



The Bell

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

From the Senior Pastor

An Evolutionary Church



When I was first introduced to evolution in my high school biology class, one of the messages I absorbed was that organisms evolve gradually across many generations. For instance, a species might start with a short tail but over time each generation would grow a slightly longer tail if it was advantageous. If enough time and changes pass, you eventually get whole new species.

That may all be true, but I also learned at some point that the evolution of species can look different when you study fossil records. From the above

example, you'd think that fossil records would show a series of slow but steady changes across time. While they sometimes do this, at other times they show the appearance of new species in a relatively short time. The theory of this latter phenomenon is called "punctuated equilibrium." The idea is that once a species appears and the population is stable, you will see little evolutionary change for a long time. It's reached an equilibrium. At some later date, there will be some new rapid change that creates a new species. In essence, you have long periods of stability, punctuated by short bursts of rapid change.

Both gradual change and rapid change seem to take place in evolution, though there are of course ongoing debates about their relative significance.

But that makes me ask a different question: how does change happen in churches? Is it a slow, steady process consisting of small adjustments over the years that add up to big changes cumulatively? Or are there long periods of stability with little change, punctuated by large shifts in church life and culture before resettling? Both are probably true to some extent.

When I think about Plymouth, I wonder what we will look like in 50, 100, or 150 years. Those are timeframes that are longer than I can really envision. If you asked what we will look like in 3 years, I can more easily answer that. I would imagine that any shift would be gradual. A declining program may end. New programs may start. We might find more creative ways to engage with marginal members, or something else. But it will not be a revolutionary rethinking or restructuring.

Continued on page 2...

In This Issue

- Winter Shelter Task Force Update
- From the Associate Pastor
- Making a Difference in a Child's Life: Study Connection
- It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Advent
- Updates from the Music Director
- Plymouth's Past: The History of 501 W. Berry

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**. Education Hour will resume on **Sunday, September 8**.

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.

Continued from page 1...

However, when you think about two generations from now, or even longer, I assume that there will be at least one revolutionary change at some point down the line, though I can't predict when it would be or what it will consist of. After all, if someone who was a member here in 1950 was told everything we do or value now, many of them would probably respond by saying that isn't their church. Likewise, there will be evolutionary changes, whether gradual changes that compound over time, or revolutionary breaks with past practice, that may seemingly reconfigure what Plymouth means to us and the wider community.

Those changes may be things we approve of but can't currently implement, or they may be things that might seem scary or even threatening. We just don't know. From the process tradition I work out of, there is the idea that the future is genuinely open, that there is no fixed, predetermined future that we are inevitably moving towards.

So while I don't know what the Plymouth of the future will look like or feel like in 50, 100, or 150 years, I can nevertheless trust in a God who has been with us in the past and will continue to guide us into the future.

Sometimes gradually.

Sometimes seemingly all at once.

Trusting that we will be faithful to God's way, however different that might look years from now.

May the evolution continue!

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy

Winter Shelter Taskforce Update

An important event in Plymouth's past was when the church opened its doors to what was then called the Interfaith Hospitality Network (now the Just Neighbors family shelter). At that time, there was no emergency shelter for families in Fort Wayne, and so Plymouth joined with other faith communities to provide shelter for those in need.

As many of you know, we are currently considering opening our doors to the unhoused community once more, this time as part of the city of Fort Wayne's winter contingency plan. This is a plan to provide shelter for all the city's unhoused population on nights when the temperature dips below 30 degrees overnight.

In May of this year, the congregation was sent a survey to determine if this is something that they would support, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. We then formed a taskforce to determine if Plymouth would have the capacity for such an undertaking. The task force has met several times since then, and their most recent meeting was with Jennifer Rutkowski Smith, who is on the planning team for the city.

Jennifer briefed the task force on how things went last winter and provided a summary of the plan for this coming winter. Last year, the city was able to find shelter for single individuals. The biggest need was for families, which is anticipated to be a need again this coming winter. The city's planning team is asking the Fort Wayne city council for \$30,000 that would be used for things like hiring overnight staff, cleaning services, security for certain hours, and more. The funding request was made to the city council on August 6, with a vote likely happening in September.

Our capacity for being a host site this winter is likely contingent upon the funding being approved. Therefore, if this is something you would like to see happen at Plymouth, this is an opportunity to contact your city council representative to let them know you support the funding. Meanwhile, the task force continues to meet to discuss our capacity for the project. The city planning team has requested that we give them an answer by October 1, and the task force has a goal to make a recommendation to Executive Council by their September meeting.

If you have any questions for the task force, please feel free to contact Scott Avery, Bill Lambert, or Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals.

From the Associate Pastor

The Prophetic Call: Honoring Our Ancestors, Protecting Future Generations



Ever since my days in seminary, I've been guided by a definition of prophetic ministry that many of you have heard me share. Biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman, in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, says that the task of the prophet is to “nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.” It is this definition of the prophetic that I have embraced in my own pastoral ministry—always endeavoring to imagine a world that offers us alternatives to the capitalistic, militaristic, and white supremacist culture in which we live.

