

SPECIAL POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- All Church Work Day
- Christian Education
- ArtWalk
- New Ministries
- Time and Talent
-

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From the Moderator: Mic Dawson

Look for the Good Around You and Embrace It

(Another quote from my guy, Mr. Rogers)

Feeling good about your church? Tell a member of the congregation so! What about the talented hard working staff? Gold stars all around! I get appreciation for my work as moderator and it always feels good to be recognized.

At its March meeting, the Council unanimously endorsed the ministry Rev. Mulberry is sharing with us at First Church. Please, if you feel, the same way, let him know; he needs validation, too.

I read somewhere recently that being critical “appears” intelligent. I think we should be less concerned with that and more concerned with joy. We had a joyous Easter celebration including the upbeat YouTube video of a jubilant wedding processional. So look for the good and it won’t be hard to find. And when you do, embrace it mightily.

All Church Work Day! April 23

Buildings and Grounds Committee extends an invitation to EVERYONE to join us for the first 2016 All Church Work Day. It will be 23 April from 09:00 AM until 3:00 PM with lunch provided.

We have several items on our “to do” lists. One of the major items is replacing the lights in the highest portion of the sanctuary ceiling with energy efficient LED light bulbs!

We will be setting up scaffolds to enable us to reach the ceiling so several able bodied persons are needed. Let there be light!

Other areas include cleaning up the grounds around the church and (hopefully) planting blooming plants in the church sign planter. All Sunday School rooms need a good cleaning along with cleaning the windows - including the Sunday School door windows.

Our list is long and includes the Fellowship Hall kitchen, washing the stacking chairs, the stage (lots of “stuff” piled behind the curtains), the choir room (dust rhinos in hiding),

cleaning the pews, washing windows throughout the building, cleaning the stairwells (bird droppings in the north stairwell), cleaning the Boy Scout display case (I know there is a photo with William Bartlett in it. Are there other church members photos?), and many more...I won’t bore you with the entire list. Do you have an area you would like to see spruced up? If so, join us!

Yes, I know we won’t get everything done on 23 April—that’s why I list this as our first 2016 All Church Work Day!

Blessings,

Bonnie Daniels

Chairperson, Buildings and Grounds Committee

Rev. Michael Mulberry, Sr. Minister

Easter Resurrection

I am a big believer in systems theory not only for congregational life but also for how we understand ecosystems and things as big as climate change. So concepts like Wendell Berry's "solving for pattern" or Andrew Zolli's "resilience thinking" or Angela Davis speaking about "intersectionality" make sense to me. They all say that we should look for wider pattern but also not dismiss "the one" as just something that is immaterial to the whole.

My reflection is that the mainline church is spending quite a bit of time in survival mode, chasing the money and making money and numbers the sole focus of health and well-being. And the money is important for mission, ministry, and programming. If money and numbers become the sole focus of health and well-being, however, then isn't that what the church becomes? Oh, we might give lip service to mission and ministry, but we can tell you that a "successful" church is one that can balance its budget and fill its pews.

That runs counter to the Easter story. These were not a huge movement of people scrambling from place to place to give their lives over to a mission and ministry they thought died with their teacher and friend. God brings new life. But that new life can happen in almost imperceptible ways compared to the world's barometers of "success." Unfortunately, I think God can become an afterthought in a progressive Christian Church. We pick up the values of culture and then expect God to bless us as the ones who are surely "more compassionate."

If God is involved, I think we, as a church community, should help define what those measures of "new life" should be. If we use the ancient wisdom of Scripture, how would we say that "new life" is either happening or not happening in our church? How are we living out our values as a church of religious literacy, whole life sexuality, just peace, open and affirming Body of Christ? Are we being good neighbors as a downtown church? Do we speak and act with relevance? If those are not the questions for discernment, what should they be? And how do we make that resurrection narrative course through our whole system as a local church community?

Montana-Northern Wyoming Annual Conference

Montana-Northern Wyoming Annual Conference Meeting

It is again time to gather in fellowship and faith to do the business of the Association and Conference. I invite you to join me in Sheridan, Wyoming and Buffalo, Wyoming as we continue our journey to strengthen and revitalize the mission and ministry of the Montana-Northern Wyoming Association and Conference United Church of Christ.

