

Waymarks

Plymouth Church | Helena Montana

October 2023

The Ascension



This article is the last in my series about the mosaic mural that I made as part of my Concentration in Christian Spirituality while I was studying at San Francisco Theological Seminary (SFTS), in San Anselmo, CA. The original is there, in the student common area called Holy Grounds, where students can get snacks, and coffee or tea. As the manager of Holy Grounds during my third and fourth years as a student, I spent quite a bit of time there. I made cookies, rice crispy treats, and cupcakes for people to purchase, and scavenged the local thrift stores for mugs, art, and other items we could use. I was determined to make it as warm and welcoming a space as possible.

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The wall where I chose to install the mosaic was painted a hideous pumpkin orange, so the idea to cover it up was easy. Space was limited, and there are hundreds of stories in the Bible, so I selected the scenes that I felt were the most familiar to the most people, and told the story that was most important to me.

The mosaic represents the covenantal relationship between us and God, as portrayed in our sacred texts. From the creation of the world, to the flood, Moses parting the Red Sea as the Israelite people fled from captivity in Egypt, to the birth of God into our world, Jesus the Christ, who was baptized, joining our lives to his, to his teachings, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the mosaic shows a God of promise and hope.



After the mosaic was complete, several members of the SFTS community felt that it was time to revitalize the space, so Holy Grounds got new flooring, a fresh coat of paint, and new fixtures in the kitchen. In addition to the mosaic, I installed a large cork board made of wine corks, and the school purchased a smart TV for the space. Holy Grounds saw a lot of use during my time at SFTS, both as a student, and when I worked for the school after I graduated. I was always cognizant of the fact that generations of students would interact with the mosaic as time marched on, and that the mosaic would likely outlast me. This is the reason that I hid so many things within it, including the title of the mosaic itself, Faith, Hope, and Love, doing what I could to leave subtle clues of line, color, texture, and pattern to help people find them. It was always my hope that someone familiar with the mosaic would be looking at it one day and suddenly notice something that they had never noticed before, hopefully filling them with a sense of wonder and curiosity.

The Ascension is not a large part of the mosaic, and after six articles dedicated to this topic, **there aren't a lot of secrets left to reveal. There are a few things I want to mention, though. The tile used for Jesus' head here is the same tile used to represent him in The Baptism, The Sermon on the Mount, and The Last Supper.** The heart was a heart-shaped a plate that I found at Good Will. I smashed it and reassembled it as best I could on the flat wall. There are beams of light coming down from the top made of mirror and yellow glass. Colloquially, these are known as **“the fingers of God.”**

Lastly, I want to address the dedication tile at the bottom right of the mosaic. One of my classmates passed away about three months before graduation. She had fallen down some stairs and broken her ankle. While she was recovering, an embolism formed in her ankle, and then traveled up to her brain, killing her.

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It was a devastating loss to the community, and I decided to dedicate the mosaic to her. Half of the tile has been cut off in the reproduction.

It reads: “Faith, Hope, and Love by Charles Furio Wei, dedicated to Kimberlee Ann Rasmussen,” which is followed by her date of birth and the date that she died. At the graduation ceremony, her niece accepted her diploma on her behalf.

So, that’s the story of the mosaic. Literal blood, sweat, and tears went into its creation, and I have to say it is one of the proudest accomplishments of my life. If you ever have any questions about it, I am happy to talk about it. If you need me to point out one of the hidden details, I’m more than happy to do that, too.

~ Rev. Charles Wei

October is Stewardship Month at Plymouth

Yes, it's that time of the year again, the time when we think about Plymouth, what it means to each of us on Sunday and throughout the year.

The Church Council will be developing the 2024 Plymouth budget in November, so it's important that we make our pledges for next year during October and conclude the Stewardship effort by the last Sunday of the month, October 29.

As I write this message on September 23, I'm reminded of the four excellent, well- attended conversations on the homeless in Helena that many of us have attended.

