

FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF
CHRIST (UCC)

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- John McClelland Scholarship
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- Lent Recitals

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Rev. Michael S. Mulberry, Sr. Minister

Last month I related how healthy congregations need to be about mission. Mission and vision statements can often act like “North stars” to help a church transcend petty squabbles and roadblocks and anxieties that show up every time a congregation has difficult work to do.

In the work that I am doing in Annual Reviews with staff members, I am saying, frankly, “We need to **have a heart for the whole church**. If you cannot have a heart for the whole church (children, youth, young adults, seniors, singles, families, staff, potential newcomers, long-standing members, people who look like us now, people to whom God is directing us, etcetera, etcetera etcetera), then I don’t want you on staff at Billings First.”

As I have stated in previous articles, we need to be a congregation that knows how to respond to the certain anxiety that will exist as we act on mission and vision statements like that one. The fact is, everyone becomes anxious. It’s a part of being human. We bring anxiety to all of our relationships, and emotional systems are anxious systems. Sometimes anxiety motivates us to change. Sometimes anxiety forces us to remain in the status quo. Sometimes anxiety paralyzes us.

What we want is an anxiety that rouses us to consciousness and motivates us to see the way God is moving in ancient and new ways. My experience is that they can be one in the same (ancient and new). Anxiety is an emotional pain that literally means, “to cause pain by squeezing.” It is a response to a real or imagined threat and often connects us. So we best know that it is a human reality and a powerful one at that.

We should also differentiate between ordinary and acute and chronic anxiety. Acute is generated by crisis or trauma. Many of us have had the death of a dear loved one that gets triggered or brought forward by other life circumstance. Good grief will help us move past that anxiety determining how we act in all of our other relationships. We learn to use it and know ourselves so that it does not use us. Chronic anxiety is the stuff “that gets us every time.” It consistently uses us, and, when we become defined by it, any number of triggers bring it forward.

That is why good spirituality moves us toward a freedom that has us selecting behaviors rather than behaviors running our lives. When people or congregations are intensely anxious there is a limited resiliency, lessened learning abilities, magnified differences between groups and people, constrained imaginative capacities, an intense demand for certainty, an increased diagnosis of others, heightened secrecy and cover-ups, a demand for immediate resolution, a call to be the same and in agreement, delayed decision-making, too much of a reliance on number crunching, diminished self-awareness, eruptions into mindless, automatic relations, and cutoffs in important relationships. We move into self-preservation mode and a demand for safety. When anxious reactivity takes over, people look for simple solutions, someone to blame, and a strict enforcement of the rules. “We want to go back to Egypt!”

That anxiety can be contagious and create a mass reaction. Those most often blamed are usually in two positions—the most responsible and the most vulnerable.

Healthy congregations are not always tranquil, peaceful, and at ease. Tension may exist everywhere. Healthy congregations, however, allow for challenge. They exercise control over their reactions to stressful situations. They are governed more by insight, reflectiveness, and objectivity rather than by instinctual survival. They allow for behavior patterns to analyze what is happening, evaluate the situation calmly, develop different responses, and decide what to do.

That is the journey we are on as a healthy congregation. I have had extensive talks with Pastor/Parish Relations to talk about how we might use our good anxiety toward broader and more intimate connection, more transparency and an organizational connection for every event, and a structure that everyone understands and can interpret. We will need your strong voices and listening ears so that we can continue on this journey together and have a heart for the whole church.



“Though He was in the form of God, Jesus did not regard equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found in human appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even to death on a cross.”
Philippians 2:6-8

