

# Waymarks

Plymouth Church | Helena Montana

June 2024

## OUR PIECE OF THE AMERICAN PRAIRIE

We are so blessed to be living where we are, surrounded by the wild beauty of Montana. Anytime I drive out of town, no matter which direction I go, I am struck by the views, almost as if everywhere I went was part of a national park. Nature is just a few minutes away, with trails leading in all directions from our small capital city.

Here at Plymouth, we are lucky enough to have our own little piece of American Prairie, right in front of the church. As far as anyone knows, with the exception of the community garden, the labyrinth, and occasional mowing, the North 40 remains in its natural state.

Currently around the world, only 2% of temperate grasslands have been permanently protected. Much of the grasslands of the American Great Plains were tilled into farmland long ago. Unlike the grasses introduced by European immigrants, which have much shorter roots, our native grasses have extensive root systems which are able to sequester large quantities of carbon, which is one of the main factors contributing to climate change. These deep roots are resistant to fire, meaning their carbon will not be released into the atmosphere during a burn, and afterwards, it's much easier for the grasses to come back.

In the United States, we lose over a million acres of prairie every year to tilling. Unlike so much of the native grassland in our country, the North 40 has never been plowed, and it's home to many native species of grass, flowering plants, small mammals, lizards, and insects. It also provides food for birds, rabbits, and deer. Because of this, we have registered the North 40 as a Certified Wildlife Habitat, and we hope to preserve this little sanctuary of wilderness for a long time to come.



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It is not perfect, by any means. Even though the North 40 hasn't been plowed, invasive species have still managed to take root, and with our wildlife habitat designation, we cannot use pesticides. For the past three years, I've tried to eliminate at least the knapweed, but seedlings still seem to come up now and then. My next target is the dandelions, though I worry that may be a losing battle. Still, I would like to try.

The wildlife habitat signs will be going in soon, as well as a new sign for the church. Eventually, I hope we can install paths, picnic benches, and interpretive signage. I believe this could be a gift to the community, and along with the solar panels which we will soon have, a signal to the community of what we stand for. The prevailing belief in our culture is that Christians do not care about the environment, and we need to show them that just isn't true.

So, if you like to garden and find yourself with some free time, I know where there are some weeds that need to be pulled...

~ Rev. Charles Wei



## Moderator's Message—What We Do with What We Have

As Plymouth embarked upon its annual pledge drive last fall, while simultaneously hoping to fund an ambitious roofing and solar panel project and contributing to sleeping bags for the homeless, the Council wondered about competing interests. Chuck Butler selected the theme “What We Do With What We Have” for the pledge drive, and the Solar Committee began working on an application to Northwestern Energy’s USB-funded E + Renewable Program, as well as a fundraising campaign for shingles and solar.



“What we have” is a generous and devoted church community, a beautiful church with a south-facing roof waiting to collect the sun’s energy, a vibrant daycare and partnership with the Big Sky Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, and a city block with a diversity of lawn, trees, garden, labyrinth, and open field. “What we do” is join together in fellowship, and roll up our sleeves to clean the building and groom our lawn and trees, saving money so we will have more to do toward our missions. “What we will do” is work together to support the North 40 Committee as they renew our signage and work to preserve the field in way that will be intentional and attractive. We may need to be patient.

Also, “what we have” are committees that meet regularly to make decisions, based on the best information they have, about worship, building and grounds, personnel, finances, mission and outreach, the Columbarium, cleaning, food, and other details. “What we must do” is join committees, provide them with information, and trust their decisions.

The Plymouth Church Council is very grateful that Plymouth’s friends and members enthusiastically share what they have, and do what they do, to help us achieve our mission: to nurture our congregation and the wider community with acts of love and a vision of God’s image in all things. Happy Spring!

~ Jan Clinard

### **In Our Prayers Today**

In treatment/Healing: Greg Bolin, Gus Byrom, Jen, Nancy Michelson, Karen Mills, Kelly Murphy, Dianne Senne, and Grace Solis.

Bereavement: The family of Margy Kohl.

Special Prayers: Ed Canty, Maxine Ferguson, Art Gilreath, Loraine Hopgood, Jim and Doris Powell, Marlyce Taylor, Giles Walker, and the people of Israel, Palestine, Russia, and Ukraine.

