

# Waymarks

Plymouth Church | Helena Montana

July 2024

## SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Another election year is upon us, and already we are being bombarded by political ads in so many different parts of our lives: television, social media, the mail. As a church in a country where the idea of the separation of church and state used to be sacrosanct, the question always arises: What are we allowed and not allowed to do politically, as a congregation? It seems like so many churches are crossing this line, and have suffered the consequences of it. But, where exactly is this line?



Plymouth Congregational Church is a 501(c)(3), a non-profit organization, and as such, we are not allowed to engage in political activity. The prevailing wisdom is that such activities would put our status as a 501(c)(3) at risk, and we could lose our tax-exempt status. **But, things aren't so black-and-white.**

The IRS actually makes a distinction between lobbying and political campaign intervention. Lobbying is activity meant to influence legislation. Political campaign intervention is activity that promotes or is in opposition to a candidate who is running for public office. While both of these activities involve politics, the IRS allows a 501(c)(3) to participate in lobbying, to an extent, but it does not allow a 501(c)(3) to participate in political campaign intervention.

We can remember the difference with the “Three L’s” for lobbying, and the “Three P’s” for political campaign intervention.

**The Three L’s:** Lobbying is about Legislation, and a 501(c)(3) can do a Limited amount of it. Non-profits can participate in lobbying activities, as long as that is not the principal activity of the organization.

**The Three P’s:** Political campaign intervention is about People running for office, and a 501(c)(3) is Prohibited from getting involved, or they may risk losing their 501(c)(3) status.

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So, we can lobby, but we can't campaign for a candidate. Jesus was an extremely political figure, so it doesn't make sense to say that the church should stay out of politics. But, we do need to be careful in how we go about it, and we always need to ask if our political activity is in line with what Jesus taught.

It can be tricky in our current political climate, because the issues are so politicized, so it can seem like taking a position on an issue means standing with one party, and that we are taking a stance against the other. Personally, I don't think a lot of the issues that have become politicized should be about one party or another. Why is the environment tied to a political party? Why is health care tied to a political party? What about education, the military, or prisons? In my mind, these are not political issues; these are human issues, these are national issues.

But, certain issues have become synonymous with a particular political party, and the concern about being involved in politics as a congregation is a valid one. We absolutely cannot promote one candidate or one party over another, but political issues are fair game. With thoughtful consideration, the congregation is allowed to decide that a particular piece of legislation is something that we want to get behind, and we don't need to be afraid of losing our non-profit status because of it. As long as we don't lose sight of who we are, a congregation, not a group of lobbyists, we can stay true to the teachings of Christ, and be active in the political life of our country. One might even say that because of who we are, we must take an active role in the politics that affect the lives of so many. ~ Rev. Charles Wei



We wished a fond farewell to Pat Christian (on the left) and to Mark and Jill VanAlstyne. Both families are returning to their homes of origin, Pat to Buffalo, New York, and Jill and Mark to Rapid City, South Dakota. They promise to stay in touch. We are going to miss you.

## MODERATOR'S MESSAGE


My rain barrels are overflowing. Here in Helena, we need the rain; other parts of the country are inundated, with flooded streets, broken dams, and damaged buildings. In many parts of the world, water is scarce. Because climate change spells more severe weather events, we can expect to see record rainfall, record heat, and record storms.

On July 10, the Montana Supreme Court will hear testimony in the case of Held v. Montana, in which sixteen Montana youth sued the State of Montana to protect their constitutional right to a safe and healthful environment. Helena Interfaith Climate Advocates (HICA), which meets monthly at Plymouth, urges people to support these young plaintiffs outside the Montana Supreme Court building at 8:20 a.m. on July 10.



Each month I get two magazines that address climate in very different ways. The Population Connection promotes worldwide family planning as the most effective and surest way to save our planet. Here's an excerpt: "Population growth exacerbates every significant problem in the world. It leads to millions of people who have little and need more, which causes resentment and a desire for revenge. It creates children who starve to death after a brief view of life. Population growth is devouring our resources and our environment. If there is to be a future for life on Earth, the coupled problems of overpopulation and insatiable economic growth must end" (John Lynn, Letters to the Editor, June 2024).

The other publication, Farm Journal, counsels farmers on how to get the best yields with drought conditions and other difficulties exacerbated by climate, trade wars, transportation, finances, and war. Over the past year, I've read many articles about farming in Ukraine—Europe's bread basket. Here's an excerpt: "Since the Russian occupation, things have been incredibly difficult. We've had to slowly restore our cattle herd because Russia soldiers killed and ate much of what we had... Our grain storage warehouse was destroyed, so we had no proper facilities to store our harvested crops... When we were able to purchase diesel, Russian soldiers stole all that we had and poured it out" (Olena Nazarenko, December 2023). Stories about mine fields among crops are horrifying. Yet, the Ukrainian farmers continue to work.



***Genesis 2:15 says "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."***

***We recognize that all created things belong to God and that we are accountable to God as stewards of the creation.***

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As I watch bombs and storms turn man-made structures into rubble **throughout the world**, it's easy to feel helpless, to look away, and to focus attention on my own little space. But as a church, we are looking outward and nurturing our community with our solar panels, our outreach and social justice efforts (such as help for refugees and community-wide awareness of issues involving the unsheltered), and our involvement with HICA.

With my own rain barrel full and Plymouth's solar panels soaking up the sun's rays, perhaps it's time to focus on climate in general, and cheer on the young protectors of a clean and healthful environment. Blessings,

~ Jan Clinard



## WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP GROUP

### 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 made an appearance in Helena on June 26th at the Civic Center, participating in a discussion with Diane.

