



# The Bell

**PLYMOUTH CHURCH**  
FORT WAYNE + UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
PLYMOUTHFW.ORG

## From the Senior Pastor

### Just Peace through Help Not Handcuffs Coalition

Plymouth UCC is a Just Peace congregation. It affirmed that covenant in 2008, inspired by the UCC's General Synod 1985 resolution and invitation to congregations to become Just Peace congregations. Those interested can read the original resolution here.



The following are just some of the claims and admonitions made in that Just Peace resolution:

- The State should be based upon participatory consent and should be primarily responsible for developing justice and well-being, enforcing law, and minimizing violence in the process.
- A local congregation should become a community of solidarity with the poor, seeking to be present in places of oppression, poverty, and violence, and standing with the oppressed in the struggle to resist and change this evil.
- A community of resistance, standing against social structures comfortable with violence and injustice.
- A community of political and social engagement, in regular dialogue with the political order, participating in peace and justice advocacy networks, witnessing to a Just Peace in the community and in the nation, joining the social and political struggle to implement a Just Peace.

As we sometimes reiterate in worship, justice and peace are connected. One of the most effective ways to lead to a lasting peace is to promote justice wherever there is oppression. That means that social activism and engagement are not simply complementary with our hope for peace; they are some of the primary means by which we seek a true peace or shalom in our society and world.

As part of that commitment to a just peace in Fort Wayne, I have been involved for the last 10 months in the Help Not Handcuffs Coalition. This effort has been focused on the proposed new jail construction in Allen County.

Negatively, the group has been opposed to the construction of a new jail, the building of which would be the most expensive public project in Allen County history.

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## Worship at Plymouth

Plymouth Church is currently offering an in-person worship service every **Sunday at 10:00 am** with our chapel class education hour at **9:00 am**. At this time, masks are optional but highly encouraged. Before worship, from **8:30 am to 9:45 am**, we offer a time of fellowship, with coffee provided, in the Folsom Room.

Our services are also livestreamed every **Sunday at 10:00 am**. These will be available on our [YouTube Channel](#). A link to our YouTube Channel will be posted on our [Facebook page](#) every **Sunday morning at 8:00 am** and included in the Weekly Digital Bulletin. Each livestream is uploaded to the Sermon Archive page on [our website](#) on **Monday mornings**.

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But positively, the coalition is focused on transforming how we address public safety, recognizing that many, perhaps a majority, of those incarcerated are themselves suffering from things like substance abuse, untreated mental health illnesses, and limited housing or employment opportunities. With a different system, one that looks options to redirect people away from incarceration and towards treatment all along the criminal justice system (before arrest, pre-trial, during incarceration, and post-release), we could reduce the jail population substantially and show that it is unnecessary to build a new jail with 50% or double the current one's capacity.

According to the VERA Institute, the jail incarceration rate in Indiana increased between 1980 and 2019 by 499% percent. That's not because crime rates quintuples. In reality, crime rates have largely declined since the 1990s, but Allen County's incarceration rate has remained elevated. That's why the current jail, originally built in 1981 to house 240 people, has added capacity over and over again through the latest expansion in 2001 to 732 beds. Building a new jail with even more capacity (for up to 1300) is simply following a failed 40-year trajectory.

Since April, the coalition has held press conferences on our concerns, led teach-ins in the community, sent delegations to public officials, spoken at public comment, helped organize folks in the community who will be most directly impacted, initiated a study of who is in the jail, filed an amicus brief with the federal case, and advocated for alternatives to incarceration commission to examine what programs are working and where are the gaps in treatment that are leading to our perpetual overincarceration program. We may be disruptive to the status quo, but that is consistent with the Just Peace resolution where it says:

"We affirm nonviolent conflict as inevitable and valuable, an expression of diversity and essential to healthy relationships among people and nations."

Escalation in tactics is sometimes necessary to achieve a just peace. Whether that means future nonviolence direct action and civil disobedience is a matter of discernment and strategy. But it would certainly not be the first time that those seeking a just peace would be called disturbers of the peace. In that, we would be in very good, dare we say it, even sacred company.

