

Waymarks

Plymouth Church | Helena Montana

April 2023

Homelessness in Helena

As many of you know, our Outreach and Social Justice Committee is urging us, as a congregation, to address homelessness in Helena. To that end, we have joined forces with The United Way in forming a coalition of government agencies, non-profit groups, and faith communities to discuss the issues regarding homelessness, talk about past efforts, and work towards bringing our unsheltered neighbors off the streets and into housing, so that they can be safe, fed, and live with dignity. My main focus is to coordinate communication efforts between the faith communities and the other organizations involved in this effort, so that we can share information with each other and with the wider community about what is going on and the importance of what we're doing. My goal is to lower barriers and get buy-in from our community for what we are trying to do, because without that, none of this can happen.

I stumbled across a video about how Portland, Oregon may have “solved” homelessness in their city, so watched it, hoping to gather some insight that might help us with our endeavors. The video mostly consisted of the person driving around, with the camera showing the street view of downtown Portland. The longer I watched it, the more dismayed I became at the videographer's point of view. They kept referencing laws that were not strict enough, which gave rise to tent cities, and how people living on the streets were making it difficult for businesses to operate there. Lack of police enforcement was also cited as a problem, as large arrows in the video pointed at tents on the sidewalk, people sleeping on the ground, and vehicles where it was apparent people were living.

The tone of the video was that homelessness itself was the problem, and that the solution was to get rid of homeless people. There was no compassion for the plight of our unsheltered neighbors, no suggestion that we needed to take care of them and make their lives better, no acknowledgement that homelessness is merely a symptom of a broken society, and not the problem itself.



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I don't want to come down too harshly on this person; it seemed to be coming mostly from a place of ignorance rather than maliciousness, but it highlighted the necessity of critical thinking as we endeavor to do any kind of advocacy. We need to remember why we're doing what we're doing, and what the ultimate goal is.

Our goal is not to get rid of homeless people; it's to get our unsheltered neighbors into secure housing. Our goal is not to remove an eyesore; it's to make sure that our neighbors have enough food to eat and access to medical care. Our goal is not to create a more comfortable place for us to shop and work; it's to be representatives of God's love, and make sure that everyone is included in God's family.

If we do not go into this with the right intention, we risk harming those we claim that we want to help. As we continue walking down this path of helping our unsheltered neighbors, let us remember why we are doing it, so that we can do it with integrity, honesty, and love.

~ Rev. Charles Wei



In Our Prayers Today

At Home: Giles Walker, Margy Kohl, Gus and Brenda Byrom, Greg Bolin, and Nathan Schreder as they go through cancer treatment. Loraine Hopgood, for continued recovery.

Touchmark: Evelyn Nelson, and Art and Clara Gilreath;

Hunter's Point: Marlyce Taylor; Jim and Doris Powell.

Edgewood: Ed Canty

Special Request: For Floyd Piedalue and his wife who are struggling with financial hardship. They ask for the strengthening of their faith and grace during this difficult time. They also need a vehicle or an affordable mechanic.

Prayers for us and the families of Jay Shelden, Kay Burkhardt, and the victims of the shooting in Nashville, as we mourn the loss of our loved ones.

To add someone to the prayer list, please call the church office at 442-9883 or email pccof-ficemgr@gmail.com.

Creation Care Tips

EARTH DAY

This year, Earth Day falls on Saturday, April 22. How are you going to celebrate? Here are some ideas that might help you think about your connection to our planet:

- ◆ Pick up some litter from the street or park.
- ◆ Walk or bike somewhere instead of driving.
- ◆ Go for a hike.
- ◆ Have a vegan meal.
- ◆ Watch a nature documentary.

There are lots of things you can do to celebrate Earth Day! Remember, God made this beautiful planet for us to live on, so we should respect it, and treat it with care.

~ Rev Charles Wei



Outreach and Social Justice: Creating Partnerships

Welcome Bruce Day—On Sunday April 23 Bruce Day, Executive Director of Helena Food Share, will present a mission moment during worship and join us for a Fireside Chat during the Fellowship Hour.

