

December 2020 eNews

What will You Remember?

Custer Congregational UCC Advent Calendar
board



Wider Church Resources

Click on these logo links for resource information



UCC Christmas Eve

1:30 pm Service of
Lessons and Carols



UCC CoVid page

Compiled resources for
churches and families.



A Very UCC Christmas

Dec 27 8 am



Sound of Angels

World Council of
Churches Christmas
message



MAC Advocacy

Focusing on 2021
legislation affecting
children and families



Braver Angels

A non-profit focused on
depolarization



Wholiness Team

Central Pacific
Conference, a partner in
shared ministry
conversations



Wholiness Team

Pacific NW Conference, a
partner in shared ministry
conversations

Conference resources

Click on these logo links for resource information. Many additional resources can be found on our WEBSITE www.mnwcucc.org.



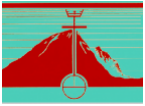
New Money for New Ministries

Video of our seminar with Andrew Warner



2020 Stewardship

Featuring how each of our churches creates "Beloved Community"



Local Church Info

Addresses, social media links, and newsletters



"5 for 5" explained

OCWM, OGHS, NIN, STC, and Christmas Offering

Local Church News

Click on these logo links for more information. To include your church news, email items to ucc@mnwcucc.org before the 29th of each month.



Telling the Stories

Rev. Laura Folkwein, University UCC, awarded a Louisville Inst. grant to find silenced stories of Indigenous and Settler peoples



Thanks-Taking

Denouncing the violence and harm done to First Nations people, and learning from, celebrating and affirming our Native sisters and brothers



Ecumenical Support

Miles City UCC/DOC minister Rev. Amber Dixon Richardson does occasional preaching for local UMC and PCUSA congregations



Just Mercy movie

Great Falls UCC watches and discusses movies about racism, such as "Just Mercy" and "13th"



Blankets for Youth

Columbus UCC made and donated 30 fleece blankets to Tumblewood for vulnerable and homeless youth



Food Cards Funded

Red Lodge UCC Virtual Harvest Dinner raised funds to buy 78 IGA gift cards



Tree Decorating

Pilgrim UCC families to decorate church tree with one of their ornaments, to be documented with slide show



Dress-A-Child

Mayflower UCC members to provide new clothing for 24 children for Christmas



God-seeds



Rev. Dr. Marc Ian Stewart

A Gift Remembered

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:7, NRSV

There are all types of [memes out there](#) now that begin with "if 2020 were (*first blank*) it would be (*second blank*).". Such as, "if 2020 were a food truck it would be liver and onions." My favorite is about making lemonade out of lemons, illustrated by a pic of a cut-in-half lemon that is 90% lemon peel with one tiny bit of juicy flesh in the very middle. Yah, I'm looking to find something good about 2020. Perhaps it turns out to not be so difficult because the good is in such a stark contrast to everything we've had to get through.

If 2020 were a person, it would be my Uncle Junior. He lived in my grandparent's unfinished attic. When we visited, he'd lie on the living room couch all day chain-smoking and watching television. He was quite a sight with hair and beard covering his grubby, v-neck t-shirt collar. We boys lay on the floor, marveling at the television, because it was back in the days before my parents could afford a household TV. Uncle Junior introduced us to the Three Stooges and provided a running commentary on the plot. My parents would allow us three episodes; then it was, "Go on outside to play."

The last time I remember seeing Uncle Junior at my grandparents' home was on Thanksgiving, when I was about 7 years old. His hair and beard were all the longer since our summer visit, and he may have been wearing the same t-shirt as before. For some reason, he had a buck knife sheaved on his belt. He remembered we could only see three Three Stooges episodes; so, before we were sent outside to play, he invited us up to his attic room. Uncle Junior had joined a record club and wanted to give us some albums. My older brother was gifted with an Elvis Presley album. I was gifted with the "Don Janse and his 60 Voice Children's Chorus Christmas" album. I remember receiving this gift as if Uncle Junior were giving me one of his prized possessions, and I remember wondering with concern how he could possibly part with it. I did not know about the nature of Uncle Junior's "strangeness" at the time, but a few months later he was committed to the State Hospital and spent his remaining 35+ years in mental health facilities.

This Children's Chorus Christmas album gift was Christmas-defining in my life. Fifty-five years later now, on this 2020 Thanksgiving, I found the album on Youtube. As I listened for the first time in over 50 years, I knew the order of the tracks and anticipated each solo coming up in each song. Of course, there is

deep nostalgia in hearing the songs again. Yet, there is even more to that 1965 Christmas gift: I remember the fullness of Uncle Junior sharing something so significant to him that he wanted me to have it. There was not much in Uncle Junior's life that made sense, but there was nothing truer than that gift of the heart amidst the chaos.