The 5th and last conversation in this series was appropriately set at Plymouth on September 27, with a big thanks to Jennifer Thompson for organizing them. They have drawn widespread attention to the need for emergency housing for far too many of our neighbors, and the need for a longer-term solution in our community.

The Stewardship theme last fall was: "What we do with what we have." This year, let's think about what might be possible with what we pledge and give.

And as we do, think about the value of a quarter. I remember once upon a time, and bet some of you do too, when a quarter bought a gallon of gas, a movie ticket, and candy bar.

So now, in addition to your pledge, put a quarter in the offering plate every Sunday.

They will be kept in a separate jar. Then, watch the quarters add up to help with Plymouth's Stewardship.

In the spirit of giving,
Chuck Butler, chair, 2024 Plymouth Stewardship



Moderator's Message: Investing in our Future

Is Plymouth Congregational Church a church that demonstrates vitality? From the outside, it certainly appears vital: we're playing a critical role in the community as we lead conversations about our unsheltered neighbors; a community garden occupies a large section of our grounds; we host a thriving daycare and the Big Sky Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

In addition, a church with "vitality" must be future-oriented. How can we protect and grow this church for the generation that follows?



- 1) If you sit in the north pews, you may have noticed pieces of sheetrock on the floor, due to leaks in the long, narrow flat roof, as well as around the windows along the top of the north-facing roof. Terry Tatchell and Mary Drysdale have been busy getting bids for new roofing, and although the south-facing roof may have a few years of life remaining, it's logical to completely re-roof the sanctuary soon to protect our investment and to prepare for the potential of installing solar panels.
- 2) We've been talking with solar energy representatives, who say "investing in solar is investing in your future." After recouping the initial cost, the money now spent on electricity can be used for other needs. Solar panels also demonstrate our concern for our climate's future. Our plan is to select an installer based on bids we have, write a Universal System Benefits grant to reduce our initial cost as much as possible, ask for your financial commitment, and proceed only if and when we are awarded grants. With government incentives and grant funding, our outlay could be as little as \$12,000; an amount we would save in electrical costs in less than five years.
- 3) For Pastor Charles' two-year mark with us, the Council is conducting a review "to identify areas of strength and needed growth for ministry projects, programs, and personnel." We will be asking Charles and ourselves:
 - Where has growth happened in the past year in this ministry?
 - Where have we seen excellence displayed?
 - What changes can be made to aid the pastor in advancing the overall mission of the congregation?

A UCC study shows the correlation between congregational vitality and ministerial excellence, which means we're all in this together—when we demonstrate vitality as a congregation, our pastor thrives; as our pastor displays excellence, our congregation thrives. Charles may have some new, future-oriented ideas. How can we support him in the growth of his ministry?

- 4) We negotiated a new three-year lease with the Big Sky Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, ensuring our continued relationship. We view our building as an asset to the community that also serves as an important funding source to offset maintenance costs.

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In addition to considering infrastructure, outreach, and spiritual leadership, we must recognize that technology, social media, and online services are essential to a robust future. We've invested over \$5,000 in cameras and equipment. Do we consider those "out there" watching computer screens when we plan the service, when we sing or play music, when we serve as liturgists, when we make announcements, and when we deliver messages? Every week, 10-40 viewers check us out online. Do we look and sound inviting and vibrant?

Blessings,

~ Jan Clinard



True Colors:



A gathering of the
LGBTQIA+ community
and allies (18+)

Every Monday at 7:00 PM
512 Logan Street
Susanna Wesley Place
(next door to St. Paul's
United Methodist)
Room 208
truecolorshelena@gmail.com

Monthly Schedule
Week 1: Movie Night
Week 2: Potluck
Week 3: Game Night
Week 4: Craft Night



Creation Care Tips

The Future of Food—Cricket Flour

While the thought of eating insects might be distasteful to some, insects are consumed regularly by many people around the world.

High in protein, B12, and iron, with a mildly earthy and nutty taste, cricket flour can replace some or all of the other kinds of flour used in many recipes. Crickets need less feed, less space, and less water to grow an equivalent amount of protein, compared to traditional livestock, and generate fewer greenhouse gases.