Prayers for us and the families of the victims of war and gun violence, and natural disasters 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](mailto:pccofficemgr@gmail.com).*



## Treasurer's Message

Just a few quick updates this month:

- Earlier this year Plymouth participated in the One Great Hour of Sharing by the national UCC Conference and gave \$493.00 to this very worthwhile program which supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the UCC.
- At the end of April approximately 33% of the year has passed but up to 38% of the 2024 pledges have been received. Thank you everyone!
- Large payments in May included \$29,065.50 to Solar Montana (the 50% deposit required for our solar panels) and \$25,156.00 to Christman Roofing for the new south roof and installing new rain gutters and drop downs. These payments were covered by generous donations of \$33,000 to the solar project and cash on hand in checking.
- We also paid \$4779.03 to Lewis and Clark County for the second half of our assessments for the 2024 year. This covers street maintenance, open space maintenance, landfill monitoring, storm water utilities, urban forest management and water quality inside the city. As a nonprofit we do not pay property taxes.



**In March I included the line “Save room in your budget for a miracle.” We did that and I believe the above payments and sharing of gifts are miracles. Thanks to all of you who participate so generously.**

Finance Committee Members: Lynn Bolin, Pat Christian, Jan Clinard, Alane Dallas, Don Harriott, Al Simons, Terry Tatchell, Gail Tronstad.

~Gail Tronstad (gail.tronstad@gmail.com / 406-459-2444)

\*\*May Tidbit: Meaning of intaxacation: The euphoria you feel when you get a tax refund from the IRS only to remember you sent the money to them in the first place.





## WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP GROUP Invites you:

### Suggested Summer Read

Plymouth's Women's Fellowship hopes you will have time to read and think about two books this summer: The Women by Kristen Hannah, and Healing Wounds by Diane Carlson Evans. Both summarize the real-life experiences of Vietnam War-era army nurse, Diane,



though Hannah's book is fiction based on fact. Kristen Hannah, author of many acclaimed novels including The Four Winds and The Nightingale, worked closely with Diane Evans, who resides here in Helena. Hannah will make an appearance in Helena on June 26th at the Civic Center, participating in a discussion with Diane. Tickets for admission (\$10) may be purchased through the Civic Center; or for \$30 you can acquire a copy of the book as well as admission. Don't miss this opportunity to learn more about



Sunny Ray Mandeville

the books, the experiences recorded, to see Kristen Hannah and our own local treasure, Diane Carlson Evans.

The Lewis and Clark Library has generously donated 4 copies of The Women for Plymouth folks to share. There is a list on the table in the narthex if you are interested in borrowing a book. We only ask that you return that copy to the church so that others can have a chance to read it as well.

In the fall the Women's Fellowship hopes to provide a program, inspired by both The Women and Healing Wounds, about women who make a difference. We'll keep you informed as our plans progress.

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### Shower for Baby Emma

All are invited to celebrate the arrival of Emma Thompson Goto with a baby shower in the Fireside Room on Thursday June 27 in the afternoon. Scott and Yumi are her parents; Shaun and Jennifer are her grandparents. Emma will be dedicated during worship on Sunday, June 30. (For those of you who attended the women's luncheon on May 28, note the change of date for the shower.).



Sweet little Emma's hand



Little Sprouts art contribution to the Fireside Room exhibit.

### Fireside Exhibit

We have enjoyed the creative work of the Little Sprouts Day Care kids, exhibited in the Fireside Room since Easter. The next exhibit will feature the travels and plans you have for the summer months. Let either Pat or Jennifer know if you have something you would like to post. Whether you plan to stay home, garden and read, or climb Mt. Everest, your contributions are amazing!

### Flowers for Church Entrance

We hope the threat of frost is past, so it's time to "sow." Flowering plants (reds, yellow, orange and blueish-lavender are good) and green vines are welcome additions to the five large pots located outside the entrance to the church. The red pot nearest the door is shaded, while the other four are very sunny. Thanks to Terry there is a functioning drip line attached to all. You are invited to bring plants, adopt a pot, or contribute financially to the purchase of plants. If you are willing to help, let Jennifer know.



More Little Sprouts artwork.

