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# The Presbyterian

Embracing Grace  
Embracing Community

Publication of First Presbyterian Church Great Falls Montana

JANUARY 2026

## Friends make Christmas dinner Merry & Bright!



The dinner reminded me of the fellowship dinners at the church I attended back in the day...way back! Great prime rib, the best tasting mashed potatoes ever. Ham, all the trimmings and some really, really, good desserts. And the best part: wonderful company!

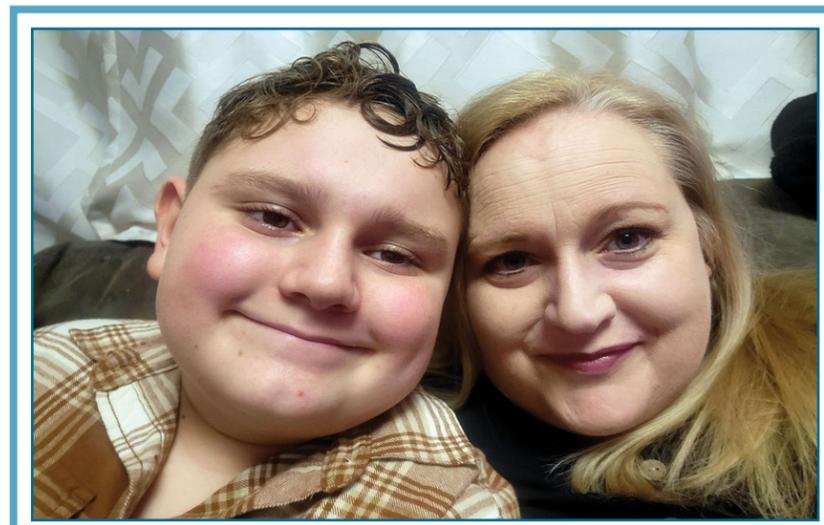
Pastor Risa Paul, Interim Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Great Falls, has hosted these potluck dinners since Christmas 2023.

"I do this because of all the Christmases I have had in ministry where my own family was far away and I had no one to share the joy of a family dinner," she said. "My family is still scattered, but doing this has become one of my favorite traditions. I love sharing great food and great conversation around a Christmas table."

That first year saw eight people around the table, this year, twenty people joined together in the Social Hall at First Presbyterian Church to share some world class cooking and great old-fashioned community. The best part of all, many sitting at the table were friends of our members. People who had never been in the church.



Montana 200 Day Ending  
Photo by Dave Herman



Jessica with her older son

Rev. Jessica Crane Munoz will be our guest speaker for Sunday Service January 18. She is the pastor of Sunrise Presbyterian Church in Great Falls and the Residency Director for the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation. She is a Montana native, originally from Lewistown, and returned to the state in 2021. She lives with her husband, two boys, and cat.

# JANUARY PENSAMIENTOS

Pastor Risa Paul

## My (1) Word! What a difference!

The holidays are over - well mostly. I leave my decorations up through January 6. That is Epiphany - also known as Three Kings Day. I sometimes wonder why we picked this time of the year to change the calendar. Someday I will google that and then I will know.

All the media is full of articles telling us how to be a better person - lose weight, stop procrastinating, get in shape, have more friends, become more this or less that.

Funny, I'll bet if I looked back a year ago, or January 2016, or January 2006, or even January 1996 --- I am willing to bet that I would see pretty much the same articles. These are pretty much the same articles that I remember seeing in the January issues of my mother's magazines when I was growing up!

So, if these are the things that in fact we say we want to do/be, why aren't we doing them? Why, every year, do we end up making the same resolutions, and every year we end up at the end of the year with nothing really having changed? Both in our physical lives and in our spiritual lives.

We just have to look in different media to find the same articles; how to pray more, how to have a rich devotional life, how to get your family to church .... the exact same articles that have been published for years. I know for years my spiritual New Year's resolutions were the very same.

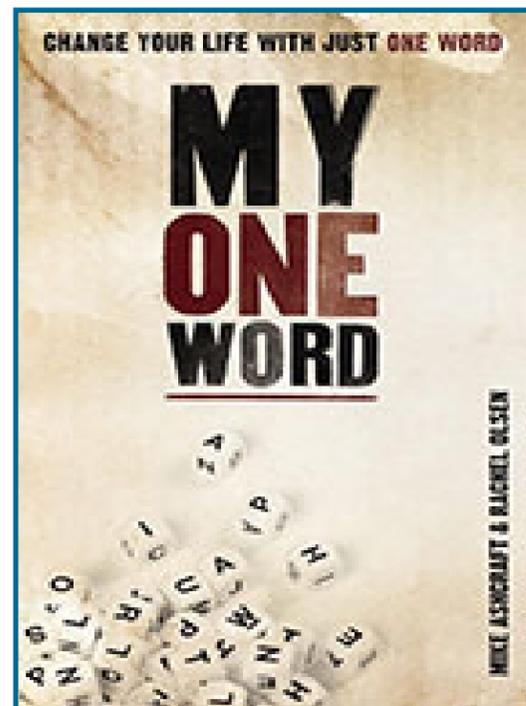
And so we try to step around it by saying that we do not make resolutions anymore. But really, we do have that desire, and all the articles we consume exacerbate that!