Peace,  
Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy



*Rev. Timothy Murphy and members of the Help Not Handcuffs Coalition outside the Allen County Community Corrections office in November 2022, getting ready to meet with Executive Director, Kim Churchward.*

## From the Associate Pastor



I've long held the belief that contemplative spiritual practices and contemplative spirituality can greatly enhance peace and justice work, particularly in the church. I've observed for many years how often those who work for peace and justice either burn out or grow angry, cynical, and frustrated in their work. I'm not alone in this observation. In his book, *Being Peace*, Thich Nhat Hanh wrote, "in the peace movement there is a lot of anger, frustration, and misunderstanding. The peace movement can write very good protest letters, but they are not yet able to write a love letter... Can the peace movement talk in loving speech, showing the way for peace? If we are not peaceful, then we cannot contribute anything to the peace movement. It would be wonderful if we could bring to the peace movement our contribution, our way of looking at things, that will diminish aggression and hatred. Peace work means, first of all, being peace."

I believe that for our justice work to be sustainable, we need to cultivate peace within ourselves—not for ourselves alone, but on behalf of our whole weary world. It's easy to burn out when it comes to justice work because the work seems never-ending. It can be thankless work, and there are often setbacks and disappointments. Therefore, it is important that we are rooted in a deep peace—the kind of peace that the apostle Paul talks about when he speaks of a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). In my experience, this kind of peace can most readily be found through contemplative spiritual practice—whether that's centering prayer, lectio divina, breath prayer, or other forms of meditation.

Call me naïve, but I really do believe that contemplative spiritual practices can be powerful tools when it comes to our work for peace and justice in our world. I might even go so far as to say that I believe that contemplative spiritual practices can save our world. Contemplative spiritual practice helps to ensure that our justice work is rooted in love and non-violence. It helps us approach our adversaries with more empathy and compassion, and therefore disrupts cycles of hate and anger. Contemplative spiritual practice helps us to be peaceful, even as we engage in the difficult work of seeking a just peace for all.

***“Contemplative spiritual practice helps to ensure that our justice work is rooted in love and non-violence. It helps us approach our adversaries with more empathy and compassion, and therefore disrupts cycles of hate and anger.”***

When we take time to be still and listen in silence for God's still small voice, we have the opportunity to touch the heart of divine love. That connection not only sustains us through the difficult work of peace and justice advocacy, but also helps us clarify our vision. Contemplation puts us in touch with God's dream of shalom for the world and helps us articulate what we are for, not just what we are against. Not only that, but through our individual practice, we come to better understand our particular role in the peace and justice movement. It's not realistic that every person would respond to every call to action and every injustice in the world. We all have a role to play and a unique calling to respond to. Part of the call to contemplation is a call to understand our distinct role in the healing and mending of the world.

Sacred activist Howard Thurman once said, “ask what makes you come alive and go do that, because what the world needs is more people who have come alive.” This quote echoes the words of second century theologian Irenaeus, who said that “the glory of God is the human person fully alive.” Contemplation helps wake us up and come alive to a God-soaked world. This aliveness has the power to fuel our work for a more just world, and sustain us through difficult and frustrating seasons. So may we all find ways to practice being in the presence of God, and may we be sustained by God's abiding peace. May we come alive to all the ways God is calling us to mend our world, and may we be invigorated to continue our work in imagining, seeking, and creating a more just and peaceful world. May it ever be so!

Peace,  
Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals



## From the Peace and Justice Committee

At the beginning of every worship service, we are reminded of our four covenants of Open and Affirming, Global Mission, Earthwise and Just Peace. These covenants not only state what we believe, but also guide our work. Just Peace is explained further by stating that there can be no real peace without justice and equity for marginalized, oppressed or those left behind, and our work is to pray and advocate for justice in this world for all people.

But I had some questions of where this term just peace came from, so I did a bit of research. I found that in the mid 80's a group of interdenominational Christian scholars set up a just peace framework as an alternative to war. This included practices such as supporting non-violent direct action, cooperative conflict resolution, advancing democracy, human rights and religious liberty, fostering just and sustainable economic development, and encouraging grassroots peacemaking groups.

So, I don't think that as a Just Peace congregation, we can actually accomplish all of these things, but we certainly agree with them, and are always reminded of their importance. I can honestly say that after leaving the weekly service, I am always thinking about the "work" I am doing or not doing to promote justice for others. Of course, this is due to the excellent sermons of Rev. Timothy and Rev. Sara by teaching us the radical teachings of Jesus. I can't thank them enough.

As chair of the Peace and Justice Committee, I invite you to join us on the **third Thursday of each month at 5:00 pm** in the Amistad Room. We are beginning to see that there are many of us in the congregation involved in various peace and justice issues, both inside and outside of Plymouth Church, but we are often not aware of this work. We hope to not only bring awareness to these task force groups, but also to help with their growth. If you have not already been invited to attend a Peace and Justice committee meeting, I invite you now.

