

The Bell



PLYMOUTH CHURCH
FORT WAYNE + UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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UCC General Synod 2025 Roundup

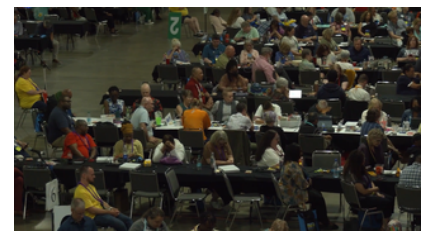
I was not able to attend the United Church of Christ's General Synod in Kansas City, MO this year. I was originally designated to be a delegate of our conference, but I ended up going to my home denomination's General Assembly in Memphis, TN at the same time instead.

However, I wanted to give a summary of some of the resolutions that the General Synod discussed and voted on at that gathering. As a reminder, these resolutions “speak to, not for” the church. That means that they are things that the General Synod thinks all UCC churches should consider and support, but each congregation makes its own decision on the degree to which it will do so. Our four covenants come out of past resolutions.

Articles have been written about each of these resolutions, so I will not go into their details here. Those wanting to read up on them can find articles at <https://generalsynod.org/news-listings>, particularly between the dates of July 12-16. You can read the resolutions themselves here: <https://generalsynod.org/resolutions>.

I found information on the following resolutions:

- Restoring full funding to USAID and Voice of America. This was actually two resolutions. The first focused on reductions and eliminations of international aid by the Trump administration that began early in 2025. The resolution about VOA lamented the loss of editorial independence. During floor discussions, speakers highlighted the importance of holding public institutions accountable to their founding missions of service and truth-telling. They named how restoring full funding would help stabilize global partnerships, combat poverty, address climate change, and support journalistic integrity in a time of growing disinformation.
- Calling for an end to violence against religious minorities in India. This focused around discrimination that our Christian partners, Muslims, and others in India have been facing with the Hindu religious fundamentalism of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. It urged people to advocate legislatively with their representatives and stand in solidarity with affected communities.
- Declaration calling for end to Genocide in Palestine. This highlighted US complicity in the starvation and killing of Gazans, denouncing actions by the US and Israeli governments which are making these deaths possible, demanding the US to recognize international law, demanding Israel stop the killing and end the occupation, and rejecting the idea that criticism of Israeli policies is inherently antisemitic.



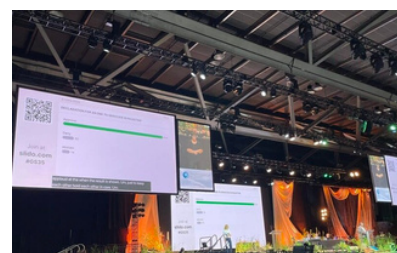
- Opposing current US immigration policies and resolution reaffirming immigrant and migrant rights. This criticized federal executive orders and use of the Aliens Enemies Act. It challenges the cultural climate of criminalizing all immigrants and reaffirms the past 15 pro-immigrant resolutions of former General Synods, calling current efforts a denial of people being in the image of God and denouncing violations of basic human rights. One of the resolutions also highlighted the impact of the racial ministries of the UCC and the stress its members are feeling from federal targeting. Congregations are encouraged to offer events like Know Your Rights trainings and accompaniment ministries, among others.
- Affirms Our Whole Lives sexuality education celebrating 25 years. This resolution also addressed threats to accurate sexuality curriculums in schools, especially regarding the exclusion of LGBTQ perspectives in schools and our commitment to being an Open and Affirming denomination.
- Support for human rights in the Philippines amidst abuses occurring there. This highlighted support for ecumenical efforts internationally and in the Philippines for a peace process between warring parties in that country. It included a condemnation of extrajudicial killings and lack of accountability for the country's militarized police force.
- Reconciliation to be in full communion with Puerto Rican partner after a split in 2007 and to be in full communion with the Evangelical Church in Germany. These two resolutions affirmed that the UCC recognizes these church communities as authentic representations of Christianity and looks for ways to be in partnership with one another.
- Resolution on continuing evolving language on mental health. This highlighted some of the research on the mental health impacts of social media and the documented increase of mental health diagnoses. It noted the importance of non-stigmatizing language and efforts to reduce stigma around mental health issues.

