

MISSOULA FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
WELCOMES ALL PEOPLE OF ANY AGE, GENDER, COLOR, ETHNICITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, ECONOMIC STATUS,  
OR PHYSICAL ABILITY INTO THE FULL LIFE AND MEMBERSHIP OF THIS CONGREGATION.

# TOWER TIDINGS

JULY 2026

The Eighty-Ninth Epistle of John – “Promoting a Better AI”

7-1-26

I’ve been thinking a lot about AI recently – and I, for one, thinks it’s about time we began promoting this new and promising field of opportunity! So much potential, so many possibilities, so many ways in which we can finally improve our human situation with the right engagement of innovative and creative ideology – so I say, why not move more intentionally into the AI world? That is, to move more into the **Actual Intelligence** world we’ve seemed to have abandoned recently?

(what did you think I was talking about?)

Of course, what most people are thinking about when AI comes up is “Artificial Intelligence,” and it is a problematic area of human endeavor to say the least. I think we already struggle tremendously with “Actual Intelligence” (or maybe a better term is “Authentic Intelligence?”) in that our thought processes as a nation and as a world continue to be indescribably messed up and often seem to be wholistically unable to effectively move us into an optimistic future, as is evidenced by our species’ regression into new wars, new conspiracies, new falsehoods, new vilifications of the stranger, new abandonments of the marginalized, new climate-damaging practices – none of which is actually new. What is new is the amplification of these vices and the power behind their momentum, fueled by dark money and evidence suppression and outright lies seeking to bend reality to human agenda – it is astounding to me and many others how we ever came to the point where people – often good hearted, caring individuals – are drawn in to support what is morally reprehensible and ethically destructive.

I have thus drawn a particular conclusion: **We need much more Actual Intelligence before we even consider Artificial Intelligence.**



✠ **July 5, 2026**

**6th Sunday after Pentecost**

*Genesis 24:34-38,42-49,  
58-67*

*Psalms 45:10-17 or  
Psalms 72*

*Romans 7:15-25a*

*Matthew 11:16-19,25-30*

✠ **July 12, 2026**

**7th Sunday after Pentecost**

*Genesis 25:19-24*

*Psalms 119:105-112  
or*

*Psalms 25 (UMH 756)*

*Romans 8:1-11*

*Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*

✠ **July 19, 2026**

**8th Sunday after Pentecost**

*Genesis 28:10-19a*

*Psalms 139:1-12, 23-24  
(UMH 854)*

*Romans 8:12-25*

*Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43*

✠ **July 26, 2026**

**9th Sunday after Pentecost**

*Genesis 29:15-28*

*Psalms 105:1-11, 45b  
(UMH 828)*

*Romans 8:26-39*

*Matthew 13:31-33,44-52*

But what does that mean? What are the standards of Actual Intelligence? Should we call it something else, like Empirical Rationality (ER) or Tested Truths (TT) or Morality-Centered Ideology (MCI)? Playing the word-soup game rarely produces consensus, but what does seem apparent is how many people agree that we as a species are not thinking straight regarding reality. Adding something that promises to do our thinking for us when our present thinking is already so confused seems like a recipe for disaster, for that thinking entity would be created by the bad thinking already present. There is great promise for powerful computing, but there is also great danger if such technology becomes a tool of exploitation and manipulation – things also disturbingly common in today's cutthroat world.

This is where our faith has essential input, for it offers qualities AI will likely never possess – the counter-intuitive wisdom of selflessness, the admittedly illogical value of sacrificial love, the emotional power associated with natural beauty, the unanticipatable (a word I artificially created!) returns on forgiveness. All of these speak of values irreducible to formula, calculation, or algorithm, yet all of these bring to life a dimension of depth and significance that far exceeds explanation or comprehension. Call it spirit, call it soulfulness, call it existential propriety, call it metaphysical tangentialism (another word I made up!), but whatever you call it, it is what will always define life apart from technology – and it will always require that we ourselves do the work to live into its promise and bring to life its potential for ourselves and the world.

