

The Commentator

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YOUTH NEWS



Milestones for February are happening on February 9th and 23rd. On the 9th, all interested 5th grade students and parents will be invited to participate in the Ten Commandments Milestone in the Sunday School room following coffee and donuts.

Then on February 23rd, the Kindergarten Cross Milestone will be taking place in the Sunday School Room following donuts and coffee. Kindergarten children and parents are invited to come learn about how the cross is an important symbol of our Christian faith. Children will also be making their own mosaic cross and sharing what the cross means to them. Crosses will be displayed before and after service on March 23rd and will then be available for the children to take home.

The closing Lutheran Youth Collective Event will be happening on February 16th from 1:00 to 3:15 at Sunset Bowl. Stay tuned for ride information and permission slips if you have a middle school student participating in confirmation on Wednesday evenings. Contact Nikki if you have any questions.



HOW you can HELP

- ❖ Teen Pantry
- ❖ Worship: ushers, assisting ministers, readers, transportation drivers.
- ❖ Sunday School, helpers, and teachers.

J.O.Y. BIBLE STUDY

Coffee, tea, laughter, and scripture with fun thoughtful life discussions. Meeting at 6:30 am every Wednesday morning at Montana Jack's on Hansen Lane. Contact Michel Podyry at 406-855-8446 for more information.



HOPE CIRCLE BIBLE STUDY



This circle/bible study meets the 3rd Thursday in the month, 9:30 AM, at the church. We meet for fellowship and study God's word. Our meeting this month will be February 20th and you and your bible are welcome to join us. For more info call Bette, 406-245-5054

MENU



Wonderful Wednesday
February 12 @ 6 pm
Play Inn

Marvelous Monday
February 24 @ 6 pm
Perkins (free pie Monday)

(Any questions call Debbie
406-248-5313 or 406-696-7029.)



FAMILY PROMISE SUCCESS IN 2024



As our Atonement family prepares to host Family Promise of Yellowstone Valley (FPYV) again February 23–March 2, we want to share some information on what volunteers and donors helped achieve in 2024.

FPYV shelters four families at a time in churches, thanks to partner congregations like Atonement. Who are these families?

- More than half were evicted from their homes, even though two-thirds had parents working full time. Parents who aren't working are required to get jobs while in the program.
- Four out of every 10 have been impacted by domestic violence or substance abuse.
- 70% of those sheltered were children with an average age of 9.
- Families stayed in the church shelters for an average of 85 days in 2024.

Most then moved into one of Family Promise's 12 transitional apartments. Thanks to generous FPYV donors, these transitional apartments provide safe housing at a cost well below market rates. This allows families to build or rebuild credit and save money so they can move into safe, permanent housing.

Ninety percent of families served by FPYV succeed in keeping housing for a year or longer after moving from FPYV transitional apartments.

Also in 2024:

- 28 families were helped with furniture and other household items. For information about donating gently used household goods to FPYV, please contact Timothy Olsen at 406-294-7432.
- Three vehicles were donated to families who had none. To learn more about donating a vehicle, please contact Michelle Downey at 406-294-7432.
- The Community Stabilization Program helped 47 families, including 92 children. Some of these families contacted FPYV before eviction and were helped to stay in their homes. Some were helped through the FPYV shelter programs and some received ongoing services after graduating from the shelter program. The Stabilization Program is tailored to each family's needs and may include case management, financial education, life skills, housing support, workforce development and other services.

Please prayerfully consider how you can support Atonement's ministry to homeless families in 2025. The sign-up board will be up at church for you to volunteer anytime Feb. 23—March 2.

Volunteers are needed to set up inflatable beds after church on Feb. 23, to prepare or host evening meals, to stay overnight with guests (you get your own room for sleeping) and to help with tear down and laundering bedding on Sunday, March 2.

Thank you for supporting FPYV.

TEEN PANTRY NEEDS:

Soft Granola Bars
 Protein Bars
 Shelf Stable Milk
 Pop Tarts

Spaghetti Noodles
 Hamburger Helper
 Hormel Complete
 Packet of Cheese Crackers

Pasta Sauce
 Chicken Helper
 Freeze Dried Hashbrowns
 Packet of Peanut Butter Crackers

Canned Chicken
 Canned Ravioli
 Cups of Fruit

A CLOSER LOOK AT OUR CHURCH BUDGET

"A Closer Look at Our Church Budget" — A 2025 Budget Q&A

At our recent congregational meeting, the church budget was unanimously approved by voice vote—a testament to the trust and collaboration that defines our church family. This process reflects our shared commitment to God's mission and the exciting year of ministry ahead!

