



The Bell

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

From the Senior Pastor

Post-Election Discipleship



As I write this, the 2024 election has not yet been resolved. By the time you read this, most races will have a presumptive winner, but some may not. I know many people have been exhausted by the news and stress around this year's election. I can't tell you the results nor if your preferred candidate(s) won.

What I can tell you is that while I don't know the winners, nor who the next president will be, I do know what our role as disciples will be. We are to be witnesses to the truth we have experienced and try

to live out each day together. That won't change or at least, it shouldn't.

When I was serving at another UCC congregation in 2008 as Minister for Youth and Social Justice, I found it hard to get people engaged in justice work for almost six months after the election. Many of them had been very involved in a number of ballot propositions, including protecting marriage equality, and others had invested a lot of emotional energy in the presidential race. So afterwards, people seemed to demobilize for a bit.

There was a rally for immigrant rights in a neighboring town a dozen of us marched in, and a few things here and there. But people by and large unplugged for a spell. I think it came out of the mistake of investing so much of their religious ideals with their political identity.

However, for much of the churches' history in many places, they were not in power. They did not have a government that represented them on all sorts of things, and they didn't have a way to directly influence it in any case. Instead, what they did, especially in the early church but also in movements through the centuries, was to seek to build the community in microcosm that they believed was God's dream in macrocosm.

I don't know who is going to be in charge come January as I write, and you might not either as you read this, depending on how close the results are. Nevertheless, I know what we are called to do. We are to speak out for peace. We are to march for justice. We are to pray for compassion, not only for ourselves, but for our neighbors and our enemies alike.

We are to care for those who are suffering, and show them that there is a

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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**.

To learn other ways to connect with Plymouth, see the last page of this newsletter.

community where they can find the sacred at work and the Spirit among them. We are called to embody that, through the power of Christ at work in us, no matter what. If policies are moving in ways we sympathize with, we can push for them to be even more inclusive. If they violate our core convictions, we are to model an alternative way.

Our salvation comes from being faithful to Jesus' way, strengthened through God's grace, regardless of the context in which we find ourselves, friendly or antagonistic. We dare not cozy up too closely with power that so readily crucifies those it deems expendable, and we must also avoid isolating ourselves as if we were an island unto ourselves, where the gospel has no bearing or good news to share with our world.

We are to be in the world but not of the world: in the system, but not of the system. Whatever that system may be, there will be a witness that needs to be lived and shared. That's what I hope to be doing post-election, and I pray that you too will find that Way worth walking. Whatever is before us.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy

48th Annual Boar's Head Festival



Oh Come All Ye Faithful!

Casting and coordinating is in full swing for the upcoming 48th annual Boar's Head & Yule Log Festival. If you would like to be involved with this year's Festival, there is still time! Please see Kara Jaurigue on Sunday or you may email her at kkjaurigue@gmail.com.

There is room in the cast, or maybe you would like to sing in the Festival Choir? If you enjoy sewing, helping in the kitchen, working with children, or if you have a background in security, we have a place for you!

The Boars Head & Yule Log Festival is funded by our Patrons. There is a free will offering we collect following each of the services if you feel inclined to donate. Also we can't forget our fun Wassailers, who climb the pews singing and begging for your spare change! If you'd like to be a Patron, and support the Festival financially, we would love to add you to our Patron mailing list.

Mark your calendars now; Festival Services are **Sunday December 29 and Monday December 30 at 5:30pm and 8:00pm** each evening. Plymouth Church members can pick up their (6) tickets on **December 8, 15 and 22** before and after church in the Folsom Room. The **Public Box Office date is Thursday December 12 from 4:30pm to 6:30pm** at the church. We hope you will come and be a part of the holiday magic that is Boars Head.

