

FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF
CHRIST (UCC)

SPECIAL
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THE *Congregationalist*

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Rev. Michael S. Mulberry, Sr. Minister

As we turn the page to a new year, my hope and prayer is that we will focus on our strength as the people of God. When a congregation focuses on strength, it will look to the future and increase the potential for change or renewal. Focusing on strength allows us to look at options, take stock of our resources, seek out support, ask a variety of questions, affirm the ability to reach goals, and make clear, thoughtful decisions.

Read in those actions the good possibility that we will make mistakes or fail at times. Even when we focus on our strength as the people of God, we are aware that mistakes and failure happen. Strength is found in our resilience, building healthy systems and structures that help us bounce back. Rabbi Hillel wrote, "I get up. I walk. I fall down. Meanwhile, I keep dancing."

Dancing has that connotation that while we do our work together there is an underlying movement toward joy and celebration. I believe strength, joy, and celebration are one in the same in healthy congregations. Meanwhile, unhealthy congregations seem always drawn to misery. And misery's traveling companions are helplessness and powerlessness.

A focus on strength is a focus on the future. They are not caught up in pathology, blame, and deficits but exhibit a fighting spirit, almost a feistiness about who they are and what they will be. As the longest running institution in Billings, we have every right to be feisty about our future.

A focus on strength is a focus on learning. We learn different ways of being and adapting. Like all healthy bodies that have developed immunity, we develop "wise blood." Learning also means that we will be engaged and interactive with one another. We share ideas, dialogue with others, and ask relevant questions.

A focus on strength is a focus on mourning. We grieve well. When people, families, or congregations cannot mourn, they become locked in time. They refuse to let go of what used to be and try to mold the church into a replacement for something that is irreplaceable in their heart. Mourning develops an intimacy that encourages a vision for the future. Without mourning, feelings go underground waiting for a trigger into anger, back-biting, and despair.

A focus on strength is a focus on grace and graciousness. Hans Selye, a pioneer in charting the effect of emotional states on physical health, noted that the two emotions most detrimental to health are vengeance and envy. Conversely, the most nourishing attitude is gratitude. Healthy congregations foster a caring spirit and encourage a confident tone. The people are generous with each other and with outsiders. Wholesomeness pervades their gathering and informs their direction.

In my short time among you, I have seen how strong and resilient you all are as a people. As we focus on strength to focus on the future, learning, mourning well, and being a gracious people, I do not see any reason why Billings First Church should not continue to be the historical and prophetic witness to God's love and justice.

Shalom,
Mike

Time With Teresa

- **Time with Teresa...** It's 2015! I love this poem, and it's my WISH for all of you in the next 365 days: "May Light always surround you; Hope kindle and rebound you. May your Hurts turn to Healing; Your Heart embrace Feeling. May Wounds become Wisdom; Every Kindness a Prism. May Laughter infect you; Your Passion resurrect you. May Goodness inspire your Deepest Desires. Through all that you Reach For, May your arms Never Tire." — D. Simone
- We have lots of work and fun planned in the New Year, and it's time to get busy being the HANDS and FEET of Jesus! May the Holy Spirit fall afresh on you each day~ Pastor Teresa
- **Diaconate~** We will meet Jan. 13, 2015 @ 7:00pm.
- Primetimer's Older Adult Ministry (55+) Dinnertime January 15, 5:30pm Fancy Sushi Asian Fusion 1313 Grand Ave. ALL 55+ WELCOME! YUM! Come make some new friends!
- Primetimer's Older Adult Ministry (55+) Winetime January 22. At the home of Kenny & Marcy Brown. ALL 55+ are welcome. Bring an appetizer to share. Beverages provided. It's a great time fellowship! Come and make some new friends!
- Primetimer's Older Adult Ministry (55+) Studytime-My office 10:00 Sunday morning. What does scripture say about aging? Different topic each week. All are welcome.
- If you would like Home Communion, please let Mike or Pastor Teresa know. Either of us would be delighted to visit with you.
- **If you are hospitalized, please notify the church office, or Mike or Teresa, so we can be present for you. The hospitals do not let us know.**

Listening Sessions

These are the proposed times for Listening Sessions regarding the termination of our employment relationship with Randy Foreman, our addendum to the Safe Space Policy, and how we shall move forward as a church. We want all of our church members to participate in this part of our church life as we go forward. It will be critical to have wide ownership, transparency, and communication about who we are and who we want to be.

