

# The Bell

#### **PLYMOUTH CHURCH**

FORT WAYNE + UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST PLYMOUTHFW.ORG

## From the Senior Pastor

Evangelism: That Scary "E" Word

There it is, that scary word: evangelism. It conjures up for so many of us images of people on street corners shouting about the risk of hell, tracts being passed out on the risk to your immortal soul, or other imagery like two men in matching white short-sleeve dress shirts and black pants knocking on doors to tell you about their faith.

Many of us have experienced very hurtful episodes growing up or in adulthood of feeling judged or pressured from high stakes altar calls. We're done with that. We don't want to be affiliated with that. And we certainly don't want others to confuse us with that. We run in the opposite direction.



Those were some of the types of things we discussed at a recent workshop on evangelism that the Evangelism and Marketing Board, Rev. Ofner-Seals, and I designed. We went through those challenges, as well as other concerns people

What does evangelism, or its root evangelical, even mean? It's shifted multiple times, from simply meaning sharing the gospel, to intellectual assent to certain theological claims about Jesus and salvation, to even being a nonreligious cultural signifier on certain political commitments.

But if being evangelical is instead about deciding that there is some good news that is worth sharing from our faith, then that means that even I am evangelical. That's true even as I am an openly progressive Christian committed to a gospel of inclusion and social justice, specifically energized around connecting our faith to God's kin-dom on earth, which I associate with reducing economic income and wealth inequality, protecting our planet from climate change and communities from pollution, dismantling racism in our lives and institutions, promoting nonviolent resistance as a way of life in the face of injustice, and affirming LGBTQ persons and those who have been marginalized from many faith communities.

Continued on page 2...

have.

#### In This Issue

- IKC Prayer Shawls
- From the Associate Pastor
- Richard C. Hess Peace Studies Scholarship Recipient
- Seed to Marsh Project So Far
- ICMEP Brings the World to Fort Wayne
- Women's Book Study
- Celebrating Pride at Plymouth
- Children's Summer Programming
- Staying Involved at Plymouth in the Summer

# Worship at Plymouth

Plymouth Church is currently offering an in-person worship service every **Sunday** at 10:00 am. Masks are optional at this time. From 8:30 am to 9:45 am, we offer a time of fellowship, with coffee provided, in the Folsom Room. Our chapel class education hour will finish May 22 and resume in the fall.

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

#### Continued from page 1...

I'm evangelical about that. I want to spread the word about that, because I believe that's what the Spirit of God is about. The good news I want to share touches my life personally, and the lives of those around me, and I want to share about that. Evangelism is about getting really clear on the problems we see in the world and seeing how our faith offers good news and hope in response to those obstacles. It is my hope that while this was our first workshop on Progressive Evangelism, we will continue to help equip people in feeling comfortable (and even energized!) about sharing with others the values and commitments we lift up collectively whenever we gather together.

I believe that there is much good news our world still needs to hear, and I look forward to supporting Plymouth members to feel that they have some good news to share with others, too!

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy Senior Pastor and Teacher

# **IKC Prayer Shawls**



As you may know, the IKC will be hosting the UCC General Synod to be held in Indianapolis in June 2023. Thousands of people, including about 800 delegates from all over the USA and globe will be attending the General Synod. At the General Synod there is usually a Safe Space Suite, a large room provided for people to come in for a time of prayer, reflection, meditation, rest and a time to break away from the hustle and bustle of Synod.

The UCC's Mental Health Network will be hosting and curating the Safe Space Suite. Our IKC Wise team is partnering with the National UCC Mental Health Network to provide prayer shawls for that space. We would therefore be asking church folks and friends to consider making prayer shawls for the General Synod event. A target number right now is to have 650 prayer shawls to come from our respective churches. At the IKC Annual Meeting in 2023, we hope to begin to assemble, display, and bless the shawls.