Time With Teresa

- Calving has begun! That means only one thing~ Spring is in the air! As we pass through the Lenten Season, a time when we have historically prepared our hearts for Easter with self-examination, repentance, and prayer, we also want to keep in the forefront the mission that Christ put before himself and before us; however, our sense of mission is propelled by the work God does in our hearts during Lent. Like the bread in the Eucharist, it is only after we've been broken that we can be given to the world. Lent prepares us to be given to the world and God's mission in it. My prayer is that during the Lenten journey you will encounter God in a new and deeper way as you join Christ in his mission! May the Spirit Fall Afresh on you~ Teresa
- **OUR 5th ANNUAL CONGREGATION AND HOME-BOUND ST. PATRICK'S PARTY MARCH 22th** after worship in Fellowship Hall. This is a combined fellowship event. It is the 5th year we will have our homebound worshipping and sharing a meal together. They would love to visit with YOU, so we are combining the events. Hosted by the Diaconate Board. We'll have corned beef, cabbage, potatoes, Irish Soda bread, and a great dessert! Come have some fun!!! If you would like to assist with this very special event, let any Deacon or Teresa know. Our homebound guests will be treated to their lunches, but otherwise it is \$10.00 per person. After expenses, any additional money will go into the general church income.
- **Diaconate Meeting:** March 10th @ 7:00 pm. We'll need to elect a Moderator, so be in prayerful consideration if this is a responsibility you might enjoy. Be considering options to be Moderator, either co-chairing or using a rotating month model. Our Constitution mandates that we have a Moderator. March 1st and April 5th are Communion Sundays.
- Our **Prayer Chain** can always use more prayers! Call Bonnie Conn 373-6740.
- **Primetimer's Winetime March 26th @ 5:30pm at the Lechner's.** Join us for fun and fellowship. Bring a friend! Wine provided, please bring an appetizer to share.
- **Primetimer's Dinnertime March 19th @ 5:30pm** Ciao Mambo Italian Restaurant.
- ***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!***
- ***Have you returned your funeral/memorial planning sheet?***
- 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 to get a voucher. Suggested rides: Church, Primetimer events, funerals, doctor, senior lunch program? **HOME-BOUND Older Adult Primetimer's (55+) only.**

Lenten Recital Series and Soup Luncheon

Our annual FRIDAY NOON LENTEN RECITAL SERIES will begin on Friday, February 20. Programs are as follows:

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20

Steve Plaggemeyer, Theatre Organist~
In Fellowship Hall

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Coulson City Clarinet Ensemble:
Maryann Jacobson,
Jolane Jones, Laurel Linde,
and Sheri Rolf

FRIDAY, MARCH 6

Anne Kania, contralto and
Lee Hancock, pianist

FRIDAY, MARCH 13

Mark Souedi, trombonist, and
Sandi Rabas, pianist

FRIDAY, MARCH 20

Dr. Fred B. Binckes, organist

FRIDAY, MARCH 27

Palma Wolverton, pianist

Recitals begin at 12:05 in the sanctuary. A soup and bread luncheon will be available following each program in the parlor/library of the church. Soup is catered by Soup and Such. Suggested donation \$5.00.

This is a long-standing program of our church, and well received by music lovers in the community. It happens only because we have musicians from Billings and the surrounding area who are willing to share their talents in a program for which they receive no remuneration. Please remember to thank these performers for their generous gift to us all!

Special thanks also to Breanna, Kim, Steve, and the women of Mayflower Circle, all of whom play a big role in getting everything lined up and set for the Series and lunches to follow. Plus the faithful members of First Church who assist with serving lunch and clean up following each program. We are blessed in this community!

John McClelland Scholarship

Applications for the John McClelland Scholarship are now available at the church office. The deadline for submission is April 11, 2015. In making the awards the Scholarship Committee will give first priority to students from First Congregational. Consideration will also be given to students from Mayflower. Three or four scholarships will be awarded in amounts ranging from \$1500 to \$2000.

One Great Hour of Sharing

The One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) special mission offering of the United Church of Christ involves you in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. When a disaster strikes or people are displaced or made refugees by violence or extreme poverty, you are part of the immediate response and of the long-term recovery. Through OGHS you engage in holistic development programs including health care, education, agriculture, food sustainability, micro-financing and women's empowerment. Because the UCC relates in mutual partnership to churches and organizations through Global Ministries and worldwide response & recovery networks, your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing put you in the right place at the right time for the relief, accompaniment and recovery of the most vulnerable. You meet immediate needs and you address the underlying causes that create those needs in the first place. Thank you for your generous contribution.

Youth and Young Adults

The youth are getting ready to go into a busy spring season!! This last month in February the youth held their annual Sweetheart Dinner! Thank you so much to the Mayflower Christian Education Committee for all their hard work and support and thank you to all of you for coming out and supporting our youth on their journey in getting to Monterey, CA for our annual mission trip! They raised \$1,040!

The older youth have been continuing their discussions on prayer making prayer boards of 100 things they are thankful for and love! Doesn't sound too difficult, but try sitting down and coming up with 100 things you are thankful for! They also participated in the Ash Wednesday service at First Church!

Coming up this month the youth will be helping with camp Sunday at First Church, host their annual Pancake Breakfast on Palm Sunday, March 29 at First Church from 8:30-10:30! Come enjoy pancakes for a free will donation and support the youth's mission trip. They will also be taking their annual ski trip to Bridger Bowl, March 22-23!