As AI (Artificial Intelligence) is used to further and deepen these aspects of being human, it seems possible that it can be shaped into an asset to human growth and healthy world development. But if it is used as a substitute for what makes humans what they are beyond purely biological entities, it has the potential to become one of the most destructive forces our species has ever created.

I, for one, intend to stress the importance of Actual Intelligence first – and I sense that we have an incredible amount of work to do in this area already. This, added to the abysmal track record for humans finding new ways to abuse technology, makes me think that the promise of AI is much like that of the golden calf – a shiny new god drawing our attention away from things of much greater importance.

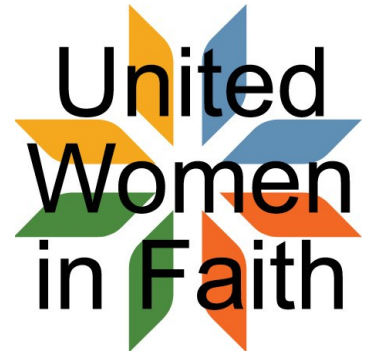
And we should never be in the business of creating our own gods.

God's Grace Be With You,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John D. Stewart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping 'J' and 'S'.

**UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH****Inspiration Tool Box**

“It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know the sense of wonder and humility.” Rachel Carson



**AUGUST 4, 1:30 pm.** Please mark your calendars to join our members at the Village Residence Center sunroom for a time of festive fellowship and reacquaintance. Afternoon refreshments will be enjoyed. For questions or if you need a ride, call Tish at 406-370-6572.



The United Women in Faith book group will not meet again until September. Meanwhile, the group wants to recommend to the entire congregation *The Book of Hope: a Survival Guide for Trying Times*, by Jane Goodall and Douglas Abrams, which we read and discussed in May. We all need some hope in these trying times! We also suggest *Flowers of Fire: The Inside Story of South Korea's Feminist Movement and What It Means for Women's Rights Worldwide* by Hawon Jung, *Seventy Times Seven: A True Story of Murder and Mercy in Gary, Indiana* by Alex Mar, and *God's Ghostwriters: Enslaved Christians and the Making of the Bible* by Candida Moss. See you in September, when we'll meet to discuss *The Happiest Man*

### **Summer Retreat at Rock Creek Resort in Red Lodge, Montana (July 12–14)**

Nestled at the base of the Beartooth Mountains, Rock Creek Resort offers beautiful scenery, comfortable accommodations, and opportunities for recreation and renewal. Combined with the learning, community, and soul care that are central to the Compelling Preaching Initiative, this retreat provides a unique opportunity for personal and ministry growth. Whether you are exploring your call to proclamation, seeking to strengthen your preaching and leadership skills, or simply looking for space to reconnect with God and others, we hope you will join us. Register [here](#) today and invite a friend, ministry colleague, or fellow lay leader to come along. Also, contact the church office for more information.



## Friday Night Out Gathering - July 10

**Friday Night Out July 10th at Jim & Cheryl Bauer's home at 6:00 p.m.** Please bring a dish to share and your own place setting if able. The address is 16535 Folsom Road, Florence, MT. Come and enjoy dinner with a view. For directions or questions, please call 760-379-0375. Mark your calendar and we'll look forward to seeing you then!



### **Fair Booth Time – Here before you know it!**

The Fair starts July 31<sup>st</sup> this year and continues until August 8<sup>th</sup>, so plenty of shifts to cover! As with last year Grace UMC is partnering with Common Good Missoula as well as looking for help from us. How the funds raised get split up depends on volunteer time contributed. You can designate your time toward First UMC, Common Good (CGM), or Grace UMC.

We've had about 17 advance sign ups from our effort in May, but we could, of course, always use more help. Now we really need to start pinning down more specific shift commitments, and getting coverage for those difficult to fill evening shifts. The sign up sheets will be at the long table in the narthex next to the name tags. Please stop by after church and let us know you can help. **OR** contact Joe Loos from Mission & Outreach: [joeloos7245@gmail.com](mailto:joeloos7245@gmail.com), **OR** Roxanne Roehl from Grace UMC: 406-239-1452. - Thank you!

