

**First Presbyterian Church**

# The Mustard Seed

**NEWSLETTER**

Vol. 2026 Issue 2

First Presbyterian Church, Helena, MT

February 2026

## Annual Meeting Sunday, Feb. 8

The Annual Meeting will be held Sunday, Feb. 8, after the worship service.

The 2026 budget will be presented and new classes of Deacons and Elders voted upon.

Proposed changes to the bylaws will also be presented. Notification of the changes was mailed to the congregation in January.

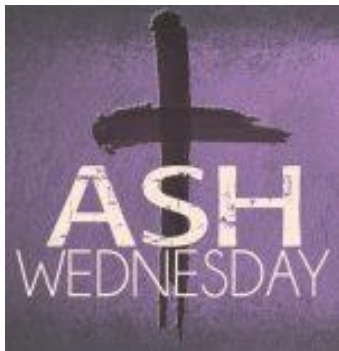
Copies of the 2025 Annual Report will be available prior to the meeting.



## Warming Hearts

FPC gathered donations of towels and blankets in January, which will be distributed to local agencies in February.

## Ash Wednesday Service Feb. 18 at Noon



You are invited to attend the Ash Wednesday service and luncheon on February 18 at noon.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent. This traditional service will include the imposition of ashes.

A light meal of soup, rolls, and cookies will be provided after the service.

## Lay Liturgist Training Feb. 22

There will be a lay liturgist training on February 22 in the sanctuary after worship. This will be a chance to practice our liturgy-reading skills and to provide common ground about the ways that we lead worship.

All lay liturgists are encouraged to attend, as well as anyone else who is interested.

## Plan for Covering Services in Richardson Hall

In the past, services in Richardson Hall – receptions following funerals, weddings, baptisms, family reunions (usually for members and family/friends of FPC) – were the responsibility of the Presbyterian Women's Organization (PW).

Members of PW would meet with family members, pastor, funeral directors, to determine what was desired in terms of set-up, catering, etc.

With the dissolution of PW at FPC, another group needs to be charged with this task. Session asked the deacons to devise a plan to cover

these activities.

At the December 14, 2025, meeting, the deacons agreed on the following plan of action regarding services in Richardson Hall. Carol Gneckow and Kathy Chambers will coordinate volunteers from among the deacons and congregation-at-large for one-time events in Richardson Hall.

If you are interested in volunteering for this task, please contact Art Bumgardner, moderator of deacons, by calling 406-468-8342 or emailing him at [renart1962@gmail.com](mailto:renart1962@gmail.com).

## You Can Still Get an FPC Shirt!

So — you meant to get a First Presbyterian Church shirt, but time ran out or you forgot?

Never fear, you can still get one. Just take a solid-color shirt (preferably black, grey or beige) to Big Sky Print-wear, 1400 Euclid Avenue. Tell them you're with First Presbyterian, and pay them directly: \$20.

## Bible Study

Fridays  
at Noon



## Trivia Question:

Who appeared with  
Jesus during the  
Transfiguration?



(Answer on page 11.)

Dear friends in Christ,

Over the first quarter of my residency here, I engaged in a process of listening and learning about our congregation and our context in Helena. I walked around the church's neighborhood, interviewed congregants and Helena residents outside of our church, looked at demographic data, and attended community events. As I have reflected on our context and our congregation, I have been struck by how our context challenges our congregation's ecclesiology – our understanding of what it means to be the church.



Our congregation's understanding of what it means to be the church centers around particular structures: the structure of our building, the structure of our liturgy, the structure of our committees. While these structures can be good and can help us as we seek to bear witness to the good news of God in our community, they become less and less sustainable as our membership declines and ages. I find it fascinating and encouraging to be reminded that the church has existed for most of its history without these structures that we associate with church today. For the first few centuries of the church, before Christians were legally allowed to practice their faith, Christians gathered in homes, rather than in buildings dedicated to worship. The organ didn't become a standard in Western Christian worship until the Middle Ages, and even so, much of the world has continued to worship without it. The Presbyterian structure of church government wasn't birthed until the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Buildings, organs, and committees can all be wonderful, but they are not essential to being the church.

