

MESSAGE FROM PASTOR CHARLES

Altar vs Communion Table

We have some pretty interesting conversations during Worship Committee regarding many different aspects of worship, from the music and prayers that we use, to the way things look, and even the order in which we do things. It's hard to say how much of this has a direct impact on our worship experience, but the hope is that with deeper understanding comes more intentional preparation, which should lead to a richer worship experience for everyone.

A recent topic of conversation was the difference between an altar and a communion table. Growing up in the Presbyterian Church of the USA (PCUSA), I was taught that we don't use altars in church, because an altar is a table that a priest uses to make sacrificial offerings. When we hear the term "sacrificial offering" what often comes to mind is the offering of live animals, which would be killed on an altar by a priest. Not only are there no priests in the PCUSA, instead they have "teaching elders," the denomination also does not practice animal sacrifice. Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice, and because of that, it is no longer necessary to kill animals at the altar. His death and resurrection are the foundation of our faith, and he told us to remember him through the practice of communion, so the "altar" became the "communion table."

The United Church of Christ also does not have priests or practice animal sacrifice, so I was very surprised to discover when I became UCC that the use of the word "altar" was quite common in UCC congregations. Most churches have some kind of table at the front of the church, the chancel, to put a Bible, flowers, candles, and/or other decorative items, but some churches call it an "altar," and others call it a "communion table." I had no desire to step into a new community and declare that the use of the word "altar" was wrong, and demand that we start calling it a "communion table." Instead, I had to figure out a way to become comfortable with using that word.

Because of the way I was taught and raised, an altar will always be a place of sacrifice in my mind, and even though we don't practice animal sacrifice in the UCC, we still make sacrifices. When we give an offering to the church, that is a sacrifice. Most of us could use more money, so giving to the church is a sacrifice. We must figure out a way to do with less in order to give an offering.

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MODERATOR'S REPORT

Lynn Bolin

August 2026

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of our United States of America, we are reminded that the main reason our ancestors, the Pilgrims, came to this country was for religious freedom.

America's 250th is not just a celebration of independence, it is a celebration of ideals. Religious freedom is among the most cherished of these ideals, a gift passed down through the ages and entrusted to the future. If the nation is to thrive in its next chapter it must continue to honor the gift, protect it and extend its promise to all - especially in an era of polarization and social change.

We are a country of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and people of no religion. Diversity is not a threat to our American project – it's one of our greatest achievements. Yet diversity tests the nation's commitment to religious liberty. We must ask how we can protect the rights of minority faiths. This protection is a big part of why the American experiment has endured for 250 years but it requires vigilance and a willingness to defend the rights of others and not just our own.



Don filling in holes to make it easier to mow



New Zoom events
from the UCC:

August 20, 3:30-4:30

Faith, Disability, and
the Crisis of Home-
lessness

September 10, 3:30-
4:45

Responding to the
Deadly ICE Deten-
tion System: Ways to
Resist

And many more!

Find them at [ucc.org/
events/category/](https://ucc.org/events/category/)

Our Committee continues to be active in supporting community efforts to provide emergency overnight housing for homeless persons. Helena Area United Way is seeking volunteers to stay overnight for a few nights this winter at one of our Helena area churches who will be able to provide some accommodation of homeless persons during bouts of extreme cold weather. Financial contributions to United Way to support this activity are also welcome. Please see me for more details.

Our Place is now operating out of the remodeled south wing of the Good Samaritan store located on North Montana Avenue at Custer (the old Gibson's building). Our Place is operating a day center Monday - Friday for Helena's homeless persons. During the workweek, a van drives downtown each morning to provide transit for homeless persons to the day center.

Night time emergency shelter is extremely limited. Many homeless are forced to sleep downtown on the sidewalks or in nooks and crannies behind our buildings in Downtown Helena.

We will be soliciting contributions next month to raise funds for cartons of fresh milk for our Helena area school youth, in cooperation with Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church.



Any concerns or suggestions for ongoing needs, please call Gus at (406) 202-8768

TREASURER'S REPORT—Gail Tronstad

Recently I was looking at food pyramids online and wondered if there is a financial pyramid for small churches. There is not but there are interesting measurements. Below are highlight of a couple of principles for small churches as we review of our budget through the close of the second quarter.

Don't spend more money than you bring in -- As of June 30, our income has exceeded our expenses by \$6,562.

Start an emergency fund – Plymouth has a solid practice of setting aside funds that can be used in an emergency as well as funds for anticipated expenses. We have a sabbatical fund in a CD of nearly \$20,000. We have moved \$30,000 from the Betty Purvis unrestricted savings account and \$20,000 from the Memorial Fund savings to one year CDs with an interest rate of 3.67 APY. The savings and CD total for the Betty Purvis account is \$36,550. The Memorial account savings and CD total is \$26,575.

