



# The SPIRE



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

## January/February 2025

*“I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.” —Psalm 89:1, NRSV*

“We live inside an unfinished story, a story that began with the Spirit of God hovering over the primordial waters at the beginning of time and which took a dramatic, climactic turn two thousand years ago when that same God became human, lived among us, and beat death once and for all. We share this story with Mary Magdalene and the apostle Paul. We share it with Saint Augustine and Julian of Norwich, Desmond Tutu and Leymah Gbowee. We share it with the pastor who runs the soup kitchen out of the church basement and with the first guy in line to eat there each week. The stories we tell with our lives, then, aren’t meaningless absurdities, tragic in their brevity, but rather subplots of a grander narrative, every moment charged with significance, as we contribute our own riffs, soliloquies, and plot twists to the larger epic, the Holy Spirit coaxing us along with an ever-ebullient, “And then? And then? And then?”

From “Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again,” by Rachel Held Evans (1981-2019), p 217.

This is my last letter to you, my community at First Congregational Church of Ripon.

I have accepted a full-time Chaplain position with The-daCare, which begins late February. My last Sunday as Pastor of First Congregational Church will be February 16, 2025. Our family will remain in Ripon where we have made a wonderful home and our kids have built



incredible friendships. I look forward to new ministry opportunities in Chaplaincy, and yet at the same time feel bittersweet in saying goodbye to First Congregational Church, which has been so much a part of my life and my family’s lives over the last five and a half years, and where we have made lasting friendships and so many good memories.

And so I write to you one last time.

But this is not the last time you will receive a letter from a pastor, a theologian, a preacher or teacher of the church. Because your story is not done yet.

There are so many things I wish to write to you about, and too many things I feel I could say about our

life and ministry together these past few years.

But the most important thing I need to say is “thank you.” You are a congregation that matters to this community, and you have done and will do great things. You leave me inspired by what you say and what you do.

You matter because of the extravagant way you welcomed me and my family to Ripon on a hot summer afternoon on July 14, 2019. You brought food and (cold!) drinks, and more than enough help to move an entire household of belongings into our new home in less than an hour.

You matter because you welcomed the community into our church, for the Ripon College Center for Diversity and Inclusion, Choral Union Choir, Campus Ministry, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Ripon Area Community Theatre, ADVOCAP, Girl Scouts, Narcotics Anonymous, Kiwanis, PEO, Rotary STRIVE Program, Crossroads Academy and the new Hillside Academy

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**Prayers...**

For Health & Healing: **Lyle Mathias** (hip surgery); **Jack Christ** (broken foot); **Kaitlyn Edwards** (knee surgery); **Amanda Edwards** (elbow surgery); **Preston Osteen** (cancer); **Barb Splittgaber** (hospitalization, knee replacement); **Lavonne Butler** (health); **Audrey Conant** (strength, healing); **Kih Bergin** (health); **Wendy Smith's** daughter, **Hannah** (respiratory infection, melanoma); **Michele Wittler** (health); **Katie Del Ponte's** cousin and **Tony Reilly's** niece **Jessica** (cancer); all who are experiencing health issues and are in need of prayer; all who are undergoing medical tests and awaiting results.

**Concerns...**

For the **Solberg** family who hit a deer in early November and needed to replace their vehicle; the election; for **Barb Splittgaber** who underwent a knee replacement and then was back in the hospital for unrelated serious health issues; for the conclusion of **Pastor Jeffrey's Ministry**; **New Year's** violence around the world and in New Orleans; for **children and teachers** and getting them the support they need; **wildfires** in southern California.

**Joys...**

For the ministry of **Ashley Dodson** with our children, youth, and families; the Christmas music in worship from **Stephanie Prellwitz, Maria & Kurt Dietrich, Katie Grady, Erik Dietrich, Nick Retzlaff, Sarah Joy Solberg, Tammi Kenton, Tim Lyke, Tony Reilly, Jessica Jensen, Paul Dietrich, Grace Retzlaff, Chris Lyke, and Mike Boscaljon**; For a Christmas gathering with church member **Audrey Conant** and other church members on December 3 at Markesan Resident Home (We invite you to send notes/cards to Audrey Conant, c/o Markesan Resident Home, 1130 N Margaret St, Markesan, WI 53946); for **Tim Lyke** filling in for **Al Sturgeon** on December 29, as Al was unable to lead worship last-minute; **Julie Mathias** for organizing this year's Christmas decorations, and for all the volunteers who helped put up and take down the church decorations.