# Creation Care Tips

## Did You Know? - What's in Our Water?

According to the International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) data from 2022, the following items were collected due to the cleanup efforts of about 469,482 volunteers around the world:



- 8,158,402 pounds of trash.
- 15,519,392 total items.
- 1,860,651 cigarette butts (did you know? - once in the water, the butts will slowly dissolve and release the pollutants they absorbed from the tobacco — such as nicotine, arsenic and lead)
- 1,175,045 plastic bottles
- 998,661 food wrappers
- 844,375 bottle caps (plastic)
- 622,780 grocery bags plus 567,763 other plastic bags
- 463,269 foam food containers and 425,637 plastic food containers
- 423,551 paper cups and plates
- 406,557 plastic straws/stirrers
- 1,1982,302 tiny trash made from plastic/foam pieces were collected. (can you imagine being one of those trash counters—yikes!)

This is astounding and there are more than these pollutants that were not mentioned on this list! Even though we are landlocked here in beautiful Montana, our waterbodies and waterways are also threatened by these same pollutants.

Ocean Conservancy is using ICC data to target 10 single-use plastic items commonly found. Dr. Anja Brandon, associate director of U.S. plastic policy at Ocean Conservancy says “**We must start with reducing plastic at the source. Banning** cigarette butt filters, plastic bags, plastic straws and stirrers, plastic foam foodware and cutlery would eliminate roughly 1.4 million tons of plastics in the United States alone.”

What can we do as Christians and Creation Care advocates? What are ways we as individuals can reduce single-use plastics? Food for thought.

Source: <https://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/international-coastal-cleanup/>

## The Importance of a Choir to the Christian Church—Part II

Last month in our Waymark publication, I gave some background on the importance of a choir to the Christian Church. This is an important issue that warrants some discussion. In Part II this month, I'd like to delineate specific reasons why a choir such as our Plymouth Choir is an indispensable aspect of a worship service.



1. A choir sings to “glorify God.” This phrase was used by Johann Sebastian Bach. He believed that all of life should be lived for the glory of God. He signed all his compositions Sol Deo Gloria (SDG), indicating his intent as a composer. The phrase aptly applies to church choirs as well.

2. A choir enhances and enriches a congregation’s individual worship experience. It can broaden a congregant’s experience of God. Each person worships differently based on many factors—personality, emotional state, life challenges, personal beliefs and frame of mind. How each person receives a choir’s music, and its message, is difficult to measure, but a choir’s presence in a worship service can be of value to congregants.

3. A choir can touch people’s lives; its message can change lives. These realizations make it necessary and imperative to rehearse music in such a way as to convey the spirit and message of the music to its listeners. Technically speaking, this means working on the technical details that result in a meaningful performance, such as notes, rhythms, vowel sounds, consonant energy, intonation, musical phrasing, dynamic shading, and appropriate balance (number of singers in each voice section--when possible).

To just sing through the music each week is not an effective way to move a congregant’s superficial understanding of the music to one on a higher spiritual plane (if the music is of high quality and suitable for the choir’s ability level—that’s another Waymark article!). In other words, the message will not be communicated effectively. As Robert Shaw, arguably the world’s foremost orchestral/choral conductor said, “The attention to minute technical details in the music can release floods of spiritual understanding.” It then has the power to help transform the world into a more loving and peaceful place through individual listeners.

4. A choir is a “facilitator of worship,” a “conduit of faith” for themselves and the congregation. It helps congregants to extend beyond the temporal and towards a more spiritual worship experience, at least theoretically. A choir can be an inspiration to a congregation and help lift the members from an apathetic or indifferent place to a place of renewal of their Christian spirit. This can only happen if a choir sings with genuine commitment, wholehearted enthusiasm, and more refined musicality.

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This doesn't mean that every church choir, however large or small, skilled or less skilled, balanced or unbalanced, must sound like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, or a large-city choir that employs one or more professional voices (called "ringers," not necessarily church members) in every section, or even like a more well-known choir down the street. It simply means that it must be evident to the congregation that their choir is doing its best and has tried to improve their musical performance each time they sing in the worship service.

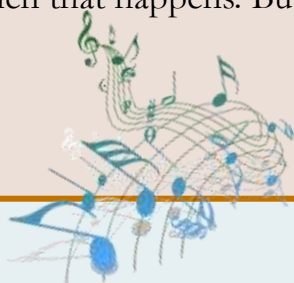
5. A choir gives church members an opportunity to serve God and their church, and utilize what musical and vocal ability they have in a meaningful and rewarding way, an opportunity that can last a lifetime.