The older Youth will also be helping with a Maunday Thursday service at First Church. We are looking for people or groups to provide Wednesday night dinners for our younger and older youth in April and May! Please contact Kimmie if you are able!

Spiritual Director-In-Residence

With Rev. Mike Mulberry's definition of spiritual practice in mind, I'd like to focus on **gratitude** as spiritual practice. Spiritual practice is "something one does regularly, persistently, and consistently. The object is to make it part of our bloodstream, then our blood, and then a part of every last red blood cell. We become our practice." Gratitude is a loving and thankful response toward God for God's presence with us and within this world. It is not necessarily a response for the blessings that we enjoy, but gratitude becomes attitude toward life in all circumstances. Growing into gratitude may take practice. Here are some ideas for practice:

- Begin a gratitude journal by keeping a record of the gifts you have received from God daily.
- Include thanksgiving in your prayers.
- Express gratitude to others. Cultivate the habit of saying "thank you," "I am so grateful," "you are so kind" and so on. Write a letter of thanks to someone who has touched your life. If that person is living, send it.
- Notice your tendency to make comparisons that result in feelings of dissatisfaction or entitlement. Practice abstaining from comparative statements about what you don't have. Instead give thanks for what you do have! Think in terms of abundance rather than scarcity.
- Gratefully give and share all that you have and are as a sign of thankfulness to God.

Gratefully yours,

Barbara Gulick, MRE, DASD



Lenten Soup and Bread Supper

Important Dates This March

- 3/6 **Lenten Recitals Series and Luncheon**
 3/8 **Second Sunday Lunch, 12:00 pm F.H.**
 3/10 **Diaconate Meeting** 7:00 pm Library
 3/11 **Lenten Program and Soup Dinner** at First Church 6 pm
 3/13 **Lenten Recitals Series and Luncheon**
 3/17 **Council Meeting** 7:00 p.m. Library
 3/19 **Primetimer's Dinnertime** 5:30pm at Ciao Mambo. Rsvp to the church office or Teresa.
 3/20 **Lenten Recitals Series and Luncheon**
 3/22 **All Church St. Patrick's Dinner**
 3/25 **Lenten Program and Soup Dinner** at First Church 6 pm
 3/26 **Primetimers Wintertime** 5:30 pm at the home of Ruth and Charles Lechner. Bring an appetizer to share, wine provided.
 3/27 **Lenten Recitals Series and Luncheon**
 3/29 **Palm Sunday, Pancake Breakfast** 8:30-10:30 am F.H. Free will offering.

Lenten Soup & Bread Suppers - Wednesdays, February 25 through March 25 at 6:00 pm. Our Lenten program series will be *The Jesus Fatwah: Love Your Muslim Neighbor as Yourself*, a shared Lenten experience with Mayflower Church. Dinner will begin at 6:00 pm so that our program will be over on time in consideration of travel for various choir rehearsals.

- **March 4 at Mayflower**
- **March 11 at First Church**
- **March 18 at Mayflower**
- **March 25 at First Church**



Edward Barta, chair of the outreach committee, asked me to photograph Family Promise family activities for the bulletin board on the kiosk in the narthex.

I forgot. I'm considering photographing the FP furniture and supplies instead. I'm not thinking of anything artsy, just a plain photograph. Edward Barta is an accomplished photographer who inspires me.

I don't know how many pillows, pillowcases, sheets, mattress pads, blankets, towels, washcloths, reading lamps, beds, clocks, nightlights, nightstands, and such we have. Also, a vacuum, long extension cord, broom and dustpan, shelves and a cabinet for some of the above. This is all fit into the small storeroom that we share with the church's electrical and computer network systems. I forgot to mention that we also have children's beds, Pac-n-Pla playpens, diapers, wipes, feminine hygiene supplies, batteries, bulbs and lots of electric fans. We still have inflatable mattresses and electric pumps. I forgot to mention facial tissues. And masking tape.

I suppose I could take a photo of those goods or of a similarly long list of things in the big downstairs kitchen.

Oh, packages of food like instant potatoes, cold cereal, mac n cheese, sugar, coffee, and nondairy creamer. Stuff in the fridge and freezer.

In the kitchen – pantry I guess – are all of the high chairs, games, and furniture for the living area: couch, 2 easy chairs, floor lamps, extension cords and power strip, TV, DVD player, lots of books and lots of toys. I could take a photo of those things too.