Percentage of budget going to staff – For small churches this can range from zero to one hundred percent. Plymouth's budget for pastor and staff is at 45% of total.

A highlight at the end of the second quarter is that 54% of the pledged income for 2026 has been received.

At this time, the Plymouth budget is strong and healthy. Each of you has a part of in this – from financial support to volunteer giving to your presence and work to spread the spirit and love of Plymouth to others. Thank you for all you do.



Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” One of my favorite parts of our worship service is when we have the opportunity to pray together. During the Prayers of the People, we are invited to speak aloud the names of those we wish to have the congregation pray for. Sometimes we can hear those names spoken aloud and other times they are spoken in a mere whisper. I can pray for the people whose names I hear clearly as well as for those names I can’t hear. For me, this is an opportunity for us to communicate directly with God whether we speak or hear a name aloud, quietly, or silently in our hearts. God hears all of our prayers.

Please remember that if you have a special friend or family member you’d like the congregation to pray for, you can ask for their name to be included in our worship guide, in the Waymarks, or added to Charles’ prayer list only.

- ☐ You can find a prayer request card in the pew rack that can be completed and put into the offering plate or dropped in the church office.
- ☐ You can also speak with, call, or send an email to Pastor Charles or to our office administrator, Kendall Larson. The power of prayer in our church community is palpable. It is a privilege to pray for each other in the presence of God.

Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

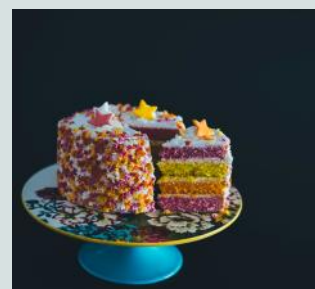


Happy late August Birthdays to:

17 Al Simons
22 Connie Erickson
22 Pr. Charles Wei
31 Janet Tatchell

And a Happy Early September Birthday to:

9 Chuck Butler





In Our Prayers

Special Prayers: Maxine Ferguson, Art Gilreath, Loraine Hopgood, Doris Powell, Marlyce Taylor, and Giles Walker. All those who are experiencing the horrors of war and natural disasters.

Medical Treatment: John Breisnes, Karen Senne Hayes, Lynda Hayes, Marcia Lauer, Betty Louise (Kiki), Kelly Murphy, Maureen Nordahl, Suzanne Nybo, Phyllis Weaver,.

To add someone to the prayer list, please fill out the prayer card in the pew backs, call the church office at 442-9883 or email pccoficemgr@gmail.com.

The United Church of Christ Daily Devotional:

Created by the Still Speaking Writer's Group by The Pilgrim Press, the Daily Devotional grounds our daily faith.

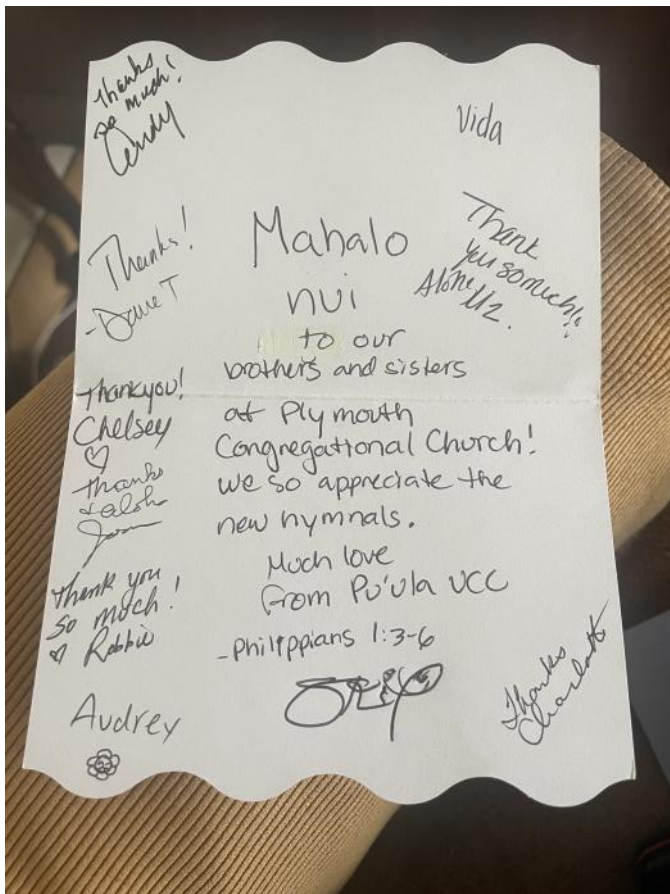
To subscribe: <https://www.ucc.org/daily-devotional/>

There is also a box on that webpage to search previous devotional messages.

