



**PLYMOUTH
CHURCH
FORT WAYNE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**2024
Annual Report**

Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne

United Church of Christ

We welcome all who seek God's presence in their lives!

We are ... **an Open and Affirming (ONA) congregation** (2001),
proclaiming extravagant welcome, particularly to LGBTQ members, friends, and
neighbors. We find strength in our diversity, and a way to understand the inclusiveness
of God.

We are ... **a Just Peace congregation** (2008),
centering our life in prayer, study, and worship. We seek the things that make for peace
and justice within the whole human family. We are committed to defending and
protecting the human rights of all people.

We are ... **a Global Mission congregation** (2012),
as recognized by Global Ministries, a common witness of Wider Church Ministries,
UCC, and Division of Overseas Ministries, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
We are committed to mission endeavors that are "intensely local, intentionally global."

We are ... **an Earthwise congregation** (2015),
having vowed our resolve to be good stewards of creation. As a community we seek to
reduce energy consumption, advance energy conservation practices, and embrace
renewable energy sources. We urge prudent use of earth resources as a display of
intergenerational solidarity – for our good, and the good of all future generations.

The Plymouth Church Covenant

(revised 2011)

We affirm our faith in the God
whose mercy calls us into the church.

We are united in our quest to promote
justice and peace for all who dwell on earth.

We are committed to the patient rule of Jesus Christ:
We rejoice in the wisdom of His teaching,
and the excellent way of His love.

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
we covenant to support the local and global mission
of the church with prayer,
participation in worship,
and generous financial support.



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SENIOR PASTOR AND TEACHER



I took my first sabbatical after 17 years of ordained ministry (and just shy of my sixth year at Plymouth) this spring, from April 1-June 30. Its focus was on the theme of friendship. I met with friends I hadn't seen in years around the country, shared my children's book with half a dozen churches about Jesus making friends with bioluminescent creatures, and I intentionally focused on developing and expanding friendships here in the Fort Wayne area. My purpose in this latter aim was to make it more likely that I would be able to remain in Fort Wayne going forward, as that was the greatest gap in living here since 2018. I thank you all for giving me that opportunity and making it a priority.

Before my sabbatical, I had also recognized that I needed to pare back a few obligations to avoid burnout. Those were clarified during the sabbatical and upon my return. The most significant of these was withdrawing from the leadership of the Help Not Handcuffs Coalition, of which I had served for two years. In their formative periods, I had made a point to attend most of Plymouth's justice action teams. However, as they became more lay-directed, I reserved my leadership to primarily the Anti-Racism Team, which is our newest still. I also paused further Film and Faith events after having one in January. While that gathering and discussion went well, I have been unsuccessful in developing a team to assist me in planning events, either specifically for young adults or more generally for all-age film discussions. Until such a time that there is sufficient demand, shown in lay leadership, that pause will continue.

I had some success in expanding ecumenical collaboration with other pastors, with the most fruitful being with Pilgrim Baptist Church here in town. With Pastor Raymond Dix, we held a pulpit exchange in August, which also included several representatives of each congregation attending each other's services. After the MLK service in January, I also worked to confirm that Pilgrim Baptist will be hosting the service in 2025, which I think is important in expanding multi-racial and cross-congregational ownership of that event. I also joined a fledgling interfaith dialogue group in Fort Wayne. My current time boundary is to not serve in any leadership capacity, but I am able to participate.

There were several notable anniversary milestones that staff reached this year. Our Music Director Robert Nance celebrated his 25th anniversary, which included an opportunity to guest preach for the first time here. Additionally, Sunday School Director Katie Watson reached her 10th anniversary, and John Hoelderle, our Building Maintenance Manager, celebrated his 5th anniversary. Over the course of the year, we said farewell to Philip Slane as our Associate Music Director, Tina Puitz as Office Manager, and Elizabeth Pruitt as Communications Specialist. We welcomed Maryrose Beerman for a time as our new Associate Music Director before she accepted a position at Peace UCC in town, and Tony Ray began as our new Office Manager.

Educationally, I led two Chapel class series this year. The first was a review of UCC General Synod resolutions that were made the previous summer. The second was around Theologies of Communion, including variations of practice, boundaries, and interpretation. I also led several sessions of the Covenant class for youth considering being confirmed. I enjoy teaching and so I always appreciate such opportunities to guide discussions and introduce new ways to consider various theological and ethical topics.

Probably the biggest change to worship this year was the inclusion of sign language interpretation being offered starting in September from Cassidy Cwiertnia, who began attending Plymouth earlier that summer. I worked with Nakia Brabham on modifying our livestream feed to account for this addition, which continues on a trial basis. As a small scale change, we also began making it possible for those who want worship services online to also mark their attendance, which adds a level of participation to those attending from afar and gives us a better sense of who is staying active even if they are not able to be here in person.

In consultation with the moderators and Rev. Ofner-Seals, we experimented this fall with adding a short devotional time ahead of monthly board meetings. Rather than individual boards having a separate devotional time, all boards met together for a single devotional time before dispersing for their specific meetings.

My denominational work did not change much from last year. I am co-moderator of the Disciples Peace Fellowship, which is my primary institutional connection with my home denomination of the Disciples of Christ at this time. I serve as co-chair of the Anti-Racism Task Force of the Indiana-Kentucky Conference and am treasurer of the Northeast Association. I attended the IKC's Annual Gathering, and coordinated with our Conference Minister, the Rev. Chad Abbott, to have Plymouth be selected to host the Annual Gathering event for next year. There will certainly be volunteer opportunities coming up as we welcome other churches from around the conference in 2025!

I led or assisted in three memorial services this year. With my sabbatical, I preached fewer sermons this year, totaling 28 Sunday worship services, which included the pulpit exchange with Pilgrim Baptist. I also provided messages at other special services such as Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and the Christmas Eve 10:00 pm service.

As we look to 2025, I pray for us to continue to grow in our faithfulness to the way of Jesus, especially in such times as when our broader world acts to deprioritize the gospel of peace, compassion, inclusion, justice, and love.

Peace,
Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy

ASSOCIATE PASTOR



Yet another year has flown by at Plymouth, and it was indeed a full year. If I had to come up with a theme for the year in one word, I would choose **community**. So much of what was accomplished this year was about building community—both within and outside the walls of Plymouth Church. Here are just a few of the highlights:

2024 was a **Covenant Class year**, with this year's class being held every Wednesday evening from January-May. I co-taught this year's class with Rev. Timothy and Rev. Christen Petit Miller from Peace UCC. There were five students from Plymouth and two from Peace. Four of the five students from Plymouth chose to be confirmed on Pentecost Sunday. Many months later, one of the students told me that even though they often complained about having to come to class, they missed it because of the bonding and community they experienced in the group.

2024 was also a banner year for reaching out into the larger Fort Wayne community. Following the winter, several members approached me about how we might better serve the unhoused population during the winter months. After some time in discussion with the Executive Council, a taskforce was formed to determine if Plymouth could offer our building as a potential overflow space for homeless families the following winter. That taskforce met for several months, working with people from non-profits serving those who are unhoused. After much discernment, the taskforce recommended that Plymouth offer space in January 2025, and Executive Council approved the recommendation. Unfortunately for us, after the decision was made, we found out that the city no longer needed our space. Nevertheless, it was an energizing process, and it was inspiring to see how many Plymouth members were excited to help.

One of our biggest community building events of the year was once again **Pride at Plymouth**, on June 29. This year's event was organized by Evangelism and Marketing with the help of an additional taskforce. I served as an advisor to the taskforce, since most of them had not helped with Pride at Plymouth in the past. This year's event featured several new events, including a drag story hour and a book signing with the authors of *Embracing Queer Family*.

Other community building highlights throughout the year included an event to assemble care packages for women traveling to Ohio to receive abortion care, a Blessing of the Animals service with First Presbyterian Church in April, attending regular Tuesday Gaza ceasefire demonstrations with fellow Plymouth members, Wednesday Night Live gatherings, two welcoming group sessions for new members, a congregational retreat in June, tabling at the Women's Strike with the Reproductive Rights action team (also in June), participating in Fort Wayne Pride in July, the third annual fall fest at Eagle Marsh, and the Interfaith Thanksgiving service in November, just to name a few!



Rev. Sara and members of the 2024 Covenant Class

Education is an important aspect of Plymouth's community life. This year, I worked with the Christian Education board to deliver a wide variety of topics for the Sunday morning adult chapel class. Some highlights of the classes I led include a series on the book *Rest is Resistance* (co-led with acting associate pastor January Simpson), a series on progressive biblical interpretation, and a class on developing a spirituality of gratitude. I also helped organize a special chapel class session with guest speaker Elaine Zoughbi from the Wi'am Center in Bethlehem.

