

The Mustard Seed



NEWSLETTER

Vol. 2026 Issue 4 First Presbyterian Church, Helena, MT

April 2026

*Come,
worship
with us!*



Maundy Thursday

Taize' Service

Thursday, April 2
7 p.m.

Good Friday

Friday, April 3
Noon

Easter Sunday

Sunday, April 5
10 a.m.
Social Time
11 a.m.

In person at:

535 N. Ewing St.
Helena

or online:

www.fpchelena.org



**Spring
flowers**
are in
bloom
near the
church
entrance!

Home Communion Training April 19

Pastor Emily will facilitate a home communion training on April 19 after worship.

This training is intended for anyone who is ordained or about to be ordained as an elder or deacon as well as anyone who is interested in learning more about communion.

We will explore how communion is understood theologically and the practicalities of extending communion to those who are unable to join us in person.

Sign up now

Heritage Center Tour April 16

Vic Reiman will lead us on a tour of the new Montana Heritage Center on Thursday, April 16, at 1 p.m.

We will meet at the north entrance off the main parking lot. Be prepared to walk about 4 blocks.

Be sure to sign up ahead of time, as we are limited to 10 people maximum. (Another tour will be offered in June for those who can't participate in April.)

Family Promise Comfort Food Challenge April 19

This year's Comfort Food Challenge in support of Family Promise will be held Sunday, April 19, 4-7 p.m., at Carroll College.

This annual event raises funds for Family Promise of Greater Helena, which helps children and their families overcome homelessness.

Come, enjoy delicious food samples from restaurants and church congregations. FPC's Melissa Stiles will be serving up biscuits and gravy!

Raffles and silent auction baskets will also be offered. Tickets are \$20 per person or \$45 for a family of up to 6 people, and are available at the door and from the FPC Mission & Outreach Committee.



FIFTH SUNDAY POTLUCK

Sunday, March 29

after the Worship Service

Bring a favorite dish to share!

Three of our members will be "telling their stories," so you won't want to miss it!

POET SOCIETY DINNER

(Presbyterians Out Eating Together)

Wednesday, April 1, 5:30 pm

Hardware Café

(in Montana City)

Bring a baby picture of yourself, if you have one.

Please let Barb know if you're planning to attend.

One Great Hour of Sharing Continues

Around the world, millions of people lack access to sustainable food sources, clean water, sanitation, education, and opportunity.

The work done in support of the causes supported by One Great Hour of Sharing - disaster, hunger, poverty, climate change, and immigration/migration and refugees - serves individuals and communities in need. This work provides people with safety, sustenance, and hope.

Thank you for supporting One Great Hour of Sharing, an Offering that responds directly to the call to do justice in Micah 6:8: "What does the Lord require of you? ... to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God."

"Responding to Christ's call to ministries of compassion for the world's most vulnerable."

Mission & Outreach Committee
Carol Gneckow

Trivia Question:

Who was the first to see Jesus after his resurrection?



(Answer on page 15.)

Dear friends in Christ,

During my college semester abroad in Uganda, we explored the book “*Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith After Genocide in Rwanda*” by Ugandan priest and theologian Emmanuel Katongole (If you are looking for an Easter season read, I commend it to you!). Katongole reflects on how the genocide in Rwanda – the most Christianized country in Africa – is a mirror reflecting the deep brokenness of the Church. The Rwandan genocide, which began on Easter week and consisted of Christians killing other Christians, often in the same churches where they had worshipped together, illuminates the divided nature of the body of Christ. Katongole urges that we lean into our identity as a united body, made possible through Christ’s death and resurrection.



Years after reading *Mirror to the Church*, I am still struck by this statement from Katongole: “To live as the body of Christ in such a time as this is to reimagine what it means to remember and embody that story of resurrection.” In this Easter season, as we celebrate Christ’s resurrection once again, I continue to wonder what it looks like in the time and place in which we find ourselves to embody this story that is at the heart of our faith. In my own life, I wonder what needs to die – what God might be inviting me to let go of – and what new life God is inviting me into. In our world in which death and destruction are overwhelming, I wonder how to be resurrection people – people who are working towards restoration and repair and healing amidst the brokenness around us. And as a church in the threshold between what has been and what will be, I wonder what God is inviting us to let pass away and what new things may emerge.