Prayer shawls may be made to cover the shoulders of a recipient. There are some free crochets and knit patterns on the internet to explore as you get started. Think about knitting or crocheting your prayer shawl in a group so that there is camaraderie and fellowship as you do so. See what groups or church ministries may want to get involved in this project. Spread the word by word of mouth. Find a way to present your shawls in an attractive way before sending it off to the IKC Annual Meeting in June 2023. Take pictures of the shawls your group creates and keep your congregation informed.

Through this prayer shawl ministry, the crafters and our IKC churches will have a wonderful opportunity to show love and hospitality to our General Synod delegates and participants. As you knit, crochet or quilt these prayer shawls, you can infuse the shawl with prayer for the recipient who will receive your prayer shawl at Synod. You can pray for our General Synod, for the success of the Synod and movement of the Spirit in all we do. When finished, recite a prayer as you gently fold the finished product. You may attach a prayer, a poem, a verse of scripture or a single word to the prayer shawl. Know that your prayer shawl will bring love and comfort to someone out there whom God is already preparing to receive your shawl.

For more information on this project, kindly contact your IKC General Synod Local Arrangements Committee Co-Chairs, Becky Moore at r.sowder@sbcglobal.net or Rev. Merlyn Lawrence at revmerlynlawrence@gmail.com to express your interest in the project, to gather more information and to get instructions on when and where to bring or send your groups' finished prayer shawls. If you wish to send your shawls to the IKC office between now and June 2023, feel free to do so.

# Richard C. Hess Peace Studies Scholarship Recipient

The Peace and Justice Committee is happy to announce the recipient of the 2022-2023 Peace Studies Scholarship.

Sanelisiwe Ncube, from Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, is the sixteenth recipient of the scholarship. This fall, Sanelisiwe continues work toward a Master of Arts in Theology and Peace Studies from the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Theological Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. The committee is pleased to support Sanelisiwe again this year as she seeks to enhance justice and peace through her studies from the Seminary. Sanelisiwe states, "When I earn my degree, I want to go back to Africa, specifically to my country, and involve myself in peace issues and reconciliation in the government and within the church setup. My project is mainly focusing on the critical analysis of how the Church has contributed to both the building and the destruction of marriages in Zimbabwe and Zambia (a neighboring country). This will help me when I am done with my program especially on how to handle issues around church."

Ms. Ncube intends to return to Zimbabwe to teach and to work with non-governmental organizations in reaching out to the communities to reduce intolerance, fundamentalism and religiously motivated conflicts. The Peace and Justice Committee is delighted to provide support for Sanelisiwe as we are confident that her studies will guide her to lifelong work in promoting justice and peace.

This year, the scholarship was made possible in part by the generosity of Bill Deans, who contributed earnings from the sales of his books to augment the earnings of the scholarship endowment.

#### From the Associate Pastor

The longing is the return message.

I recently came across a Rumi poem called "Love Dogs," about a man who cries out in prayer to God, only to then be mocked by a cynic who says, "I have heard you calling out, but have you ever gotten any response?"

The praying man has no answer to the cynic's question, and so he stops praying. That night, as he sleeps, he dreams that he sees Khidr, known as the guide of souls, who asks him, "Why did you stop praying?" The man says, "because I never heard anything back." Khidr



then says to the man, "this longing you express is the return message. The grief you cry out from draws you towards union."

How often have we been like the praying man, longing to hear an answer from God to our most heartfelt prayers, but more often feeling like we are in a one-way conversation? But what if the longing we feel IS God's response? What if the longing we feel is God's way of staying in communication with us?

For me, this is a powerful idea, particularly when it comes to our struggle for a more just and compassionate world. My whole life, I have longed for what writer Glennon Doyle calls "a truer, more beautiful world." Even as a child, my imagination was always sparked by the idea of God's kin-dom come "on earth as it is in heaven." As an adult, this longing has taken the form of advocacy and activism, both inside and outside of the church. I rejoice that my journey has brought me to Plymouth, where I know I am surrounded by many others who share this same longing.

Perhaps you too, like me, sometimes feel discouraged by the lack of progress on issues of social justice. Perhaps you too, like me, sometimes feel frustrated by the political obstacles we face. Perhaps you too, like me, wonder where God is in the struggle. Well, what if God is there, in the longing itself? What if that longing that we feel for a "truer, more beautiful world" is in fact God responding to our prayers and giving us the encouragement to continue our work?

