

City Commission, Staff, and Residents—

San Antonio, Texas; Dallas, Texas; Orlando, Florida; Richmond, Virginia; New York City, New York; Brookville, Pennsylvania; Lenexa, Kansas; Cincinnati, Ohio; Nashville, Tennessee; St. Paul, Minnesota; Fort Collins, Colorado; Brookings, Oregon; Woodinville, Washington.

All of these municipalities, from across the country, varied in political demographics and culture, have something in common: all of them have defied the First Amendment and attempted to restrict the church's free exercise of religion in ministering to the unhoused and impoverished of their communities, whether through zoning laws, health code minutia, or nuisance ordinances.

Something else these municipal governments all have in common: all of them have lost that fight in the judicial system.

Do you really intend to fine or incarcerate a pastor for practicing the most basic tenet of the Christian faith? Do you want that kind of attention? Do you want to risk shelling out thousands of dollars in a settlement when you could actually collaborate with the people who are trying to make a difference?

What do you think will happen if you manage to prevent these people from staying on the church property? Will the ones who are a danger to themselves or others cease to be so? Will the ones suffering mental and physical illness and substance use disorder be better able to get healing? Will the ones most vulnerable to violence be better protected from it?

Of course, the situation at First United Methodist is not ideal. Of course, we need to come to a solution that promotes the health and safety of the *entire* community.

This is not a solution. It is political pageantry designed to have the appearance of action without doing anything to solve the root of the problem. It is whitewash over the decay of chronic neglect, injustice, and violence that undergirds the crisis of homelessness.

People experiencing homelessness are members of our community, with the same basic rights as all of us. It is time for this city to recognize them as human beings and as neighbors, not as a nuisance, and act accordingly. The economic cost of passive or carceral responses to this crisis far outweighs the cost of care, housing, and justice. The moral cost, even more so.

Rev. Stephen Underwood, Pastor,
Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
1025 Central Ave. Great Falls, MT 59401

Lisa C. Kunz

From: Lisa C. Kunz
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:32 AM
To: 'Maeyhem Violette'
Subject: RE: First UMC

Good Morning ~

Thank you for your comments. Your comments will be shared with the Commission and appropriate staff for their consideration.

Best regards,

Lisa Kunz

City Clerk/Records Manager
Civic Center Room 204
406.455.8451

From: Maeyhem Violette <maeyhemviolette@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 7:55 PM
To: commission <commission@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: First UMC

Hello,

I wanted to take a moment to voice my support for Rev. Wakeley and First UMC.

Rev. Wakeley is exercising his religious freedoms and being truly Christlike by offering a safe place for the unhoused. They deserve dignity and help, and Rev. Wakeley is offering both.

I am also writing to express my lack of support for Rick Tryon and his repeated behavior of targeting groups and individuals for his scapegoating and disrespect. He is an abusive person and I'm consistently disappointed in his behavior as a public official in my community.

Unhoused individuals are human beings, not a nuisance, and to charge the church or Rev. would be an embarrassment.

Thank you for your time,

Andrea Alfson

Sent from Yahoo Mail on Android

Lisa C. Kunz

From: Lisa C. Kunz
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:32 AM
To: 'seanmatthewmcg@gmail.com'
Subject: RE: [All City Commissioners] Richard Tryon and FUMC

Good Morning ~

Thank you for your comments. Your comments will be shared with the Commission and appropriate staff for their consideration.

Best regards,

Lisa Kunz

City Clerk/Records Manager
Civic Center Room 204
406.455.8451

From: City of Great Falls Montana <webmaster@greatfallsmt.net>
Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 6:07 PM
To: City Commissioners <CityCommissioners@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: [All City Commissioners] Richard Tryon and FUMC

Sean McGuire (seanmatthewmcg@gmail.com) sent a message using the contact form at <https://greatfallsmt.net/>.

I am submitting this letter with the caveat that these are my personal opinions and do not represent those of my employer.

To the City Commissioners,

My faith in government has been eroding since 2008. The consistent behavior of Commissioner Tryon, before and after his election, particularly in regards to First United Methodist Church's attempts to mitigate Great Falls' homelessness epidemic, has hastened that erosion considerably.