Change can be scary. Declining numbers in the pews can be scary. Aging membership can be scary. Looking at long-term finances can be scary. But the story of our faith is one of death and resurrection. The story of our faith is one of old things passing and new things emerging. Jesus says, “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” In this season, let us be of good courage, knowing that we follow a God of resurrection. In this season, let us ponder what it means to remember and embody that story of resurrection, right here in Helena, right now.

Grace and peace,

Emily Cowser

The Rev. Emily Cowser

MINUTES OF THE SESSION

March 17, 2026

The regular meeting of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Helena was called to order on March 17, 2026, at 1:07 PM by Pastor in Residence Reverend Emily Cowser who moderated “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 Jeff Chaffee 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 added continuing discussion of the Future of the church and asked if there were any other changes docket. Hearing none, a motion was made, seconded, and passed to accept the docket as amended.

CONSENT AGENDA:

- a. Approve the minutes of the February 17 regular Session meeting.
- b. Accept the reports of committees and Deacons.
- c. Approve the continuation of the POET Society, which will meet monthly for dinner.
- d. Approve the tour of the Montana Heritage Center in April and June
- e. Participate in Blue Sunday, April 26 through the Montana Children’s Trust Fund and Child Abuse Prevention Network of Montana by placing blue pinwheels along 11th Avenue (approximately 10 dozen).
- f. Approve John R Gneckow, Kathy M Chambers, and Leo D Potter as Authorized Signatories for the Vanguard Funds.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed to accept the consent agenda as presented.

CLERK’S REPORT: The Clerk had nothing to report.

Active Membership as of January 31, 2026	80
Active Membership as of February 28, 2026	80

RESIDENT PASTOR’S REPORT:

The Maundy Thursday service will be in the style of the Taizé monastery in France.

Pastor Emily asked the Deacons if it would be helpful for her to facilitate a home communion training. The training would be open to all Deacons and Elders as well as anyone interested in learning more about communion, including the theology of communion as well as the practicalities of extending the table. The training is scheduled for April 19.

In February she was involved in:

- Meeting with her coach, counselor, a mentor, her spiritual director, a pastor colleague, her 1001 apprenticeship cohort and two other pastors.
- Attended Carroll College basketball games with church members.
- Attended meetings of the Session committees.
- Attended the Helena Ministerial Association lunch.
- Attended the Glacier Presbytery meeting.
- Facilitated training for lay liturgists.
- Involvement in one-on-one and group encounters with FPC members.
- Attended the Saturday evening Togendowagan Society (Native American) church service at St. Peter’s Episcopal Cathedral where she was welcomed and asked to assist in serving communion.

Upcoming time away from the church:

March - 28 with the Coalition for Christian Outreach staff

May 1-18 leading a group of students on a wilderness expedition.

Communion	Total	Breakout
February	50	43 in person, 7 at home

Pastor Emily asked for approval of the Position Description for Commissioned Pastor for Worship and Pastoral Care originally presented at the February Session meeting. The position description has been approved by the Presbytery Committee on Ministry. A motion was made, seconded and passed.

We talked about:

When was the last time you sensed a presence of God outside our church; and when was a time you sensed a presence of God within our church?

In April, we will discuss: What are the gifts of our congregation?

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

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

Consent Agenda Approval: John R Gneckow, Kathy M Chambers, and Leo D Potter as authorized signatories for the Vanguard funds.

Treasurer Leo Potter gave the financial report. Giving in February was \$19,081 bringing YTD to \$31,617. The checking account balance was \$83,356 and the savings account balance was \$179,719.

Expenses were reviewed. Noted was that copier costs are higher for the year and will increase as the Worship Committee has asked that Bible readings be placed in the Sunday bulletin.

Vanguard accounts increased \$4,871 in value in February, YTD value up \$12,495.

The Memorial Committee: The committee did not meet in February.

Old Business:

The Building Committee has looked at the carpet in Richard Hall and received bids from \$18,000 to \$28,000 for vinyl plank.

The two 38-year-old furnaces are being replaced. Plans are to use emergency funds from Lona's Legacy fund to pay for the cost.

After review and discussion, we decided that excess funds from the checking account and Restricted savings should be rolled over into the Vanguard Cash Reserve Fund.

