present with each other and with God focused on the heart of this church's identity, mission, vision, and ministry, that we make space for a future in which First Congregational UCC of Ripon not only survives, but flourishes.

With hope,

Amanda

Rev. Amanda Edwards

Interim Pastor

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.

**WI Conference UCC
Annual Meeting**
April 10-11
Green Lake Conference Center
Learn more and register at wcucc.org.

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



Introducing this year's confirmation class and mentors:

Confirmand/Mentor

Cameron Del Ponte/Jeanne Williams

Benjamin Edwards/Andy Lyke

Kirsten Edwards/Dawn Scholtens

Seiler Solberg/Amanda Edwards

Participants have explored the history and layout of the Bible, considered the liturgical year, and begun to experience various spiritual practices. Confirmands have interviewed adults about their faith, and will explore creeds that shaped the Christian faith.

Please keep our confirmands and their mentors in prayer as they continue their confirmation journey.

— Pastor Amanda



Spire Deadline

Our next Spire newsletter will be for May/June, 2026. The deadline for submissions is Wednesday, April 22, at noon. Please submit materials to the church office, or email to Maria Dietrich at dietrich.maria@gmail.com.



Pastor *Amanda Edwards*

Christian Education Director
Katie Del Pointe

Communications and Operations
Director *Tina Solberg*

Moderator *Penny Allard*

Vice-Moderator *Maria Dietrich*

Clerk *Justus Paul*

Treasurer *Andy Lyke*

Choir Director *Kurt Dietrich*

Faith Formation *Sue Leonard*

Finance *TBD*

Buildings/Grounds . *Gary Scholtens*

Membership *Wendy Smith*

Nominating *TBD*

Organist *Maria Dietrich*

Outreach *TBD*

Search Committee *Mary Lyke*

Worship *Kathleen Hones*

Church Contact Info

Communications and Operations
Manager: Tina Solberg
920-748-5898 or
office@riponcongregationalucc.org

Pastor Amanda Edwards is in the office on Wednesdays. She can be reached at pastoramanda@riponcongregationalucc.org.

If you need to contact church custodians Rod & Peggy Freeman (or anyone else) please utilize the private church directory.



Welcome, Tina!

The Executive Committee is pleased to announce that Tina Solberg will be joining the staff as a part-time Communications and Operations Manager. She will coordinate the church's communications, digital presence, and operational systems, ensuring the worship, community life, and business of the church is coordinated and maintained professionally and efficiently. Tina will work primarily remotely, about 15 hours per week.

Shawl Ministry

The Shawl Ministry Team is taking a respite from meeting, but our hands are busy making confirmation stoles, prayer shawls, and baby blankets. If you would like to help with these tasks, contact Jeanne Williams, Meg Schwemmer, or Janet Voskull. Supplies are in plastic bins in the chapel, along with pattern books.



FOG will be held on Friday, April 18 at 5:30 p.m. at the home of Jack & Bev Christ. Want to host? Contact Bev Christ if you'd like to host a FOG gathering sometime!



Help Stock the Pantry

During the months of September and October, the food pantry would appreciate your donations of baking supplies, tuna and hamburger helper. Ongoing needs include paper grocery bags, peanut butter, and personal toiletry items such as deodorant, soap, and feminine hygiene products. Cash donations are always much appreciated as well. Donations may also be dropped off at the church and will be delivered to the pantry. Thanks for your help!

—Outreach Committee

Coffee Fellowship

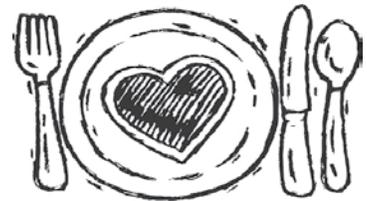
Friday Coffee Fellowship takes place at 9:30 AM at Ripon Dough Company. We hope you'll join us!



Trivia Night! ***Every third Thursday*** ***at Knuth's Brewery***

Every third Thursday at 6:30 pm - start showing up at 6 pm.