# 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.



## Prayer Requests

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



## Spire Deadline

Our next Spire newsletter will be for March/April, 2025. The deadline for submissions is Wednesday, February 12, at noon. Please submit materials to the church office, or email to Maria Dietrich at dietrich.maria@gmail.com.



- Pastor *Jeffrey Dodson*
- Christian Education *Ashley Dodson*
- Moderator . . . . . *Penny Allard*
- Vice-Moderator. . . *Jeanne Williams*
- Clerk . . . . . *Justus Paul*
- Treasurer . . . . . *Andy Lyke*
- Choir Director . . . . *Kurt Dietrich*
- Faith Formation . . . . *Ruth Retzlaff*
- Finance. . . . . *Tim Lyke*
- Historian . . . . . *Robin Patzlaff*
- Maintenance Officer *Gary Scholtens*
- Membership. . . . . *Bev Christ*
- Nominating. . . *J. Christ, T. Konecny*
- Organist. . . . . *Maria Dietrich*
- Outreach . . . . . *Dawn Scholtens*
- PPRC . . . . . *Jeanne Williams*
- Women's Fellowship *Susan Osteen*
- Worship . . . . . *Kathleen Hones*

## Church Contact Info

Director of Administration & Communications: **Kaitlyn Boscaljon**: 920-748-5898 or office@riponcongregationalucc.org  
If not in the office, Pastor Jeffrey Dodson can be reached at ... jeffrey@riponcongregationalucc.org  
If you need to contact church custodians Rod & Peggy Freeman (or anyone else) please utilize the private church directory.

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from the Ripon Area School District, Wisconsin Conference UCC Historical Committee, and for opening the sanctuary to the Green Lake Festival of Music, the Ripon High School Baccalaureate service in 2024, and the annual Ripon College Baccalaureate services, greeting and worshipping together with faith communities different from our own.

You matter because you built a downtown playground in our church backyard allowing neighborhood families and children from the Boys and Girls Club a safe place to play.

You matter because of the hospitality shown to the LGBTQ community, for becoming the 1,587th Open and Affirming church in the United Church of Christ in 2019, for all you do to support the high school Social Justice Alliance (SJA), for being a founding member of the Ripon Area LGBTQ Pride Rally, for offering sanctuary to the Ripon College Queer-Straight Alliance (QSA), and for your commitment to make all people are respected in our community.

You matter to an incredible number of children and youth, who learned compassion and justice from you through Sunday School lessons, events and retreats, and who had the privilege of leading a worship service each fall.

You matter to the Northeast Association of the Wisconsin Conference UCC, modeling for our sister churches the way we can advocate for justice, thrive in a rural oriented community, and seek to better our community through engagement and action.

You matter because you said “yes” to feeding the hungry through a simple Community Dinner each month, pivoting when COVID required us to get creative, and modeling how to do this ministry with our fellow area churches year after year. You helped bring together 4 other churches to consistently provide 1 free dinner each week for people in need of food and fellowship.

You matter because of the ways in which you show up in our community and side with the oppressed and marginalized, such as attending the Black Lives Matter rally downtown in 2020, joining in a car caravan with handwritten signs to visit members of our church during COVID in a drive-by “We Care” event, helping the homeless, knitting prayer shawls and baby hats, plant-

ing a pollinator/native garden on church grounds, writing to the editor of the Ripon Commonwealth about social issues and matters of our community to promote positive change, and attending the Ripon Pride Rallies year after year proclaiming God’s love for all people.

These are a few of the stories I take with me. They are the stories I will remember you by. And there are MORE stories just like these that you know and by which you will remember our ministry together.