Seeing Tryon saying what he's said, in multiple public forums, without censure by or consequences from his colleagues, has signalled to me that the City of Great Falls is invested in protecting his efforts to dehumanize people with complex problems.

Is it because you would rather see "the problem" cleared out of sight and out of mind? What else will you overlook in order for "the problem" to disappear?

I don't know what's on your mind, but you should know that your decision-- and my decision-- not to say anything up to this point has deepened a scar that will take decades to heal.

-- A Concerned Citizen

Lisa C. Kunz

From: Lisa C. Kunz
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:32 AM
To: 'James Bamfield'
Subject: RE: First UMC Comments

Good Morning ~

Thank you for your comments. Your comments will be shared with the Commission and appropriate staff for their consideration.

Best regards,

Lisa Kunz

City Clerk/Records Manager
Civic Center Room 204
406.455.8451

From: James Bamfield <bamfieldjames@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 5:46 PM
To: commission <commission@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: First UMC Comments

Good afternoon mayor and city commissioners,

I am writing in support of First United Methodist Church and against issuing a public nuisance charge against the church and/or Reverend Wakely.

I have been a citizen of Great Falls for a good three quarters of my life, spending 4 years of it living downtown, on the 300 block of Central Avenue. As such, the homeless issue is not one I am ignorant to, and I am fully aware of the issues it has. While I can play devil's advocate, and understand the argument that seems to be made often of "the homeless are dangerous", it should not make any difference on the fact that these people are members of our city, and deserve the same respect and assistance we offer to any other member of Great Falls.

Reverend Wakely has done what he can to help these members of our community, offering a safe place to lay their head at the end of the day. Offering up food and other services to them, as well as being cooperative with the police, local businesses, and even the city commission directly. I have worked with First UMC on a few occasions, and it is abundantly clear Rev Wakely works hard to ensure he does everything he can to help, and keep it all above board.

While I can not personally speak on what he [Rev. Wakely] has said or asked of the city commission, what I can speak on is the public messages being sent out and posted by Commissioner Rick Tryon. He has made it clear he wants to push legal actions against the church/Rev. Wakely. Such 'calls to action' Commission Tryon has made is, to be blunt, disgusting. Rev. Wakely is trying to assist our homeless community members. The city commission should be pushing to offer help to Rev Wakely to help him with the Homeless problem, not punish someone in the community trying to be a loving member.

Please, do the right thing and offer Rev Wakely help with his mission of assisting our community.

-James Bamfield

Lisa C. Kunz

From: Lisa C. Kunz
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:33 AM
To: 'Seth Lutter'
Subject: RE: Homeless Discussion

Good Morning ~

Thank you for your comments. Your comments will be shared with the Commission and appropriate staff for their consideration.

Best regards,

Lisa Kunz

City Clerk/Records Manager
Civic Center Room 204
406.455.8451

From: Seth Lutter <sethalutter@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 5:44 PM
To: commission <commission@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: Homeless Discussion

Great Falls City Commissioners,

I've been hearing recently about a church in downtown Great Falls receiving flack for housing the homeless and providing them meals. I hear that the push for fining/punishing the church for doing Christ's work is also a City Commissioner. I hope this isn't true. If so, I believe our city's leaders' morals have dipped far below a level of decency that I'm unsure we can recover. By condemning the least of these in our community, we condemn ourselves and we draw a line in the sand of who and what we believe to be acceptable and honorable. It's not as if the homeless want to be homeless. I recommend everyone read the causes of rural homelessness to learn more: <https://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/Rural.pdf>

So instead of treating the homeless like second class citizens in our own city, why don't we do something FOR them and not TO them? Other cities have banded together and provided homes for the homeless while actually saving money in the long run. Check out the article in Chicago about how the local hospital provided housing and mental health services which helped the population tremendously while also saving the hospital's bottom line:

<https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2019/02/21/homelessness-as-medical-condition-chicago>

I don't see how a single moral person or Christian could simply condemn a church for doing exactly what a church is supposed to do. If we provide the means for people to be homeless (high cost of living, low wages, accessible addictive substances, lack of funding for mental health services) but we don't try and cure the cause, then we're not trying to actually cure this city of its ills, we are just trying to put a bandaid on symptoms that will never go away.

