

First Presbyterian Church

The Mustard Seed

NEWSLETTER



Vol. 2026 Issue 5 First Presbyterian Church, Helena, MT

May 2026

Lost Soles Walk Returns May 17

It's time to grab your walking shoes and join us for a stroll on Sunday, May 17.



This Lost Soles Walk begins at 11:45 a.m. at Prickly Pear Park in East Helena. The walk will be about one mile.

Afterwards we will have lunch at Smith's Bar and Restaurant on Main Street in East Helena. If you don't want to walk, you can still join us for lunch at about 1 p.m.



April POET Society diners. (Les Cramer photo)

POET Society Diners gather May 6

This month's POET Society dinner will be May 6, at 5:30 p.m., at the Grub Stake, and feature fun, games, conversation and good food.

Email Barb if you wish to attend. This will be the final POET dinner of the season. We will resume in September.

Fall Spiritual Formation Retreat

Pastor Emily will be facilitating a fall retreat focused on the theme of prayer. Together, we will explore what prayer means, our struggles with prayer, and a variety of ways to pray.

The retreat is tentatively planned for September 10th-12th at the beautiful Glacier Camp on Flathead Lake. If you are interested in attending, please let Pastor Emily know, so that she can begin to gauge the size of our group.

Girls Thrive Clothing Drive - Call for Volunteers!

If you wish to help Girls Thrive sort donated athletic clothing, please join them at their office in the First Presbyterian Church from **12:00-2:00 pm on Monday, May 18**. We will be sorting clothing by size and type to deliver to our students.



If you would like to help with delivery to the schools, please join them at their office in the First Presbyterian Church at **2:45 pm on Tuesday, May 19 and/or Wednesday, May 20**. The clothes will be delivered to Bryant Elementary on Tuesday and Broadwater Elementary on Wednesday.

If you have any lightly used or new athletic clothing in kids sizes, we would gladly accept the donations at the church Girls Thrive office by calling Blair Hasegan, (406) 438-6066.

Girls Thrive Snacks

Buy Snacks: For snacks, they prioritize healthy snacks for their students to maximize their nutrition after school.

One thing needed **every week** during the school year is **3 bags of 3 lb mandarin oranges from Costco**. These can be purchased and placed in the fridge upstairs in the box labeled Girls Thrive. They also need **monthly purchases of Frigo String Cheese Sticks, That's It Bars, Kirkland Beef Sticks, and other healthy nut-free snacks**. The Cheese Sticks can be placed in the fridge upstairs, and the rest can be accepted at the Girls Thrive FPC office.

Questions? Contact Carol Gneckow, Mission & Outreach or John Bryan, Education Committee.



FIFTH SUNDAY POTLUCK

Sunday, May 31

after the Worship Service

Three of our church friends
will "tell their stories!"

Trivia Question:

About 3,000 people
became followers of Jesus
on what day?



(Answer on page 15.)

Dear friends in Christ,

At our April Session meeting, I asked each person to name three gifts of our church. What things are we naturally good at? What are our assets? Together, we created a long list: Generosity. Music. Welcoming others. Tradition. Compassion. Willingness to participate. Friendship. The Prayer Chain. Community mission. Responsibility to one another. Eagerness to learn. Education. Worship. Camaraderie.



Our congregation has lots of gifts! Together, God has given us abundant talents, skills, and resources. There is much to be grateful for.

In this season of change, transition, and planning for the future, I want to encourage us to focus on our gifts. Change is hard. Transition can be draining. Uncertainty about the future can be anxiety-producing. Amidst these difficulties, it can be easy for us to fixate on problems that need to be solved, challenges that we want to overcome, and resources that we are lacking that we wish that we had. When we keep our gifts in mind, we ground ourselves in gratitude and in God's abundance.

You'll find in the Session minutes that Session has decided to experiment with some ideas for restructuring our church governance and leadership beginning in June. Currently, we have nine committees, which is a lot for our small congregation! As people inevitably step down from roles due to the need to rest, health concerns, or a desire to spend time in other good ways, our current structure creates a significant struggle to find new people to fill those roles. With the ideas that we are implementing, we will now have five committees. Our hope is that with these changes, we will not only have healthier, more rested leadership but also that we can spend less time and energy on managing the church, so that we can spend more time and energy serving the community.

