



First Presbyterian Church

The Mustard Seed

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 2026 Issue 1

First Presbyterian Church, Helena, MT

January 2026

You're invited to a basketball game!

The Friendship Committee is planning an event for January 31.

FPC members and friends are invited to attend the Carroll College women's (5pm) and men's (7pm) basketball games together as a group.

Additional information to follow. Hope you can join in the fun.



Christmas Carolers

FPC members and friends joined together to bring Christmas music to the homebound in December.

Warm Hearts Drive



The Warm Hearts drive began Dec. 27 and will conclude at the end of January, to be gifted on Valentine's Day.

The drive will collect new blankets (bedding), new towels (washcloths, hand towels & bath towels.) Your donations will serve Family Promise, God's Love, Good Samaritan Ministries, Helena Community Offender Reentry Program, Rocky Mountain Development Center, The Friendship Center, and YWCA.

Warm Hearts is an ecumenical ministry of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Associates of Helena "to witness and share the mission of Jesus who calls us to love God with our whole hearts and love our neighbor even as God loves us."

God's Peace,
Carol Gneckow, Chair, Mission & Outreach

Supporting the SROs

From the 25% amount of The Peace & Global Witness offering that stayed with our congregation — and keeping the peacemaking and reconciliation in our own community — the Mission & Outreach Committee chose to gift the SROs (School Resource Officers) in the schools with bags of candy.

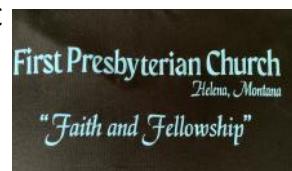


Jill Cook and Carol Gneckow delivered the candy at Helena Middle School, CRA Anderson, Helena Indian Alliance, Capitol High School and East Helena Middle School. The picture is at the East Helena school.

The candy provides a wonderful avenue to open conversations with the students.

FPC Shirts Available: Place Your Order By Jan. 18

To anyone who might want a shirt similar to Barb's (FPC on front shoulder and First Presbyterian Church, Helena, Montana, "Faith and Fellowship" on back), with teal blue lettering, here are two choices:



1. Take your own solid colored shirt — any length sleeve -- (black, grey or beige) to Barb Leland or to the Church office with \$20.



or

2. Choose black, grey or beige for your short-sleeve shirt and bring \$30, and Barb will order your shirt. If there is any money left over, it will go into the Friendship Committee donation jar. Choose: sm, med, lg, xl, xxl.

DEADLINE: SUNDAY, JANUARY 18th. The goal will be to wear our shirts to church on the Congregational Meeting Day, February 8th.

Holiday decorations
will be taken down on
January 11.
All are
welcome to help!



Trivia Question:

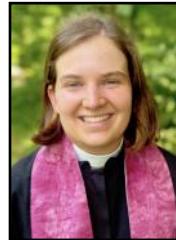
According to John 1:1,
what was in the beginning
and was with God?



(Answer on page 15.)

Dear friends in Christ,

One of the habits that I find valuable as I begin a new calendar year is reflecting on my rule of life. A rule of life is an intentional set of practices and rhythms that help us to deepen our relationships with God and with others, grow in particular areas, and live purposefully. Developing a rule of life is a historic Christian practice that dates back to people like Saint Benedict in the sixth century, who established a written rhythm for monastic communities that included daily routines of prayer, work, and study. Some of the practices in my rule of life are daily morning prayer, Sabbath, and worship.



As we begin a new year, what practices is God inviting you to explore?

Is God inviting you to be intentional about a rhythm of prayer? Perhaps you might begin each day with five minutes of silence, with praying for those in need, or with praying through a psalm.

Is God inviting you to be intentional about engaging with Scripture? Perhaps you might commit to studying a particular book of the Bible this year, to looking back at our weekly lectionary texts at another point in the week, or to participating in a Bible study.

Is God inviting you to be intentional about the practice of Sabbath? Perhaps you might find ways to more intentionally rest one day a week – alone or with others.

Is God inviting you to participate in community in new ways? Perhaps there are relationships in your life that you would like to deepen or new ones that you would like to form.

Is God inviting you to grow your practice of generosity with your time and money? Perhaps there are ways that you would like to serve the community this year or organizations that you would like to support financially.

