

Montana - N. Wyoming Conference  
United Church of Christ

## CONFERENCE NEWS

*Together in Spirit - January 22, 2026*



### Discerning Your Response

*By Conference Minister, Rev. Tony Clark*

Dear Folks:

It has seemed like this new year has started off with roughness, rudeness, and



ruthlessness. There is a cold going around that knocked out our office staff for a week. We are still waiting for snow to hit in Billings; the last snow we received was before Christmas, and I worry about the effect on our water for our agriculture. And then there is the news, which you can probably name as well as I can. The most painful of the latest events is the killing of an American citizen by government officials in Minneapolis, Minnesota, not far from where I served early in my ministry. This [letter](#) from the Minnesota Conference Minister Rev. Sadagopan is a place to begin healing. This [video](#) from her reminds us that we Christians are in it for the long haul.

We are watching as our American way of life is being eroded. The government is sowing distrust with misinformation and brutal bullying. We are hearing and seeing responses across our nation as frustrated and scared people join in marching and protesting. A work force pause has been called for Jan 23 in Minneapolis. The New Hampshire Episcopal Bishop Hirschfeld has [called](#) for his clergy to be ready because a new era of martyrdom is upon us, and we Christians, especially clergy, can no longer simply speak out but may need to put their bodies on the front lines.

Over the last few weeks, several of us in Montana-Northern Wyoming have been preaching on the theme "(In)Justice in our Community" using the Epiphany Day text [Matthew 2: 1-14](#) where the magi went [home by another way](#). As we get these sermons, we will link them on mnwcucc.org website. I preached on this in Great Falls on Jan 4 and at my home church, Mayflower, on Jan 11, and in my preaching, I was reminded of the violence that Herrod used to maintain his power. Herrod built infrastructure like port cities and fresh water to Jerusalem, and he extracted huge taxes from the people to pay for these improvements. When things didn't go his way, he resorted to violence to silence the people. The magi did not play into this scheme, and neither did Joseph, Mary and Jesus, as they were warned in dreams to leave the region.

Maybe you see parallels between Herrod and what is happening in America at the beginning of 2026. The violence of power and the power of violence are becoming increasingly commonplace on our streets. As new as this might be to many of us, it is not new to the world. Most of the world's people today and in the past live



under some kind of power-hungry regime that serves the wealthy and powerful while denigrating the poor and vulnerable. Many of us can go about our normal daily routines because it is not us being targeted. So how might we respond when it's not our lives at stake? Are we ready, as Bishop Hirschfeld says, to become martyrs? Are we ready for the long-haul, as the Rev. Sadagopan says? Blessings as you discern your best response.