Our Strategic Planning Team has also been busy working on updating our vision and mission statements, charting out strategic goals, and exploring the steps ahead for calling the next pastor and discerning the church's future. We look forward to sharing our work with the congregation soon.

As we navigate these changes, let's keep our eyes on God's abundance and the plentiful gifts that God has given us.

Grace and peace,

Emily Cowser

The Rev. Emily Cowser

Helping Intermountain

Many thanks to the volunteers who helped Mission and Outreach stuff packets for an Intermountain mailing. In a couple of hours, we stuffed several hundred of their 3,000 goal.



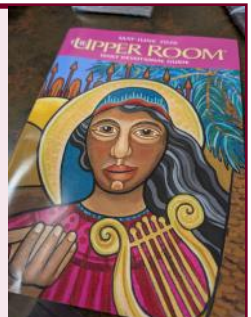
Blue Pinwheels for April

We planted Blue Pinwheels around the church property to help raise awareness of child abuse and neglect.

May-June Devotional Books Available

Copies of "The Upper Room" Daily Devotional Guide are available in the wall rack by the church office door.

Large-print and regular editions are provided free of charge. Please take some to use and to share with others.





Montana Heritage Center

A great group gathered for the museum tour, and Vic was a wonderful and knowledgeable guide!

Giving Opportunities

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

Toiletries & Coupons: Donations of toiletries (small, travel size) and coupons can be dropped off in the collection basket inside the main entry doors. Tonna Strasko delivers the donations to God's Love, the Friendship Center, and YWCA.

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

MINUTES OF THE SESSION

April 21, 2026

The regular meeting of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Helena was called to order on April 21, 2026, at 1:05 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 John Bryan 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 restructuring of the church government and asked if there were any other changes to the docket. Hearing none, a motion was made, seconded, and passed to accept the docket as amended.

CONSENT AGENDA:

- a. Approve the minutes of the March 17 regular Session meeting.
- b. Accept the reports of committees and Deacons.
- c. Approve the Last Chance Tour Train event on June 29th.
- d. Approve attendance at the Senators’ games on June 11th.
- e. Participate with the Hunger Team at our Redeemer’s Lutheran during the month of September with special offerings to raise money to provide all the milk for the Kid Packs program, Helena Food Share

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

CLERK’S REPORT: The Clerk read a letter from Ann Miller of God’s Love thanking the churches and community for their continuing support of the mission of God’s Love.

The Clerk then reported that he is retiring from the position of Clerk of Session effective June 1, 2026, which is the start of the Session and Deacon Calendar year for First Presbyterian Church-Helena. Max Oliver has been selected and agreed to fill the position. A motion was made, seconded, and passed appointing Max as Clerk beginning June 1.

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

RESIDENT PASTOR’S REPORT:

- Pastor Emily presided over communion during worship 4/2/26 and 4/5/26, and at Touchmark 4/12/26.
- She is grateful for the many people who made our Holy Week and the beginning of the Easter season possible.
- She spent a restorative week paddling with a mentor and friends and is looking forward to more paddling time in May.
- While she is traveling in May, Butch, Tim Lanham (Director of Glacier Camp), and Jeff Buscher (United Way) will be filling the pulpit.
- She has begun planning our fall spiritual retreat for September 10th-12th. The Glacier Camp was chosen because it has private bedrooms with private bathrooms, and food service. The congregation is encouraged to attend.
- Deacon and elder training will be held in June.
- She has been working on ideas for restructuring our church governance to reflect the realities of our membership. She hopes to implement the ideas in June as elders and deacons transition on to or off of Session or Board.
- **Restructuring Possibilities:**
 - ◊ Administration Committee absorb responsibilities of Personnel and Memorial Committees.
 - ◊ Combine Christian Education and Fellowship Committees into a Congregational Life Committee.
 - ◊ Instead of a Worship Committee, have seasonal worship planning teams. Continue delegating ongoing worship tasks (e.g., coordinating liturgists) to individuals.
- **ACTION ITEM: A motion was made, seconded and passed to pursue restructuring the church governance beginning June 1, 2026.**

A “Town Hall” is being planned so the congregation has an opportunity to hear about the proposed changes and to ask questions and/or offer suggestions.