Even if you are feeling adventurous enough to try crickets, you should not catch them yourself. There is no way to know if the crickets you find have been exposed to pesticides or what they have eaten, and eating them may put you at risk. Well-sourced and carefully handled cricket flour is relatively easy to find online. Be warned, those with shellfish allergies might want to avoid crickets, as there is a high probability they may be allergic to crickets, as well.



Women's Fellowship Events

The Women's Fellowship Group made the decision during the kickoff meeting to actively support the homeless/unsheltered people in our community (Helena) for the purpose of purchasing warm sleeping bags during the month of October: Our goal is to raise \$5,000. For more information contact Susan Butler (406-465-1636).

Give Homelessness the Boot—A boot will be on the table in the Fireside Room. Please put your cash or checks (made to Plymouth Congregational Church) if interested in supporting this effort.

A bake sale and pot luck will be conducted on October 15. Please sign up to bring a baked item to sell. Sign-up sheets for baked goods and food for the potluck will be in the narthex.

October meeting schedule:

Tuesday, October 10 at 10:00 a.m. in the Fireside Room.

Tuesday, October 24 at 11:30 a.m. at the Overland Express Restaurant

We invite you to come and join us for all of our activities!

~Sunny Ray Mandeville

In Our Prayers Today

In treatment/healing: Greg Bolin, Gus and Brenda Byrom, Margy Kohl, Nathan Schreder, Dianne Senne, and Dianne Wei.

Bereavement: Mika Rae Bentle and Ellie Wei.

Special Prayers: Ed Canty, Art Gilreath, Loraine Hopgood, Evelyn Nelson, Jim and Doris Powell, Marlyce Taylor, Giles Walker, Karen Mills, Kelly Murphy, and Missie Nicole Pope.

Prayers for us and the families of Andy Tran, Ray Kilius, and all the victims of gun violence, 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 pccofficemgr@gmail.com.



ROUGH SLEEPERS COMMUNITY and DISCUSSIONS



Susan Butler and Wilmot Collins, Mayor of Helena



City Commissioner Andy Hunthausen with guest from the audience



Rough Sleepers meeting at Temple Emanu-El



Temple Emanu-El



Shopping Cart used to represent the unsheltered/homeless in our community



Pastor Charles

ROUGH SLEEPERS COMMUNITY and DISCUSSIONS (Cont.)



Ed Field, "Faces of our Unsheltered Neighbors" exhibit photographer



Rosana and David—Rough Sleepers lunch preparation.



Pastor Charles making sandwiches for the Rough Sleepers lunch meeting at Plymouth.



Ryan, Teresa, and Shandy— health care workers and guest speakers



Jerry and Sandee delivering dessert

Now that the Rough Sleepers series is over, what should I do now?

Rev. Quinn Caldwell's Daily Devotional from the UCC "Stillspeaking" column spoke to me Thursday morning, September 28. (Well, he actually always speaks to me, but this time he read my mind.) Just yesterday Plymouth concluded its five-week conversation regarding themes raised in Tracy Kidder's book "Rough Sleepers." Since August 30, when Dr. Pat Christian of Carroll College offered a more academic look at the origins of the housing crisis and resultant rise in unsheltered people everywhere, approximately 120 caring, interested, invested individuals gathered weekly at different locations throughout the city to learn more.

Subsequently, at Our Place, we heard from Theresa Ortega, Mark Nay from Good Samaritan, and Rev. Dr. Jeff Buscher of United Way, who introduced us to their friends, the people it is their privilege to serve, who live on the streets. The third discussion took place at the Montana Jewish Project – Temple Emanu-El, who hosted us in the side-yard because the conference room could not hold the audience we had come to expect. This discussion centered on the role of education in preventing and addressing the realities of nearly 300 unhoused children in our public school system. Michele Zentz, Siobhan Hathorn from HPS and Jaymie Hazel from Rocky Mountain Development Council – Head Start contributed significantly to the conversation.