There was also one rejected resolution, which was focused around a proposed structural change to the denomination. It would have given the General Minister and President more power, allowing them to directly appoint the Associate General Minister rather than them being voted on by the General Synod. With concerns around democratic backsliding in the United States, it was deemed inappropriate and was voted down by around a 2-to-1 margin. Most resolutions are passed, and the rejected ones always have a lively debate. I'm sure it would have been interesting to listen to.

All resolutions include elements calling for educating congregation members about them, which hopefully this Bell article has assisted with!

Peace,

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



Engaged Spirituality

from the associate pastor

In Christianity, we tend to think of mystics and activists as being in two separate camps. We imagine mystics spending all their time meditating and reflecting inwardly, while we see activists practicing their faith outwardly through prophetic protests, peace marches, and speaking truth to power. But the truth is, mysticism and activism are really two sides of the same coin, which is an engaged and sustainable spirituality.

Howard Thurman, a pastor who was often described as a chaplain to the civil rights movement, was a model of this kind of engaged spirituality in the 1940's and 50's. In a lecture given in 1978, towards the end of his life, he said that mysticism can be defined as “the response of the individual to a personal encounter with God within their own soul.” Social action, he said, stems from this, being “an expression of resistance against whatever tends to, or separates one from, the experience of God, who is the very ground of our being.”

For Thurman, social injustices such as poverty, racism, militarism, and environmental degradation hindered others from having the kind of intimate experiences of God that we were in fact created for. For him, there was no deeper reason for mystics to be activists. All people were made to experience communion with God. If they are prevented from doing so because of unjust conditions in the world, then it is our responsibility to work for change.

Other mystics have written extensively about the deep connection that all creation enjoys. All humanity is connected to one another, to creation, and God, according to most mystical traditions. If that is true, and we are indeed connected to children starving in Sudan, or Palestinians living the nightmare that is Gaza, or immigrants suffering in squalid prison conditions, then if we are true mystics, we cannot rest until they are free. But also, if we are true mystics, we can't forget, even as we work for justice and peace in our world, to take time to reconnect with God.



Howard Thurman, 1899-1981

Mysticism and social action go together. One does not function properly without the other. Without social action, mysticism becomes little more than naval-gazing, and without contemplation and spiritual practice, we can easily burn out in our pursuit of social justice.

For those of us who claim Christianity, Jesus is the perfect model for this kind of work. He spent most of his time with the people — healing, teaching, and reaching out across dividing lines. But every now and then, Jesus would retreat, heading to the mountains, or across the sea, to spend time in communion with God. Jesus gave us the model for our own engaged spirituality. As with so many other aspects of our faith, we need only follow his example if we want to grow into a more engaged, more sustainable spiritual life. May it be so!

Benevolence Committee May-August 2025

Grants & Special Offerings

These grants align with Plymouth's "Just Peace" covenant

"Grounded in UCC polity and covenantal theology, Just Peace is a call for UCC churches to address systemic injustice using non-violence and Just Peace practices. Together, we affirm with prophetic hope that "Peace is Possible." — UCC.org

"Through prayer, study, and worship, we seek those ways of peace that are rooted in justice and liberation for all people." — PlymouthFW.org

Alive Community Outreach — \$2,500

Area of impact: Fort Wayne

To strengthen Alive's presence in Fort Wayne high schools by expanding the Peacemaker Initiative to reach more students with nonviolence education and restorative intervention. To help deepen relationships with students, families, and community partners and nurture a culture of peace in schools and neighborhoods. To build momentum toward future growth, laying the groundwork for eventually extending Alive's impact into middle schools.