The 131th Conference Annual Meeting which will be hosted by First Congregational UCC of Sheridan, Wyoming and Union Congregational UCC of Buffalo, Wyoming, on April 22-24, 2016.

Paper registration forms are found on the kiosk in the narthex or can be found by going here: <https://mnwcucc.org/attachments/article/95/CAM%202016%20registration%20form.pdf>. If you wish to register online, you can go here: <https://mnwcucc.org/index.php/event-registration>.

Gratitude from Rev. Mike

Thanks to all of you who helped me to celebrate my 54th birthday. The card shower, I believe engineered by the diabolical and loving Myrle Theimer, was a wonderful gift. Thanks to Myrle and to all of you who participated. Speaking of diabolical, the chocolate bunny from Brian Bross already has lost its ears and head! The greetings I received from so many others lifted my day. I felt loved and cherished, and I am grateful.

Thanks to all of those who participated and led out in making our special educational opportunities and worship services for Lent, Holy Week, and Easter such a meaningful time. As I said in my Easter Day sermon, I am grateful for all of those people who showed up for watching Michael Pollan's "In Defense of Food" and participated in "The Daniel Fast" in some way, shape, or form. I am thankful to all of those who helped me set up and clean up for the two times our church hosted. It takes an enormous amount of energy to be responsible for it all. Thanks also to two great colleagues, Rev. Steve Gordon and Rev. Stacey Siebrasse.

I depended on so many people during Holy Week. Thanks to the Jesuit volunteers and the Ameri-corps VISTA volunteers for their roles as readers: Julia Kehoe, Laura Keating, Emma Quinn, Christian Keeve, and Kayla Janowski. Thanks to Michael Drake for playing trumpet for me at the last minute! Thanks to the Diaconate and the Older Youth for their participation in our Maundy Thursday. You helped us tell the story, and Diaconate facilitated our young people doing it in a mature, serious, and responsible way. Thanks to all who read and participated in the Good Friday Stations of the Cross. We had twice the number of people as last year and more than twice the faith communities. People from Angela's Piazza are already looking to involve more people next year. Sisters Mary and Pat are such great community leaders. I still have the indelible image of Vi Krum carrying the cross during our journey. Thanks to Kim Harris for the ways she took photos to pass along and help us remember so many of these events. Finally, thanks to our Barbara Dobesh and Laura Blodgett for making the Easter Day service something more than just a Sunday service. It was beautiful.

Thanks to Nikki Olson and the new Bereavement Meals team as you took care of one of our families in the congregation. Hopefully, this will be a model for future care and concern. Your love and care was strongly experienced by a family in our congregation.

Thanks to so many of you who have had kind and encouraging words to say to me. As I continue to walk through this time, I am also grateful to a Church Council that is willing to be courageous and do "hard things" with conflict and difficult change before them. We have a great set of leaders who are, day by day, trying to rebuild a church infrastructure that had fallen into disrepair over the years. I am especially grateful for Mic Dawson and her leadership even when she knows the decisions she makes will not make her popular. Her will to make us a healthy congregation ripples out to many people but especially me.

There is so much gratitude to express, and I am sure I have left people out. But I am excited for the ways we are responding to God's call to our church . . . to be church.

Youth and Young Adults

March was another busy month in the life of our children and youth! We finished up two Our Whole Lives Classes. We had a K-2 class with 5 participants and a 4-6 grade class with 10. What a great time we all had! If you missed out on having your child participate in these classes we will have another round next fall!

We had a great Family Fun Night at Steep World on March 18, we spent the evening climbing and playing at the indoor climbing gym downtown! The Older Youth held their annual Pancake Breakfast on Palm Sunday at First Church! We tried something different this year and served after worship and upstairs! How awesome was it to come right out of church and be served pancakes, eggs and sausage! We had a great turnout and made \$300 towards our mission trip! Thank you to all who stayed for breakfast and to all who helped the kids in preparation and cooking!