I stand with the downtown church providing Christ-like services. If the city doesn't like it, I suggest the city (and businesses) band together and try and help these people instead of ostracizing them. You can't act like the victim while simultaneously twisting the knife and providing no help to those who need it.

Seth Lutter

Lisa C. Kunz

From: Lisa C. Kunz
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:33 AM
To: 'Megan Mattingly-Arthur'
Subject: RE: Support for Rev. Wakeley

Good Morning ~

Thank you for your comments. Your comments will be shared with the Commission and appropriate staff for their consideration.

Best regards,

Lisa Kunz

City Clerk/Records Manager
Civic Center Room 204
406.455.8451

From: Megan Mattingly-Arthur <meganmattinglyarthur@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 5:44 PM
To: commission <commission@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: Support for Rev. Wakeley

Rev. Wakeley is doing exactly what churches should do: helping people who are unhoused. That's what the Great Falls City Commission should be doing as well.

Megan Mattingly-Arthur



Virus-free. www.avg.com

Lisa C. Kunz

From: Lisa C. Kunz
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:33 AM
To: 'Josh Hughes'
Subject: RE: Church and homeless people

Good Morning ~

Thank you for your comments. Your comments will be shared with the Commission and appropriate staff for their consideration.

Best regards,

Lisa Kunz

City Clerk/Records Manager
Civic Center Room 204
406.455.8451

From: Josh Hughes <zookey@teamkaizengames.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 4:55 PM
To: commission <commission@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: Church and homeless people

Hello.

My name is Josh Hughes, and I am a lifetime resident of Great Falls.

The church helping the homeless people (First UMC) is merely doing exactly as Jesus has taught: helping 'the least of these' those in power have abandoned.

Beyond that, we have seen repeatedly how Rick Tryon will target marginalized groups, be they the homeless, the LGBT community or others, in blatant scare tactics to bolster his personal politics.

I am writing in to both show my support of the courageous and Christ-like actions of First UMC, and to publicly express my disgust with Commissioner Tryon's continued vitriol.

Funny how people looking to cause pain for marginalized groups or ban books can get the blessing of 'religious freedom' protection in our country, yet people who actually care about Christ's message and teachings (and living them out) get targeted much the same way Christ himself did.

Please, Great Falls City Commission, hear us and rise up to be better than that.

Josh Hughes

Lisa C. Kunz

From: Lisa C. Kunz
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:33 AM
To: 'Jasmine Taylor'
Subject: RE: Support for Rev. Wakeley

Good Morning ~

Thank you for your comments. Your comments will be shared with the Commission and appropriate staff for their consideration.

Best regards,

Lisa Kunz

City Clerk/Records Manager
Civic Center Room 204
406.455.8451

From: Jasmine Taylor <jasmine.taylor.mt@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 4:50 PM
To: commission <commission@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: Support for Rev. Wakeley

Mayor and Commissioners,

I am writing to express my support for Reverend Jeff Wakeley and his continual work to support the unhoused community in Great Falls. Our unhoused citizens are community members and deserve the same dignity, respect, and consideration afforded to all those who live in Great Falls. It is disheartening to see these real people, who are experiencing real-life hardship, be treated as a nuisance.

Reverend Wakeley is exercising his constitutional right to Religious Freedom. He is living the tenants of his faith by allowing the unhoused a safe harbor on church property. He has clearly stated that he does not allow or condone any illegal behavior.

Over the past several weeks, Commissioner Tryon has publicly, both on his private social media and under his title as a Commissioner, launched a targeted harassment campaign against Reverend Wakeley. Commissioner Tryon continually engages in this type of unethical and unprofessional behavior. In this instance, he is implicating the city in his affront on Reverend Wakeley's constitutional rights. I urge the city to examine the ethics of Commissioner Tryon's conduct and the potential losses to the city should any party file a lawsuit due to his continued threats and harassment.

