



# The Bell

PLYMOUTH CHURCH  
FORT WAYNE + UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

## From the Senior Pastor

Still Novel, Still Needed, Still Speaking



It has been a long time since I've either worked at or been part of a congregation or religious organization that wasn't Open and Affirming (ONA). The last time was back in 2006, when I was a ministry intern during seminary at Webster Groves Christian Church (they voted to become ONA in 2022). Since then, I've served in a variety of ways at Compton Heights Christian Church, Pilgrim United Church of Christ, (a)Spire Ministry of First Congregational Church of Pasadena, Progressive Christians Uniting, and All Peoples

Christian Church. All were Open and Affirming communities and organizations. For almost five years now, I've been your Senior Pastor. So, honestly, it's been long enough that it's becoming a bit hard to even remember what it's like to not be part of a community that values LGBTQ+ people and perspectives.

For some of you, it may have been even longer since being part of a church that wasn't ONA. If you've been here long enough, you might have to go back to 2001, which is when Plymouth officially became ONA. Alternatively, some of you have found your way here more recently, and the felt contrast between what you experienced *before* and the novelty of our ONA covenant *now* surely still resonates in a powerful way. Yet over time, what once felt like a brave and controversial stance to some inevitably becomes routine and normal. I know that for some youth who have grown up at Plymouth, the idea that any church is not ONA doesn't even make sense to them. That followers of Jesus should be ONA is obvious, even self-evident.

But regardless of whether being part of an ONA church has the same affect that it did when you first became part of, I want to remind you that there are still many in our region who don't know that there are LGBTQ+ affirming places of worship like us. Even in 2023, even this past month, I still periodically get emails or questions from people who are looking for a place to explore their faith with others. They don't know about Plymouth or our values. They ask questions like: What is your congregation's stance on same sex marriage? Are you LGBTQ+ affirming? Can gay people join your church?

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## Worship at Plymouth

Plymouth Church is currently offering an in-person worship service every **Sunday at 10:00 am**. At this time, masks are optional. Before worship, from **8:30 am to 9:45 am**, we offer a time of fellowship, with coffee provided, in the Folsom Room. Our weekly 9:00 am chapel class education hour concludes for the summer on Sunday, May 21 and will resume on Sunday, September 10.

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**.

*Continued from page 2...*

Even when people hear that we are ONA, they are sometimes skeptical. I know of one lesbian couple at a previous church I served at who recounted how they attended a church for a couple of years with no problem. They felt welcome. They didn't hear anything against LGBTQ+ people from the pulpit. They made friends there. Things felt good. But it all fell apart when they asked about volunteering and serving as leaders. All of a sudden, roadblocks were thrown up, because they were seen as unrepentant sinners on account of their relationship. They learned the difference between being silently tolerated and being affirmed. Lots of people have had similar experiences. They've been burned one too many times, so they don't always even believe it when we say we are ONA.

Whenever people ask me such questions, I try to make it plain what that means in practice. At its most elementary, we reject the idea that being queer is sinful or something one needs to repent from. We welcome LGBTQ+ persons into membership as well as leadership in the church. That means serving on boards, becoming officers, or seeking a path to ordination as a pastor. We baptize, perform weddings, and offer funerals. Approximately one-quarter of active participants are LGBTQ+ as well as one-third of staff. We have participated in Fort Wayne Pride and other events for years as a church. That's much clearer than "all are welcome." It paints a picture.

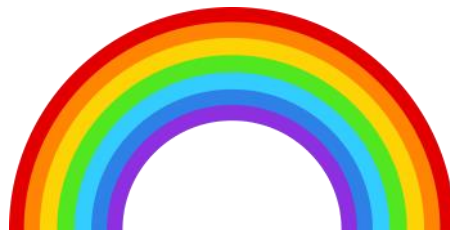
Of course, that doesn't mean we're perfect. We are still learning and growing. Being ONA is not a set destination but more an unending process. Since I came here, we delved more deeply into gender identity, which had received much less attention than sexual orientation up till that point. We've added signage for multiple gender-neutral bathrooms. We leased the adjacent building we purchased to Fort Wayne Pride, which is now their center for programs and activities. And we started our own Plymouth Pride event last year, which will be offered again this June.

There are still growing edges. There are still things we can do better and ways we can reduce the harm that comes about when imperfect people, i.e. everyone, gather together. We still have more to do to be more fully ONA. There is still internalized homophobia among us that peaks out at times, even among LGBTQ+ members. There is the theological baggage we are still unpacking sometimes *decades* after leaving other places. And there is of course the wider witness that our world still needs, until we fulfill my dream that being ONA becomes second nature everywhere. I want a world where our ONA witness becomes so unexceptional that no one ever needs to ask a pastor what the church's position is on LGBTQ+ persons ever again.