We had some amazing Older Youth help lead the Maundy Service at First Church UCC by serving communion to small groups around the table and offering foot washing before participants entered the 'garden' to pray. Unfortunately our work day at camp was cancelled due to weather, but we were able to do the work day at the conference office on the Monday after Easter. We had a small but great group of Older Youth show up and spend the day painting offices and cleaning carpets at the conference office!

We have another busy month coming up. We will begin our High School Our Whole Lives class this weekend. This is our biggest High School class yet with over 12 youth participating! We are also starting our Young Adult Book group with our first meeting on April 3, 5-7 pm at Kim's House. We are reading the book Love Wins by Rob Bell, if you haven't had a chance to read it yet, come on April 3 anyway, we will discuss what books we want to read moving forward.

Our Family Fun night this month is April 8 and we will be spending the evening at Skate World, 6-8 pm! Cost is \$5/skater. Come enjoy and evening getting lost in time with roller skating around the arena, playing video games and having a blast!! On Sunday, April 10 the older youth will be helping out the Mayflower Sunday School raise money for their playground at the annual Spud Sunday right after service at Mayflower. The cost is a free will donation.

The Older Youth Mystery Event this month is on April 17 and will be 3-5 pm and \$20/person. The clue for this month is: **Be Careful, Is There A Target On Your Back?** We will be finishing out the month with a work day at Camp Mimanagish on Saturday, April 30. All ages are welcome to join us, just let Kim know if you are interested in helping out! The deadline to sign up for the conference youth mission trip is April 15. Please contact Kim for more information or visit www.mnwcucc.org.



Important Dates This April

4/8 Family Fun Night at Skate World
 4/12-18 **Breanna on vacation**
 4/12 **Diaconate Meeting** 7:00 pm Lib
 4/19 **Council Meeting** 7:00 p.m. Li-
 brary
 4/21 **Primetimer's Dinnertime** 5:30
 p.m. at , rsvp to church office.
 4/23 **Church Work Day**
4/22-24 Annual Conference Meeting
in Sheridan and Buffalo WY.
4/30 Work Day at Camp Mimanagish
5/6 ArtWalk at Billings First Church

Time and Talent Pledge

Lots of people want to help, they are just waiting to be asked.

If you haven't noticed, the new Time and Talent lists are on the bulletin board by the church office. If you are looking for help with a project, check it out. If you are the chair of a committee, check and see if there is someone who wants to be on your committee.

About 40 people have turned in Time and Talent sheets. If you haven't filled one out and want to, they are available on the bulletin board.

Lyla Dyer, Vice Moderator



First, thanks to the Rev. Mike Mulberry for being so supportive of our church's participation in Family Promise, program to house homeless families. Mike has spent many nights at our church as a volunteer host, in addition to his leadership role locally and even nationally, in that he initiated one of the programs in the East.

Penny volunteered two hours at the new Family Promise Day Center, just north across from Riverstone Health, Easter afternoon. Actually, she wasn't feeling altogether well, so it was more like an hour and a quarter. She said she likes the new facility, although they keep the temperature cool there.

If you are interested in finding out about volunteering at the day center, phone Sharon or Caitrin at 406-294-7432.

Volunteering at the Day Center is pretty straightforward, usually. Sharon assigns two-hour shifts and normally the place is quiet enough to read or do a puzzle. Once in a while the children are noisy or the adults don't get

along, according to Penny. The people staying at the Day Center on weekends know that volunteers are there as a presence only and don't referee any disputes.

Each week Caitrin sends an email updating everyone about the families on service. Thursday she said there were four families with 15 adults and children, ages 7 to 15. This last time she requested volunteers:

- Mentors for the FPYV new mentor program! If you are interested please contact the main office 406-294-7432 and ask for Emilee, our AmeriCorps Vista volunteer!

- FPYV is looking for volunteers for our annual Golf Tournament! Please contact Sharon at the office 406-294-7432 if you are interested in being on the committee!

First Congregational is scheduled to host families again May 1 to May 7.