We often are overly ambitious when we set goals, leading to discouragement and giving up. Rather than setting out for total transformation, spend time in prayer asking God what small shift(s) you can make this year as you seek to live purposefully. May God bless our efforts to continue to grow in our faith and remind us of God's steady faithfulness despite our weaknesses and faltering.

Grace and peace,

Emily Cowser

The Rev. Emily Cowser

~ *Thank You Notes* ~



Family Promise® Family Promise of Greater Helena

Family Promise

A huge THANK YOU to Jim & Charlotte Meyer, who cooked and served, Joan Reiman, Beverly U., & Bonnie who helped serve, Bonnie Anderson, who overnight hosted, and you, our congregation, who contributed to our Family Promise Week November 30 - December 6, 2025. The food and fellowship were great and appreciated by the 2 Family Promise families who were our dinner guests.

Our next week for hosting at the First Christian Church location will be the week of February 22-28, 2026. Put that on your calendar and think about how/what you could do for this mission of our church.

Questions or to volunteer, call Bonnie Anderson at 406-461-2794 or e-mail bonniejean1@gmail.com

Family Promise falls under our Mission/Outreach Committee

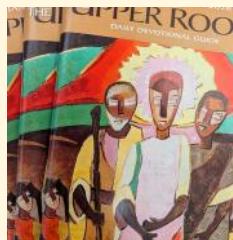
Crossroads Prison Ministries says 'thank you'

Pearle stopped me at church last Sunday and said she had received a telephone call from Crossroads Prison Ministries. They were thanking her for the First Presbyterian Church's donation of \$704 for the purchase of the "Bible for Prisoners" campaign.

What a wonderful Outreach program for FPC. In the Bible, the number 7 symbolizes perfection, completion, divine fullness and spiritual completeness, stemming from the 7 days of Creation. Thanks to your generous contributions there will be 70 prisoners who will be gifted a Bible.

Blessings!

Carol Gneckow, Chair, Mission & Outreach Committee



Upper Room Devotionals

for January and February
have arrived and are available from
the rack next to the church office.

S scenes from the S eason



Spanglish students offer special music.



Xpress Singers' Children's Christmas Choir also sang.



Gifts for the Prison Fellowship Angel Tree Ministry

MINUTES OF THE SESSION

December 16, 2025

The regular meeting of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Helena was called to order on December 16, 2025, 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.

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. Several items were added to New Business:

Accept Bill Cook’s request to be moved from Inactive Status to Active Status.

Determine responsibility for design of background check procedures on new paid and volunteer staff.

Explore designating an area in the sanctuary or in a close proximity thereto as a “Cry Room” for families with a baby and/or for individuals needing special accommodation for medical reasons.

Begin discussion of the future of FPC-Helena after Pastor Emily’s contract expires.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed to accept the docket with additions.

CONSENT AGENDA: A motion was made, seconded, and passed to accept the consent agenda:

Approve the minutes of the November 18th Session Meeting.

Accept the committee and deacon reports.

CLERK’S REPORT: The Clerk stated he had nothing to report. Later, a box of cookies addressed to the Session was revealed which included a card from Office Manager Julie Young thanking Session for its kindness during the past year.

Active Membership as of October 31, 2025	89
Active Membership as of November 30, 2025	89

RESIDENT PASTOR’S REPORT: Pastor Emily finished her contextual analysis process of learning more about our neighborhood and our congregation. She interviewed three people outside of our congregation to learn more about Helena: the President of Helena Young Professionals, the Director of God’s love, and a business owner. She also had three conversations with a total of five church members to learn more about our congregation. She hopes to prepare some written reflections on her learnings and process her experience with her

seminary professor and her coach before sharing some ideas for the next year. She is grateful that FPC was able to participate in the Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service. It was a good opportunity to connect with other churches and provided a meaningful worship service for those who attended.

It was wonderful to be part of the Community Thanksgiving Dinne. Pastor Emily said she was grateful that so many people in our community were able to eat together. She enjoyed meeting new people including some of our congregants' families.

She attended a retreat of her 1001 apprenticeship cohort at Trinity Retreat Center in Connecticut during the week beginning December 8.