From the Associate Pastor

Advent: Then and Now



*That was no time for a child to be born,
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;
Honor & truth were trampled to scorn—
Yet here did the Savior make His home.*

Madeleine L'Engle

As I write this, Advent is still over a month away, but by the time you read this, it will only be a few weeks away, and the holiday season will be ramping up as Thanksgiving approaches. I would suggest, therefore, that it is not too early to start thinking about Advent, and what it might mean for us this year. It's been a tough year for many in our world. Whether we think about the people of Gaza, who (as of this writing) continue to endure a genocidal war, or we think about people a little closer to home in Florida or North Carolina, many of whom lost everything in this year's hurricane season, we might wonder where to find joy this holiday season. Maybe we even feel a twinge of guilt about our own preparations and upcoming celebrations, knowing that so many of God's children are displaced, homeless, starving, grieving and carrying other heavy burdens. How dare we celebrate when so many have so little?

But here's the thing. Christ was not born into a perfect world 2000 years ago. He was born into a world very much like ours—a world of woe. As Kelly Nikondeha writes in her book *The First Advent in Palestine*, “the ache of injustice and suffering preceded the first Advent.” Jesus was born to a teenage girl embroiled in scandal, to a peasant family in occupied Palestine living under the brutality of the Roman Empire. Corruption was rampant in the world Jesus inhabited, even in the highest echelons of power, and even amongst the religious elite. Peasants and day-laborers were forced to give much of their income to Rome, leaving them with little to survive on. Even those with some means were burdened financially by required tributes to Caesar, taxes to Herod, and tithes to support the temple. It was a difficult time for all but the most powerful people in the region. And yet, good news still came to the people. Good news came to the shepherds, to the day-laborers, to the innkeepers, to barren women and to ordinary priests. Jesus was born- even in a time such as that.

Jesus was born then, and Jesus will be born again in our world this Christmas. Good news of God's love will come to the people of Gaza and Lebanon. Good news of redemption will come to climate refugees and all the displaced people of the world. The good news of God's kingdom of justice and peace will come to those living in poverty, the oppressed, and all who grieve. There is, however, one catch. Jesus will be born again, not in the physical form of a child in Bethlehem, but within each one of us. Therefore, Jesus is only as alive in our world today as we allow him to be. The power of Jesus is only as potent as we allow it to be. We are the body of Christ in the world today.

This is why the season of Advent is so important, and though our culture tends to skip right from Thanksgiving to full-on Christmas, we know better. We know that a season of preparation is needed. We must prepare the way in our own hearts, making room there for Jesus to be born anew. We must de-clutter our minds and spirits, not only for Christ's love to enter in, but also for Christ's love to propel us into action in a hurting world. This is the meaning of Christmas. The lights, presents, and celebrations are nice, but they are not the point. The point is for Jesus to be made real in the world once more through our words, our actions, our hands and feet. This birth might not change the facts on the ground right away, but if we are willing, it will change us, and by extension, little by little, it will change the world. This Advent season, may we allow ourselves to be part of the story. May we prepare our hearts for the good news to be born within us, and may we be prepared for that good news to transform us and our world. May it be so!

Peace,
Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals
Associate Pastor

Keep Hope Alive: Sponsoring Olive Trees in the West Bank

There is an olive tree in Bethlehem that is over 4000 years old. Stop and take that in for a moment. This is an olive tree that would have been planted 2000 years before Jesus was born. The tree even has a name—Al Badawi, which means ‘the big one.’ The tree is the centerpiece of the yearly olive harvest in the region, one of the most important annual events for Palestinian farmers. Many Palestinian farmers rely on the olive harvest for their livelihoods each year.

Unfortunately, Palestinian olive groves in Bethlehem and throughout the West Bank are under attack. The UN recently reported that hundreds of Palestinian olive trees have been burned, vandalized, or stolen by Israeli settlers since the start of the most recent harvest season in September. There have also been reports of Israeli soldiers preventing farmers from accessing their land, claiming the land is a “closed military zone.” Some farmers now feel it is a risk to their very lives just to harvest the trees on their own property. Indeed, UN officials have called this year’s harvest “the most dangerous olive season ever.”

The olive tree is a national symbol for Palestine. It represents the deep connection Palestinians feel to the land, it is a crucial source of income, as well as the source of an important staple in the national diet. Palestinian writers and poets have long used the symbol of the olive tree in their work. Thus, Palestinians take the attacks on their olive groves personally. It feels like an attack on their very identity.