Jan Evrard

## Plymouth: A Just Peace Congregation

Plymouth Church's four covenants are the foundation for the work we do. The four covenants are:

- Open & Affirming
- Just Peace Congregation
- Global Mission Church
- Earthwise Congregation

This year, the Bell will take on one of our covenants each quarter to showcase the work Plymouth does that aligns with our covenants. This is the first issue of 2023 and its focus is on the Just Peace covenant.

"We are ... a Just Peace congregation (2008), Through prayer, study, and worship, we seek those ways of peace that are rooted in justice and liberation for all people."

The following Plymouth groups live out the work mentioned in the Just Peace covenant:

- Peace and Justice Committee
- Environmental Action Team
- Reproductive Rights Action Team
- Afghan Refugee Taskforce
- Just Neighbors Team

Visit the Plymouth website at [www.plymouthfw.org](http://www.plymouthfw.org) to learn more about our covenants and how to get involved!





*Photos from various fun-filled days at the Marsh!*

## **Fun and Service at Eagle Marsh: Environmental Action Team**

I've always loved being outdoors enjoying nature. Both of my parents, Mary Jane and Dale Stedman, plus Girl Scout and YWCA camps reinforced that passion. My favorite activities in retirement have been volunteering as a trail guide, often at Eagle Marsh. So, when the Environmental Action Team (EAT) was being launched here at Plymouth, I quickly suggested a series of projects with the Seed-to-Marsh program at Eagle Marsh, part of the Little River Wetlands Project. The team was excited about the idea, and we began planning. So far, we've learned, played, and participated in the following wetlands restoration projects:

In February 2022 we invited church members to join us in the Folsom Room to learn about the Little River Wetlands Project and Eagle Marsh in particular. We all enjoyed a light lunch provided by Congregational Life folks while Aly Munger, Wetlands Educator, taught us about the importance of wetlands restoration and showed us beautiful nature photos. She explained how community members have saved and restored hundreds of acres for the good of the environment. Then, under Aly's guidance, we helped stratify seeds to prepare them for planting.

In March, church members and friends met at the marsh to plant seeds in large flats which we put in the hoop-house on the property. We also brought a few smaller flats to church so children could see the progress as the seeds sprouted. We then put on boots and hiked around a muddy trail, observing nature, and sharing knowledge about plants and animals. Some people learned to pond-dip, finding interesting creatures in the water.



In May we returned to the marsh where some of us got our hands dirty again, transplanting delicate seedlings into small pots. This gave them space to mature and gain strength for planting on the marsh. Again, those who wanted to took a nature hike, observing changes in the flora and fauna.

In October, the team decided we should invite everyone to meet in the evening for a Fall Festival at Eagle Marsh. We had a bonfire, hot cider, and s'mores. We walked along the edge of the barn pond and around trail eight, gathering seeds from dried blossoms of shore and prairie plants. The sun was setting, so we circled the bonfire for more snacks. You can see why EAT is a fitting name for our Environmental Action Team! Phil Slane and Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals led us in campfire songs and Rev. Sara shared a vesper meditation. The stars and moon were lighting the sky as we gave thanks to God for the beauty of creation and the camaraderie of our Plymouth family.

The EAT is already planning another marsh activity in addition to our work on composting, recycling, and environmental awareness. Stay tuned!

Jan Gibson, Environmental Action Team



## Renew, Refresh, Reboot: Standish Circle

Many of you are familiar with the three annual fundraisers conducted by the Standish Circle at Plymouth: pepper jelly, Christmas wreaths, and hand-knitted goods. We're proud of our products and plan to continue offering all of them in the future. As with many groups, COVID-19 affected our ability to continue with monthly meetings for over two years. As we prepared to head into 2023, we determined that there might be value in discussing options for the future.

The knitting group, known as Knit and Kibitz, was particularly interested in expanding its focus and membership by reaching out to others in the church who may not be knitters (or even kibitzers!) and inviting them to be part of the group. It was noted that our church is filled with a number of very talented and creative people...“makers” if you will. They include not only knitters and crocheters, but also poets, photographers, paper artists, weavers, painters, jewelry makers, beaders, woodworkers, floral designers and who knows what other creative talents are hidden among us!

We also discussed the fact that it might be great fun to use some of our monthly meeting dates learning from each other through demonstrations and/or hands-on mini workshops in a variety of artistic endeavors. Another observation was that the group certainly did not need to be limited to just women or those who identify as women...ALL are welcome and encouraged to be part of our “makers” group!