Since November 13th, her time spent with folks included:

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

attending meetings of the Memorial Committee.

attending the Helena Ministerial Association lunch.

participating in the leadership of the Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service.

serving Communion at Touchmark.

attending the Community Thanksgiving Dinner.

engaging in one-on-one and small group encounters: Bill and Marti Cook, Trace Haythorn (our congregation's coach through Synergos, Les Cramer, Joy Edgar, Deb Whitcomb, Max Oliver and Wanda Jewell, Kathy Chambers, Tim Lanham, John and Carol Gneckow, Lucille Letcher, Chuck Carlson, and Matt and Diane Richards.

She will leave December 28 to be with family in Pittsburg to celebrate Christmas and return January 3.

Communion	Total	Breakout
November	108	51 in person, 46 online, 11 at home

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Administration Committee: Chair Jim Meyer reported.

Treasurer Leo Potter gave the financial report. In November, FPC had a net operating income of \$11,511, (income \$28,347, expenses \$16,836).

In November, Vanguard Funds showed a gain of \$2556.60, bringing the YTD gain to \$36,112. They have now reached \$305,156.63 vs 2024 end of year value of \$296,887.08. We have disbursed \$26,000 during the year for building/ property improvements and repairs.

The Memorial Committee: The committee met on November 17 and December 7. See reports below.

Karen Witte brought up changing meeting times. She will research times and days of the week for consideration.

FPC will be receiving new internet and phone service. Installation will be in January.

Budget projections were presented and discussed. We have received 39 pledges. The total amount is an increase of 5% above this year's pledges.

ACTION ITEM: Recommend Session adopt the budget as proposed for 2026.

Motion passed.

A list of members recommended for change from active to inactive status will be presented to Session in December.

ACTION ITEM: Recommend that Session review the names of members for change from active to inactive membership status. Motion passed.

Pastor Emily will send a letter to each of those who will be transferred to inactive status.

Next meeting: January 14, 2026, at 4:00 PM.

The Memorial Committee: Written reports were submitted to Session.

November 17, 2025, meeting:

Financially, memorial gifts have been received in memory of Marsha Davis, Rose Leavitt, and Dave McNay. Additionally, an anonymous gift was also received in memory of Rose Leavitt. After recording the gift in the Memorial Book, the funds were placed in the Kitchen Fund.

Another company has been contacted for quotes to replace the Richardson Hall stage curtain.

Ward Stiles will check with a contact about replacing the deteriorating concrete on the front apron.

The committee reviewed their job description, the history of the committee, its purpose, and future possibilities and suggestions from Pastor Emily and committee members. The document will be revised and reviewed at the next meeting.

The committee discussed the role of the Synergos committee and outcomes that might affect the committee's future role and purpose.

December 7, 2025, meeting:

The bid for replacing the Richardson Hall stage curtain was received and deemed prohibitive after shipping and installation were added in. Kathy will contact another company for a second bid.

Meanwhile the committee visited the stage and concluded that it would look better by moving some stored items.

Ward and Kathy discussed the need for new Christmas decorations for the church. He will contact a local company that does decorating and storage for an appointment to discuss our needs and request a bid.

Building and Grounds Committee: Chair "Butch" Plowman reported.

Max Oliver has attended a meeting as a potential enlistee to the committee.

Eric Much will not be able to examine and offer advice concerning the roof and masonry damage near the bell tower until later.

Mark and Butch met with Linda Peterson of “Odd Jobs Are Us” regarding shoveling the sidewalks. She and her son will shovel the snow for \$150 per event. They will use our snow blower and leaf blower.

Jake Delude from Dawn to Dusk is willing to meet with us regarding expansion of his lawn care services to include snow removal and sprinkler maintenance. Yeti and Ground Guys have also been contacted for similar meetings.

The regularly scheduled and preventative maintenance report from All Season Heating and Air Conditioning was reviewed. FPC has nine furnaces,--four (4) of which are over 25 years old and two (2) in excess of 30 years. Seven are “all okay at this time”. The furnace in the office basement is starting to show its age. Continued maintenance is required. We need to be prepared and planning ahead for replacing it should it fail.

Property Oversight Committee: Did not meet.

Next Meeting: January 14 at 10:00 AM

Christian Education Committee: Elder John Bryan reported.

The committee discussed getting a Nursery Attendant for the Christmas Eve Worship service. Patti Borsberry’s niece Anabell Spatz has agreed to look after the nursery. Les Cramer will include a statement that FPC will have a nursery attendant available that evening when he places the Christmas Eve ad in the paper.