It can be discouraging to long for justice in a world that so often rejects the very values and principles of God's kin-dom. It can feel lonely and disheartening when our efforts at compassion and solidarity are met with resistance or even mockery. But I have an inkling that the stronger our sense of longing is, the more deeply present God is with us. So do not despair and do not give up. Keep praying, keep marching, and keep showing up. Nurture that sense of holy longing, knowing that within that longing is God's voice, urging us on. May it ever be so!

Peace,

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals Associate Pastor

# Seed to Marsh Project So Far

Members of Plymouth Church have been busy over the past four months working to prepare seeds of native plant species for a project called Seed to Marsh, which was done in collaboration with staff from the Little River Wetlands Project.

Beginning in February, an intergenerational group of about 50 Plymouth members gathered in the Folsom Room to learn about the importance of native plants in our local wetlands and to stratify seeds of several varieties of native plant species. Next, in March, a group of about 30 members and friends headed to Eagle Marsh to plant those seeds in pallets so they could then grow into seedlings. After about a month, those seedlings were then brought back to Eagle Marsh to be transplanted into pots so they could grow strong enough to be planted in the ground.

The Seed to Marsh project was the first undertaking of the newly formed Environmental Action Team at Plymouth Church. The project allowed for church members and friends to learn more about the environment around them and to take an active, hands-on role in helping to maintain the health of our local wetlands. Members who participated gained an appreciation for the beauty and diversity of our wetlands and learned a lot about the importance of those wetlands when it comes to the ecological health of our region.

Many thanks to the Environmental Action Team and in particular, Jan Gibson, for organizing this project for the congregation. We look forward to many more!

"Work for the justice created things need, work for the health of each plant and its seed; work for the creatures abuse has betrayed, work for the garden God's wisdom once made." -Daniel Charles Damon

To learn more about the Little River Wetlands Project, please visit their website at <a href="https://www.lrwp.org">www.lrwp.org</a>.









# **ICMEP Brings the World to Fort Wayne**

Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Jerusalem, South Africa, and the UK By Dr. Michael Spath, Executive Director of Indiana Center for Middle East Peace

For 17 years, the mission of Indiana Center for Middle East Peace has remained the same – "We are a voice of conscience for peace, justice, human rights, and intercultural encounter." Every one of our board members, and all our many supporters and friends throughout the years, focus like a laser beam on these core values in their personal lives and in our work together at ICMEP.

And yes, while ICMEP has been a leading voice in our region because of its focus on issues of justice and human rights in Palestine and Israel, this year, 2022, we are bringing the world to Fort Wayne.

This month, Tuesday, May 24, 6:30 pm at Plymouth Church, ICMEP welcomes – free and open to the public – Syrian refugee and concert violinist, Mariela Shaker, to share her story and music. Mariela is a Syrian violinist who fled war-torn Aleppo on a 2013 US music scholarship. She was granted asylum and US citizenship. She received the Daily Point of Light Award from President George H.W. Bush, was named Champion of Change for World Refugees by President Barack Obama, and was given the Spirit of Anne Frank Center's Promisekeeper Award.

Mariela has performed worldwide, in London, Jordan (at the invitation of Queen Rania), at the Beyond Borders conference in Scotland, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, United Arab Emirates, and more. She has performed for various United Nations agencies, and throughout the US – at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center for World Refugees Day, and at the Lincoln Center. Finally, Mariela has also worked with Cate Blanchett, Ben Stiller, and Meryl Streep to fundraise over a million dollars toward supporting Syrian refugees. ICMEP offers this program with support from the Fort Wayne Downtown Improvement District and Jerry and Diane Mackel.

#### Already in 2022, ICMEP has:

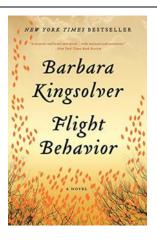
- thanks to Board Chair, Terry Dougherty, hosted Nowruz and Eid celebrations for our new Afghan neighbors;
- welcomed Iranian children's book author, Golbarg Bashi ("P is for Palestine");
- hosted an Earth Day environmental justice conference featuring Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, Co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign and Malik Yakini, a leading spokesman at the intersection of urban farming and racial justice.