First Session: Sunday, January 18, 1:00 p.m.

Second Session: Wednesday, January 21, 1:00 p.m.

Third Session: Wednesday, January 21, 6:30 p.m.

Sessions will last no more than one and a half hours.

Christian Education

2015 is going to be an exciting time at Billings First Church! We are moving forward on a dream that our Youth Director, Kim Harris, has shared with us. Beginning on January 11th at 9:30 am, all ages are invited to the Fellowship Hall for a hot breakfast before joining a Faith Formation class at 9:45. Our Prereaders (Preschool through 1st grade) and our Elementary school students (2nd grade through 6th grade) will each have a class that will use the Holy Moly curriculum. These young people and their leaders will watch a short video that introduces the day's story before they explore the story through art, games and sharing.

Our youth (7th-12th grade) will gather to explore 12 of the most important stories in our faith tradition using the curriculum Echo the Story. Youth and their leaders will have the opportunity to see the story, hear the story, enter the story, and find their place in the story.

Adults will continue to gather for Adult Forum at 10am.

Children and youth will be invited to be part of Melody Choir at the end of their classes (10:30) and Jo Lokken will continue her great work in teaching the songs of our faith.

We will continue to have a Staffed Nursery each Sunday morning. Children in Kindergarten and younger will be able to attend the nursery following the Children's Time. We will also be creating a Children's Space in the Chapel area of the sanctuary. Young children will be welcome to come to the Children's Space so that they can still be part of our worshipping community, while being able to move about a bit to play with quiet toys (such as puzzles, coloring books, word games, stuffed animals, etc).

The Christian Ed team is very excited about our new All Ages Faith Formation ministry. We hope that you will be part of it, either by bringing your children and youth, by helping to prepare the breakfast, by volunteering to be an age group leader or helper, or by participating in Adult Forum.

Sunday morning schedule, beginning January 11th

9:30 am Hot breakfast available in the Fellowship Hall

9:45 am Holy Moly PreReaders gather

Holy Moly Elementary gather

Echo the Story youth gather

10:00 am Adult Forum in the Library

10:30 am Melody Choir practice

11:00 am Worship for all ages

Kindergarten and younger may go to the Nursery following the Children's Time

Children's Space in the Chapel area for older children

Annual Meeting: January 25th

The 133rd ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CHURCH is slated for Sunday, January 25th, immediately following service. All committee reports need to be forwarded to Breanna NOW! (The deadline is January 5!!! Send them to her at firstchurchbillings.org in a word document please). The reports will be ready to pick up the Sunday before the Annual Meeting. This is the primary business meeting of the church whereby all interested have an opportunity to learn more about our mission, our ministry, and the general state of the church. We are also required to adopt a 2015 Budget at that time. Anyone can attend and offer input, thus broadening our voice—but vote is by membership only. These meetings tend to be celebrative rather than combative, reflective (especially with regard to those who left us in death this year) and optimistic rather than despairing. It is no secret that an enormous challenge has been set before us. Please prayerfully consider how YOU may be a part of meeting that challenge!

Youth and Young Adults

The youth had a busy and great December! We started off the month with a great turnout for our annual sweets bazaar! We raised almost \$300! Thank you to everyone who donated and/or purchased baked goods!! The Older Youth helped with packing food boxes at the Food Bank on December 13. We had a great electronic Christmas Pageant on the 15. The OY had their annual Christmas party on December 21 to close out the year! We have a great second half of the programming year coming up! We will be starting a jr. high school Our Whole Lives class in February, planning for our mission trip to Monterrey, CA. We will have an informational parent and youth meeting on Tuesday, January 13 at 6 pm at Mayflower. We will have a parent informational meeting for 7-9 grade OWL on Thursday, January 15 at 6 pm at Mayflower. We are also hoping to go skiing sometime in March! We still people to provide dinners from February through May if you would like to cook a dinner for the youth please contact Kimmie 855-4317.



Family Promise
of Yellowstone Valley

Our church was blessed with tens of volunteers who have helped this past year to host all of the families as guests in our church Sunday school rooms. We have the opportunity to volunteer again starting on the week of February 8, 2015 when the good people from First United Methodist Church will help us host 3 or 4 families.

