



The Bell

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

From the Senior Pastor

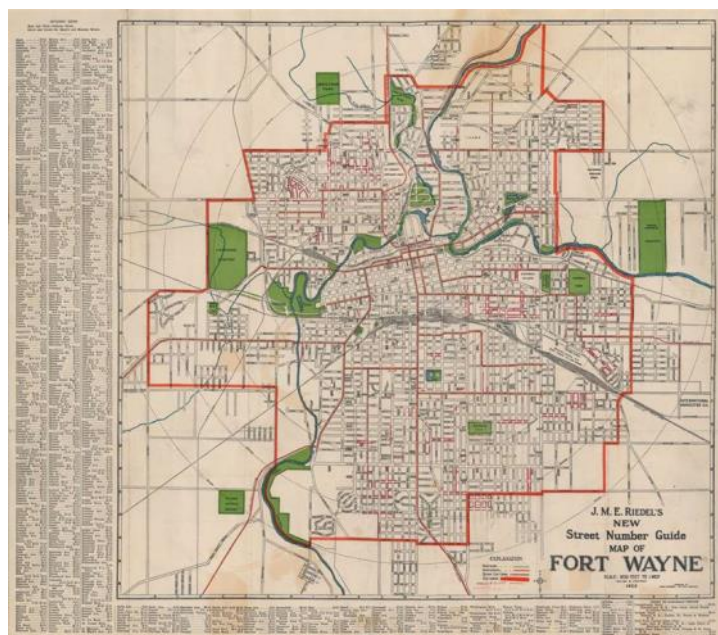
Pastoral Pedaling Then and Now



In service to this Bell's theme of Plymouth Generations, I was drawn to a common thread between one former pastor here and myself. Initially as trivia was gathered in preparation for a sesquicentennial celebration several years ago, it came to my attention that a former pastor used to ride his bicycle a lot.

That was the Rev. Jame Stuart Ainslie, who, according to our historical records, was pastor at Plymouth from 1890-1900. It is documented in multiple places that he was known for riding his bicycle to make pastoral care visits. I think this was noted as a humorous fact since by the time these things were written down, often in the 1950s or 60s, the automobile had already become the predominant method of transportation in Fort Wayne. Riding a bike felt quaint.

One big difference between then and now is the substantially expanded geographical boundaries of the city. I found a map from 1922, a full generation later after his pastorate, but even then, you will be amazed at the relative compactness of the city. See the image below. It's not so difficult to travel around by bicycle when State Street is the northern edge of town (thus the name for North Side High School)!



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Worship at Plymouth

Plymouth Church is currently offering an in-person worship service every **Sunday at 10:00 am**. Before worship, from **8:30 am to 9:45 am**, we offer a time of fellowship, with coffee provided, in the Folsom Room, as well as our weekly Chapel Class education hour at **9:00 am**.

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 **Mondays**.

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The city might have a much larger population compared to Rev. Ainslie's day, but it has expanded outward far faster than its population has grown (this is known as sprawl). We may have more people, but they are more spread out by distance than in the 1890s or 1920s. That makes it far more difficult to make pastoral care visits by bike, given the breath of its current boundaries.

Nevertheless, I, too, have been known to make pastoral care visits by bicycle in these 2020s. Specifically, when I visited Ruth Anne Sprunger on Indiana Avenue, I would almost always travel by bike. It helped that we lived in adjacent neighborhoods. Beyond that, I can make it easy enough to places on Anthony Blvd. on the east side, Tillman Park on the southside (where folks have gathered before to pick up trash), and on the northeast side, I can comfortably make it about as far as Johnny Appleseed Park.

Distances much beyond that doesn't feel safe enough with the infrastructure largely hostile to walking or biking. For instance, I have not attempted to travel by bike to Parkview Regional Medical Center. It's simply too far away, would take too much time, and I don't know the routes needed to make it there and back in one piece, if they even exist.