#### And this fall, ICMEP welcomes:

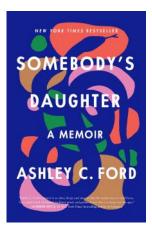
- from Jerusalem, Jeff Halper, founder of the Israel Committee Against House Demolitions and a leader of the One Democratic State Campaign; and
- from the UK, Garth Hewitt, singer/songwriter/troubadour/activist and Honorary Canon at St. George's Anglican Cathedral in East Jerusalem.

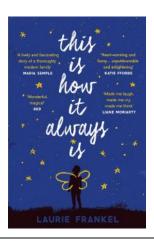
And finally, to remember the December 26, 2021 passing of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, for ICMEP's annual Gala we're flying in from Cape Town, South Africa, Rev. Edwin Arrison, Arch's friend, colleague, and partner in the anti-apartheid movement, once imprisoned for his work, and who like Tutu during his life, works for Palestinian civil, political, and human rights.

We at ICMEP remain so grateful for all our many friends and supporters for these 17 years. Committed to our core values, we want nothing less than the transformation of hearts and a moral revolution, the full realization of what Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, calls "interbeing," so that justice and peace might finally prevail and Martin Luther King, Jr's "beloved community" might finally become a reality.









# Women's Book Study

Some people love to read. Some people love to share the books they read with friends and family, and some even like to get together in groups to explore a book's deeper meaning in good company.

Plymouth has a long history of study groups of various kinds, from Bible studies to women's consciousness raising, to peace education, to spiritual development, and so on. The current Women's Book Study, open to all who self-identify as women, is entering a new phase this year. Our goal is to become more inclusive by welcoming drop-ins at any session. If you like the sound of this month's book, you can show up at the meeting without needing to feel an obligation to return another time.

So far this year we have read both novels and non-fiction books (see the list below). We read books, suggested by group members, which in general address one or more of the four covenants that Plymouth has adopted, namely the environment, world and local mission, just peace, and gender issues. Since September, in novels we have clambered in Appalachia as a family is transformed by a butterfly phenomenon, we have journeyed with a mother and child fleeing to the U.S. from cartel brutality in Mexico, and we've puzzled with parents and siblings of a child grappling with gender identity. Our nonfiction readings took us with Greg Boyle to the gang-ridden streets of LA and with Bryan Stevenson to the cells on death row in Alabama. Two books had specifically local references: Ashley Ford's tale of growing up Black in Fort Wayne and Tracey Chevalier's descriptions of the Black Swamp, which used to stretch from Fort Wayne to Lake Erie before being drained for agricultural purposes. For future offerings, watch your weekly digital bulletin!

I think it's fair to say that those of us who are attached to the Women's Book Study all love reading. We're challenged by each others' ideas and experiences. We enjoy getting to know each other better, appreciating the variety of our insights and differences. We often find ourselves reading books we might not have picked up had it not been for the group's choice. We aim to provide a safe and welcoming space where each of us can grow in our journeys of faith. And lest you think we are a seriously bookish lot, we want you to know we also laugh a good deal and usually part feeling strengthened for whatever comes next.

Books previously read and discussed in the Women's Book Study include:

- Flight Behavior by Barbara Kingsolver
- American Dirt by Jeanine Cummins
- Somebody's Daughter: A Memoir by Ashley C. Ford
- This Is How It Always Is by Laurie Frankel
- Tattoos on the Heart by Greg Boyle
- In the Corner of the Orchard by Tracey Chevalier
- Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson

The Women's Book Study meets every third Tuesday from 12:00 pm to 1:15 pm in the Amistad Room. For summer study meetings, please sign up with Judith Beineke. For further information, contact Judith at jrbeineke@yahoo.co.uk.