When it comes to the wider UCC community, one of the major highlights of the year was working with the **Indiana-Kentucky Conference ONA taskforce**. After two years of leg work, we

were finally ready to craft an ONA covenant for the conference and write up a resolution for it to be voted on at the annual gathering in June. At the annual gathering, there was a great deal of discussion about the covenant, with nearly everyone speaking in favor. In the end, the ONA covenant was passed with resounding support, and the Indiana Kentucky Conference is now officially Open and Affirming.

At the level of the national church, I began my work as a member of the **UCC Palestine Israel Network** steering committee. As part of that work, I traveled to Washington DC twice in 2024—once in March and once in September. These trips to DC included a great deal of lobbying and advocacy with representatives in congress, as well as protests at the capital to demand a ceasefire in Gaza. For the September trip, we were joined by several other Plymouth Church members and others from the wider Fort Wayne community.

One of the more notable aspects of my work this past year was my time as acting head of staff while **Rev. Timothy Murphy was away on sabbatical** from April-June. During this time, I had the pleasure of working alongside Rev. January Simpson, who took on some of my regular responsibilities during the sabbatical period. The theme for the three-month sabbatical period was *rest*, and so many of our activities focused on that theme, including the aforementioned *Rest is Resistance* chapel class series and the *All Who Are Weary* retreat. While I took on more responsibilities during this period, having Rev. Simpson on board made it more than manageable and lots of fun. I was grateful for strong support from the Plymouth community during the sabbatical period, and for the support of the staff. I learned a lot more about what it takes to make a place like Plymouth run smoothly, and for that I am grateful. I look forward to planning my own sabbatical, which I will be eligible for in the fall of 2026.

Overall, it was another year to be grateful for at Plymouth Church. While we enter 2025 with some trepidation about what is to come with state and national politics, I am surer than ever that the Plymouth community will be a safe refuge for many of us in the storms to come. I am confident that no matter what happens in our world, at Plymouth, we will continue to build inclusive community that resists evil and oppression, shows love and justice, works and prayers for a just peace, and does its best to follow in the ways of Jesus, our savior. May it be so!

Peace,
Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals

MODERATOR

As I come to the end of my second year as moderator I look back with thanks for the opportunity you have given me to serve in this capacity for our church. I am so proud to be part of such a healthy and caring congregation which serves our community in so many ways. I often share with others that Plymouth Church is an amazing church which runs well due to the fine pastoral and musical leadership and the dedication of all who serve on boards, task forces, and other groups year in and year out.

One notable situation for us in 2024 was the sabbatical taken by Reverend Timothy. It was a time of renewal for him and we benefit from the experiences he enjoyed and the new things he learned. We were in very capable hands during his absence with Reverend Sara Ofner Seals and Reverend January Simpson. They even created a new retreat entitled “All Who Are Weary.”

Plymouth continues to reach out into the community through donation drives, our annual Plymouth Pride, Greenway cleanups and events at Eagle Marsh, assisting Afghan refugee families, and countless members participating in protest events that were in line with our Covenants. Reverend Timothy did a pulpit exchange with Pilgrim Baptist Church and we again participated in the community Interfaith Thanksgiving Service at the Temple.

In May we were approached by a group working with the city to see if we could provide shelter for families during the coldest nights of the winter. Much discussion ensued and many members of the congregation volunteered to help with this mission. We offered to cover the month of January. In mid-November we learned that the city found a place available for the entire season and would not need us. However, we have voted to offer the shower facilities in our basement for the homeless, in conjunction with In As Much Ministries. They will schedule clients for two days per week and provide the towels and toiletries, and Plymouth will provide volunteers to receive the guests. This is another substantial way that we are sharing God’s love with our community.

We had numerous members join in 2024. We celebrated many traditional activities, including Confirmation, Open & Affirming Sunday, Heritage Sunday, Resource Faire, Annual Meetings and, of course, the Boars Head Festival. Tradition and innovation continue hand-in-hand here at Plymouth.

Thank you again for allowing me this opportunity to serve, and I look forward to more wonderful opportunities for our church in 2025 and beyond. May God continue to bless us with faith, strength and wisdom as we head into the future.

Scott Avery
Moderator

LICENSED MINISTER

I continue to enjoy the role of licensed minister at Plymouth Church. The past year has provided several opportunities to participate in the life of the church. It included 3 Sundays of assisting with worship services, one included a healing service and another offering the invitation for communion service; creating the story “Donna” to share for Pride Sunday worship service on June 30th; attending the IN/KY Conference and witness the vote to become an open and affirming conference; writing the devotional “Coneflower” to include in the Plymouth Advent Devotional.

As part of my licensed ministry, I continue to be aware of the need to be present and available in the everydayness of life. There is much going on in the lives of those around me; both in my church family and the community where I live. Sometimes folks just need a listening ear or a helping hand. I am learning to leave space in my day for the unexpected times that require me to step into my ministerial role. This year found me performing a wedding ceremony on my front porch at 7:30 on a Sunday morning just ahead of a thunderstorm. Not exactly the way we planned it originally but no one got wet!

This year I also continued to focus on the balance of being both a licensed minister and an active church member. There are so many interesting opportunities to participate in at Plymouth Church it is a fine balancing act. In addition to not wanting to over extend myself, I also am aware of confidentiality and conflict of interest issues that may come up serving in multiple roles. Currently I co-chair the Benevolence Committee. This seems to be a good fit with being a licensed minister as it allows me to learn about the many services agencies in and around Fort Wayne, participate in the churches outreach programming, and puts my creativity and organizational skills to good use.

I continue to be thankful for the supportive community of Plymouth Church. You called me and have given me the opportunity to learn and serve as a licensed minister. For me it is important work that I take seriously. I look forward

to the year ahead and the opportunities it may bring for me, and for each of us, to reflect the light and love of Jesus into the world around us.

Peace friends,
Allen W. Haynes, LM

ASSOCIATE IN PASTORAL CARE

Greetings, Plymouth family! I offer the following report of my work as Plymouth's Associate for Pastoral Care for 2024 with deep gratitude.

The visitation work I do as Plymouth's Associate for Pastoral Care remains a source of fulfillment and gratitude. Not only are the Plymouth members I visit good, interesting, and thoughtful folks, they remain committed members of this community, and we all should be grateful for that. When able, they watch or listen to our streaming worship services, they read the bulletin and ask about what we have going on, and they're always happy to hear when new members have joined. I've even had caretakers and facility staff mention how much Plymouth still means to our homebound members. These good people remain invested in the life of our community, and I invite you to consider including them in your prayer time, as well as occasionally calling on those you miss seeing in service, if you don't already do so.

Helping to keep Plymouth more fully engaged with our longtime members are several volunteers who transform our weekly altar flowers into two or three smaller arrangements and then deliver them to different folks and visit for a bit. This year our volunteers have been Barb Duch, Jan Gibson, Lucy Hess, and Jan Younger—often in the good company of Linda Balthaser. Their work truly is a ministry of this church, and a real gift of time and care.



I had the privilege of assisting with the memorial services for Charlie Belch (Jan. 27) and leading the memorial service for Ruth Anne Sprunger (Jan. 20), both of whom joined our saints in December 2023. This year I also mourned the loss of Shirley Slater in May, and was grateful to attend her interment in Plymouth's memorial garden on June 12. Certainly Plymouth, along with other communities and lives they touched, are better because of these wonderful people, now departed. Finally, I assisted with the memorial service for Lloyd Winters, held at Plymouth on April 12.

For three months this year, April-June, I also served to support Rev. Sara during Rev. Timothy's sabbatical. What a whirlwind introduction to church pastoring that was! During that time I had the opportunity to participate in monthly meetings with our moderators, with the EC, and with the Congregational Life, Deacons, and Christian Education boards, as well as with the Anti-Racism Task Force. Learning

about the good work of these groups "from the inside" was fantastic. Rev. Sara and I alternated leading and assisting with worship each week, as well as facilitating Plymouth's Sunday afternoon "Joys and Concerns" Zoom gathering. I facilitated Bible Study each week and co-led a chapel class series on the book *Rest Is Resistance*, alternating weeks with Rev. Sara. Rev. Sara and I also worked together to plan a congregational retreat - "All Who Are Weary" - for June 8. It was well-attended and, frankly, a really good day.

It was during those months that I delivered a trial sermon at First Congregational UCC in Angola, and was called to be their part-time Associate Pastor, beginning in July. Between my preaching obligations for Cross UCC in Berne, and work with FCUCC in Angola, I have not been able to be present at Plymouth on Sundays during the second half of this year. I remain grateful for monthly Tapping Into Faith gatherings, which help keep me connected to this community I hold dear.

Friends, as 2025 gets underway, I pray for you an abundance of hope rooted in the faith that you are loved extravagantly by Love that does not cease. May that love cast out fear and release you from despair, leading you to love your neighbor as you are loved. And so may God's realm be among us, even in this world and in these times.

SUNDAY SCHOOL DIRECTOR

In worship, we hear a story and then we play with the story. Because we are adults, and timid about letting others see our playfulness, we sit quietly and play with the story inside our minds. Our pastors share their play—their ways of mixing Biblical history and current events and personal experience—and we listen and mix in a bit of our personal experiences as we do the work of understanding what our faith is saying to us today.