So let me invite you to a spiritual practice that has made a distinct difference in my life. Each January I choose a word that exemplifies the person that I feel God is calling me to be. I've done it now for 12 years with such words as finish, release, rest, desire, complete. And you live with that one word all year. For the last couple of years we have had a check-in group both online and here at the church as our words have twisted and changed through the year.

It is one of the most powerful tools for spiritual growth I have ever used.

I hope you will join me this year along with those who have used My One Word before.

**January 5 at 6 pm** will be our first meeting this year. We'll watch a short introductory video and be on our way to a year of spiritual growth. Questions? Check with me, or with Jane, Melinda, AnnMarie, or Marla.



## Happy Birthdays JANUARY

- Fred Koontz** 01 - 01
- Molly Schwartz** 01 - 04
- Mike Rausch** 01 - 20
- Della Johnson** 01 - 21
- Judy Kinonen** 01 - 22
- Helen Spencer** 01 - 24
- Alice Lorentz** 01 - 22
- Dean Schamp** 01 - 31

The Presbyterian is a monthly publication of First Presbyterian Church of Great Falls  
 Deadline for submissions: 20th of each month  
 Send pictures or story ideas our way  
 Email articles, ideas and/or pictures to:  
**secretary@firstpresgfmt.org**  
**Subject: NEWSLETTER**  
 For images, please include the name of photographer and any information you'd like added to the newsletter.

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF GREAT FALLS**  
**1315 CENTRAL AVENUE**  
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 FRIDAY 8 A.M. TO NOON  
 SUNDAY SERVICE: 10 A.M.  
 FELLOWSHIP FOLLOWING SERVICE  
 ALL ARE WELCOME

First Presbyterian Church Operating Fund  
 Activity Report November 2025

	Actual	Budget
	YTD	YTD
Revenue	\$232,487.80	\$296,319.76
Total Expenditures	250,964.25	\$283,989.01
Net Operating Revenue \$	(18,476.45)	\$ 12,330.75

## Calendar for JANUARY:

- 4: **Sunday** Epiphany  
Communion
- 5: **Monday**  
6:00 p.m. My One Word
- 6: **Tuesday**  
Noon Souler Energy  
3:15 p.m. Mission Committee  
4:00 p.m. Property Committee
- 7: **Wednesday**  
10:00 a.m. Galatians - Deep Dive
- 8: **Thursday**  
8:30 a.m. Coffee @ Miss Kitty's  
10:30 a.m. Grandview Service
- 11: **Sunday**  
11:30 a.m. Personal Prayer  
Sanctuary
- 13: **Tuesday**  
10:00 a.m. Iris Service  
3:00 p.m. Finance Committee  
3:00 p.m. Worship Committee
- 14: **Wednesday**  
10 a.m. Galatians - Deep Dive  
1p.m. Outreach Committee
- 15: **Thursday**  
8:30 a.m. Coffee with Risa  
6:30 p.m. Session
- 17: **Saturday**  
10 a.m. Presbyterian Women
- 18: **Sunday** **Guest Speaker - Jessica Crane Munoz**  
11:30 a.m. Corporate Prayer  
Graham Parlor
- 19: **Monday**  
**10 a.m. NEWSLETTER DEADLINE**
- 21: **Wednesday**  
10 a.m. Galatians - Deep Dive  
6:30 p.m. Mid-Week Ministry
- 22: **Thursday**  
8:30 a.m. Coffee @ Miss Kitty's
- 27: **Tuesday**  
5:30 p.m. Deacons
- 28: **Wednesday**  
10 a.m. Galatians - Deep Dive
- 29: **Thursday**  
8:30 a.m. Coffee with Risa  
10:30 a.m. Newsletter mailing
- 1: **February Sunday**  
**Annual Meeting after the Service**

## Article No. 18

**Becoming more than who I was yesterday****By Starfish Scholar Rhizza A. Valderama**

Growth doesn't always happen in big, noticeable moments. Most of the time, it happens quietly on ordinary days, in small choices, and in ways no one else really sees. As a pastor's wife, I've learned that a lot of growth happens behind the scenes, in prayer, in support, and in simply being present.

There were many times when I doubted myself. I felt the weight of expectations and wondered if I was doing enough for my family, for the church, and for God. It's easy to feel like you always have to be strong and faithful, even when you're tired or unsure. Over time, I've learned that God does not ask for perfection, only a willing and honest heart.

I've come to realize that growth looks different for everyone. I may not always stand in front or be seen, but my growth shows up in listening, encouraging, praying, and serving quietly. Every time I choose faith instead of fear, patience instead of pressure, and trust instead of control, God is working in me even when no one notices.

There are seasons when waiting feels hard. I've had moments where I wanted answers right away, but God gently taught me to trust His timing. Growth often comes in the waiting when we continue to serve, love, and believe even when things feel unclear. Those small acts of faith truly matter.