I am inclined to photograph these as they are, where they are. Many First Church and Methodist and Humanist volunteers deploy these about every 3 months, then stow them 7 days later. Everyone helps and the set-up and takedown each time takes about an hour. That's it for the stuff. That's what I'm thinking about snapping a photo of today or tomorrow.

The enjoyable part of Family Promise is signing up to serve as a volunteer host and getting acquainted with the adults and children who are enrolled in Family Promise. Please consider whether you would enjoy doing that.

Dan Stuckman



May St. Patrick
guard you wherever
you go, and guide
you in whatever
you do – and may
his loving protec-
tion be a blessing to
you always.

May the road rise to
meet you.

May the wind be al-
ways at your back.

May the sun shine
warm upon your
face.

And rains fall soft
upon your fields.

And until we meet
again,

May God hold you
in the hollow of His
hand.

-Irish Blessing

Mayflower Circle

Mayflower Circle will meet March 17, 2015 at 12:00 noon in the Mayflower Church parking lot. This month we are going to the Special K Ranch via a van they will provide. If you enjoy spring and animals and flowers, please come to see and learn how the folks at SKR help Mother Nature with her spring activities. Come if you are a member or if you would like to be a guest this one time. Call Myrle Theimer (245-3650) if you have questions.

From The Moderator: Mic Dawson

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Shakespeare

There’s been some buzz about the name “Billings First Church” — and I believe that’s a good thing both inside and outside the congregation.

Each Sunday, Mike begins service with the greeting “Welcome to Billings First Church, both historically and prophetically.” I think this is a concise but elegant way to describe ourselves. First Congregational Church has stood on the same corner for 133 years. Through our values we seek to discern where God is still speaking in today’s world. I believe using the name outside our walls, such as in the newspaper, is also a good idea. Because we’ve been on the same corner for so many years, it’s easy for people to assume they know all about who we are and what we have to offer without ever “getting a sample.” If describing ourselves differently brings people in to see what this “Billings First Church” is about it’s all to the good.

We know who we are and that we seek to discern how God is still speaking in today’s world will be apparent to anyone new coming in our doors.

Christian Education

Children and Youth are worship leaders too!

Following a training session in December, many of our children and youth are now helping to lead worship by serving as Acolytes. Our acolytes work in pairs, as a reminder that “whenever two or more are gathered in My name, I am with them.” The acolytes bring the light of Christ into the sanctuary at the beginning of worship. Perhaps more importantly, at the end of the service they carry the Light of Christ out of the sanctuary and into the world, leading us to do the same!

With thanks for the leadership of our children and youth: Elijah, Rhianna, Sacred, Dustin, Taylor, Marika, Niketa, John, Tiffany, Jace, Jaxson, Elizabeth, Cody, Thomas, William, Boo, Gabe, Mia, Sophia and Wyatt.

All Ages Faith Formation

We serve a hot breakfast every Sunday beginning at 9:15, and we’d love to have more volunteers who can provide an easy breakfast casserole. Are you willing? We have some inexpensive, easy recipes if you can help! Please see Kim Harris for more details.

Many thanks to our Winter Session Faith Formation Leaders: PreReaders-Nina Hernandez, Donna Staigmiller-Brady, Readers-Julie Solberg, Aaron Blakeslee, Youth-Emma Kerr-Carpenter, Cheryl Degges, Substitutes-Barbara Gunn and Cheryl Stewart.

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Briana Price Owen Norsworthy	2 Jase Norsworthy Jr.	3	4	5	6 M.A. Bellingham Angus Fulton	7
8	9	10	11 John Degges	12 Sara Howland	13 Terra Price	14
15 Cathy Brown	16	17 Doug Barnes Karen Hyvonen	18	19 Susan Arneson Donna Forbes	20	21 Kay Bartlett
22 Troy Krieger Nick Hingle	23	24 Tom Howard	25 Fran Oland	26 Bess Redlund	27	28 Mark Lubbers Dan Struckman
29	30	31				

*If you, or someone you know, has a birthday not listed, please let us know so we can make the correction!

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 March Congregationalist is here!

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Highlights of Worship in March

Every Wednesday at 12:00 p.m.~ Tolling of the Bell
Chapel, 12:10-12:40 p.m.~ "Rest" worship with *lectio divina* and communion

Sunday, March 1, Second Sunday in Lent~ Purple

- ⊕ In celebration of UCC Women's Week (March 1-7), the women of our church lead out worship.
- ⊕ Sacrament of Holy Communion
- ⊕ New Member Orientation after worship.