New Business:

The committee discussed the moneys for assistance with Pastor Emily's salary. The goal is to set aside the moneys from Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation (OPSF). Noted is that FPC Helena is receiving a discount for several items regarding her salary. Specifically, we receive a discount rate for the pension in addition to moneys provided by OPSF. Noted is that Glacier Presbytery's recommended minimum for a pastor's salary is low and the package for a called pastor is likely to be much higher than we are currently paying. We **DO** see the need to have a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) starting in the near future. We will start making the congregation aware of the financial challenges that we will be facing.

We are planning a full review of the financial books and records IAW with the Book of Order. We will use the Pittsburgh Presbytery information and checklist as a guideline for this. We should thoroughly understand our financial situation considering the upcoming challenges. We discussed the possibility of a full audit, but it is not required by PCUSA Book of Order and is noted to have a significant cost.

We reviewed and instituted a general application form for several restricted funds. This will include a letter explaining the funds and their usage. As we do, the people officially needed to sign documents for the funds needs to be updated. Suggested signers are John Gneckow, Kathy Chambers, and Leo Potter.

Consent Agenda:

Approved John R Gneckow, Kathy M Chambers, and Leo D Potter as Authorized signatories for the Vanguard Funds.

Chair Jim Meyer and Wanda Jewell presented a general request form for money that has not been budgeted.

We will try to provide information to the congregation on QCD's, stock transfers, and other methods of donating to FPC.

Next Meeting: April 14 at 1:00 PM

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

We have a leak in the kitchen dishwasher. Butch contacted Clark's Plumbing to look at the leak. Estimated cost to repair it is \$4400.

Approved use of Richardson Hall on March 20 & 21 for the annual AA Pockets of Enthusiasm.

Approved use of the Sanctuary and Fellowship area for Pearl Winsor's student's spring recital May 30.

Approved the Bridger Club for Thursday afternoon use of Richardson Hall in addition to regular Tuesday afternoon use.

A family has offered to pay for the repair/replacement of the noisy fan in the basement of the east wing. Fan replacement will cost approximately \$650.

We have received estimates ranging from \$18,956 to \$27,787 to replace the carpet in Richardson Hall with vinyl plank. The committee does not feel that this is a priority at this time but will require action in the future.

Of more interest is the Music Director's report that the church organ is presenting "end of life" indicators. Options are:

Buying and installing a used chest--cost \$90,000

Replace with an electronic instrument—cost \$60-70,000

Butch suggested a committee of musicians to investigate what is the best choice for the church organ.

Next Meeting: April 14 at 10:00 AM

Christian Education Committee: Chair John Bryan reported. A written report was submitted to Session.

After discussion, the Committee decided to table hiring a youth group leader.

After the childcare policies have been reviewed and updated, we will recruit volunteers for childcare from the church who are 18 or older. We would then be able to advertise that we have childcare available for the church services.

During the Session meeting, Elders discussed the possibility of dissolving the sub-committee for scholarships and make the Christian Education committee responsible for awarding scholarships.

Session also discussed Girls Thrive. Blair Haseman has agreed to make a presentation about the organization during the April 12 church service. Session also made a motion to assist the group in organizing and distributing clothing on May 19. The motion was seconded and passed.

Next Meeting: April 13, 2026.

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

Up-coming Activities:

Fifth Sunday potluck March 29 following the worship service.

Presbyterians Out Eating Together (POET Society) will be dining April 1 at 5:30 PM at the Hardware Café in Montana City.

Tour of the new Montana Heritage Center--April 16 at 1:00 PM. Meet at the North Entrance off the main parking lot. Limit of 10 people maximum. THERE WILL BE A SIGN-UP SHEET FOR THIS.

Consent Agenda:

Approved continuation of Poet Society meeting for dinner.

Approved the Tour of the new Montana Heritage Center in April and June.

Approve the Lost Soles walk for May 17th.

Next Meeting: April 8, 2026.

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

Chair Carol Gneckow opened the meeting sharing an email from Andrew Christofferson, a missionary whom we support and is living in Dubai. She also shared 1 Peter 1:21 with the committee members.

The undesignated mission money of \$1427.10 hasn't been transferred from Vanguard yet. Talked about splitting the money between the Salish Kootenai and Little Shell tribes. Janet will contact God's Love about a training opportunity to address systemic behavior of the homeless. Carol will contact Intermountain, the Montana Children's Fund and CASA about donating to one of their projects.

