



The Bell

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

From the Associate Pastor

A Hidden Family History



“That is why we were created—to gather the sparks, no matter where they are hidden. And when enough holy sparks have been gathered... the repair of the world, awaited so long, will finally take place.” -Rabbi Isaac Luria

A little over a decade ago, my dad started to get interested in genealogy. Around the same time, my brother sent in a sample of his DNA to ancestry.com to find out more about his heritage. These two concurring events revealed to me something about my ancestry that I had never known—I am a quarter Jewish!

Turns out, my dad’s father had been raised Jewish, though he was no longer a practicing Jew by the time my dad came around. Perhaps that’s why I had never heard anyone in my family talk about him being Jewish. I had always been told that my paternal grandparents simply weren’t religious, and that was the end of that. But as my dad continued his genealogy research, the picture came into clearer focus. My family has Ashkenazi Jewish heritage, stretching back to Hungary in the 1800s (that’s as far as my dad has gotten to date on our family tree).

This was an interesting fact to learn, to be sure, and as the years went on, I began to gain more and more of an interest in this lesser-known aspect of my family’s history. Then, in the summer of 2022, I traveled to Albuquerque for the summer symposium of the Living School—a contemplative spirituality school offered by the Center for Action and Contemplation. One of our professors that summer introduced me to the Jewish concept of Tikkun Olam, which is Hebrew for ‘repair the world.’ This concept sparked an interest in me and marked the beginning of my quest to not only learn more about my Jewish heritage, but to fully embrace it as an integral part of my identity.

Fast forward to April 2024. Since I first heard the idea of Tikkun Olam two years earlier, many things had changed. I had finished my time in the Living School, started a new job halfway across the country, and perhaps most importantly, I had spent two weeks in the West Bank of Palestine in June of 2023. While in the West Bank, I wrestled a lot with my own conceptions of Jewish religion, culture, and politics.

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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**. Chapel Class concludes for the summer on May 19. We will resume in the fall.

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.

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I struggled to reconcile my ideas about what it meant to be Jewish with the extreme human rights violations being committed every day in the West Bank by people who claimed to be Jewish, and who claimed that their country was a Jewish state.

The longer we were there, however, the more I began to be able to differentiate between the State of Israel and its policies, which were less than 100 years old, and the Jewish faith, which is, of course, many thousands of years old. It helped that many of the Israelis we met there were fully opposed to the occupation and were themselves able to differentiate between their faith tradition and their national politics. We met Israeli Jews who used words like apartheid and settler colonialism without apology, knowing that such realities had little to do with their faith tradition. Indeed, it was being Jewish that led many of these activists to do the solidarity work they were doing in the first place.

Upon returning to the United States, I became familiar with other Jewish leaders, thinkers, and activists who stand firmly in solidarity with Palestinians. In fact, the more research I did, the more I realized that it is within the Jewish community that we find some of the clearest, strongest, most passionate voices for Palestinian solidarity— among them Mark Braverman, Gabor Maté, Norman Finklestein, Jeff Halper, Sahar Vardi, Simone Zimmerman, Phil Weiss, Rabbi Brant Rosen, activists with groups like Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now, and countless others. Here was a path I could take to embrace my heritage in an authentic and meaningful way. Here was a way for me to embrace the concept of Tikkun Olam as a Christian pastor with Jewish heritage who desires to stand in solidarity with peacemakers and justice-seekers of all faiths and backgrounds.

This is the journey I find myself on today. I believe that I am honoring my Jewish ancestors, not to mention the Jewish prophetic tradition that all Christians are indebted to, by standing in solidarity with Palestinians. Doing so is hardly antisemitic, as some would claim. It is in fact the opposite. It is honoring a people whose historical commitment to justice, equality, and human rights goes back thousands of years. It is honoring the ancient practice of Tikkun Olam. It is, in fact, the distinctly Jewish work of repairing the world.