Until that happens, we still have work to do. Plymouth Church, when it comes to our ONA covenant, we are still novel to many. We are still needed. And we are still speaking.

Peace,

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



**“We are ... an Open and Affirming congregation (2001), welcoming members of the LGBTQ community. We find strength in our diversity and a greater understanding of God's inclusive love.”**

## From the Associate Pastor



As I write these words, many of us are just coming up for air after the impactful “What is Truth Seminar,” featuring Rev. Traci Blackmon, Valerie Tutson, Bob Nance, and vocalists from Heartland Sings. As I pondered the many takeaways from the weekend, I was struck by how much the ideas of the seminar applied to our identity as an Open and Affirming congregation and our recent advocacy efforts on behalf of transgender youth in our community.

This spring, the Indiana General Assembly passed a slate of legislation that many of us described as “the slate of hate.” Among the many laws that were passed was SB480—a ban on gender-affirming care for minors. Lawmakers masked the hate and fear behind this bill with the false narrative that they were only trying to protect children from overzealous parents and doctors with a ‘woke,’ leftist ideology. They based this argument on a handful of isolated anecdotes, and they ignored the

overwhelming number of facts and statistics provided by doctors and mental health professionals about the benefits of gender-affirming care.

Many of us from Plymouth stood up to resist these lies and speak our own truth about the importance of seeing and affirming our transgender siblings, especially transgender youth. Over a dozen of us from Plymouth rallied outside the Allen County courthouse for the ‘No Hate in Our State’ rally. Many more of us signed postcards to our legislators asking them to say ‘NO’ to the slate of hate. Several of us made trips to the statehouse in Indianapolis to lobby our legislators and rally with others across the state. Through our Evangelism and Marketing board, we partnered with five other local congregations to put a half-page, trans-affirming ad in the Journal Gazette and printed 50 trans-affirming yard signs for members to put in their yards (it still delights me every time I see one of our signs as I’m driving around Fort Wayne). We wrote emails and letters, and we made phone calls to our representatives.

After all that work, many of us felt discouraged and deflated when SB480, along with the rest of the “slate of hate,” was passed easily by the conservative supermajority. Of course, the work is not yet done, and the story is not yet over. Many of these laws, including SB480, have already been challenged in court and will hopefully be blocked while litigation continues. While we wait to see what happens in court, it’s important that we continue to speak the truth about a radically inclusive God who loves and affirms our LGBTQ+ siblings. We must continue to counter false narratives that are based on fear and hate. We must reflect the love and affirmation of God back to those who have faced rejection and discrimination in our community. Every seed of truth that we plant is important. Every conversation in which we speak the truth in love has an impact, even if we don’t see it right away. So, keep talking, keep speaking your truth, and keep standing up for love.

In her ‘What is Truth’ lecture on the opening night of the seminar, Rev. Traci Blackmon said we must always look for the “truth behind the facts.” When it comes to the facts about transgender youth and gender-affirming care, we know the statistics and the data. We know that most trans folk are aware of their gender dysphoria sometime between the ages of 2 and 7. We know that gender-affirming care requires months, if not years, of intensive therapy before medical interventions are applied. We know that gender-affirming care saves lives, and that less than 1% of those who receive such care change their minds later. But behind all those facts there is an even greater truth—that trans youth, along with all LGBTQ+ individuals, are made in the image of God, are beloved by God, and through their unique identities, God is further glorified in our world. That’s a truth worth standing up for, and I’m so grateful to be serving a church that is not afraid to do so.

Thanks be to God!

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals  
Associate Pastor





*Plymouth members and friends at the No Hate in Our State rally in March 2023.*



*Plymouth Church's booth at Fort Wayne Pride in 2022.*



*Plymouth members and friends at the 2019 Fort Wayne Pride March.*



*Plymouth Church's booth at Fort Wayne Pride in 2017.*



## **Plymouth Church: An Open and Affirming Congregation**

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

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

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

“We are ... an Open and Affirming congregation (2001), welcoming members of the LGBTQ community. We find strength in our diversity and a greater understanding of God's inclusive love.”

“The Open and Affirming Coalition certifies local churches and other ministries of the United Church of Christ as “Open and Affirming” after adoption of an ONA covenant welcoming all persons into Christian community, including equal participation in the life and ministries of the church. An explicit welcome to LGBTQ+ persons is required.”

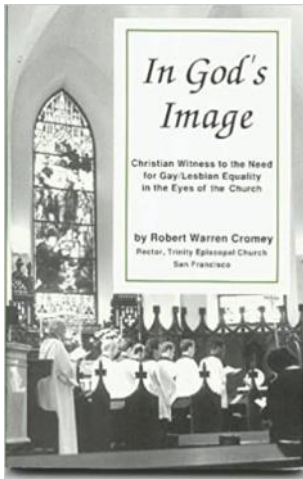
The Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ was founded in 1972, with the first ONA congregation being welcomed into the Coalition in 1986. There are currently over 1,800 Open and Affirming UCC congregations. The ONA Coalition, “advocates for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, and equips UCC congregations to become effective witnesses to Christ’s extravagant welcome.”