In Sunday school, we hear a story and then we play with the story. Kids are not timid about play. We play in our sandbox, with dolls, with blocks and paint and glue. The Good Shepherd leads elephants and camels, the toy people sharing Communion visit the baby in the nativity, Abraham's stars are added to a picture with a handful of glitter ("I am in this story in the stars," one student said, "I am in the story but I am not born yet."). We play together, doing the work of making the old stories make sense today.

With our new portable sand bag we've been able to take some stories out of the classroom. Our "desert bag" made a summer appearance at Plymouth Pride, giving kids a space to play and parents a place to ask about our children's programming. We brought stories of welcome adults and children at Wednesday Night Live this fall.

The creators of our Godly Play curriculum have been auditing their stories for racial equity, and we have been incorporating their changes into our room. This fall we purchased two new sets of story illustrations of Bible stories where characters are portrayed with Indigenous American and multi-ethnic features.

We have not held any OWL classes in this calendar year, but with the renewed energy from the Reproductive Rights Task Force we are looking forward to hosting a teacher training event at Plymouth this spring. Look for classes for elementary and middle school kids early in 2025 as well.

Our Godly Play classroom for kids in preschool and elementary school has between 3-15 kids each week, with an average around 7. Our youth class for middle and high school students has an average attendance of 3. 29 unique kids have attended our Sunday school programs in 2024, and we've reached 70 kids through family mailings.

Ashton Weber, Amy Coursen, and Karra McCormick have joined me in the Godly Play room over the year. Kristen Miller and Misha Chemey have led up our youth class, just recently joined by Karen Nesius-Roeger. I am thankful for each of our volunteer leaders, and thankful for all of the parents and grandparents who fill our classes with kids each week! And I am thankful for the kids—they are the ones who make these spaces of learning and connection possible.

Respectfully submitted,
Katie Watson



MEDIA SPECIALIST

The media department has maintained a dependable schedule of livestreams for Sunday service and other events all year. We experienced some equipment failures midway through the year, but quickly updated our systems. The plans for the coming year is to expand the church's media presence on other platforms outside of YouTube. I also remain committed to spreading the word of God through my work behind the cameras.

Respectfully submitted,
Nakia Brabham



Regional Youth Event trip to Rock Island, IL

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

Church annual attendance for 2024 came out to a total of 7,632. Starting mid-August 2024, we added an online attendance form to serve a two pronged approach: to give our members viewing from our live stream the ability to be counted in attendance, and to provide accommodation to folks who may not be able to sign the pew pad in church due to sensory issues, arthritis, handwriting learning disorders, or its just too early to do anything other than type. At this point, this has added a consistent ten extra people to the count every week, the highest being thirteen.

Monthly Totals for All Services 2024			
Month	Total	Month	Total
January	473	July	504
February	568	August	545
March	866	September	772
April	620	October	533
May	533	November	659
June	549	December	1010

Special Services:

The following attendance for the special services were included in the totals above.

Ash Wednesday: 60
Maundy Thursday: 27
Good Friday: 64
Sunrise Service: 34
Pentecost: 145

Thanksgiving: 25
Luminous Night: 36
Christmas Eve 4pm: 113
Christmas Eve 10pm: 140

Average Comparisons:

The following charts provide a comparison of the 2023 and 2024 average Sunday worship attendance by month, with a final average for the 10:00am service representing each year.

2023 Worship Averages	
Month	10:00 AM
January	120.4
February	139
March	131.25
April	169.8
May	164
June	110.75
July	111.4
August	124.5
September	133
October	131.4
November	146.25
December	143.4
Monthly	135

2024 Worship Averages	
Month	10:00 AM
January	118.25
February	127
March	148.2
April	155
May	129
June	110
July	126
August	130.75
September	154.4
October	133.25
November	164.75
December	144.2
Monthly	137.08

Youth Director

Once again writing of the Annual Report has snuck up on me. Maybe I should put a reminder on my calendar in October so I can get it done in November before Boars Head takes over my brain. I continue to keep a tidy calendar and I track who comes to what events and such, but again, stopping long enough to try to remember what we were doing last spring and summer always confuses me, while reminding me of how wonderful our young people are! Another report is due, and each year it's no different, I get to report that our Youth are awesome!

Each winter brings us Show Choir, Jazz Band and ISSMA season. If your children are in the Arts, you know this is a crazy-busy time for families. Show Choir competitions keep kids out into the wee hours on Saturday nights, and honestly, for many, Sunday mornings are the only days our kids have to be at home and rest. Youth activities can be hit or miss in January and February every year, but we roll with it, because, well, Show Choir and Jazz Band are awesome! Each January, busy kids or not, the Youth cook, prepare, serve and clean up our annual Casa d'Plymouth lunch fundraiser. This meal goes hand in hand with Plymouth's Annual Business meeting and the spaghetti and meatball lunch continues to be a church favorite! In February the Youth gathered at Headwaters Park Ice Rink, which is another fan favorite event, the rest of the month was hit or miss with big competitions, so the group gathered twice that month to keep folks connected. March brought us some smaller group gatherings, and for St. Patrick's Day we had some fun having a GREEN lunch, with all foods being green! Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, then Spring Break happened. April helped us to reconnect, and have some time to hang in the Youth Center, then May brought us our annual Graduates Sunday. In the past, June is when we had Graduates Sunday, but in 2023 the attendance was so low on such a big day of celebrations, I suggested to Rev. Timothy and Rev. Sara that we move it to May before folks head out for the summer. It seemed to work really well being in May, and it gave our Graduating Seniors time to let all of their accomplishments sink in. Our 2024 High School Graduates were: Nick Barone, Mariah Grim and Elyse Jaurigue. It's always wonderful to hear from our young adults and what Plymouth Church has meant to them over the years. I feel like our end of the year gathering wasn't as special as it has been in the past, we did gather for Ice Cream with our congregation. Our summer was busy with Plymouth Pride on June 29, we made a meal for Just Neighbors on July 7. On July 17th we took off heading to Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois for the 2024 Regional Youth Event (RYE). What a trip! Rev. Sara and Kara took a super group of Youth for the semi-annual RYE. The Youth that went on the trip were: Adella Barone, Nick Barone, Andrew Jaurigue, Claire Roney and Toby Watson. We had a great time with workshops, morning worship, singing and sharing the "Love is Greater than Fear" theme for four great days! We even got to visit Rev. Sara's Parents, where they fed us dinner and folks got to swim in their pool! The RYE trips are always fantastic and a way for our youth to connect and meet other youth from the UCC! August brought us Youth at the TinCaps game and then September rolled in and we kicked off our program year!

The youth continue to be busy, but they make Youth Group and our events a priority, something I have always admired about them. They are building friendships that could last a lifetime, and knowing that Plymouth Church is a safe place for them to come and be themselves, is truly something special.

Respectfully submitted,
Kara K. Jaurigue, Youth Director



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION BOARD

“Helping people to know God and to be obedient to him is perhaps the greatest gift we can bestow. Understood in this way, Christian education can be one of the most compassionate ministries of the church.” --Perry G. Downs

The Christian Education Board has the responsibility for developing, planning and guiding educational offerings via classes, seminars, books studies, special guest speakers and conferences throughout the year.

Opportunities in classes and special programs are the responsibility of this board, working in conjunction with individuals and committees.

This year Christian Education was approached by Bob Nance (Music Ministries) to assist with a special event titled “What is Truth”. The event was on May 4-5 with Valerie Tutson as the main presenter. Valerie held a workshop on Saturday morning with a luncheon provided by the CEB. On Sunday Valerie led an intergenerational Sunday School class.

The technology project of 2023 that added the two large monitors and the ability to ZOOM the chapel classes for those who were not able to attend in person proved to be very beneficial as several attended via ZOOM. Members of the Christian Education Committee were trained on the equipment in 2024 to help with presentations.

Katie Watson, Sunday School Director, reported to the CEB in October on the children’s education program. Children continue to use materials from *Godly Play* curriculum. Please see Katie’s full report.

Kara Jaurigue, Youth Director, reported to the CEB in November on the many different activities that Plymouth youth participated in during 2024. Including the annual spaghetti dinner, youth “lock in” and bread sale, and the youth Christmas party. Please see Kara’s report.

Covenant Class began in January with seven participants, under the leadership of Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals and Rev. Christen Petit-Miller. We celebrated the confirmation of four new members on Pentecost Sunday.

This year Christian Education developed a digital Advent Devotional that starts on the 1st Sunday of Advent (December 1) and concludes on Christmas Eve. We were looking to recruit 20 individuals who would write a short article based on an assigned scriptural passage. This is an excellent opportunity to share your insights, reflections, and spiritual journey with our community during this special season of the year.

