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From the Moderator: Mic Dawson

REFLECTION

This is, of course, the time of year traditionally associated with reflecting on the past year(s) and setting goals for the months to come.

At the Special Meeting December 13th, we as a congregation decided that we would engage in a guided, deliberate process of reflection to determine how we will be a church in the future. All options are on the table for consideration by the whole with the aim of uniting the congregation around one course of action.

I think we all know the value of seeking counsel from others when we face a difficult decision and that is the situation the church finds itself in now. In order for us to accomplish a productive, coherent discernment process professional help is needed. And, of course, professional help costs money.

The Endowment Fund of the church is meant to provide for the continuing Life of the church, its Missions and Ministries. It's said if there's no money there is no mission but the reverse can also be true: if there's no mission, what good is the money? The majority of those at the Special Meeting felt using endowment funds to move forward with this project was a good idea. I don't believe they considered it lightly. And I also believe we will come out of this a richer more vibrant church.

Happy New Year to you all!

Annual Meeting January 24th.

The 134th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CHURCH is slated for Sunday, January 24th, immediately following service. All committee reports need to be forwarded to Breanna NOW! (The deadline was December 17!!! 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 2016 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!

Time With Teresa

- “Life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who journey the way with us. So be swift to love, and make haste to be kind. And the blessing of God, who made us, who loves us, and who travels with us, be with you now, and forever. Amen” (Adapted from a blessing by Henri Frederic Amiel (1827-1881))
- Happy New Year, everybody! I realize the new year will have sorrow, pain, and hardship, but there will be joy, abundance, and blessings, too. Let’s focus on those blessings.....May the Holy Spirit fall afresh on you EVERY day! Peace, Pastor Teresa
- Thank you to Rev. Mulberry, Barbara Dobesh, and Pat Burg for sharing their gifts with us at the annual Advent service at West Park. We had about 40! Very fun.
- **Mark your calendars for January 31st!** Immediately following worship in Fellowship hall. We’ll have a presentation and question/answer time from Sue Bailey of the Adult Resource Alliance of Yellowstone County (formerly Council on Aging). Sue will discuss resources available to assist older adults in remaining independent longer. BONUS!! Sue is an expert on Medicare and can answer your questions! Lunch will be provided. Please RSVP to church office or text me 861-5578
- **Home-Bound? Need A RIDE? It’s SUPER easy to use our Transportation Ministry.** A cabbie will show up just when you request~ Please call the church office or me @ 861-5578 to get a voucher. Suggested rides: Worship, Primetimer events. HOME-BOUND Older Adult Primetimer’s 55+) only.
- *******DISCONTINUED GRIEF EDUCATION AND SUPPORT GROUP MONDAY’S** @ 4:00pm @ Conference Office. All are welcome. No charge. Pastor Teresa is always available for private counseling or support. No charge. Call my cell to make arrangements 861-5578.
- **Primetimer’s Studytime~** Sunday mornings @ 10:00 in Teresa’s office. Looking for something different? GODISSTILLSPEAKING! Our curriculum focus is what God would want for us as we pass from middle-age towards the final quarter of our lives.
- **Primetimer’s Dinnertime~** Pizza Ranch. 2505 King Ave Jan 21 Thurs. @ 5:30pm. Please join us for a time of fellowship, food, and fun! Come make some new friends. Call the church office if you would like a ride.
- **Primetimer’s Winetime~** At the home of Doug & Liza McClelland Jan 28 Thurs. @ 5:30pm. Please bring an appetizer to share. Beverages provided. Come make some new friends! Call the church office if you would like a ride. Let’s kick off our New Year by sharing fellowship!
- **PRAYER CONCERNS:** We pray for the Church, Staff, and Leadership. We pray for World peace in the New Year, for Syria, and Argentina, and 11 million people who have fled their homes seeking safety. We pray for those recovering from surgery, and for those about to have surgery. We pray for those who grieve. In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers. Amen.
- Our Prayer Chain can always use more prayers! Call Bonnie Conn 373-6740 if you would like to be a prayer or to request prayers for someone.
- Home Communion-If you would like to share communion in your home, please let Pastor Teresa or the Rev. Mike know. We’d love to see you!

12th Night Feast, Come One, Come All!!!

