



Montana - N. Wyoming Conference
United Church of Christ

CONFERENCE NEWS

Together in Spirit - January 29, 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 mnwcu.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 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





*Bozeman Pilgrim Congregational &
Helena Plymouth Congregational*

January

KEEPING IN PRAYER ...

CREATION JUSTICE WEBINAR

VENEZUELA, OIL & U.S. IMPERIALISM

THE CRISIS AND
OUR FAITH-ROOTED RESPONSE

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11
1:00 PM ET / 10:00 AM PT



VENEZUELA, OIL, AND U.S. IMPERIALISM ON WEDNESDAY, FEB 11



IT IS TIME TO RETURN PEACE TO OUR NATION'S CITIES:



MEET SIX UCC CLERGY WHO PUT FAITH IN ACTION

Don't Forget Who the Real Enemy Is

January 24, 2026

"But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you."
—Luke 6:27-28

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous."

—Matthew 5:43-45

Yesterday I was among more than 600 clergy from many faith traditions—along with 50,000 people—who marched together for the righteous cause to end the occupation by 3,000 ICE officers in our great state of Minnesota. We are not protesters. We are good neighbors. The holy actions, speeches, and recent arrests of my clergy colleagues is barely in the rearview mirror of our lives when we find ourselves again in this place of grieving disbelief.

Lord in Your Mercy, end this occupation.

Yesterday we felt hope. Yesterday we felt encouraged. Yesterday we felt empowered. Yes, in minus 11-degree weather our bodies were cold, but our hearts were warmed. We knew that we are not alone here in Minneapolis. We felt your prayers. This morning those feelings are being pushed aside again for another violent encounter with ICE officers on the South Side of Minneapolis.

Lord in Your Mercy, end this occupation.

My home is in South Minneapolis, not too far from where the epicenter of grief and mourning erupted. Yet, I am far enough to not hear the sirens and the whistles and the screams of "Get in your house!" Those voices and sounds of violence live in my body now. I suspect they may have taken residence in your body, too.

Lord in Your Mercy, end this occupation.

We are 17 days past the day Renee Good was killed, and now we grieve another, this time a brother Alex Jeffrey Pretti, an ICU nurse who wanted to be a "force for good."^[1] Two hundred clergy on Thursday went on patrol along one of the hardest hit areas of our city, along Lake street not far from where Alex Pretti was shot 10 times. Friends, we are all working hard to hold fast to love, hold fast to compassion, and hold fast to justice until only peace remains. It feels like they are winning. Don't be fooled.

Hold fast to love. Don't let hate invade.

I want to make something very clear today after this most recent killing: ICE officers are not our enemy. They are people caught in a larger oppressive system that is occupying our democracy and violating our values. This present evil is much larger than that.

Hold fast to compassion. Don't let cruelty reign.

Jesus says very clearly in the Gospels we are to love our enemies. "Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you.[2]" Also, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... for God makes the sun rise on the evil and the good.[3]"

The enemy is hate.

The enemy is silence.

The enemy is cruelty.

The enemy is racism.

The enemy is greed.

The enemy is believing we are each other's enemies.

Hate wins when we let evil infect our hearts and minds.

About an hour ago our General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ called me from Germany. Like me, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson had little to say in this horrible moment. I am numb. My body and spirit is tired from all the marching and praying this week. We were silent for a time together in our disbelieving grief, breathing in and out, together.

Feel what is in your body. Hold the hand of someone you love. Light a candle. Eat some food.

Hold fast to justice. Don't let rage win.

Here in Minneapolis we are being asked to light a candle, and meet our neighbors and remember Alex and Renee and all those who have been shot, who have been abducted, who have disappeared from our neighborhoods. This is not the first time tyranny has reared its head among the people. We can use the tools of our voices, our presence, our dollars, our votes, and our pulpits to end this occupation.

Do the good that is yours to do. But above all, love them, do not hate them.

The Holy One loves them, and so must we,

Rev. Dr. Tanya Sadagopan
Conference Minister
Minnesota Conference of the UCC

[1] New York Times, January 24, 2026, "Alex Jeffrey Pretti Knew He Wanted to Help Others."

[2] Luke 6:27-28

[3] Matthew 5:43-45

January 16, 2026

Minnesota Conference UCC Message
in Response to Ongoing ICE Violence



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