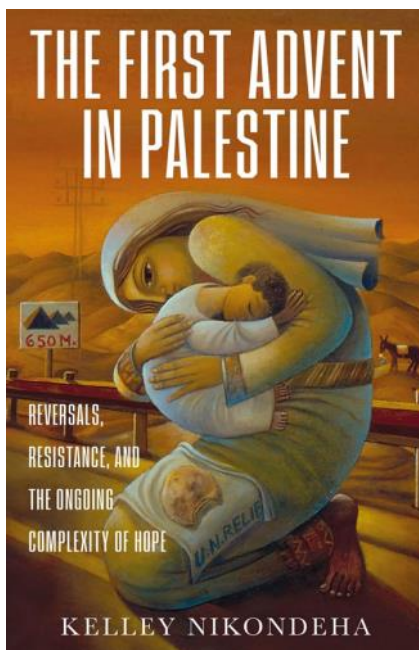
The United Church of Christ Global Ministries team has started a campaign to help these farmers and their families, and you can help! With the “Keep Hope Alive” campaign, Global Ministries is working with partners on the ground to raise money to plant more olive trees in the West Bank. A single tree costs \$20. If you are looking for some alternative gift options this holiday season, consider sponsoring a tree (or three!) in honor of a loved one, and help keep the ancient Palestinian tradition of olive farming alive.



To sponsor an olive tree through the Global Ministries Keep Hope Alive campaign, visit <https://www.globalministries.org/regions/mee/keep-hope-alive-campaign-2024/>

It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Advent!

Advent Book Study: *The First Advent in Palestine*
“The first advent was about the arrival of God into a world of woe,
and every advent since invites us to grapple with what Jesus’s coming
means to our fraught landscapes now.”
-Kelley Nikondeha



This year for Advent, Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals will be leading a book study on *The First Advent in Palestine* by Kelley Nikondeha. The book takes the reader through the birth narratives in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, detailing the struggles of the various characters and how they moved from despair to hope during the very first Advent in the land of Palestine.

Reading the Advent narratives of Luke and Matthew anew, in their original context, changes so much about how we see the true story of resistance, abusive rulers and systems of oppression, and God coming to earth. In Luke, Rome and Caesar loom, and young Mary's strength and resolve shine brightly as we begin to truly understand what it meant for her to live in the tumultuous Galilee region. In Matthew, through Joseph's point of view, we see the brutality of Herod's rule and how the complexities of empire weighed heavily on the Holy Family. We bear witness to the economic hardship of Nazareth, Bethlehem, and the many villages in between—concerns about daily bread, crushing debt, land loss, and dispossession that ring a familiar echo to our modern ears. Throughout her explorations, Nikondeha features the stories of modern-day Palestinians, centering their voices to help us meet an Advent recognizable for today. This thought-provoking examination invites us into a season of discovery, one that is realistic and honest, and that still wonders at the goodness of God's grace.

The Advent book study will take place during the regular Wednesday Night Live Bible study time, and will be held December 4, 11 and 18. You can purchase the book at Bookshop.org, or wherever you buy your books!



Plymouth's Global Mission Covenant calls us to support programs such as Growing Hope Globally that impact the lives of our sisters, brothers, and siblings globally.

Plymouth Church has been an active and contributing member of Growing Hope Globally for nearly 20 years! Plymouth members along with our local church and farmer partners contributed \$19,721 to Growing Hope Globally, which directly helped 359 people find lasting solutions to their hunger in Honduras as well as Burkina Faso in West Africa.

So, what does Growing Hope Globally do?

They partner with local farmers and rural & urban churches like Plymouth to create a growing project that helps international families and communities break the cycle of hunger and poverty to lead healthier, more productive lives. Specifically, Plymouth Church is part of the Ashley, IN Growing Project, which includes two other local churches and farmers.

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

Here is an example of how the program works:

A Burkinabe woman named Noali doubled the sorghum production on her one-and-a-half-acre farm from 550 lbs. to 1100 lbs. How'd she do that? Before receiving training, Noali recognized her soil was poor and there was a problem with weeds. But she didn't know what to do about it. Through GHG she learned a variety of climate-smart, environmentally friendly agriculture practices and improved her soil. She composted and switched to an improved seed variety.