# Summer Family Gatherings

Want to meet some of our newest Plymouth families? Want to check in with your old Plymouth friends? Want to spend some time exploring with your own family?

Parents and kids are invited to these monthly gatherings over the summer. If there are toddlers, kids, teens, or graduates in your home, please join us!

- Saturday, June 11, 7:30 am to 11:30 am: Community Harvest Food Bank. Assist with their Saturday distribution. Registration required.
- Sunday, July 10, 3:00 pm: Cedar Creek Produce. Pick-your-own blueberries to take home. The Young Adult fellowship group will be joining us on this outing, too!
- Sunday, August 14, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm: Poplar Community Gardens. Tour this urban garden and harvest veggies for food pantries.

Look for more details as these dates draw closer. Please contact Katie Watson at kjwatson4@gmail.com if you have questions.

# Sunday School Reminders:

Our last day of Sunday school is May 22! During class, kids and families can join us for our annual Service Blitz — a sampling of speedy service projects. After worship, stick around for the Ice Cream Social, with chalk and bubbles outside.

On Sunday, June 5, kids and youth are invited to meet in the Narthex just before worship at 10:00 am. We will celebrate Pentecost by bringing in red streamers and flags from around the world.

Sunday school takes a break for the summer, but we will return on September 11, 2022!

# **Celebrating Pride at Plymouth**

This month marks 21 years since Plymouth Congregational Church officially declared itself as an Open and Affirming congregation. Plymouth Church strives to be an inclusive community, advocating for the rights of all peoples, including the LGBTQ+ community. As we approach June, which is recognized as Pride Month in the United States, it is important to know how Plymouth participates.

Plymouth has a history of showing up to the Fort Wayne Pride Festival to show people they are beloved just as they are. Despite the parade being canceled last year, Plymouth volunteers were able to spread the Plymouth message at our booth in the non-profit resource fair. Once again, Plymouth will be participating in this year's Pride Festival. Fort Wayne Pride 2022 will be held July 22 and 23, with the parade and non-profit resource fair on Saturday. Plymouth will be showing up once again and we are always looking for volunteers to help work the booth. If you are interested in helping Plymouth at Fort Wayne Pride, contact January Simpson at avellowdog@gmail.com for more information.

This year, Plymouth will also be celebrating Pride right here at the church! Join us on Saturday, June 25 for the very first Plymouth Pride Event. Starting at 11:00 am with a workshop from UCC pastor Rev. Leah Robberts-Mosser titled "Biblical Self-Defense for LGBTQ Folks and Allies," the event will feature resource tables, food trucks, musicians, and finish with a drag show. The event is free and open to the public, so please invite your friends within the community. The next day, Sunday, June 26, Rev. Leah Robberts-Mosser will return for a special summer Chapel Class, titled "LGBTQ-Affirming Practices for Faith-Based Institutions." More specific details about the event are yet to come, so please stay tuned to our digital bulletin and social media platforms.



The Plymouth Congregational Church booth at the 2021 Fort Wayne Pride.







# Staying Involved at Plymouth in the Summer

The summer months are soon approaching, which means we are nearing the end of our programming year. Chapel classes and Wednesday Night Live will take a break at the end of May and resume in the fall. This doesn't mean Plymouth is taking a break for the summer. There are many programs that continue through the summer months so that you can stay connected to Plymouth!

#### **Tapping Into Faith**

Tapping Into Faith is Plymouth's monthly pub theology gathering. This is a wonderful opportunity to get together with folks from church and the community for some casual conversation about how our spiritual life impacts (or maybe doesn't impact) our daily life in the world. There's a lot of chat, a lot of laughter, and everyone is welcome. The Evangelism and Marketing Board provides "table carbs" for snacking for this evening of fun discussion. Non-Plymouth friends are always welcome to join.

Tapping Into Faith meets on the last Monday of each month at 7:30 pm in the party room of Mad Anthony Brewing Company.

### **Supply Drives**

The Evangelism and Marketing Board hosts monthly supply drives throughout the year, and will continue during the summer! Previous supply drives have been done for Just Neighbors, YWCA, Rescue Mission, and more. The donation of specific supplies and sometimes even your time and talents can be given at these supply drives. Stay tuned to the Plymouth Church Facebook page and digital bulletin to find out when our next supply drive will be!

