

Waymarks

Plymouth Church | Helena Montana

November 2023

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP GROUP

Kicking Homelessness to the Curb—Sleeping Bags Campaign

What this group of amazing, focused, and committed group of ladies is nothing short of a miracle!

When Jennifer Jeffries Thompson organized five community conversations to discuss topics raised by Tracy Kidder's book, *Rough Sleepers*, the peoples of Helena, Montana responded with interest and growing awareness. Helena's unsheltered neighbors became a serious and immediate concern to more people than it had been in recent years.

After just two of these conversations, Plymouth's Women's Fellowship launched a project to raise funds for the purchase of sleeping bags for some of Helena's homeless population. These bags would be given to Our Place of the Good Samaritan Ministries to be distributed to those most in need.

Under the leadership of Sunny Ray Mandeville, the fellowship set a goal of \$5000, well aware that might be a difficult goal to achieve. We planned a pot luck luncheon and bake sale for mid-October to help raise the funds, and we announced our project in church.



Sunny Ray, Mark, and Susan—Giving the "Boot" to Homelessness in Helena

Plymouth's congregation responded in its usual generous manner. The \$5000 was raised within two weeks! Outside donations came in, some solicited and some not, from the Universalist Unitarian church, an insurance company, a healthcare organization, friends, and a completely unexpected check from a neighbor who uses Plymouth for meetings. At least half of the donations came from Plymouth's congregation. The response has been overwhelming.

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What we initially envisioned as a mid-campaign fundraiser, the potluck and bake sale, turned out to be a culmination and celebration. Mark Nay, the Outreach Coordinator at Our Place, joined us to share his personal experience of homelessness, and to express his deep gratitude for our effort. We ended up raising an additional \$4865, bringing the total of money raised to about \$9000!

We purchased 55 Kelly sleeping bags, deemed to provide safety to 0 degrees F. On a Saturday, Chuck and I helped Mark pick them up and stack them in his office at Our Place. The timing **couldn't have been better, as the snow and freezing weather followed the next week.**

There's more to the story. With the extra money we raised we'll be making a second order for about 40 more bags. And the store manager where we purchased the sleeping bags called to say he had 41 pairs of warm gloves he wanted to donate. Jennifer started a large ripple in a pond. Thank you, Plymouth, for your caring, generous hearts. This is a special congregation!

~ Susan Butler



Women's Fellowship Events

November meeting schedule:

Tuesday, November 14 at 10:00 a.m. in the Fireside Room.

Tuesday, November 28 at 11:30 a.m. at the Overland Express Restaurant

Treasurer's Report—3rd Quarter Update

Dear Plymouth family,



As we enter the long season of winter, anticipating the joys of Thanksgiving and the start of Advent, it is good to reflect on where we are in the home stretch of our fiscal year and to look ahead to the 2024 budget planning process. The Financial Affairs Committee has met and created a first draft of our 2024 budget. We await the final pledge number and other information to complete it, but we anticipate presenting a robust budget to the congregation at the January annual meeting. Please remember to submit your pledges for the upcoming year so we can have the most accurate figures to plan with. And if you have not completed your 2023 pledge, we encourage you to do so. Your pledge contribution enables us to end the year in good fiscal health.

I reported to the council at the end of the third quarter that our total income from all sources as of September 30 is \$159,498, and our total expenses thus far are \$172,190, putting us in the red by around \$12,700. The outstanding pledges would easily cover that shortfall if they all come in before the end of the year. Of course, we know we won't get all the outstanding pledges, but we are confident that our income from pledges will come in and help us cover the current deficit.

Our "ad hoc" building use is going up, increasing our income in that area. Thanks to Alane and council members revamping our building use rates and scheduling system, we are seeing greater use of the building by paying guests. The agreement with the UUs was updated resulting in them agreeing to pay more for the use of the sanctuary and other spaces, which will help our bottom line in this last quarter and the future.

Looking forward to 2024, we know that we will have to pay \$55 per month for fire security system monitoring. We also are anticipating higher electricity bills as NW Energy is planning a significant rate increase. This makes our solar panel project even more urgent and valuable. Much of the costs for the solar panels will be covered through a grant we are applying for from NW Energy, and tax incentives. The remainder of the cost plus the substantial cost of the new roof will need to be paid for through fundraising. None of those costs will come out of the operating budget for 2024.

The United Church Funds Endowment Fund is hovering around \$95,000. As I reported in my last report, that we will not receive any income from it this year, however, we hold out hope the fund will recover in the coming year allowing us to draw perhaps a few thousand dollars.

And now, as we give thanks for the many blessings we have received, let us continue to participate in the life of our church community and "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8)."

In Christ, ~ Pat Christian, Treasurer

Moderator's Message: Investing in our Future

We just submitted a request for an incentive through the USB-funded E + Renewable Program to NorthWestern Energy for a solar photovoltaic system to be installed on the south-facing roof of our sanctuary. The total cost of the project will be \$58,131 for which we requested an incentive of \$34,878.

We're hopeful, but we must raise matching funds, apply for an Investment Tax Credit, and replace the entire roof (\$53,539). This could be a heavy lift today, but it will lighten the utility bills in the future. If we're not awarded the incentive, we'll try again and we'll keep saving your contributions to go toward the project when we are successful.



Plymouth plays a leadership role in the community. Within the past two years we raised awareness and funding for Afghan refugees as they acclimate to life in Montana. This September, we sponsored a series of discussions about homelessness that attracted hundreds of participants and community leaders—culminating in lunch served from our kitchen and affirming the building's importance in fulfilling Plymouth's mission to nurture our congregation and the wider community with acts of love and a vision of God's image in all things. From an energy perspective, this means caring for God's creation, reducing our carbon footprint, and demonstrating our commitment to clean energy.