Peace,

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals
Associate Pastor



Richard C. Hess Peace Studies Scholarship Recipients

The Peace and Justice Committee is pleased to announce the 18th and 19th RCH Peace Studies scholarship recipients this year. The first recipient is Achoko Phinias who will complete his master's degree at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary next spring. Mr. Phinias has been teaching peace at the university in his home country of Kenya. Developing a firmer background in peace and justice has helped him to be an effective teacher at the university. His plans after completing his master's degree are to continue teaching, build community programs for peace, offer workshops and essentially affect the government of his community and country.

The second recipient is Pornchai (Paul) Banchasawan, who is in his final year at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. He is a pastor in Thailand while also serving as elected President of the Hmong Church District 20 of the Christian Church of Christ in Thailand. While in this position Paul learned of Peace Theology and realized that this is what he needed to study to be more effective in his own country. Paul, along with his wife and three children, are eager for him to finish his last year. Upon graduation Paul will return to Thailand to work with the Hmong Church communities to incorporate peaceful methods at conflict resolution.

Both of these men expect to make a difference in their respective homeland and to help their communities and government to use peaceful means to resolve difficult issues. We are proud of these scholarship recipients!

From the Associate in Pastoral Care



The past month or so at Plymouth has been an eye-opening one for me as I've been filling in during Rev. Timothy's sabbatical. Sitting in on more meetings than usual may not sound even a little bit thrilling, but as someone unchurched until eight years ago, I'm grateful for these new glimpses into how Plymouth works. We are a community deeply rooted in tradition, and we are a community with a drive to make progress in our self-understanding and our engagement with the larger community in which we live. The tension between our history and our need – practical and spiritual – to grow out of our history into our future is difficult to navigate occasionally, but this tension is, precisely, the stuff of life. Of creation. Of good growth. Of generation.

In the preface to his little essay, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, Nietzsche writes, “we require history for life and action, not for the smug avoiding of life and action, or even to whitewash a selfish life and cowardly, bad acts.” However, a few pages later, he insists that life depends on the power to forget, going so far as to say, “without forgetting it is quite impossible to live at all.” The rest of his essay explores this tension between the required remembering and required forgetting involved in a thriving life.

Nietzsche aims his argument at the philosophy of Hegel (and his vast following), who declared history the supreme science, developed a systematic dialectic to explain the progress of history as necessary—nearly mechanical—and then happily determined that history had completed its progression in reason through his dialectic. How humble. In the History essay Nietzsche argues this self-satisfied assurance that there is no more to be questioned or accomplished, nothing else to work towards, stunts life's flourishing on every level, from individual to cultural.

History—all science—must support life if it is to have validity and worth. Nietzsche makes the case for three good uses (advantages) of history in the service of life and seven damaging uses, which undermine life. I think the three uses of history he explores are relevant for Plymouth (not to mention the nation) as we navigate from our past, through our present, and into our future.

The uses of history are monumental, antiquarian, and critical. Each of these is essential, and it would be a mistake to focus on only one or two while ignoring the advantages of the other(s). Our task is to celebrate and preserve what is life-giving while destroying/releasing what hinders life. This will be a brief and incomplete sketch; but I hope it offers a different lens to look through while being a church as long-established-yet-progressive as Plymouth is and aims to be.

Monumental history—“the knowledge that the great which once existed was at least *possible* once and may well again be possible”—supports action and striving. Looking to great people, events, and accomplishments from our past encourages us as we work to do difficult and good things as individuals and communities. Monumental history is the highlight reel, the inspiring montage backed by a power ballad, which helps us believe great things are achievable and motivates us to pursue them despite difficulty. It edits out the details that make the achievement or the person appear unrepeatable or unworthy of admiration and imitation.

However, this “editorial” view of history can work against striving, active life if it isn't balanced. With too many specifics erased, monumental figures and works serve as the great levelers of individuals – nobody can achieve what was achieved, and so those who try are squashed by armchair critics and anyone invested in maintaining the status quo. Do you see any monumental history at work here in Plymouth? How does it inspire you to “strive” forward? Is it balanced by antiquarian and critical? If so, how? If not, what might we try?