Bonnie Anderson talked about the Comfort Food Challenge being held at Carroll College April 19 from 4:00 until 7:00 PM. This is a fund-raising event for Family Promise. We have tickets for sale to the event for \$20/person or \$45/family. Contact Carol Gneckow to purchase your ticket.

The Montana's Children Trust fund is promoting participation in Blue

Sunday on April 26. This is a national program wherein faith communities will raise awareness within our community to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. We will participate by placing blue pinwheels along our property on 11th Avenue.

Bonnie suggested that people turn in their used printed church bulletins to be available to folks who meet at the church during the week.

Consent Agenda:

To participate in Blue Sunday, April 26 through the Montana’s Children Trust Fund and Child Abuse Prevention Network of Montana by placing blue pinwheels along 11th Avenue.

Next meeting: April 13, 2026.

Nominating Committee: Did not meet.

Personnel Committee: Did not meet.

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

Committee Old Business:

Pastor Emily will be gone the first three Sundays in May. Dianna is checking to see if she is available. Alternatives include “Butch” Plowman and Jeff Buscher who is with United Way.

- Palm Sunday is a regular service on March 29.
- Maundy Thursday service will be at 7:00 pm on April 2. Since there will not be a choir for the service, we will have selections by musical members of the congregation. There will be a combination of battery candles and lighted ones. There will be a table at the back where people can light a candle and pray for a loved one.
- Good Friday service is at noon April 3. A Tenebrae set of candles will be set up. The choir will sing.
- Easter Sunday April 5 will be a celebratory regular service with choir.

Committee New Business:

Pastor Emily will ask someone involved with Girls’ Thrive to speak at the April 12 Sunday worship service. Then in May, the FPC members are invited to help Girls Thrive with the event of collecting and delivering clothing.

Dianna read from the Book of Order which encourages the congregation to follow along in the pew Bible as the liturgist reads the Bible passages.

Patti gave a short report about strategic planning. Since Emily will be leaving in May 2027, a committee is working on updating our Mission and Vision preparation for a new Pastor Nominating Committee.

Next meeting: April 14, 2026, at 10:00 AM.

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

Bonnie Anderson shared Devotion #6 (Compassion) from the Diaconal Ministries.

Old Business:

Jill Cook, BJ Burns and Bonnie Anderson expressed interest in assisting with events taking place in Richardson Hall. Ward Stiles is interested in ushering.

Deacon New Business:

Discussed removal of people on the shut-in list. Deacons will talk to flock members to determine if removal from the shut-in list is appropriate.

Pastor Emily provided information on serving communion outside of the church services as outlined in the Book of Order. The information will be provided to the congregation through the Mustard Seed and Sunday bulletin.

Board Report:

During February 2026, two (2) meals were provided. Eleven (11) cards were sent acknowledging birthdays, two (2) cards sent acknowledging anniversaries, four (4) sympathy cards, and three (3) get-well cards were sent out. Two (2) Grief booklets were also provided for people who lost a family member during the past year. There were no (0) hospital visits. Communion was served to five (5) people at Touchmark and two (2) people received communion at home.

Next Meeting: In April following the Worship service.

Session Old Business: none

Session New Business: Session discussed reducing the Deacon length of term from three (3) years to two (2). Will reducing the length of service make it easier for members to accept a nomination to be Deacon?

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

Elder John Bryan closed the meeting with prayer.

The next Regular Session Meeting: April 21, 2026, at 1:00 PM

John Gneckow
Clerk of Session

Comfort Food Challenge

Sunday, April 19

4:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Carroll College–Campus Center

Individual \$20 / Family (up to 6 people) \$45

Enjoy a night of great food and community.
Taste delicious comfort food samples prepared by local
restaurants, church congregations, and community
members.

- Raffles
- Silent Auction Baskets

All proceeds help children and families experiencing
homelessness.

Tickets can be purchased from FPC, and at the door.

Great Food. Great Cause. Great Community.





CROSSROADS

PRISON MINISTRIES

Becoming a Crossroads Prison Ministries Mentor

There are thousands of volunteers across the United States, and in over 20 extension centers worldwide, bringing hope, light and love into prisoners' lives. God has a special place in His heart for the prisoner. Jesus tells us that if we have visited those in prison, we have visited Him (Matthew 25: 36,40).