Your voice matters. As a community rooted in faith, we recognize the importance of every voice and every perspective. Scripture reminds us that "the body is not made up of one part but of many" (1 Corinthians 12:14), and each part plays a vital role in our shared journey. To continue fostering transparency and clarity, we've prepared a detailed Q&A addressing common questions about the budget, how funds are allocated, and the vision guiding these decisions. We hope this fosters deeper understanding, trust, and unity as we move forward together in faith.

General Offerings

Q: Why are we expecting an increase in general offerings?

A: Our 2025 budget reflects a goal of at least a 5% increase in member giving and a 3% overall increase, accounting for guests and new members. This is based on:

- **Growth in Worship Attendance:** Average attendance has grown from 92 in 2022 to 135 in 2024, reflecting a vibrant and engaged congregation.
- **Faithful Generosity:** Strong giving from both long-term members and newer attendees demonstrates our shared investment in the ministry.
- **Strategic Vision:** These goals support essential priorities, including the Youth Director position, property maintenance, and local partnerships.

Q: What if we don't meet the expected increase in offerings?

A: The finance committee and council will closely monitor giving and expenses. If income falls short, we will adjust spending to prioritize essential ministries. With the faithfulness of our congregation, we are confident that we can meet these goals through prayer, generosity, and shared commitment to ministry. Together, we can continue creating spaces for all to experience and share Christ's love.

Synod Contributions

Q: Why are we reducing contributions to the Montana Synod?

A: While our budget reflects a 1% reduction in the percentage allocated, the total dollar amount will actually exceed our 2023 contributions. This adjustment balances support for both local and synod partnerships, including ministries like Family Promise, Habitat for Humanity, and feeding students.

We're also strengthening synod partnerships. As a founding member of Christikon and St. John's, we remain deeply connected to these ministries. This year, we are adding a financial partnership with Luther's Lodge, and Pastor Ryan is collaborating with the Interim DEM, Pastor Kay Wittman, to develop new synodical ministry opportunities. We are supporting the synod in many new ways.

Youth Director and Sunday School Positions

Q: Why is the Youth Director position a priority in the budget?

A: This role is essential for nurturing the faith of our youth and families. Initially funded by the Capital Campaign, last year's remaining balance helped transition the role into our general budget. This year, it is fully supported by the general ministries budget, ensuring long-term sustainability.

To support growth in our Sunday School program and accommodate Billings Public Schools District's calendar changes, we are expanding Sunday School by four weeks and increasing prep time by 90 minutes per week.

Q: Why has the Youth Director budget decreased slightly from 2024 to 2025?

A: The 2024 budget included overtime wages and expenses for the National Youth Gathering, which will not occur in 2025. The adjusted budget reflects regular wages while maintaining full support for the role.

Property Maintenance

Q: Why is there a significant increase in the property maintenance budget?

A: As our congregation grows, maintaining a safe, welcoming, and functional campus is critical. The property maintenance budget is increasing from \$70,715 in 2024 to \$81,281 in 2025 (14.9%), covering essential upkeep and long-term care.

Unemployment Tax Rate Increase

Q: Why has our unemployment tax rate increased significantly?

A: Our unemployment tax rate has quadrupled due to state-level adjustments and our employment history. While this increase is beyond our control, it is being carefully managed within the 2025 budget.

Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)

Q: Why include a COLA increase of 2.5%?

A: A 2.5% COLA ensures that staff wages keep pace with inflation and reflects our commitment to fairly compensating employees. This adjustment supports stability and affirms the dedication of our ministry leaders.

Pastor's Salary and Reallocation of Benefits

Q: Why does the pastor's salary appear fairly high in the budget?

A: Pastor Ryan's call paperwork includes full health insurance coverage for his family. However, as good stewards of our resources, we've reallocated these funds to areas like professional expenses, continuing education, and salary adjustments. This approach saves the congregation nearly \$10,000 while supporting the ministry's goals.

What Can I Do?

- **Pray for Our Ministries and Leadership**
Pray for wisdom, growth, and the ability to serve our community faithfully.
- **Share Our Story**
Invite friends and neighbors to worship and ministry. As we grow, so does our impact. Sharing the good news and love of Christ, as well as the mutual support and community we experience here, is essential.
- **Increase Your Giving**
Prayerfully reflect on your giving as an act of faith and commitment. A 5% increase (or more) in giving from each household would sustain vital ministries like youth programming, property maintenance, and local partnerships. If you're new to giving, starting with any consistent amount makes a meaningful difference.
- **Get Involved**
Volunteer in ministries that inspire you, like Sunday School or Family Promise. Your time and talents are invaluable to our mission.
- **Engage with the Budget and Vision**
Stay informed, ask questions, and share ideas. Your voice matters as we plan for the future.
- **Support Partnerships**
Advocate for and participate in partnerships like Christikon, Habitat for Humanity, and Luther's Lodge. Every effort strengthens our connections.