We are a church made up of stories. No singular story defines our congregation, but all of our stories reflect the magnificent love of God.

I take my leave, inspired by the good I have seen in each of you, inspired by the love you share with one another and this community, and inspired by your willingness to let the Holy Spirit gather you and toss you and set you free upon the world. I am inspired by this faith community.

So, go, and be all that God has called you to be.

Love one another.

Love God.

Walk with Jesus Christ.

Trust the Holy Spirit.

Tell people they matter.

Go to marches and rallies.

Keep raising the rainbow above our doors.

Sing in the church, and on the streets.

Tell people that love wins.

Laugh at our mistakes.

Share your tears and your joys.

Leave the light on for the stranger.

Read good theology AND embody good theology.

Be a people of resurrection.

Be of one heart, one mind, one spirit with one another.

Be the church.

May we inspire love and justice all our days. Let that be our story.

You inspire me. Thank you,



Rev. Jeffrey



## ***Called to Care Team***

Volunteer to visit at-home church members, those in the hospital, or church members in need of community and connection. We will meet monthly to discuss care plans and visits. This NEW Ministry Team is open to any new volunteers. Join us on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 9 a.m. - Pastor Jeffrey



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



## **Winter Worship at First Congregational Church**

**United in Christ's Love, A Just World for All**

**Sundays: 9:00 am Faith Formation**

**10:30 am Worship in-person (4 pm online) • 11:30 am Fellowship Hour**

### **Sunday, January 5 | Communion and Epiphany Sunday**

10:30 am Worship IN-PERSON | 4:00 pm Worship ONLINE

### **Sunday, January 12 | Baptism of Christ Sunday**

10:30 am Worship IN-PERSON | 4:00 pm Worship ONLINE

### **Sunday, January 19 | MLK Sunday**

10:30 am Worship IN-PERSON | 4:00 pm Worship ONLINE

### **Sunday, January 26 | Annual Meeting of the Congregation**

10:30 am Worship IN-PERSON | 4:00 pm Worship ONLINE

### **Sunday, February 2 | Communion Sunday**

10:30 am Worship IN-PERSON | 4:00 pm Worship ONLINE

### **Sunday, February 9 | Souper Bowl of Caring and Annual Chili Cook-Off**

10:30 am Worship IN-PERSON | 4:00 pm Worship ONLINE

### **Sunday, February 16 | Rev. Jeffrey Dodson & Ashley Dodson's last Sunday**

10:30 am Worship IN-PERSON | 4:00 pm Worship ONLINE

### **Sunday, February 23 | Seventh Sunday after Epiphany**

10:30 am Worship IN-PERSON | 4:00 pm Worship ONLINE

### **Sunday, March 2 | Communion and Eighth Sunday after Epiphany**

10:30 am Worship IN-PERSON | 4:00 pm Worship ONLINE

### **Tuesday, March 4 | Mardi Gras; Pancake Supper TBD**

10:30 am Worship IN-PERSON | 4:00 pm Worship ONLINE

### **Wednesday, March 5 | Ash Wednesday**

Service and Ashes Distribution TBD





## Help Stock the Pantry

During the months of November and December, the food pantry would appreciate your donations of canned soups and boxed meals. 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

...To the family of **Mamie Butters**. Mamie died on November 12, 2024. Mamie's children, **Mary Hilbert** (Kevin) and **Randy Butters** (Laurie) appreciated the kindness and prayers of the congregation. A Celebration of Life was held on Monday, November 19.



...To **Katie Del Ponte**, at the passing of her family's Great Aunt Sharon to cancer in December.

...To **Justus Paul** and **Lynn Grout-Paul**, at the passing of Justus' adult son **Justus "Jay" F. Paul**, who died on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2024. Please hold Justus and the family in your prayers.



## Coffee Fellowship

Friday Coffee Fellowship takes place at 9:30 AM at Mugs Coffee Shop. We hope you'll join us!





## *Shawl Ministry Caps*

The Shawl Ministry team has chosen as its next project, making simple winter hats to put in our giving box for anyone who needs a little extra warmth during the cold and dark months of our Wisconsin winter.