Antiquarian history, “belongs to the preserving and revering soul—to him who with loyalty and love looks back on his origins; through this reverence he, as it were, gives thanks for his existence.” This exercise of history preserves every detail it can gather in the hopes of preserving the conditions that have established the life one gives thanks for. It is, “the contentment of a tree with its roots, the happiness of knowing oneself not to be wholly arbitrary and accidental, but as growing out of a past as its heir, flower and fruit.”

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This vision of history we most easily would ascribe to a church's life, and perhaps rightly so. And it seems equally likely that the dangers of this use of history may well be a primary danger for any church community as well.

When the antiquarian use of history is not balanced with the others, we view every single historical detail as equally worthy of preservation—"what is old must be immortal"—becoming petrified in a way, serving the past to the detriment of the future. Antiquarian history can only preserve life, it cannot generate life; it cannot recognize the worth and power of what is in the process of becoming, and thus paralyzes forward momentum, stifles action and new life for the sake of holding onto what has been. What helps you feel rooted here at Plymouth? What are you heir to here? How do you embrace that tradition, those roots, while keeping the church lively—reaching toward new growth?

Critical history, in some ways, is most important and most dangerous. It requires the most finesse. We, "must have the strength, and use it from time to time, to shatter and dissolve something to enable [us] to live: this [we] achieve by dragging it to the bar of judgment, interrogating it meticulously and finally condemning it." Life alone is the judge.

Monumental history elevates Thomas Jefferson as a man worthy of honor and imitation for his remarkable contributions to our nation. Critical history reminds us of his extensive enslaved "staff," including Sally Hemings, preventing us from turning him into an idol. Antiquarian history insists Confederate monuments remain in town squares and government buildings to preserve cultural heritage. Critical history makes it "clear how unjust is the existence of some thing, a privilege, a caste, a dynasty, for example, how much this thing deserves destruction." The danger of critical history, that it easily may cause us to throw the baby out with the bathwater, is clear, but so too is its necessity. Is there achievement or tradition Plymouth clings to that makes us complacent or too rigid? What sort of critical approach could free us for new growth and life abundant, without uprooting us entirely?

As the current generation of Plymouth's family, we are blessed with history that is rich and fertile ground for growth and new life. We have roots that run deep as an institution and within the community of Fort Wayne. When considering our past and looking ahead, may we find inspiration to generate new life, tend with care the traditions that shape our identity, and have the courage trim away old growth that hinders our continued fruitfulness.

Peace,

Rev. January Simpson
Associate in Pastoral Care



2024 Bell Submission and Publication Schedule

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.

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?
- 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

Van Gorder Scholarship Recipient

Elyse Jaurigue received a Van Gorder Scholarship for Ball State University. The Van Gorder Scholarship, established in 1998 according to the terms of the will of Pauline Van Gorder, is awarded for tuition and fees for post-secondary education leading to a degree, certificate, or license for a graduating senior who is a member of Plymouth Church.

The first Van Gorder Scholarship was awarded in 2000. Elyse is the 53rd recipient. The cumulative total of the Van Gorder Scholarship awards is now \$89,750.

20 Years of ICMEP at Plymouth

In October 2004, Indiana Center for Middle East Peace (ICMEP) held its first program in Plymouth Church's Folsom Room, eight people having lunch with Dr. Raed Muallem, Headmaster at Archbishop Elias Chacour's Mar Elias Educational Institutions (K-12) in Ibillin, Galilee. From those humble beginnings, ICMEP has gained a nationwide, even global presence, with people from around the world attending its many Zoom webinars and interviews. And during those 19 years, Plymouth Church has been an integral partner in ICMEP's work.

ICMEP has benefited from strong leadership from Plymouth's members. Current Plymouth members on the ICMEP Board include Michael Spath (founding Executive Director), Terry Dougherty (Chair), Ahnee Conner (Treasurer), Patty Pendleton (Secretary and founding member), Linda Kerr, and Pam Etheridge. Michael is also Co-Chair of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions Board of Directors and a member of the Global Kairos for Justice Coalition, based in Bethlehem. Michael was also one of the founders of the United Church of Christ Palestine-Israel Network (UCC-PIN). Plymouth Church was one of the original twelve congregational sponsors of UCC-PIN's 2017 General Synod "No Way To Treat A Child" Resolution regarding Israel's torture of child detainees and prisoners (passed with almost 80% of the vote).