Wrap Up

As we move forward, we encourage everyone to continue speaking up, sharing ideas, and collaborating. Your questions, insights, and participation help shape our ministry and strengthen our community. Together, with open hearts and a shared purpose, we can live out God's calling for our church. Thank you for your faithful support of our shared mission. Together, we are building a future that reflects God's love and care for our church, community, and beyond.

Leadership

ENDOWMENT FUND RECIPIENTS FOR 2024 DIVIDENDS

Billings Education Foundation
St. John's Luther's Lodge

Tumbleweed
Big Sky Senior Services

GAMES AND GOODIES AT WYNDSTONE



Enjoy a Sunday afternoon with our WyndStone Friends as we have Games and Goodies on Sunday, February 16, at 1:00 PM. Meet in the lobby a bit early and join the fun!

Evangelism Committee



Heartfelt Greetings from Atonement Lutheran Preschool!

February always makes me take note of all the special ways to show and receive love! We have been blessed in so many ways our Atonement family has shown love to our preschool!

Enrollment for the 2025-2026 preschool is now open. We offer three different classes for parents to choose from: a Tuesday/Thursday 3–4-year-old preschool class; a Monday/Wednesday/Friday 3.5-5-year-old preschool class; and a Monday/Tuesday/ Thursday/ Friday 4-5 year old K-Prep class. We want our ministry to thrive and continue to serve all these special young children as they learn and explore at preschool! Please remember – the best advertisement is word of mouth!

The Preschool along with Youth & Family will be hosting a Fat Tuesday Pancake Supper on Tuesday, March 4th from 5:45 – 7:00 pm. Come join us for a fun-filled evening!

This we will be celebrating Valentine’s Day and the last week of February we will be having a Dr. Suess week with a theme for each day... if you want to find out our themes let me know and you can be part of the fun!

We could use your help with some of the supplies we will be working with in the coming months. If you can find and donate these items below, that would be a great help during the school year...

- ♥ Googly Eyes
- ♥ Large Oatmeal Canisters (empty)
- ♥ Fruit Loops
- ♥ Kraft Paper roll
- ♥ Multi-color Pom poms
- ♥ Large Cereal Boxes
- ♥ Sweetheart Candies
- ♥ Heart Stickers
- ♥ Walmart/Target/Albertsons Gift Card

Thank you for all your prayers and support as we continue our journey through the school year! We are blessed to have your support and generous hearts! Happy New Year!
Blessings,

Sara Westrope
Atonement Lutheran Preschool Director

THANK YOU

We are incredibly grateful to Russell & Suzanne Bender for their generous donation to the Teen Pantry. Using their unused flex money from 2024, they purchased much-needed personal hygiene products—filling *four huge garbage bags*! These essential items have made a significant difference, and the teen pantries were so thankful to receive them. Your generosity and thoughtfulness are a true blessing to the community. Thank you for making such an impactful contribution!



FROM THE PASTOR

But still a person. With a family. With daughters. With a spouse. With grandchildren.

She died near a sacred place in my life—a holy site in my heart. Near the first “real” mountain I ever climbed. A place where I discovered how to love myself. To find myself. To know myself. To become a friend to myself.

I wish she had known herself as a friend.

She knew pain—chronic pain.

She knew grief.

She knew trauma.

As do so many of us.

But do we know ourselves as a friend?

Do you know yourself as a friend?

I’ve learned that knowing ourselves as a friend is deeply healing. To see ourselves as someone worth spending time with, worth listening to, worth loving—that’s healing.

It’s learning to experience ourselves the way God sees us.

It’s learning to see ourselves in the light of the divine.

So, can you do something? Can you write yourself a letter? A letter from God to you. As your tender, compassionate heavenly parent, what might God want you to know? To hear? How precious do you think God holds you?

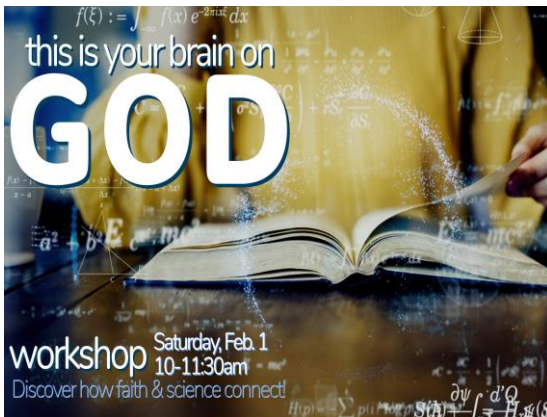
It might feel a little silly or awkward, but could you try? If not now, maybe tonight, just before sleep, in place of your usual prayers. Perhaps you could even listen in your mind for what God wants to lovingly whisper to you. What is God proud of you for? How has God held you through life’s hardest moments? What beautiful, authentic truths about you does God know and cherish?