Gifts of the heart enrich our troublesome times. From this year, I will remember the absolute faithfulness of our chaplains and pastors who have found ways to keep ministering during CoVid- distancing protocols. I will remember the outpouring of prayer and concern when my son and his partner missed their scheduled return time from a backcountry trek. I will remember the connecting that happened, even by Zoom, for our virtual Conference Annual Meeting. I will remember sermons and devotionals that spoke comfort and challenge for living through these times. I will remember that as much as we were thrown off a sense of equilibrium, we constantly found ways to put our best forward.

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Global Ministries Idea

2020 has been a year like none other in our lives! The COVID pandemic has changed our way of doing church, our way of thinking about others, our way of celebrating important occasions and holidays, and our ways of expressing gratitude. In this Advent season of things being different, GLOBAL MINISTRIES has an opportunity for you!

Maybe you have someone you'd like to remember or honor this Christmas season, someone who doesn't want any gifts or is in a position to not need any material items. Think about what it might mean to them to receive a card from Global Ministries that indicates you have chosen to honor them by making a donation that can help do good work for those less fortunate and in dire living

conditions. Or, as the moods of the season take you to memories of someone you have lost, making a donation in their memory can truly be a meaningful way to highlight the life you shared with them. Or, maybe there is simply someone dear to you that you would like to honor with a special recognition.

Here are Alternative Christmas suggestions for ways you can support the work of Global Ministries this season.

- *General gift where most needed to support our mission personnel and partners in 90 countries.*
- *Gift to the Center for Social Equity and Inclusion in India. This is the partner specifically chosen as part of Global Ministries' current Southern Asia Initiative; Gifts will be used to support their response to the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to their ongoing social justice efforts.*
- *Gift of global crafts. Purchase hand-crafted items created by global artisans from places such as Congo, Chile, Colombia, East Timor, India, Palestine, Thailand, and the US.*
- *Gift to a selected theme area of your choice. These areas can be found on the web site.*

More information can be found at globalministries.org/alternative_giving. You can make your donation directly on line, where you can find the craft catalog as well. If making a donation by mail is easier, use this address (Global Ministries, Office of Resource Development, P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206), and be sure to indicate the address to which you would like to have an acknowledgement sent. Global Ministries will send that as well as a receipt to you. **MOST IMPORTANTLY: 100% of your gift will go to your designated choice, with nothing used for administration or banking fees.**

Merry Christmas from Global Ministries.

Carol Shipley, Global Ministries Board Co-Chair

Member of Great Falls First Congregational UCC

Team Ministries

Healing the Earth

Our [Conference Green Team](#) met in November. Our three goals, are:

1. Share information with Conference churches about becoming a Creation Justice Church.
2. Engage in political advocacy around clean energy solutions to heal the earth.
3. Identify someone at each Conference church to be a Green Team liaison/member.

"Green Team" will meet again Tuesday, Dec 15, 2 pm.

- Register in advance for this meeting:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/zoom-link>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Goal 1 Actions: We are making connections with groups that are already doing political advocacy around climate justice issues. When we have these connections better established, we will publicize these around the Conference.

Goal 3 Actions: Your pastors and moderators will be receiving a letter from our group, inviting someone from your church to be a Green Team liaison/member. If you find someone to join/connect with us, there will be a gift! (Look for the letter to come soon).

Recommends video clip from [Citizen's Climate Lobby](#): ["Undo Your Part"](#).

Stay healthy; stay green!

Culture of Wellness/ Surviving the Pandemic

Held a Zoom gathering for clergy serving local congregations, to share strategies, support, and find "worship buddies" for shared worship planning.

Worship sharing between churches, such as University UCC Missoula and Red Lodge Community UCC, and Great Falls UCC with Plymouth UCC Helena.

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Connecting Our Justice Work

During our time "together" at CAM, we discovered that there's a lot of justice work being done across the conference. From book studies to peaceful protests, our churches are doing the work of justice. So, let's get connected!

Anyone who is interested in justice work in your church and/or community are invited to participate as we begin to explore more about working for justice within our own communities and across the M-NW

Our Dec. 16 Agenda (roughly):

- A time of reflection/devotion
- A little background
- Get acquainted (not your life story – name, church, role you play in your church's justice work)
- Roles within the group: note-taker/secretary
- What's happening now (what are the churches up to these days?)

Conference. Participating in this year's CAM is **not** a requirement but we hope that those who were part of the justice break-out sessions will join in.