The fourth gathering in the series focused on the role of local government – policies, attitudes, and efforts addressing the housing crisis – and featured Mayor Wilmot Collins and County Commissioner Andy Hunthausen. The pews at Covenant United Methodist were filled, and questions continued well past the hour. And finally, Plymouth folks heartily and generously welcomed the public for lunch and a discussion focusing on the health concerns and services offered to those living on the streets as well as others who find themselves without resources to pay for medical care. We heard from Shandy Day and Ryan Lehman from St. Peter's Health Care, as well as Teresa Kelley Brewer representing PureView Health – Health Care for the Homeless located next door to God's Love.

Where to go from here, when our "Rough Sleepers" discussions have been so illuminating in many ways, and daunting in some? What's our path when the road before us is complicated by lack of funds to do what needs to be done tomorrow, or pervasive attitudes hinder courageous opportunities, when health care especially for those suffering addictions or mental health challenges is complicated with civil liberties and societal stigmas? How can we anticipate and address the predicaments of those who re-enter mainstream having served prison sentences that preclude meaningful housing or employment? What could we be doing to prevent poverty and housing that excludes those who routinely earn less than \$3000 a month?

For beginners, be aware of and take part in the work of many wonderful agencies and non-profits in our community who take a piece of this complicated pie and "serve it up". There isn't time to duplicate or second-guess what is already being addressed by many. Secondly, be informed, ask questions, vote your conscience, and demonstrate interest in our local schools even if your children live far away. Follow-up on promises made by those in leadership positions. Trust your faith, and make an effort to remove politics from the equation. This crisis is more than a balance sheet; it is a moral imperative.

Caldwell asks for a road map from God, and one is not apparent. Or is it? He concludes: "*Absent an indisputable theophany, I guess I'm glad to have what I have instead of lists of rules: ancient witnesses and guides, modern sages and teachers, companions for the road, a still, small voice inside, a mind I'm trying hard to keep open, and communities of other confused souls who feast and fight and pray and love so hard that I'm pretty sure any path we're on must be God's.*"

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Rough Sleepers—Plymouth book copies

If you acquired Kidder's book "Rough Sleepers" from Plymouth (we ordered and distributed 15 total) and no longer have a need for it, please return your copy to the church. We are offering our extra copies to other churches in the denomination in hopes they may be interested in replicating this read and discussion.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- Sandwich Crew who arrived at 9:00 AM Wednesday morning and built 150 sandwiches in less than 2 hours. Amazing!
- Table and Chairs Crew who devoted considerable time Tuesday afternoon placing, cleaning, and restoring tables and chairs to accommodate the same 150 or so people. Yes, we can seat that many!
- Mark Cadwalder and Bret Brunner for providing and running the sound system.
- Sandee and Jerry Sept of Covenant United Methodist for the delicious and individually-wrapped desserts provided at the Rough Sleepers lunch meeting.
- Jeannie Warden of HCTV for her loyal and thorough filming of each and every Rough Sleepers conversation.
- Phil Drake and Nolan Lister of the Helena Independent Record for their interest and amazing coverage.
- Tom Buchanan of KMTX television for wonderful coverage and sincere interest in these efforts.



Charlie and Security

"Faces of Our Unsheltered Neighbors"

Plymouth Congregational Church is ready to present a beautiful and compelling photo exhibit that features men, women, children and families who are currently living on the streets in Helena. The exhibit can be viewed in locations to be announced soon, and is available beginning in January 2024 to any faith community or public building free-of-charge. The first unveiling will take place on Friday October 13 at Carroll College from 9 AM to 12 noon in the lower commons. The community is invited to take part in a conversation and update on the housing crisis. The exhibit will be featured in conjunction with the FUSE Summit.

The exhibit is made possible by the generous support from the Town Pump Foundation. Thanks to Ed and Kathy Field for their beautiful work and to Dr. Jeff Buscher of United Way for their contributions to the collaborative work in our community.

THANK YOU!

Jennifer Jeffries Thompson, Outreach & Social Justice

Plymouth Congregational Church, UCC

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.



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