Over 90% of its 230 programs have been held at Plymouth Church, hosting Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious, political, and NGO leaders, scholars, activists, journalists, musicians, and others. And almost 20 of Plymouth's members (along with 250 others) have traveled to Palestine and Israel as part of its "Solidarity Tours" meeting with a host of leaders striving for a just peace and full civil, political, and human rights. John Gardner traveled with us twice, Rev. Timothy Murphy and Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals both have traveled with us recently.

ICMEP annually hosts TaybehFest (celebrating the first microbrewery in the Middle East in the Palestine village of Taybeh), and commemorates Nakba Day (May 15, the 1948 dispossession of the Palestinian people from their homes in over 500 villages), and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10), this year its 75th anniversary.



ICMEP holds a protest supporting a free Palestine every Tuesday for the foreseeable future from 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm, rain or shine, on the Allen County Courthouse lawn. All are welcome to join.

And ICMEP created ArabFest, now its own 501c3, and Fort Wayne for Refugees. In addition to UCC-PIN, ICMEP has a number of other national partners – Jewish Voice for Peace, US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, Friends of Sabeel North America, American Muslims for Palestine, ICAHD-USA, and Voices From the Holy Land.

And ICMEP financially supports Mission Partners in Palestine and in the US – Al-Rowwad Cultural & Theatre Arts Society, Aida Refugee Camp, Bethlehem ("Beautiful Resistance"); ArabFest, Fort Wayne; Bil'in Resistance Movement, Bil'in, Occupied Palestine; Center for Community Resource Development, Nablus Old City; Palestine Writes; Playgrounds for Palestine; Tent of Nations Peace Farm, Bethlehem ("We Refuse to be Enemies"); and Wi'am Conflict Resolution Center, Bethlehem.

ICMEP thanks Plymouth Church for its unwavering and faithful partnership for its 19 years of solidarity with the people of Palestine.

{ Indiana Center for Middle East Peace is "a voice of conscience for peace, justice, human rights, and intercultural encounter." It is an independent, not-for-profit, 501c3, tax-exempt organization. }

People of Plymouth's Past

In this column, we shall explore some of Plymouth's 154 year history, and of some who led the way. William Mossman was born September 17, 1843 near Coesse, Indiana in Whitley County. He attended school in Coesse and remained on the family farm until age 27.

In 1870, William opened a general store in Coesse and shortly after purchased a steam powered sawmill. He became an agent of the Pennsylvania railroad at the Coesse station. It was the sawmill that would make him a wealthy man. He cut timber for the railroad for use in making boxcars and ties. This service attracted the attention of the Burlington, Santa Fe, Chicago, Milwaukee, Chicago Northwestern, and the Rock Island railroads. The McCormick Harvester and Deering Harvester were also major customers for his lumber.

In 1868, William married Lois Douglas and they would have three children together. Lois ran the store in Coesse and was involved in the management of their businesses until her death in 1915. Always looking for sources of the lumber, the mill was moved several times throughout the state. In 1910 William built a mill in Memphis, Tennessee, allowing the use of the Mississippi River to move lumber from the north and western United States.

In 1885 William purchased the interest of Frank Alderman in the heavy hardware house of Alderman and Yarnelle to become Mossman and Yarnelle Co., located on Pearl Street. He became President of the Dudlo Manufacturing Co., which made insulated wire and was the largest employer in Fort Wayne at the time. William served as Director and Vice President of Wayne Knitting Mills for thirty years. He was also Director of the Old National Bank and the first Vice President of Tri-State Loan and Trust, which he helped organize in 1889.

In 1916 William donated \$75,000 to build the YMCA and \$30,000 to build a swimming pool for the YWCA. He was an active member of Plymouth Congregational Church serving as a Trustee among other duties. He also donated \$20,000 to our pipe organ. William Mossman died on April 12, 1929 and is buried in Lindenwood Cemetery.

