PLYMOUTH CHURCH FORT WAYNE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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The Bell

STAY IN THE LOOP WITH UPDATES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS!

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Wednesday Night Live Revamp

Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy



As many of you are already aware, we are making major changes to the structure of Wednesday Night Live starting this fall. Our kickoff will be on Wednesday, September 2, and will include some of the changes, but the new regular weekly structure will become fully apparent by September 9.

Trying something new can be scary sometimes. We get into our routines, know what to expect, and it feels comfortable. Wednesday Night Live has looked practically the same since I arrived at Plymouth eight years ago. It worked, and I saw no need to turn over an apple cart that was successful in its design.

Classic WNL (from 2018 onward at least) began with three things: children's choir, Bible study, and adult choir, all beginning at 5:15 pm. Kids would learn some songs, play instruments, and prepare for periodic opportunities to share songs for Sunday worship. Meanwhile, I would lead discussion-driven Bible studies on the scripture that would be the focus for the upcoming Sunday service. When I started, we averaged about 20 people per week. Choir members would rehearse for upcoming Sunday

services. I occasionally would hear a lament from someone about having to choose between the latter two but that's just how it was structured. You had to pick.

After that initial program time, we had dinner at 6:00 pm. Our caterers have changed over time but this was, in my mind at least, the centerpiece of the evening. Everyone gathers from various programs and eats together, with some announcements, fellowship, and often a song from the children's earlier gathering.

Post-dinner, two other program things occurred: handbells met to rehearse in the Sanctuary and there was a book-study, led by the Associate Pastor. Both would wrap up by around 7:30 pm and we'd be done for the night.

However, over the years, Wednesday Night Live has atrophied in various ways. The first change was the decline of the book study, which was already struggling pre-COVID. We attempted various short-term discussion options with limited results. A few brief post-dinner programs had good responses, but after running their course, there was a gap.

Over the years, the Bible study went from 20 people attending on a good night to about 5-8 folks most weeks. Those there enjoy it, but fewer are taking advantage of group scripture study for various reasons.

Additionally, in the past few years, the children's choir stopped being viable. There might be 0-2 kids on any given Wednesday. It was halted.

Finally, there were some issues with group dynamics with the dinner. Fewer people were coming to the dinner, with many people either leaving after their group met or only showing up afterwards for their thing. What was meant to be a unifying experience was becoming increasingly fragmented. Instead of a single WNL experience with a throughline, it had shifted into more of an a-la-carte buffet style, which had a more individualistic quality than its group-building intent.

So after years on this declining trajectory, we decided to make a fundamental change and experiment with a new model.

Here is the new design. Broadly speaking, it will begin with community group-building time and then break out into different activities.

Rather than dinner being at the chronological center, dividing up music and programming, it's now at the start. Folks are invited to gather for dinner and fellowship as the starting point at 5:30 pm.

Following dinner is a time for a weekly intergenerational activity in the same space. This will include a variety of types of things, including quick service projects, discussion topics, arts and crafts, or learning some songs together, depending on the week. This portion will always include a scripture story and prayer as part of that time to help frame whatever we are doing.

Finally, after our intentional intergenerational time, folks will break out into their various groups, whether that be choir practice, the dementia support group, handbells, the Our Whole Lives sexuality curriculum, or other small groups that decide to form. Things like Bible study will be held on a different day so as to not conflict or force people to choose.

This new structure hopes to revitalize Wednesday Night Live in several ways. Rather than separating out kids and youth with their modest numbers, it will integrate them more into programming with the rest of the church. For example, it's more fun to sing with 40 people of all ages than with one other person. Additionally, it pushes towards a more collective experience in its flow, while still giving space for personalized interests with the breakouts afterwards.

This is an experiment that we will be giving a try and living into. There might be tweaks once we get started as we learn what's working and what isn't. If you have not been a part of Wednesday Night Live before, or it's been many years since you were active, I invite you to give it a try starting in September and see what it's all about. I pray that it may be a blessing to you and to Plymouth as a whole!