This month, in the season of love, may you come to love yourself as a friend.

And may you always remember this truth: God loves you.

With Faith,

Pastor Ryan



Ever wonder how faith & science connect? In “**This is Your Brain on God,**” we’ll explore how your brain is wired for spirituality—no science degree or spiritual expertise required! This workshop is designed to be **accessible for everyone**, whether you’re a seasoned churchgoer, new to contemplation or just curious. Through **easy-to-understand stories, simple hands-on practices and relatable insights**, our presenters will explore how brain science reveals the ways God shapes our minds, hearts, and lives.

Presenters: Rev. Kay Wittman-Interim DEM for MT Synod
 Dr. Dale Peterson-Retired Neurologist
 Judy Peterson-Early Childhood Educator
 Pastor Ryan Chaddick

CHURCH FINANCIAL REPORT DECEMBER 2024

QR Code for easy giving!



Scan with a Device

Ministry Budget			
Income	\$56,543.60	Expenses	\$44,761.71
Profit/Loss	\$11,781.89	Net Income YTD	\$3,969.78
Mortgage Fund			
Income	\$4,661.23	Mortgage	\$5,163.00
Profit/Loss	(\$501.77)	Net Income YTD	\$538.05

Julie Andersen – Treasurer, Atonement Lutheran Church Council



PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

The Prayer Shawl Ministry currently meets at 10:45 after church in the snack room and we would love to have you! We are working on prayer shawls and hats/scarfs for our local school children. We have many prayer shawls available for you to give to anyone in need of a little bit of lifting up! Feel free to take one! Each prayer shawl is numbered and listed on the clipboard in the cupboard. If you would please just fill out the information on the clipboard, this helps us track how many prayer shawls we have made/given away! If you have any questions, please reach out to Jane Hansen at 406.861.2953 or jhansen0359@gmail.com.

Christikon Clips

February, 2025

Information for our Congregations



Welcome to Pastor Heather Wigdahl as our new Executive Director. She will be on-board the middle of this month.

She begins with us on the recruiting trail with Taryn.

We are currently **recruiting staff** for the upcoming season. If you know someone who would be a good fit, direct them to <https://christikon.org/employment/> for more information and application.

Register NOW for camp and don't forget to invite a friend!

Go to: <https://christikon.org/registration-individual-information/>.

Family Adult opportunities can be found at our website. Our speaker for the **Continuing Ed Retreat and Mountain Weekend** is **Dr. Dave Ellingsen**. Register and see details at: <https://christikon.org/adult-family-programs/>.

Work Weekend is May 23-26, 2025. Join us in readying the camp for the 2025 season. All are welcome! Register NOW!

Donate online! You can use the Internet to make a gift, or to find out more about this special ministry. Go to www.christikon.org.

Save the dates: The Annual Christikon Benefit Auction at the Billings Depot is coming on **Sunday, April 27th**. Do you know of an item, service or getaway that would be a great auction item? Please contact the office! Watch for further updates on our website or notices at your church.

Our plans for the 2025 season are going forward and we are excited to welcome you to Christikon this summer! Watch for updates on our website.

**It is the mission of Christikon to awaken and nurture faith in Christ —
exploring God's creation and the adventure of life together.**

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406 656-1969 ● secretary@christikon.org ● www.christikon.org



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 (406) 245-7004
 atonementbillings.org

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Council Member's

President.....Dennis Roseleip
 Vice President.....Ryan Kapperud
 Secretary.....Sarah Wald
 Treasurer.....Julie Andersen

Ryan Kapperud (2025)
 Michel Poodry (2025)
 Sara Wald (2025)
 Clint Westrope (2025)
 Ellery Bolte Youth Rep (2025)

Russell Bender (2026)
 Tara Bolte (2026)
 Frank Rodemer (2026)
 Lane Severson (2026)

Julie Andersen (2027)
 Diane Erickson Olson (2027)
 Mike Noland (2027)
 Dennis Roseleip (2027)



WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Join us Wednesday mornings starting at 10 am in the Jerusalem room as we engage in a Bible study.

SAVE THE DATES

- March 4th Fat Tuesday Pancake Supper
- March 5th Ash Wednesday Worship
- March 12th Soup Suppers and Lenten Worship
- March 16th New Members Meeting/Brunch
- March 19th Soup Suppers and Lenten Worship
- March 23rd New Members Reception
- March 26th Soup Suppers and Lenten Worship



BRINGING THE HOPE WE SHARE IN CHRIST TO ALL!