We have 10 new cots for our guests! The 5 adult cots are as wide as a single bed with a 4-inch thick mattress. I'm hoping the fitted sheets we have will work on them! The mattresses are somewhat thicker than those we have for the host cots and don't roll up as the current host cot mattresses do. The 5 children's cots each plop outward like a camp chair. About 20 inches wide, or so, and 30 inches long. They don't have mattresses, but they do come with a flannel sheet. Thanks to the outreach committee! Thanks to our generous people (including those from First Methodist Church) who gave money to help pay for these. The cost was about \$1300 for the 10 beds.

Those of you who are familiar with the FPYV storage room at our church know that we share the room with the computer and telephone system equipment. It was a crowded space, about the size of a walk-in closet, and now, with the new mattresses stacked like – well, mattresses – the space seems even smaller. Things do fit. Just so you know. Just don't go waltzing in there thinking you've got room to goof off. You don't.

First Christian Church, over on 6th Ave, a block from the new library, just began hosting families. They have a relatively small facility but the guest rooms were superb. Like us, they have no showers for the guests, and like us they have wonderful, generous, respectful volunteers.

Of course, it's all about the homeless guests. I have mixed emotions for Randy and his 2 children Tayshawn and Bobbi Jo, because they are getting their own apartment! Randy has been working all Summer roofing and now he works a 40-hour week, so he's got a healthy bank account in addition to his "decent check" from his job. I am happy for them, but I will miss them.

Dan Struckman



ANNUAL REPORTS DUE!!!!

Important Dates This January

- 1/9 & 16 **Youth Climbing 8-9 pm**
 1/11 **Second Sunday Lunch, 12:00 pm** F.H.
 1/13 **Diaconate Meeting** 7:00 pm Library
 1/13 **Mission Trip Meeting** 6pm Mayflower
 1/15 **Jr. High OWL Meeting** 6pm Mayflower
 1/15 **Primetimer's Dinnertime** 5:30 p.m. at Fancy Sushi, rsvp to Teresa or church office.
 1/19 **Office Closed Martin Luther King Jr. Day**
 1/20 **Council Meeting** 7:00 p.m. Fellowship Hall
 1/22 **Primetimers Winetime** 5:30 pm at the home of Ken & Marcy brown. Bring an appetizer to share, wine provided.
 1/23 **Youth Overnight Retreat 7pm First Church**
 1/27-2-2 **Breanna on vacation**

All Annual reports are due to Breanna asap please email them to her immediately. The Annual Meeting will be January 25 following worship, but reports are due in Jan.5 so that they can be compiled and reports available for members/friends on Sunday, Jan. 18. The annual meeting is Jan. 25 following worship in the sanctuary. Please email annual reports to Breanna at firstchurchbillings.org, she will be compiling the annual report .

Adult Forum Schedule

"Telling Our Stories" will resume on January 11.

Here is the schedule of our presenters:

January 11, Fran and Sherm Oland

January 18, Karen and Randy Hyvonen (a goodbye session before they move to the east coast)

January 25, Pat and John Burg

Spiritual Director-In-Residence

I've just come inside after walking my snow labyrinth as "diamond dust" is falling. Walt has built a fire in the fireplace, and its flames not only warm our living room but also fascinate. What is it about flames of fire in their proper place and a candle's flame that draw us to Mystery, that invite us to rest in the Presence of the Holy One?

The Illuminated Labyrinth was again held on New Year's Day in Fellowship Hall. You may wish to walk the labyrinth's path to the center or walk around its perimeter, or you may simply wish to sit quietly beside the labyrinth and listen to the music of the singing bowls. You are invited to use this time at the labyrinth to discern and declare your intentions for the New Year. As you enter the labyrinth you may wish to let go of something old, an old habit or an old tape that keeps looping in your head and distracting you, in order to make room for something new as you enter the labyrinth's center.

What is God calling you to be or to do in this New Year? What spiritual practice will draw you closer to God? Discern it, receive it, embrace it, celebrate it! And leave the labyrinth as God's "New Creation." Our next labyrinth opportunity will be on the Vernal Equinox, March 21, as we contemplate growth and new life in the midst of Lent.