12th Night Feast, Come One Come All!!!! Come join the youth group for a magical evening for their 12th night feast on January 24, 5 pm in the fellowship hall! Come be transported back to medieval times and be guest at Yellowstone manor as Lord Malcolm and Lady Sophia are your hosts for an evening along with many other guests from the youth group. Come enjoy a wonderful dinner and entertainment including a joust, some magic and wonderful gifts of music! Cost for this evening is \$20/person and tickets are available before and after church or by contacting Kim, 855-4317 or Kim.harris@campmimanagish.org

Rev. Michael Mulberry, Sr. Minister

The Big Vote

In talking with Rev. Tracy Heilman, my beloved, about the future of our church, the words that emerged were “building capacity.” Like any living organism, churches have a life cycle. My reflection is that our faith community is nearing the end of its life cycle as so many of the historic leaders move beyond retirement to a place where they can no longer serve on boards and committees as they once did. So, inevitably, we are naturally losing a great deal of historical knowledge, interrelationship, and people power. That is not good or bad. It is what it is. It can feel bad as we come to a place of necessary conflict and change. Not unlike a college team or an extended family, however, we are in a time when the seniors have graduated or the great matriarchs and patriarchs can no longer lead the way. There is a void.

To date, long before I came, I believe church staff was asked to step in and fill that void. What results is a congregation that becomes more and more an audience called in to do emergency surgery and less a working congregation that sees itself responsible for the day to day maintenance of church life. That creates tremendous stress on staff as the congregation sees itself as an “evaluator” of the church (as staff does it) and less as a participant. That puts even more stress on staff as staff members recognize they will either accomplish tasks or they just won’t get done. Breanna has to set up for the next event downstairs. Teresa has to talk to seniors about their legacy giving. Kim has to make sure that Sunday School teachers show up.

I know some of you saw my votes at the congregational annual meeting on Sunday, December 13. I so strongly believe in what Ed is putting before us. I think he has been faithful. And if we are a congregation rather than an audience, we, individually, owe it to one another to recognize the responsibility to stay informed, to respond in a timely fashion to church notices, and to recognize that not all the hard work is our own. When we do not, it diminishes all of us. People who put in hard work, sometimes necessary hard work to keep people informed or to present in an evenhanded fashion, become bitter as they recognize their efforts will never be validated. I hope not but that is what I fear. We may lose potential leaders as they throw up their hands in frustration.

Even more so though, I believe we cannot move forward unless we have a wide consensus in the church. I voted to table. I voted against the proposal to take \$40,000 out of Endowment and get started with a discernment process. I thought the process left us split in a way that had great potential to do damage if we could not find a path forward together. I hoped we could develop consensus and did not see it. With recent history, I worry that the vote will be punished by some who disagree.

So now we have to decide whether we will be church. If those who carried the vote see this as a win/lose proposition, then we all lose. If those who disagreed with the vote refuse to participate in the process in the future, then we all lose. These are not statements made to squelch beliefs or opinions. Rather, I make them in hope that we will see Christ in the eyes of people who held a different opinion than ours on the day of that vote.

I took great hope in a number of young adults, who spoke with ownership and enthusiasm, about the future of our church on that day. I was especially grateful for Emma Kerr-Carpenter who recognized the hard work of people who had gone before her and also recognized the fears of people who did not agree with her on that day. Emma will become a member of Billings First Church on Sunday, January 17, and represents so much of the good of this historical church. I thought, on that day, Emma reflected what it means to be church.

This is a historic time in the life of our church. As Ed related, we really are at a crossroads. Whatever the details of our future, in the next few months and years we will have to decide whether we will be church. My favorite political candidate for president likes to say, “It’s in our hands.” Amen.