### **Joys and Concerns**

Joys and Concerns is a time to name something we are grateful for, a concern we have, and to be in prayer together. This meeting takes place every Sunday at 1:00 pm over Zoom. The link appears next to the order of worship in each digital weekly bulletin.

#### Women's Book Study

The Plymouth Women's Book Study is open to any reader who self-identifies as a woman, whether you've attended before or not. The following month's chosen book is announced in the digital bulletin. Past books include *This Is How It Always Is* by Laurie Frankel, *Somebody's Daughter* by Ashley C. Ford, and *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins.

The Women's Book Study meets every third Tuesday from 12:00 pm to 1:15 pm in the Amistad Room. For summer study meetings, please sign up with Judith Beineke. For further information, contact Judith at jrbeineke@yahoo.co.uk.

# **Centering Prayer Group**

Centering prayer is a form of silent, contemplative prayer meant to open the heart to God's presence and action within. The Center Prayer Group meets on both the second and fourth Tuesday of the month at 5:30 pm in the Chapel. Whether you are new to centering prayer, or practice it regularly, all are welcome to join this group.

### **Young Adult Ministries**

Recently, the Young Adult Film and Faith group has restarted. This, along with other various young adult ministries will continue throughout the summer. Look for announcements of future events in the digital bulletin and on our social media pages.

More summer events will be posted in our digital bulletin, on our social medias, and on our Google Calendar. View the links below to stay updated. Contact Elizabeth Pruitt at edp@plymouthfw.org if you have trouble accessing these platforms.

Website: www.plymouthfw.org YouTube: Plymouth Church FW

Facebook: @plymouthchurchfw Instagram: @plymouthchurchfortwayne

# Parish Nurse Program

Supported by Marion Health, the Parish Nurse Program "provides registered nurses who are committed and called to help the congregation stay well and improve the overall health and healing ministry of individual faith communities." One Sunday a month in the Folsom Room, the Plymouth Parish Nurses will be available for a variety of healthcare resources and support. Please note the Parish Nurse Program does not provide prescriptions or diagnostics. Additionally, a new informational health flyer will be placed in the stall of every restroom each month at Plymouth.

If you would like to learn more about this program, including finding out how to volunteer (non-medical volunteer opportunities are available), please contact Erin Shaw at selshaw@live.com or 260-224-0860.

# **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.

#### Want to Write for the Bell?

The Bell has taken on a new format and we are hoping YOU will help us! If you have a passion, "side-hustle," or personal mission that aligns with Plymouth's values and covenants and are interested in writing a 500-700 word article about this topic for the next issue of the Bell, please contact our Communications Specialist Elizabeth Pruitt at edp@plymouthfw.org or (260) 432-9424 for more information.

In your message, please state your name, article topic, and as much information as possible about what your article would entail. Please note articles may be edited for length and clarity.

# **Contact Us**

#### Senior Pastor and Teacher

Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy tcm@plymouthfw.org

#### Associate Pastor

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals smo@plymouthfw.org

#### Associate in Pastoral Care

January Simpson jls@plymouthfw.org

#### Music Director

Maestro Robert Nance robert@maestronance.com

#### Youth Director

Kara Jaurigue kkjaurigue@gmail.com

#### Sunday School Director

Katie Watson kjwatson4@gmail.com

#### Child Care Director

Michelle Grim davidandmichellegrim@gmail.com

#### Office Manager

Tina Puitz tmp@plymouthfw.org

#### Communications Specialist

Elizabeth Pruitt edp@plymouthfw.org

#### Receptionist

Jake Slone jss@plymouthfw.org

#### Building Maintenance Manager

John Hoelderle jmh@plymouthfw.org

#### Media Specialist

Nakia Brabham nakia.brabham@yahoo.com

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

plymouthfw.org | Phone: (260) 423-9424 | Fax: (260) 423-9426 | fb.com/plymouthfw