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy

Senior Pastor and Teacher

Moral Injury and the Need for Lament

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals



I've been thinking recently about moral injury-- the psychological and emotional distress that can happen when a person commits, witnesses, or fails to prevent actions that violate their deeply held moral beliefs or values. For example, a soldier in war follows orders that leads to the death of civilians. A doctor in a hospital with limited resources is forced to ration care. Or, in the case of the genocide in Gaza, the knowledge that our tax dollars have contributed to absolutely horrendous human suffering.

When it comes to that last one, there are days when I feel an almost suffocating sense of grief knowing that my tax dollars have enabled our government to participate in the massacre of innocents and the destruction of entire communities. There are times when I'm not sure I can stand it. And I almost always feel alone when I'm in that mental space.

And yet, experience tells me I'm not alone. I know there are people out there who feel the same way. I've spoken with many of you. I've looked many of you in the eye and known that none of us are alone. Still, the feelings of loneliness are hard to resist, and I suspect this is part of what moral injury does. The weight of it forces us into isolation. All we can feel is the heaviness of our failure to stop the horror. It presses against us from all sides and makes us feel alien to the world itself.

This is why we need to take time for communal lament. Not to wallow in our misery, but to remind ourselves that we need not bear the weight of this injury alone. By engaging in lament as a community, the moral injury doesn't disappear, but the burden doesn't feel as heavy. Furthermore, when we come together in the brutal honesty of lament, we chip away at our perceived powerlessness and are

reminded of the power we hold together as a community.

To be sure, there is still so much work to be done. But every now and then, it's worth taking a moment to recognize that we've all been deeply, deeply wounded by the events of the last few years. It's worth taking the necessary time to tend to those wounds if we want to have any hope of bringing healing to our world.

There will be days when we feel like we can't breathe. How could it be otherwise? If it were not the case, we wouldn't be human. If it were not the case, we would not be made in the image of a God who weeps. Indeed, I am convinced that the more deeply we feel the weight of this injury, the more deeply we are connected with the heart of God, whose own heart breaks with ten thousand times the intensity as ours.

In that sense, maybe it's actually a good and powerful thing, every now and then, to let ourselves really feel the grief that we so often tamp down within us. It won't feel good, exactly, but maybe it can remind us of a truth that the powers and principalities would rather we forget— that God's love, which lives in us, is the ultimate power. At times it will break our hearts. But it also has the capacity to empower and embolden us beyond what we think we are capable of. Especially when we work together. May it be so.

A Weekend of Action for Our Immigrant Neighbors



Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals

On August 28, 29, and 30, Hoosiers across Indiana will come together in a unified public witness calling for an end to ICE detention at Miami Correctional Facility. Here in Fort Wayne, we are partnering with Fuerza Unida and Indivisible Northeast Indiana to sponsor a teach-in and public vigil as part of this statewide weekend of prayer and action.

Approximately 600 people in ICE custody are currently being held at Miami Correctional Facility, a state-run, maximum-security prison, with plans to expand its capacity to 1,000 detention beds. Organizers have raised concerns about inadequate staffing, limited access to basic medical care, the deaths of two detained people this year, and the financial cost to Indiana taxpayers.

The human cost is even greater. More than 70% of people in ICE detention nationwide have no criminal record, according to figures cited by organizers. Detention separates community members from their loved ones, traumatizes children, and leaves families struggling to survive. As organizers emphasize, "Every detention bed represents a family in crisis."

Here in Fort Wayne, the weekend will include two public events:

- Teach-in: Saturday, August 29, from 1 to 3 p.m. in the theater at the Allen County Public Library.

- Public vigil: Sunday, August 30, at 11:30 a.m. on the steps of Plymouth Congregational Church (sign making materials will be available during fellowship hour before church).



The Indiana Organizing Project is coordinating more than 50 prayer vigils across the state. Together, participants will sound a moral alarm, stand in solidarity with immigrant neighbors, and bring greater public attention to what is happening at Miami Correctional Facility.

This injustice is taking place in an Indiana facility, making it a concern for all Hoosiers. Please join us for this important weekend of education, prayer, solidarity, and action.