Adult Chapel Classes:

Chapel Classes In January- consisted of Reverend Sara’s finale of the Bethlehem series which was presented on the 7th. On January 14, 21, 28, Reverend Timothy conducted classes focused on the Synod Resolutions of 2023 General Conference

Chapel Classes for February- include Reverend January Simpson on the 4th; Reverend Sara on the 11th, “A Queer Affirming Reading of the Bible”; and Reverend Timothy Price on the 18th and 25th, “The Clobber Passages of Scripture”.

Chapel Classes for March -include Reverend Sara on the 3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th, on the subject of Celtic Christianity.

Chapel Classes for April -Zoughbi Zoughbi, the director of the Wi'am Center in Bethlehem, joined via Zoom and gave a talk about the work of the center and life on the ground in Bethlehem. Rev. Sara and Rev. January Simson presented a 4 week session on the topic *Rest Is Resistance*.

Chapel Classes for May - Intergenerational Sunday School with Valerie Tutson followed by the conclusion of *Rest Is Resistance*, then on May 19 Wayne Peterson- Stephan led a class entitled, *Trauma Informed Faith*. There was no class on Memorial Day Weekend. Classes resumed on September 8.

Chapel Classes for September - Rev. Sara conducted a series on Progressive Biblical Interpretation 101 (4-part series)

Chapel Classes for October- were conducted by Joel Givens on the subject of Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. (4-part series)

Chapel Classes for November consisted of Reverend Timothy's two sessions on *Theologies of Communion* (November 3 and 10). On November 17 Erin Ness, the executive director of St. Joseph Mission Shelter, spoke on *the Current State of Homelessness in Fort Wayne*. Reverend Sara held a one session class on the subject *A Spirituality of Gratitude in Difficult Times* on November 24.

Chapel Classes for December included sessions led by Patty Meriwether and Laurel VanAmerongen entitled *“The Changing Landscape of Gender Identity”*.

We are so blessed with an abundance of gifted Pastors and teachers, church members and guests from within our community to lead us in this most compassionate ministry of the church.

Respectfully submitted,
Reggie Troutt, Chair

Peace & Justice

PJs met regularly; here is a brief summary of our work this year:

Action Teams:

- reviewed the work of, and financially assisted (when requested) the action teams
- set up and implemented a process for action teams to submit budgets for the upcoming year and to make financial requests through PJ's when planning events

Peacemakers:

- fulfilled a funding assistance request
- represented Plymouth with a table at the Peacemakers concert in October

Peace Scholarship:

- reviewed applications for the Peace Scholarship
- awarded two scholarships

Funding and support:

- continued support of Study Connection, fulfilling funding requests as needed
- contributed financial support to other organizations' peace and justice related initiatives

Food distribution :

- set up a designated coordinator for Plymouth food contributions to manage how random donations of food (other than those connected with a particular food drive) are distributed either to the community food locker in the parking lot or to other organizations, so they do not languish in the donation bin.

Submitted by Linda Hite

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE BOARD

In January 2024 the Congregational Life board met for our first meeting of the new year and selected our chair, recorder, financial secretary and purchaser. In February, we had a successful chili cook-off with a larger crowd than expected to play euchre and enjoy the time together. On February 13, we planned and executed a wonderful Shrove Tuesday event, serving over 60 people with pancakes and sausage. We offered plain and blueberry pancakes and other fruit options with a lot of compliments.

March brought the planning of Easter breakfast for which we served several casseroles alongside sausage gravy and biscuits with fruit. We also hosted a lunch for potential new members and organized the kitchen to be more fluid for us as a group and decided to change the donut order to accommodate the influx of demand.

May was an active month for our board as we were planning and getting everything ready for the ice cream social and Pentecost. Nate secured two large cakes and Molly Jordan from Oh Five Scoop Shop donated three large tubs of ice cream. We had 91 people come through to enjoy a delicious piece of cake (or one of each flavor provided) and the wonderful ice cream.

In July we welcomed Rev. Timothy back from sabbatical with a reception after worship. We also worked as a group preparing for the Tin Caps game, which was a sell out! Everyone had a great time, and we plan to keep that tradition alive as long as there is interest.

In August we hosted the Plymouth Church Picnic at David Heffner Park with an incredible turnout. We had plenty of food and games. The venue was amazing, and we booked it for the year 2025 right away.

In November we hosted a second lunch for potential new members, and we planned for Luminous Night and Las Posadas services in December. AJ Calkins prepared Thanksgiving dinner again this year.

In December, the board provided cookies and hot cocoa for the reception following the Luminous Night service, and provided a celebratory meal following the Las Posadas procession on Sunday, December 8.

Respectfully Submitted by
Nathan (Nate) Vanover Board Chair

Standish Colony Circle

The Standish Colony Circle consists of members and friends of Plymouth Church who donate to nonprofit agencies serving families the proceeds from fundraising projects (sweet pepper jelly, prepaid orders for Christmas wreaths, and a variety of items made and donated to their Makers' Group [formerly Knit and Kibitz] sale). With the name change, there was an expansion in the variety of items available for sale and for silent auction bidding.

Sweet Pepper Jelly: \$1,416.49
Christmas Wreaths: \$314.80
Makers' Group: \$1,029.00

TOTAL: \$2,760.29

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Balthaser, Financial Secretary



DEACONS' WORSHIP BOARD

According to the by-laws, The Deacons Worship Board is primarily responsible for providing the congregation with sacraments and prayer services and other related tasks.

Deacons assisted in services and provided the elements for communion every first and third Sundays and also helped assist with the fifth Sunday prayer services. We also participated in Maundy Thursday and Good Friday observances, as well as fellowship of the music series events.

We welcomed Tony Kell and Vicki Kruse onto our board. and put things in place for membership review in conjunction with Rev.Timothy. We are at the beginning of the process of the review and will pick it back up at the beginning of the 2025 year.

Our Director of Music Robert Nance was able to purchase new instruments this year, and also had musical events here at Plymouth Church.

We also were able to purchase several Christmas trees for the church including a new large tree for the Folsom Room and Narthex and two for behind the pastor's chairs. This helps to welcome in the Christmas season.

The Ushers have been successful in welcoming in new guests and members and have aided in services held in the church, led by Jason Vanover and a good group of volunteers. This is an important part of our board and we are all thankful for their service and commitment.

The Board members for the 2024 year were Jason Vanover, Claire Simms, Tony Kell, Wayne Peterson-Stephan, Vicki Kruse and Carol Patterson.

We also had the great honor of Mary Bir as a Deacon, though she decided because of health issues to step down. Mary is greatly missed on the board.

Respectfully Submitted by
Jason Vanover
Board Chair

Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival Committee

The 48th annual Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival again filled Plymouth Church on December 29 and 30 respectively. Festival services were enjoyed at 5:30 pm and 8:00 pm and this year, fell on a Sunday and Monday evening. Kara Jaurigue completed her second year as Festival Director, which she could not have done without the help from everyone on the production team. Jim Schmidt, former Director, again enjoyed watching his family in the festival along with his wife Jeanette, and he plans to help behind the scenes or in the cast in the future.

As per tradition, the production team and volunteers arrived on December 26th at 10:00am to prepare the sanctuary, put up the set, clear out all necessary spaces, set out props and get the building ready for 5 days of Festival fun in the church.

Production Team members include: Robert Nance, Rob Getrost, Beth Walker, Misha Chemey, Brandy Logan, Maddie Hartman, Eric Miller, Laura McCoy, Meredith Minchski, Karen Neisus-Roeger, Roger Eversole, Emma Walker, and Christopher Hartman.

Our Festival Costume Crew works hard all year long to create, build and repair existing costumes, then arrive in November to begin work for the upcoming cast. This year our **Costume Crew** was Chad Logan, Maggie Fiedler and Sue McCurdy. I want to mention Jim Clouser who has worked on the crew for the past several years, but this year a move, and health issues for both him and his wife Carol kept him away. Finding volunteers to cover our child areas is

one of the hardest places to “cast” folks. Our **Parent volunteers** that covered the Sprite Room and Youth Center, which houses our children when they are not in the sanctuary, need mentioned, and thanked! Thank you to *Michelle Grim, Amanda Minchski, Katie Watson, Emma Bowen, Kate Hollingsworth, Stevie Sheets and Vivan Bickley*. Our **Make Up Artists**, *Janice Furtner and Elyse Jaurigue* assisted the cast with stage makeup for each service.

The Festival this year was composed of 154 cast members, close to 100 musicians, and a crew of close to 50 people. Again, our cast has two members who have been involved all 48 years: *Jim Clauser and Louise Misegades*.

The entire Plymouth staff continued to offer great support for the Festival. This year, last minute staff changes made things interesting, to say the least. The production team and I want to extend the biggest **THANK YOU** to *Tony Ray*, our new Office Manager. Tony came in brand new, knowing nothing of Boars Head and he ROCKED IT! He jumped in and gave 120% to help prepare for our beloved festival. Thank you to *Jake Slone* for again helping with all things tickets, printing and mailing. Thank you to *John Holderele* and a big shout out to *Jamal Taylor* for being the custodian on duty during the festival, as this is no easy job! Jamal was ready and able to take care of anything that was needed while Plymouth hosted approximately 800 people each night.