It's a prison ministry you can do from home. Crossroads is a mail-based prison ministry, making it possible to serve no matter where you live. Lessons from incarcerated students are mailed directly to you, and you return your responses by mail.

Learn more: cpministries.org, call: (800) 668-2450.

Thanks from Mission & Outreach
Carol Gneckow

Ongoing Bible Studies

Sarah & Rebekah Bible Study Meets Thursdays



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

This month's study will be at the church

Thursday, April 2, at 10 a.m. Visit with Merle Korizek for more information.

Friday Noon Group Studying Book of Ruth

The Friday Bible study meets at noon at the church.

The group studies various books of the Bible. Everyone is welcome to participate and you can join in any time.

Contact leader John Coefield for details.



'Who is the Holy Spirit' study meets Thursdays

This 12-week study meets Thursdays, at noon. Visit with John Bryan for details.

Helena Area Habitat for Humanity Wants Your Spring Cleaning Cast Offs

Doing Spring Cleaning? Helena Area Habitat for Humanity is promoting re-use of your slightly used cast-offs and “what am I going to do with all this stuff?”



They do have a great reference list of items needed: appliances, furniture, cabinets, lighting, household decor, building supplies, doors, windows, tools.

Learn more at www.helenahabitat.org/donate-items or call (406) 204-7307.

Thanks from Mission & Outreach
Carol Gneckow



*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 Feb. net giving is here:

	Feb. 2026	YTD
Income	\$28,345	\$50,932
Expenses	\$19,790	\$42,249
	\$8,555	\$8,683

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

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	S
<div style="background-color: #c8e6c9; padding: 20px; border-radius: 10px;"> <h1 style="margin: 0;">APRIL</h1> <h1 style="margin: 0;">2026</h1> </div>			1 2 pm Choir 5:30 pm POET Society Dinner @ Hardware Café.	2 <i>Maundy Thursday</i> 10 am Women's Bible Study Noon <i>Holy Spirit</i> Study 7 pm AA 7 pm Maundy Thursday Service	3 <i>Good Friday</i> Noon Good Friday Service 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	4
5 <i>Easter Sunday</i> 10 am Worship w/Communion 11 am Social	6 10 am Personnel 5 pm Xpress Singers	7 11:30 am Bridge 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	8 10 am Building & Grounds 1 pm Friendship 2 pm Choir 3:30 pm Bells	9 Noon <i>Holy Spirit</i> Bible Study 6:30 pm Chat Bridge 7 pm AA	10 Noon Bible Study 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	11
12 10 am Worship 11 am Social Time 11:15 am Deacons	13 11 am Christian Education 1 pm Mission 5 pm Xpress Singers	14 10 am Worship Committee 11:30 am Bridge 1 pm Admin 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	15 2 pm Choir 3:30 pm Bells	16 Noon <i>Holy Spirit</i> Bible Study 1 pm Heritage Center Tour 7 pm AA	17 Noon Bible Study 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	18
19 10 am Worship 11 am Social 11 am Home Communion Training 4-7pm <i>Comfort Food Challenge</i>	20 5 pm Xpress Singers	21 11:30 am Bridge 1 pm Session 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	22 2 pm Choir 3:30 pm Bells	23 Noon <i>Holy Spirit</i> Bible Study 6:30 pm Bridge 7 pm AA	24 Noon Bible Study 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	25
26 10 am Worship 11 am Social Time	27 5 pm Xpress Singers	28 11:30 am Bridge 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	29 2 pm Choir 3:30 pm Bells	30 Noon <i>Holy Spirit</i> Bible Study 7 pm AA		

April Birthdays

2nd Sylvia Huntsman
16th Dianna Goodman
17th Diane Richards
22nd Judy Birch

24th Carolyn Anderson
28th Denise Johnston
28th Madisyn Gard



April Anniversaries

26th Matthew & Diane Richards



POET Society Dinner

April 1, 5:30 pm
Hardware Café
in Montana City

Bring your
baby picture!

Pictured at left, the
group attending the
first POET Society
Dinner last month.

Trivia Answer: Mary Magdalene

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: pearlynp@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*