Come join us down at Knuth's for fun and laughs. Good food and drinks! Team "Thirsty Firsts" invites everyone to come join us. You don't need to be smart! Just need to be willing to have FUN!!



COMMUNITY DINNER

Our Community Dinners are held on the fourth Tuesday of every month, in a drive-through format. Our next dinners will be held on March 24 and April 28, serving at 5:30 p.m.



Chapter & Verse Book Group

Meetings are held on second Mondays in the Chapel unless otherwise specified. You may bring a light snack to share and your beverage. Books may be purchased at Knuth's Book Cellar in downtown Ripon.

March 17 - 7 pm - Life & Death & Giants by Ron Rindo

Area writer Ron Rindo (UW Oshkosh) explores the lives of the Amish and "English" living near Neshkoro, WI, as they engage in raising a child whose size and talents challenge their beliefs and cultural norms. Meet the author for a reading and discussion at Knuth Book Cellar.

April 13 - 7 pm - House of Broken Angels by Luis A. Urrea

Pulitzer Prize finalist Urrea's raucous and moving story of a family on the Mexican-American border, celebrating two of their most beloved relatives during a joyous and bittersweet weekend. Recommended by Kat Griffith.

May 11 - 7 pm - The Correspondent by Virginia Evans

Sybil Van Antwerp has been writing letters all her life—to family and friends, to authors she admires. When she has something to say, she writes a letter. An unexpected letter from the past and fading eyesight force Sybil to rethink how she has lived and is living her life. A gentle novel, full of the wisdom of a life lived fully.

From the Outreach Committee

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a vital special mission offering of the United Church of Christ. It connects you to disaster relief, refugee assistance, and development efforts around the globe. When disasters strike, or when individuals are displaced due to violence or poverty, OGHS ensures immediate response and ongoing recovery.

Through your support, OGHS funds comprehensive development programs in areas such as healthcare, education, agriculture, food security, microfinancing, and women's empowerment. By partnering with Global Ministries and international response networks, OGHS maximizes its impact. Your contributions help meet urgent needs while addressing the root causes of vulnerability, ensuring long-term, sustainable solutions for affected communities.

The OGHS special offering will be collected on **March 15th, 2026**.

—Anne Flasch, Outreach

June 9 - 7 pm - Book Sharing Session - Come and talk about the books you have been reading and help us choose books for the fall series, beginning in August. We welcome suggestions of fiction and nonfiction titles.

5th Sunday Series Begins March 29th

The Faith Formation Committee is sponsoring an adult education program that will occur at 9am on the 5th Sundays that occur this year in March, May, August, and November. This series will bring in local experts to lead conversations about issues related to religious practice, social justice, creation care, mental health, economic inequality, etc. The idea of the 5th Sunday Series is to gather adults from the church and the community to engage in learning and conversation. A light breakfast will be served and the sessions will conclude in time for members to join the worship service. These are the topics and speakers scheduled for 2026.

March 29th - Brian Smith and Tim Lyke will lead a season about "Reaching the Unchurched" based on Brian's most recent book.

May 30th - Al Sturgeon will talk with us about the History and Future of the American Civil Rights Movement, sharing insights from his recent trip with students to civil rights sites.

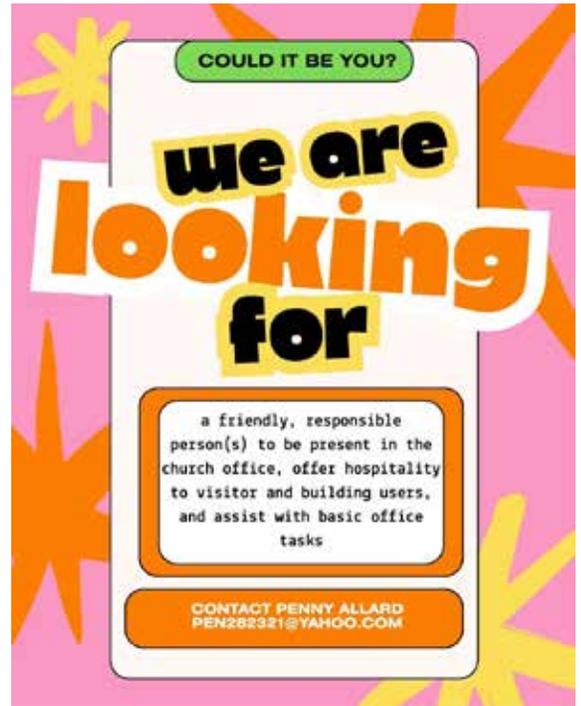
August 30th - Jacqueline Clark will present her research about Racist Images in American Popular Culture based on household objects, advertising, and other items she has collected.