In reality, I mainly bike to and from my house to the church building. It's only about fifteen minutes away, and so long as it's not raining, it's at least 20 degrees outside, and I don't have other scheduled meetings or visits around town that day, I try and prioritize traveling via bicycle. It's easiest from March-November, but there are some days it's doable even in the middle of winter.

It's not done as a way to be retro or quirky; it just helps me enjoy the day more and feel some relief from the otherwise compulsory feeling of car-centric infrastructure, which has grated against my sensibilities for decades. One nice plus is that I occasionally get to see and greet other church members and colleagues who I wouldn't have noticed if I was driving past at 40 mph in my car. On several occasions, I have waved to Rev. January Simpson as she is taking a morning walk with her dog. I might see Rev. Bill McGill as he is leaving Imani Baptist after finishing Sunday worship or a Bible study there.

You just never know who you might run into while traveling on a human scale. Besides that, it is one small thing I can do to help encourage Fort Wayne to build itself in ways that are friendly and inclusive to alternative modes of traversal, whether by choice or necessity. Whether I see you sometime for a visit within bike-accessible boundaries or I go get my car to make the trek, I look forward to all the ways we can collectively create a more just, livable, compassionate, and sustainable community for all our residents, now and in the future!

Peace,

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



From the Associate Pastor

Centering Prayer: Past and Present



It would be easy to assume that the popular Christian practice of Centering Prayer is nothing more than a contemporary invention—a Christian spin on practices such as Zen or mindfulness meditation—practices that have become all the rage with the “spiritual but not religious” crowd. But in fact, forms of Christian meditation, including Centering Prayer, have been around since the earliest days of the church and are in many ways the heart of our tradition.

One of the earliest indications that some form of silent meditation was practiced by early Christians comes from the collected sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers—spiritual contemplatives of the 4th and 5th centuries who fled into the desert as Christianity began to align itself more closely with the Roman Empire. But it is within the 14th century spiritual classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, that we find the clearest reference to something that looks most like Centering Prayer today.

The practice of Centering Prayer is all about letting go of our thoughts, to make room for God’s presence. The Cloud of Unknowing includes many instructions exactly to this effect, such as “...be loath to think of anything... either in general or in specific. But let your thoughts be and take no notice of them.”

Unfortunately, many forms of Christian meditation, including Centering Prayer, were forgotten, or lost over the centuries, particularly as the Protestant Reformation took hold. It wasn’t until the 1950s and 60s, with the work of contemplative priests like Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating, that there began to be a resurgence of interest in contemplative prayer practices. Now, thanks to organizations like Father Keating’s Contemplative Outreach and Father Richard Rohr’s Center for Action and Contemplation, contemplative Christianity is having something of a renaissance, and more people are discovering Centering Prayer, and other contemplative practices, for the first time.

Contemplative prayer has become an important part of my own spiritual journey, which is why when I arrived at Plymouth two and a half years ago, one of the first things I did was start a Centering Prayer group. We are a small but dedicated group, and while I still practice by myself most mornings, there is something particularly special about practicing in a group. There is a unique energy that arises when a group of people sit together silently with no intention other than to be in God’s presence. Sure, there are times when it just feels boring, and when I can’t seem to keep thoughts of what’s for dinner or my list of chores from running through my head. But even then, I know that as I practice letting go of those thoughts, I’m strengthening my spiritual muscles, one thought at a time.

If you’ve ever been curious about Centering Prayer, I invite you to join us. We meet every Monday at 5:30 pm. It’s pretty much the same every week, so feel free to drop in any time. It only takes about five minutes to get all the instructions you need to participate fully, so don’t worry if you have no experience. And if you are experienced at the practice, you can jump right in! Hope to see you there!

Centering Prayer consists of learning to withdraw attention from our thoughts—those incessant creations of our busy minds—in order to rest in a gentle, open attentiveness to divine reality itself.