As I consider what is essential to being the church, I have found myself returning to the earliest record that we have in Scripture of the believers after Pentecost:

*"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."* -Acts 2:42-47

This earliest record of Christian community focuses on a rhythm of activities: devotion to the teachings of the apostles, fellowship, sharing meals, praying, giving to those in need, and praising God. As we seek to continue to be the church in our time and place, I wonder in what ways God is inviting us to continue this rhythm of activities that mark us as believers. With the resources that we have – with the people who are currently part of our congregation and with our money, time, and energy – how can we continue to do these things? In what ways do we

hope to learn, fellowship, pray, give, and praise in our future together? As we shift our ecclesiological imagination – our imagination of what it means to the church – may we open ourselves to the still, small voice of the Spirit.

Grace and peace,

Emily Cowser

The Rev. Emily Cowser

## Seeds & Saplings

### Mission & Outreach Chooses Catalog Gifts

The Presbyterian Mission Agency operates through the Presbyterian Church (USA). Generous gifts to the *Presbyterian Giving Catalog* are signs of our gratitude: feeding the hungry, comforting the brokenhearted and sharing our faith with young and old.

By joining our gifts together, however large or small, we expand our witness to God's gracious and abundant work in the world. Your gift provides help, hope, assistance, and relief to people, families, and communities in need.

The Mission & Outreach Committee has selected two giving opportunities:

**(1) Bag of Moringa Tree Seeds (Item OG10010) \$40.** Moringa leaves can be an important source of nutrition since they can be ground and added to food to provide protein, amino acids, vitamins and minerals in communities that struggle with malnourishment. A gift of a sack of moringa seeds is enough to start a small nursery of these quickly growing, drought-tolerant trees.



**(2) Sapling Set (Item OG10040) \$30.** Globally, humans face deepening ecological crises, and vibrant ecosystems are under threat from widespread deforestation. A gift of 90 saplings helps restore God's Earth by mitigating climate change, sheltering wildlife, reinforcing soil and providing nutritious food for surrounding communities.

This campaign will be February 1-22, 2026. Please remember to write "Seeds" or "Saplings" on your check. Or, simply write "Giving Catalog" on your check and we'll distribute your financial gift accordingly. Thank you! Questions? call Carol Gneckow, (406) 422-9914.

# MINUTES OF THE SESSION

January 20, 2026

The regular meeting of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Helena was called to order on January 20, 2026, at 1:00 PM by Pastor in Residence Reverend Emily Cowser who moderated a “Dwelling in the Word” and subsequent Session meeting.

Reverend Cowser handed out a page of Scripture from 1 Kings 19:8-18 for the “Dwelling in the Word” for this month. The verses were read aloud twice and members were asked what stood out to them.

Elder Jim Meyer opened the meeting with prayer.

There was a quorum with the following Elders present: Arlyn “Butch” Plowman, Carol Gneckow, Patti Borsberry, Jim Meyer, Jeff Chaffee, Barb Leland, and John Bryan. Deacon Ward Stiles, Clerk of Session John Gneckow and Treasurer Leo Potter were also in attendance.

**APPROVAL OF DOCKET:** Reverend Cowser asked for additions to the docket. No items were added.

## CONSENT AGENDA:

- a. Approve Max Oliver as a member of Building and Grounds Committee and Janet Potter as a member of the Mission and Outreach committee.
- b. Accept the reports of committees and Deacons.
- c. Approve the Deacons’ plan that Carol Gneckow and Kathy Chambers coordinate a group of volunteers from among the Deacons and congregation-at-large who will be trained to do the job of planning and coordinating one-time events in Richardson Hall.
- d. Give a tithe of the 2025 income from the unrestricted Vanguard #1 fund to the Mission committee to be used for mission.
- e. Approve the minutes of the December 16<sup>th</sup> Session meeting.

Carol Gneckow asked to remove “c” as it was partially incorrect. The moderator moved the item to the Deacon report.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed to accept the docket and amended consent agenda.