Further, the city has received around \$1 million in Covid relief funding. Rather than explore the many ways these monies could provide relief to the unhoused, the Commission is focusing on threats of punitive damages to Reverend Wakeley and his church

It is truly upsetting and embarrassing to see our city commission not only engage in, but tolerate such conduct

from a commissioner. I urge the commission to desist in their threats of fining Reverend Wakeley and his church, and rather focus on uplifting ALL members of our community, including the unhoused.

-Jasmine Taylor

Lisa C. Kunz

From: Lisa C. Kunz
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:33 AM
To: 'Aishly Corrigan'
Subject: RE: Unhoused population at First UMC

Good Morning ~

Thank you for your comments. Your comments will be shared with the Commission and appropriate staff for their consideration.

Best regards,

Lisa Kunz

City Clerk/Records Manager
Civic Center Room 204
406.455.8451

From: Aishly Corrigan <aishlycorrigan@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 4:31 PM
To: commission <commission@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: Unhoused population at First UMC

I find it really disheartening that Mr. Tryon wants the police to start handing out tickets to a Pastor and church for trying to provide shelter and some comfort to the Great Falls homeless. Actually, the attacks by Mr. Tryon on Pastor Wakeley and the church are nothing short of disgusting. For community members who claim to be Christian, I see none of their Christian values showing. I think instead of attacking the church and Pastor Wakeley for trying to improve a very sad situation, the city and us as a community should be looking for ways to help Pastor Wakeley and the homeless community. Pastor Wakeley has provided time and time again different ideas that can improve the unhoused situation as well as having meetings to discuss what can be done and needs to be done. I SUPPORT Pastor Wakeley and First UMC for assisting those in our community who are experiencing misfortune. I look at this situation and the homeless community as still part of our community who need help, not tickets or arrests as seems to be Mr. Tryon's thoughts. Also remember please, that the type of misfortune seen downtown can happen to any of us at any time.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40, 45, NIV)

I for one am thankful that there are Christians such as Pastor Wakeley who live the word of God by their actions instead of those who claim to be Christian yet their actions say different.

Thank you for your time,

Aishly Corrigan

Lisa C. Kunz

From: Lisa C. Kunz
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:34 AM
To: 'Sam Harrington'
Subject: RE: Comments for 2/15/22

Good Morning ~

Thank you for your comments. Your comments will be shared with the Commission and appropriate staff for their consideration.

Best regards,

Lisa Kunz
City Clerk/Records Manager
Civic Center Room 204
406.455.8451

-----Original Message-----

From: Sam Harrington <sam.harrington.mt@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 3:52 PM
To: commission <commission@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: Comments for 2/15/22

Mayor Kelly and Commissioners,

I am writing in today regarding the ongoing issue regarding homelessness in this community. First and foremost, I think most of the citizens of this city are closer to being homeless than any of us would care to admit. Not all homeless people are jobless and despite working, many members of the community still struggle to make ends meet. This can be especially true after an instance of poor health, a family crisis, etc, which again, ANY of us could experience at ANY time. Vilifying the homeless does nothing to address the underlying causes of homelessness. What would help at the local level would be increased access to affordable housing and drug/alcohol treatment, to start.

Additionally, I am disheartened to see the continued attacks on faith leaders in this community who are simply doing as their faith instructs them to do. Proverbs 14:31: "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God". I think that time and time again, Mr Wakely in particular, has shown himself to be a compassionate and genuine man of God, handling the threats to himself and his congregation with the grace and dignity of a good community leader.

Thank you for your time,

Sam Harrington

From: [Lisa C. Kunz](#)
To: [Bob Kelly](#); [Eric Hinebauch](#); [Joe McKenney](#); [Rick Tryon](#); [Susan Wolff](#)
Cc: [Greg Doyon](#); [Charles Anderson](#); [Krista Artis](#); [Jeffrey Hindoien](#)
Subject: FW: Letter about Methodist Encampment
Date: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:55:59 AM

FYI

From: Lisa C. Kunz
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:55 AM
To: 'Giordano' <giordanolahaderne@gmail.com>
Subject: RE: Letter about Methodist Encampment

Good Morning ~

Thank you for your comments. Your written comments will also be shared with the Commission and appropriate staff for their consideration.