As I step into a new year, I'm reminded that every new beginning is another chance to grow. We don't have to carry the past with us. We are allowed to start again, with hope and with trust that God is still at work.

Most of all, this journey has taught me to be kinder to myself. I've learned that mistakes don't disqualify us they teach us. I don't have everything figured out, and I'm learning that it's okay. God is still shaping my heart, one day at a time.

Becoming more than who I was yesterday isn't about meeting expectations or having it all together. It's about daily surrender choosing to trust God, choosing to grow, and choosing to take one step forward each day. As a pastor's wife entering a new year, I am still learning, still growing, and still placing my trust in Him. And that, for now, is enough.

***“Forget the former things;  
do not dwell on the past.  
See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up;  
do you not perceive it?”***

Isaiah 43:18–19 NIV



**A BEVY OF PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN  
GATHERED FOR THE ANNUAL  
CHRISTMAS TEA**

On December 13, 2025, Presbyterian Women hosted the annual Christmas Tea in the Graham Parlor. (See pictures below)

Despite the cold weather, fifteen women gathered to share homemade goodies, door prizes and good conversation. There was lots of laughter and stories told that entertained those present.

The group wishes to thank those that helped set up the tables, the decorations and prepared the beverages. They couldn't do all that without you!



**PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN NEWS**

**Presbyterian Women Meeting  
Starts off 2026!**

Presbyterian Women will begin the new year with their meeting which will be January 17 (Saturday), 10:00 am at Toni Larson's home (3400 Bison Lane).

The meeting will include discussing Lesson 4 from Horizon's study book Let Justice Roll Down. Denise Mort has copies of the guide if you are interested in purchasing. Other topics of discussion will include disbursement of the rummage sale money made in 2025, and other projects.

The group hopes you will consider attending.

**MITTEN TREE IS MAGICALLY  
TRANSFORMED!**

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the Mitten Tree is now the Mitten Bin. It is located on the stage in the Social Hall until January 18, 2026.

Presbyterian Women is sponsoring the bin. They are asking generous people to help fill it with new or gently used cold weather clothing to be donated to the Rescue Mission.



## Yes

Published in *Houdini* (2002)

It's like a Tap-Dance  
Or a new pink Dress,  
A sick-naive Feeling  
Saying Yes.

Some say Good morning  
Some say God bless –  
Some say Possibly  
Some say Yes.

Some say Never  
Some say Unless  
It's stupid and lovely  
To rush into Yes.

What can it mean?  
It's just like Life,  
One thing to You  
One thing to your Wife.

Some go Local  
Some go Express  
Some can't wait  
To answer Yes.

Some complain  
Of strain and Stress  
The answer may be  
No for Yes.

Some like Failure  
Some like Success  
Some like Yes Yes  
Yes Yes Yes.

Open your Eyes,  
Dream but don't guess.  
Your biggest Surprise  
Comes after Yes.

- Muriel Rukeyser



When Caitlyn Korin from the Great Falls Children's Receiving Home stopped by the church to pick up the items Mission Committee had collected, she sat down with me and explained the purpose of the Home.

The home, she said, provides shelter for abandoned, abused, neglected and homeless children waiting to be placed in a permanent home. But the main thing the Home provides is consistency. The children brought to the Home come from a chaotic situations, where they experienced little to no consistency. "We provide structure and support through simple things like three meals a day served at the same time each day," she said. The donated house has seven bedrooms, large open living spaces, and a great back yard.

Caitlyn applauded First Presbyterian Church and all the other doners for their support this Christmas season. - By Jane Surmi

**Children's Receiving Home receives  
'essentials' from Mission Committe**

# The Desert as Spiritual Geography

**Graham Joseph Hill**

In the early centuries of the Christian movement, something remarkable happened. As the faith moved from persecuted minority to imperial religion, as bishops gained political power and churches grew comfortable, a countermovement emerged. Thousands of men and women left the cities of Alexandria, Rome, and Antioch and walked into the wilderness. They sought caves and abandoned tombs, crude huts and rocky hermitages. They became the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the abbas and ammas whose sayings and practices would shape Christian spirituality for millennia.

Why the desert?

The desert was, first of all, a place of emptiness. It offered nothing to distract: no marketplaces, no theaters, no dinner parties, no endless social obligations. In the stripped-down landscape of sand

and stone, these seekers encountered themselves and, in that encounter, encountered God. The desert was a furnace that burned away illusion, a silence that exposed every inner voice clamoring for attention.

“You can’t heal what you can’t see. You can’t offer to God what you refuse to acknowledge.”

But the desert was also a place of confrontation. The monks spoke freely of the demons they battled there, the demon of acedia (spiritual listlessness), the demon of vainglory, the demon of lust, and the demon of anger. Modern readers may interpret these figures psychologically or take them at face value; either way, the wisdom holds. In solitude, we meet the parts of ourselves we’ve been running from. The desert doesn’t create our inner chaos; it reveals it. © 2025 Graham Joseph Hill