Fort Wayne Urban League — \$500

Area of impact: Fort Wayne

To purchase more than 50 banned books for the 'Free Banned Books Giveaway' at the League's 2025 Juneteenth celebration, including these titles:

- *Ruby Bridges Goes to School* by Ruby Bridges
- *The Hate U Give* by Angie Stone
- *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor
- *Something Happened in Our Town* by Marianne Celano
- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
- *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini
- *New Kid* by Jerry Craft
- *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do you See?* by Bill Martin Jr.
- *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White
- *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle

Emma Feigley Grants

Plymouth Peace & Justice Committee — \$1,800

Area of impact: California

To purchase Disaster Relief Clean Up Bucket kits for victims of the recent California wildfires (in conjunction with the Southern California Nevada Conference of the UCC and a matching \$250 grant from the UCC).

Plymouth lovingly assembled 36 five-gallon buckets (with lids), including packets of scouring pads, sponges, and tough wipes, dish detergent and household cleaner, clothespins and clothesline, dishwashing and work gloves, scrub brushes, dust masks, and 33-gallon trash bags.



One Great Hour of Sharing — \$2,520

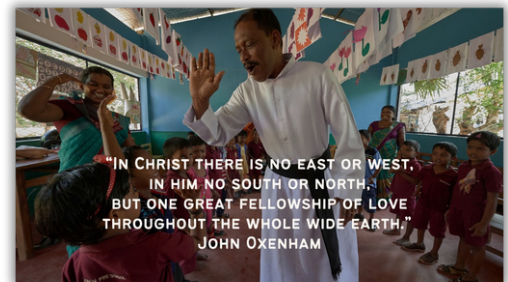
Area of impact: worldwide

To connect you to aid in disaster relief, refugee assistance, and development efforts around the globe. When disasters strike, or when individuals are displaced due to violence or poverty, OGHS ensures immediate response and ongoing recovery.

Global Mission Partners — \$636

Area of impact: Sri Lanka

To support the Indiana-Kentucky Conference Sri Lanka Partnership. For 30+ years, the Conference has cultivated a deep, mutual, global partnership in Sri Lanka, first with the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India and now with the Church of the American Ceylon Mission (CACM), a church of primarily Tamil Christians of low caste, ones on the furthest margins of their society. From advocating for peace during the Sri Lankan Civil War to supporting pastors' education, this ministry has been multifaceted and enriching over the years.



Strengthen the Church — \$2,232.25

Area of impact: local and national

To cooperatively build up the the United Church of Christ by the people of the UCC. Conferences and the national organization equally share the gifts given by members and friends of local congregations. The funds raised support leadership development, new churches, youth ministry, and innovation in existing congregations.

Special Offerings

Next Special Offering



Special offering on October 5 for **Neighbors in Need**

Gifts to Neighbors in Need (NIN) support the United Church of Christ's ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM). The other two-thirds of the offering support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, direct service projects and grants.

2026 Plymouth Benevolence Grants Program

As we move into fall, the Benevolence Committee of Plymouth Church begins preparations for the 2026 Benevolence Grants Program. As part of that process we look to you, the people of Plymouth Church, for your knowledge and input as we review and compile the list of agencies and organizations that will receive a letter of invitation to submit an application for the 2026 program. Do you know of a not-for-profit agency or organization that has 501(c)(3) standing, and aligns with the four guiding covenants of Plymouth Church? Do you think they would be interested in submitting an application for additional funding? If so, you may send their contact information, including a contact person and email address to pfwbenevolencegrant@gmail.com by September 30 and we will include them on our list of potential applicants. If you have additional questions regarding the grants program please reach out any one of the committee members.

Thank you for your consideration and participation in this important work!

Benevolence Committee Members: Allen Haynes, Mark Friskney, Beth Walker, Susan Bolinger, Cher Jackson, Deveanna Schieler

Pepper Jelly Returns!