Our Festival Patrons are a critical part of this production, and Boars Head could not happen without their financial support. At the time of this report, over 100 people/families donated to this year's production, and while those numbers are still coming in, we feel confident in our donations this year. A QR code was added to the program and it looks like that was a successful addition as \$325.00 was collected using that method. We hope this will continue to be a way for people to donate during and after the festival.

The weeks and months leading up to the festival can feel hectic, but there is a wonderful inner feeling for those of us who are involved. The experience of tradition is revealed to all of us during “Let All Mortal Flesh” and as the characters of Mary and Joseph carry that small bundle out of the sanctuary, while the Congregation sings. A small child in the arms of Rev. Timothy Murphy and Katie Watson, carrying the Christ flame into the world, as the sounds of the harp “In the Bleak Midwinter” whispers to the silent, dimly lit sanctuary. We value and honor the gift Plymouth offers the community each year and we look forward to the 49th annual Boar’s Head and Yule Log Festival (and plans are in the works for the 50th anniversary!)

Respectfully submitted,
Kara Jaurigue, Artistic Director

Committee Members: Maestro Robert Nance (Music Director)

Music Ministry

I am privileged to present my 25th Annual Report on the activities of the Music Ministry at Plymouth Congregational Church. I, along with members of the Music Committee, volunteers and music associates have worked diligently to present opportunities for faith enrichment through the arts. We have accomplished this through our parochial programs, our outreach through the music series and partnerships with other area non-profits in the community. We continue to focus on ways to help local artists maintain their livelihoods by generously sharing our facilities for them to perform and rehearse and, when possible, presenting them in concert.

Highlights of 2024:

On January 14, Plymouth Music Series presented our annual community Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. commemoration program. The service was performed with a live audience as well as live-streamed on our YouTube channel. The service featured Thee Combo (Robert Nance, Brad Kuhns and Dave Mendenhall), Janice Furtner, Rev.



Timothy Murphy, Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals, Rev. Raymond Dix, Rev. Bill McGill, Pastor Karen Staton, Rev. Timothy Lake, and Rev. Angelo Mante, Rabbi Meir Bargeron, and singers from Heartland Sings, Pilgrim Baptist Church and Plymouth Church.

On February 18 the music series presented the Neue Wind Octet, a group that got its start at Plymouth Church which has championed local artists and encouraged and supported their work.

On March 10 the music series presented a unique piano concert in the Folsom Room featuring Robert Nance; we served light food and beverage. The event was also live-streamed via our YouTube Channel.

March 24-31 was Holy Week during which the music ministry provided special music from Palm Sunday, to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter.

On April 14 we said goodbye to Phil Slane, who resigned his post as associate musician to move to Michigan. He was honored in worship for his years of service with a tribute by Robert Nance. During the service, all the children gathered around Phil to sing “This Little Light of Mine.”

The music series presented the “What is Truth Seminar 2.0” on Saturday May 4 and Sunday May 5. This year’s event featured storyteller Valerie Tutson, the Rev. Sara Ofner Seals, Maestro Robert Nance and vocal artists David Bobay and Sydney Fabregas. The Saturday event featured an interactive seminar of stories, music and activities throughout the day. Then on Sunday, Valerie Tutson participated in Sunday School and in worship.

In May, from the 19 through the 22, Plymouth provided access to the facilities for 18 international opera singers who were in town to compete in the Heartland Sings Vocal Competition. During their residency in Fort Wayne, these emerging professionals enjoyed the hospitality of the church where they rehearsed, competed, performed in competition, attended two workshops, and were interviewed for television. They stayed just blocks away at The Bradley Hotel. They performed in concert with Heartland Sings Vocal Artists and Orchestra in “A Night at the Opera”, which was attended by a live audience and a televised audience as well.

During the summer, the Plymouth Music Series hosted three concerts. On July 14, vocalists Antonio Azpiri and Wagner Pastor performed a duet recital. On August 4, Oboist John Uchal performed a recital. On August 18, we presented a New Orleans Jazz concert outdoors in the parking lot just north of the church. As a gesture of appreciation to Plymouth Church for all they do to support the arts, Heartland Sings donated the use of their mobile stage (called the ART-V™) for this event.

On August 28, the Music Ministry began the fall season of Wednesday Night Live activities with dinner and activities for children by Sweetcakes entertainment (balloons and face painting). Also in August, we welcomed Maryrose Beerman to the post of Music Associate, replacing Phil Slane.

On September 8, we started off the church year sharing programming information with the congregation at the annual church fair. Then on September 22, the music series presented “Peace Like a River: Hymns, Psalms and Spiritual Songs of Peace.” This concert was a participatory hymn-sing, featuring Plymouth’s Sanctuary Singers, the Plymouth Bell Ensemble and narrator Janice Furtner.

On September 29, the church honored director of music Maestro Robert Nance for his 25-years of service to Plymouth Church. In addition, Maestro Nance delivered a sermon on creativity entitled, “The Divinity Within.”

In October, Plymouth participated in Heartland Sings’ production of Karl Jenkins THE PEACEMAKERS. This community event involved 8 different social service agencies who displayed tables at the event to share with the audience information about their organization and their work toward a peaceful, peace centered community. The overall project was designed to address the issue of violence in our community with a particular focus on gun violence.

On October 17, the Governor of Indiana, the honorable Eric Holcomb, awarded Maestro Nance with the Sagamore of the Wabash award for his distinguished service to the state of Indiana by virtue of his work in the

community, for founding the vocal arts company Heartland Sings which has changed the cultural landscape in NE Indiana and has impacted the region and beyond, and for his commitment to advocating for the arts and the artists who create it for the community's betterment.

On November 17, the music series presented mezzo soprano Meridian Prall and pianist Robert Nance in recital. Ms. Prall is a native of Fort Wayne, studied music for a time with Maestro Nance at Heartland Sings, earned her degrees in vocal performance as an opera singer and won the 2024 Metropolitan Opera Vocal Competition. Her performance was dynamic and inspiring, and was live-streamed via our YouTube channel.

On December 15, the music series presented "Feliz Navidad." This program featured the Spanish language community choir, Canto de Corazón, under the direction of Maestro Robert Nance and guitarist Cote Godoy. This choir was created with support from Plymouth Church Benevolence, Heartland Sings, and the Renaissance branch of Fort Wayne YMCA with a goal to provide an opportunity to sing exclusively in Spanish for the purpose of bringing two cultures together through music to engender greater understanding.

From December 28-30, we presented the 48th Annual Boar's Head & Yule Log Festival Service in the sanctuary of Plymouth Church. This year's presentation featured a chorus of 46 plus a 20-piece orchestra all under the direction of Maestro Robert Nance.

On December 31, we said goodbye to Maryrose Beerman who for the past four months served as our associate musician. Our sister congregation, Peace UCC, was in need of a musician and Maryrose decided to answer their call for a music director. While we were sad to see her go, we were grateful for the time we had with her and wish her much success in leading the music ministry at Peace UCC.

General Program Information:

The Plymouth Music Ministry has a wide range of opportunities for musicians of all levels. Opportunities range from the Sanctuary Singers (choir for older youth and adults), Youth Music opportunities (high school and middle school), Children's Choirs (PreK-2, 3-5), Plymouth Bell Ensemble (older youth to adults), Thee Combo (contemporary piano, bass, percussion ensemble), and various individually tailored opportunities for interested members of the congregation to share their talent in worship.

The Music Ministry is a steward of some of the finest musical resources in the city, including an extensive music library and excellent instruments.

The music library is quite a treasure trove of choral, handbell, keyboard and orchestral selections. We continue to make improvements to the music library with ongoing maintenance, including retirement of titles, replacement of deteriorating or lost copies of titles, new storage boxes, and the acquisition of new music.

Plymouth is blessed with some of the finest instruments in the city, which are openly available to qualified musicians and students when schedules permit. We have a custom made Allen Digital Renaissance Concert Organ (largest of its type in the region), two concert-grade Steinway grand pianos, a Yamaha AvantGrand™ digital grand piano (not portable), a Yamaha P-250 digital keyboard (substantial yet portable), a 4-Octave set of Malmark Handbells and a 4-octave set of Choir Chimes, a substantial set of Orff Instruments, various percussion instruments and sundry other instruments used for the musical education. All of the instruments are carefully maintained and the quality of Plymouth's musical instruments and equipment ranges from good to outstanding. We are blessed to be the stewards of such equipment for our use in worship, special services and concerts.

All in all, it has been a good year, and I am grateful to the many members and staff who have risen to help offer music for worship and public outreach concerts. I continue to make it a priority to present concerts from Plymouth as often as possible featuring the many talented folks at Plymouth Church as well our local musicians who help to contribute to the quality of life in our community.