Sunday, March 8, Third Sunday in Lent, Amistad Sunday!~ Purple

- ⊕ New Members join.
- ⊕ Second Sunday Lunch after worship, Baked Potato Bar

Sunday, March 15, Fourth Sunday in Lent, Camp Sunday~ Purple

- ⊕ Kim Harris planning worship, Tom Norquist preaching
- ⊕ One Great Hour of Sharing Offering
- ⊕ Two New Members join

Sunday, March 22, Fifth Sunday in Lent~ Purple

- ⊕ Teresa Kennedy preaching
- ⊕ St. Patrick's Lunch for Homebound
- ⊕ Pray for Rev. Cheryl Stewart, Rev. Mike Mulberry, and Abraham Mulberry, in mission to Chiapas, Mexico.

Sunday, March 29, Palm/Passion Sunday~ Red

- ⊕ 8:30-10:30 a.m., Youth Pancake Breakfast
- ⊕ Worship begins with "Trial of Christ" in _____ Park across from Yellowstone County Motor Vehicle.
- ⊕ "Palm Processional" into worship.

Thursday, April 2, Maundy Thursday, 7:00 p.m.~ White

- ⊕ Moving through the night service: tentatively scheduled that Older Youth lead us out in Communion, Feetwashing (bring socks and shoes easy to remove), and Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Friday, April 3, Good Friday, 12:00 p.m.~ Stripped of Color

- ⊕ Joint Service with Mayflower Congregational UCC
- ⊕ Stations of the Cross moving through the downtown area to make the last hard road of Lent real in our lives and in our community. Join us outside the church to begin.

Friday, April 3, through Sunday, April 4~ Easter Vigil

- ⊕ Sign up for half-hour intervals for as long as you want or for multiple times to keep vigil and be in solidarity with God in Christ as we mourn, encounter the silence, and expectant waiting for new life. Call the church office to sign up for times from Friday, April 3, 2:00 p.m. to Sunday, 7:00 a.m. (approximate sunrise).
- ⊕ Materials provided: music, books, art, spiritual forms and reflection. All to be used for your time in vigil.
- ⊕ Labyrinth walking will be offered at times to be announced.
- ⊕ Friday, April 3, and Saturday, April 4, will have hour long, group *lectio divina* times. All are welcome.

Priority List

Using a subcommittee appointed by Church Council, the three members present for that subcommittee meeting discerned the Top Ten priority list for Billings First Church. Know that part of the job of this subcommittee was to discern “groupings” (e.g., microphones and screens under a whole new sound and video system) and items that should come out of our regular working budget (e.g., file cabinets for staff members).

The next step is for “Champions” to emerge in the church who will champion certain items or projects, develop a plan, and seek out funding for their item or project. Church Council asks that “Champions” (an individual, group, board, or committee) attach themselves to the most likely board or committee and regularly report to Church Council and the board or committee their progress, their plans, and how they are negotiating the funding.

This is a great opportunity to see our money at work!

In no particular order, here are the TOP TEN PRIORITIES! Read ‘em and rejoice!

- ⊕ Van/mini-bus for seniors and youth
- ⊕ Green Energy Building
- ⊕ New choir robes
- ⊕ Light for the grand piano
- ⊕ A new sound/video system for sanctuary and beyond
- ⊕ Outside church sign
- ⊕ Church signage within our building
- ⊕ Shelves for the sacristy
- ⊕ Recruitment/Welcome campaign
- ⊕ Powerpoint possibilities for sanctuary

Montana Northern Wyoming Conference UCC

MNWC Investment Opportunity update on our "fund to help support newly graduated ministers": \$2000 pledged, inquiries underway, some more promised <http://mnwcucc.org/index.php/conference-news/25-1>

For Church Clerks and Secretaries: The Center for Analytics, Research and Data (CARD)—the United Church of Christ's research and information office—has a unique request for the nearly 5,100 congregations in the denomination. For the first time, CARD is asking all local churches to participate in the longest-running survey of congregational life in the United States. Once completed, the Faith Communities Today (FACT) survey, open now through March 31, will give local churches insights to help them grow—information and trends on membership, programming, youth and young adult ministries, vitality and use of technology. http://www.ucc.org/fact_survey_02202015