In April 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 meetings of the Session committees and the Board of Deacons meetings.
- Attended the Helena Ministerial Association lunch.
- Involvement in one-on-one and group encounters with FPC members and a staff member from Intermountain.

Upcoming time away from the church:

May 1st through 18th running the Pittsburgh marathon and leading a group of students from Williamson College of the Trades on a wilderness expedition with the Coalition for Christian Outreach.

Communion	Total	Breakout
March	53	51 in person, 2 at home

Before moving into committee reports, Pastor Emily asked Session members to list the gifts of our congregation: generosity, responsible, welcoming, compassionate, traditional, missional, friendly, participating, eager to learn, diverse, and musical.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

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

A summary financial report: Giving in March was \$17,275. The total expense was \$20,129.

The Vanguard accounts showed a loss of \$13,589.49 for March and YTD loss of \$1,094.82.

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

Committee Old Business:

The two new furnaces have been ordered. Plans are to use emergency funds from Lona's Legacy fund to pay for the cost.

Excess funds from the checking account and restricted savings have not yet been rolled over into the Vanguard Cash Reserve Fund.

Internet provider TDS is now indicating that they will start in June connecting the church to their system.

We have been experiencing some difficulties with our communication system. It was felt that the problems are technology issues in our end and not from our current provider.

Committee New Business:

Leo is doing a long-range budget review looking for possible adjustments.

The annual accounting review has not been done for this year.

Jim is looking at some alternative sources of income. He is hoping to provide the congregation with some explanatory materials regarding the availability and use of specialty funds for donations to the church.

Because of owner health issues, Mini Scholars Discovery Academy (East wing lower floor renter) will cease operations on June 1st, 2026.

Next Meeting: May 12 at 1:00 PM

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

Actions taken:

Big Sky Acoustics provided a complementary assessment of sound limit-

ing strategies for the church offices. Since 50% of the daycare noise is entering around the doors, we will order noise reducing seals for the door jambs and frames along with door sweeps for the three doors. The consultant also suggested white noise machines for the desks. Sound proofing the wall between the daycare and pastor's office is not a practical option.

Pads for the Automatic External Defibrillators (AED) are dated. We will order replacements. We also recommend training on the use of the AED.

Vic volunteered to rehabilitate the 11th Avenue door (an original part of the 1892 structure) this summer.

Discussions:

The Food Box on the corner of Rodney and Tenth has been rendered inoperable with no one claiming responsibility. It was installed as an Eagle Scout project. The scout has moved on. If no one steps forward to take care of it, then it should be removed.

Sara George is closing her daycare effective June 1st. Darla's Child Play Preschool approached us offering to lease part or all of the space, although at a lesser rate than the daycare was paying. Darla's school already has enrollees who have paid for next year's class, and Darla does not want to approach them requesting a fee increase. We will negotiate a new lease next spring.

ACTION ITEM: Accept Darla's Child Play Preschool as a replacement tenant for the East Wing ground floor effective June 1, 2026. Motion passed.

A new booster water heater has been installed for the dishwasher.

Two new furnaces have been ordered to replace the two 38-year-old ones.

Les reported that a more economical restoration for the organ may be available from a Utah vendor.

Butch also verbally reported that we have had a consultation regarding our electronic communication issues. It seems technology has outstripped our equipment. The consultant recommended that FPC move from 3 routers to a single router that will provide multiple access points within the church.

Next Meeting: May 13 at 10:00 AM

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

Three applications for Linton scholarships were approved. Each of the applicants will receive \$1000.00.

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.

The presentation on April 12 by Girls Thrive was well received. Session previously agreed to assist the group in organizing and distributing clothing on May 19th.

Pastor Emily asked the committee to spread the word about a September retreat at Glacier Camp for members of our congregation.

Next Meeting: May 11, 2026.

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

Up-coming Activities:

Presbyterians Out Eating Together (POET Society) will be dining May 6 at 5:30 PM at the Grub Stake Restaurant on Lincoln Road.

Tour of the new Montana Heritage Center may be offered in June.

