

First Congregational United Church of Christ - Rhinelander — February 2026

Have you ever wondered why there is an extra “r” in February?

For as long as I can remember, whenever I spell it out I have to intentionally sound it out in my head: *Feb-ru-ar-y* — instead of how I normally say it out loud, *Feb-yoo-air-ee*. It just doesn't come naturally. The quick explanation is that the word comes from the Latin *Februarius*, made its way through French, and eventually into English. Somewhere along the way, our pronunciation softened to avoid having two “r’s” too close together, while the spelling stayed loyal to its Latin roots.

And now? It's just how it is. We deal with it. This makes me wonder — maybe a silly question — do you have any extra “r’s” in your life?

Not literal letters, of course, but things that tagged along with you somewhere along the way. Habits, patterns, or possessions that just sort of... stayed. Clothes hanging in the closet that you never wear. Routines you follow without remembering why. Grudges that have been quietly taking up space for years. Ways of thinking, reacting, or holding back that once served a purpose but may not anymore.

Extra “r’s” are often hard to identify. They've simply become part of us. No thought required. No conscious decision. They just are.

Our recent move to Wisconsin has helped uncover some of my own extra “r’s.” Boxes that are literally unpacked sit in our basement! My goal was to load up and move across the country - I did not have energy to pause, notice each item, consider, and then decide to pack or get rid of.

February is a good month for this kind of reflection. It's short. Quiet. Often cold and stripped down. It doesn't shout for attention like December or promise fresh starts like January. February simply invites us to notice — to pause and ask what we're carrying and why.

As we move through this month, perhaps it's worth asking ourselves: What are the extra “r’s” in my life right now? What habits, assumptions, grudges, or burdens have come along for the ride? And which of them might God be gently inviting me to loosen my grip on? Not everything needs to be fixed or discarded. Some things are worth keeping. But paying attention is a faithful place to begin.

After all, February still works just fine — extra “r” and all. And so do we.

- Submitted by Tim Grade

BOARD OF TRUSTEES FINANCIAL CORNER

The Board of Trustees met on January 12, 2026 to bring us up to date on the financial working of the church. We are pleased that our Schwab Investment account continues to show accumulating dividends. Because we have been able to complete 2025 without drawing any funds from our investment account, the dividends have accumulated making the balance in that fund \$709,161.00 at the end of the year. We will continue to monitor the investments in this account during the coming months. As of December 31 our income year to date for our general fund is \$145,415.54. Our budgeted annual income is \$133,775.00. Our expenses are as expected at this point in the year. As always, we are now monitoring our income and expenditures. At our meeting, we worked on finalizing our proposed budget for 2026, incorporating some of the initiatives that Tim and Susie are working on. We will report on the progress on all of these initiatives as well as other budgeted projects during 2026. If you have not submitted your pledge card and plan to do so, we ask that you bring it or mail it to the church office as soon as possible so that we can better determine our anticipated income for 2026. If you are unable to submit a pledge at this time, that is fine. We know that you will support the work of the church with whatever you are able during the coming year. We are sincerely grateful for all pledged and non-pledged income, and will endeavor to use it wisely. As always, we are planning funding sources on various projects, and will let you know how you can help.

| | Dec. 2025 | Jan-Dec. 2025 | Budget 2025 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| Income | \$ 27,111.00 | \$144,971.00 | \$133,775.00 |
| Expenses | | | |
| Ministerial | \$7,783.06 | \$57,626.11 | \$63,086.00 |
| Temporary | \$58.99 | \$4,632.76 | \$9,500.00 |
| Staff | \$3,289.94 | \$35,357.02 | \$35,640.00 |
| Music | \$487.00 | \$1,198.37 | \$200.00 |
| Education | \$0.00 | \$0.00 | \$800.00 |
| Mission | \$1,166.63 | \$15,000.00 | \$15,000.00 |
| Maintenance | \$3,272.41 | \$42,760.72 | \$51,300.00 |
| Office | \$1,750.41 | \$10,673.21 | \$12,300.00 |
| Boards | \$.00 | \$3,732.37 | \$6,900.00 |
| Total Expenses | \$17,808.44 | \$176,980.58 | \$194,726.00 |

Your Board of Trustees:
Dave Havel, Investments
Pat Juday, Secretary
and Stewardship
Jane McEldowney, Stewardship
Tom Winquist, Chair