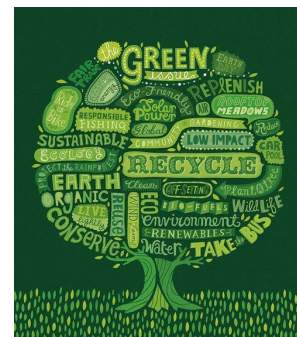
### **Thank you, for a Great Pride Celebration!**

Thank you for helping us to "Manifest Love and Celebrate with Pride!" You all donated \$ 957.54 toward a First UMC 2026 Pride Celebration Sponsorship. You gave us a great turnout for the Pride Parade – there were 20 of us, and of course the Missoula community turned out by the thousands! And you volunteered to help make our fellowship hall and sanctuary available as a Missoula Community space during the Saturday celebrations; offering a supportive retreat space to get refreshments, find friends and allies, and find some kid friendly activities. Thank you!



**Green Notes: Save the Planet! It's a Bargain!**

Doing right by Planet Earth just got easy AND inexpensive at First Church. The Green Team is asking for monthly (or yearly) contributions to defray the cost of our composting and glass recycling programs. You can participate in both programs for a minimal \$3 monthly fee – or \$35 for a full year. That's a price drop from years past, and a real bargain. Friends, neighbors and members of First Church are invited to participate in the program. Everyone is welcome!



The glass recycling bins and smaller compost bin are located behind the Sunshine House, in the alley next door to the church's Education Annex. They're accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Remember: NO GARBAGE is allowed in the bins. Our contractors won't pick up any glass or compost mixed with garbage. Also, the glass should be clean; all colors of glass are accepted.

These two programs help reduce the amount of waste that goes to Missoula's landfill. Glass is endlessly recyclable. Our contractor delivers Missoula's glass to businesses that make new glass, roadbed materials, deck and flooring, and other products. Our composting contractor makes and sells soil for use in local lawns and gardens.

Join today! Just send a check to First UMC, marked "glass recycling" and start bringing your glass and compost materials to our bins. Questions? Email Sherry Devlin at [sherrydevlin@gmail.com](mailto:sherrydevlin@gmail.com).

**Church Pledges and Donations**

The donation page via the Breeze website can be found at:

<https://firstumcmissoula.breezechms.com/give/online>

Designate where your donation goes when donating an online by using the dropdown menu below the donation amount.

You can also donate via text message: (406) 998-1982 include donation amount and a keyword like "Pledge" or "Building".

Mail in donations are also welcome.

Contact:  
Leslie Uhlenbruck,  
Financial Secretary  
First United Methodist Church  
P.O. Box 7646  
Missoula, MT 59807-7646

**CONTACT OUR OFFICE**

**Weekday Hours**

**Monday-Thursday 9-12**

**Phone:** 406- 549-6118

**E-Mail:** [FUMCmissoula@gmail.com](mailto:FUMCmissoula@gmail.com)

**Website:** [www.firstumcmissoula.org](http://www.firstumcmissoula.org)

**Facebook:**  
[www.facebook.com/1stumcmissoula](http://www.facebook.com/1stumcmissoula)

**Instagram:**  
<https://www.instagram.com/missoula1stumc/>

**PASTOR JOHN**

**Office:** Available Monday-Friday

**By phone:** 406-549-6118 or  
406-396-8966 (cell)

**E-Mail:** [john@FUMCmissoula.com](mailto:john@FUMCmissoula.com)

**Hospital visits:** Please call John or the office if you know of someone in the hospital. **Home visits:** upon request.