November 29th - Topic TBD.

We welcome having community members join us for these events! Please contact any member of the Faith Formation Committee if you have questions or ideas for possible session leaders and topics.


LEAVING A
LEGACY

Continue the Legacy



Our church just celebrated its 175th anniversary, and what a history we've had! From a modest start in 1850, we are blessed to have a small but mighty congregation housed in a beautiful building with space for both worship and fellowship. Planning a future gift to our church is one of the most powerful actions you can take to ensure the church remains strong and endures for generations to come. Below is sample language which you could use to add to your will.

Sample Will Language: I give to the First Congregational Church of Ripon, 220 Ransom Street, Ripon, WI, 54971 (US Tax ID # 39-6026190) \$_____ (or _____% of the rest of my estate) to be used for general purposes.

Thank you for considering a way to help keep our church strong for future generations! - Andy Lyke, treasurer

Faith Formation - Sunday School News

This year is flying by! We are so excited to start working through Lent, getting ready for Palm Sunday and the wonder and joy that Easter will bring. We love having our new assistant, John Kakuzi, from Ripon College. He is a sophomore, studying music education. He is also on the Ripon College Swim Team. The kids are enjoying learning all about him and cannot wait to see how he inspires our kiddos.

A quick reminder, the bulletin shows that Sunday school starts at 9:00 a.m. I typically arrive by 9:00 a.m. but do not start lessons until 9:30. I want to give the kiddos time to arrive, without feeling rushed, grab a snack to eat, and, especially in this cold weather, warm back up before we make them learn. We always love visitors and welcome any kiddos who want somewhere to learn about God and Jesus.

Looking ahead in the Calendar:

April 5: Easter Sunday - No Sunday School, please join us for an easter egg hunt and Easter worship together

May 10: Children and Youth Sunday

May 24: Last Day of Sunday School - We will present our Bibles that have not been presented yet from previous years, as well as our 3rd graders, entering 4th grade in the fall.

Parents, please watch your emails as well, as I will be sending out a survey about Summer Services and Weekly Sunday check ins vs A Week Long VBS.

—Katie Del Ponte



Making Space for Our Future

Make space for a future in which First Congregational UCC of Ripon flourishes. Join Pastor Amanda April through August for a series of collaborative, generative exercises focused on the heart of this church's ministry and to shape its future. Each month*, participate in either:

- an in-person retreat OR
- virtual gathering on Zoom

**Although you are encouraged to attend a retreat or virtual gathering every month, they are designed so that you do not need to be present at all of them to contribute or gain deeper insight.*

Phase 1: Identity Deep-Dive and Vision/Mission Creation

1. April: Who we are, What we do, and why
2. May: Crafting our Vision and Mission

Phase 2: Let's GO-O (Governance, Organization, Operations)

3. June: How we do what we do
4. July: How do these structures amplify or diminish our vision and mission?

Phase 3: Enacting the Vision

5. August: Ministry Action Plan

SAVE THE DATES

Making Space for the Future Retreats

These interactive, generative in-person evening retreats are designed to dive the most deeply and collaboratively into that month's focus area.

Monday, April 20

Monday, May 18

Monday, June 15

Monday, July 20

Monday, August 17

Making Space for the Future Zoom Gatherings

1 hour evening virtual gatherings for people unable to participate in-person and/or who want a secondary opportunity to discuss their reflections following the in-person retreat.

Sunday, April 26

Sunday, May 31

Sunday, June 21

Sunday, July 26

Sunday, August 23



Easter Flowers

Once again our sanctuary will be filled with Easter flowers.