From 7/21/26:

Our lives are not pass/fail tests. They are sacred works in progress, shaped by a faithful God who refuses to give up on us. When shame tells you that you're falling short, remember this: God isn't standing over you with a red pen. God is beside you, committed to your becoming.

Prayer: God of peace, free me from the belief that Your love must be earned. Gather every part of who I am—spirit, soul, and body—and remind me that Your faithfulness is greater than my striving. Amen.



Thank you card from Pu'ula UCC Church in Pa-hoa, Hawai'i. The Bible verse they reference is this:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

This card is on the south side of the bulletin board.

SUMMER READ AND DISCUSSION—Jennifer Jeffries Thompson

What have you learned from Montana's past that informs our future? Come hear what the experts have to say. Don't miss out; plan to attend; bring friends!

August 26, 12:00 to 1:00, in Plymouth's Fellowship Hall, featuring Mark T. Johnson discussing the history of Chinese in Montana and immigration policies today.

September 2, 12:00 to 1:00, in Plymouth's Fellowship Hall, featuring Drenda Niemann and Todd Harwell discussing the 1917-1918 flu epidemic and contagions anticipated presently.

September 9, 12:00 to 1:00, in Plymouth's Fellowship Hall, featuring Valerie Hellermann addressing the Cuban Refugees in the 1950's – 1960's compared with refugees currently residing in Helena.

September 16, 1:00 to 2:00, Large Meeting Room, Lewis & Clark Library, featuring Jordan Evertz speaking on hunger in north-eastern Montana in the 1950's compared with food shortages today. (Attendees are encouraged to bring flour, sugar, salt or cornmeal for Helena Food Share.)

The topics are based on selected essays from Montana, Magazine of Western History (with permission). Citations are available upon request by contacting the church office. All discussions are free and open to the public. Bring sack lunches and/or beverages if desired..



Camp Mimanagish:

**Geography of Grace
Retreat 8/26-8/30/26**

**The Soul of Aging
9/14-9/18/26**



Flu epidemic, 9/2/26,
noon, Fellowship Hall



Cuban and other Refugees,
9/9/26, noon, Fellowship Hall



Pastor Charles fixing the stone work at the base of our sign.

Pastor Charles, continued from page 1

But, sacrifice is more than just giving something up. When people sacrifice animals, it's often for the purpose of cleansing one's sins. The idea is that the animal takes on your sins, and the animal is punished in your place, to make yourself right with God. Some people think this is what happened when Jesus sacrificed himself for us.

We don't give monetary offerings as a way of asking for forgiveness, though I'm sure there are plenty of people in the world who do. Instead, these offerings are a way of saying thanks, and of contributing to the good work that God is doing in the world. Everything we have comes from God, and giving a small portion of it back is an acknowledgment of that. And, when we understand just how much God loves us, the giving, while sacrificial, becomes an act of joy. It is a gift, as much as everything that God gives to us is a gift.

So, I place the offering on the altar on Sunday during the worship service, because it is a sacrifice, and I don't have to feel uncomfortable with using the word "altar." And, when we celebrate communion, we use a different table, the "communion table," because we are not priests, and we are not sacrificing Jesus. Jesus is the priest offering the sacrifice, and we are the recipients of that grace, given to us as a gift of love, not as an obligation. God does not require sacrifice from us. But, people who love each other very often give each other gifts as an expression of that love. God is always blessing us with gifts. And, if we are so filled with gratitude that we feel moved to do the same, then we absolutely should.

You're Invited!

Bible Study:

Every Tuesday
9:00 a.m.
Fireside Room

Sandwich Ministry:

Second & Fourth
Wednesday of the
month. 9:30 a.m.
Kitchen

Chime Choir:

Will resume in
September

Women's Fellowship

Will resume in the fall.

Cleaning Crew

Saturday mornings
Contact Kathe to
volunteer:

603-860-4539 or
kathe@simonshome.
org



United Church of Christ
400 S. Oakes St. Helena, MT 59601

PLEASE
PLACE
STAMP
HERE

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.



Office Hours

Pastor Charles Wei:
9:00 am—1:00 pm Tues—Thurs
and by appointment

Administrative Assistant
Kendall Larson:
9:00 am—1:00 pm Mon –Fri

Contact Us

Church Office: 406.442.9883

Web:
www.plymouthmontanaucc.org

Email: pccofficemgr@gmail.com

Also: www.facebook.com/plymouthcongregational



Sundays 10:00 am Worship Service in person and on
You Tube through our website