Youth and Young Adults

December was a very busy month for our youth! We had a great Family Fun Night at the beginning of the month where we went to look at Christmas Lights around town on the trolley! This was such a popular activity that we added a second night later that week! A great time was had by all participants young and old! Our older youth also helped out with Bell Ringing for the Salvation Army on one of the Saturday afternoons! They also helped write the script and take pictures to put together the slideshow Christmas Pageant for First Church. The older youth mystery event this month turned out to be their Christmas party which they all put on their best duds and went out for a fancy dinner at the Rex and a gift exchange! They rounded out the month with their annual overnight retreat where they started the evening with pizza and then headed to the Grand Escape Room where they broke into two teams to race each other to get out of their perspective mystery rooms. They then spent a couple hours ice skating and ended the night by going back to the church to play games and hangout the rest of the night into the wee hours of the morning! The younger youth also had a pretty busy month! They spent their weekly youth group meetings learning about the meaning of advent and making advent ornaments and calendars, the next week they learned about the meaning of candy canes and making candy cane ornaments. They ended the month with their Christmas party and going to the movies on New Years Eve. The Older Youth have also been working hard all month practicing for the upcoming 12th night feast which is a fundraiser for the Conference Mission Trip this summer. They will continue working on the feast and present the 12th night feast on January 24, in the fellowship hall of First Church. Tickets are \$20/person and you can purchase tickets from the youth after church in the narthex on Sundays, or you can contact Kim or the office for tickets. January's Family Fun Night will be Friday, January 8 at 7:30 pm at Centennial Ice Arena. We will be taking in a Billings Bulls Hockey Game. Cost is \$8/adult, \$6/child under 12. Please RSVP by Thursday, January 7 to Kim or the office. The Older Youth Mystery event will be on January 17, 3-5 pm. The clue is "Put on layers and take a ride down the slippery slope" and the cost is free! Please RSVP by Saturday, January 16. We are still looking for volunteers to provide dinners for the youth groups on Wednesday nights for February-May. Please contact Kim if you are interested!

Spiritual Director-In-Residence

As we celebrate Women's Christmas on January 6 at the Illuminated Labyrinth around the theme of threshold, we think of women as keepers of the traditions, many of which center on food. Are there certain foods that are part of your family celebration of Christmas without which it doesn't seem like Christmas at all? Have you had to relinquish some family traditions around the holidays because of a change in your family's geography or demography? Or a change in diet because of health or environmental issues or economic circumstances? Perhaps it is time to leave an old tradition behind and cross the threshold to embrace something new as a spiritual practice which brings you into a greater awareness of God's presence and activity in your life. Blessings to you in the New Year!

SAVE THE DATE AND INVITE YOUR FRIENDS! On Wednesday, January 6, 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. we women of wisdom will celebrate Women's Christmas at the Illuminated Labyrinth in Fellowship Hall and with light refreshments in the Narthex around the theme of threshold.



Important Dates This January

1/8-9 **Jesus Seminar**
 1/10 **Second Sunday Lunch, 12:00 pm**
 F.H.
 1/12 **Diaconate Meeting** 7:00 pm Li-
 brary
 1/21 **Primetimer's Dinnertime** 5:30
 p.m. at Pizza Ranch, rsvp to Teresa or
 church office.
 1/18 **Office Closed Martin Luther King**
Jr. Day
 1/19 **Council Meeting** 7:00 p.m. Fellow-
 ship Hall
 1/28 **Primetimers Winetime** 5:30 pm at
 the home of Doug & Liza McClelland.
 Bring an appetizer to share, wine provid-
 ed.

Annual Reports Due!!!

2016 is here and those Annual Reports are due!!! The Annual Meeting will be January 24, reports were due in by December 17 so that they can be compiled and reports available for members/friends on Sunday, Jan. 17. If you do not have your report in by then it may be left out of the annual report booklet. Please submit all annual reports in a word document to firstchurch@firstchurchbillings.org.

Mayflower Circle will not meet in January.



Saturday we attended the rally at Pioneer Park in support of the local Muslims. I heard that someone with a holstered handgun also showed up, his face covered with a scarf. Today in the newspaper I saw his photograph, read that the local police had asked him to leave the rally, so he did. Perhaps because he did not support the local Muslims. I guess not, anyway. I knew about his presence at the rally at the time, but the weather was cold and I didn't look for him. I did see a huge pickup parked near the rally, but I felt comforted that the license plate had the Crow Tribal Seal. Was it fair to assume that if Native Americans were present they would be fair-minded? I think so, but I'm speaking from experience.

Perhaps the rally would have been incomplete without someone like him nearby to demonstrate against. I think most people ignored him.

So in that regard, I guess he did support the local Muslims, albeit indirectly. He didn't carry a sign, just his sidearm. And his scarf. Was he afraid of being recognized? Even the Muslim women didn't cover their faces at the rally. Was anyone frightened? Not anyone I spoke to.