Music Ministry Staff:

Robert Nance, Director of Music

Timothy Cunningham, Music Associate

Phil Slane, Music Associate (Jan - March) | Maryrose Beerman, Music Associate (September - December)

Music Subcommittee:

Anne Hughes, Chair; Jan Younger, Linda Balthaser, Janice Furtner, Jane Meredith, Eric Miller, and Virginia Zimmerman

EVANGELISM AND MARKETING BOARD

E & M continues to work at being the face of Plymouth in our community, taking advantage of opportunities to share our four covenants with people of greater Fort Wayne.

We passed out materials and chatted with people at the Interfaith Services Fair at Indiana Tech, Pride Fair at Purdue Fort Wayne, and Queer Puppet Shows held by the Center for Non-Violence at the Main Library. Volunteers from E & M and other Plymouth members staffed a resource table at Fort Wayne Pride in July, and as usual, Plymouth had a good representation in the festival parade.

Record numbers of attendees and organizations marked our third annual Pride at Plymouth at the end of June. We owe much of this success to the assistance of a Pride Task Force, and especially Pastor Sara. Many volunteers put in time to decorate, move equipment, provide staffing for organization and activity tables, and interact positively with all our visitors and presenters. The sanctuary was full for the family-friendly drag show, with coverage by the Journal Gazette and local news stations.

We provided sponsorships to the following local organizations: Wellspring, Positive Resource Connections, Road to Recovery, Interfaith Community Thanksgiving Service, support of our partner Union Baptist Church in their building kick-off, and a successful supply drive for Fairfield Elementary.

We also continue to sponsor Tapping Into Faith, which meets the last Monday of each month at Mad Anthony's. Pastor January Simpson provides leadership for this, and E & M pays for appetizers for the group. Average attendance was approximately 15, with a mix of Plymouth people and friends. This also provides a positive and inclusive face to employees and other patrons at Mad Anthony's.

Publicity focused on WBOI promotional messages which mention our four covenants. In the coming year, we will also be recognized on the WBOI Honor Roll which includes a link to the Plymouth web site on the wboi.org web page and an extra on-air mention each week. We placed ads in the Fort Wayne City Guide which is distributed throughout Fort Wayne, and in Fort Wayne Magazine's "Best of Fort Wayne" fall issue. We do few newspaper ads, as we have seen little response to them. We do continue to advertise in the annual Fort Wayne Pride special issue of the Journal Gazette. We also receive varying levels of publicity through the previously listed sponsorships and resource tables at community events. Facebook and Instagram are our primary social media methods of advertising, and when Plymouth members share our updates on their own pages it compounds exposure. We benefited from excellent local television and newspaper coverage of Pride at Plymouth. With the assistance of Pastor Sara we updated the graphics and information on our church sign board. The church web page has been modified to include the availability of sign language interpretation at morning worship. This information is also being added to the sign board and will be part of WBOI promos starting in January.

E&M members for 2024: Michele Dollarhite, Mark Friskney, Trevor Harkenrider, Nathan Rupp, Emma Walker and Dawn Wiley.

Vicky Pogue, Chair



journalgazette.net
Pride month wraps up with 3rd annual celebration at Plymouth...

HUMAN RESOURCES BOARD

The Human Resources Board had a productive year, accomplishing two key tasks that will benefit both current and future employees of Plymouth Congregational Church.

As the board with the largest budget, we continually face the challenge of providing our excellent church staff and ministers with appropriate income and benefits.

Health Insurance Program

2024 marked the first full year under our new health insurance program. Previously, we offered health insurance through a United Church of Christ benefit plan, but due to excessive costs, we sought an alternative. After a challenging transition at the end of last year, this year's renewal went smoothly, allowing us to offer a valuable benefit to our staff while managing costs effectively.

Staff Changes

Staff changes in 2024 including the departure of Office Manager Tina Puitz and Communication Specialist Elizabeth Pruitt. We are pleased to welcome Anthony (Tony) Ray as our new Office Manager.

Maryrose Beerman joined us for the last half of the year as the Associate Music Director. At the end of 2024 she will be leaving Plymouth and taking on a full time role at Peace UCC.

Budget Management

The Human Resources Board operated within its 2024 budget and ended the year with a surplus.

Additional Activities in 2024:

1. Reviewed staff evaluations prepared by senior department administrators, including the Senior Pastor and Associate Pastor.
2. Reviewed Plymouth's current health insurance and pension plans.
3. Updated the current Human Resources Policy.
4. Prepared and submitted the Annual Human Resources Board Budget to the Stewardship and Finance Board.
5. Monitored monthly expenditures of the Human Resources Budget.

Collaborated with other boards and committees on human resources-related issues as needed.

Board Member Departures

As 2024 ends, we say goodbye to long-time HR Board members Margie Dougherty and Laura Ramsey. Both have extensive backgrounds in Human Resource management, and their expertise will be missed. Laura dedicated countless hours to creating the HR Board budgets. Her financial acumen was a tremendous asset and will be challenging to replace. I am grateful to have worked with both Laura and Margie for the past few years.

Respectfully Submitted by John Hoffman, Human Resources Board Chair

Board Members: John Hoffman (Chair), Margie Dougherty, Laura Ramsey, Becky Hollingsworth, Kristin Steckbeck-Bilinski, Anne Rolland

Staff Consultant: Rev. Timothy C. Murphy

PROPERTY BOARD

After some very large-scale projects in 2023, the Property Board has focused on finishing some of those projects and some smaller scale improvements around the Plymouth building. Many of these improvements are in keeping with the church's covenant to be good stewards of our environment. Renovations to the Folsom Room and lighting for the Boar's Head Festival were finished. This also included converting all of the lighting in the Folsom Room over to

LED. Toilets throughout the building were replaced with low flow toilets. An energy audit was performed by Energy for Purpose and was completely paid for by grants. Many of the recommendations from the audit have already been implemented and more are in the works. The Green Team has been working on making sure that our solar panels are working of full capacity and the Property Board has been working with them to make the needed repairs and improvements. All of these projects have helped in keeping energy cost increases for the church to a minimum. Utilities make up about 40% of the PB budget, or around \$47,000 annually, so working to limit or even reduce these costs is vitally important to the church's finances.

While the Property Board's budget is substantial, the bulk of that budget goes to utilities (\$47,000), property insurance (\$20,000), and general repairs to the HVAC system and other parts of the building (\$31,500). The expenses for most of the improvements and maintenance you see around the building are paid for through the Major Maintenance and Replacement Fund. 30% of the funds generated by the church's endowments are placed into this fund and allow us to maintain the quality of our property as well as have funds available for any unforeseen issues in the future. After some very large expenditures in 2023, the focus this year has been on allowing the balance in this fund to grow. The fund had a balance of \$108,660 in January of this year and will be around \$140,000 at the end of the year. Even with this modest increase, we were still able to finish payments for the Folsom Room renovation and the Boar's Head lighting upgrades as well as pay for the smaller projects listed above.

Other improvements you may have noticed around the building include: the new awning over the Berry St. entrance, landscaping improvements around the parking lot, and new cabinets in the Folsom Room which were designed and constructed by Sam Lipscomb. This year also saw the formation of a volunteer landscaping team led by Gary Kerr. This team has saved the church several thousands of dollars in landscaping expenses.

A huge shoutout also goes to our team of building staff including John Hoelderle and Jamal Taylor. While we may not see them here on Sunday, we can rest assured that they are here throughout the week working to keep our building in pristine condition and completing the necessary projects around the property.

Respectfully submitted,
Barrett Seals

Board Members: Clara Bowling, Janelle Couture, Barb Duch, Gary Kerr, Samuel Melo, and Sam Lipscomb

STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE BOARD

The expected work of the Board is addressed at each meeting. Monthly financials prepared by the church Financial Administrator Stephen Cook are reviewed by Treasurer Doug Powers and Assistant Treasurer Jan Evrard. Board minutes prepared by John Escosa are also reviewed and Jean Vrabel coordinates the volunteers who prepare the weekly receipts deposits. Rev. Timothy shares items needing Board attention or discussion.

Besides the normal flow of Board work, this year the Board spent considerable time working on 4 significant projects:

- Completion of the 5 year audit and implementation of recommendations contained in the audit
- Assuring that the church endowment is managed in accordance with the church's policies
- Recognizing that the church's membership demographics are changing and planning for the impact those changes are having on current and future budgets and programs.
- Updating and using an annual church budget process that is timely and workable for the boards and committees of the church

In March the board was notified that all requested data had been provided for the 5 year audit conducted by the accounting firm Dulin Ward and DeWald. The 5 year audit has been completed, printed and distributed. Adjusting internal processes, making adjusting entries, and providing for new accounting requirements took several months.

PNC Bank announced in March that the management of the church's endowment had been assigned to the South Bend office from Fort Wayne. That prompted the board to have board members Doug Powers and Ian McCormick

initiate numerous discussions with PNC focusing on adhering to the church investment policies and the endowment's investment strategies. This has been an ongoing project and will continue into 2025.