We'll [meet via Zoom](#) on December 16th at 6:30 – 8 pm.

Questions? Contact Lynne Spencer-Smith [406-770-9157](tel:406-770-9157) or pastor@greatfallsucc.org

- Connecting the dots (Ways we can connect for resources and encouragement)
- What can we do better together? (Combining efforts for greater impact)
- What other groups can we connect with and who will start that connection?
- What's next? (including setting date/time for next gathering)
- Three things – Set three things to be done in the next 6 weeks (this would normally be a month but, you know, Christmas).



Rev. Dwight Welch

Faith Formation Committee

Rev. Pam Peterson of Red Lodge and Rev. Laura Folkwein of Missoula have led the Faith Formation Committee since the 2019 Conference Annual Meeting. Special thanks to Rev. Pam Peterson for restarting the committee and for both in leading us

in the work of the committee. This has included scholarship support for youth events, the sharing of church educational events, and coordinating with the

Committee on Outdoors Ministry.

As Rev. Pam Peterson takes leave of her committee work, we want to thank her for the getting Faith Formation off the ground and providing direction for us. We wish her well in whatever endeavors she puts her heart into. Rev. Dwight Welch of MSUB was voted as co-coordinator along with Rev. Laura Folkwein as we go into 2021. He will also join the Committee on Outdoor Ministry so that the two committees can work together on future curriculum.

If you have interest getting involved with the Faith Formation Committee contact Rev. Dwight Welch at dwelch@msubillings.edu. For Outdoor Ministry contact Trudi Downer at kdtd48@itstriangle.com.



Pastoral Reflection



Rev. Danielle Rogers

Peace in the Midst of Chaos

Pilgrim UCC, Bozeman, Christian Education Director
MT-NWy Conference Faith Formation Committee

Looking out my window, I see the beauty of the Rocky mountains brushed with freshly fallen snow and I am in awe of its majesty. For a small moment I feel a peace in the stillness of my soul as I surrender to the winter elements, the cold, the wind, and the ice formed on the tree branches. I take a breath, say a prayer of gratitude and recognize God's beauty and love during this storm of chaos and illness that surrounds us. Simply put, I say a prayer for the gift of life and all that comes with it.

2020 has dealt us insurmountable blows. We have seen millions of people infected with Covid-19 and hundreds of thousands die from the virus. Families have navigated work while overseeing their children's online school. Our elders and compromised community has lived in isolation for months. The stress and anxiety is palpable, creating a whirlwind of emotions.

This virus has hung over our nation while we watched cases of police brutality be tried in our courts, children still being detained in cages at our borders and a growing distrust of our mainstream media. The chaos erupted causing massive emotional fatigue, continuing political division and many questioning God's presence in our lives.

Our physical spaces for spiritual growth were closed, leaving many bewildered and scared. Our entire way of being was broken. So, we as a church community worked diligently to create a connection to one another through our desire to serve a loving God. We sought moments of peace during constant moments of chaos.

In John 16:33 it states, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart. I have overcome the world."

I find solace in worshiping a God who recognized and lived in a world fraught with hardships, sickness, betrayal, and death. Jesus fully understands our humanity, our trials and teaches us to find peace within him, within our relationship with God. In every worry, God is there. God is present in our lives and in our world. We can lay our uneasiness on the promise Jesus has made and cemented in his death and resurrection.

In the days ahead, I pray for your own moments of peace. I pray for the gift of stillness to reach every aspect of your life. Do not be afraid to lay down burdens on the shoulders of our God and allow yourself to find joy in the smallest of things.

As you navigate through much uncertainty, may the first verse of the hymn "Be Still my Soul" provide solace and peace.

Be Still my Soul: the Lord is on thy side;
bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
leave to thy God to order and provide;
in ev'ry change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: thy best thy heav'nly friend
thro' thorny ways leads to joyful end".

Calendar

December 3 Church and Ministry Commission Zoom 6:30 pm

December 8-10 AM21 Church and Ministry national gathering, [virtual](#)

December 9 Committee for Outdoor Ministries Zoom 7 pm

December 15 Green Team 2 pm [Zoom, registration](#)

December 16 Connecting Justice Team Zoom 6:30 pm [Zoom, registration](#)

December 17 Clergy Gathering 10-noon [Zoom, registration](#)

December 17 – January 7 Conference Minister, Marc Stewart, on vacation

January 9 Wholiness Team all-day virtual

July 11-18, 2021 [General Synod 33](#) will be held using virtual technology, such as Zoom

Montana – N.Wyoming Conference United Church of Christ

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