It's time for Plymouth's annual Pepper Jelly Project! We will gather in the kitchen Tuesday, September 9 and Thursday, September 11 from 10:00 am to 4:30 pm. It may be necessary to work on September 12 for a few hours.

If you are interested in helping for a few (or several) hours, please contact Joyce Augspurger at jema7749@comcast.net or call/text 260-466-5376. No experience is necessary! Lots of sampling! We generally make about 200 jars – interesting and fun days.

Also, you may contact Joyce to place an order for this popular and delicious sweet pepper jelly. A favorite size is a half-pint, \$6. In limited quantities, there are pints, \$10 each and also a 4 ounce size, \$3. There will be a Sunday morning, later this Fall, when we will sell it in the Folsom room.

We also accept any size canning jars. We will sort, clean and use the ones we need and find homes for the rest.

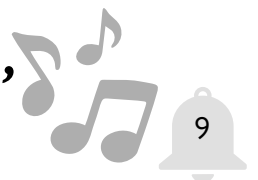
As always, thank you for your continued support of this annual project. The profits from this and the Christmas wreath sales are distributed to local charities which support families and children.



*“Those summer nights...”
(and days!)*



“...tell me more, tell me more!”





Fort Wayne pastors begin hunger strike in support of Palestinians in Gaza



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First Name ^{*}

Last Name ^{*}

'I'll eat when they eat': Indiana pastors participate in nationwide fast for Gaza

by [Kayla Berkey](#) | published on Jun 24, 2025

Fort Wayne church celebrates 'Pride at Plymouth'



The Journal Gazette

Prayer response to immigration raids

Jun 16, 2025



Rev. Martin Garcia of Amistad Church welcomes community members Wednesday evening at Plymouth Congregational Church to a prayer vigil in response to military-style immigration raids throughout the country.
Stan Suszka | The Journal Gazette



LOCAL NEWS

Helping neighbors: Vigil held for 'immigrant justice' in downtown Fort Wayne

by: [Taylor King](#)
Posted: Jun 11, 2025 / 09:03 PM EDT
Updated: Jun 11, 2025 / 11:19 PM EDT



Let fasting open senators' eyes to Gaza horrors

Sara Ofner-Seals Jun 20, 2025

Occupation, oppression define Palestinians' lives

Timothy C. Murphy Aug 19, 2025

Plymouth's Past

Philemon Alfred “Phil” Steigerwald (aka Santa Claus) was born October 21, 1927 in Fort Wayne. Those of you who lived in or around Fort Wayne between 1950-1980 probably have a photo or two of Phil with your children sitting on his lap, or maybe YOU on his lap! He would first don the Santa suit as a junior in high school for Sears and Roebuck, and in 1950, took his act to the Wolf & Dessaur department store where he became the “real deal” to most families in Fort Wayne.

It was also during this time that Wolf & Dessaur became known for their wonderful Christmas window displays, as well as creators of their own TV show called “Santa In Wonderland” on WKJG TV. Phil also presided over the annual downtown Christmas lighting ceremony until 1985, at which time the City refused to pay the required \$100 fee. In 2023, Phil became a member of the International Santa Claus Hall of Fame.

But there was much more to Phil than his role as Santa. He was owner and broker at Fairfield GROUP REALTORS for 40 years, and a long time active member of Plymouth Church. He was a soloist at both Plymouth and Achduth Vesholom with his beautiful baritone voice. Phil was also treasurer of the Allen County Republican Party and 5th District city councilman from 1963 to 1971.

Phil and his wife, Patricia, were married at Plymouth Church in 1952 and had four children: Marcia, Laura, Elizabeth (Beth) and Philemon. Daughter Beth and granddaughter Emma are currently active members at Plymouth Church, representing third and fourth generations of Plymouth members.

Patricia died in 1990 and Phil passed away in 2004.

Plymouth Archives



Seeking Scribes for the Season

Advent Devotion Writers Needed!