This was also the task of our spiritual ancestors, the most notable, of course, being Jesus himself. We look to Jesus to understand what it means to envision an alternative world—one that is more compassionate, more empathetic, more merciful, and more just. But of course, this isn't easy. Jesus' kindness to outcasts and enemies continues to be mostly unmatched in our world, and those who attempt to follow his way are often ridiculed or ignored. Keeping our hearts wide open while developing a strong back and thick skin is no easy task. But that is our call. It is impossible to imagine a different kind of future if we harden our hearts or become cynical and jaded.

Many of us are concerned about how life will be in this country and on this planet for our children and grandchildren, and despite what some politicians may say, even those of us without children of our own have a stake in what life will be like for future generations. We want to leave this world a better place than we found it, but we often feel powerless in the face of corporations, billionaires, and powerful politicians who seem to care only about themselves in the present moment. We feel helpless and hopeless and are tempted to give up on the prophetic work that our faith calls us to do.

The truth is, we will likely never be rid of the greediness of the powers that be. But that doesn't mean we can't create alternative communities in which our values are reflected and lived out. It is up to us to build and shape those communities, based on the values of our spiritual ancestors, in which future generations can ground their own prophetic work. Again, Jesus was the ultimate example of this. Richard Rohr writes that “it is almost impossible to turn away from what seems like the only game in town (political, economic, or religious), unless we have glimpsed a more attractive alternative. It's hard to imagine it, much less imitate it, unless we see someone else do it first. Jesus is that icon of the more attractive alternative, a living parable. Jesus has forever changed our human imagination, and we are now both burdened and gladdened by new possibility.”

Life in first-century, occupied Palestine was no picnic. The Roman Empire was brutal and oppressive. Nevertheless, Jesus brought the kin-dom of God to that time and place. He created a community in which people were free to be themselves, free to dream, and free to love and be loved. He did that because of his ability to imagine a world beyond the oppressive status quo surrounding him. We are called to do the same.

Plymouth Church can be this kind of community—as we like to say—not just for ourselves, not just for our children and grandchildren, but for the next seven generations and beyond. Indeed, for many of us, it is that kind of community already. It is our task to keep dreaming and imagining so that it can continue to be that kind of community for future generations. May it be so. Amen.

Peace,

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals
Associate Pastor

Making a Difference in a Child's Life: Study Connection

This fall, Plymouth is celebrating the 12th year of a successful Study Connection with eleven 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 SC is arranged. Tutors and subs meet at church a week before the start for an orientation and to discuss planning for the school year. Each session, the children bounce off the bus and happily meet with their tutors for a little over an hour in the Folsom Room. Each child has a SC 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 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 SC 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 setting out the healthy snacks that are donated by the Peace and Justice Committee and Christian Fellowship Board.

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 with SC and with 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 BD time 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 pm 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 in the digital bulletin or the FWCS Study Connection website [here](#). All volunteers must have a background check which is done by the FWCS. Everyone is welcome to be a special friend to an elementary age child. Providing support and encouragement is the main task for each tutor and sub. Being a tutor is a great way to make a difference in a child's life.



It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Advent!



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

Each devotional in this project will include 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 (the writer's reflection, usually one or two paragraphs)
- a question for reflection
- a concluding sentence prayer

The entire article, which includes all the elements listed above, should be between 250 and 300 words. The deadline for articles is **Friday, November 1**. 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 a list of the verses as well as more specific information. Writers will be able to select the passage they want from a list provided -- first come, first served.

As a congregation, observing the Advent season is an ingrained part of our heritage. This Advent, we begin a new opportunity to observe this season.



Updates from the Music Director

Music Ministry Opportunities

Starting September 4, 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. 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. Rehearsals are on **Wednesdays from 5:15 pm to 6:00 pm** and regularly on **Sunday mornings at 9:00 am**. 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. Rehearsals on **Wednesdays from 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm** and performances for worship once a month.
- **Plymouth Children’s Choirs** – this program provides a creative outlet for children K-5 and includes singing, choir chimes, Orff instruments, and occasional drama and art. This group will perform for worship once each month, and for special services throughout the year. Rehearsals on **Wednesdays from 5:15 pm to 6:00 pm** (*starting date TBD*).
- **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 faith, restore hope and discover God.



Plymouth Music Series 2024-25

This summer, we had several wonderful concerts for the community including a recital by Antonio Azpiri and Wagner Pastor, an oboe recital by John Uchal, and finally our New Orleans Jazz Band. Plans are being solidified for the 2024-25 season, and include some exciting programs that feature a traditional Hymn Sing in September, Metropolitan Opera Competition winner and soprano Meridian Prall in November, in December the Canto de Corazón (Fort Wayne’s only Spanish language choir created in collaboration with Plymouth Church and Heartland Sings), in January, our annual MLK Commemoration, in February a vocal duet program with Natalie Young and Ashlee Bickley McCrory, and in March, a keyboard recital featuring our own Maestro Robert Nance. Stay tuned for an announcement in late August.