**CLERK’S REPORT:** The Clerk reported that FPC began 2025 with 90 members. During the year, we added six new members and moved one person from inactive to the active list. However, FPC had seven members die. Session also approved removing 10 members from active to inactive status. Result is 80 active members as of December 31, 2025.(see the table below)

The required annual report has been filed with the Montana Secretary of State’s office.

The Clerk also read a letter to Session from Mike Davis thanking everyone for the support he and his deceased wife received during Marsha’s illness.

<b>Active Membership as of December 31, 2024</b>	<b>90</b>
New Members	6
Restored to Active Status	1
<b>Total Additions</b>	<b>7</b>
Deaths	7
Moved to Inactive Status	10
<b>Total Losses</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Active Membership as of December 31, 2025</b>	<b>80</b>

**RESIDENT PASTOR’S REPORT:**

Pastor Emily finished her contextual analysis process of learning more about our neighborhood and our congregation. She presented Session with written reflections of what she observed during the process. She is open to discussing all or parts of her reflections if asked.

In December she was involved in:

Visiting with family in Pittsburgh over the holidays.

Meeting with her coach, counselor, two mentors, her spiritual director, a pastor colleague, and her 1001 apprenticeship cohort.

Attending meetings of the Session committees.

Attending the Helena Ministerial Association lunch.

Serving Communion at Touchmark.

Involvement in one-on-one and group encounters with FPC members and two people who came to the church looking for financial help.

Communion	Total	Breakout
December	58	51 in person, 7 at home

**COMMISSIONED PASTOR’S REPORT:**

During the past year, Dianna’s activities have included:

Preaching on various occasions.

Serving communion.

Instrumental in reviving the previously discontinued Christian Education Committee.

Provided Pastoral Care to a terminally ill member and others.

Hospital visitations.

Presided over a wedding.

Taught a segment about the prayer shawl and tassels at a private school.

Led the Advent study.

Moderated a couple of Session meetings.

Lay Liturgist and conducted Lay Liturgist training.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

**Administration Committee:** Chair Jim Meyer reported. A written report was submitted to Session.

Treasurer Leo Potter gave the financial report. In December, FPC had an income of \$7380 bringing the 2025 income \$51,410. We exceeded our budgeted income by 15.8%and operated under our budgeted expense by 5.2%.

Vanguard Funds showed a 2025 gain of \$36,112. Vanguard #1 increased \$14,271 during 2025. Ten percent equals \$1427,10.

**ACTION ITEM: The Administration Committee recommends that a tithe of 2025 Vanguard Acct#1 be given to the Mission and Outreach Committee to disburse in accordance with the congregation approved motion of April 21, 2020. Approved.**

**The Memorial Committee:** The committee did not meet in December.

The Christian Education Committee is requesting \$8,000 from the Murfitt Vanguard fund for anticipated scholarships. The Committee requested more information from the Committee.

Karen Witte brought up changing meeting times. She will research times and days of the week for consideration. After discussion, the Committee will move meetings to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month at 1:00 pm.

None of ten members recommended for change from active to inactive status have responded back and will be considered “inactive.”

**Next Meeting:** February 10 at 1:00 PM

**Building and Grounds Committee:** Chair “Butch” Plowman reported and a written report was submitted to Session.

**ACTION ITEM: Approve Max Oliver as a member of the Building & Grounds Committee. Approved (See the Consent Agenda).**

Butch, Mark, Max, and John will begin reviewing and updating the building use policies, procedures, and prices during January.

Butch has contacted Green Line Pest Control regarding the continuing rodent problem in the Girls Thrive area.

Butch will set a consultation appointment with Pioneer Flooring/Premier Flooring Solutions in Helena for new flooring ideas in Richardson Hall.

Butch will schedule time with Big Paw Concrete Coating to look at the spauling on the colored concrete near the main entrance.

The parking contract with the Indian Resource Center for 5 parking spaces has expired. Butch will reach out to them regarding a new contract.

The Bridge Club is moving the weekly game day from Tuesday to Thursday.

At the request of Session, the committee discussed a fragrance-free area within the sanctuary without arriving at a solution.

John Bryan expressed an interest in doing the repairs to the bell tower roof masonry. Les will fly his drone to video the area needing repairs to facilitate discussion on the way to safely accomplish the repair.