The goal of Noali's local GHG partner is to assist smallholder farmers, especially women, to improve their food security through more efficient farm production and market linkages. They demonstrate dry-land farming techniques like planting in zaï holes to capture available rainwater, retaining moisture where the seedlings are. They show how green cover crops can control weeds and can also be used to feed livestock, while enriching the soil with organic matter. They research and source seed more suitable to the climate.

Once a farmer begins producing higher yields she can start saving her own seed for future planting.

Staff are on hand for technical support to participants like Noali, the head of a seven-member household whose main livelihood is agriculture. The sorghum she grows is now enough to feed her family, and what she sells brings in income to cover household expenses and purchase food to improve the family diet with vegetables and some grains that she doesn't grow herself. Noali, like the other participants, commit to sharing their knowledge and experience with other community members, passing it on.

Plymouth's Global Mission Covenant calls us to support programs such as Growing Hope Globally that impact the lives of sisters, brothers, and siblings who live in harsh, harsh conditions.

Your gift to Growing Hope Globally will make a lasting impact for generations to come because it will provide things that can never be taken away: knowledge, experience and empowerment.

Please use the envelopes in the pews to make a donation today. Write GHG on the envelope and on the memo line on your check. Or go online to Plymouth's website and click on the Growing Hope Globally donation link.

Any amount will make a difference!



Music Ministry News

Tis the season when music and the arts at Plymouth Church are especially active and in focus at Plymouth Church. Let me offer my sincere gratitude to all the many folks who share their talents with the music ministry!

In addition to our weekly work to provide musical enrichment and leadership in worship, the music ministry presents numerous concerts throughout the year, prepares for special services and activities, and annually prepares for our annual Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival Worship Services.

This is a very active ministry and there is definitely a place for you - everyone is welcome!

If you are interested in joining one of Plymouth's choirs or offering your musical talents in worship, please contact me at robert@maestronance.com or speak to me on Sunday mornings after worship.

On behalf of our music staff, Maryrose & Tim Cunningham, and the music committee, Anne Hughes, chair, I thank you for your support!

Sincerely,

Maestro Robert Nance
Director of Music

Upcoming music opportunities:

Interfaith Thanksgiving Service massed choir - We need singers to volunteer to sing for the community thanksgiving service on 11/26 at 7 p.m. This group will gather at 6 p.m. at Temple Achduth Vesholom to rehearse and then participate in the 7 p.m. service. Contact Robert Nance at robert@maestronance.com if you are interested.

Boar's Head Festival Choir - we welcome all singers to sign up and participate in the Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival Worship Service as a member of the choir. This choir, along with a professional orchestra, provides the music for this annual event. Contact Robert Nance at robert@maestronance.com if you are interested.

Music Series presents Meridian Prall, Mezzo Soprano
Winner of the 2024 Metropolitan Opera Vocal Competition
November 17 at 2 p.m. | Sanctuary, Plymouth Church

Music Series presents Canto de Corazón
Fort Wayne's Spanish-language choir
December 15 at 4 p.m. | Sanctuary, Plymouth Church

Plymouth's Past: The History of 501 W. Berry St

PLYMOUTH'S PAST

Vincent E. Slater was born August 25, 1913 in Watertown, NY. He would go on to study choral music at Westminster Music School, understudy work at Peabody School of Music, and Organ at Curtis Institute of Music. During World War II, he served as a chaplain's assistant, and was in the entertainment core of the Army Air Corps in Miami and South America.

After the war, he became the assistant organist at First Baptist Church in Washington D.C. at the same time President Harry Truman attended. It was here that Vincent became acquainted with Albert Einstein, who was part of the string quartet he conducted at the church.

In 1948, Vincent became organist and choir director at both Plymouth Church and Achduth Vesholom Congregation. He was also founder and director of the Community Chamber Choir, and Plymouth's boys choir. Most notably, he arranged the music for Plymouth's Boars Head Yule Log Festival, and led the Plymouth choir in on European tours in 1979 and 1982. During this time, Vincent and his wife, Shirley, would have four children.

