



The Bell

PLYMOUTH CHURCH
FORT WAYNE + UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Visioning in 2025



Almost six years ago, Plymouth had a series of visioning workshops focused on how we were living out our four covenants and ways we could live them out more fully. Over the course of the summer and fall of 2019, we developed a matrix that listed possibilities and activities we could add in what we proclaim in venues like worship and education, how we

relate to each other in our internal fellowship, and new ways we could serve in the broader community. I found it to be a good process.

In 2025, we are exploring the possibility of doing some renewed visioning once again. Part of this may include looking more intently at our life as a congregation together. In what ways are we reaching out to people who don't know about Plymouth and our vision of what it means to follow Jesus? What are the gaps? What are things we might do to more effectively evangelize (scary word for many!) our understanding of the gospel?

What are all the ways that people are able to connect with each other here? What is working? What are the gaps? Where are people falling through, and how can we collectively do better at connecting with each other and giving opportunities for meaningful participation? Would additional small group ministries be worth pursuing? What about members checking in with people who are inactive on a more regular and structured basis? Something else?

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Plymouth is already doing so much in so many areas in terms of social justice, advocacy, and witness, especially with teams organized around refugees, tutoring students, offering a shower ministry to the unhoused, speaking up for reproductive rights, addressing racism and working to dismantle it here and elsewhere, and working to green our space and our society. This is not an exhaustive list. However, do we publicize these efforts enough, or are accomplishments only known to those most directly involved? How might we celebrate these things more fully in ways that are not indulgently self-congratulatory (a perennial concern of mine)?

Alongside these questions, there are still also broader questions around demographic shifts and the aging of our membership, long-term organizational trajectories, and cultural changes affecting church membership and institutional affiliations more broadly.

These are the kinds of questions I would invite you to think about. I don't know what form exactly this process may look like. As of this date, no decisions have been made. It might include a survey to gather data, deliberate time set aside among boards and committees, and/or one or more workshops that people attend.

Whatever the format may be, there will definitely be opportunities to contribute to this process. We are a congregational church, and that means that we will need your thoughts, reflections, and voice as we collectively make priorities and perhaps at times choose between multiple worthy possibilities. Whether you have been here for less than a year or have been around for decades, your perspective matters concerning how we can continue to grow and live out our mission in this time and place. Please give yourself some space to consider some of the above questions and look for ways to share later in the year.

Thank you!

Peace,

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

Building Communities of Resilience and Resistance

from the Associate Pastor's desk



If any of you are like me, you are feeling a heavy weight these days. Maybe the weight is so heavy it threatens to paralyze your ability or even your desire to take action against the illegal and unconstitutional acts of the current federal administration. Every day seems to bring about a new constitutional crisis that threatens the well-being of millions of Americans, as well as vulnerable populations overseas. What can any of us do to resist? We feel powerless and tempted to stick our heads in the sand rather than watch our democracy go off the rails.

I've said it before, and I will say it again, I believe our power lies in the strength of our communities. Plymouth is a strong, thriving community full of compassionate people who care about peace and justice. Therefore, I believe we have a role to play in the coming weeks and months. At the moment, I believe much of our power lies in our ability to support threatened and vulnerable populations, both inside and outside of the church.

For example, we have queer members whose very identities are being attacked by the federal government, and they need our support. They need to know that Plymouth has their backs. There are numerous ways for us to demonstrate our care for them, from putting up our Plymouth yard signs in support of the trans community (available in the narthex on Sunday mornings!), to educating ourselves about using the correct pronouns, to calling our elected officials about proposed legislation that would take away LGBTQ rights and protections.

We are also acting on behalf of women and girls in the congregation through our reproductive rights action team. The team is busy making phone calls to our state legislators to advocate for access to safe and effective abortion care, as well as necessary health care for women who experience miscarriages or other pregnancy complications. The team is also busy preparing to host an Our Whole Lives teacher training, which will help educate our youth about sexual health and human sexuality from an evidence-based perspective.

Outside of Plymouth Church, we have immigrant neighbors and unhoused neighbors whose well-being and very existence is being threatened. We have reached out to a neighboring Hispanic congregation to provide them with 'red cards'— laminated cards affirming their rights that can be given to law enforcement officials if they are stopped. We are also going to make similar cards for our Afghan refugee friends. For our unhoused neighbors, we are currently providing showers for those who are unsheltered, which not only serves them and meets a need, but also gives us a chance to connect with them and develop trusting relationships, should we need to take further action on their behalf in the future.

All of these practices are ways that we can care for each other and our neighbors, building our resilience as a community, and strengthening our ability to resist unjust policies that hurt the most vulnerable among us. As Jesus said, whatsoever we do for the least of these, we do for him.

Of course, the number one thing we can do, as Christians, to strengthen our resilience as a community is to center ourselves in the Gospel of God's radical love. That can take many different forms-- from praying together on Sunday mornings, to making time for private prayer and devotion, or attending Centering Prayer or Bible Study, to just being in fellowship with one another. It all makes a difference. So, I encourage everyone who is part of the Plymouth community to find ways to plug in and connect with your fellow members. We need each other now, more than ever. Let's work together to build a resilient community of compassionate resistance, rooted in God's love for the purpose of caring for our neighbors within and outside the walls of the church. I can't think of a better place to start in these chaotic, unsettling, and turbulent times.

- Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals



MLK Jr. Commemoration Service Reflection

For many years, Plymouth has hosted the annual MLK Jr. commemoration service in our sanctuary. This past January, the service was held for the first time in a long time at Pilgrim Baptist Church. While the program was largely the same as in past years, shifting the location to a predominantly Black congregation made a substantial difference in the feel of the event. I believe this can be attested to by those from Plymouth who were in attendance. It was a much more diverse audience, and Plymouth members made an impressive showing in representing us despite it being such a cold Sunday afternoon.



I think there is more that can be done to vary up the content and add additional community voices and ownership within this service in the future, but this past gathering was a big step in the right direction! Thank you to all who took the time to be with others in our region and maybe even catch a glimpse, if only for a moment, of the Beloved Community.



- Rev. Timothy Murphy

*Top: Rev. Dr. Timothy Murphy & Pastor Raymond Dix, Jr.
Bottom: MLK Jr. Commemoration Service at Pilgrim Baptist Church*

Congregationalism

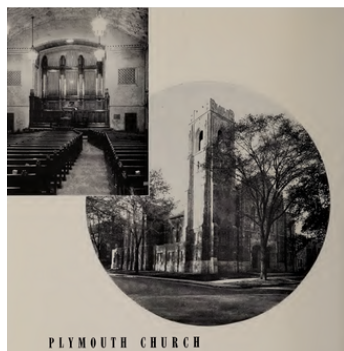
Congregationalism, as the word implies, is a church governed by the congregation. Each church enjoys full autonomy. It elects its own officers, determines its own constitution and by-laws, formulates or adopts its own covenant, and calls its own minister. Ultimate authority in all interests resides in the whole body of Congregational Christian churches throughout the world.

Robert Browne (1550-1633) was the first to set out explicit congregational principles and is considered the founder of Congregationalism. He felt the congregation should choose its own leaders, ministers should be ordained by the congregation rather than bishops or other ministers, and that the voice of the people, guided by the elders, is said to be the voice of God. While each church would be independent, they would come together to discuss matters of common concern.



In 1620, a group of 102 Pilgrims sailed upon the Mayflower to North America establishing the Plymouth colony and bringing the congregational tradition to America. The Pilgrims and Puritans not only gave us Congregationalism, but also the town meeting. They were there at the start of the American Revolution, and many of the Minutemen at Lexington and Concord were Congregationalists. They brought the civil liberties of England's Magna Carta to America and developed the system of free enterprise.

In 1844, Henry Ward Beecher and brother Charles came to Fort Wayne at the request of a number of members who left the First Presbyterian Church and were attempting to start a Congregational church. However, they decided they wanted to remain Presbyterians, and started the Second Presbyterian Church instead. By 1870, a vocal minority of members would prove too much for popular minister George O Little, and he and several members would leave the church in August of 1870. This seemed like an opportune time to canvass regarding the idea of organizing a congregational church.



On the evening of Wednesday September 14, 1870, a preliminary meeting took place in Mr. John Gilbert's office at Meyer Bros. & Co. Wholesale Drugs on Columbia Street. It was here they decided to go forward to form a new Congregational church in Fort Wayne. On September 20, 1870, a meeting took place at the old German Methodist Church located at the northeast corner of Fulton and Washington Streets, where the first members of 19 women and 11 men were received. It was also at this meeting that they would adopt the Constitution, the Articles of Faith, and choose the official name of Plymouth Congregational Church.

A series of mergers and unions took place in 1957 between the Congregationalists and the Evangelical and Reformed churches to create the United Church of Christ. On November 29, 1960, Plymouth would join the UCC with a 96% positive vote of the congregation.

Memorial Concert honors Patricia Adsit

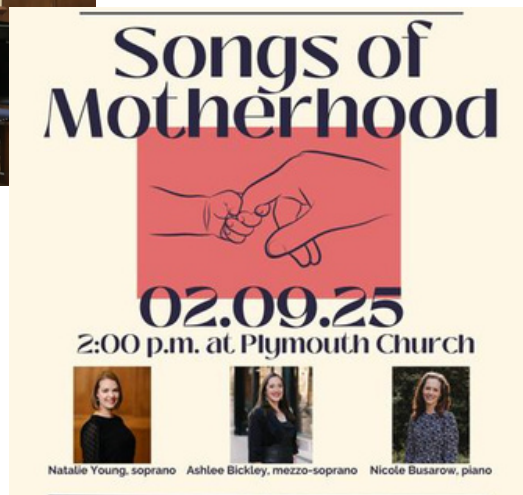
Local philanthropist and church member Patricia Adsit passed away on February 13. Her legacy in Fort Wayne is significant, from her 30 year career as a teacher in Fort Wayne Community Schools, to her 35 year retirement career as a community servant and philanthropist in Allen County. While there will be no funeral service celebrating her life, there will be a special memorial concert at the church on March 30 at 4 pm.

Musicians from all over Allen County will gather to perform in this tribute concert conducted by Maestro Robert Nance. There will be a gathering at 3:00 pm in the Folsom Room prior to the concert and a reception following. Everyone is invited to attend.



Plymouth Music Series 2025

“Songs of Motherhood,” February 9, 2025





Financial Report

January 2025

	Month Actual	Month Budget	Month Variance		YTD Actual	YTD Budget	YTD Variance
Total Income	\$74,984	\$72,238	\$2,746		\$74,984	\$72,238	\$2,746
Total Expenses	\$65,397	\$65,197	\$200		\$65,397	\$65,197	\$200
rounding	\$1		\$1		\$1		\$1
Net Income (Loss)	\$9,588	\$7,041	\$2,547		\$9,588	\$7,041	\$2,547

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