Best regards,

Lisa Kunz

City Clerk/Records Manager
Civic Center Room 204
406.455.8451

From: Giordano <giordanolahaderne@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:53 AM
To: commission <commission@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: Letter about Methodist Encampment

To Whom It May Concern:

I spoke during the public comment period of this week's City Commission meeting. Thank you for listening respectfully and allowing me and my wife to voice our concerns about our neighborhood, and the way the homeless are being treated there. I would like to share with you the full text of my prepared remarks.

I'm a lifelong resident of Great Falls, MT. I grew up attending its schools, I graduated from Great Falls High, and I became a public school teacher myself. I'm also an ordained minister in my church. Two years ago, my wife and I bought our first house. It is a very modest home and we love it, but unfortunately for us it is located near the First United Methodist Church downtown.

The Methodist Church Homeless Encampment, for those of you who don't have to live near it, is a living nightmare—especially after dark. You will often find addicts there sleeping off

drugs or alcohol, but also people shooting up, passing around bottles of booze, fighting, and screaming at the tops of their lungs at all hours of the night. My neighbors and I have called the police on the Encampment many times. I've yet to witness a single arrest, or even heard of one being made. Because of this, the Methodist Encampment is a zone where disturbing the peace, public intoxication, and drug use have been essentially legalized. Thus, the encampment continues to attract many addicts and the mentally unstable.

We knew we weren't moving into a wealthy neighborhood, but we had no idea we'd be living near an open-air homeless encampment. As residents of the neighborhood, we were never consulted about Reverend Wakeley's decision to do this. None of us were ever asked by the church if this encampment was okay. When we initially expressed our concerns about the encampment going unmonitored, we were informed that Reverend Wakeley expected us to act as his church's surveillance crew, and to call him personally any time we witnessed illegal activity taking place. That way he could assess whether or not to trespass anyone off the property. So not only were we never asked about the encampment, the task of monitoring it got outsourced to us while the Reverend and the members of his congregation retired to their safe, quiet neighborhoods at night.

For the past year we have been forced to live with the consequences of the encampment, which means vagrants and drug addicts wandering up and down our streets at all hours of the day and night, often trespassing through our back yards, and stealing our property for drug money. My wife and I chose to live in Great Falls because we thought it would be a safe place to raise our future children. After what we've been through dealing with men drunkenly stumbling to and from the Encampment, I would be concerned even letting a child play in my back yard.

As part of my calling as an ordained minister, I've spent much of my life working with the homeless and in addiction recovery. I spent two years volunteering my time at churches, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and drug detox programs in some of the most impoverished neighborhoods in New York City (the South Bronx, among others). I also spent several years as the head teacher of a federal juvenile detention and drug rehabilitation facility, working with incarcerated youths who had committed federal crimes—many of them from Montana, and many of them drug-related. I have nothing but love for the homeless and for those afflicted by the evils of drugs and addiction. But I firmly believe that the Methodist church's current approach does far more harm than help. This church and others like it are run by compassionate people who do not lack empathy, but who do lack life experience and a firm grasp on the reality of the situation for people like who actually have to live in this neighborhood.

People may ask "What would Jesus do in this situation?" I can tell you: Jesus would heal these people of their pain, their mental health problems, and their addictions. And He still will, and is waiting with open arms to do so. But the so-called "progressive" view, that people have a right to sleep on the sidewalk, is not only legally devoid of any merit but is inhumane, indecent and dangerous. It is also immoral and deeply un-Christian. Ask yourself why the church doesn't open its doors to these people, instead encouraging them to sleep on concrete in sub-zero weather. I think the answer is obvious.

These people need help. The best thing we can do for them is hold them accountable and point them to the MANY mental health, housing, and addiction recovery resources available, NOT enable their destructive behavior by giving them a consequence-free zone that makes it easier

for them to keep using. This encampment solves nothing, helps no one, and exacerbates problems we already face. Such a disaster would never be allowed to operate in Fox Farm or Prospect Heights. It should not be allowed in our neighborhood just because our incomes are lower. I urge Reverend Wakeley or the city to please shut it down and start treating our brothers and sisters like human beings, not exploiting their anguish and suffering as some kind of marketing campaign for their personal projects.

Sincerely,
Giordano Lahaderne