Plymouth Church welcomes and celebrates the LGBTQ+ community! Whoever you are, wherever you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here!

To learn more about the Open and Affirming Coalition, go to [www.openandaffirming.org](http://www.openandaffirming.org).

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

# ***In God's Image: Christian Witness to the Need for Gay/Lesbian Equality in the Eyes of the Church* Book Review**



*In God's Image: Christian Witness to the Need for Gay/Lesbian Equality in the Eyes of the Church* chronicles the life of Robert Cromey and his experiences and evolution in the Church, primarily his work and devotion to the LGBTQ+ community during the height of the AIDS epidemic. Cromey's work as a rector led him to San Francisco Trinity Episcopal Church, where he served a message of tolerance and affirmation to the LGBTQ+ community. This journey toward acceptance was far from an easy endeavor and Cromey was met with great backlash. Much of Cromey's work led him to

question his own faith at times, such as when he would hold the hands of a dying AIDS victim or fight for the legal rights of same sex couples, but Cromey persisted.

Ignorance was the forthcoming factor in most of what he witnessed. He put in a lot of work during his career fighting to educate as many people as he could, regardless of their willingness to listen. As the world evolved, Cromey has been given the privilege of seeing many things he fought so hard for change, yet there is still so much work to do. Cromey stands to welcome people from all backgrounds into the house of God, no matter who they are and where they fall in the spiritual path. Tyranny has no place in a true understanding of God's love.

*In God's Image* is a great read for those who weren't around to witness the AIDS epidemic or to see the beginnings of the affirming churches of today. The religion of today is much different than that of the past, yet there is still a long way to go to dispel the ignorance of believing in a hate-filled god.

Nathan Vanover

*In God's Image: Christian Witness to the Need for Gay/Lesbian Equality in the Eyes of the Church* and other books are available for check out from the Louise Folsom Library in the Amistad Room.



## **LGBTQ+ Pride Facts**

- The first officially recognized LGBTQ+ pride and protest march was held in New York City on June 28, 1970, to commemorate the one year anniversary of the Stonewall Riots and was called the "Christopher Street Liberation Day March."
- The annual New York City Pride March is now the largest LGBTQ+ event in the world.
- Each color in the original pride flag, designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978, represents something: Hot pink is for sexuality, red is for life, orange is for healing, yellow is for sunlight, green is for nature, turquoise is for magic and art, indigo is for serenity and harmony, and violet is for spirit. There have become many versions of this flag over the years, but the meaning of pride and unity still stands.
- The United Church of Christ is known as one of the most welcoming and affirming Christian denominations, celebrating same-sex marriages since 2005 and ordaining LGBTQ+ pastors since 1972. Plymouth Church became a part of the UCC in 1960 and became an Open and Affirming congregation in 2001.
- Rev. William R. Johnson, the first LGBTQ+ minister ordained by the UCC in 1972, was also the first openly gay minister in a mainline Protestant denomination.
- Fort Wayne has been celebrating pride each July for over twenty years. This year's festival will be July 21 and July 22 at Headwaters Park.

Sources: pride.com; hrc.org; fwpride.org

## Pride at Plymouth 2023

Plymouth Church will be hosting the second Pride at Plymouth on **Saturday, June 24 from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm!** The day will kick off with a workshop at **11:00 am** with Kris Wise, covering safety and mental health issues among the LGBTQ+ community, with an emphasis on the trans experience. From **12:00 pm to 4:00 pm**, we will have resource tables of various nonprofits in the community in the Folsom Room, activities for kids and adults, food trucks, artwork from local artists, and live music featuring the work of Gabe Kanka, Jen Fisher, and Home by Ten. The celebration will conclude with a family friendly drag show at **3:00 pm**.

The first Pride at Plymouth in 2022 would not have happened without the work of our wonderful volunteers and we will need more again this year! We'll need hands to help decorate on Friday, June 23 and volunteers to work short shifts during the event on June 24. Keep your eye on the bulletin for more information on how to get involved!

Two weeks prior to Pride at Plymouth, Rev. Timothy Murphy and January Simpson will be offering a forum on drag after worship on **June 11** in the Folsom Room. This workshop will cover some of the history of drag and its significance for the queer community, as well as an examination of drag through the lens of theology. This will be a fun and interesting way to learn about drag. You'll walk away knowing drag is far more than just lip syncing in bold makeup!