Barbara Gulick, MRE, DASD



**“Twenty years
from now you
will be more
disappointed
by the things
that you didn’t
do than by the
ones you did
do. So throw
off the
bowlines. Sail
away from the
safe harbor.
Catch the
trade winds in
your sails.
Explore.
Dream.
Discover.”
-Mark Twain**

Mayflower Circle

Mayflower Circle will meet January 20, 2015 at the home of Doris Redinger. The meeting begins at 1:00 pm. the program will be “State of Our Church” by Rev. Michael Mulberry. Guests are always welcome and you are encouraged to bring a friend. Call Myrle Theimer at 245-3650 with questions.

From The Moderator

Yesterday was a wonderful start to Christmas Week - a full sanctuary, beautiful music from a guest violinist, the Bell, Melody and Adult choirs, great preaching and praying, and having the Senior Minister, Mike Mulberry, become the newest member of First Church! We are an expanding congregation once again and each Sunday’s worship experience brings new and exciting opportunities for spiritual growth and awareness. If you haven’t attended church recently please make a New Year’s resolution to do so soon. We would love the chance to welcome you back.

By the time you read this message it will be the New Year. Mike Mulberry’s Installation Service, originally scheduled for January 11, has been postponed and will be rescheduled for a Sunday in March. Annual Meeting will follow the worship service on Sunday, January 25. If you are an officer, Board or Committee Chair and haven’t already done so, please submit your annual report to Bre no later than January 5.

The Finance Board will continue to work on the 2015 budget in January. Church members will review and vote to approve the budget at the Annual Meeting. 2015 pledges, the main source of income, continue to lag and the next four weeks will be critical. If you haven’t submitted your 2015 pledge yet, it’s most important that you do so prior to the Annual Meeting. If you’ve already pledged, please consider increasing the amount by filling out a new pledge card, if you are able.

This is my last Congregationalist report. I’ve been honored and proud to serve as Moderator. Many, many people, including the church’s staff, officers, members of the Senior Minister Search Committee and the Church Council, have contributed hundreds of hours of service to our church and in so doing have made my job that much easier. I thank them all and extend best wishes to our new officers, board and committee members, especially Mic Dawson, my successor as Moderator.

Outreach

Recently the Board of Outreach held a retreat at Edward Barta’s cabin near Nye. In this beautiful setting, Barbara Gulick and Edward led the group in a process to discern a missional focus for First Church. As various ministries were suggested, we discussed how each would meet the goals of Education, Evangelism, Action, Advocacy and Celebration. We chose to focus on *Low cost housing* (Prairie Tower and Big Sky apartments); *Homelessness* (Family Promise, Habitat for Humanity and Downtown issues/solutions); the *Non Discrimination Ordinance*; *Go Green*; and an *Expanded Alternative Christmas Fair/Bazaar*. During January, the board will be asking members and friends to join committees dedicated to carrying out these ministries this year and in years to come. Please consider how you might become involved.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<p>*If you, or someone you know, has a birthday not listed, <i>please</i> let us know so we can make the correction!</p>				1	2	3 Jettzen Lokken
4 Jim Bentler	5	6 Gladys Blevins Ken Brown Leslie Taylor	7 Beau Fredlund	8 Kim Harris	9	10
11 Randy Krieger	12	13 Obert Udem Jan Hawk	14 Rosalee Zeier	15 John Peck Margaret Norsworthy Diane Arkava	16 John Fredlund	17
18 Karen Durfey Amber Ruff	19 Pat Burg Tom Tollefson Jane Moses	20 Bonnie Wamsley Mary Alice Jaksha	21 Courtney Staggs Cody Solberg	22 Kory Emond	23 Robin Deverine-ro	24 Roger Howell C.J. McIntosh
25 Nicole Valdez Charles Smillie	26 Jon Hughes	27 Brenda Emond Austin Olson Emily Dunphy	28	29 Allison Bailey Karen Doolen Jere Wamsley Hannah Valdez	30	31 Brigid Shearer

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
Teresa Kennedy, Pastoral Care Associate
Kimmie Harris, Youth/Young Adults
Laura Blodgett, Chancel Choir
Jo Lokken, Melody Choir
Barbara Dobesh, Organist/Pianist
Steve Plaggemeyer, Assistant Organ/Piano
Susan Ogden, Parish Nurse
Jan Duffy, Bookkeeping
Breanna Rolandson, Administrative Assistant
Barbara Gulick, Spiritual Director-In-Residence

Our Ministers

Every member of the congregation!