We will be working in the coming months to transition into this more expansive group of creators and would welcome ideas and input from any and all church members. We would also welcome new members into the group, regardless of whether your interest is in creating, or you wish to participate in just September jelly making and/or holiday wreath sales. If you want to be added to our communications list, please let us know by texting 260-750-6524 or emailing queenmum1948@icloud.com. Leave your name and contact information, and we will be in touch.

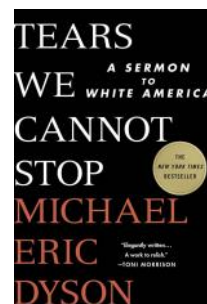
As in the past, all proceeds from our projects will be donated to selected nonprofit agencies serving families in need. It's the perfect way to give of our time, talent and treasure!

Let's make 2023 the year to expand our horizons and enjoy new arts and artists!

Kathy Kolb

### Want to Write for the Bell?

If you are interested in writing a 500-700 word article for the next issue of the Bell that relates to Plymouth's mission and covenants, please contact our Communications Specialist Elizabeth Pruitt at [edp@plymouthfw.org](mailto:edp@plymouthfw.org) or (260) 423-9424. In your email, please provide a summary of your article.



## Louise Folsom Library Book Review

The Louise Folsom Library (housed in the Amistad Room) has a great selection of books covering the topic of Just Peace.

*Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* by Michael Eric Dyson was written as parts of a sermon about racism in our country. Dyson is a Black Baptist minister. He shares many situations that both happened to him or he witnessed concerning racism.

I am among those white privileged persons who really had no idea what Black Americans experience daily. My parents never taught me how to stand if ever stopped by the police like Dyson's parents did for their son's safety. He taught his own children the same thing. My husband and I never taught our daughter anything like that because we felt we didn't have to.

Dyson contends that whites don't know or understand the history of black America because much of it has been eliminated or downplayed. Currently Florida is trying to take that history out of curriculum and textbooks.

I, like many others, take my whiteness for granted. Dyson shared scenes depicting how racism and ignorance are real problems yet today despite all the civil rights legislation.

I liked a quote by Dyson: “Justice is what love sounds like when it speaks in public.” Dyson and many others are speaking, we just need to listen.

Please stop by the Folsom Library and explore other books on the topic of Just Peace.

Terri Stumpf

## Plymouth Music Series Upcoming Programs

**Saturday, February 25 — 7:00 pm**  
**Symphony No. 1 in C-Sharp Minor**  
Composed by Howard Terrell.  
Performed by **Philharmonic Players Association**  
Maestro Robert Nance, conducting

**Sunday, March 5 — 4:00 pm**  
**A Concert for Ukraine**  
**Alexander Klepach, Piano**  
A public reception follows the concert.  
RSVP on Facebook [here](#).

**Sunday, April 16 — 4:00 pm**  
**Lisa Gerstenkorn, Contralto**  
RSVP on Facebook [here](#).

**Tuesday, April 25 — 7:00 pm**  
**Texas Boys Choir**  
Dr. Todd Prickett, artistic director.  
RSVP on Facebook [here](#).

**Friday - Sunday, May 5-7**  
**What Is Truth? An Exploration in Study, Story, & Song**  
Featuring Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate GM and VP, Justice and Local Church Ministries UCC, Valerie Tutson, storyteller; Robert Nance, keyboardist; various musical artists. More detailed information coming Spring 2023!

**Sunday, May 28 — 4:00 pm**  
**New Orleans Jazz Pentecost Celebration**  
Join us in celebration in the parking lot on Berry and Fairfield for a New Orleans Jazz-style Worship Service!  
RSVP on Facebook [here](#).



## ICMEP: A Voice of Conscience

From our first programs in 2005, Indiana Center for Middle East Peace (ICMEP) has been “a voice of conscience for peace, justice, human rights, and intercultural encounter.” One of the major reasons why our partnership with Plymouth Church has been so fruitful for these 18 years has been the harmony our ICMEP mission with Plymouth’s “just peace” covenant.

Our expanded mission is committed to:

1. challenging stereotypes, disinformation, intolerance, injustice, and prejudice in all its forms, including antisemitism and Islamophobia;
2. providing critical analysis of the cultures, movements, and issues in the Middle East;
3. promoting strategies of non-violent conflict resolution, social transformation, and sustainable peace;
4. supporting the theological, moral and legal principles for a just peace offered by Kairos Palestine; and
5. being a prophetic voice in the US regarding the impact of US policy at home, in the Middle East, and around the globe.