Lost Soles Walk May 17 at Prickly Pear Park followed by lunch at Smith's Bar and Restaurant.

Fifth Sunday potluck May 31

Consent Agenda:

Approved a Last Chance Tour Train event on June 29th at 11:00. Lunch afterwards.

Approved the attendance at the Helena Senator games on June 11th.

Next Meeting: May 13, 2026.

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

Chair Carol Gneckow opened the meeting by reading an excerpt from Horizons Bible Study "Like a Mustard Seed" from Matthew 13.

Committee Old Business:

The mission tithe money of \$1427.10 has been transferred from Vanguard. The committee decided to add \$72.90 to make the total \$1500. The money will be split 50-50 between the Salish Kootenai and Little Shell housing authority.

The Mission Committee decided to purchase three (3) family tickets to the Comfort Food Challenge April 19. This is a fund-raising event for Family Promise.

Thanks to the volunteers who helped with Intermountain's seed packet mailing project.

FPC is participating in Montana's Children Trust Fund's Blue Sunday on April 26. This is a national program wherein faith communities help raise awareness within our community to strengthen families and prevent child

abuse and neglect. We have placed blue pinwheels along our property on 11th Avenue, and Rodney and Ewing Streets.

Committee New Business:

There will be a tour of the Intermountain campus on May 29. There will be a sign-up sheet and more information forthcoming.

Consent Agenda:

Approved participation with the Hunger Team at our Redeemer's Lutheran during the month of September with special offerings to raise money to provide all the milk for the Helena Food Share Kid Packs program.

Carol has been in contact with Rob Lawler, Coordinator of Faith and Community Services to learn more about purchasing age-appropriate Christian children's books. There are 26 visitation rooms throughout Montana where moms & dads or guardians can meet in a safe place. These rooms may be available to place books. Rob will be attending the May 11 committee meeting to share his thoughts and ideas.

Carol closed the meeting by reading the words from the hymn "We are Marching in the Light of God."

Next meeting: May 11, 2026 at 1:00 PM

Nominating Committee: Did not meet.

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

Julie Young's staff evaluation will be done in April. Ann Swisher's evaluation is due in June.

Jeff is working on a draft of the Child, Youth, and Adults with Vulnerabilities Protection Policy based on the PC(USA) Policy and Procedures. Matt will then review and edit the policy.

Mary Stiles is taking the lead on background checks with help from the office.

Carol Stebbins and Joy Edgar have both resigned from the committee and Vic Reiman announced that he has attended his last Personnel Committee meeting. In light of the resignations, Committee membership was discussed. Considering upcoming work by the Synergos Planning Group on the number and role of committees, recruiting additional members will be put on hold.

The committee is interested in learning more about Girls Thrive and defining ways that FPC can be supportive of their program.

The committee also discussed recent health-related issues experienced by members of our congregation and how to best respond to these types of events. Dr. Jim Meyer will work on putting an emergency kit together for those in our congregation who have appropriate

training to address any medical events until the EMTs arrive.

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

Committee Old Business:

Patti thanked everyone who helped put together and participated in the four services during Holy Week.

Pastor Emily will be gone the first three Sundays in May. Pulpit Supply coverage includes: “Butch” Plowman, FPC Lay Pastor; Tim Lanham, Director of Glacier Camp; and Jeff Buscher who is with United Way.

Summer will soon arrive bringing Earth Day, Mother’s Day, Pentecost, and Independence Day. Pastor Emily will be presenting a Synergos series titled “Deeper in Faith,” some of information is specific to churches without pastors.

The choir will sing through Pentecost Sunday and then take a break for summer. A group of individuals will also entertain us with the FPC hand chimes during Pentecost Sunday.

Committee New Business:

As a result of recent medical events during the Sunday service, the committee discussed how to respond to the situation.

Quietly relay or ascertain if the Pastor or Liturgist is aware of the event and to consider if this is a suitable time for a prayer.

Continue with the service and politely avert attention away from the activity created by the medical emergency.

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: May 12, 2026, at 10:00 AM.

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

Vicky Bryan shared a devotional based on Proverbs 3:5-6 “Wisdom begins with seeking God through prayer and immersing ourselves in His word.”