Preparing for the 2025 annual budget was a major responsibility of the Board. In early summer, Ian McCormick and Laura Ramsey, serving as member-at-large, worked with the Stewardship Campaign task force to plan for the Fall Stewardship campaign. At the same time, Doug Powers worked with the board to review the previous year's budget preparation process. From that review, the 2025 budget timeline was shared with boards and committees in June. Their initial budgets were submitted in October. All anticipated income sources have been identified and boards will make necessary adjustments to in order to present a balanced budget at the annual congregation meeting in January 2025.

During 2024 the Stewardship and Finance Board became acutely aware of its responsibility to provide oversight of the church's assets and resource. At the same time, we strive to do the work of the church. The joy is knowing that our congregation is so blessed to have so many members who give so generously of their time, talents, and resources.

Respectfully submitted,
Richard Conklin, Board chair

Board members: Richard Conklin, John Escosa, Jan Gibson, Ian McCormick, and Jean Vrabel. Douglas Powers, Treasurer, and Jan Evrard, Assistant Treasurer, also served on this Board.

Staff supports: Rev. Timothy C. Murphy and Stephen Cook, Financial Administrator

Benevolence Committee

The Benevolence Committee, a subsidiary of the Stewardship and Finance Board, presents the following report of benevolence fund distributions for 2024.

Following the review of grant applications at our February meeting, the Benevolence Committee approved 25 awards as part of the grants program, including regular denominational support, **totaling \$99,959**. Of note, the amount awarded to the Indiana/Kentucky Conference was increased by \$2000 in 2024. Awards are distributed in four scheduled payment groups in April, June, September, and October. This schedule is maintained to assist in balancing revenues and distributions for cash flow purposes. A complete list of agencies and organizations receiving 2024 awards follows this report.

The Benevolence Committee also oversees the Emma Feigley fund. Managed very similar to the benevolence grants program, earnings from this account are used to fund applications submitted for consideration. The advantage of this fund is that applications may be considered throughout the year as long as there are funds available. The following applications were approved and funded in 2024:

• Foster Grandparents	\$2000
• Beth Walker for Bloomingdale Elementary	\$ 750
• Michelle Grim for Weisser Park Elementary	\$2250
Total Awarded in 2024	\$5,000

Additionally, the Benevolence Committee works with office staff to track funds collected for special offerings and then generate a check request for the disbursement of those funds. The committee uses the amount reported in the approved financials for the month following the collection of a special offering as the amount collected for reporting purposes. Totals are reported in the year they are disbursed, which may not be the same year they are collected. The following lists the special offering disbursements in 2024:

• One Great Hour of Sharing – denominational offering	\$2536
• Strengthen the Church – denominational offering	\$3492
• Global Mission Partner – Plymouth offering	\$2509

(New in 2024; recipient may change annually)

Organization	Awarded	April	June	Sept.	Oct.
Denominational Support					
OCWM-IN/KY Conference (UCC)	\$37,000.00	\$9,000.00	\$9,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$14,000.00
Open and Affirming (UCC)	\$5,000.00				\$5,000.00
CUE Seminaries (UCC)	\$5,000.00				\$5,000.00
Denominational Support Total	\$47,000.00				
Benevolence Grants					
Dr. Bill Lewis Center for Children	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00			
Blue Jacket	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00			
Center for Nonviolence	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00			
Creative Women of the World	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00			
Faith in Indiana, Allen Co. Chapter	\$1,959.00	\$1,959.00			
Give Hear	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00			
Growing Hope Globally	\$1,000.00				\$1,000.00
Homebound Meals	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00			
Indiana Center for Middle East Peace	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00			
Just Neighbors (IHN)	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00			
Lisa's Legacy	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00			
Long Term Care Ombudsman	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00		
Matthew 25	\$1,000.00		\$1,000.00		
Mustard Seed	\$1,000.00		\$1,000.00		
My Autism Ally	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00			
St. Joseph Missions	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00		
Positive Resource Connection	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00		
Thirteenth Step House	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00		
USF Jesters	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00		
Wellspring	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00		
Wi'am Center	\$1,500.00		\$1,500.00		
Benevolence Grants Total	\$32,959.00				
Capacity Building Grants					
Madina Village School, Inc.	\$20,000.00			\$20,000.00	
Capacity Grants Total	\$20,000.00				
		\$25,459.00	\$24,500.00	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00
Benevolence Disbursements 2024	\$99,959.00			\$99,959.00	

• Christmas in July – denominational offering	\$960
• Neighbors in Need – denominational offering	\$2372
• 2023 Thanksgiving Offering – Plymouth Offering	\$1089
• 2023 Christmas Offering – Plymouth Offering	<u>\$2263.50</u>
Total disbursed in 2024	\$15,221.50

Because our building is a valuable asset used by a variety of organizations within the community, it is the practice of the Benevolence Committee to track the use of the building and determine the monetary value of that contribution to the community. **For 2024 that value is \$27,340.**

2024 Benevolence Committee Members: Allen Haynes, Co-Chair; Wayne Peterson-Stephen, Co-Chair; Jim Lasley; Mark Friskney; Beth Walker; Cher Jackson; Susan Bollinger

Staff Consultants: Rev. Timothy C. Murphy; Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals

Growing Hope Globally Task Force

For the 20th year, Plymouth Church and its Congregation have supported a Global Mission Covenant by contributing to Growing Hope Globally. Our 2024 contributions as of October 31st total \$6,013, which include a \$1,000 Plymouth Benevolence grant. This will be combined with contributions from Peace UCC and Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren to make a joint donation to Growing Hope Globally. Last year the Growing Hope Globally organization served more than 211,00 people in 45 agricultural development programs in 31 countries.

This year the Task Force reaffirmed its commitment to Growing Hope Globally. We organized a joint Harvest celebration with Peace UCC, Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren and its local Farmers in Ashley, Indiana.

What does Growing Hope Globally do? They partner with local farmers and rural & urban churches like Plymouth to help international families and communities break the cycle of hunger and poverty to lead healthier, more productive lives. Plymouth church members have in the past helped communities in Honduras as well as Burkina Faso in West Africa.

Growing Hope Globally supports programs such as building water storage, providing eco stoves, developing water intolerant seeds and improving farming techniques. This in turn increases money available to the family and the potential for an improved quality of life. Participants are committed to pass this information forward to others in their community.

Respectfully submitted,
Katie and Charlie Carboneau, Growing Hope Globally Leadership

Grants and Scholarships Committee—Report will be added at a later date

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating Committee works to identify church members willing to serve on Boards and as Officers of the church. Our work begins by checking in with the people currently serving whose terms are due to expire to see if they can serve again (there are term limits) and to ask if they would be willing to serve again. Our next step is to determine how many vacancies we need to fill and then we begin to identify potential candidates for these openings. The committee shares the responsibility of contacting potential candidates. We share the responsibilities of the vacancy with the candidate - and ask them if they would be willing to serve.

Our first meeting was on the last day of February 2024, and we met monthly through May. The committee worked together very well. We were able to fill all vacancies in what may be record time – finishing in June!

We presented a complete slate of nominees in October to the Executive Council and the congregation at the Annual

Election Meeting. The congregation affirmed our work by approving the slate of candidates.

Thank you to all church members who agreed to renew or accept a position to serve beginning in January 2025. We would encourage any church members interested in serving in the future to speak with one of the pastoral staff members – or the Nominating Committee chair – to express your interest. We will begin our work again in Spring, 2025 to fill vacancies for 2026. Hearing from church members about their interest in serving is always good news for our committee! Please let us know.

I would like to extend my personal Thanks to the 2024 committee members: Lowell Beineke, Laura Coon, Ann Filler, Monty Millage, Laura Rudolph and Bill Vrabel – you were all a pleasure to serve with! Thanks also to Staff Consultants Rev. Timothy Murphy and Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals – and their superb spreadsheet mastery!

Peace,
Beth Walker

Committee Members: Joe Bir, Ann Filler, Monty Millage, Patty Pendleton, Laura Rudolph, and Darlene Smith

Staff Consultants: Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy and Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals

CONFERENCE DELEGATES

2024 Indiana – Kentucky Conference UCC Annual Gathering

Celebrating 60 years of IKC, the Annual Gathering was August 23-24 held at St. Marks United Church of Christ in New Albany. The theme of the conference was “The Time is Now”. This year was a business meeting focusing on passage of the 2025-6 budgets, the revised Clergy Compensation Guidelines and the vote to have IKC become an open and affirming conference. Plymouth’s delegates to Conference were Ahnee Conner, Wayne Peterson-Stephan, and Lucy Hess. Also in attendance were church members Beth Walker, IN/KY Conference Board Chairperson, Allen Haynes, the Reverend Timothy Murphy, the Reverend Sara Ofner-Seals, and the Reverend January Simpson.

Friday morning began with Conference Minister Chad Abbott preaching from 2 Corinthians 6:1-13. Reverend Abbott reminded worshipers to stay grounded, to live expansively, to heal together, and to put one foot in front of the other leading with love.