One in seven residents of Helena struggles with hunger. One in five Helena children don't know where their next meal is coming from. Helena Food Share was founded in 1987 to help provide emergency food to our neighbors who face hunger. Families come to the pantry because they are facing difficult times. For many years, Plymouth has collected and delivered packaged food, most particularly cereal, and has made financial donations to Food Share. We look forward to hearing from Bruce about a newer and bigger facility that will be built in the coming months.

Thank you Greg Bolin—While the Michelsons have been away on vacation, Greg Bolin has graciously, beautifully and expertly provided music, and led the choir during worship. Greg recently returned to Helena, where we are truly blessed to have benefit of his training and musical accomplishments. Thank you, Greg, for lending us your talent.



To Peggy Coggeshall—Peggy loaned us a collection of her hand-drawn, pen and ink art for the Fireside Room during March. It's hard to believe that this is her first exhibit, as we have known and appreciated Peggy's artistic capacity at Plymouth for many years. She not only had a hand in children's ministry, camp art classes, and Easter activities, she welcomes the chance to teach adults who are interested in learning more. Talk to Peggy if you are curious.

To Liz Gundersen—During the month of March, Liz delivered fruit to Tamarack House, our neighbors to the west, on behalf of Plymouth Church.

To Brenda Senne—Brenda will bring fruit to Tamarack House during April. We are delighted to hear that you all have had a wonderful experience getting to know our neighbors and being able to deliver a small measure of our care and concern. From Ed and Mary Barrett, Patti Burke, Suzanne Nybo, and Lynn Bolin we hear nothing but positive feedback about this "Empty Stocking" campaign, the Christmas that keeps giving-natured attitude regarding great causes that need a little help.

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To Ed and Mary Barrett—Thank you, Ed and Mary, for helping prepare and serve the “Clergy Advocates” luncheon, Thursday, March 30. Can’t say enough about your good-natured attitude regarding great causes that need a little help.

**Thank
YOU!**

~ Jennifer Jeffries Thompson, Outreach and Social Justice Chair



Women's Fellowship

The Women's Fellowship group is an active group of busy, dynamic, wonderful ladies.
All women are invited to join them.

For more information contact Sunny Ray Mandeville.

April 11—Meeting in the Fireside Room—10 a.m.

April 25 28—Luncheon at Jorgenson's—11:30 a.m.

UCC GRANT AWARDED to PLYMOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH (March 28, 2023)

Dear Ms. Jeffries Thompson,

We are pleased to share with you that the grant submitted by Plymouth Congregational Church has been approved. The award is in the amount of \$6,400.00.

Congratulations!

According to your grant application, the funds we are providing will be used to resource ESL classes for Afghan women resettled in Helena, MT. {excerpt from official letter}

Thank you Jennifer for all of your hard work on the grant application!

Yay!



The Campaign for Helena Food Share
Building a Hunger-Free Community

Did You Know?

1-in-7 of our neighbors experience food insecurity, including **1-in-5 kids and seniors**

The **number of food services** Helena Food Share has provided since 2001 **has grown by 2600%**

Helena Food Share **helped over 8,300 of our neighbors** by providing **80,410 services** last year, including:

- **29,724 Grocery Share** services
- **42,047 Kid Packs** for Helena-area kids
- **1,481 Senior Commodities** boxes and **4,934 Emergency Food Packs**

Your gift to the Campaign for Helena Food Share will provide

3X the space for customers to shop, eliminating waiting lines outside

3X the warehouse space with additional space to build food packs and boxes.