Once again Plymouth is developing a Advent Devotional Email Calendar that starts on the 1st Sunday of Advent (November 30) and concludes on Christmas Eve. We are looking to recruit 20 individuals who would write a short article based on a scriptural passage. This is an excellent opportunity to share your insights, reflections, or spiritual journey with our community during this special season of the year.

Each devotional in this project includes the following elements:

- a title
- the key verse of the text written out (the verse upon which the devotional is primarily focused)
- the devotion itself (your reflection, usually one or two paragraphs)
- a question for reflection
- a concluding short prayer

The entire article, which includes all the elements listed above, should be between 250 and 300 words -- but who's counting? The deadline for articles is Monday, November 3, as this allows time for proofreading, editing, and formatting.

Your unique perspective and personal experience can greatly enrich our Advent Devotional, making it a meaningful resource for our congregation. If you would like to participate in this project or would like more information please send an email to Plymouth.Advent@gmail.com. At that time we will send you a list of the passages from which to choose -- first come, first served. And as requested from last year's participants, there are far more passages from which to choose.



Richard C. Hess Peace Studies Scholarship

The Peace and Justice Committee is pleased to announce the 2025-26 recipients of the RCH Peace Studies Scholarship.

Joshua Adler will be a junior at Manchester University majoring in music performance, philosophy/religion and peace studies. He believes that his studies will lead him to develop a deeper understanding of the “intersection between music, faith and social change”. He has participated in travel experiences to Kenya and New Orleans where he studied with individuals dedicated to peace building in their communities. Currently, he is the president of the Kenapocomoco Peace Coalition at North Manchester and became certified in conflict resolution. Upon graduation, Joshua plans to pursue a Master of Arts in Theopoetics at Bethany Theological Seminary, further developing peacemaking through music. Dr. Kay Brown, a mentor, believes that Joshua is “poised to make an impact on the peacebuilding field, particularly in lifting up the intersection of art, faith and justice.”

Chandra Surya will begin an online Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism this fall at the Anabaptist Mennonite Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. Chandra grew up as a Hindu but converted to Christianity at nineteen when he heard Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Touching him deeply to become a peacemaker, Chandra decided to earn a Bachelor of Theology degree. Currently living in Surkert, Nepal, he is employed as a Principal of a Bible School and pastor of a Mennonite church. Chandra is eager to learn more about peace making and conflict resolution to be an influencer in his home area for reduction of violence. He plans to teach new methods of achieving peace throughout his community and through courses for church planners and pastors provided at the Bible School. Dr. Longkumer of Antioch Missions in Nepal shared that he believes, “the investment in Candra’s education will have a great impact on the people of Nepal”



Music Ministry Opportunities

Starting September 3, the regular schedule of Wednesday night rehearsals and worship services begin. The Music Ministry has many opportunities for all ages and all are welcome to participate. Questions? Contact Director of Music Robert Nance, robert@maestronance.com. Then add your voice and/or instrument to the musical life of Plymouth Congregational Church!

Plymouth Music Ensembles include:

- **Sanctuary Singers** – this choral ensemble sings for worship most Sundays, and for all major events including Boar's Head, music series concerts, and special holiday services. Rehearses Wednesdays from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. and regularly on Sunday mornings at 9 a.m. Additional special rehearsals scheduled as needed.
- **Plymouth Bell Ensemble** – rings for worship once each month, and for all major events including Boar's Head, an occasional music series concert, and holiday services. Rehearses Wednesdays from 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.
- **Plymouth Children's Choirs** – this program provides a creative outlet for children K-5th grade and includes singing, choir chimes, Orff instruments and occasional drama and art. This group performs for worship periodically, and for special services throughout the year. Rehearsals on Wednesday from 5:00 – 6:00 p.m.
- **Youth Music (instrumental and vocal)** – Music opportunities are varied for middle and high school-level musicians. Rehearsals for youth are scheduled based on the availability of the participants. If you are interested in sharing your musical talents, please contact Robert Nance!
- Additional opportunities for music leadership are always possible and will be considered; contact Robert Nance for more information.