For the most up to date information about Pride at Plymouth and the Pre-Pride Drag Workshop, follow us on Facebook (@plymouthchurchfw) and Instagram (@plymouthchurchfortwayne).



*Resource tables in the Folsom Room at the 2022 Pride at Plymouth.*



*Gabe Kanka performing at the 2022 Pride at Plymouth.*

# Fort Wayne Pride 2023!

The 2023 Fort Wayne Pride Festival will be held this July 21 and July 22 at Headwaters Park! Below is the schedule of events for the fun-filled weekend!

Please note: due to construction in the area and a large number of participants, the 2023 Pride March will begin to the north of the Headwaters East Festival Plaza near the Headwaters fountain.

## Fort Wayne Pride Schedule of Events

### Friday, July 21

- **7:00 pm to 12:00 am - Kickoff Party**
  - Music from local bands, dance party, vendors, beer and food vendors

### Saturday, July 22

- **12:00 pm to 12:00 am - Fort Wayne Pride Festival**
  - Vendor market, nonprofit resource fair, beer and food vendors, workshops, cornhole tournament, live entertainment from local/regional/national artists on two entertainment stages
- **2:00 pm - Pride March**
  - Kickoff to the north of the Headwaters East Festival Plaza
  - Open to all Pride supporters
- **12:00 pm to 7:00 pm - Vendor Market**
  - Over 150 retailers and businesses throughout the festival
  - Pride Food Plaza
- **12:00 pm to 7:00 pm - Nonprofit Resource Fair presented by Gilead**
  - Located at Headwaters Park West
  - Community stage, workshops, yard games
- **12:00 pm to 6:00 pm - KidSpace**
  - Free for children under 12 w/ adult admission.
  - Games, prizes, crafts, drag story time, character appearances, and a moonwalk.
  - Located at Headwaters Park West
  - Adult supervision required
- **2:00 pm to 5:00 pm - Cornhole Tournament**
  - Enter by 1:30 pm or until bracket is full
  - Free to enter
  - \$50 First Prize
  - Email [director@fwpride.org](mailto:director@fwpride.org) for early registration (check-in by 1:30 pm still required)

### Festival Parking Shuttles

- Presented by DePuy Synthes
- Free with multiple drop-off/pick-up locations
- Two Trolleys available for all
- CTN bus available for elderly and differently-abled festival goers

For more information on the Fort Wayne Pride festival and Fort Wayne Pride as an organization, go to [www.fwpride.org](http://www.fwpride.org).



## 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 though! 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 7:00 pm in the party room of Mad Anthony Brewing Company.

### 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 *The Choice: Embrace the Possible* by Dr. Edith Eger, *Freezing Order* by Bill Browder, and *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

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](mailto:jrbeineke@yahoo.co.uk).

### 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 supplies and sometimes even your time and talents can be given at these supply drives.

### 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 Centering Prayer Group meets on both the second and fourth Monday 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.

### 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.

### Various Special Events

There will be plenty of special events this summer at Plymouth Church or offsite, including a TinCaps game, Pride at Plymouth, the Annual Church Picnic, and more! Keep an eye on the weekly digital bulletin and our social media posts for future event announcements.

Details on summer events will be posted in our digital bulletin, on our social media, and on our Google Calendar. View the links below to stay updated. Contact Elizabeth Pruitt at [edp@plymouthfw.org](mailto:edp@plymouthfw.org) if you have trouble accessing these platforms.

Website: [www.plymouthfw.org](http://www.plymouthfw.org)

YouTube: [Plymouth Church FW](https://www.youtube.com/Plymouth Church FW)

Facebook: [@plymouthchurchfw](https://www.facebook.com/@plymouthchurchfw)

Instagram: [@plymouthchurchfortwayne](https://www.instagram.com/@plymouthchurchfortwayne)



## 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](mailto:edp@plymouthfw.org).

### Financial Report

March 2023

	Month	Month	Month	YTD	YTD	YTD
	Actual	Budget	Variance	Actual	Budget	Variance
<b>Total Income</b>	\$66,063	\$95,602	(\$29,539)	\$201,459	\$211,108	(\$9,649)
<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$64,235	\$68,607	(\$4,372)	\$173,796	\$175,456	(\$1,660)
<b>Net Income (Loss)</b>	\$1,828	\$26,995	(\$25,167)	\$27,663	\$35,652	(\$7,989)

### Contact Us

**Senior Pastor and Teacher**

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

**Youth Director**

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

**Communications Specialist**

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

**Associate Pastor**

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

**Sunday School Director**

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

**Receptionist**

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

**Associate in Pastoral Care**

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

**Child Care Director**

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

**Media Specialist**

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

**Music Director**

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

**Office Manager**

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

**Building Maintenance Manager**

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

**Financial Administration**

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

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

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

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