During WWII those at home supported the war effort, in part, by knitting socks, hats, and mittens for soldiers, refugees, and medical staff. A classic pattern was Beanie No. 212, a watch cap knit in a simple stitch pattern (see image) with a folded edge for extra warmth. The basic pattern can be knit using a circular needle and worsted weight yarn. Simple decreases make a star pattern in the crown of the hat. Once you know the basic pattern, you can make variations with different stitch patterns, cables, stripes, etc.

Simple decreases make a star pattern in the crown of the hat. Once you know the basic pattern, you can make variations with different stitch patterns, cables, stripes, etc.

We meet on Wednesday mornings at 9:30 AM in the chapel for tea, conversation, and knitting, but all are welcome to participate in this project whether they attend those meetings or not. Copies of the pattern are available here, and along with lots of donated yarn, in the chapel for anyone who wants to participate in this project. We will also have plastic bags and tags for finished hats with these supplies. If you are feeling a need to do something to make the world a warmer place, this project may be just what you need.

If you prefer to crochet, here is a pattern for you.

Look for an announcement of a coffee-hour session to learn how to make these hats.

Questions: Contact Jeanne Williams

## *Hopes great and small*

“The Christian lives with three hopes, two great and one small,” writes Bryan Wolfmuller. In his “Wednesday What-Not” blog, the pastor explains: “Our first great hope is in Christ our Redeemer, whose death and resurrection are our forgiveness, life, salvation and great hope. Our second great hope is in Christ the King returning soon to judge the living [and] the dead, and establish the new heaven and earth where the righteous dwell. This is our hope for the resurrection and the life of the world to come.”

Amazingly, there’s more! “Sandwiched between these two great hopes is our small hope, our lesser hope, our hope for tomorrow, our hope that we might begin to love and serve our neighbor, and do some little something to bless the people around us,” Wolfmuller continues. “This is the hope that energizes our vocations, that motivates our love, and that is the reason we make New Year’s resolutions. We hope that we might do something a little bit better tomorrow than we did yesterday.”

The pastor concludes, “If this was our only hope, it would be despair. But sandwiched between the love of Christ and the joy of the resurrection, this little hope is wonderful, and certainly not to be despised.”



## *The Chapter and Verse Book Group*

Who We Are - We are a group of First Congregational Church of Ripon members who like to read and talk about books that inspire us, challenge us, entertain us, and shed light on issues that we care about as progressive Christians--equality, fairness, love for self and neighbor, and the pursuit of lasting peace in our communities, countries, and the world. Our book choices are mostly fiction, represent a variety of cultural perspectives and historical periods, and are written by contemporary authors. Come if you have read the whole book, part of the book, or if you are curious about the book and want to hear others talk about it.

When We Meet - We meet on the third Wednesday of each month at 7 PM at members homes. All are welcome! The person hosting the group will lead the discussion and provide light snacks and beverages.

What we are Reading - Each month, we choose a new book to add to our schedule. Below is a list of books we will be reading and discussing.

