

Waymarks

Plymouth Church | Helena Montana

January 2024

THANK GOD FOR OUR COMMITTEES

As we start a new year here at Plymouth, and some of our leadership gets shuffled around, I want to remind everyone that so much of the work that we do is done by our faithful committees.

- The Worship Committee helps to make sure that worship happens every Sunday, and the
- Finance Committee makes sure that we have enough money to pay our bills, so that the lights and the heat stay on.
- Buildings and Grounds makes sure the walls stay standing, and
- Outreach and Social Justice makes sure we keep focused on the things that we should be focused on.
- Pastoral Care maintains our relationships with those who can't make it to church regularly, and
- Personnel makes sure things run smoothly with all of the employees of the church.
- We have the North 40,
- Slogan, Membership, Columbarium, and
- Stewardship Committee; not to mention
- The Women's Fellowship, which for all intents and purposes, operates as our Fellowship Committee.



The only reason we are able to have the impact that we do on our community is because of all of the hard work that our committees do. All of the committees work together to support the work of the Council, and the work of the church. It is truly inspiring to me. In many churches, the vast majority of the work is done by about 10-20% of the members, but Plymouth is special. I feel like that ratio is reversed here, which is why we have such a lively and vibrant congregation that people around town recognize and admire.

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We are truly blessed to belong to this community of hard-working and loving people, and we are definitely a light on the hill for everyone to see. As long as we keep doing this work, we inspire others around us, and we can all continue working together to make our wider community, and the world, a better place.

If you feel like you would be able to help on one of these committees, let us know, and we can see where you might fit in. Your gifts and talents are very much needed here, and we hope that you will bless us with them. ~ Rev. Charles Wei



Our First Quilt Blessing—December 17, 2023

This beautiful quilt was made by our new member Kathe Simons and is currently on display in the narthex.

In Our Prayers Today

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

Bereavement: Claire Crosbey, the family of Lila Meloy, Marlyce Taylor, and Bob Morgan's family.

Special Prayers: Ed Canty, Art Gilreath, Loraine Hopgood, the people of Israel and Palestine, Russia and Ukraine, Evelyn Nelson, Richard & Carol Penfield, Missie Nicole Pope, Jim and Doris Powell, 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.



Moderator's Message

Christmas wasn't very "white" this year and I'm concerned that so little snow has accumulated on our fields, pastures, mountains, and yards. Googling the date of *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), I was dismayed to see articles claiming Al Gore was wrong: glaciers aren't melting, temperatures aren't climbing, fires and floods are just normal. But if you go straight to Glacier National Park's website or for that matter, go to Glacier Park, you'll see that glaciers are shrinking. Glued to Zoom during the Held v. Montana trial this summer, I was convinced that the truth about climate change is not only inconvenient, it's terrifying. Any honest judge hearing that case would have made the same conclusion.



Jill Alstynne arranged a meeting for the Church Council this summer in which we heard from Patrick Judge about the incentives available to non-profits for installing solar panels. Any Council hearing those facts would have concluded that we must pursue the incentives for solar energy. Now, as we raise funds to re-roof and install solar panels, we await the verdict on our application. You can help by writing a check to Plymouth Church, with "solar/roof" in the memo.

This year the Council heard ideas from the North 40 Committee, including allowing the field to revert to a natural state. The church has been grappling with how best to utilize this property asset for decades: community garden (yes), labyrinth (yes), a permanent easement for cable (no), camp site (no), daycare sandbox (yes), trees (?).... Agreeing on a climate-friendly, yet neighborly approach to our property may be challenging.

Plymouth's Church Council attempts to seek out the facts regarding each issue we confront and agree on the best path forward--sometimes confronting inconvenient truths and engaging in lively discussions. The Council will appreciate your support, your input, and your understanding as we work on your behalf in the coming year. Please plan to attend the Annual Meeting on January 28, immediately following the service in the sanctuary. You will review the annual report and vote to adopt a budget and a slate of officers.

I hope that in 2024, Plymouth will begin utilizing the sun's energy to produce electricity and each of us will find more climate-friendly ways to live. ~Jan Clinard

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."

HAPPY NEW YEAR from the OUTREACH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Crock Pot Ministry



Thanks to all of you who signed up to provide a crock-pot snack for the unsheltered folks who frequent Our Place. Plymouth will house the crock pots for this purpose in the downstairs kitchen. You are welcome to acquire the crock pot from the church, take it home and fill it with your favorite recipe. Deliver the snack to Our Place at the appointed date and time, plug it in to keep it warm (cooking should have already taken place), and retrieve the empty crock pot the following day. Return it to the church kitchen for continued use the next month.

Thanks to the generous support from a recent grant from the Town Pump Charitable Foundation, paper cups and plastic spoons will be provided. You will find them also in the kitchen stored conveniently next to the crock pots. If you need help with transportation, Gus Byrom or Frank Kromkowski are pleased to help. Alane Dallas will send out reminders as needed.

Great News about Ruth's Place for Unsheltered Women!