We have covered a wide range of intersectional issues: racism; climate justice; apartheid, settler colonialism, and ethnic cleansing; immigration and refugees; antisemitism, Islamophobia, and homophobia; Christian Zionism and Christian triumphalism; the capitalist war economy; religiously-inspired violence; and more. And our program formats have been equally varied: lectures, exhibits, films, concerts, dance, and more.

We are active members of the Global Kairos for Justice Coalition, based in Bethlehem. We are recognized across the US through our regular Zoom webinars, often partnering with the United Church of Christ Palestine-Israel Network, Friends of Sabeel North America, Voices For the Holy Land, Jewish Voice for Peace, Israel Committee Against House Demolitions, and other national organizations. And locally, ICMEP is a partner in the quest for justice by other like-minded social justice, religious, and community groups and NGO’s. And we have received awards and recognition from Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Sikh organizations.

Justice, peace, liberation, and human rights lie at the heart of ICMEP’s mission.

Dr. Michael Spath

You can find more information about ICMEP  
and future events at their website:

[indianacmep.org](http://indianacmep.org)



## Stay Connected with Plymouth Church

In addition to our public Facebook page, Plymouth has a private Facebook group available to members called [Plymouth Generations](#). Join this Facebook group to communicate easily with other Plymouth people! You must already have a Facebook account to join this group.

Plymouth Church sends out the Weekly Bulletin to keep you up-to-date on things like online gatherings, ways to help others while social distancing, and other news. The Weekly Bulletin is now sent out on **Saturdays at 7:00 pm**. If you are not receiving these messages, please check your spam folder first. If you still are not receiving them, please contact our Communications Specialist Elizabeth at [edp@plymouthfw.org](mailto:edp@plymouthfw.org).

### Financial Report

December 2022

	Month	Month	Month	YTD	YTD	YTD
	Actual	Budget	Variance	Actual	Budget	Variance
<b>Total Income</b>	\$62,820	\$67,472	(\$4,652)	\$827,929	\$832,196	(\$4,267)
<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$71,978	\$82,263	(\$10,285)	\$826,186	\$830,159	(\$3,973)
<b>Net Income (Loss)</b>	(\$9,158)	(\$14,791)	\$5,633	\$1,743	\$2,037	(\$294)

### Contact Us

**Senior Pastor and Teacher**

Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy  
[tcm@plymouthfw.org](mailto:tcm@plymouthfw.org)

**Sunday School Director**

Katie Watson  
[kjwatson4@gmail.com](mailto:kjwatson4@gmail.com)

**Communications Specialist**

Elizabeth Pruitt  
[edp@plymouthfw.org](mailto:edp@plymouthfw.org)

**Associate Pastor**

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals  
[smo@plymouthfw.org](mailto:smo@plymouthfw.org)

**Child Care Director**

Michelle Grim  
[davidandmichellegrim@gmail.com](mailto:davidandmichellegrim@gmail.com)

**Receptionist**

Jake Slone  
[jss@plymouthfw.org](mailto:jss@plymouthfw.org)

**Associate in Pastoral Care**

January Simpson  
[jls@plymouthfw.org](mailto:jls@plymouthfw.org)

**Office Manager**

Tina Puitz  
[tmp@plymouthfw.org](mailto:tmp@plymouthfw.org)

**Media Specialist**

Nakia Brabham  
[nakia.brabham@yahoo.com](mailto:nakia.brabham@yahoo.com)

**Music Director**

Maestro Robert Nance  
[robert@maestronance.com](mailto:robert@maestronance.com)

**Financial Administration**

Steve Cook  
[financial@plymouthfw.org](mailto:financial@plymouthfw.org)

**Building Maintenance Manager**

John Hoelderle  
[jmh@plymouthfw.org](mailto:jmh@plymouthfw.org)

**Youth Director**

Kara Jaurigue  
[kkjaurigue@gmail.com](mailto:kkjaurigue@gmail.com)

**Custodian**

Brent Friday  
[bjf@plymouthfw.org](mailto:bjf@plymouthfw.org)

501 W. Berry Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 46802

[plymouthfw.org](http://plymouthfw.org) | Phone: (260) 423-9424 | Fax: (260) 423-9426 | [fb.com/plymouthfw](https://www.facebook.com/plymouthfw)

**Whoever You Are, Wherever You Are on Life's Journey, You Are Welcome Here!**