P. and I walked the two blocks back home from the park before the photographer snapped a photo of the rally. She had been sick to her stomach the previous night and I headed to the Family Promise Christmas party at the American Lutheran Church.

Family Promise is the only homeless shelter program in Billings, Montana, that allows men to stay with their families. About four families do one-week

rotations at various churches around town. Because the burden is distributed widely, every 12-13 weeks our church houses the families and feeds them. We sign up volunteers to spend the night and to provide meals.

I was one of the first volunteers at the party, so I wandered down to the gift area. Here's how it worked: kids were ushered down to the gift area and chose gifts for their family members. The goods were displayed on tables: scarves and socks and hats, jewelry and watches, flashlights, lotions, ornaments, stuff like that. My job was to mark their names off a list. I tried to do it without having to actually ask them their names. I did recognize a few people from the last time they stayed at our church. First Congregational United Church of Christ.

While I waited for children to bound into the gift area, I saw a young lady nearby, her hair pulled into a pony tail. She looked like a young adolescent, so I assumed she was somebody's kid. She had Buddy Holly glasses, in style these days. She said her name was Kate. "Hi, Kate," I said, "I'm Dan."

"The pharmacist," she said. "Wow," I said. "How did you know that?"

"I met you two or three years ago," she said. "I'm the veterinarian." I peered at her.

"Oh, I guess I remember," I lied. She was only four-foot something tall and couldn't have weighed 80 pounds.

"Do they let nine-year-olds become veterinarians?" I asked.

Dan Struckman.

Worship Highlights ~ January

Throughout Epiphany and on into Lent, I am going to be sharing one of the most important parts of Jesus' life and ministry and the individual and communal spiritual practices around it—food. Whether it was water into wine or bread and grape or the multiplying of loaves and fish, Jesus's life and mission was about the community that formed around food.

With the promised land out of reach, Jewish communities in Galilee in the First Century began to disintegrate. One of the central tenants to building and keeping that community was the sharing of food.

In his Jewish ancestry, the practice of kosher or *kashrut*, defined what it meant to be Jewish as different ethnicities and peoples intersected and empire after empire overran the ancient Near East. Even within Muslim practice, the understandings of *halal* and *haram* shape health and dietary practice.

My historical work with immigration led to some unusual relationships with a kosher meat packing plant in Postville, Iowa. When that plant was raided by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, many Jewish faith leaders were embarrassed by what was found. As a result, many Jewish Reconstructionist and Reformed synagogues and leaders began to faithfully ask what it might mean to live out a "new kosher."

Christianity did that same kind of reforming work in the First and Second Centuries but did not call it kosher. Perhaps it is time to return to this ancient spiritual practice as we deal with issues around international hunger, the loss and fracture of community, and personal health issues like obesity and Type 2 diabetes. How do we develop a faithful practice around food?

I am excited to set out on this journey with you as we decide what faithful practices we shall share as a community of faith. Then, in Lent, we shall even deeper into spiritual practice with multiple levels of a "Daniel Fast" which will help us all work on food practice more intentionally and mindfully with other communities of faith.

Second Sunday after Christmas~ White

January 3, 2016

Genesis 1:9-13; John 1:10-16: "Seeds Abound: God's Practice of Regeneration"

The Baptism of Christ~ White

January 10, 2016

Scripture: Luke 3:1-14, 21-22; Exodus 16:2-4a, 11-15; 17:1b-6: "Eating in the Wilderness: Intentionality and Mindfulness"

Second Sunday after Epiphany~ Green

January 17, 2016

New Member Sunday! Martin Luther King, Jr., Sunday

Scripture: Daniel 1:3-17; Mark 5:35-43: "Defining Kosher or *Kashrut*"

Third Sunday after Epiphany~ Green

January 24, 2016

Scripture: I Corinthians 6:9-15a; Luke 9:10-17: "Developing a Food Ethic"

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany~ Green

January 31, 2016

Scripture: Hosea 4:1-4; 6:5-6; Corinthians 8: "What Are Your Food Rules?"

Transfiguration Sunday~ White

February 7, 2016

Scripture: Luke 24:28-31; 1 Corinthians 12: "What Are *Our* Food Rules?"

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					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 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						

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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**

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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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