Vincent was also a piano soloist and choir director for Ft. Wayne Philharmonic, as well as organist for the Christian Science Church and Unitarian Universalist Congregation. At one point he advised the Fort Wayne Ballet and arranged and directed music for the Civic Theatre. He would go on to retire in 1984. Vincent Slater died May 29, 2006, and his wife Shirley, passed May 13, 2024. They are buried together in the Plymouth Memorial Garden.



Take a walk back through the Plymouth Archives to 1982.
That's the year Plymouth began sponsoring the Parry Lecture series.
Many renowned theologians have been brought to
Fort Wayne for the Parry Lectures. These lectures are made possible
through the generosity of the Arthur Parry Sr. Fund.
Arthur Parry, Jr. set up a fund in memory of his parents, Arthur Sr. and Margaritte Parry.

Arthur, Sr. graduated from Fort Wayne High School in 1905. He continued his education at University of Michigan where he earned his degree in law in 1905. Arthur and his wife, Margaritte became very active members of Plymouth Church. Sunday School teacher and Trustee were just two of the numerous positions he held at Plymouth. He and Margaritte had one child, Arthur Parry, Jr.

Arthur, Sr. lived to be 96 years old.

Religious and civic organizations were Arthur's passions. His passions lived on through the Parry Lectures. The intent of the Parry Lectures was to bring in pioneering thinkers and interpreters of Christian faith. The Louise Folsom Library has a section devoted to the Parry Lectures. Stop in and check out one of these books. Also, some of these lecturers' books are on display in the Folsom room until December.

Article by Terri Stumpf

(Special thanks to Monty Millage, Plymouth's archivist for helping locate this information.)

Advent Devotional Booklets

The season of Advent reminds us that we are still waiting and working for the full realization of God's kingdom. We long for a world free from oppression, hate, suffering, and injustice. We yearn for the day when God will make all things new. This waiting is not a passive one, rather, it is a time of active preparation. Just as the Israelites waited in hope for the coming of the Messiah, we too are called to prepare our hearts for Jesus' return.

To help you in preparation for the season, people of Plymouth have written devotions for the 24 days of Advent. The devotionals will involve scripture readings, meditations, reflection questions, prayer, hymns, poems, and even artwork by some of the younger people in our Sunday School Department! It is our hope and prayer that these devotionals will help prepare you for Christmas, as well as the continued work of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.



If you are on the Plymouth email list, you will automatically receive these on a daily basis starting on December 1. Hard copies, both regular and large print will be available at the church.

Tony Ray

Office Manager at Plymouth Congregational Church

Tony Ray is the new office manager at Plymouth Congregational Church, bringing with him a wealth of experience and a passion for service in the non-profit sector. With a background that spans years of work in various non-profit organizations, Tony is dedicated to helping communities thrive through organized, effective operations. His career has always been rooted in a strong desire to make a positive impact and support meaningful causes.



Tony is a graduate of Indiana Wesleyan University, where he earned a degree in Business Administration with a minor in Non-Profit Management. His educational background, combined with his hands-on experience, has provided him with a deep understanding of the unique needs of faith-based organizations and how to best support their mission.

Outside of work, Tony is an avid traveler with a love for all things summer. Whether it's exploring new destinations, soaking up the sun, or enjoying outdoor activities, summer is his season of choice. He shares his home with two loyal dogs, Gus and Leo, who keep him company on his adventures and add joy to his daily life.

Tony is excited to bring his skills, passion for non-profit work, and love for community to his new role at Plymouth Congregational Church.

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 Office Manager, Tony Ray at tdr@plymouthfw.org.

Financial Report: September

	Month Actual	Month Budget	Month Variance	YTD Actual	YTD Budget	YTD Variance
Total Income	\$65,722	\$70,050	(\$4,328)	\$710,432	\$715,463	(\$5,031)
Total Expenses	\$81,378	\$96,181	(\$14,803)	\$640,791	\$674,662	(\$33,871)
Net Income (Loss)	(\$15,656)	(\$26,131)	\$10,475	\$69,641	\$40,801	\$28,840

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