Deacon New Business:

Ward Stiles suggested inviting the new deacons to the April and May meetings. Art will contact the new deacons and invite them.

Bonnie Anderson suggested that Deacon terms be reduce to two (2) years from the current three (3) years. This will be looked at by the Strategic Planning Team.

Board Report:

During March 2026, no meals were provided. Nine (9) cards were sent acknowledging birthdays, one (1) card sent acknowledging anniversaries, one (1) sympathy card, and two (2) 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 five (5) hospital visits. Communion was served to one (1) person at Touchmark and one (1) person received communion at home.

Next Meeting: May 17 following the Worship service.

Session Old Business: none


Session New Business: none

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: May 19, 2026, at 1:00 PM

John Gneckow
Clerk of Session



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 March net giving is here:

	March 2026	YTD
Income	\$29,906	\$80,839
Expenses	\$20,129	\$62,379
	\$9,777	\$18,460

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!*

Hand & Foot Cards

Fridays, 1:30 p.m.

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

Join us for worship!

**Sundays,
10 a.m.
or online @**
www.fpchelena.org

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
MAY 2026					1 Noon Bible Study 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	2
3 10 am Worship w/Communion 11 am Social	4 10 am Personnel 5 pm Xpress Singers	5 11:30 am Bridge 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	6 2 pm Choir 3:30 pm Bells 5:30 pm POET Society Dinner @ Grub Stake	7 10 am Women's Bible Study Noon Holy Spirit Study 6:30 Bridge 7 pm AA	8 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	9
10 <i>Mother's Day</i> 10 am Worship 11 am Social Time	11 11 am Christian Education 1 pm Mission 5 pm Xpress Singers	12 10 am Worship Committee 11:30 am Bridge 1 pm Admin 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	13 10 am Buildings & Grounds 1 pm Friendship 2 pm Choir 3:30 pm Bells	14 Noon Holy Spirit Bible Study 6:30 pm Chat Bridge 7 pm AA	15 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	16
17 10 am Worship 11 am Social Time 11:15 Deacons 11:45 am Lost Soles Walk	18 5 pm Xpress Singers	19 11:30 am Bridge 1 pm Session 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	20 2 pm Choir 3:30 pm Bells	21 Noon Holy Spirit Bible Study 7 pm AA	22 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards	23
24 <i>Day of Pentecost</i> 10 am Worship 11 am Social Time	25 <i>Memorial Day</i> 5 pm Xpress	26 11:30 am Bridge 7 pm Al Anon 7 pm Scouts	27	28 Noon Holy Spirit Bible Study 7 pm AA	29 1:30 pm Hand & Foot Cards TBA Tour of Intermountain	30
31 10 am Worship 11 am 5th Sunday Potluck						

May Birthdays



1st Chris Goodman
1st Ruth Williams
3rd Justice Gard
5th Tim Borsberry
5th Hezekiah Rowland

14th Julie Chaffee
18th Pearle Plowman
20th Joe Steffens Jr.
24th Hunter Foster
27th Kathy Chambers



May Anniversaries

22nd Josh & Shannon Koutecky


Thank you

Dear First Presbyterian Friends,
Thank you all for the kind prayers, cards, hugs and love you gave me through the last year. My journey with cancer and the sad losses of 6 in my extended family along with my dear dad were more bearable because of your love.


Thank you and may God's Blessings be with all.

-Julie Chaffee

Mother's Day May 10

We will honor all women in the congregation with a flower. 

Friday Bible Study

The Friday Bible Study will meet May 1, at noon, and then take a break until next fall. 

Cover photo: Mount Helena blossom

Trivia Answer: Pentecost

Pastoral Care In May

Pastor Emily will be out of the office May 1-18, visiting family, running the Pittsburgh Marathon, and leading a wilderness expedition for college students.

Thank you to Butch Plowman, Glacier Presbytery Camp Director Tim Lanham, and United Way Community Impact Coordinator Jeff Buscher for preaching on Sundays, May 3, 10, and 17.

Thank you also to the following people for being available to assist with pastoral care emergencies while Pastor Emily is away:

May 1-6: Dianna Goodman; **May 7-12:** Butch Plowman;

May 13-18: Janet Potter.

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*