**CHURCH STAFF**

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- John Daniels, *Pastor*
- Catherine Thomsen, *Administrative Assistant*
- Cheryl Bauer, *Administrative Assistant Sub*
- Jim Bauer, Carol Davis, Cara Lightfield.  
*Office Volunteers*
- Leslie Uhlenbruck, *Financial Secretary*
- Larry Chace, *Treasurer*
- Craig Gohl, *Custodian*
- Greg Boris, *Chancel Choir Director*
- Jason Triche, *Hand Bell Choir Director*
- Luke Larson, *Organist and Pianist*
- Cindy Ekstrand, *Sunday School Director*
- TBD, *Nursery Attendant*

*Deadline for August 2026  
July 20*

**Tzedakah Pocket Offers Hope**

This month has been a real challenge and has shown us the great need folks have in our area. The requests we received required considerably more funds to resolve than usual but they were justified requests. Once again, your support was there to help us resolve issues to the extent we can and get those in need on their way with our prayers and well-wishes. We couldn't do this without you and we are grateful every day for your help. This month also brought a pleasant surprise, a gift from our Ruth Fellowship. They had a little extra money and decided to buy some gas cards for us to use for the many requests for gas we get these days. The cards will not be reflected in the numbers below because we didn't buy them but what a blessing they have been for those who come to us in need. Thanks, Ruth Fellowship.

A summary of assistance provided by our church's Tzedakah Pocket ministry for the month of June 2026 and Year to Date 2026 are shown below. We help whenever we can with as much as we can. Please continue to donate whenever you are able. We can, and do, make a difference for those who come to us for assistance.



*Tzedakah* **Summary**

**2026 Donations: \$5,880.26**

Assistance Paid	June 2026			Year to Date 2026		
	Amount	Fam	Child.	Amount	Fam	Child.
<i>Lodging</i>	\$ 1,081.64	2	4	\$ 1,809.92	7	4
<i>Rent/ Sec. Dep.</i>	\$ 305.00	2	3	\$ 1,215.00	6	9
<i>Other</i>	\$ 341.00	4	2	\$ 3,736.83	40	39
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 1,727.64</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>\$ 6,761.75</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>52</b>

## IN OUR PRAYERS...

### ~PRAYERS~

- ✦ Courage and strength for Ernie J's grandnephew, who has just been diagnosed as blind in one eye, and deteriorating eyesight in the other eye, and for his parents as they help him negotiate his new reality.
- ✦ Guidance and success for this year's graduates.
- ✦ Strength for Doug H's brother-in-law, as he cares for his wife, who has Alzheimer's.
- ✦ That all the kids who are out of school for the summer (and their parents) will have a good summer.
- ✦ That the heart monitor a young congregant is getting Monday (15<sup>th</sup>) will reveal what's going on.
- ✦ For the safety of the people in Salt Lake City and all affected by the wildfires there.

### ~HEALING AND COMFORT~

- ✦ Continued comfort and peace for Phyllis W. as she remains stable in hospice care.
- ✦ Healing for Tish's nephew's wife Nicole, who was life flighted to Stanford Hospital with liver failure, and will be evaluated Tuesday (16<sup>th</sup>) to see if she qualifies for a liver transplant.
- ✦ Successful oral surgery and a quick recovery for Pastor John's father, Dan D.

### ~THANKSGIVING~

- ✦ Gratitude for prayers for John T during his road trip to Memphis and back for his great niece's graduation.
- ✦ Gratitude that Rocky A's family (grandson Sam, great-grandson Josiah and his parents- Emre & Tenley-, and my daughter Michi) have all made it safely to their destinations.
- ✦ Thanksgiving for our wonderful, loving church that is so different from churches his family attended in his childhood.
- ✦ Thanksgiving that Linda J's daughter's medical tests are looking good, and gratitude for all the prayers on her behalf.
- ✦ Joy and thanksgiving for 58 years of marriage between Joe and Karen L. (anniversary June 7<sup>th</sup>) and Doug and Nancy H. (anniversary June 8<sup>th</sup>).
- ✦ Joy for Mason and Amber B's wedding June 6<sup>th</sup> and blessings on their union.
- ✦ Joy for the service conducted by Theresa C. and communion by Ira.