Les will also fly the drone to look for and evaluate any needed work on the southside stained glass window as a result of the recent windstorm.

**Property Oversight Committee:** Did not meet.

**Next Meeting:** February 11 at 10:00 AM

**Christian Education Committee:** No written report. Chair John Bryan verbally reported.

The committee discussed needing additional funds for scholarships. Dianna will write a proposal to present to the Administration Committee.

John Coefield's Bible Study will resume as soon as John is able to return to church following recent knee replacement surgery. Dianna Goodman is starting a new Lenten Bible study. John Bryan is planning a study on "The Fruit of the Vine," --date to be determined.

**Next Meeting:** February 2026.

**Friendship Committee:** Elder Barb Leland reported. A written report was submitted to Session.

### **Up-coming Activities:**

Members of the congregation are invited to attend the basketball games at Carroll College on January 31. We will sit together. Details will be provided in January.

Ash Wednesday Service 2/18/2026 at noon. Following the service, a light meal (soup, roll, cookies, water, and coffee) will be served. We are inviting the general public to the worship service and luncheon.

Fifth Sunday potluck March 29 following the worship service.

### **Other Business:**

Considering a trip/tour to Our Lady of the Rockies combined with a lunch.

Looking at August 30 in Kennedy Park for a church picnic.

**Next Meeting:** February 11, 2026.

**Mission and Outreach Committee:** Chair Carol Gneckow reported. A written report was submitted to Session.

**ACTION ITEM: Session approve Janet Potter as a committee member. Approved (See the Consent Agenda).**

Special Guest: Gus Byrom, Plymouth Congregational Church.

Plymouth Congregational Church will partner with FPC for United Way's Point in Time Survey at God's Love January 29, 4:00-7:00 PM. FPC will prepare a hot



meal in our church and transport it to God's Love. Plymouth Church members will bring a salad and cookies and serve the meal. Motion made, seconded, and passed to participate in the Point In Time Survey by preparing a meal for participants of the survey.

Carol read thank you notes from, Crossroads Prison Ministry (Bibles for Prisoners), God's Love, and the YWCA for our support to their programs.

The committee also decided to send \$850 to United Way in support of the "Helena Emergency Shelter Program."

**Next meeting:** February 12, 2026.

**Nominating Committee:** Did not meet.

**Personnel Committee:** Elder Jeff Chaffee reported. A written report was submitted to Session.

Les' annual evaluation has been completed.

Emily's six-month evaluation is due soon. She will complete the questionnaire beforehand.

Nursery Attendant Job Description and review of necessary policies were discussed. Individuals were assigned policies to review and recommend updates, as necessary. It was suggested that once the review and update is completed, they be reviewed by a lawyer.

Mary Stiles agreed to follow up with Julie and Pastor Emily to understand the program used for the background checks.

**Next meeting:** February 2 at 10:00 AM

**Synergos Committee:** Did not meet. Next meeting in January 2026.

**Worship Committee:** Chair Patti Borsberry reported. A written report was submitted to Session.

#### Committee Old Business:

Lenten season services were planned. Dianna Goodman will order Lenten books.

Ash Wednesday is February 18. The service will be at noon followed by a light meal provided by the Friendship Committee.

Palm Sunday is a regular service on March 29. Palm fronds will be handed out as people enter the sanctuary.

Maundy Thursday service will be at 7:00 pm on April 2. Three stations will be offered for attendees, i.e., washing of hands, anointing with oil, and communion. Taizé music (simple meditative chants) will be used.

Good Friday service is at noon April 3. Candles and sanctuary lights will be darkened.

Easter Sunday April 5 will be a celebratory regular service with choir.

Deb Whitcomb will ask someone involved with Girls' Thrive to a February Sunday worship service to talk about their program.

#### Committee New Business:

Carol Gneckow and Kathy Chambers sorted the stored Christmas decorations.

**Next meeting:** February 10, 2026, at 10:00 AM.

**Board of Deacons Minutes:** A written meeting and activity report for December were submitted to Session.

Moderator Art Bumgardner opened the meeting with prayer. Kathy Chambers followed with Devotion #5 from the “Diaconal Ministries Devotions for Deacons.”