A commercial production kitchen for repacking and preserving food helping expand food delivery options

A community education space for gathering and teaching healthy eating and cooking skills



Visit [HelenaFoodShare.org](https://www.HelenaFoodShare.org) to Learn More & Donate

Sam Forstag of the Montana Coalition to Solve Homelessness was the featured speaker at a March 30th meeting held at Plymouth of Helena Clergy Advocates for Housing



Forstag has worked since 2021 as a Partner in the social justice advocacy organization Central House Strategies, <https://www.centralhousestrategies.com/>, and is currently a full-time advocate/lobbyist during the 2023 Montana Legislative Session on behalf of the Montana Coalition to Solve Homelessness. He began his work advocating on issues such as protecting renter/tenants' rights, immigrant and refugee rights, Indigenous justice, affordable public higher education, criminal justice reform, and voting rights. Sam spends summers working as a wildland firefighter for the U.S. Forest Service. Sam graduated from the University of Montana in 2017, where he served as President of the Associated Students of the University of Montana.

Join Us in the Urgent Work of the Montana Coalition to Solve Homelessness—By Sam Forstag

The Montana Coalition to Solve Homelessness was formed last fall to advocate for policies and resources to effectively and compassionately support people living without shelter in Montana. **With Montana's ever-growing housing crisis, the number of people living on the streets, in their cars, or on someone's couch is growing. This isn't the Montana we want.**

Low vacancy rates, lack of housing people can afford, rental prices outpacing wages, a lack of mental health services, and lack of coordinated care all lead to long-time Montanans being priced out of a home. For most homeless shelters in Montana, the needs of the unhoused in their community far exceed their facility capacity. This problem has grown during the past three years, with many shelters seeing a 40%-80% increase in people needing shelter. **Montana has nearly \$2 billion in the bank. There is no better time for Montana's Legislature to provide funding so that we can take care of our neighbors so they can get back on their feet.**

We can choose a different path by ensuring everyone across the state who needs shelter has it. We are on the ground, working with people living unhoused, addressing shelter, hunger, mental health, physical health, and safety needs. Our teams act as case managers, housing navigators, and crisis response professionals. We want to partner with policymakers to decide what services and resources are needed and how to deliver them.

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Our Montana Coalition to Solve Homelessness is a group of service providers, community partners, and other stakeholders from across the state working together to ensure that people living without housing in Montana are sheltered and on a path to housing stability, since everyone needs stable housing to be healthy and safe.

Identified policy solutions include increasing access to shelter beds - especially for aging populations, increasing state funding for nursing homes, group homes, and other supportive housing options, providing Medicaid reimbursement for shelter services, and funding state grants to shelters to enhance and improve operations.

People living unhoused deserve dignity and respect. We work with local service providers across Montana to help individuals, families, and youth experiencing homelessness. Once someone without permanent housing leaves a hospital or doctor, it falls to homeless providers and shelters to provide after-care and mental and emotional support. These services are often uncompensated and leave homeless providers searching for funding. This care is necessary to achieve even minimal stability. Public resources should help fund this care.

Nearly 40% of people who are unhoused live with a mental health disorder, a substance use disorder, or both. As a state, we don't have enough addiction treatment or mental health care for those who need it, leading people into a cycle of crisis. It is essential that unhoused people suffering from trauma, mental illness, and addiction, all of which lead to erratic and sometimes unsafe behavior, have access to safe shelter and health care. Homeless providers do their best to treat their clients with respect, dignity, and compassion. To achieve our goal of solving homelessness, private and public partners must do the same.

To read the full statement of the Coalition's mission and principles, go to <https://montanarescuemission.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/MCSH-Mission-and-Principles>.

To keep Montana the place we love, we need to work together. Please join us. If you don't know much about your local shelter, learn more. There are countless opportunities to volunteer or donate. Thank you all for your time and engagement. These next few weeks will be crucial, and your help makes all the difference. Feel free to call me at (406) 880-0088 if I can provide any other useful information over the phone!