If you would like to donate a plant in memory or honor of someone, please provide your name, their name, and your check/cash of \$15.00 for each plant. Make checks payable to First Congregational Church.

Deadline is Sunday, April 13. Thank you.

—Julie Mathias

Number of plants _____ @ \$15 = \$ _____ total.

Please indicate number of plant(s): _____

Given by _____ (as you wish it to appear in the Spire)

In honor / memory / celebration of _____
(Circle one)

In honor / memory / celebration of _____
(Circle one)

Place this slip along with your cash or check in the collection plate or deliver it to the church office (locked box next to office door) no later than Monday, March 23. Thank you.

Worship Participation Schedule

Date	Lector	Ushers/Greeters	Tech Booth	Coffee Fellowship Hosts
Mar. 1	Jack Christ	Kaitlyn Edwards & Piper Boscaljon	Skip Wittler	Osteen Family & Kih Bergin
Mar. 8	Daniel Volkmann	Kathleen Hones	Andy Lyke	Wittlers/Kaitlyn Edwards
Mar. 15	Julie Mathias	Janis Edwards/Wendy Smith	Gary Scholtens	Ed & Gary Scholtens families
Mar. 22	TBD	Tony Reilly/Scott Henke	Sarah Seidler-Halwas	Andy & Tim Lyke families
Mar. 29	Julie Mathias	Preston & Susan Osteen	Tim Lyke	Prellwitz/Henke/Reilly fam
Apr. 5	Dawn Scholtens	Janet Vossekuil/Bev Christ	TBD	Worship Committee
Apr. 12	Deanna Boone	Wendy Smith & Jeanne Williams	Gary Scholtens	J & L Mathias, Meg Schwemmer
Apr. 19	Ed Scholtens	Seidler-Halwas Family	Andy Lyke	Worship Committee
Apr. 26	Tim Lyke	Michele & Skip Wittler	Sarah Seidler-Halwas	TBD

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!

MARCH/APRIL 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 9:30 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	2	3	4	5 6 pm NA meeting	6 9:30 am Coffee Fellowship	7
8 9:30 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	9	10 6:30 pm Cabinet mtg	11	12 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm FCA	13 9:30 am Coffee Fellowship	14
15 9:30 am Sunday School 9:30 am Worship committee 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour 11:45 Outreach committee	16	17 7 pm Book Group with Ron Rindo at Knuth Book Cellar	18	19 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm FCA	20 9:30 am Coffee Fellowship	21
22 9:00 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	23	24 5:30 pm Community Dinner	25	26 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm FCA 6:30 pm Trivia at Knuth's	27 9:30 am Coffee Fellowship	28
29 9 am 5th Sunday with Brian Smith 9:30 am Sunday School 10:30 am Palm Sunday Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	30	31	April 1	2 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm Maundy Thursday service	3 9:30 am Coffee Fellowship 6:30 pm Good Friday Ecumenical Service at Immanuel United Methodist Church	4
5 9 am Easter coffee breakfast 10 am Easter photo booth 10:30 am Easter Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Easter Egg Hunt	6	7	8	9 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm FCA)	10 9:30 am Coffee Fellowship	11
12 9:00 am Sunday School 9:30 am Worship committee 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	13 7 pm Book Group: House of Broken Angels	14 6:30 pm Cabinet mtg	15 12 pm PEO meeting	16 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm FCA	17 9:30 am Coffee Fellowship 4pm wedding rehearsal	18
19 9:00 am Sunday School 9:30 am Worship committee 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	20	21	22 12 pm Spire deadline	23 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm FCA 6:30 pm Trivia at Knuth's	24 9:30 am Coffee at Mugs 4 pm wedding rehearsal	25 4 pm wedding in Sanctuary
26 9:00 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	27	28 5:30 pm Community Dinner	29	30 6 pm NA meeting	May 1 9:30 am Coffee	2

Future Events:
 May 10 - Children & Youth Sunday
 May 24 - Last day of Sunday School
 June 7 - Summer worship begins 9:30 am

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