--Cynthia Bourgeault



Indiana Center for Middle East Peace and Plymouth: A Long History

From the very beginning, Plymouth Church, its pastors and staff, its Executive Council, and the congregation as a whole have been very supportive of ICMEP's programs in support of full civil, political, and human rights for Palestinians, particularly the Palestinian Christian community.

Our first program was a lunch in the Folsom Room in September 2004 for Dr. Raed Mualem, Headmaster of the K-College Senior Mar Elias Educational Institution Schools in Ibillin, Galilee, Israel, founded by Abuna (later Archbishop) Elias Chacour, three-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee and author of the acclaimed *Blood Brothers*. Michael Spath was Abuna Chacour's US Board at the time, Pilgrims of Ibillin, and had spent time at the school. Twelve people attended the lunch.

Since then, ICMEP has hosted Abuna Chacour himself three times in Fort Wayne; on another occasion, Rev. John Gardner invited him to be a Parry Lecturer.

Since those humble beginnings, ICMEP has hosted over 240 programs, 90% of which have been held at Plymouth Church. They have included presentations by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars, activists, social reformers, political, religious, and NGO leaders, as well as its annual Commemoration of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights at Plymouth. ICMEP also has hosted concerts by Arab and Palestinian musicians, drama, Sufi dancers, and Tibetan Buddhist monks.

One of the programs most often referenced was Arab Fest, when ICMEP hosted a joint Christian-Muslim dinner at Plymouth Church, with food the Muslim community brought. Over 300 attended, overflowing the Folsom Room, into the hallways. And when it was time for Muslim prayer, they made their way to the carpeted floor in the sanctuary, and many of the Christians in attendance sat in silence in the back of the sanctuary to observe and many, to take time for their own prayers.

Plymouth has been generous, too, in its financial support of ICMEP's programs, providing it with a Benevolence Grant for the last number of years. ICMEP is particularly grateful. And there has been financial assistance, too, for those who travel on Michael's Solidarity Tours.

Plymouth's pastors have participated in Michael Spath's ICMEP "solidarity tours" - John Gardner twice, both Timothy Murphy and Sara Ofner-Seals, and in the last year, Timothy and Sara have been engaged in creating a partnership with our dear friend, Zoughbi Zoughbi, founder of the Wi'am Conflict Resolution and Transformation Center in Bethlehem.

More than 15 of Plymouth's members have traveled with Michael on his solidarity tours in the last 20 years. They return and offer programs for Plymouth's members about what they experienced, about who they met in Palestine and Israel. They return informed, committed, and changed.

An upcoming joint ICMEP-Plymouth program will be the devotional, "Walking the Palestinian Stations of the Cross" on **Tuesday evening of Holy Week, March 26.**

Finally, ICMEP has benefited from strong leadership from Plymouth's members. David Jolliff and the late Judy Kuelling are former board members. Current Plymouth members on the ICMEP Board include Terry Dougherty (Chair), Pam Etheridge (Vice-Chair), Ahnee Conner (Treasurer), and board members Linda Kerr and Bill Lambert. Patty Pendleton, Plymouth member and one of ICMEP's founders 20 years ago, is Secretary of the Board.

So much more could be said about the ICMEP-Plymouth relationship. ICMEP continues to be deeply grateful for the support of all kinds we receive from Plymouth.



PLYMOUTH CHURCH FORT WAYNE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

2024 Bell Submission & Publication Schedule

May Bell

Submissions Due: Wednesday, May 8

Publication Date: Friday, May 17

August Bell

Submissions Due: Wednesday, August 7

Publication Date: Friday, August 16

November Bell

Submissions Due: Wednesday, November 6

Publication Date: Friday, November 15

Please submit all Bell articles by **11:59 pm** of the submission deadline date to Elizabeth Pruitt at edp@plymouthfw.org. The Bell is then sent out at 4:00 pm on the publication date.

Email reminders are sent out a few weeks in advance for those who frequently contribute to the Bell. If you'd like to be added to that list, please let Elizabeth or Jake know.