Plymouth is grateful and privileged to be able to provide a beautiful sanctuary for two congregations, a safe learning space for young children, and meeting space for the Helena community. A solar PV system will enhance the spiritual and civic value of the building, while helping fulfill our mission. Plymouth Church is a highly-visible and unique structure in our community, which makes it a wonderful place to demonstrate the benefits of clean and sustainable power production.

~ Jan Clinard

In Our Prayers Today

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

Bereavement: Ellie Wei.

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

Prayers for us and the families of the victims of war and gun violence, around the world 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.



Stewardship 2024 - What we do with what we have"

Thanks to the folks who have submitted pledges for 2024!

While October was Plymouth's Stewardship Month, pledges are gladly welcome in November especially now as the Church Council begins work on the 2024 operations budget.

On October 8, Lucinda Sheldon shared heart-felt comments about her family being among Plymouth's founders and how much Plymouth and its members mean to her personally, as they did to her late brother Jay, who spoke to us last fall during Stewardship month.

Dewey Skelton spoke on October 22 about his early life and how much Plymouth means to him and Rosana and the importance of 'giving' to support Plymouth.

Liz (Doctor Liz to me, as I have known her for years) and Claire spoke to the congregation on October 29. Liz has been a champion of ExplorationWorks from before the doors opened many years ago and many kids have benefitted from her caring approach to teaching and education of robotics. She and Claire shared with us how much Plymouth means to them. "I really like coming to Plymouth" Claire said, "everyone is so friendly!"

Liz spoke of being raised in a Congregational Church in Hartford, CT. "It was a church like this (Plymouth) where people from various parts of the community came together each week to meet in prayer, worship and concern. That is why I pledge each year - I always want to find a place where hearts beat closer to the surface"

So, thanks to everyone who has pledged!

To those of you who are still thinking about how much to pledge for 2024, please submit your pledge cards ASAP! As you consider your pledge, keep in mind our Stewardship theme "What You Do with What You Have" and what we can all do with what we pledge and give to support Plymouth's operations and ministry.

Plymouth, our members and ministry are well-known throughout the community for our Outreach and Social Justice - all made possible by our pledges and giving.

In the Spirit of ThanksGiving,

~Chuck Butler,
2024 Plymouth Stewardship Chair



Creation Care Tips

North 40—Native Grassland

Some of you may have noticed that we stopped mowing the North 40. While this may have saved us some money, this is not why we did it. Besides the community garden and the labyrinth, this land has not been altered since the time the church was built, which means it is still wild native Montana habitat, and much the same way you would not go into a forest to mow a meadow, we decided to not mow this natural area this summer.

There are invasive species growing in the North 40, but we are taking steps to remove them. Eventually, we would like to put in paths and interpretive signage to teach people about native Montana flora.

In order to prepare for that, we thought we should allow the native plants to flower and reseed themselves, which would be difficult if not impossible for them to do if we mowed.

So, please bear with us as we make this transition. It may look a little messy, but nature is messy, and we want to take care of our wild neighbors, as well as our human ones.

- The North 40 Committee





**FALL SPLENDOR
AND FUN!**



Outreach and Social Justice Update

Faces of Our Unsheltered Neighbors

In November “Faces of Our Unsheltered Neighbors” can be viewed two times in two different locations. During the Pig Roast at St. Paul’s in celebration of the Power of the Shower, the photos will be featured. Then on November 10 the exhibit will be previewed at Signs Now, located on Last Chance Gulch. Be sure to save the date of December 5 when the exhibit will be shown at Our Place (pictured on page 2 of this newsletter); a shelter for many folks living without permanent housing.

There will be a reception and an invitation to the broader Helena community to not only see the exhibit but to celebrate the potential of Our Place in serving our unhoused community. Details will follow in our next newsletter. Interest in the photo exhibit has been keen, and dates are reserved through April 2024.

Special Olympics Dinner

Plymouth will provide dinner for 50 Special Olympians on Friday, November 10, from 5 to 6 pm in our Fellowship Hall. If you are interested and available to help with food preparation, serving or clean-up, we would be happy to hear from you. Call or speak with Jennifer to let her know of your interest. Or refer to the sign-up sheets located on the table in the narthex.

Tamarack House

November marks the end of Plymouth’s 2023 involvement in providing fruit each month for the residents of Tamarack House, located just across the street from the church. Richard and Linda Burns will provide fruit one time for the month of November. Thank you to all who contributed throughout the year. You may remember that it was part of the Empty Stocking program. We recently learned from Claire that this ministry has been so well received they are hoping we will continue it for another year. Tamarack House is a facility administered by Spring Meadow Resources.

Rough Sleepers

Don’t forget! If you have a copy of Tracy Kidder’s book and do not need it any longer, please return it to the church office. Many thanks.

~ Jennifer Jeffries Thompson



*Thank
You*

WITH A GRATEFUL HEART

A Moment for Mission—Florence Mayer

Thank you for all your help and support **in making our God's Love dinner such a big success!** We prepared and served sloppy joes with coleslaw (from scratch—we shredded and chopped a LOT of cabbage and veggies) and cookies for approximately 80 hungry people. It was a very heartwarming and appreciated experience!

Hail to the Chef—Dewey Skelton



Kitchen crew hard at work preparing dinner for God's Love

All of us from Plymouth Congregational Church wish you, your friends and family a beautiful and blessed Thanksgiving!

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

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