The committee discussed getting additional funds for scholarships. Dianna will write a proposal to present to Session.

The Thursday and Friday Bible studies are done December 18 and 19, John Bryan is planning a study on “The Fruit of the Vine,” date to be determined.

Next Meeting: January 12, 2026.

Friendship Committee: Elder Barb Leland reported.

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.

The committee proposed serving a small meal (soup, roll, and cookie) on Ash Wednesday following the service. We are considering inviting the general public to both events.

All the committee agreed that the Thanksgiving Community Dinner went well. We estimate that attendance was around 120 people. We received over \$400 in donations and will use the money to replace a couple of our roasters.

Barb reported that Christmas Caroling was fun with 4 men and 4 women participating. The group went to Edgewood, Touchmark, Helena Pointe, and a couple of church member homes.

Next Meeting: January 14 at 12:30 PM at Shelly's Restaurant.

Mission and Outreach Committee: Chair Carol Gneckow reported.

FPC received thank you notes from Food Share and God's Love for donations and from Mount Powell Stars Special Olympics for hosting their team dine out.

The Community Thanksgiving Dinner went well. We served over 100 people.

The Prison Fellowship Angel Tree gifts are scheduled to be delivered starting December 19th. In addition to the gifts, each child will receive an age-appropriate book, candy, and fruit. Each family will also receive \$50 gift certificate from Safeway/Albertsons.

FPC raised \$704 for the Bibles for Prisoners, Crossroads Prison Ministry program. Every \$10 that the congregation gave sent a Bible to men and women in prison.

The Pastor Fund for mission giving had a balance of \$200. The committee decided to purchase four \$50 gift certificates at Safeway/Albertsons for Pastor Emily to have available during December and into the next year. An unused Angel Tree gift card will be included giving her five gift cards to hand out as she deems appropriate.

FPC hosted the Family Promise families on November 30. Thanks to Charlotte Meyer for preparing the meal and Joan Reiman for serving the dinner.

The Mission committee decided to contribute 90% of their remaining 2025 Mission funds to the "United Way Helena Emergency Shelter Program."

Next meeting: January 12, 2026, at 1:00 PM.

Nominating Committee: Did not meet.

Personnel Committee: Did not meet.

The committee was tasked with designing a procedure for background checks on paid and volunteer staff.

Next meeting: first Monday of each month at 10:00 AM

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

Worship Committee: Chair Patti Borsberry reported.

Committee Old Business:

Thanked CLP Dianna Goodman for substituting for Pastor Emily on short notice Sunday December 7 worship service.

Two new banners have been purchased for the Sanctuary for Advent. Patti is planning to inventory and take pictures of the church banners.

CLP Dianna Goodman lead an Advent study on Thursday December 4, 11, and 18 using the Advent book "Names for the Messiah".

Joy Edgar reported that there were only two responses in the Pew Friendship Pads December 7.

It has been suggested that someone involved with Girls' Thrive be invited to a

Sunday worship service to talk about their program.

Committee New Business:

FPC will have an ad in the IR for the Christmas services (the nursery will be available).

On December 21, the Queen City Consort and the FPC Chime Ringers will join the Choir in providing music during the Worship Service.

Next meeting: January 13, 2026, and February 13, 2026, at 10:00 AM.

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

Deacon Bonnie Anderson, Shepherding Ministry Coordinator, reported that 164 contacts were made in October.

The Board brought forward a church member's question asking if meals prepared by a church member and delivered to a nonmember should be counted in the meal ministry. A motion was made and seconded to count all community meals. The motion was amended to keep a separate count of meals served to members and nonmembers. Motion passed.

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 and funerals that occur at the church. Our Pastor would still be the facilitator for the service and the Deacon team would facilitate the social and food part. Carol shared that this is an emotional time for the family and that a lead person plays a vital role in coordinating and assisting the family.

Pastor Emily opined that a team and a coordinator work together as needed and that another committee is not necessary.

Deacons discussed sending out gift packets to the shut-ins. A motion was made, seconded and passed to gift the shut-ins with a large print devotional, a pewter angel, and some treats.

Board Report:

During November 2025, 3 meals were provided. Twelve (12) cards were sent acknowledging birthdays, four (4) cards sent acknowledging anniversaries and two (2) sympathy cards. Two Grief booklets were also provided to people who lost a family member during the past year. There were nine (9) hospital visits. Communion was served to six (6) people at Touchmark and five (5) people received communion at home.