On Monday, December 18 the Helena City Commission met to decide the future of the proposed homeless shelter for women. After months of hard work, attention to details, conversations among many folks, careful research and long-term planning, the Conditional Use Permit was accepted with one dissenting vote. Plymouth's Outreach and Social Justice Committee joined many in supporting this important step in addressing the housing crisis in our home town. We are so pleased to have had a hand in this development.

The women's shelter, called Ruth's Place, will be open to women currently living on the streets, regardless of their particular challenges, addictions or dependencies. That does not mean that there won't be rules which guide behavior; it means that as a "low-barrier" facility, all are encouraged to seek shelter at this location beginning in February.



Interior of Simple Cremations where Ruth's Place will be.

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Ruth's Place is located directly behind Our Place in the same building with its own entrance and hours of operation. Like Our Place, it will be managed by Good Samaritan. There will be plenty of opportunity for Plymouth folks to help in a variety of ways. For now we will continue to compliment the work of Theresa Ortega of Good Samaritan and Jeff Buscher of United Way as they continue to explore other options for all unhoused people. There is still much work to be done.

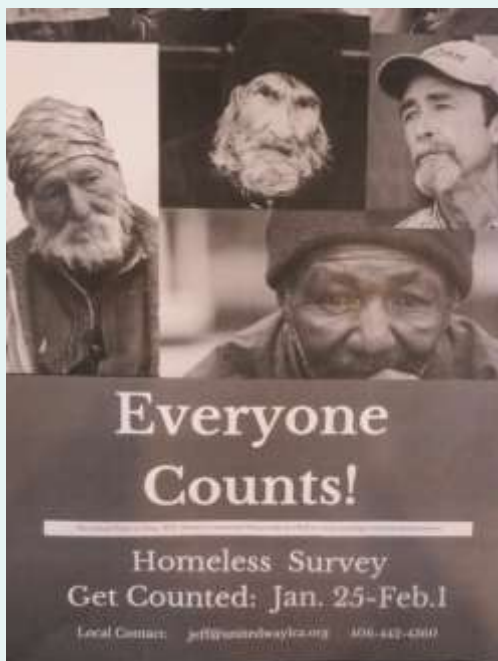
It Doesn't Just Happen...

Have you noticed that the east wall in the Fireside Room has a new look? Not only is it repaired and repainted, it features the exhibit "Faces of Our Unsheltered Neighbors," a photo display taken by Ed Field with narration prepared by Jeff Buscher and Jennifer Thompson. This traveling exhibit, funded earlier this year by a generous grant from the Town Pump Charitable Foundation, has been shown at a variety of locations throughout town and will continue to be featured at churches, offices, and public buildings until next July.



Thank you, Ed and Kathy Field, for providing the resources and expertise in seeing that the wall is repaired; to Terry Tatchell for considerable guidance and "heavy lifting;" and (well Ed wants me to say) I helped with the taping.

Point in Time Survey - Can you Help?



On Thursday, January 25, United Way of Helena is orchestrating the yearly count of unhoused people. Dr. Jeff Buscher, Community Impact Coordinator for United Way, asks for volunteers to assist with the count. There are two shifts: 1st shift from 3 - 7 PM; the 2nd shift from 9 - 11 PM. The survey is safe, as counters work in groups. Training is provided that same day at United Way at 3:00 PM; call Dr. Buscher at 406-442-4360 if you are interested. Pastor Charles and Jennifer Thompson will be providing soup at the library beginning at 4:00 PM for the workers and for those being counted. Let us know if you want to help with providing or serving something warm.

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Town Pump Charitable Foundation Grant Awarded

Again, Plymouth is so lucky to receive support from the Town Pump Charitable Foundation. They awarded Plymouth \$500 in December 2023 to assist with our efforts to provide care for our neighbors in need. This year we are using these funds to purchase gift cards for some of our friends who are finding the holidays a bit difficult; and to purchase serving supplies for our efforts in 2024 to provide snacks for folks at Our Place. Thank you, Town Pump, for recognizing the good work of Plymouth folks and for your support in the many ways that we reach out.



~Jennifer Jeffries Thompson



Treasurer's Message

To the Plymouth family, you may have heard that this is my last month as your treasurer. Next June I will be moving "back east" to Buffalo, NY, where my husband and I lived for 25 years. It is time to be closer to family, especially our new grandchildren, and slow the pace of life. We have enjoyed our years in Helena, teaching at Carroll, exploring the state, and, for me, participating in the life of Plymouth Congregational Church. When I arrived in January 2015 I planned to church-hop until I found the right fit but after my first Sunday at Plymouth, where the congregation was planning their formal vote to become open and affirming. I realized I was in the right place. The hymns of my childhood, tweaked for modern sensibilities, comforted me in this strange new world. Plymouth - all of you - were so important to my transition to this new adventure. I have been welcomed and included, and I thank you so much for that.

Being your treasurer has been a humbling experience. I learned a lot about how the church functions - and how generous, hard-working, honest, and creative this community is. There was never a problem we couldn't solve, even if it took a while. As Congregationalists, we understand the importance of a good process! We got a new boiler, updated and maintained many features of the building, and most exciting of all are looking forward to a more sustainable future with a new roof and solar panels. Our endowment fund will provide a measure of security into the future. What encourages me the most is the joyful mix of old and new faces on Sunday mornings. Our committees are all working hard, cooperating for the good of the wider community. The projects we've undertaken are so important and ambitious - it's breathtaking!