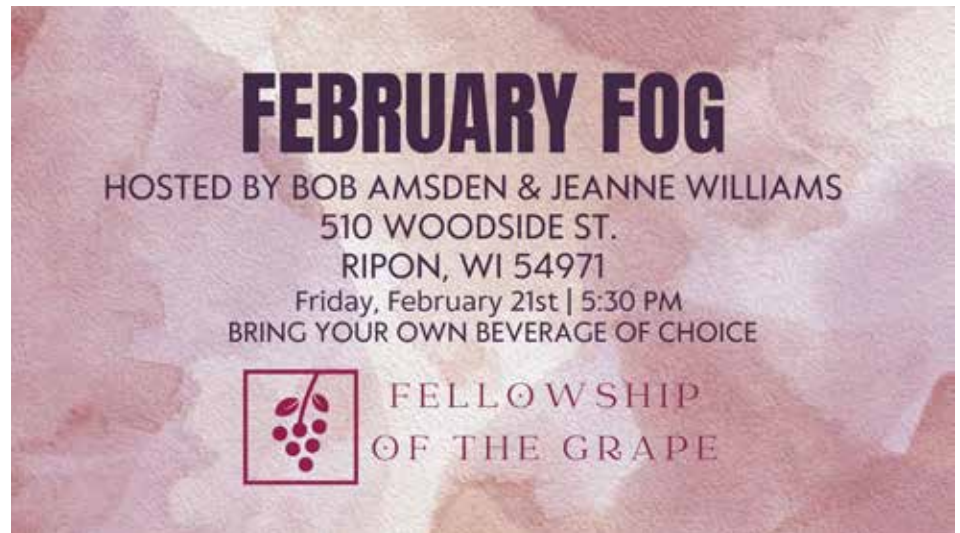
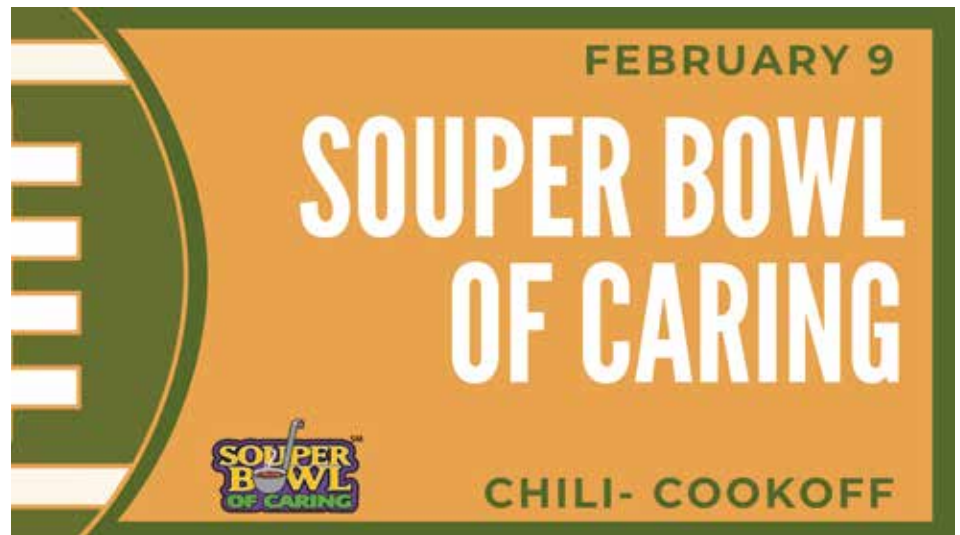
January 2025 - Fresh Water for Flowers by Valerie Perrin

An eccentric young caretaker brings exuberant life to a small town French cemetery in this #1 international bestselling novel: "Enchanting" (Publishers Weekly). (Jan. 15 at home of Maria Dietrich)

February 2025 - Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver

"May be the best novel of [the year]. . . . Equal parts hilarious and heartbreaking, this is the story of an irrepressible boy nobody wants, but readers will love." —Ron Charles, Washington Post (Feb. 19 at Jeanne Williams')

## *February Activities*







# Poinsettia & Wreath Donors



**Thank You to all who donated poinsettias and wreaths to beautify our sanctuary this Christmas!**

**Poinsettias Given in Honor of:**

- Our loves ones given by The Retzlaff Family (2)
- Our children: Jamie, Benjamin, Kirsten, Wilder and Piper given by Amanda and Kaitlyn Edwards (2)
- Our family given by Tom & Debbi Konecny
- The Hones children given by Kathleen Hones
- The First Congregational Church 175th Anniversary given by LaVonne and David Butler (2)
- Don & Helen Christ given by Jack and Bev Christ
- Frank & Marilyn Shepard given by Jack and Bev Christ

**Poinsettias Given in Memory of:**

- Carrie Stein Bartik given by Julie and Lyle Mathias
- Wayne Larson given by Michele and Skip Wittler
- Nellie and Walter Baran given by Michele and Skip Wittler
- George and Margaret Wittler given by Michele and Skip Wittler
- Nancy Livingston & Muriel Keipe given by Michele and Skip Wittler
- Schwemmer and McHale family members given by Bruce and Meg Schwemmer
- Doug & Audrey Lyke, Murray & Carla McNair given by Tim and Mary Lyke

**Advent Christmas Wreaths** given by Lyle and Jule Mathias in memory of their parents Claire and Kathaleen Mathias and Skip and Nancy Stein.