Dan Struckman

Mayflower Circle

Mayflower Circle will meet April 19, 2016 at the Conference Office 2016 Alderson Ave. The meeting begins at 1:00 pm. the program will be "Crime and Crime Prevention in Billings" by Officer Tom Keightly. Guests are always welcome and you are encouraged to bring a friend. Call Myrle Theimer at 245-3650 with questions.

Spiritual Director-In-Residence

In June of last year Walt and I attended a multi-disciplinary conference on climate change entitled "Seizing the Alternative". Of the 80 plus workshops offered I chose one on spiritual practices that help us to cope with change, especially, in this case, climate change. These spiritual "coping strategies" are not exclusive to the fear and anxiety caused by climate change. We are confronted with societal changes and political chaos as well. Our first reaction is to fight or flee that which causes us pain instead of confronting and walking through our pain. In our workshop we experienced both guided and unguided meditation and listening to music and singing, but the most important practice of all was that of caring for each other in the midst of crisis, the coming together of community, not the fracturing of community, to deal with both individual and collective pain. In Psalm 23 we hear that God is present with us and "prepares a table before (us) in the presence of (our) enemies, whether these are perceived enemies from without or enemies from within ourselves. Reinhold Niebuhr's prayer which has been adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous speaks to us in these times: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Outreach, ArtWalk

First Church ended its first year's participation in Art Walk with the February display of paintings by Jim Vincent and pottery by Chuck Heath. It has been an enjoyable and rewarding experience bringing art, music, food, and people together in our beautiful venue. Commissions from art sales contributed over \$250.00 to our church discretionary funds most of which is intended to be used for the downtown homeless population needs. In short, I believe our goals of fundraising and of bringing the Billings community into our church has been successful.

I am confident that this second year of involvement will be even better. In order to continue with Art Walk we need to meet our yearly obligation of \$400.00. This past year's start-up fees were graciously paid by funds from the Christian Ed committee. In order to raise funds for this event we are asking the congregation for help. You could help us out in either of two ways: first, a handful of contributions in the \$25-\$50 range would obviously be a big help; second, if you have art at home that is gathering dust or not wanted any longer, we ask you to donate it for a silent auction that we will have to help generate funds.

I would like to thank the many members of the congregation who donated food, music, wine, and time to this past year's Art Walk events. I would also like to thank my fellow Art Walk committee members Julie Solberg and Brad Blaesius for their help. Please give one of us a call if you have any questions, ideas about possible artists to host, or anything else that pertains to our involvement in Art Walk.
Thank you. Edward Barta

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 Emily Guthridge Mickey Wambolt Laura Doll	2
3 Lou Fox Jordan Stickney Molly Tollefson	4 Jared Hauck Marjorie Meader	5	6 Lisa Degges	7 George Bentler Natalie Goulding Bill Royer Peter Tolton	8 Casey Degner	9 George Selover
10 Addie Cooper Kaleb Ostermiller	11	12 Virginia Court	13 Mark Moak	14	15 Julie McClelland Nikolas Olson	16
17	18 Dolline Stanaway	19	20	21 Janet Lillis Doris Redinger	22	23 Cathy Andersen
24	25 Morgan Edmond	26 Ali Lubbers	27 Amy Dunphy Ellen Erikson Martha Rhoades	28 Maddy Brown Ed Gulick	29 Kay Wegner	30 Bruce Kline Charlie Norsworthy

We're now on facebook!

Become a friend of "Billings First"
and get important information online and updated daily!

Billings First Church

First Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC)

*Theologically progressive, radically inclusive,
committed to justice!*

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An "Open & Affirming/Peace with
Justice" Church

Our Staff

Rev. Michael Mulberry, Senior Minister

Kimmie Harris, Youth/Young Adults

Laura Blodgett, Chancel Choir

Jo Lokken, Melody Choir

Barbara Dobesh, Organist/Pianist

Steve Plaggemeyer, Assistant Organ/Piano

Jan Duffy, Bookkeeping

Breanna Rolandson, Administrative Assistant

Barbara Gulick, Spiritual Director-In-Residence

Our Ministers

Every member of the congregation!



www.firstchurchbillings.org

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hello
spring!