Beth Walker, Conference Board Chairperson, opened the first Plenary Session at 9 am. The Conference Secretary, Reverend John Gardner, reported that 48 churches were represented with 126 delegates, 81 of whom were clergy and 45 were lay members. The following were approved: the conference standing rules, acceptance of the meeting agenda, approve the 2022 annual gathering minutes and the 2023 minutes. The Regional Ecumenical Partners, the Reverend Don Gilette and the Reverend Crystal Williams from DOC IN, the Reverend David Long Higgins from the Heartland Conference and the Reverend Melissa Holland from the Kentucky Council of Churches were welcomed. The Nominations for the Board of Directors and the Delegates to the General Synod for 2025-28 were presented and approved.

Next the 2025-2026 Budgets were presented and there was a period for questions and answers. Following that the revised Clergy Compensation Guidelines were presented with a question and answer opportunity. After a break, Dakota Robert, chair of the O&A committee, presented the process for consideration to be an Open and Affirming Conference. From the first invitation in 1985 from the National United Church of Christ to consider becoming O&A to the sponsorship of education sessions and survey collection among the IK churches brought this proposal for a vote. A spirited question and answer time followed.

Lunch served by the St. Marks committee was followed by the opportunity to meet with the various Ministry Teams of the Conference to learn about their activities.

The afternoon Plenary Session began after lunch. Reverend Chad Abbott reviewed the accomplishments in a State of the Conference message. Reverend Abbott cited the new framework for Clergy Compensation Guidelines, a unified commission on ministry, the Open and Affirming Proposal, and the development of conference resources based on courage, justice and education. He further urged the conference churches to support and build a sustaining conference to “do Jesus’ work energized by the knowledge that God is Just Beginning”. Next the three IK grants awarded this year were presented: 1) Carmel, IN-supported making an accessibility entrance into the church; 2) Louisville church used the funds to offset the expenses of seminary fees; and 3) Plymouth, Fort Wayne offered a Diversity through Art program featuring local artists of color.

A By-law amendment to the Personnel Handbook updated Article 7 item 3B so that Personnel or Human Resources committees were responsible to make sure policies adhered to the laws and provided clear guidelines to employees. This motion was presented, discussed and unanimously passed. After limited discussion, the Clergy Compensation Guidelines were moved, and unanimously passed.

After a short break, the 2025-2026 budgets were moved, with 2 motions for change reflecting a 12.5% decrease in 2025 of OCWM and in 2026 back to the standard 15% contribution. These were unanimously passed. The 2025-2026 budgets were approved.

Ministry Milestones Recognition and Awards were next recognizing the four clergy who had retired in 2023-24. The anniversary of ordination was recognized with one person having served 70 years. Of those receiving recognition, Reverend Don Kaufman, who was in interim at Plymouth between Reverend Dicken and Reverend Gardner, was recognized for 55 years, Ruth Phillips for 50 years and Susie O’Shaunessy, one of Plymouth’s own, for 30 years. There are 21 members in Discernment. Remembrance of those deceased was observed. An Award for service to the Pension Board for the success of the Christmas Fund was given to Paul Ramsey. The Lou and Mary Anna Speller Humanitarian Service Award went to Reverend Kay Pepmeier, and the Social Justice Award was given to Reverend Diane Snowa for her work with food insecurity at St. Andrews Church.

A joyous banquet followed in the evening reviewing accomplishments over the 60 years of the IK Conference.

Saturday’s Plenary Session began with a presentation of the Young Ambassadors program for teens who partner with teens from Germany. The program is 30 years old.

A Motion was presented to encourage all churches to donate an extra \$250 to \$1000 to the OCWM to help offset the deficit budget. After discussion, the motion passed. The O&A proposal was proposed; after a brief discussion a paper ballot was used. The vote was 96 yes and 6 no. The motion passed.

The Board Members were thanked for their service. St. Marks Church members and committees were thanked for their generous hospitality. The 2025 annual gathering will be August 22-23 at Plymouth UCC, Fort Wayne.

The conference ended with a worship service and communion. Reverend Teresa Walton O’Bannon gave an inspiring message to send everyone on their way energized to continued God’s work.

Respectfully submitted by:
Ahnee Conner, Wayne Peterson-Stephan, and Lucy Hess



Green Team cleaning up the River Greenway

Summary of Financial Information for the Year

Year: January 1 - December 31, 2024	2024 Actual	2024 Budget	2023 Actual
Resources:			
Contributions (pledges and gifts)	\$498,778	\$480,000	\$454,168
Other income (parking, rent, grants)	\$179,575	\$174,989	\$126,026
Endowment fund transfers	\$269,212	\$269,212	\$269,724
Total Resources	\$947,565	\$924,201	\$849,918
Expenses:			
Staff salaries and expenses	\$562,857	\$591,044	\$538,438
Office and other expenses	\$41,178	\$48,300	\$38,227
Building and grounds	\$125,072	\$127,251	\$120,994
Boards	\$37,870	\$51,505	\$45,410
Benevolences	\$102,468	\$99,959	\$98,532
Total Expenses	\$869,446	\$918,059	\$841,551
Rounding Entry			(\$2)
Net Surplus (Deficit)	\$78,119	\$6,142	\$8,365
Working assets (market value):			
Cash in checking	\$1,234,568		\$1,195,858
Endowment funds:			
Undesignated/Unrestricted	\$7,778,887		\$5,683,488
Designated (a.k.a. Special)	\$1,211,340		\$1,104,028
Total Assets	\$10,224,794		\$7,983,374

2024 Special Offerings and Other Benveolence Gifts

Organization	Amount Given
One Great Hour of Sharing	\$2,290
Neighbors In Need	\$2,632
Strengthen the Church	\$3,392
Christmas in July	\$960
Miss Virginia's Pantry (Thanksgiving)	\$1,228
Crossroad (Christmas)	\$3,041

Clerk Report

The Clerk collaborates with the Office Manager to make certain that there is a faithful record of membership rolls and proceedings of the Church. The data includes admissions of new members, removals of members, deaths, weddings and baptisms.

Below is a summary of member additions and removals for 2024. Twenty people became new Plymouth Church members. There were eight deaths and one transfer out, resulting in a net increase of eleven members.

Total Members as of January 1, 2024	433
Additions	
Letters of Transfers In	2
Affirmation of Faith	16
Baptism	2
Confirmation	0
Total Additions	20
Removals	
Deaths (members)	8
Deacons' Removal	0
Withdrawn by Request	0
Letters of Transfer Out	1
Total Removals	9
Total Members as of December 31, 2024	444

New Members

Name	Date	How Received
Mike Tulley	3/10/2024	Transfer in
Donald Tulley	3/10/2024	Transfer in
Brian Flory	3/10/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Kimberly Koczan Flory	3/10/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Ann Escosa Griffen	3/10/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Daveana Schieler	3/10/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Jeffrey Williams	3/10/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Maya Koczan-Flory	5/19/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Lucia Leal	5/19/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Claire Roney	5/19/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Owen Roney	5/19/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Jessica Conner	11/24/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Lilly Conner	11/24/2024	Baptism
Rylan Conner	11/24/2024	Baptism
Joy Grow	11/24/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Tina Grow	11/24/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Sue Hiatt	11/24/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Raymond Ledo-Blunt	11/24/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Nancy Messinger	11/24/2024	Affirmation of Faith
Melissa Richard	11/24/2024	Affirmation of Faith

Baptisms

Name	Date	Officiant
Lilly Conner	11/24/2024	Rev Timothy C. Murphy
Rylan Conner	11/24/2024	and Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals

Weddings

Name	Date	Officiant
Michael Lambert and Victor Seewald	12/18/2024	Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals

Deaths

Name	Date	Affiliation
Ross Sonday	1/31/2024	Member
Shirley Slater	5/13/2024	Member
John Congdon	8/11/2024	Member
John (Jack) Dyer	8/20/2024	Member
Dana Wichern	9/26/2024	Member
Bonnie Pennock	11/22/2024	Member
Carol Miller	11/30/2024	Member
William Spindler	12/9/2024	Member

Transfers Out

Name	Date
Betty Barry	2/29/2024

Respectfully submitted,
Katie Carboneau, Clerk

Moderator	Scott Avery
Assistant Moderator	Cammy Sutter
Treasurer	Doug Powers
Assistant Treasurer	Jan Evrard
Clerk	Katie Carboneau
Recorder	Molly Jordan
At-Large Members	Patty Pendleton
Youth Member	
Advisors: Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy, Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals	
Board Representatives: Christian Education —Reggie Troutt; Congregational Life —Nate Vanover; Deacons' Worship —Jason Vanover; Evangelism and Marketing —Vicky Pogue; Human Resources —John Hoffman; Property —Barrett Seals; Stewardship and Finance —Dick Conklin	





Collecting seeds at Eagle Marsh as part of the Green Team's Fall Fest



Local drumming group at ICMEP's drumming extravaganza



Special chapel class with guest Elaine Zoughbi