Plymouth Music Ministry

Maestro Robert Nance

Plymouth Music Series



The Music Series has gotten off to an early start this season. We hosted a sold-out concert on July 23 with the presentation of "The Two Sides of Cole Porter", and in August we featured two beautiful recitals featuring Jazz pianist Reggie Berg and oboist Barrett Seals. Both recitals featured a special ice cream social provided by Oh Five Scoop Shop.



Next on the concert calendar are the Grammy Award Winning NEW YORK VOICES. On Saturday, October 3 at 7:30 p.m. in our sanctuary, this veteran ensemble will present an amazing array of vocal jazz. The group recently announced they were retiring from touring and now they are more popular than ever! We are fortunate to have them present a concert for us here in Fort Wayne as part of their final tour. Tickets are FREE. However, because of their popularity, reservations are required via Eventbrite. You can use the following link: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/new-york-voices-in-concert-tickets-1997634030159?aff=oddtdtcreator OR you can go to www.Eventbrite.com and search for New York Voices in Concert.

For more information about the music series' 2026-27 season, visit www.plymouthfw.org/plymouth-music-series or pick up a brochure at the church!

Music Ministry Opportunities

Starting Wednesday, September 2, we begin our regular fall schedule of rehearsals and worship services. The Music Ministry has many opportunities for all ages, and all are welcome to participate. Questions? Contact Director of Music Robert Nance, or Music Associates Brandon Porter and Tim Cunningham. Then add your voice and/or instrument to the musical life of Plymouth Congregational Church!

Plymouth Music Opportunities

- **Wednesday Night Live** - Dinner & Creative activities for all ages starting at 5:30 p.m.
- **Sanctuary Singers** – this choral ensemble sings for worship most Sundays, and for all major events including Boar's Head, music series concerts, and special holiday services. Rehearses Wednesdays from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. and regularly on Sunday mornings at 9:00 a.m. Additional special rehearsals scheduled as needed.
- **Plymouth Bell Ensemble** – rings for worship once each month, and for all major events including Boar's Head, choir clinic, and holiday services. Rehearses Wednesdays from 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. and performs for worship once each month.
- **Additional opportunities** for music leadership are always possible and will be considered; contact any member of the Music Ministry team.

Plymouth's Past

English Bonter Mitchell Foundation

The English Bonter Mitchell Foundation was established in 1972 by Mary Tower English, her sister Louise Bonter, and daughter Elizabeth (Betty) Mitchell as a tribute to Mary's husband, Dr. Calvin English. In 1905, Dr. English, along with 30 other business men of Fort Wayne, established the Lincoln Life Insurance Company. He served as the first medical director.

Dr. English was born in 1858 just north of Fort Wayne. He studied medicine in New York and Philadelphia, opened his first office in Bluffton in 1884, and moved his practice to Ft. Wayne in 1889. He was commissioned a Major in the United States Volunteers in 1898 as commanding officer of the second division hospital during the Spanish American War.

Dr. English, a long time member of Plymouth Church, died in 1948, leaving a large amount of Lincoln National Life stock that became the base of the future foundation.

Throughout the years, Mary English refrained from cashing out the stock. However, in 1965, with the help of LNL Attorney and Plymouth member Dale Covers, they drew up a will that would divide the stock at Mary's death between several Fort Wayne institutions such as the RedCross, local hospitals, YMCA and YWCA, and Plymouth Church. Plymouth was to receive 5.37%.

In 1972, Plymouth member and former President and CEO of Lincoln Life, Henry Rood, believed Mary should change her will from one time donations to a Foundation to allow for annual payouts, and Mary agreed to do so. The English Bonter Mitchell Foundation became active upon her death in 1975.

However, this was not the end of the matter. Attorney Dale Covers filed a lawsuit that challenged the foundation, stating that in 1972, when Mary was 91 years old, she would not have been of sound mind. Plymouth Church, along with others, joined the suit, because of the fact that Plymouth's share would have been approximately $690,000 (4.3 million today). After a few years in the courts, the Judge came

to believe Mary was very much of sound mind and ruled in favor of the Foundation. Plymouth has since been blessed with contributions from the foundation each year, totaling much more than the original $690,000.