In peace and prayer,

Pastor Tony

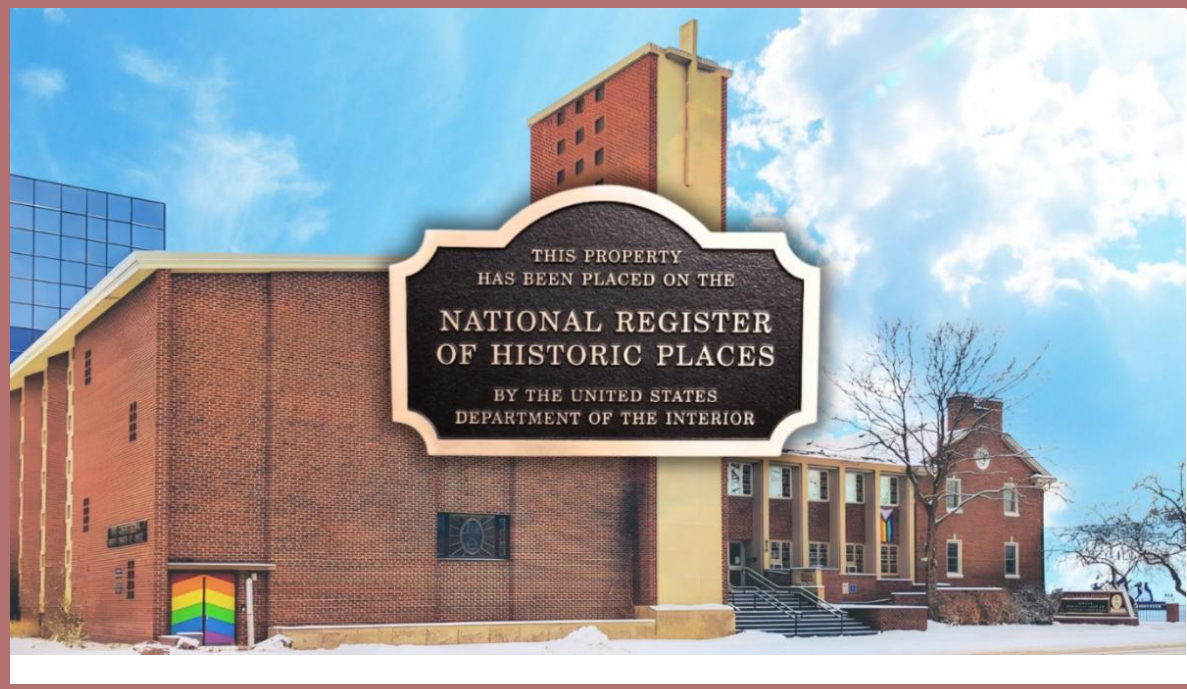
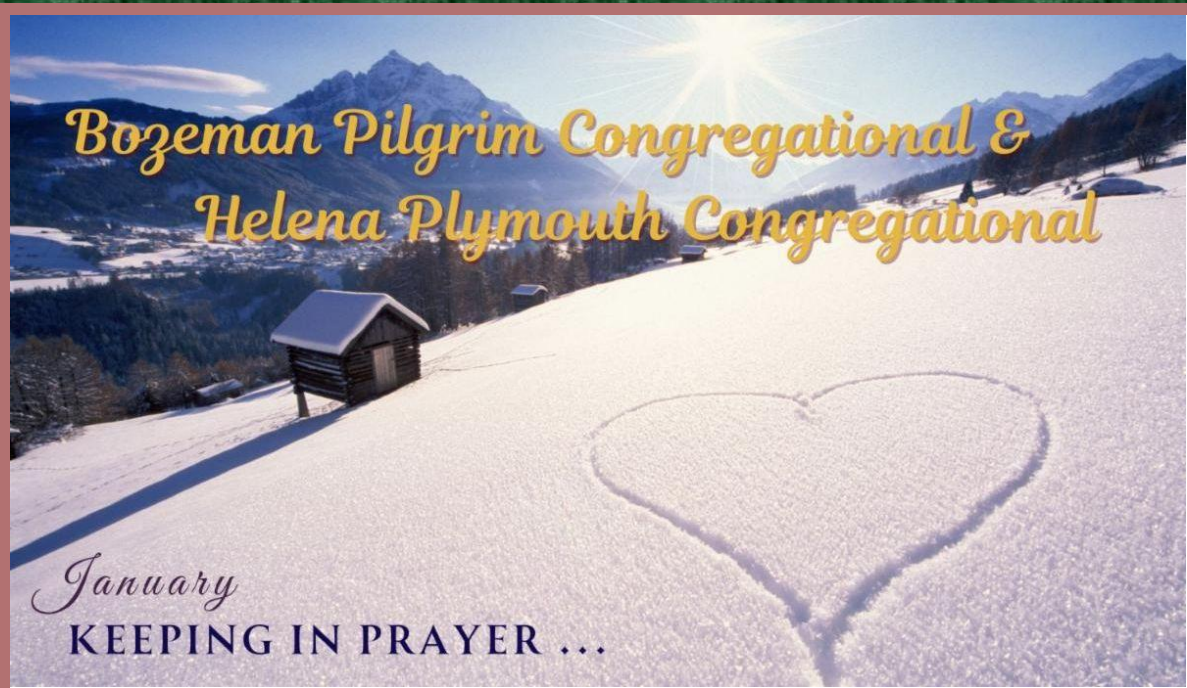
**January 16, 2026**

Minnesota Conference UCC Message  
in Response to Ongoing ICE Violence



January 28 - Board of Directors @ 5 pm  
February 4 - Church and Ministry @ 1:30 pm  
February 16 - President's Day (office closed)  
February 17 - Green Team @ 3 pm







### Billings First Congregational Church Listed on National Register of Historic Places

Billings, MT — Billings First Congregational Church has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a federal registry of historic buildings and sites across the country. The church is the first religious building in Yellowstone County to earn this recognition.

Billings First Congregational Church was founded in May 1882 by Rev. Benjamin F. Stuart. It was the first faith community established in the fledgling town. Billings—named for the railroad's former president, Frederick H. Billings—quickly earned the nickname of the “Magic City” due to its explosive growth following the arrival of the railroad in August 1882. The following year, the church completed construction on a permanent brick building situated on a plot of land donated by the townsite company. The building was funded by a substantial donation from the Frederick Billings family. The Congregational church served as the only house of worship in the rapidly growing railroad town for several years.

“The congregation is proud of this designation, and we thank those who worked hard to have the church included on the National Register,” said Karen Stainton, church moderator. “But a church is more than a building. For nearly 150 years our congregation has been an essential thread in the fabric of this community.”



'OUR ALLEGIANCE IS TO GOD'S KIN-DOM'



UCC'S PILGRIM PRESS RELEASING A MEMOIR





MN CONFERENCE RESPONDS TO FATAL ICE SHOOTING

# TAKE US HOME BY ANOTHER WAY



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