Your January congregationalist is here!

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A HAPPY
NEW YEAR

Billings First Church Priority List: Give us Your Top 10

- Make the energy sources for the church green/sustainable.
- Create a quiet room that divides the main sanctuary from the chapel with sound-proof glass.
- Buy a washer and dryer for church use.
- Church sign to put up high on our building.
- Signs that are clear and abundant, clear and obvious (\$100-500)
- Increase the number of hymnal racks
- Replace worn attendance folders and replace pencils with ball point pens (no need to sharpen).
- New computer hard drive for Office Manager
- New computer for Teresa Kennedy
- New computer for Bookkeeper
- Office painted for Bookkeeper/Treasurer
- Air conditioning for Bookkeeper/Treasurer
- Locking file cabinet for Bookkeeper/Treasurer
- New Heating system for Bookkeeper/Treasurer
- New flooring
- New roof
- Guttering
- A light for the grand piano.
- A new music rack and light for the organ (we should consult with the Holtkamp firm on this, I believe).
- A better light above the pedal board (again, consult with Holtkamp).
- Set the fan in the Choir Division chamber up so that, when the organ is on, the fan is off—and when the organ is turned off, the fan goes on automatically, as the fan in the south (Great and Swell) chamber does.
- Our Whitechapel handbells will quite possibly need some repair work as we prepare to establish a handbell choir again, in time for Advent and Christmas.
- Gloves for the handbell choir, two sets, white and black.
- For small price items Diaconate would like shelves in the Sacristy area or in the Fellowship Hall kitchen. < \$100
- Diaconate would like shelves in the Sacristy area or in the Fellowship Hall kitchen (\$100)
- For a larger item Diaconate supports a van to bring elderly persons to Church services, etc. (\$30,000)
- Van for youth/children (to and from worship or activities)
- Diaconate would also like the idea of laminate flooring to be put in the Library and Parlor with use of throw rug in Parlor. (\$20,000)
- Drapes to separate the space between the Chapel and the Sanctuary.
- Flowers & products (landscaping) for east front of Church(\$500)
- Hospitality hostel/house for justice and peace workers
- Remodel sanctuary so that it is more connectional with an open chancel area
- Accessible Building space
- Mission grants for downtown
- Multi-stall women’s restroom on the 1st floor (\$10,000-20,000)
- Hands-free microphone(s)
- Power point possibilities in sanctuary (\$800-1000)
- Solar array on roof
- Projection screen(s) for the sanctuary (to play videos, project hymns, show photos, etc.)
- New sound system (\$20,000)
- Repair hand rails (\$500)
- Replace carpet in library
- Website development and upkeep (\$5,000/year)
- Outreach to new members via TV/newspaper ads
- New windows for library/parlor choir room
- Sound proof conferencing area for ministers to provide congregational privacy or for committees dealing with sensitive issues
- Sanitizers for Family Restroom, especially for diaper change station
- Sign in kitchen regarding sanitation processes, and sanitizer for tables, chairs and counter tops to be used prior to and following events. Temperature signs for heating processes and processes for using the sanitizer in the Fellowship Hall.
- New furnace and an efficient system to spread heat
- Energy efficient windows throughout building
- New music for choir that is more modern (\$200-300)
- New robes (\$1200)
- Intergenerational projects/activities.
- HVAC plus electrical updating
- Centralized file storage system kept securely.
- Make exterior wall of sanctuary more attractive. Church does not have inviting exterior. Add something between two stain glass windows.
- Four tier file cabinet for Senior Minister
- Locking file cabinet for Teresa Kennedy
- Media Center room with internet access.
- Youth Room with new furniture (not hand-me down)
- Youth Room with climate control (hot and cold)
- Youth room as one big room and center wall removed.
- Funding a Habitat House
- Funding a mission trip
- Funding more scholarships

Please List Your Top 10 for the Priority List, detach this sheet and return to the church office, or send us an email with your top 10 to firstchurch@firstchurchbillings.org

1.	6.
2.	7.
3.	8.
4.	9.
5.	10.