Worship Highlights ~ April/May

Second Sunday of Easter~ White

April 3, 2016

Sacrament of Holy Communion

Scripture: John 20:19-31: "Grieving toward resurrection"

Join Rev. Mulberry in running the Purple 5K starting at 9:00 a.m. and ending at Sky Point. Proceeds go to funding Spare Change for Real Change. Then join us for worship at 11:00 a.m.

Liturgist: Brian Bross

Scripture Reader: Nina Hernandez

Third Sunday of Easter~ White

April 10, 2016

Scripture: Acts 9:1-20: "Called to Deeper Faith"

Liturgist: John Smillie

Scripture Reader: Dan Cohn

Good Shepherd Sunday~ White

April 17, 2016

Scripture: Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23: "Originally Blessed"

Liturgist: Tom Howard

Scripture Reader: Sophia Heilman

Break the Silence Sunday

April 24, 2016

Scripture: Luke 13:10-17:

Liturgist: Judy Burnam

Scripture Reader: Kayla Janowski

Sixth Sunday of Easter~ White

May 1, 2016

Sacrament of Holy Communion

Diaconate Meal Ministry

The Diaconate's newly organized Meal Ministry provided two dinners for Hillary Barry and her family upon Hillary's recent hospital discharge following surgery. Many thanks to Barbara Gunn, Ken and Marcy Brown, Jerry Howland, Janet Hawk, Cheryl Stewart, Lila Dyer, Nikki Olsen, Barbara Gulick and Virginia Bryan for their joyful willingness to step forward and be of service. If you would like to be a part of the Meal Ministry, please contact Virginia: 690.1662 (phone or text) or vbryan1041@gmail.com.

Christian Education

Anyone who has been in church over the last month has heard me announcing the church garden. We--myself and 12 intrepid gardeners from the church and community--are planning a container garden for the space that will be inhabited by the future Pocket Park. We have HUGE dreams of growing our own fruits and veggies that will eventually become part of our Church culinary and spiritual life. I also hope that this garden can become an integral part of our Sunday Morning offerings for both children and adults. I dream of Sunday mornings before church being spent outside pruning, weeding, and harvesting the fruits of our labors as a congregation. There are incredible lessons about community and God's love for us to be gleaned from a garden. God's abundant love for us appears through out the bible in the form of plants; from the Garden of Eden, to the plant that shelters Jonah, to the burning bush, to Jesus's object lessons about grape vines, mustard seeds, and barley. How awesome would it be for us to come into church with dirty knees and fingernails and the taste of fresh snap peas on our tongues?

This dream will not become a reality without the help of many hands and hearts. Many more than the 12 we have. We need the support of our church family to make this a reality. We need help on all different levels! Our current physical needs are: gardening tools (trowels, shovels, gloves, a garden hose), large containers (over 15 gal), hay bales, seeds of any type (except squash, melons, or large tomatoes), and potting soil. Our intellectual needs are: folks who can help plan/write a Sunday morning curriculum based in gardening and appropriate for ages 0-90+. Our spiritual needs are: prayers! Pray that we can get plants to grow and get people who are excited to grow them. Pray that next year we can have everyone from age 90+ to 0 out in the garden firmly rooting themselves in community and God's love.

PS. Christian Education for children on Sunday Mornings has been on hiatus this last winter and will continue to be on hiatus until next fall. Meanwhile, we are working feverishly on a more generationally integrated, cohesive format for our Sunday morning offerings that we can't wait to unveil. Melody Choir continues to occur on Sunday mornings at 10:30am.

Emma Kerr-Carpenter

Called to Care, New Lay Visitation Ministry

At the behest of the Diaconate, we will begin an intentional lay visitation ministry on April 17 with the Commissioning of Lay Visitors in the 11:00 a.m. service, followed by a light lunch and orientation session for the newly commissioned visitors. We will base our ministry on the UCC's "Called to Care" model, which has some kinship to Steven Ministry, but, instead of training first and then beginning the ministry, we shall use a continuing education model. We are fortunate to have several resource persons in our congregation! Several persons have signed up to be visitors in the Time and Talent survey. More would be welcome for this caring team. Please indicate your interest by notifying the church office.

- Barbara Gulick, Visitation Ministry Coordinator