February Birthdays:

| | |
|------------------|-------|
| Vera Finses | 02/11 |
| Larry Frasier | 02/15 |
| Nancy Frasier | 02/18 |
| William McKenzie | 02/24 |



Contact Information:

Mailing Address: 135 E Larch Street,

Rhineland, WI 54501

Church Office Hours: Tuesday thru Friday, 8 a.m. to Noon

Call Us: 715-365-1535

Prayer Chain: 715-360-5306

Visit Us Online: rhinelandrucc.org

E-mail Us: rhiucc@newnorth.net



February Lay Readers:

| | |
|-------|-------------|
| 02/01 | Beth Studer |
| 02/08 | Mary Dork |
| 02/15 | Beth Studer |
| 02/22 | |

Thank you
VOLUNTEERS!

February Greeters:

| | |
|-------|--------------------------------------|
| 02/01 | Cherie Gilmeister |
| 02/08 | Jackson Hoffein |
| 02/15 | Larry McKitrick & Todd McEldowney |
| 02/22 | Jackie Schmeider & Everlie Jahn |

CREATION CARE CORNER

Last week I attended a Zoom meeting sponsored by Faith In Place. The speaker was Dr. Steve Vavrus, the Wisconsin state climatologist. (I didn't know we had one.) He reviewed facts that we have previously discussed in this space and made clear statements of other facts and their implications for the future. I will list some of them here:



- 2025 statistics are not available yet
- 2024 was the worst year on record since recording began in the mid-1800s
- Nearly the entire world is well above average temperatures
- Starting in the 1970's, steep rise in temps world-wide has occurred
- 2 years in a row have been above the 1.5 C marker for severe climate effects
- 425 ppm atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) is measured at Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii
- 3 main effects of this are: 1) more extreme heat, 2) Stronger storms, 3) Higher sea level
- Heat is the deadliest killer of people, mainly affecting the tropics
- In the 2010's, Wisconsin had 21 rainfalls only expected once every 100 years
- Since 1880, global sea level rose 10 inches, with a 3 foot total rise expected
- Most people in the world live along coastlines, where "tidal flooding" now occurs
- Populations least responsible for climate change suffer the highest consequences
- Americans emit 6 times the global average of CO₂
- Africa & India suffer the most consequences
- Pacific island countries are disappearing
- In the Milwaukee heatwave of July 2022, the central city was the hottest, and also where people are most vulnerable due to poverty
- Federal funding cuts have made some climate data unavailable

We have the ability to react to these changes:

- Renewable energy prices have dropped 55-72% since 2014
- Renewable energy has now surpassed coal for generation of electricity
- Heat wave action plans are now in place in large cities, with early forecasting, cooling centers, and protecting workers from the heat
- 1995 Chicago heat wave- 739 deaths; 2012 Chicago heat wave- 18 deaths

Again, remember when you vote to vote for the health of the climate and all of God's creation.

-Sandy McKittrick

Minutes
Executive Council
December 18, 2025

1. Call to Order and Opening Prayer

Meeting was called to order at 3:31 p.m. by moderator Sandy.

Present: Carla Chropkowski, Cecily Dawson, Tim Grade, Sandy McKitrick, Tom Peterson, Gale Willcox, Tom Winquist

Prayer was offered by Tim.

2. Agenda Additions/Changes

None

3. Approval of November Meeting Minutes

Corrected to include two missing points under Old Business. Moved by Tom W., seconded by Cecily, to accept the minutes of November 20 as corrected; motion carried.

4. Pastors' Reports

Sound system has been cleaned up by the company that installed it. List of needed equipment upgrades remains. Troublesome internet issues were also addressed and cleaned up. Cecily suggested we check our current system for the hearing impaired, as the new system is for hearing aids only. Christmas Eve will be a big night. Deepen is now finished but may start up again in the future. Kids' ministry is up and running. Word of the year for 2026 is *bridge*, defining the work of reconnecting, training, and supporting our members in moving from one way of functioning to another, creating a new culture.