Previous issues of the Bell are available digitally on the [Plymouth website](#).

Plymouth Church: Past, Present, and Future

Whenever I tell someone in the area I work at Plymouth Congregational Church, they almost immediately know where and who we are. It is clear that Plymouth has made a name for itself in the last 150 years. I frequently am told stories by members, attendees, and even just Fort Wayne locals about the way Plymouth has made an impact on them in some capacity, whether that be through Boar's Head, the Music Series, or even our booth at Fort Wayne Pride.

And with such a rich past and lively present, what will the future of Plymouth look like? You're sure to get a glimpse of that by working in a Sunday School classroom or assisting with Youth Group. Hearing from the youth of the church offers a new perspective on Plymouth and the world today through fresh eyes. New members also offer a unique perspective, as they may bring knowledge from previous church or work experiences that may never have been thought of or possible before.

Not only are hearing stories from Plymouth's past or an individual's journey at Plymouth fun and inspiring, they can help us learn and work toward creating a better future for our congregation and the greater community. That is why this year, the Bell will be featuring articles inspired by our past, present, and future under the theme, "Plymouth Generations."

Whether you've been at Plymouth your whole life or just joined us last year, we'd love to share your story! If you are looking for some guidelines of what to write, feel free to skim some options below.

- What led you to choose Plymouth?
- Where has God's journey taken you since you joined Plymouth?
- The beginning/ending of a task force, an action team, or annual event.
 - Groups starting as a response to a current event
 - Groups disbanding due to outside circumstances
- Interview your child about what they've learned in Sunday School/ Youth Group/Covenant Class.
- History of rooms/artwork/other memorial gifts in the building
- Goals and plans for future task forces/boards/action teams.

If you have an interest in writing an article but it doesn't quite fit a topic above, don't worry! These are just suggestions to start brainstorming. Please email me with your name, associated group (if applicable), and the topic of your article. Photos to accompany the story are always welcome.

Even as staff here, I can tell Plymouth has made a deep impact in this community and I know it will continue. I look forward to reading your stories and learning more about the light that is Plymouth Congregational Church.

Peace,

Elizabeth Pruitt
Communications Specialist

Plymouth Church Historical Timeline

1870

Plymouth worshiped in the German Methodist Church on the northeast corner of Washington and Fulton.

1871

A church is built for the congregation on the northwest corner of Washington and Fulton for \$4,700.

1893

The second church building was built at the corner of Jefferson and Harrison. This building sold in 1924.

1921

Two lots were purchased on the southwest corner of Berry and Fairfield for \$36,000.



1924

The fourth building for the congregation was completed in 1924 costing \$285,000.

1955

Two dog-legged aisles in the sanctuary were changed to make one center aisle. The courtyard was enclosed, and the space was designated for infants and toddlers.

1957

The United Church of Christ was formed, combining the Evangelical and Reformed Churches and the Congregational Christian Churches.

1960

Plymouth becomes part of the United Church of Christ.



1974

The Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival was brought to Plymouth Congregational. The Christmas story is told with actors, carols, a handbell choir, chorus and orchestra.



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Plymouth Church Historical Timeline Continued

1999

A major reconstruction moved the staff offices to the second floor and a small chapel was added.



2004

Renovations made the entire first floor handicap accessible.



2013

An elevator installation has made the entire facility handicap accessible.

2016

Roof solar panels were installed to continue our mission of being earth-friendly.



2021

Plymouth divests its endowment from coal, oil, and natural gas companies.



On September 20, 2020, Plymouth Church celebrated its 150th Anniversary. We received a proclamation issued by the Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, in honor of this anniversary. Read it [here](#).

Holy Week Services

Maundy Thursday | Thursday, March 28 at 6:00 pm

Maundy Thursday Communion Service recalls the events of Holy Week leading up to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. Dinner, foot washing, and Communion are included.