## Worship Participation Schedule

Date	Lector	Ushers/Greeters	Tech Booth	Coffee Fellowship Hosts
Jan. 5	Ashkey Dodson	Eleanor, Frances, Ainslie Dodson	Gary Scholtens	Edwards, Flasch families
Jan. 12	Sarah Seidler-Halwas	Tony Reilly & Scott Henke	Tim Lyke	Dodson and Grout-Paul
Jan. 19	Janis Edwards	Jeanne Williams, Deanna Boone	Sarah Seidler-Halwas	Christ and Minch
Jan. 26	Amber Dalziel	Gary & Dawn Scholtens	Daniel Volkmann	Smith and Schwemmer
Feb. 2	Gary Scholtens	NEED VOLUNTEER	Tim Lyke	Nelson/Harper, R. Retzlaff
Feb. 9	Janet Vossekuil	Mary & Tim Lyke	Erik Dietrich	K&M Dietrich, Amber Dalziel
Feb. 16	Bev Christ	Confirmation Class	Mike Boscaljon	Williams, Christ families
Feb. 23	Bryce Aul	Kaitlyn & Amanda Edwards	Gary Scholtens	Prellwitz/NEED VOLUNTEER




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!

*Thanks*  
for your participation



# JAN/FEB 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>29</b> 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>January 1</b> Happy New Year!	<b>2</b> 6 pm NA meeting	<b>3</b> 9:30 am Coffee at Mugs	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b> 9 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour 11:45 am Faith Form. mtg.	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b> 9:30 Prayer Shawls	<b>9</b> 6 pm NA meeting	<b>10</b> 9:30 am Coffee at Mugs.	<b>11</b>
<b>12</b> 9 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour 11:45 Outreach, Worship mtgs	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> 6:30 pm Cabinet	<b>15</b> 9:30 Prayer Shawls 7 pm Book group	<b>16</b> 8:30 am Church Staff meeting 6 pm NA meeting	<b>17</b> 9:30 am Coffee at Mugs	<b>18</b>
<b>19</b> 9 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	<b>20</b> 	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b> 9 am 175th Anniv mtg 9:30 Prayer Shawls	<b>23</b> 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA)	<b>24</b> 9:30 am Coffee at Mugs	<b>25</b>
<b>26</b> 9 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Annual Meeting and Fellowship Hour	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b> 5:30 pm Community Dinner	<b>29</b> 9 Called to Care mtg 9:30 Prayer Shawls 4:15 pm Ripon College 3CM gathering	<b>30</b> 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA)	<b>31</b> 9:30 am Coffee at Mugs	<b>February 1</b>
<b>2</b> 9 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> 9:30 Prayer Shawls 4:15 pm Ripon College 3CM gathering	<b>6</b> 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm FCA)	<b>7</b> 9:30 am Coffee at Mugs	<b>8</b>
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<b>16</b> 9 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	<b>17</b> 	<b>18</b> 6:30 pm Cabinet	<b>19</b> 9:30 Prayer Shawls 12 pm Spire deadline 7 pm Book group	<b>20</b> 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm FCA	<b>21</b> 9:30 am Coffee at Mugs	<b>22</b>
<b>23</b> 9 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> 5:30 pm Community Dinner	<b>26</b> 9:30 Prayer Shawls 12 pm Community Blood Drive	<b>27</b> 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm FCA	<b>28</b> 9:30 am Coffee at Mugs	<b>March 1</b>
<b>2</b> 10:30 am Worship (4 pm online) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> 6 pm NA meeting 6:30 pm FCA	<b>7</b> 9:30 am Coffee at Mugs	<b>8</b>

**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***