Searching for an Associate Director of Music

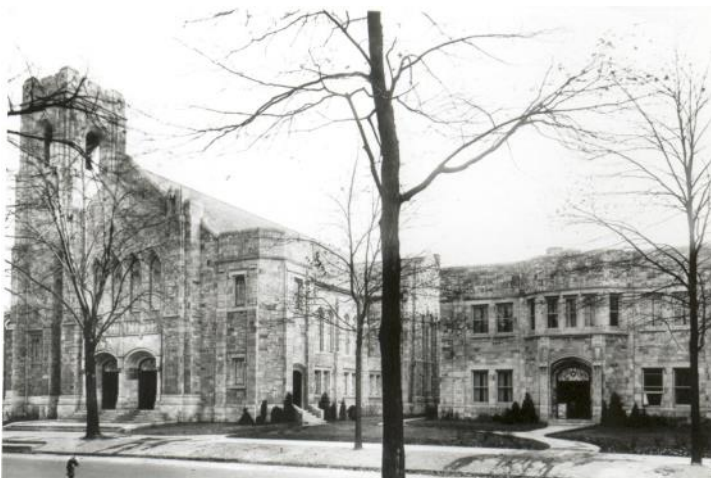
As many of you may know, our association musician Phil Slane moved to Michigan earlier this year and we are now searching for his replacement. We hope to have his position filled soon. In the meantime, the music ministry is working to maintain all current programming with the help of qualified parishioners.

The application for the Associate Director of Music can be found on Indeed. For a full job description and more information, you can check out our website [here](#).

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

Rev. Arthur J. Folsom came to Plymouth in 1910, when we were meeting in a church located on the corner of Harrison and Jefferson. It was during his 23 years of service that Plymouth experienced their greatest period of growth. So much so, that the building exceeded its capacity with 815 members, creating the need to look for a space to build a new facility in the year 1916.

This resulted in the purchase of the Cressler Home located at the corner of W. Berry and Fairfield at a cost of \$22,500. The Cressler Home was an open air school, used to treat children with tuberculosis while meeting their educational needs. The Harrison & Jefferson building was sold at a cost of \$95,000.



In 1921, we bought the adjacent lot at Berry and Fairfield for \$14,500, and funds were raised for the construction of the new building in 1922. At this time, Plymouth had 1,185 members with a Sunday school enrollment of 630.

Guy Mahurin, a Plymouth member, became the architect for the new building, and Indiana Engineering and Construction Company provided the contractors. The building was of an English Gothic design and Indiana limestone was used in the construction. During this construction, a cornerstone (time capsule) was laid by George T. McCullem, Secretary of the Congregational Church Building Society. The final cost of the new church was \$322,000 (\$285,000 construction cost and \$37,000 for the properties).

The congregation dedicated the new building during the week of October 5-12, 1924. At the Sunday morning October 5 service, there was the presentation of the keys by Mr. B. Paul Mossman of the Building Committee, with acceptance by Mr. William Hess, Chairman of the Board of Trustees. A dedication sermon was given by President Ozora S. Davis D.D. of the Chicago Theological society.

On October 6, a Young Peoples Reception was held, and on Tuesday, the Plymouth Circle Reception and Banquet took place. On October 8, the annual meeting of Plymouth Church was held. Annual Reports were presented, and election of officers were positioned for the ensuing year. Rev. James Stuart Ainslie D.D. of Chicago and former pastor of Plymouth Church, was the evening speaker. Rev. Ainslie spearheaded the construction of the previous church at Harrison and Jefferson.

Thursday, October 9 was designated as City Community Night. Mr. E. F. Yarnelle of Mossman Yarnelle Company presided over the event. Greetings were extended to the Plymouth Congregation from many Fort Wayne city dignitaries, including Mayor William J. Hosey.

At the completion of the church construction, a balance of \$90,000 remained. However, nothing was done to reduce the amount until J. Earl Groth spearheaded a drive in 1940 to pay off this remaining balance. A mortgage burning ceremony took place at Plymouth's 75th anniversary celebration on December 6, 1945, when the balance was finally paid off.

Plymouth Archives

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

June 2024

	Month Actual	Month Budget	Month Variance	YTD Actual	YTD Budget	YTD Variance
Total Income	\$131,2424	\$142,893	(\$11,669)	\$527,852	\$512,082	\$15,770
Total Expenses	\$89,864	\$94,797	(\$4,933)	\$440,984	\$451,369	(\$10,385)
Net Income (Loss)	\$41,360	\$48,096	(\$6,736)	\$86,868	\$60,713	\$26,155

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

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