Plymouth Gallery



Worship ‘n’ Wiggles





Plymouth Solar Panels





A Community Food Locker with a Creative Touch

Our new Community Food Locker, built by Sam Lipscomb and Steve Hollingsworth and funded by the

Peace and Justice Committee, helps provide food to those in need. This past month, it received a beautiful and creative finishing touch! **Kyra Mendenhall** generously shared her artistic talents by painting the locker, transforming it into a colorful and welcoming part of the community. We are grateful to Kyra for adding her creativity and spirit to this project.

May this locker be a visible reminder that our church believes in sharing, caring, and making sure our neighbors have enough.

Please watch the bulletin for opportunities to help stock the locker. **Together, we can keep it filled and help make sure no neighbor goes without.**

Seeking Advent Devotion Writers, Poets, and Artists!



Once again, Plymouth is putting together an Advent Devotional Email Calendar, beginning the first Sunday of Advent (November 29) and continuing through Christmas Eve.

Writers can choose a Scripture passage and write a short devotion, while poets are invited to contribute poems based on the Advent themes of **Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love**. Artists are also welcome to contribute drawings, photographs, or other artwork that could be included with the devotions and poems.

It's a great opportunity to share your thoughts, experiences, faith, and creativity with the Plymouth community during Advent. The deadline for submissions is **Monday, November 2**, giving us time for editing and formatting.

Interested? Please contact Garrett Pogue at **gdpogue@mail.com**. Devotional writers will receive a list of passages to choose from. First come, first served.

Let's make this year's Advent devotions a celebration of the many ways our Plymouth community reflects hope, peace, joy, and love.

Habitat for "Homeless" Birds



Bill Balasia

The church potluck had great food and a table of delicious desserts. A group of excited carpentry volunteers built 10 homes for homeless birds (I guess they were homeless). The new homes were designed for blue birds and were constructed of ceder which doesn't rot. The houses can be put in trees or on poles. The volunteers ranged in age from 4 to past four score. No thumbs were hit and no first aid was required. The placement of the sides allowed great ventilation (large gaps between the sides and the roof). I think all the volunteers from ages four and up enjoyed the build. Now to see how the birds like them.

I have two kits left over if someone would like to build a birdhouse. Please contact me at bbalasia6143@gmai.com

Plymouth Finacial Report



July 2026

	Month Actual	Month Budget	Month Variance	YTD Actual	YTD Budget	YTD Variance
Total Income	**$191,702**	**$146,957**	**$44,745**	**$684,671**	**$594,587**	**$90,084**
Total Expenses	**$80,041**	**$63,081**	**$16,960**	**$524,697**	**$547,653**	**($22,956)**
Rounding (to match Financial Statements)	($1)	($2)	$1	$1	$1	$0
Net Income (Loss)	**$111,660**	**$83,874**	**$27,786**	**$159,975**	**$46,935**	**$113,040**

Reach Out



For questions, feedback, article ideas, or story contributions, email ngb@plymouthfw.org , and we'll be in touch.

View past newsletters here: BELL NEWSLETTER | Plymouth Church

Senior Pastor and Teacher
Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy
tcm@plymouthfw.org

Associate Pastor
Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals
smo@plymouthfw.org

Associate in Pastoral Care
Rev. January Simpson
jls@plymouthfw.org

Music Director
Maestro Robert Nance
robert@maestronance.com

Associate Music Director
Brandon Porter
brandon.porter.music@gmail.com

Youth Director
Kara Jaurigue
kkjaurigue@gmail.com

Sunday School Director
Katie Watson
kjwatson4@gmail.com

Child Care Director
Michelle Grim
michelle.grim1@yahoo.com

Office Manager
Tony Ray
tdr@plymouthfw.org

Comm/Media Specialist
Nakia Brabham
ngb@plymouthfw.org

Financial Administration
Stephen Cook
financial@plymouthfw.org

Receptionist
Jake Slone
jss@plymouthfw.org

Building Mnt. Manager
John Hoelderle
jmh@plymouthfw.org

Custodian
Jamal Taylor
jlt@plymouthfw.org