Rest assured that the Financial Affairs committee is conscientious and determined to be a good steward of our funds. We never take your support for granted! The challenges going forward are rebuilding reserves for building repair and maintenance, preparing for transitions, including a pastoral sabbatical down the road, and continuing to support our various missions within the church (e.g. music) and the community (refugee support, our unhoused neighbors, and more). So wishing you all the very best in 2024 and beyond.

~Pat Christian

Creation Care Tips

VEGAN BROWNIES—Rev. Charles Wei

Did you know you can make brownies out of black beans? With so many people gathered together for the holidays, there is bound to be someone who is vegan, vegetarian, or gluten-free. These delicious brownies are a perfect addition for your holiday spread, with a smaller carbon footprint than traditional brownies, and to accommodate your friends and family with special dietary needs.

Vegan Black Bean Peppermint Brownies

- 1 can black beans, rinsed and drained (15 oz)
- ½ cup egg substitute (or 2 eggs if the brownies don't have to be vegan)
- 1/3 c. vegetable oil
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ½ c. brown sugar
- ½ c. cocoa powder
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ⅛ tsp salt
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 tsp peppermint extract
- ¼ cup sweet rice flour (sticky rice/mochi)
- ½ cup white chocolate chips (optional)
- 2 candy canes, crushed

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Grease a 10” square baking pan. Add beans, eggs, oil, sugar, brown sugar, cocoa, baking powder, salt, extracts, and sweet rice flour to a food processor and blend until all ingredients are combined. Black beans should be completely pureed. Stir in white chocolate.

Pour batter into greased baking pan, and spread evenly. Top with crushed candy canes. Bake for 25 minutes. A toothpick should come out clean after inserting in the center. Cool completely before cutting, at least 1 hour.



HAPPY NEW YEAR—FROM YOUR MUSIC DIRECTORS

What is a Prelude in a Worship Service?



According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a prelude is “an introductory performance, action or event that precedes and prepares for the principal or more important event.” In the case of a Christian worship service, it is usually a musical selection, played or sung, that is intended to create a worshipful atmosphere in which congregants can worship through prayer, meditation, reflection and song.

A prelude in a worship service, especially in a Protestant church where the worship format is less formal and ritualistic, can easily become background or “elevator” music, if congregants treat it as such. If worshipers enter a sanctuary such as ours and greet each other, socialize, and reconnect with friends, a prelude is not necessary at the beginning of a worship service. Any indication that the service is about to begin would suffice. A CD recording with worshipful, meditative music is an effective way to gather people together to begin the service. Most musicians would not choose to be “just background music” if they had gone through the process of choosing appropriate music, practicing it, and then playing it on Sunday. Too often the prelude is overlooked as a meditative lead-in to the actual worship service and ignored as the socializing continues.

This description of a typical prelude was illustrated recently when a meditative prelude was being played. The piece built to quite a dramatic finish, but as the music got louder, so did the congregants in the sanctuary, to the point where it was almost a competition to see who could be louder. Obviously, the people who were greeting and socializing couldn’t hear the response from their friends so they had to talk louder to be heard. This worked against the principal reason why a prelude is included as a segment of a worship service.

There may not be any reason to change the way a prelude is received in our church; the discussion above is intended to stimulate conversation about what our members would like the prelude to be. We are fortunate to have a room just adjacent to the sanctuary, called the Fireside Room, where conversation, socializing, greeting friends or reconnecting with others can be done. That would allow people who would like to enter the sanctuary to pray, meditate or reflect prior to the formal service to do just that. Perhaps this is too controversial to be considered. This is perhaps an issue that the worship committee might consider discussing in the future. For the time being, Nancy and I will continue to select music for the prelude that is appropriate for that Sunday’s theme and message, whether it be recorded or “live” music.



Dr. Steve and Nancy Michelson

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Plymouth Congregational Church is extremely happy and delighted to welcome the following new members to our special church family:

Al and Kathe Simons
Susan Hemion
Jaime Tompkins



Women's Fellowship Epiphany Celebration

We've all heard the story about how Epiphany would have been different if women had been the bearers of gifts, rather than those three kings. Offerings would have been diapers and casseroles, rather than gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Ladies, get ready for an Epiphany celebration Plymouth style! Please save, wrap, and bring the worst Christmas present you receive this year (or previous years) and bring it to the January 9th, 2024 meeting.

~Jennifer Jeffries Thompson and Susan Butler

January meeting schedule:

Tuesday, January 9th at 10:00 a.m. in the Fireside Room

Tuesday, January 23rd at 11:30 at the Overland Express Restaurant

YOU'RE INVITED!

PCC ANNUAL MEETING: Sunday, January 28, immediately following the service—in the Sanctuary.

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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Email: pccofficemgr@gmail.com

Also: www.facebook.com/plymouthcongregational

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