### FUMC Foundation

The First United Methodist Church Foundation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit which is managed by a board of directors who oversees its investments and disburses them according to strict guidelines. The Foundation's income and disbursements are separate from the church's general budget. One exception to this policy is continued contributions to the Building Fund.

The Foundation's objectives include charitable giving to groups with a Methodist connection that are not included in the annual budget; providing scholarships and grants for active church members seeking higher education; financial aid for active church members to attend camps, classes or retreats; and helping to fund non-budgeted needs of individuals or the community in the event of emergencies such as floods or fires.

Foundation funding is provided by individuals who want to recognize and honor the work of members and friends of the church in a way that provides a lasting impact. There are also proceeds from the sale of properties donated to the church to support the Foundation's mission. The funds are invested, and distributions are made, reliant on the interest gained on those investments. Church members and others who are interested in sharing in this ministry are encouraged to consider donating to the Foundation.

A big thank you to Judy W for weeding and cleaning up the church's northside bed and to Carol D for planting all the lovely flowers!



## LTQ 2.0

### Living the Questions Class Starting in September

People know that at its core, Christianity has something good to offer the human race. At the same time, many of us have a sense that we're alone in being a "thinking Christian," with more questions than answers. The meaning of "Christian" and "Christianity" has never been more in question than today. This fall, Faith & Justice is offering a class exploring our questions.

This class is a safe environment where there's permission to ask the questions you've always wanted to ask but have been afraid to voice for fear of being thought a heretic. *Living the Questions* provides a opportunity to discuss the beliefs we've learned in childhood, and the questions of life that those beliefs don't seem to answer. Rather than looking back to a fossilized faith and beliefs, *Living the Questions* ask questions about the future.



The hour class is built around short videos featuring leading progressive (and provocative) thinkers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a lively discussion following. It won't provide easy answers – it's a resource for people in the midst of a life-long conversation about the mysteries of faith and life.

**9:00- 9:50 Sundays in the Library (in hallway next to the Church office)**

**Part I, *Invitation to the Journey*, will begin mid-September.**

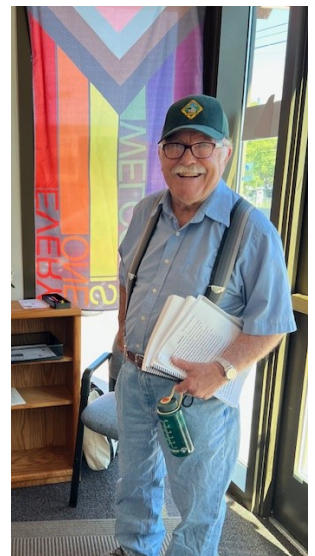
**Open to everyone – Bring your questions!**

**For more information, call Jana Staton 406-721-5558**



*Sunday morning in the FUMC rear entry.*

*Thank you to the communications and growth committee who helped spruce it up!*



First United Methodist Church  
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Instagram:  
<https://www.instagram.com/missoula1stumc/>

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*Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.*

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### **July Events**

**July 10:** Friday Night Out at Jim and Cheryl Bauer's 6:00pm

**July 31:** Start of the Western Montana Fair



### **Looking ahead to August**

**August 4:** UWF gathering at the Village Residence Center 1:30pm.

### **Weekly Events via Zoom and in person**

**Sunday Worship:** Worship 10:00 a.m. and via Zoom.  
(recordings on Facebook or the church website).

**Sunday School:** During the worship service in the Nursery for kids age 4 and up.

**Tuesday:** Pastor John's class 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. All are welcome!  
Please contact the office for the Zoom link.

**Wednesday:** Lectionary Bible Class 10:00 a.m. in the Library. Contact Rev. Barry Padgett at [barryumc@yahoo.com](mailto:barryumc@yahoo.com) for more information. All are welcome to attend!