For now, please take this time to review your schedules and make a commitment to participate in these fine programs provided by the music ministry, where everyone is welcome to experience new ways to explore their faith, restore hope and discover God.



Plymouth Music Series

One of Plymouth's outreach programs is the music ministry's **concert series**. This past summer, the music ministry organized several wonderful concerts for the community including our New Orleans Jazz Ensemble, the musical ***IN PIECES*** directed by Brandon Porter and Heather Brackeen, and ending with a wonderful **recital** by mezzo soprano Alejandra Sandoval-Montañez. Each event was followed by an ice cream reception. These concerts are made possible by a dedicated music ministry staff and committee, the church staff and many generous donors. Thank you all!



Looking ahead to next year, you'll be receiving your annual letter and brochure for the season. Concerts this year include a recital that highlights the 100-year history of Winnie the Pooh, a full handbell ensemble concert, a holiday concert featuring Fort Wayne's only Spanish language choir, Canto de Corazón, our annual MLK Commemoration, a keyboard concert by Robert Nance and a recital on immigration. Watch for your brochure in the mail soon!



Join Study Connection's 13th Year

Become a Study Connection Tutor - Make a Difference in a Child's Life

This fall, Plymouth is celebrating the **13th year** of a successful Study Connection with children, grades K-5, who attend Fairfield Elementary School. Study Connection typically begins in early October after the teachers, students and parents sign agreements, the bus schedule is made and pick up after Study Connection is arranged. Tutors and subs meet at church a week before the start for orientation and to discuss planning for the school year. Each session, the children bounce off the bus and happily meet with their tutors for about an hour in the Folsom Room. Each child has a Study Connection folder with homework or other tasks the teacher would like the child to do or practice. Once the children have eaten their snacks, the homework begins. Usually there is time near the end of the program for a group game, or story with one or two others or alone with the tutor. Materials in the tutor bags are provided by Study Connection. Other support materials are available for everyone to use, some provided by Study Connection and others are stored at the church. We are fortunate to have a storage area with books and educational games, adding extra variety to each session. Tutors take turns cleaning up and setting out the healthy snacks which are donated by the Peace and Justice Committee.



Tutors and children have fun getting to know each other. The main job of the tutor is to establish a relationship with the child to encourage and support learning. We are not substitute teachers, instead we are the child's advocate, cheerleader and an adult friend. Often, the children will teach the tutors ways to do homework so everyone can learn together. There is email contact weekly between Study Connection and the child's teacher. When semester breaks occur, the children are sad they won't see their tutors for two weeks. Birthdays are special and we make sure each child has a celebration with a song and a book as a gift from their tutor. In addition, we have at least two parties each season, one at Christmas and one at the end of the year. Between 3:30 and 4:30 pm on Wednesday afternoons, the Folsom Room is alive with youthful voices and energy.



If you would like to be a tutor or a substitute, please let Lucy Hess know at lrh22@frontier.com or call 484-4430. To apply, go to the link on our digital bulletin page or the FWCS Study Connection website:

<https://www.fortwayneschools.org/families/face/study-connection>. Scroll down to the volunteer tab to access the application form. All volunteers must have a background check which is done by the FWCS at no cost. Everyone is welcome to be a special friend to an elementary-aged child. Providing support and encouragement is the main task for each tutor and sub. Being a tutor or sub is a great way to make a difference in a child's life.

Financial Report

July 2025



	Month Actual	Month Budget	Month Variance		YTD Actual	YTD Budget	YTD Variance
Total Income	\$125,854	\$144,279	(\$18,425)		\$587,109	\$578,709	\$8,400
Total Expenses	\$62,468	\$62,438	\$30		\$509,744	\$527,118	(\$17,374)
rounding			(\$1)				\$1
Net Income (Loss)	\$63,386	\$81,841	(\$18,456)		\$77,365	\$51,591	\$25,775

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