Deacon New Business:

Elder Carol Gneckow, representing Session, presented a request to the Deacons to add a team to their responsibilities that would facilitate weddings, baptisms, family reunions, and funerals that occur at the church and for which, use of Richardson Hall is requested.

**ACTION ITEM: Approve a deacon plan where Carol Gneckow and Kathy Chambers will coordinate and provide volunteers from among the Deacons and congregation-at-large for one-time events in Richardson Hall. Motion passed.**

Board Report:

During December 2025, 3 meals were provided. Eight (8) cards were sent acknowledging birthdays, three (3) cards sent acknowledging anniversaries and no (0) sympathy cards. Six Grief booklets were also provided to people who lost a family member during the past year. There were no (0) hospital visits. Communion was served to four (4) people at Touchmark and three (3) people received communion at home.

**Next Meeting:** February 15, 2026, following the Worship service.

**Session Old Business:** none

**Session New Business:** The future of the church which was discussed during Pastor Emily’s report.

**There being no further business to conduct, a motion was made, seconded, and passed to adjourn the meeting.**

Elder Jim Meyer closed the meeting with prayer.

**The next Regular Session Meeting: February 17, 2026 at 1:00 PM**

John Gneckow  
Clerk of Session

## Hand & Foot Cards

**Fridays, 1:30 p.m.**

Never played? No problem! The game is easy to learn,  
and willing teachers abound.

# Sarah & Rebekah Bible study

The Sarah and Rebekah  
Circles have combined into  
one Bible study that meets  
monthly.

This month’s study will be  
at the church on Thursday,  
February 5, at 10 a.m. Visit  
with Merle Korizek for more information.



## Trivia Answer:

Moses and Elijah



### *Thank You for Your Generosity*

Thank you for your  
faithful giving to the  
ministry of FPC Helena.

Your financial support makes the procla-  
mation of the gospel possible throughout  
the world! Our Dec. net giving is here:

	Dec. 2025	YTD
<b>Income</b>	<b>\$27,177</b>	<b>\$295,390</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	<b><u>\$19,797</u></b>	<b><u>\$243,980</u></b>
	<b>\$7,380</b>	<b>\$51,410</b>

The online giving program can be found on  
the [fpchelena.org/giving](http://fpchelena.org/giving) website.

If you have any questions, please contact  
Treasurer Leo Potter at 815-980-5236.