Good Friday | Friday, March 29 at 7:00 pm

Good Friday Tenebrae Service marks the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. It is a moving and deeply meaningful service of remembrance and hope, that features the dimming of lights and special music presentations by our choirs.

Easter Sunday | Sunday, March 31 at 7:30 am and 10:00 am

On Easter Sunday, Plymouth celebrates the promise of eternal life with a Sunrise Service at 7:30 am, and a Festival Worship and Communion Service at 10:00 am.



Plymouth Music Series

A Keyboard Concert | Sunday, March 10 at 4:00 pm

Plymouth's own music director and Fort Wayne's honored maestro and arts advocate Robert Nance will present an inspiring program of keyboard standards as well as a retrospective of his original works and the stories behind them. Don't miss this unique experience!

Feliz Primavera: A Spring Concert By Canto De Corazon | Sunday, April 28 at 4:00 pm

What is Truth Seminar 2.0: A Weekend of Study, Story, and Song | Friday—Sunday, May 3-5

Featuring Valerie Tutson, Storyteller, Singers David Bobay and Sydney Fabregas along with keyboardist Robert Nance and Plymouth's Thee Combo, this is our second seminar that provides the opportunity to consider the question and reflect. More detailed information to come.



USF Jesters Spring Show

The University of Saint Francis Jesters have been a recipient of Benevolence grants from Plymouth for at least the last two years. The funds presented have assisted the Jesters in the cost of production of their yearly program as well as voice to print captioning technology that allows deaf audience members to know what is being said and enable performers that can not project their voice or are difficult to understand to have speaking roles.

The Jesters are a performing group of over 100 participants, ages 8 and older with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The mission of the Jesters is to enhance quality of life for people with disabilities by co-creating art, opportunity, and community.

Each September they begin meeting weekly to prepare a show that is performed in March. The cast is made up of members from Allen, Whitley, Huntington, Wells counties of Indiana and Paulding County, Ohio.

The theme of their 2024 show is "Diversity." Performance dates are **Saturday, March 9 at 6:00 pm and Sunday, March 10 at 3:00 pm**. The cost of admission is \$10 and tickets can be purchased every Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at the North Campus Auditorium or at the door the day of the show. Cash and check only, please.

Jesters also has summer programs that include instruction in dance and movement, theater and improvisation, storytelling and music.

To learn more about the USF Jesters or find out ways to volunteer, click [here](#).

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 church events, volunteer opportunities, and other news. The Weekly Bulletin is 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.

Financial Report

December 2023

	Month	Month	Month	YTD	YTD	YTD
	Actual	Budget	Variance	Actual	Budget	Variance
Total Income	\$67,839	\$68,735	(\$896)	\$849,918	\$864,134	(\$14,216)
Total Expenses	\$70,701	\$83,654	(\$12,953)	\$841,551	\$864,107	(\$22,556)
Net Income (Loss)	(\$2,862)	(\$14,917)	\$12,056	\$8,365	\$27	\$8,338

Contact Us

Senior Pastor and Teacher

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

Youth Director

Kara Jaurigue
kkjaurigue@gmail.com

Communications Specialist

Elizabeth Pruitt
edp@plymouthfw.org

Associate Pastor

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals
smo@plymouthfw.org

Sunday School Director

Katie Watson
kjwatson4@gmail.com

Media Specialist

Nakia Brabham
nakia.brabham@yahoo.com

Associate in Pastoral Care

Rev. January Simpson
jls@plymouthfw.org

Child Care Director

Michelle Grim
davidandmichellegrim@gmail.com

Building Maintenance Manager

John Hoelderle
jmh@plymouthfw.org

Music Director

Maestro Robert Nance
robert@maestronance.com

Office Manager

Tina Puitz
tmp@plymouthfw.org

Custodian

Jamal Taylor
jlt@plymouthfw.org

Financial Administration

Stephen Cook
financial@plymouthfw.org

Receptionist

Jake Slone
jss@plymouthfw.org

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

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!