Next Meeting: January 11, 2026, following the Worship service.

Session Old Business: none

Session New Business:

A motion was made, seconded, and passed to reinstate Bill Cook's request to be from inactive status to active status.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed to hold the annual congregational

meeting on February 8, 2026, following the worship service.

Elder Jim Meyer said that there are members of our church who have health issues that limit or prevent in person participation in worship services. One member he knows about has been attending worship in a church which has set aside an area of the sanctuary for those who require separation from the general congregation. Session asked B&G to explore space in the sanctuary or elsewhere where people who need separation from others could sit and be part of the service.

Elder Carol Gneckow suggested that not only should we be preparing for a decrease in Synegos' financial support for the Pastor's pay and benefits, FPC is also faced with some extensive and expensive repairs (for example, see comments on our furnaces from the Building & Grounds report) and maintenance costs. She suggested Session and the congregation start discussing and working on what we want this church to look like and be like in the near future.

Also, there is no guarantee that Pastor Emily would accept a call to be our installed pastor once her contract with Synergos expires in May 2027. FPC needs to also start thinking about that possibility.

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

The next Regular Session Meeting: January 20, at 1:00 PM

John Gneckow

Clerk of Session



In December, funds from the Walter and Elaine Anderson Trust were used to buy new banners to display in the Sanctuary.

'A Living Hope'

Camp Offers Online Epiphany Bible Study Starting January 11



"A Living Hope — Peter and His Epistles," is the title of an online Bible study offered by Glacier Camp starting January 11, at 5 p.m.

The study will focus on both the actual person of Peter and his adventures/misadventures as Jesus' disciple, and the two New Testament books attributed to him.

To participate in the study, email Camp Director and study leader Rev. Tim Lanham at timo-thy@glaciercamp.org. He will send you the link to join the study.



Thank You for Your Generosity

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

Your financial support makes the proclamation of the gospel possible throughout the world! Our Nov. net giving is here:

	Nov. 2025	YTD
Income	\$28,347	\$268,213
Expenses	<u>\$16,836</u>	<u>\$224,183</u>
	\$11,511	\$44,030

The online giving program can be found on the 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

JANUARY 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 <i>New Year's Day</i>	2	3
4 10 am Worship w/Communion 11 am Social	5 5 pm Xpress Singers	6 11:30 am Bridge 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	7 2 pm Choir	8 10 am Sarah & Rebekah Study 6:30 pm Bridge 7 pm AA	9 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	10
11 10 am Worship 11 am Social Time and Un-decorating the Church 11:15 am Deacons	12 10 am Personnel 11 am Christian Education 1 pm Mission 5 pm Xpress Singers	13 10 am Worship Committee 11:30 am Bridge 1 pm Special Session 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	14 10 am Building & Grounds 1 pm Friendship 2 pm Choir 4 pm Admin	15 7 pm AA	16 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	17
18 10 am Worship 11 am Social Time	19 5 pm Xpress Singers <i>Annual Reports Due</i>	20 11:30 am Bridge 1 pm Session 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	21 2 pm Choir	22 6:30 pm Bridge 7 pm AA	23 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	24
25 10 am Worship 11 am Social Time	26 5 pm Xpress Singers	27 11:30 am Bridge 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	28 2 pm Choir	29 7 pm AA	30 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	31 5&7 pm CC Basketball Games

January Birthdays

2nd Carole Carpenter
3rd Cathy Kovich
5th Ann Swisher
6th Kristen Clausen
8th John Gneckow
11th Carol Gneckow

14th Molly Bealer
18th BJ Burns
23rd Deb Whitcomb
25th Rex Seeley
25th Sandi Clay
28th Bill Cook

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.

The Annual Meeting of the Congregation

is scheduled for
Sunday, February 8,
after the
worship service.

**Committee
Annual Reports**
are due in the office
January 19.

Trivia Answer:
The Word.

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.
2. If she is not available, contact Commissioned Pastor Dianna Goodman — Cell: 406-431-8964; email: 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.

You may also get in touch with your shepherd.

First Presbyterian Church
535 North Ewing Street
Helena, MT 59601

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

Stamp
here



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