Plymouth Archive Team

Pride at Plymouth 2024!

Plymouth Church invites you to our third annual Pride at Plymouth! We will once again be celebrating LGBTQ+ pride right here at the church on **Saturday, June 29 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm**. As in previous years, we will have resource tables, vendors, activities for all ages, live local musicians, food trucks, and a family-friendly drag show to conclude the celebration! This year, we will be adding a family-friendly drag story hour to the day's events. Stay tuned to the bulletin and our social medias for updates and more information!



While this is our third pride festival here at Plymouth, we've proudly been an Open and Affirming congregation since 2001. "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 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!

Refugee Financial Assistance Account

Over the past three years, Plymouth Church has become involved in assisting many Afghan refugee families settle in Fort Wayne. Our involvement includes finding decent affordable housing, getting children enrolled in school, helping the parents become familiar with all the new obligations such as: income taxes, property & casualty insurance, obtaining and carrying a driver's license or state ID, buying a car and getting it registered, integrating themselves into our medical system, paying rent and utilities on time, and establishing and maintaining a bank account. In addition to these more basic things, volunteers also get involved in helping adults and children learn English, supporting families as they integrate themselves into the ebb and flow of our way of life, providing transportation to appointments, and creating special outings for the children and parents alike. We also have had numerous situations where families need financial assistance for things such as paying rent while the father finds a job and begins to get paid, purchasing washing machines and dryers, and buying children new shoes or clothes.

Throughout these first few years, we personally funded some of these expenses, or sought donations through a GoFundMe account. It would be much more efficient and less taxing on individual volunteers if there were funds available to help pay for these expenses, and not have to take the time and effort to set up a GoFundMe account, or simply absorb the cost individually.

An account has been set up through Plymouth Church to make this donation process more efficient. Anyone who would like to donate to the efforts of the Afghan Refugee Family Task Force may now do so via Plymouth's online giving site. Simply select "Refugee Support" from the dropdown menu when making your donation. Step-by-step instructions can be found down below. Visit plymouthfw.org/donate to make your donation.

The Afghan Refugee Family Task Force, which meets regularly, will manage the use of the monies donated to this specific account.

In this horribly turbulent world we live in, it seems there will always be refugee families we need to support. If this is where you would like to donate some of any additional gifts you make throughout a year, we are grateful and thank you.

Afghan Refugee Family Task Force

The screenshot shows the online giving interface. At the top, there are buttons for "Give Now" and "Sign in". Below that, the text "My Donation" is displayed above a large "\$0.00" amount. There are two tabs: "Recurring Gift" and "One-time Gift". A dropdown menu titled "Additional Gifts" is open, showing a list of categories: Memorial Fund, Sanctuary Technology, Emergency Assistance Donation, Strengthen the Church, Thanksgiving, Peace & Justice, Global Mission Offering, and Refugee Support. The "Refugee Support" option is highlighted in blue.

Donating to the Refugee Support Account

For an online donation:

1. Go to plymouthfw.org/donate
2. Click the large "Donate" button on the page
3. Choose if you'd like to make a recurring or one-time gift
4. Enter the amount you'd like to donate
5. Select "Refugee Support" from the dropdown menu shown in the photo
6. Enter your debit/credit card or bank account information
7. Submit. Thank you for your donation!

For a cash donation:

1. Include a note with your donation indicating it is for the Refugee Support account

For a check donation:

1. Write "Refugee Support" in the memo line of your check or include a note with your donation indicating it is for the Refugee Support account

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

March 2024

	Month	Month	Month	YTD	YTD	YTD
	Actual	Budget	Variance	Actual	Budget	Variance
Total Income	\$78,033	\$66,668	\$11,365	\$236,086	\$223,726	\$12,360
Total Expenses	\$61,751	\$63,774	(\$2,023)	\$179,759	\$181,273	(\$1,514)
Net Income (Loss)	\$16,282	\$2,894	\$13,388	\$56,325	\$42,453	\$13,872

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