~ Sam Forstag < sam@centralhousestrategies.com >

Treasurer's Report for April 2023



Two months into the new fiscal year – which is 16.7% of the budget year - I reported the following information to the Council at our February meeting. If we were exactly “on budget” all the percentages below would be 17.7% or below:

- Our total income from all sources is \$38,333, 18.8% of what we budgeted for two months (so we are slightly ahead)
- Our expenses totaled \$33,729, slightly below the budgeted expenses for two months
- Pledges are at 16.6%, while non-pledge donations are

running a little higher than budgeted at 28.9%

On the expense side, most categories are near or below budgeted levels, with a few exceptions:

- Worship at 28.9%; within the worship budget, online costs and supplies for worship are very high (66.9% and 63.3% respectively) and choir music is at 33.3%
- Property and liability insurance is paid at the beginning of each quarterly so we have spent 26.6% of our allocated budget so far
- Utilities are at 21.0%, much of the increase is accounted for by gas/electric at 32.9%

As Jan reported in her moderator's report, we are facing some significant expenses and challenges. Our general checking account contains just under three months of operating expenses, which is lower than one would like to see. We need to begin to rebuild our savings accounts and funds for building repairs and updates, not to mention the possibility of solar panels. The irony is that solar panels would help us reduce our monthly utility expenses significantly, but we are not in a financial position to move ahead with the project. This is why it is so crucial to explore grants, cooperative efforts with others, a fundraising campaign, and any other creative ideas you may have.

~ Pat Christian

60th Anniversary Celebration

Sunday, May 28, 2023

We will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the groundbreaking for Plymouth Congregational Church on Sunday, May 28, 2023. To help us do that, you are invited to share recipes for a church cookbook, as well as stories and memories for a booklet we can hand out. Also, if you have any pictures you would like to share, or if you have any other ideas of how we can celebrate, we welcome all of that!

Please send your recipes, stories, and pictures to pccofficemgr@gmail.com.

Deadline is April 14th





The Creation Advocacy Network invites you to join us Wednesday April 12 for two Earth Day events at St. Paul's.

Wednesday, April 12, 5:30 PM – Dinner in Fellowship Hall

Come enjoy a tasty taco and enchilada dinner, comfort food for the body and soul. Proceeds will be donated to [Our Children's Trust](#) for the [Held v. State of Montana](#) lawsuit. *Learn how you can support these sixteen courageous Montana youth who are suing to defend our rights to a "clean and healthful environment".*

Wednesday April 12 6:30 PM – Presentation by Paul Lachapelle PhD

Dr. Lachapelle is a professor in the Department of Political Science at Montana State University and founder of [Climate Smart Montana](#), a non-partisan, non-profit network with the goal of sharing information and resources to better coordinate community-based climate solutions and resiliency efforts in Montana.

Dr. Lachapelle will be speaking on climate change challenges faced by communities, including obstructionist strategies by the fossil fuel industry, and opportunities for citizens to make positive change through organizing and collective social movements. (In St. Paul's Sanctuary or online on St. Paul's YouTube channel: [St. Paul's Helena MT](#))



Upcoming events at Plymouth

Maundy Thursday, April 6, 6:00 pm—joint service and dinner with First Christian Church—Fellowship Hall

Thursday, April 6, 2:00 p.m.—Charity Knitting and Crocheting—Fireside Room

Sunday, April 9, 10:00 a.m.— **EASTER SUNDAY Worship Service**

Tai Chi meets every Tuesday and Thursday at 5:30 p.m.—Fireside Room

Change of Pace AA Group meets Mon thru Sat at 12 p.m.—Fireside Room

Plymouth Church, U.C.C.

400 S. Oakes St.

Helena, MT 59601

Plymouth's Mission is to nurture our congregation and the wider community with acts of love and a vision of God's image in all things.



Plymouth Church

400 S. Oakes St.

Helena, MT 59601

Office Hours

- Pastor Charles Wei: 9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m. (Tues. & Thurs.), and by appointment.
- Office Manager Alane Dallas: 9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m. (Tues.-Thurs.)

Contact Us

Church Office: 406.442.9883

Web: www.plymouthmontanaucc.org

Email: pccofficemgr@gmail.com

Also: www.facebook.com/plymouthcongregational

Sundays
10:00 a.m. Worship Service
In Person and Online