Summer Brunch Celebration at Florence Mayer's house



### **In Our Prayers Today**

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

Bereavement: Margy Kohl's family.

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).*





**Women's Fellowship Group—**

Summer Read Event

Filled to capacity, the Civic Center hosted authors Kristen Hannah and Diane Carlson Evans who discussed *The Women* and *Healing Wounds*. Both books are recommended summer reads for Plymouth people. Women's Fellowship hopes to provide a program and review in the fall. Consult the list on the table in the narthex if you would like to borrow a book.



Valerie Hellermann / HARRT

Valerie Hellermann, Executive Director of the Helena Area Refugee Resettlement Team, recently exhibited her newest work featuring paintings of people with whom she has worked and her passion for world peace.

New Solar Panels

View from the daycare playground. Thank you, Solar Montana for doing a great job!



Photographs taken by Jennifer Jeffries Thompson

## Shower for Baby Emma

Plymouth's Women's Fellowship hosted a baby shower for little Emma, daughter of Yumi Goto and Scott Thompson on June 27th. Emma is seen here with her mom and grandma, Miyuki Goto, who traveled all the way from Sendai, Japan.



This sweet doll, originally owned by Bev Harriott, decorated the table for Emma's shower. Carol McKerrow contributed a beautiful bouquet.





# Creation Care Tips

## Did You Know? - Carbon Footprint?

Carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases (including carbon dioxide and methane) that are generated by our actions. According to The Nature Conservancy (<https://www.nature.org/en-us/>), the average carbon footprint for a person in the United States is 16 tons, one of the highest rates in the world. Globally, the average carbon footprint is closer to 4 tons. To have the best chance of avoiding a 2°C rise in global temperatures, the average global carbon footprint per year needs to drop to under 2 tons by 2050.

Carbon offsetting means that you neutralize your own carbon footprint by reducing carbon emissions in your own community and elsewhere on the planet. It is a smart way to take responsibility for the carbon dioxide emissions that you cause and have not been able to bring down through changes to your own lifestyle.

Want to know what your carbon footprint is? To take a short, easy test and discover more about your personal carbon footprint and some actions you might be able to take for carbon offsetting go to [www.climatehero.org](http://www.climatehero.org). You will not be required to create an account to take the survey.

In addition to reducing your own carbon emissions, you may also have a positive impact on the carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere by encouraging your friends to reduce their footprints and gain talking points for discussions.



## Fireside Room Wall Display Features:

### SUMMER PLANS

Well, Jennifer Thompson did it again! She figured out a way to utilize the beautifully repaired and painted Fellowship wall without using nails! Who else would have thought to use outside trellises that are slipped under the upper pipe to hold them up? Now we have something to attach our display on and can use stick pins, and clothes pins that won't harm the wall itself. Members are joining into the idea and it's becoming a colorful display for spectators to view and enjoy.

The far left trellis holds a variety of exciting information...such as: Yumi Goto's Mom is visiting from Japan; The Skelton's have flown off to Alaska; Marsha Lauer just got back from visiting her son in Ft Worth, Texas. She had the adventure of meeting a friend whose daughter is on the same gymnastic team as Simone Biles and attended the US Gymnastic Championships being held there. Look for Marsha's photos of the gymnasts.



The middle two trellises hold African mementos that Jennifer was able to borrow which helps illustrate the area where Jonna Mandeville is visiting this summer in Africa...Ghana – Uganda and possibly Kenya.



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On the far right trellis there is information from Pastor Wei of his planned excursions with his family visiting from California and other destinations he may visit. Mary Lou and Rich Weddle just returned from the New York City area. Several families are taking advantage of being able to visit one or both of our two National Parks: Glacier & Yellowstone: The Thompsons and Marcia Warner with Katy & Maria are among those planning National Park visits.

This is just a highlight of some of the current travelers. You really need to stand up in front of the maps and follow the red yarn to catch all of the Summer Plans for Members of Plymouth Church and their families. Hope you enjoy our efforts to illustrate this glorious summer! ~Pat Buell



### **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.

Cleaning Team: Schedule for July—Saturday, July 6 (9-11am); Friday July 12 (9-11am); Friday July 19 (9-11am); and Saturday, July 27 (9-11am). If you are interested in helping the team, please let Kathe Simons know.

Lawncare Team: If you are interested in helping us keep our beautiful grounds looking nice, please contact Terry Tatchell.



## OUTREACH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Our committee is involved in sponsoring a non-partisan speaker on the history of the Middle East this September, in cooperation with our Unitarian/Universalist congregation.

We are also actively following efforts to assist Helena's homeless population. The United Way is seeking contributions to purchase the former Quality Inn next to the Kmart building. The goal is to convert the structure into apartments for those currently unhoused.

We are also exploring ways how Plymouth can more actively support members of our church community who are facing special challenges at this time.

This is a beautiful church! It is a privilege to worship with and serve you all!

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



## BUILDING AND GROUNDS

By the time you read this our new solar panel installation should be completed and fully functional. It's been an amazing journey led by Mary, Jill, and Jan. Thanks to everyone who participated and donated to the roof/solar project!

Ed Field continues to mow our lawn and keeps it looking great. In addition, cleanup and trimming will be needed on a continuing basis. For anyone interested in helping out, there is a signup sheet in the narthex. The west lawn needs to be raked to clean up small branches and cones before mowing can be done. Please contact Alane or me regarding access to the mower shed. Please let me know if you are unfamiliar with the mower or string trimmer. That's all for now, I hope everyone is enjoying our beautiful summer. ~ Terry Tatchell





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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