6. A choir can help a congregation learn new, and perhaps more relevant, hymns that can aid in the spiritual growth of a congregation, instead of staying in a familiar habit of singing the same songs week in and week out. This can lead to less enthusiasm, even complacency, or perhaps indifference to a fundamental aspect of a worship service—the singing of hymns. It has been found that quite often, a choir's enthusiasm, energy and visible commitment to hymn-singing and the music they present, can lead to more enthusiasm, energy, and commitment by the congregation.

Our choir at Plymouth Congregational Church seems to be a good example of that because we have been blessed with a congregation that sings with confidence and enthusiasm, and is open to learning new hymns, as well as older hymns that everyone is familiar with. In a recent survey of favorite hymns, we had fifteen surveys returned with two favorite hymns each, which were more than we could fit into our Music Sunday service! We'll continue to use these favorite hymns throughout the summer.

As readers can see, there are ample reasons to justify maintaining a choir in churches of all sizes. It's unfortunate that the national trend in Protestant churches is to eliminate the traditional choir in favor of "praise bands" or electronic instrumental ensembles to provide the music for worship services. In my experience, this music often becomes just a "performance" by the ensemble with very little congregation participation. Often, the "contemporary" musical group uses music that is considered more relevant, more upbeat, more interesting, or more likely to reach younger individuals or couples than the music of the past, which leaves much powerful and impactful music of the church behind, and it eventually fades away, never to be used again. Something significant and important to a congregational worship experience is lost when that happens. But that's for another Waymarks article!

~ Dr. Steve Michelson, Music Director



## OUTREACH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

### Hands On Global

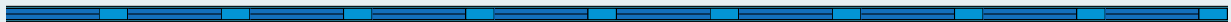
The Plymouth Council has approved the recommendation of the Outreach and Social Justice Committee to jointly sponsor with the Big Sky Unitarian Universalists a community education forum next September on the history of Israel and Palestine. The forum would bring in a speaker focusing on the historical background of the current conflict.



### Helena's Unsheltered

At its meeting on May 19, the Committee discussed the apparent, current overcrowding of homeless persons in the vicinity of God's Love down on Last Chance Gulch and what efforts may be underway in the community to shelter individuals now as summer approaches. Our fabulous members of Plymouth continue to support our Crockpot Ministry, serving hot soup at Our Place, the day center immediately north of God's Love, on the third Thursday morning of each month.

~ Gus Byrom, OSJ Chair—(406) 202-8768 / byromiii@gmail.com



### Cleaning Crew Champions Clean Church

As summer approaches, we want to continue making our church building SHINE! So many people have complimented our cleaning crew and its hard work. Many tell us the church has never been cleaner. Thank you, Crew!

I will be away for several weeks this summer and am currently recruiting cleaning crews for June and July. I will have sign-up sheets at church this Sunday (6/2/24) and the following Sunday (6/9/24). I would greatly appreciate your help – it will save me many phone calls and emails.

Please bring your personal calendar so you can check your availability.

Carry on and clean!

Gratefully,

~ Kathe Simons





**Summer Camps: You & Me: July 5-8; Youth Adventures: July 9-15;  
Great Escapes: August 25-30. Register by June 10th!**

HELP WANTED!

Men Counselors for Youth Adventures Camp

We are looking for men (men of all ages—must be at least a senior in high school to qualify) who would be interested in being a camp counselor for our young men campers this year. Counselors arrive one day ahead (Monday, July 8th and serve until Monday, July 15th, Youth Adventures Camp).

If interested, please contact Pastor Charles at 406-442-9883 or email at [pastorplymouthmt@gmail.com](mailto:pastorplymouthmt@gmail.com).

**YOU'RE INVITED!**

Bible Study: Tuesday mornings at 9:00 a.m. in the Fireside Room.

Big Sky UUs Sandwich Ministry—Second and fourth Wednesdays at 9:30 a.m.—come help us make PB&J sandwiches for Our Place. Meet in the kitchen.

Cindy Holcomb said after she attended the May Council Meeting—**"It was VERY entertaining."** Council meetings are open and members and friends of Plymouth are welcome to attend any time.

Next meeting is June 27, 4:00 p.m. in the Founder's Room.

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## Plymouth Congregational Church, UCC

400 S. Oakes St.

Helena, MT 59601

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**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](http://www.plymouthmontanaucc.org)

**Email:** [pccofficemgr@gmail.com](mailto:pccofficemgr@gmail.com)

**Also:** [www.facebook.com/plymouthcongregational](http://www.facebook.com/plymouthcongregational)

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