5. Board Reports

a. Spiritual Life

December 28 service will be a carol sing. On Friday, December 12, Sue and Carla delivered poinsettias to the homebound.

b. Building and Grounds

Still waiting on installation of backup battery, which was in the quote and should have been installed originally. Leaking flush handle in men's room has been repaired. Bazaar was successful, netting approximately \$3,200, which amount is made available to Tim for installation of chancel railings. Gary and Heidi will continue to maintain landscaping next year, except for tree trimming. Easement request by WPS is pending and we may be able to obtain some things in exchange for granting them easement. Possible installation of pay-to-use charging station for electric cars. Tom P. and Gale would like to step down as chair and secretary, respectively, but remain on the board.

c. Trustees

Investment account again showed a healthy gain. Questionable items charged to Music Supply budget are being investigated. Pledges to date for 2026 total \$70,596. Proposed Policies and Procedures will be discussed at January meeting. \$2,500 has been received from Gail Cholowski estate.

d. Outreach

Lisa Johnson is doing well but does not want to remain on the board. Jackie and Amanda will continue on the board only if we get "a lot more people" on it. Gale has expressed interest. Carla will chair and spoke passionately about areas in which she's interested. Tom W. reminded that John Stein must be asked to write a check to NATH for \$1,000, as he does not do so automatically. Sandy reminded that events planned by Outreach should be publicized to the community.

6. Old Business

a. Policies and Procedures - Building and Grounds vote

After discussion of handling of recurrent requests for use of our facilities (for-profit ventures may total no more than 10% of total budget), it was moved by Tom W. and seconded by Cecily to approve the restated Policies and Procedures of the Building and Grounds Board. Motion carried.

b. Personnel Committee Report

Sandy read aloud the report, which suggests oversight of time sheets for office manager and custodians be given to Tim and Susie. Discussion of short hold-back period after the end of the pay period before payroll checks are issued.

c. Financial Secretary and Executive Secretary duties

No discussion

d. Congregational Meeting January 25 - Annual reports due in office Friday, January 9

7. New Business

a. Publishing Executive Council Minutes to Congregation

Moved by Cecily, seconded by Carla, that beginning immediately Executive Council minutes, once approved, be included in the monthly newsletter to members. Motion carried.

b. Cecily - Positions to fill for 2026

Cecily passed out a chart of officer, board, and committee positions, listing current volunteers and nominees for 2026. John Stein will serve through April, 2026. Cecily stated her willingness to serve as treasurer beginning in 2027.

8. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 5:02 p.m.

Next meeting January 22, 2026, 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Gale Willcox

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|--|--|---|---|---|--|
| <p>1 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm BRUNCH</p> | <p>2 4:00pm –6:00pm Warm for Winter Distribution</p> | <p>3 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Choraliars Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)</p> | <p>4 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir</p> | <p>5 1:00pm –3:00pm P.E.O. (Dean Theatre) 4:00pm –5:15pm Northern Arts Council (Conference Room)</p> | <p>6</p> | <p>7</p> |
| <p>8 Youth Fancy McDonalds (Dress up & dine out at McDonalds together!) 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm Fellowship Time/Coffee Hour (dependent on volunteer availability)</p> | <p>9 4:00pm –6:00pm Warm for Winter Distribution</p> | <p>10 10:00am –11:00am Spiritual Life Board 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 1:00pm –2:00pm Trustees (Conference Room) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Choraliars Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)</p> | <p>11 9:30am –10:30am Building and Grounds 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir</p> | <p>12 1:00pm –3:00pm P.E.O. (Dean Theatre) 4:00pm –5:15pm Northern Arts Council (Conference Room)</p> | <p>13</p> | <p>14</p> |
| <p>15 Transfiguration 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm BRUNCH 3:00pm –6:00pm 4-H Positive Youth Development (Fellowship Hall)</p> | <p>16</p> | <p>17 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Choraliars Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)</p> | <p>18 Ash Wednesday will be HERE 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir</p> | <p>19 1:00pm –2:30pm Non-Fishin' Book Club (Lounge)</p> | <p>20 Newsletter Article Deadline</p> | <p>21</p> |
| <p>22 First Sunday in Lent 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm Fellowship Time/Coffee Hour (dependent on volunteer availability) 11:00am –12:00pm 'Townhall Listening Post' after Worship (Lounge)</p> | <p>23</p> | <p>24 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Choraliars Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)</p> | <p>25 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir</p> | <p>26 1:00pm –2:30pm Book Bags Book Club (Lounge) 3:30pm –4:30pm Executive Council</p> | <p>27</p> | <p>28 9:30am –11:30am Warm for Winter Distribution</p> |