*This is the day that the Lord has made:  
let us rejoice and be glad in it!*

## ELDERS & DEACONS

### FPC Elders

**Patti Borsberry**  
(Worship Chair)

**Jeff Chaffee**  
(Personnel Chair)

**Barb Leland**  
(Friendship Chair)

**John Bryan**  
(Christian Ed Chair)

**Jim Meyer**  
(Administration Chair)

**Butch Plowman**  
(Building & Grounds Chair)

**Carol Gneckow**  
(Mission Chair)

**John Gneckow**  
(Clerk of Session)

### FPC Deacons

**BJ Burns**

**Kathy Chambers**

**Jill Cook**

**Bonnie Anderson**

**Ward Stiles**  
Vice-moderator

**Vicky Bryan**

**Art Bumgardner**  
Moderator

**Rena Bumgardner**

**Ria Caussyn**  
**Carole Massman**

# FEBRUARY 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<b>1</b> <b>10 am</b> Worship w/Communion <b>11 am</b> Social	<b>2</b> <b>10 am</b> Personnel <b>10 am</b> Buildings & Grounds <b>5 pm</b> Xpress Singers	<b>3</b> <b>11:30 am</b> Bridge <b>7 pm</b> Al Anon <b>7 pm</b> Scouts	<b>4</b> <b>2 pm</b> Choir	<b>5</b> <b>10 am</b> Sarah & Rebekah Study <b>6:30</b> Bridge <b>7 pm</b> AA	<b>6</b> <b>Noon</b> Friday Bible Study <b>1:30 pm</b> Hand & Foot Cards	<b>7</b>
<b>8</b> <b>10 am</b> Worship <b>11 am</b> Annual Meeting of the Congregation	<b>9</b> <b>11 am</b> Christian Education <b>1 pm</b> Mission <b>5 pm</b> Xpress Singers	<b>10</b> <b>10 am</b> Worship Committee <b>11:30 am</b> Bridge <b>1 pm</b> Admin <b>7 pm</b> Al Anon <b>7 pm</b> Scouts	<b>11</b> <b>10 am</b> Building & Grounds <b>1 pm</b> Friendship <b>2 pm</b> Choir	<b>12</b> <b>6:30 pm</b> Chat Bridge <b>7 pm</b> AA	<b>13</b> <b>Noon</b> Friday Bible Study <b>1:30 pm</b> Hand & Foot Cards	<b>14</b>
<b>15</b> <b>10 am</b> Worship <b>11 am</b> Social Time <b>11:15 am</b> Deacons	<b>16</b> <b>5 pm</b> Xpress Singers	<b>17</b> <b>11:30 am</b> Bridge <b>1 pm</b> Session <b>7 pm</b> Al Anon <b>7 pm</b> Scouts	<b>18</b> <i>Ash</i> <i>Wednesday</i> <i>Service</i> <b>Noon</b> <b>2 pm</b> Choir	<b>19</b> <b>7 pm</b> AA	<b>20</b> <b>Noon</b> Friday Bible Study <b>1:30 pm</b> Hand & Foot Cards	<b>21</b>
<b>22</b> <b>10 am</b> Worship <b>11 am</b> Social Time <b>11 am</b> Lay Liturgist Training	<b>23</b> <b>5 pm</b> Xpress Singers	<b>24</b> <b>11:30 am</b> Bridge <b>7 pm</b> Al Anon <b>7 pm</b> Scouts	<b>25</b> <b>2 pm</b> Choir	<b>26</b> <b>6:30 pm</b> Beginner Bridge <b>7 pm</b> AA	<b>27</b> <b>Noon</b> Friday Bible Study <b>1:30 pm</b> Hand & Foot Cards	<b>28</b>

## February Birthdays

1st Charlotte Meyer  
12th Linda Granzow  
12th Pastor Emily Cowser  
13th Sheryl Eriksen

16th Stephen Bayless  
21st Mary Craigle  
22nd Jane Ogle  
29th Ron Witte



## February Anniversaries

1st Les & Louise Cramer

22nd John & Carol Gneckow

## Ongoing collections

### Helena Food Share

The Mission Committee continues to collect food for Helena Food Share. The donation bin is located just inside the main office doors.



### Toiletries/Coupons



Donations of toiletries (small, travel size) and coupons can be dropped off in the collection basket inside the main office doors.

Tonna Strasko delivers the donations to individuals in need of help with expenses, and also to God's Love, Friendship Center, and YWCA.

## Pastoral Care: Who to contact

Members of First Presbyterian Church, Helena who are in need of pastoral care, or know someone who is, should take the following steps:

1. Contact Resident Pastor Emily Cowser — Church: 406-442-4775; Email: [pastor@fpchelena.org](mailto:pastor@fpchelena.org).
2. If she is not available, contact Commissioned Pastor Dianna Goodman — Cell: 406-431-8964; email: [eastsidedesign@bresnan.net](mailto:eastsidedesign@bresnan.net).
3. If she is not available, contact Arlyn (Butch) Plowman — Home: 406-449-8705; Cell: 406-558-9240; email: [pearlyn@msn.com](mailto:pearlyn@msn.com).

You may also get in touch with your shepherd.

**First Presbyterian Church**  
535 North Ewing Street  
Helena, MT 59601

**[www.fpchelena.org](http://www.fpchelena.org)**

**Sunday Service 10 a.m.**  
**Weekly Sermon on HCTV Cable Channel 189**  
**Wednesdays at 6 pm & Saturdays at 9 AM**

**OFFICE HOURS**  
**Monday - Friday**  
**9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**

**406-442-4775**  
**[admin@fpchelena.org](mailto:admin@fpchelena.org)**

Stamp  
here



*Spreading the Good News  
of Christ through Our Love,  
Words, and Actions*